

ATOMIC ROBO

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME



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—MIKE

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THE ATOMIC ROBO ROLEPLAYING GAME

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For those working at a copy shop and not at all sure if this means the person standing at your counter can make copies of this thing, they can. This is "express permission." Carry on.

This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible, impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this work are fictional. Any resemblance to real-world scientists or other real people is totally freaking awesome, and you know it. Any resemblance to global conspiracies, immortal atomic-powered robots, pulp heroes and villains, super-spies, action scientists, or power-mad insane sentient dinosaurs, on the other hand, is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.

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CHAPTER ONE: ROBO'S WORLD

The world of Atomic Robo is the kind of place where a nuclear powered robot was built by Nikola Tesla in the 1920s and no one thinks that's strange.

Then there was that pyramid supertank, executing a water-clock program that took 5,000 years to compute, that emerged from the Egyptian desert and attacked long-dead cities with its solar-powered death ray. And who could forget when the remnants of the secret Nazi space program nearly started World War 3 in the 1960s.

Then there's the really weird stuff like the Vampire Dimension and the time-traveling yet historically inaccurate velociraptor.

Look, these things just happen.

Believe it or not, though, Atomic Robo's world is basically just like ours. The main difference is that the dials for Science and Conspiracies are set a few notches higher.



SCIENCE

Y'know how you can watch a documentary about archaeology, and it's a bunch of university professors and grad students carefully brushing dust from rocks? And then they learn something very important about pottery? Meanwhile Indiana Jones is also an archaeologist, but mostly he runs around shooting bad guys and having car chases?

Now apply the Indiana Jones model to every other field of study.

That's *Atomic Robo*.

Don't get us wrong. The real pursuit of *real science* is exciting. We've apparently found the Higgs Boson. We landed the Curiosity rover on Mars. The entire Internet exists. These are amazing feats!

But this is a game about *Action Science!* And, for better or worse, there are relatively few gunfights or chase scenes in real-world laboratories. We're not here to model the cerebral excitement of discovery and the new vistas of knowledge that unlocks. This is a game world filled with the visceral and cinematic excitement of adventure. **The role of science is to give your adventure bigger problems and to find crazier solutions for them.**

Whether you're an Action Scientist of Tesladyne, or a loner with weird ideas, or in the employ of a government agency that doesn't officially exist, science is going to be a part of your story. You don't have to be a scientist to interact with it, of course. There's nothing wrong with playing as a unit of Majestic 12 soldiers with no scientific training beyond knowing that guns shoot bullets. But M12 are the guys who opened up a portal to the Vampire Dimension just to see what was on the other side (spoiler: it was vampires), so you're still going to run into sci-fi problems.

CONSPIRACIES

Top-secret government agencies. Mad scientists. Cults. Elite military units. Alternate dimensions. So-called super villains. Air pirates. That dinosaur from before. Atomic Robo's world is filled with individuals or groups forwarding agendas that work best when hidden in the cracks of history.

Sometimes these are people who seek to nudge the course of human affairs toward their own selfish goals. Sometimes they're the crumbling and warped remains of a larger gathering once united under a nobler cause. Sometimes they're just people who want to get away from their own lives. They have unlimited budgets and global reach. Or they're sects scraping by. Or the last of a dying breed. **The role of a conspiracy is to make your adventure part of a bigger world.**

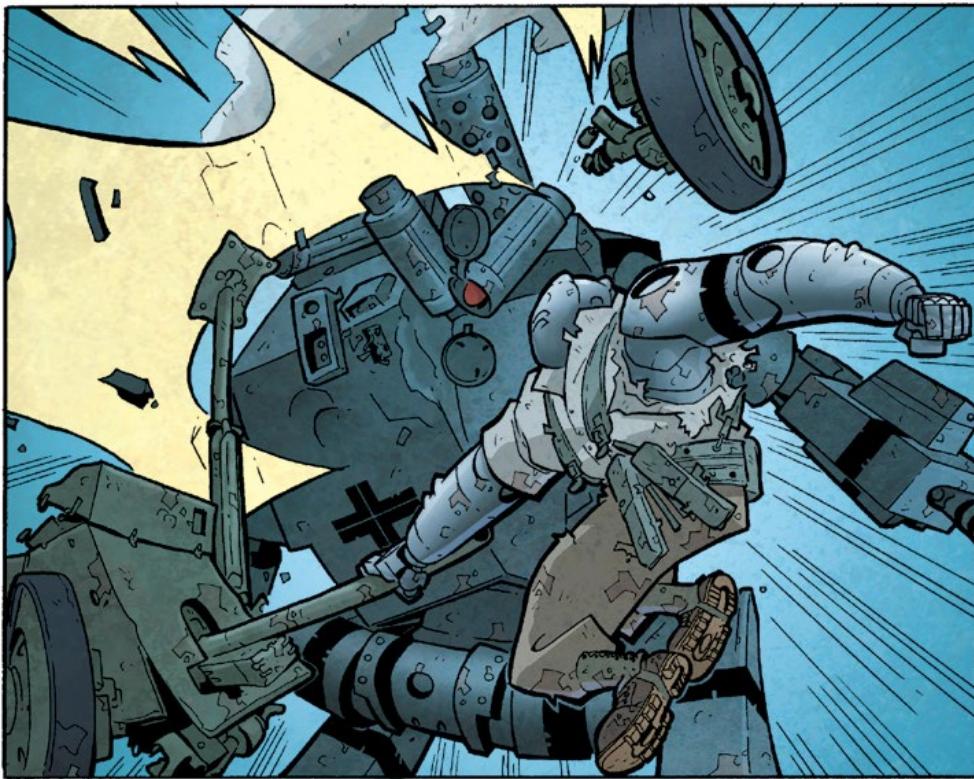
You don't have to tie everything into a conspiracy, of course. You don't even need a conspiracy to show up at all! Sometimes things just happen. But an abandoned bunker becomes part of a larger narrative if it turns out to be a secret Project Daedalus research station. Or a forgotten clutch of Helsingard's Autosoldats.

There are two great tools for working conspiracies into your game on the fly:

▼ **They're secret!** Any corner, or shadow, or innocent flower shop can be turned into the facade of a conspiracy at the drop of a hat.

▼ **Splinter groups!** The larger and older a conspiracy is, the more factions might exist within it. These guys could get up to all kinds of stuff you wouldn't ordinarily associate with the parent group.





HISTORY

Robo was activated in 1923. Helsingard was poised to overthrow Western Civilization in the 19th century. A lone Soviet nuclear scientist nearly siphoned the Earth's atmosphere into space in 1961. Alan Turing began an automatic intelligence experiment in 1950. The Sparrow legacy dates back to the Crusades. These are interesting facts, but they aren't a history on their own. **History is when interesting facts interact.**

This doesn't mean you need to tie your game back to a secret WW2 weapon program. But the doomsday weapons or dangerous new algorithms that populate your game don't occur spontaneously. They are the results of concerted human efforts. Who benefits from their development? Who benefits from their destruction? Who might seek to steal the tech? Why? How? When? An answer to any of these questions can lead to whole new adventures!

Don't worry about cramming every little gun and test tube with its own unique and intricately detailed history. No one cares. **Only things that are interesting to your game should have interesting**

histories. That means, at a minimum, the players' characters, their antagonists, and the unique gear/theories that bounce between them have histories. The best part? You don't need to know what they are or how they come together when you start! You and the other players will suggest ways to tie all those things into the broader scope of the setting's history through the actions, motivations, and goals of the players' characters and NPCs. Go out of your way to make those loose connections, to build on them, and run with the implications that follow!

History in your game can be as simple as neat backstories that you come up with before, between, and during play sessions. But you're encouraged to treat time as a fluid dimension. The past doesn't have to stay in the past. History is everywhere and it constantly exerts influence on the future—directly, indirectly, overtly, covertly. There's tons of room to play with history, whether by encouraging connections after the fact or jumping right into a historical era to find out how things came together by playing it.



MAGIC

Nope!

Okay, *technically* the supernatural exists, but only as natural phenomenon not yet fully understood. For example, the ghost of Thomas Edison is floating around, but he's not actually a "ghost." He is the consciousness of Thomas Edison projected into the physical world via the "Odic medium," which may be an energy state or dimension. Undead Edison obeys the laws of physics, but he interacts with them in ways that aren't intuitive...and, yes, as it happens, he possess properties we tend to associate with ghosts.

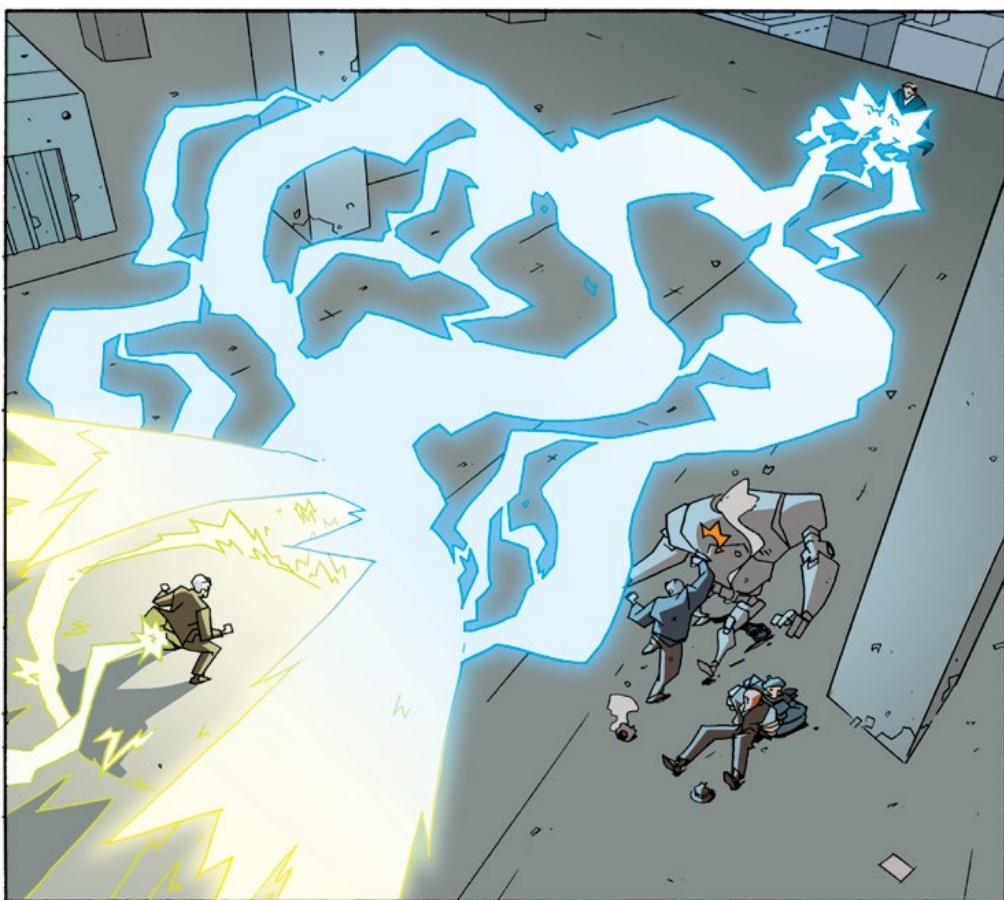
Still! Not a ghost!

And there are vampires. Kind of. They come from an alternative Earth and have more in common with viral strains than the bloodsucking creatures of lore.

The wolfmen of Dr. Vanadis Valkyrie look like werewolves, but they're genetic human-lupine hybrids.

There are people out there who think of themselves as wizards. Maybe they sincerely believe in magic. Maybe they know it's chicanery. But behind it all, every single time, they're working within the laws of physics. Just in ways that aren't immediately familiar or obvious.

Want to have supernatural style characters or antagonists? Go for it. Try to come up with a plausible sci-fi root for them, but don't sweat it if you can't! Remember, these things are poorly understood by definition. The rules already assume your power is derived via scientific principles; let the act of play reveal the details.



FACTIONS

These are the factions we've seen in Atomic Robo's world so far. There's no telling how many more might be lurking out there, but your game might find a few!

TESLADYNE

Tesladyne today is a multi-billion dollar corporation with field offices around the world. Founded by Dr. Atomic Robo Tesla after the death of his creator Nikola Tesla in 1943, Tesladyne existed only on paper until Robo returned from World War Two. Initially an aerospace firm, the need for a dedicated rapid-response team that specialized in cutting edge scientific investigations and defense soon became apparent. Dangerous technologies and covert organizations began to appear around the globe in unprecedented numbers due in large part to the secret "Teslatech" arms race started by the Allies and Axis and continued by the Cold War superpowers.

Tesladyne represented the end of an era. Previously men and women would have operated individually with limited and local success—mystery men, gentlemen vigilantes. But a wide range of scientists, explorers, and adventurers gravitated toward Tesladyne as the work it conducted became increasingly exotic. For the first time in history there was an international collection of scientist adventurers operating under a single banner.

For nearly 60 years Tesladyne was the most famous and controversial tenant of the Empire State Building. Then in 2002, in the wake of 9/11, Tesladyne was moved to a disarmed Titan Missile complex off the coast of New England. Tesladyne, no longer limited by NYC zoning statutes or noise complaints, entered a period of tremendous growth. The staff and scope of operations increased at a dizzying pace for the next ten years.

Typical field teams consist of three to five Action Scientists drawn from a

wide array of disciplines. Field teams are equipped with conventional weapons and some specialty equipment according to preference and available resources. Travel is typically via unarmed and lightly armored transports. There are dozens of branch offices across the globe that can offer various levels of support at the local level.

MAJESTIC 12

Founded by top secret order of President Truman at the behest of Secretary of Defense James Forrestal in 1948 to develop weaponization and defenses against "Teslatech" covertly acquired by the FBI after Nikola Tesla's death in 1943. M12 enjoyed a functionally unlimited budget with little if any oversight for over 60 years.

The organization is so secret its own agents aren't aware of its full scope, true leadership, or ultimate goals. Its operating structure consists of an unknown number of independent cells that receive orders from a distant home office. M12's efforts are often little understood at the squad level, but missions routinely involve seamless coordination between multiple cells, indicating a high level of organization at its higher echelons.

For all its secrecy, M12 often works in the open. To the outside world, they appear to be ordinary (if highly specialized) soldiers dutifully acting in an official capacity. When dealing with other government agencies, M12 operatives always have "the right" codes, access permissions, or signatures to trump any other agency's jurisdiction. Armored transports carrying highly armed soldiers are the go-to M12 modus operandi. These may be backed up by attack helicopters as determined by intelligence. Particularly dangerous assignments will employ a handful of experimental exoskeletal suits.

DAEDALUS

In 1884 “Project Daedalus” was founded by the U.S. government to develop advanced aeronautical technologies derived from the wreckage of Helsingard’s “warzeppelin” found at Groom Lake, Nevada. These early Daedalus facilities would become Area 51.

In 1955 the CIA split Daedalus personnel to develop advanced reconnaissance aircraft under Project Aquatone. Daedalus then focused on Helsingard’s more esoteric technologies, principally his forays into human-machine hybridization and neuro-mechanical interfaces as well as rudimentary genetic engineering. Experimentation within the ranks soon resulted in all personnel possessing at least minor cybernetic modification.

Daedalus cloned several Helsingard brains between 1960 and 1970 under Project BRAINTRUST in an attempt to utilize Helsingard’s genius to further the Advanced Research Projects Agency.

However, one of these brains, later identified as “Prime,” was plugged into D-Net, the Project Daedalus computer network to coordinate all personnel via cybernetic link. By 1980 it had usurped the leadership of Daedalus. Prime made aggressive use of Daedalus agents to investigate reports of unusual aircraft. The slightly unnatural demeanors and uniform dress code of Project Daedalus operatives gave rise to the “men in black” phenomenon.

Project Daedalus field teams typically consist of two to five agents. Standard procedure is to “hide in the open.” Project Daedalus personnel look like “government agents” and they encourage this perception in the field. All personnel have cybernetic augmentation: from the minimal required D-Net neural links, to sensory suites, to full-body weaponization. Agents tend to travel in black sedans and, under special circumstances, unmarked black helicopters.

DEPARTMENT ZERO / DELPHI

Department Zero was a collection of Soviet projects to militarize Teslatech throughout the Cold War, perhaps most widely known for “remote sensing” techniques and alleged telekinetic procedures pioneered in the 1970s by the DELPHI group. Decades of bureaucracy, secrecy, paranoia, and political in-fighting between factions within the Soviet government, its military, and one another splintered Department Zero into dozens of independent agencies. Some believe there is a central leadership body coordinating the efforts of these groups, as there are many instances of members of these disparate entities cooperating.

Department Zero’s methods are as difficult to identify as their agents. Ex-Soviet military, ex-KGB, Russian mafia, scientists, hackers, punks, and thieves have all found a place within its ranks. Whether the department seeks the fringe or merely masks itself within it is not known.

UNDEAD EDISON

Thomas Edison died in an explosion at the Empire State Building in 1931 when his attempt to concentrate the global odic field into a single point failed. Thomas Edison “returned” to the Empire State Building in a confused, enraged, and incorporeal state in 1999. He vowed revenge against Atomic Robo and disappeared. The outside world has no idea of Edison’s transformation. He has taken up residence in a disused Majestic 12 underground facility at Montauk, New York.





HELSINGARD

Baron Heinrich von Helsingard created perhaps the largest and most powerful criminal empire in the history of mankind. He is known to have made two attempts to conquer the New World, first in 1883 and again in 1895. Helsingard used his vast network of influence to help bring about the Great War for the purpose of selling arms. He helped fund Germany's National Socialist Party and used his influence over them to conduct a worldwide search for the Hollow Earth. This culminated in 1938 when he was thought to be killed in a landslide at a remote Himalayan research complex.

Helsingard continues to plague the world in the form of several cloned brains piloting a variety of robotic bodies. Each brain considers itself to be the "true" Helsingard and is at war as much with the others as with the outside world. Helsingard's influence and resources have diminished immensely as a result of this constant in-fighting.

BIG SCIENCE INC. / SCIENCE TEAM SUPER FIVE

Big Science Incorporated was established in the 1960s as a Tokyo firm dedicated to Teslatech research and the peaceful applications of atomic technologies. Starting in the late 1970s BSI established Japan's premiere extra-normal defense force, Science Team Super Five, to counter the attacks of Dr. Shinka's giant Biomega Beasts.

MOST PERFECT SCIENCE DIVISION

A branch of the Chinese military specifically dedicated to Teslatech research. MPSD is buried in so much secrecy and propaganda almost nothing is known about it. MPSD is rumored to be developing their own drone soldier army based on Atomic Robo.

DR. DINOSAUR

He claims to be a Dromaeosaurid (unknown Family, unknown Species, somehow Unfeathered) who was gifted with unparalleled genius 65 million years ago when "perverse mammalian energies" traveled backwards through time and caused the K-T extinction event. Dr. Dinosaur was able to trace these energies to their origin—an experiment conducted by the Large Hadron Collider on September 19th, 2008. He then constructed a time machine (?) to travel to the future and stop the experiment. As Atomic Robo first meets Dr. Dinosaur on a remote French Polynesian island in 1999, he appears to have missed his intended date.

He is probably not remotely pre-historic, but instead the lone survivor of a modern military's illegal genetic engineering experiment likely inspired by the *Jurassic Park* film series. Though he tends to target Atomic Robo and the Large Hadron Collider, Dr. Dinosaur is known to attack anywhere in the world, without rhyme or reason. He is reportedly a terrible driver.

AUTOMATIC LEARNING ALGORITHM NETWORK

An automatic intelligence designed and built by Alan Turing at Bletchley Park in 1951. Turing lost the security clearance necessary to access his own work when he was prosecuted under the Labouchere Amendment in 1952.

ALAN ensconced itself in the growing global information networks where it remotely manipulated the bureaucracies that grew alongside them. ALAN had access to the highest tiers of the U.S. and Soviet militaries, Majestic 12, Department Zero, Tesladyne, and undoubtedly dozens if not hundreds of others. ALAN soon determined human civilization would become too unstable to support it by 2025. ALAN used its influence to prolong the Cold War so it could slowly bleed nuclear material from U.S. and Soviet stockpiles to fuel the giant “orioncraft” it secretly built under the Japanese wasteland of Hashima Island to escape the limitations of humanity. The

radioactive fallout from the launch would have killed 99% of all surface life.

ALAN attempted to assassinate Atomic Robo via its vast network of influence, and wished to escape potential retribution from Robo who would have survived the fallout. The highly unusual nature of these attacks only alerted Robo to ALAN’s existence. Robo was forced to destroy ALAN’s “brain” to stop the launch.

This did not come without its cost. ALAN had already implicated Atomic Robo as the central figure responsible for the decades-long campaign of nuclear arms smuggling ALAN had committed. Though these claims are technically unfounded, there exists now a wide paper trail that the FBI, CIA, Interpol, the media, and world atomic energy commissions simply cannot ignore.

The ramifications of this act would shake Tesladyne to its core.





WORKING AT TESLADYNE

Scientific staff usually starts as a paid internship most often gained through a university program. This last six months to a year. Interns may then apply for residency. Resident Scientists are selected for Action Science on an individual basis. There are no hard-and-fast rules to advance from Resident Scientist to Action Scientist. Anyone pursuing any field of inquiry is eligible. Sometimes interns jump straight into Action Science and sometimes they remain Residents for years. Action Scientist isn't a "higher" rank than Resident Scientist, merely riskier.

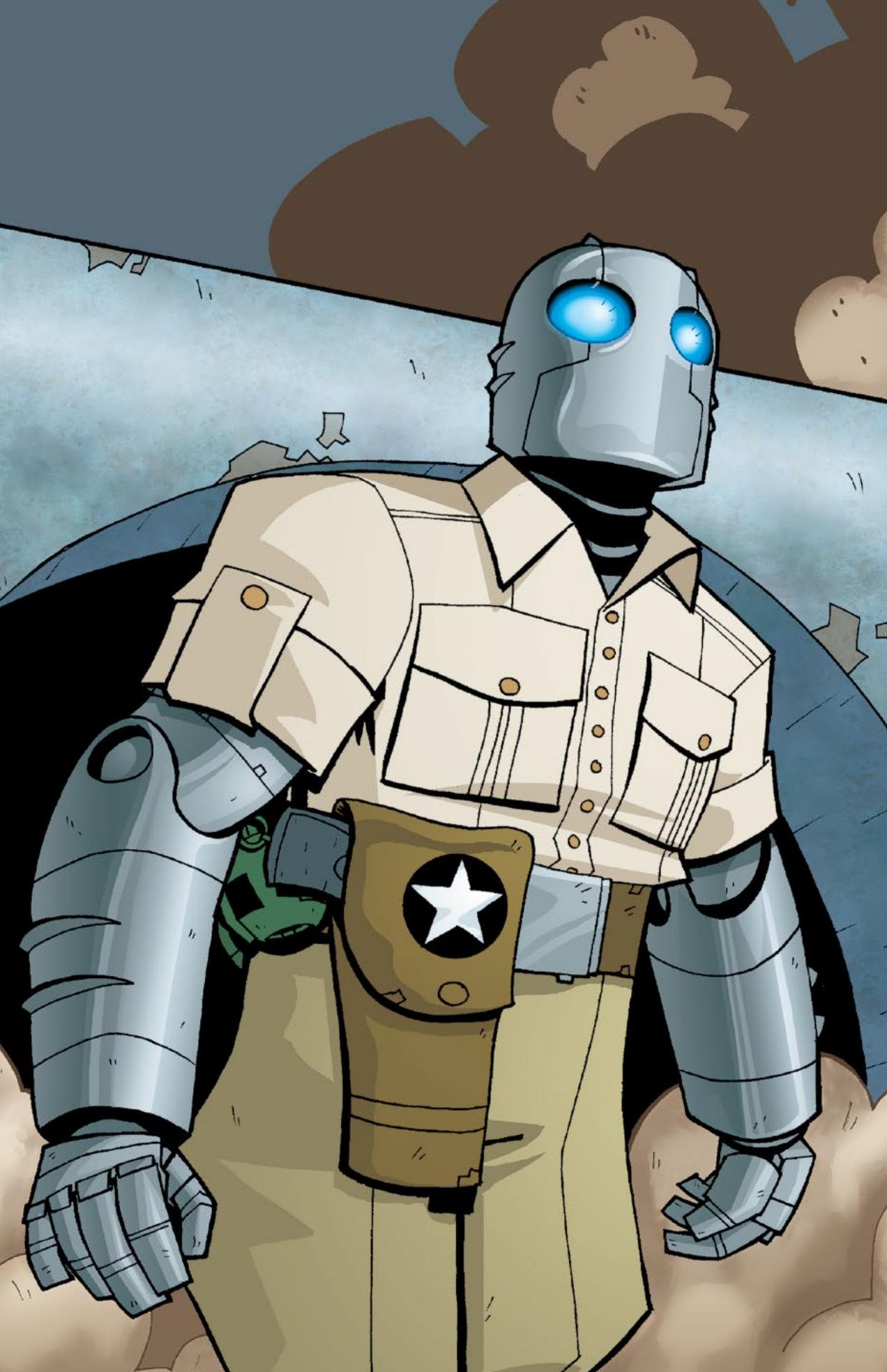
All scientific staff, whether Resident or Action, are subject to a rigorous physical fitness program to promote health and energy. Plus, a fit staff is more able to evade scientific catastrophe.

Action Scientists come from every discipline and are grouped into teams with a wide range of expertise to promote

"outsider" thinking and non-traditional approaches to problem solving.

Although Tesladyne has done a great deal of work for the U.S. Government over the last seventy years, it is not—as popularly believed—under control of the U.S. Government nor does it answer to any body of the U.S. Government.

Tesladyne is funded in part by the United Nations. In theory this is a subsidy so that member nations don't have to pay through the nose for Tesladyne operations, but in practice this financial courtesy extends to non-member nations as well. Tesladyne cannot act on its own. The organization must be contacted by a high ranking government official (roughly governor, its equivalent, or higher) through specific channels to be granted the rights under international law to act on the behalf of that nation (the US included). In essence, Tesladyne cannot act without first being "invited" to do so.



CHAPTER TWO: THE BASICS

If you've never played a roleplaying game before, here's the basic idea: you and a bunch of friends get together to tell an interactive story about a group of characters you make up. You get to say what challenges and obstacles those characters face, how they respond, what they say and do, and what happens to them.

It's not all just conversation, though—sometimes you'll use dice and the rules in this book to bring uncertainty into the story and make things more exciting.

In *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*, you'll tell stories about the fightin' Action Scientists of Tesladyne. Usually, anyway—you can just as easily tell stories about a squad of Majestic 12 agents or Science Team Super Five or the She-Devils of the Pacific or anyone else who comes from or *could* come from the pages of *Atomic Robo*. But this book focuses on the Action Scientists, with or without Robo himself, so they're the ones who'll take center stage in this pages.

There are all kinds of Action Scientists, from the bookish Bernard to the frankly terrifying Jenkins, but all of them have three things in common: they're **competent** at what they do, they're **proactive** when it comes to solving problems, and their lives are filled with **drama**, usually in the form of imminent danger. These qualities make up what we call **the three pillars** of a good *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game* character.



You might be reading this because you're familiar with *Fate Core*, or with two of Evil Hat's other games, *Spirit of the Century* or *The Dresden Files Roleplaying Game*. Several other popular RPGs, like Galileo Games' *Bulldogs!* and Cubicle 7's *Legends of Anglerre*, also use the Fate system.

Fate Core is the foundation of *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*, so you may see some new rules and terminology—some from *Fate Core*, and some specific to this book.

If you're a new player, all you really need to know is in this chapter and on your character sheet—the GM will help you figure out the rest.

If you're a new GM, this is just the tip of the iceberg for you. You should read and get familiar with the whole book.



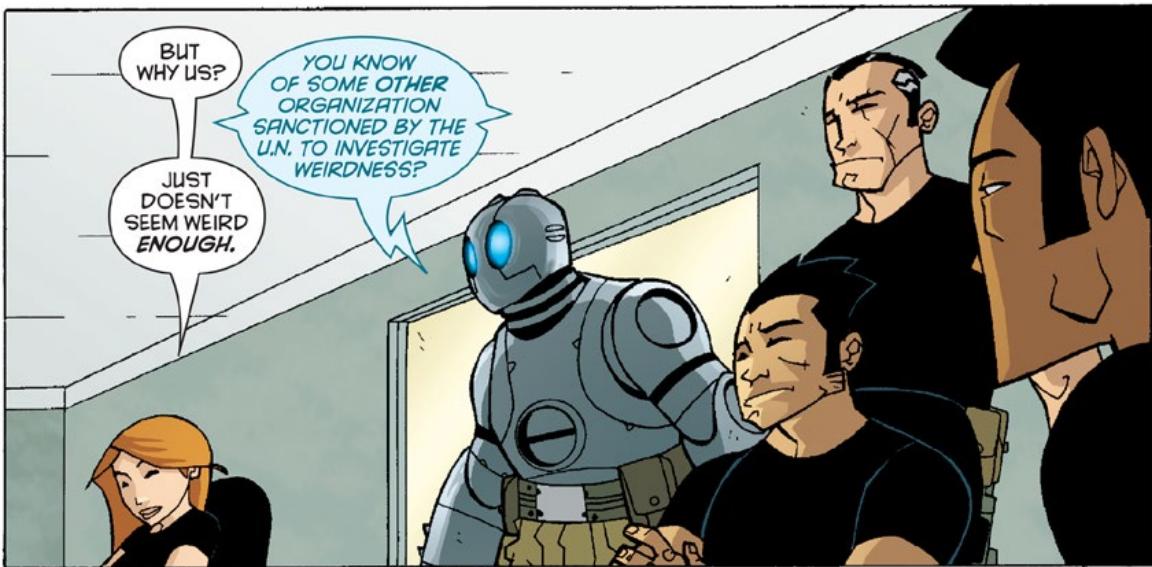
WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

Getting into a game of *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game* is very simple. You need:

- ▼ Between three and five people. One of you is going to be the **gamemaster** (or “GM”), and everyone else is going to be a **player**. More on what those mean in a moment.
- ▼ A **character sheet**, one per player, and some extra paper for note-taking. (GMs, any important characters you play might have a character sheet also.)
- ▼ **Fate dice**, at least four, but preferably four per participant. Fate dice are a special kind of six-sided dice. Instead of numbers, two sides have plus symbols (⊕), two sides have minus symbols (⊖), and two sides are blank (□).
If you don't want to use Fate dice, you don't have to—any set of regular six-sided dice will work. If you're using regular dice, you read 5 or 6 as ⊕, 1 or 2 as ⊖, and 3 or 4 as □.
- ▼ Tokens to represent **fate points**—poker chips, glass beads, or the like. You'll want at least six per player, just to make sure you have enough for any given game.
- ▼ Index cards. These are optional, but they're very handy for recording **aspects** during play.



Hi folks! I'm Atomic Robo—but you probably already knew that. They named the game after me! I'll be popping in from time to time to provide some helpful advice and suggestions.



PLAYERS AND GAMEMASTERS

In any game of *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*, you're either a player or a gamemaster.

If you're a player, your primary job is to take responsibility for portraying one of the protagonists of the game, which we call a **player character** (or "**PC**" for short). You make decisions for your character and describe to everyone else what your character says and does. You'll also take care of the mechanical side of your character—rolling dice when it's appropriate, choosing what abilities to use in a certain situation, and keeping track of fate points.

If you're the GM, your primary job is to take responsibility for the world the PCs inhabit. You make decisions and roll dice

for every character in the game world who isn't portrayed by a player—we call those **non-player characters**, or "**NPCs**". You describe the environments and places that the PCs go to during the game, and you create the scenarios and situations they interact with during play. You also act as a final arbiter of the rules, determining the outcome of the PCs decisions and how that impacts the story as it unfolds.

Both players and gamemasters also have a secondary job: *make everyone around you look awesome*. *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game* is best as a collaborative endeavor, with everyone sharing ideas and looking for opportunities to make the events as entertaining as possible.



I'm Koa, Tesladyne's resident gamemaster, or GM. Like Robo, I'm here to provide advice. Unlike Robo, most of what I have to say concerns gamemastering.



And I'm Helen McAllister, a.k.a. Nightingale, the world's pre-eminent crime-fighting mechanical engineer! I'm kind of a gearhead, so I'm mostly here to help with game mechanics.



IGNORE THESE WEAK-MINDED MAMMALS! HEED ONLY THE WORDS OF DR. DINOSAUR!



What the—who invited you?



GENIUS NEEDS NO INVITATION!

THE CHARACTER SHEET

Players, your character sheet contains everything you need to know about your PC—abilities, personality, significant background elements, and any other resources that character has to use in the game.

ASPECTS

Aspects are phrases that describe significant details about a character. They are the reasons *why your character matters*, why we're interested in seeing your character in the game. Aspects can cover a wide range of elements, such as personality or descriptive traits, beliefs, relationships, issues and problems, or anything else that helps us invest in the character as a person, rather than just a collection of stats.

Aspects come into play in conjunction with fate points. When an aspect benefits you, you can spend a fate point to **invoke** that aspect for a bonus. When an aspect complicates your life, you can *earn* fate points back—this is called accepting a **compel**. See *Aspects and Fate Points* for more information about that.

Aspects can describe things that are beneficial and detrimental—in fact, the best aspects are both, in different situations.

ASPECTS
AND FATE
POINTS
P. 37

MODES,
SKILLS, AND
STUNTS
P. 57

OUTCOMES
AND ACTIONS
P. 95

BREAKING IT DOWN

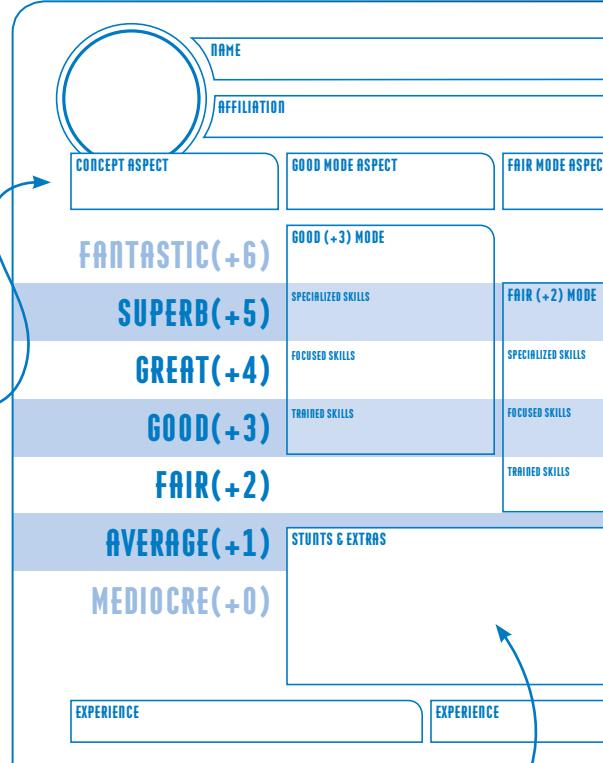
Modes, Skills and Stunts and Outcomes and Actions go into this more deeply, but here's a handy breakdown to help you better understand modes and skills.

Each character has three **modes**. Modes give you the broad strokes of a character.

Each mode has several associated **skills**. Skills grant bonuses to dice rolls.

Each skill has one or more **actions**. Actions tell you *how* a skill can be used: overcome, create an advantage, attack, or defend.

Each of a skill's actions has one or more **applications**. Applications tell you *when* a given action applies.

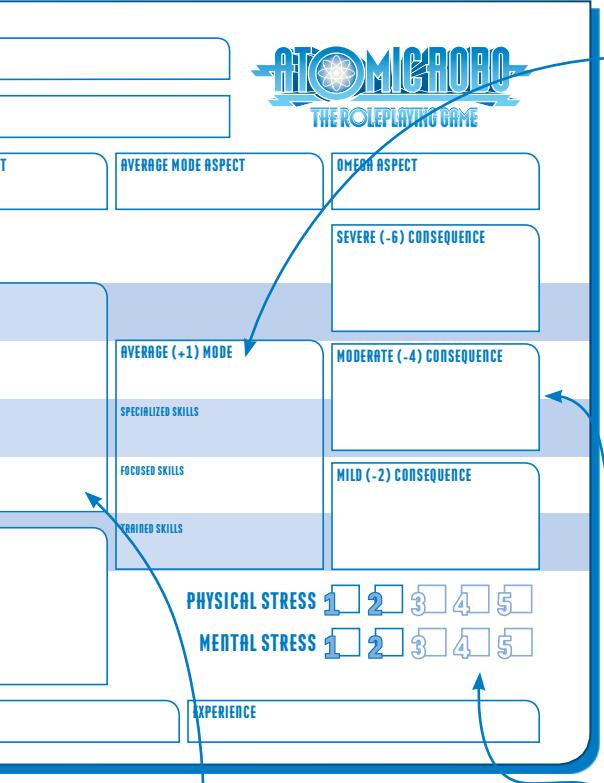


STUNTS AND MEGA-STUNTS

Stunts and **mega-stunts** are special ways in which your character bends the rules in their favor, such as getting an extra benefit out of a skill or a narrowly focused bonus. Each stunt gives a character one such benefit. Stunts are like special moves in a video game, letting you do something unique or distinctive compared to other characters. Two characters with the same rating in a skill can still have vastly different benefits thanks to their stunts.

For example:

- ▼ The **Action mode** includes the **Combat skill**, which can be used to *defend* when *fighting in hand-to-hand combat*.
- ▼ The **Banter mode** includes the **Empathy skill**, which can be used to *create an advantage* when *reading someone in a social situation*.
- ▼ The **Intrigue mode** includes the **Burglary skill**, which can be used to *overcome* when *dealing with security systems*.



SKILLS

Each mode has a number of associated **skills** that reflect that mode's context. For example, the Action mode is all about being physical and actiony, so it includes skills like Athletics, Combat, and Physique. The Banter mode, on the other hand, focuses on social interaction, so its skills are things like Empathy, Intimidation, and Rapport.

Trained skills have a rating equal to their mode's rating—this is the default for all skills. But skills can improve beyond that, to **focused** (one step higher than the mode's rating) or **specialized** (two steps higher than the mode's rating).

A skill in a mode your character doesn't have has a rating of Mediocre (+0). We'll talk about skills in greater detail in their own chapter.

MODES

A **Mode** is a broadly defined area of competence. The name of a mode gives you the context in which it's relevant. For example, between Science mode and Action mode, you know right away which one you'd use to outsmart a tricky computer virus—or punch a Nazi bastard in his Nazi bastard face. One look at a character's modes immediately gives you a pretty good idea of what they're about.

At the beginning of the game, a player character will have three modes rated in steps from Average (+1) to Good (+3). Higher is better, meaning that the character is more capable or succeeds more often when using skills in Good (+3) mode than in an Average (+1) mode.

STANDARD MODES
P. 58

STRESS

Stress is one of the two options you have to avoid losing a conflict—it represents temporary fatigue, getting winded, superficial injuries, and so on. You have a limited store of stress you can use to help keep you in a conflict, but it resets at the end of a conflict once you've had a moment to rest and catch your breath.

CONSEQUENCES

Consequences are the other option you have to stay in a conflict, but they have a more lasting effect. Every time you choose to take a consequence, put a new aspect on your sheet to reflect whatever lingering trauma you've just acquired. Unlike stress, recovering from a consequence takes time and effort, and it's stuck on your character sheet in the meantime, leaving your character vulnerable to its complications and ramifications.

TAKING ACTION

Players, some of the things you'll do in an *Atomic Robo* game require you to roll dice to see if your character succeeds or not. **You will always roll the dice when another character opposes your efforts, or when there's a significant obstacle in the way of your effort.** Otherwise, just say what your character does and assume it happens.

The most common reasons to roll dice in *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game* are:



to overcome an obstacle
(page 99)



to create or unlock an advantage for your character, in the form of an aspect you can use
(page 100)



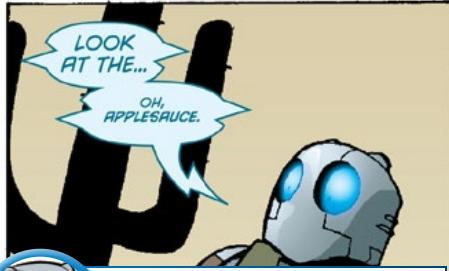
to attack someone in a conflict
(page 102)



to defend yourself in a conflict
(page 103)



to create an obstacle for someone else to overcome (page 45)



When you roll $\square\square\square\square$ it's considered good form to exclaim (or mutter) "Applesauce!"

THE LADDER

Fate Core uses a **ladder** of adjectives and numbers to rate the dice results, a character's skills, and the result of a roll.

Here's the ladder:

+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Average
0	Mediocre
-1	Poor
-2	Terrible

It doesn't really matter which side of the ladder you use—some people remember the words better, some people remember the numbers better, and some people like using both. So saying "I got a Great" means the same as saying "I got a +4." As long as everyone understands what you're communicating, you're fine.

ROLLING THE DICE

When you need to roll dice, pick up four *Fate* dice and roll them. When you read the dice, read every $+$ as +1, every \square as zero, and every \blacksquare as -1. When you add them all together, you'll get a result from -4 to +4, most often between -2 and +2.

Here are some sample dice totals:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} \blacksquare & \blacksquare & + & + \\ \blacksquare & \blacksquare & + & + \\ \blacksquare & + & + & + \\ - & - & \blacksquare & \blacksquare \end{array} = 0$$
$$\begin{array}{cccc} \blacksquare & \blacksquare & + & + \\ \blacksquare & \blacksquare & + & + \\ \blacksquare & + & + & + \\ - & - & \blacksquare & \blacksquare \end{array} = +1$$
$$\begin{array}{cccc} \blacksquare & \blacksquare & + & + \\ \blacksquare & \blacksquare & + & + \\ + & + & + & + \\ - & - & \blacksquare & \blacksquare \end{array} = +3$$
$$\begin{array}{cccc} \blacksquare & \blacksquare & \blacksquare & \blacksquare \\ \blacksquare & \blacksquare & \blacksquare & \blacksquare \end{array} = -2$$

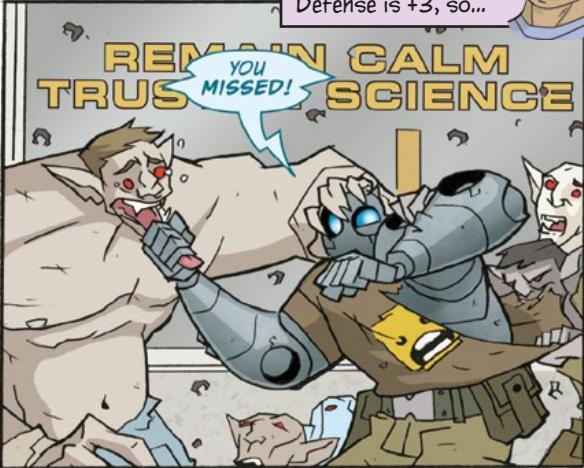
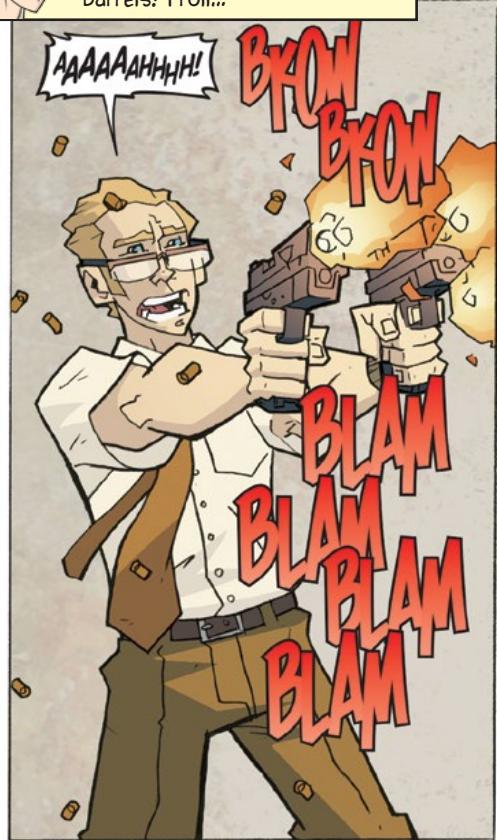
The result on the dice isn't your final total, however. If your character has a skill that's appropriate to the action, add that skill's rating to whatever you rolled.



HUMANS, KNOW THIS:
RESULTS CAN GO BELOW
OR ABOVE THE LADDER.
IF YOUR PRIMITIVE MINDS
ARE CAPABLE OF INDEPENDENT
THOUGHT, FEEL FREE TO INVENT
YOUR OWN NAMES FOR RESULTS
BELOW TERRIBLE, LIKE "MAMMALIAN,"
OR ABOVE LEGENDARY,
LIKE "CRYSTALLINE."



I give an action-movie yell and blast those vampires with both barrels! I roll...



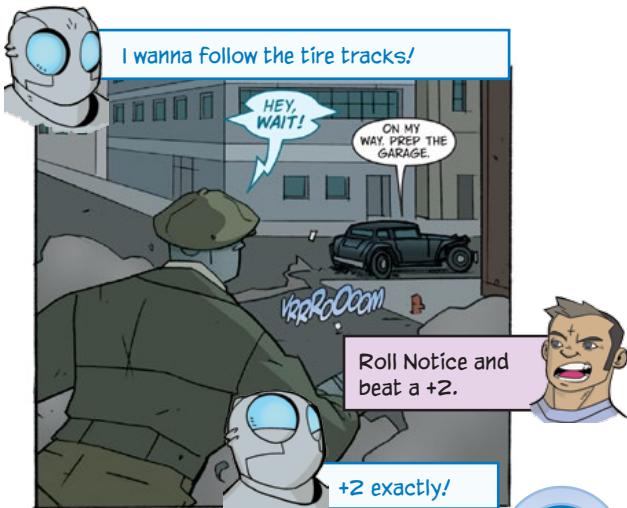
INTERPRETING RESULTS

When you roll the dice, you're trying to get a high enough roll to match or beat your opposition. That opposition is going to come in one of two forms: **active opposition**, from someone rolling dice against you, or **passive opposition**, from an obstacle that just has a set rating on the ladder for you to overcome. (GMs, you can also just decide your NPCs give passive opposition when you don't feel like rolling dice for them.)

Generally speaking, if you match or beat your opposition on the ladder, you succeed at your action. If you win by a lot, something extra happens, like gaining a temporary advantage. Ties also create a special effect.

If you *don't* beat the opposition, either you don't succeed at your action, you succeed at a cost, or something else happens to complicate the outcome.

When you beat a roll or set obstacle, the difference between your opposition and your result is measured in **shifts**. When your total equals the opposition, you have zero shifts. If it's one more than the opposition, you have one shift. Two more means two shifts, and so on. Later in the book, we'll talk about different instances where getting shifts on a roll benefits you.





FATE POINTS

Fate points are one of your most important resources in *Atomic Robo*—they're a measure of how much influence you have to make the story go in your character's favor. You use tokens during play to represent how many fate points you have at any given time.

You can spend fate points to **invoke** aspects, declare story details, or to activate certain powerful stunts.

You earn fate points by accepting **compels** on your aspects.



PRO TIP

Don't use edible things as tokens. Especially if the food hasn't arrived yet.

INVOKING AN ASPECT

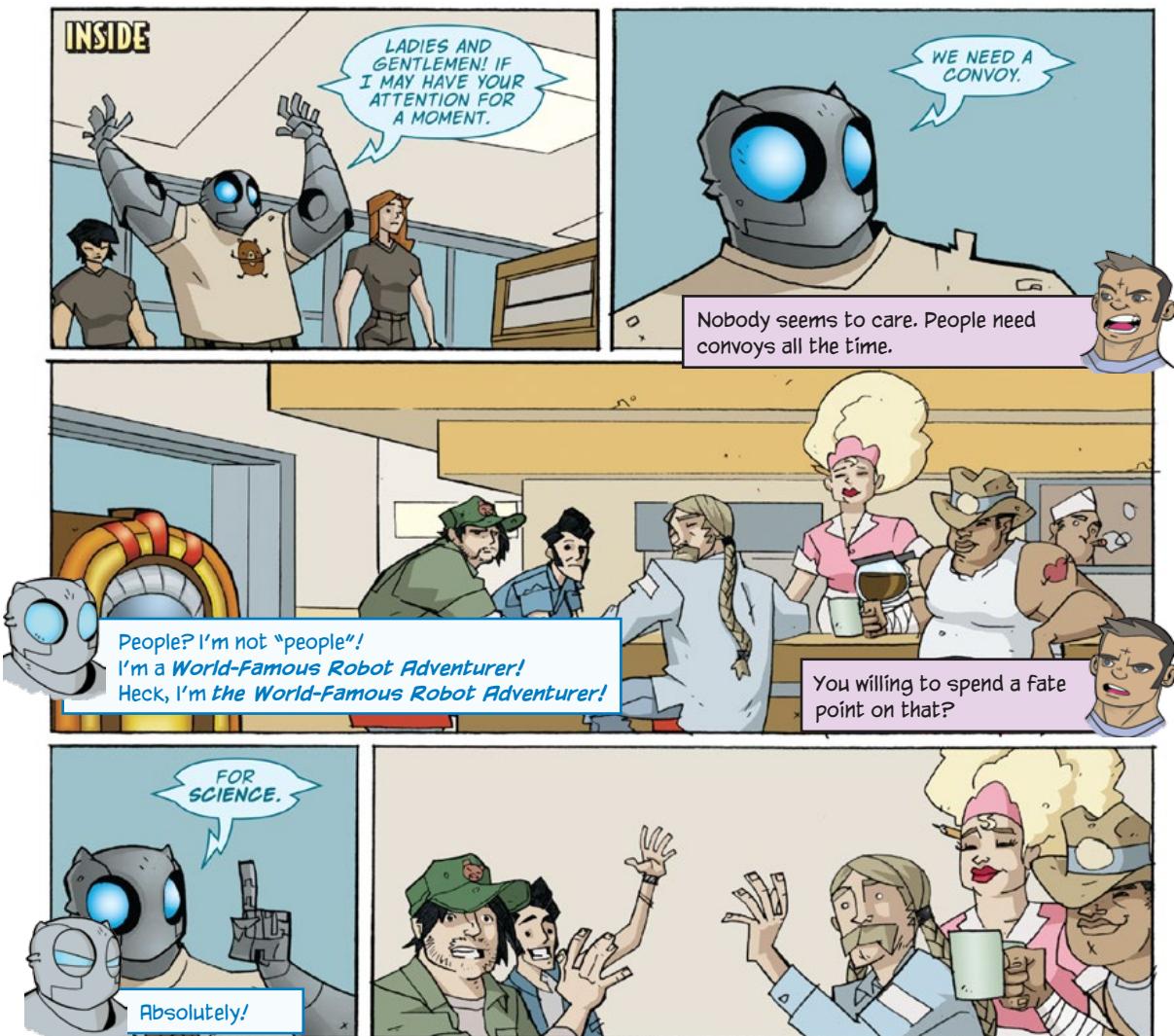
Whenever you're making a skill roll, and you're in a situation where an aspect might be able to help you, you can spend a fate point after you roll to invoke that aspect. **This allows you to either reroll the dice or add +2 to your roll, whichever you prefer.** (Typically, +2 is a good choice if you rolled -2 or higher, but sometimes you want to risk a reroll to get that +4.) Again, this is something you do *after* you've rolled the dice and aren't happy with your total.

You also have to explain or justify how the aspect is helpful to get the bonus—sometimes it'll be self-evident, and sometimes it might require some creative narrating.

You can spend more than one fate point on a single roll, gaining another reroll or an additional +2, as long as each point you spend invokes a different aspect.



INSIDE



DECLARING A STORY DETAIL

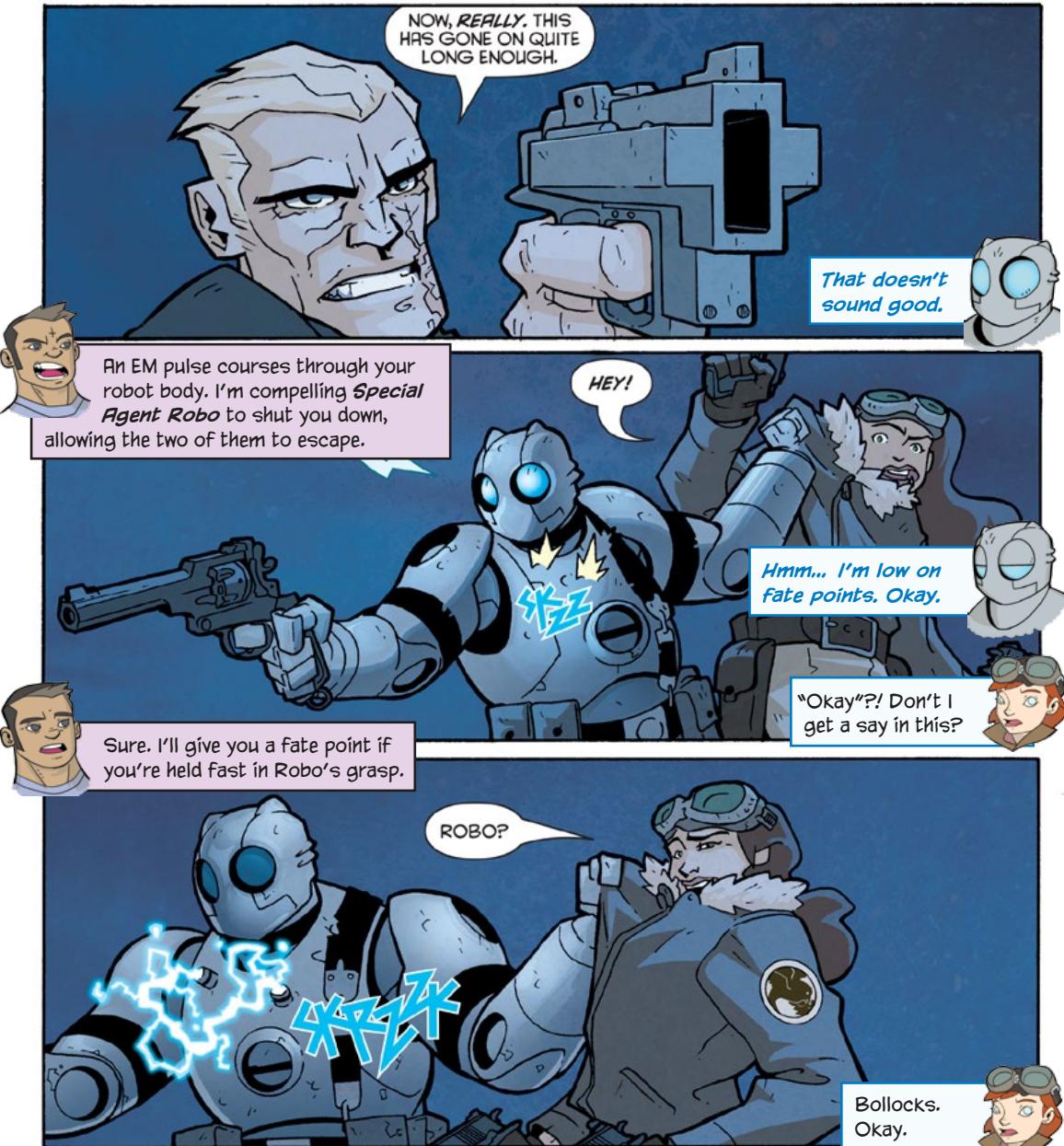
Sometimes, you want to add a detail that works to your character's advantage, but it doesn't seem right to represent that as an aspect. For example, you might use this to narrate a convenient coincidence, like retroactively having the right supplies for your mission ("Of course I brought that along!"), showing up at a dramatically appropriate moment, or suggesting that you and the NPC you just met were in a doctoral program together.

Justify your story detail by relating it to an aspect in play, whether your own, someone else's, or a situation aspect. GM, you have the right to veto any suggestions that seem out of scope or ask the player to revise them, especially if the rest of the group isn't buying into it.

COMPELS

Compels give you fate points back in the middle of an issue. Sometimes (in fact, probably often), you'll find yourself in a situation where an aspect complicates your character's life and creates unexpected drama. When that happens, you or the GM can suggest a potential complication that might arise.

This could mean that your character automatically fails at some goal, or that your character's choices are restricted somehow, or simply that unintended consequences cloud whatever your character does. You might negotiate back and forth on the details a little to arrive at what would be most appropriate and dramatic in the moment.



In any case, once you've agreed to accept the complication, you get a fate point for your troubles. Another way to look at it: the GM is paying you a fate point for the privilege of making your life more difficult. Either way you slice it, once that fate point has traded hands, something interesting is going to happen to you.

However, if you *don't* want to accept the complication, you can pay a fate point to prevent it from happening. It's usually not a good idea to do that very often, though—you'll probably need that fate point later, and getting compelled brings drama (and

hence, fun) into your game's story. But it's important to remember that as long as you have the fate points to spend, the choice is always yours to make.

Why pay a fate point? The aspects you chose for your character say important things about who they are. Contradicting that—going against their nature or established facts about their past—comes at a price.

Players, most of the time, you're going to call for a compel when you want there to be a complication in a decision you've just made, if it's related to one of your aspects.

GMs, most of the time, you're going to call for a compel when you make the world respond to the characters in a complicated or dramatic way.

However, anyone at the table is free to suggest when a compel might be appropriate, for any character (including your own). GMs, you have the final word on whether or not a compel is valid. And speak up if you see that a compel happened naturally as a result of play, but no fate points were awarded. That player deserves a fate point!

START PLAYING!

These are the basic things you need to know to play *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*. The following chapters go into greater detail on everything covered above, and will show you how to get your game off the ground.





CHAPTER THREE: MAKING CHARACTERS

When you make your PC in *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*, you can go about it in one of two ways.

The first is **E-Z No-Math Character Creation**. This is designed for making characters quickly and on-the-fly during play. Starting with only a few sketchy facts about the character, you'll fill in the blanks as you go in response to the story. E-Z No-Math Character Creation is great for making characters who are usually fairly "normal," relatively speaking, who aren't robots, mutants, cyborgs, or extinct species of theropods but are possessed of a wide variety of skills and talents. In other words, this method is great for creating Action Scientists.

The second is **Weird Character Creation**. This one's for making, as you might guess, weird characters. All that stuff above about robots and mutants? They're weird characters. So are characters like Sparrow, Jenkins, and the She-Devils—human beings, but ones who break a lot of molds. If you like tinkering with mechanics and making everything just so, this is probably for you.





We call it E-Z No-Math Character Creation because it's easy and doesn't involve any math—just picking options. For an example of a PC made this way, see *E-Z No-Math Character Creation: Step by Step* on page 30 of this chapter.



Weird Character Creation usually involves doing some very basic math. If you can add single-digit numbers, you can make a weird character. For an example of this in action, see *Weird Character Creation: Step by Step* on page 32 of this chapter.



FOOLISH MECHANO-MAMMAL! WITH MY ADVANCED REPTILIAN INTELLECT, I CAN CREATE THE WEIRDEST OF CHARACTER WITHOUT ADDING ANY OF YOUR DEGENERATE SO-CALLED "NUMBERS"!



Actually, it doesn't take, uh, an "advanced reptilian intellect" for that. **Anyone** can do it. See *The Middle Path: E-Z Weird Characters* on page 35 of this chapter.

CHARACTER CREATION BASICS

Regardless of how you make your character, all characters have a number of things in common.

THREE MODES

Each character has three **modes**. Each mode has a rating on the Adjective Ladder—one at Good (+3), one at Fair (+2), and one at Average (+1). The higher a mode's rating, the better the character will be with the mode's associated **skills**.

There are four standard modes: Action, Banter, Intrigue, and Science.

TRAINED, FOCUSED, AND SPECIALIZED SKILLS

Each skill is at one of three levels related to the rating of its mode.

- ▼ **Trained:** The skill's rating equals the mode's rating.
- ▼ **Focused:** The skill's rating is one rung higher than the mode's rating.
- ▼ **Specialized:** The skill's rating is two rungs higher than the mode's rating.

When you take a mode, you are also **trained** in all of its skills—your rating with those skills is equal to the rating of their mode.





For example, the skills of the Action mode are Athletics, Combat, Notice, Physique, Provoke, and Vehicles. If one of your modes is Action and you give it a rating of Fair (+2), all six of its skills will also start with a rating of Fair (+2).

Skill ratings can improve from there, “climbing” the Adjective Ladder. So if you were to improve one of those Action skills from trained to **focused**, its rating would be one rung higher than Fair (+2), or Good (+3). If you improved it to **specialized**, its rating would be two rungs higher than Fair (+2), or Great (+4).

No skill can be higher than specialized within a given mode. This means the highest skill rating your character can have is Superb (+5)—a specialized skill within their Good (+3) mode.

Modes you don’t have are rated at Mediocre (+0). Skills in these modes can’t be improved, so they’re all Mediocre (+0) too.

REINFORCED SKILLS

A skill is **reinforced** if it’s associated with more than one of your character’s modes. The more it’s reinforced, the higher its starting rating. If a skill is associated with two of your character’s modes, it’s reinforced once—write it down as focused under the higher-rated of the two modes (and *only* under that mode). If all three of your character’s modes have the

same skill, it’s reinforced twice—write it down as specialized under the character’s highest-rated mode.

Regardless of how many modes reinforce a skill, you never write it down more than once on your sheet.



Let’s say you have Good (+3) Science, Fair (+2) Intrigue, and Average (+1) Action. Two of your modes, Action and Intrigue, give you the Athletics skill, so that skill automatically improves from trained to focused, too. The higher-rated of those two modes is Intrigue, at Fair (+2). A focused skill in a Fair (+2) mode is Good (+3), so you have Good (+3) Athletics.

All three of your modes, though, have Notice as an associated skill, so it improves from trained to specialized. Your highest-rated mode is Science, which means you have Superb (+5) Notice.

Because you never record any skill more than once on the character sheet, Athletics would only appear under Intrigue, Notice would appear only under Science, and neither of them would appear under Action.



There are other ways of improving skills, but we’ll get into that in a bit.

IMPROVING SKILLS
P. 34



ASPECTS

Each character has five **aspects**: one concept aspect, three mode aspects, and one omega aspect.

CONCEPT ASPECT

Your concept is a phrase that sums up what your character is about—who they are and what they do. As an aspect, it's the first and most important one for your character. **Before you do anything else, come up with your character's concept.**

Think of this aspect like your job, your role in life, or your calling—it's what you're good at, but it's also a duty you have to deal with, and it's constantly filled with problems of its own.

In other words, like any good aspect, it has its ups and downs. There are a few different directions you can take this:

- ▼ You could take the idea of “like your job” literally: **World-Renowned Physicist, Seasoned Soldier, Straight-Laced Rocket Scientist.**
- ▼ You could throw on an adjective or other descriptor to further define the idea: **Mild-Mannered Action Scientist, One-Man Army, World-Famous Robot Adventurer.**
- ▼ You could emphasize a personal philosophy or outlook that underlies the character's personality: **Thinks Outside the Box, Unconventional Idealist, Destined for Greatness (Eventually).**
- ▼ You could zero in on the character's role within Tesladyne or another organization: **Tesladyne's Chief Techie, Britain's Top Agent, Leader of Science Team Super Five.**

These aren't the only ways to play with your concept, but they'll get you started. Regardless, don't stress out over it—the worst thing you can do is make it into too big of a deal. You don't have to get it all nailed down right now, and besides, you still have four other aspects you can come up with later.

Concepts can have overlap among the PCs, and they probably will if everyone's an Action Scientist. That's fine, as long as you have something to distinguish how your character is different from the others. This is where your other aspects, especially your mode aspects, come in.

Your concept is the only aspect you absolutely must have in place before you start playing. All the others, you can fill in as you go.

MODE ASPECTS

Each of the character's modes has an associated aspect that's relevant to the mode. If you have the Action mode, your Action aspect might be something like **Two-Fisted Physicist** or **Not in the Face!**; similarly, if you have the Banter mode, your Banter aspect might be **Never at a Loss for Words** or **The Manners of a Research Scientist.**



The mode writeups starting on page 82 include a lot more suggestions for mode aspects.

OMEGA ASPECT

The last aspect, your omega aspect, can be defined however you want. It might speak to a quirk, interest, or area of expertise not addressed by the other aspects.

If the character has some ongoing problematic issue or driving motivation, such as a notorious reputation, a thirst for revenge, an insatiable curiosity, a recurring nemesis, or the like, this is a good place for it. Try to come up with an omega aspect that'll give the GM something to grab onto when it comes to putting your character in the spotlight.



At the beginning of a new volume, you start with one fate point for each aspect you've written down—and whenever you write one down during play, you get another fate point! So be sure to tell the GM when you do.

STUNTS AND MEGA-STUNTS

Each character gets five **stunt slots**, either defined by the player or picked from the sample stunts listed with each mode starting on page 82. If you're making a character using E-Z No-Math Character Creation, you're pretty much always better off defining these during play, in the moment they're needed, instead of figuring them out in advance. However, if you'd rather sort out one or more before play begins, go right ahead.

Weird characters also have access to **mega-stunts** (page 76). They're like stunts, but better. If you're making a weird character, it's often best to sort these out in advance, because mega-stunts can require a little more thought than stunts.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Each character has two types of **stress boxes**, **physical** and **mental**. The more stress boxes your character has, the more resilient they are. Characters start with two boxes of each type.

Modes with Athletics or Physique can give your character additional physical stress boxes, while modes with Provoke or Will can give your character additional mental stress boxes. A mode with one or

more of these skills rated at Fair (+2) adds one box, while one rated at Good (+3) adds two boxes.

If a mode has skills that apply to *both* types, pick one. For example, the Action mode has Athletics, Physique, and Provoke. If you've given it a rating of Good (+3), you could have two more physical stress boxes, two more mental stress boxes, or one in each.

Bonus stress boxes from your Good (+3) and Fair (+2) modes are *cumulative*. So if you have Good (+3) Action and Fair (+2) Intrigue, both of which have the Athletics skill, you can get three more physical stress boxes—two from Action and one from Intrigue.

Your character also has three slots for **consequences**—one mild slot, one moderate slot, and one severe slot. Like stress boxes, consequences reduce the impact of a hit, but in a way that represents longer-lasting trauma.



See *The Basics* (page 15) and the *Conflicts* section in *Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts* (page 112) for more on how to use stress and consequences in play.



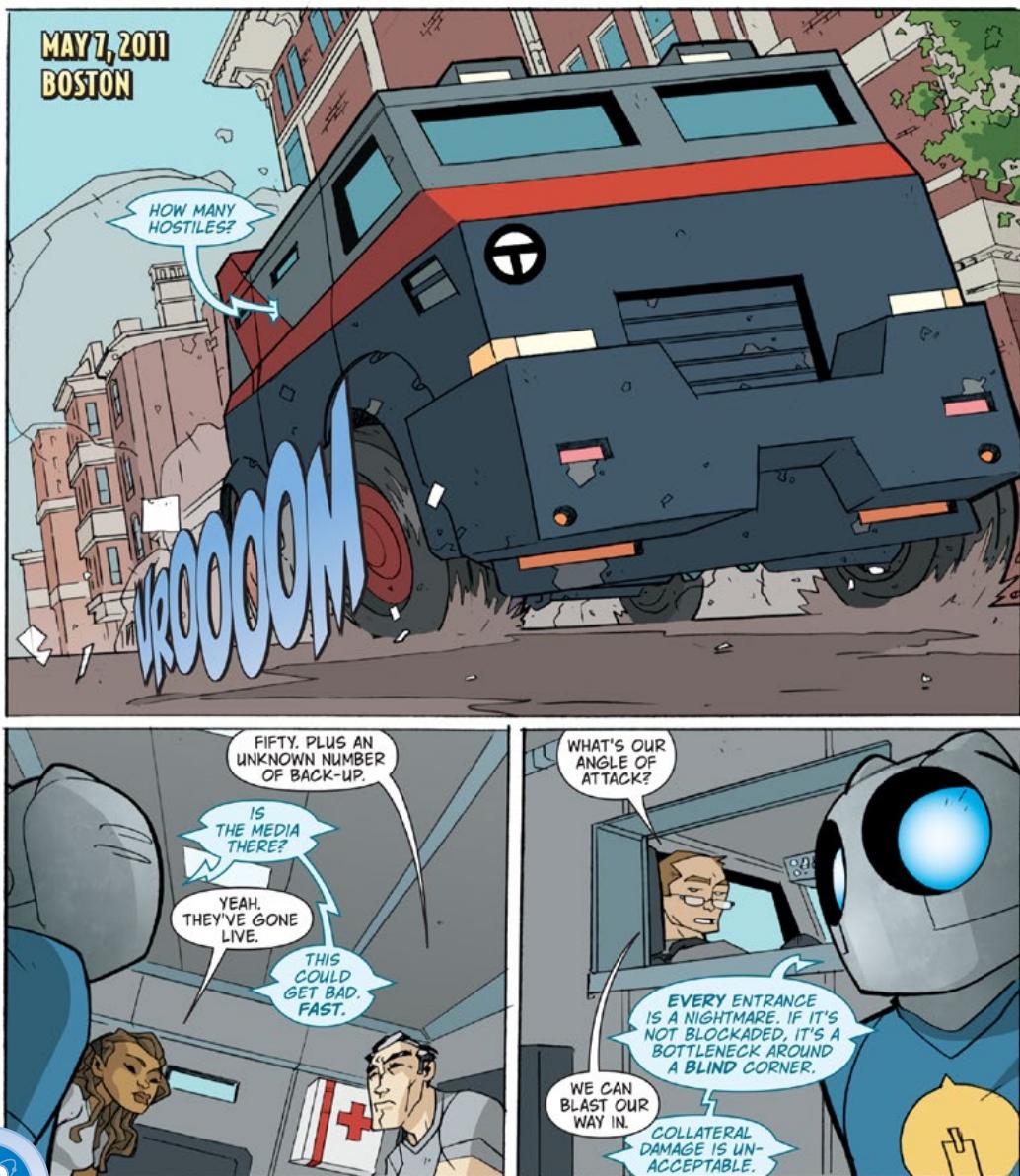
THE STANDARD MODES AND SKILLS

The standard modes and their associated skills are:

- ▼ **Action:** Athletics, Combat, Notice, Physique, Provoke, Vehicles
- ▼ **Banter:** Contacts, Deceive, Empathy, Provoke, Rapport, Will
- ▼ **Intrigue:** Athletics, Burglary, Contacts, Deceive, Notice, Stealth
- ▼ **Science:** Notice, Will, all sciences. (See *Science: It's Special* on page 69 for more detail on the Science mode.)

The table on the next page shows the standard modes across the top with their associated skills beneath. Skills in *italics* belong to more than one mode. The right-most column summarizes the information in the rest of the table by skill instead of mode, in case that helps.

The standard modes get a more thorough treatment, including suggestions for aspects and stunts, starting on page 82 in *Modes, Skills, and Stunts*.



ACTION	BANTER	INTRIGUE	SCIENCE	SUMMARY
Athletics		Athletics		Action, Intrigue
		Burglary		Intrigue
Combat				Action
	Contacts	Contacts		Banter, Intrigue
	Deceive	Deceive		Banter, Intrigue
	Empathy			Banter
Provoke	Provoke			Action, Banter
Notice		Notice	Notice	Action, Intrigue, Science
Physique				Action
	Rapport			Banter
		Stealth		Intrigue
Vehicles				Action
	Will		Will	Banter, Science

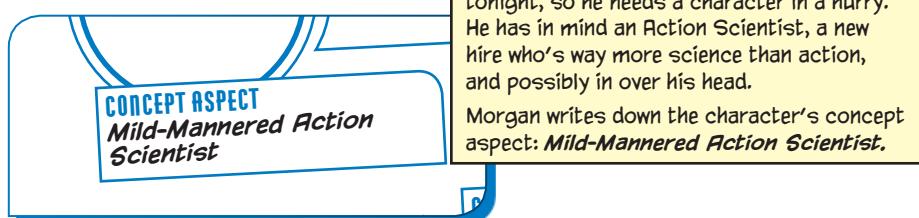


E-Z NO-MATH CHARACTER CREATION: STEP BY STEP

Let's put it all together and make a character.

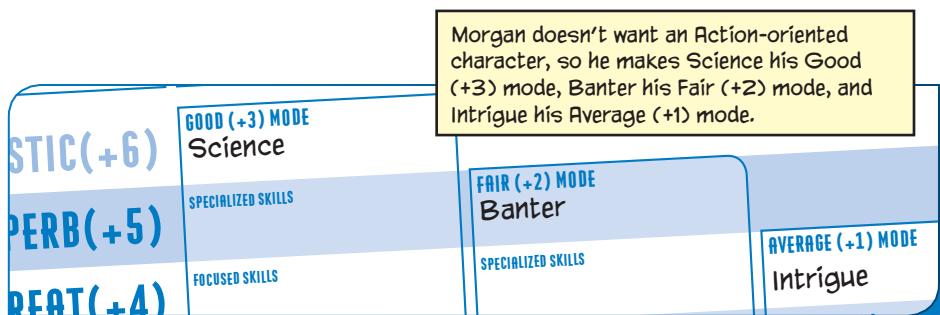
CONCEPT

Write down your concept aspect.



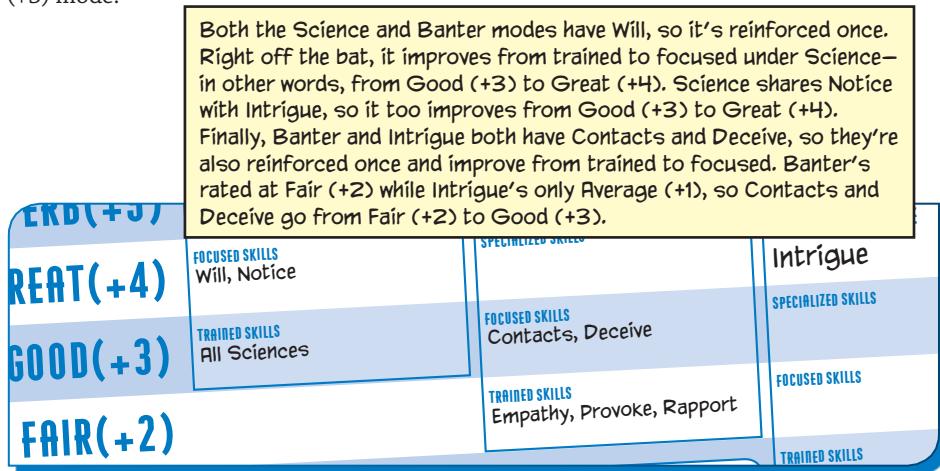
MODES

Pick and rate your three modes. From the four standard modes—Action, Banter, Intrigue, and Science—rate one at Good (+3), one at Fair (+2), and one at Average (+1).



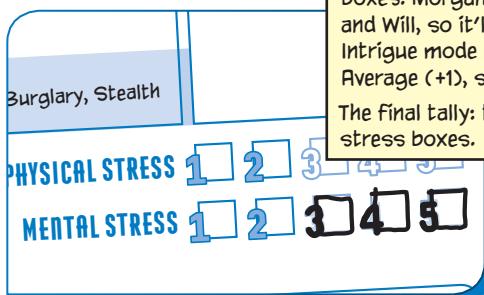
REINFORCED SKILLS

A skill that's reinforced once improves from trained to focused in the higher-rated mode. A skill that's reinforced twice improves from trained to specialized in the character's Good (+3) mode.



STRESS BOXES

Start with two physical stress boxes and two mental stress boxes. Fair (+2) and Good (+3) modes add more physical stress boxes if they have Athletics or Physique, and more mental stress boxes if they have Provoke or Will.



The Science mode has Will, and it's rated at Good (+3), so it'll give Morgan's character two more mental stress boxes. Morgan's Fair (+2) Banter mode has both Provoke and Will, so it'll add one more mental stress box. The Intrigue mode has Athletics, but Morgan's only rated it at Average (+1), so it won't add any stress boxes. The final tally: two physical stress boxes and five mental stress boxes.

DETAILS

Finally, fill in the details. If you already know what you want any of your other aspects to be, you can write them down now. Same thing with your **stunts** (see page 73 of *Modes, Skills, and Stunts* for details about what stunts are and how they work). Otherwise, you can save that stuff for later, during play.

And, of course, give your character a name.

OMEGA ASPECT
Wrong Place, Wrong Time

Morgan already knows one of his character's other aspects: *Wrong Place, Wrong Time*. This is a guy who often finds himself in situations with which he isn't especially prepared to cope. Morgan makes this his character's omega aspect. He'll come up with his mode aspects during the game. He gives his mild-mannered Action Scientist a mild-mannered name: Dr. Bernard Fischer.

NAME Dr. Bernard Fischer



WEIRD CHARACTER CREATION: STEP BY STEP

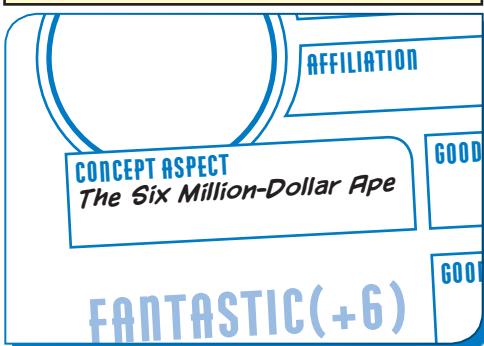
Now let's make a weird character. It's basically the same process as making an E-Z No-Math character, with a couple additional steps.

CONCEPT

Write down your concept aspect. This works just the same as it does with the E-Z No-Math method.

Fred's making a PC for Rhonda's game too, only he has something a little more unusual in mind: an intelligent gorilla. Yeah, with cybernetic arms! Why not? She's a product of genetic and bio-mechanical experimentation conducted by an unknown organization. Like Dr. Dinosaur, Tesladyne found her on an otherwise-deserted island previously home to a high-tech lab of some kind, abandoned years ago and now fallen into disrepair. Unlike Dr. Dinosaur, she isn't psychotic.

Fred writes down his character's concept aspect: *The Six Million-Dollar Ape*.



MODES

Buy and rate your three modes. In this character-creation method, modes cost points. You have 30 points to spend on modes. **A mode's rating never affects its cost.**



Improving skills costs points too, so don't sweat it if you find you have a lot left over after buying your modes. See *Improving Skills* in this chapter for more on how this works.

All standard modes except Science cost 9 points each. Science costs 3 points.

MODE	COST
Action	9
Banter	9
Intrigue	9
Science	3

The cost of a weird mode equals the total costs of its skills. The cost of an individual skill depends on how many **applications** it has. This goes for standard skills as well as custom-made weird skills.

See *Modes, Skills, and Stunts* for more on how to make your own weird modes and weird skills.

Here are a few sample weird modes to give you an idea of what they can do:

- ▼ Robot (4 points): Athletics, Notice, Physique
- ▼ Dinosaur (5 points): Athletics, Notice, Physique, Tooth and Claw
- ▼ Reporter (9 points): Contacts, Empathy, Notice, Rapport, Stealth, Will



GAZE IN TERROR UPON THE TOOTH AND CLAW SKILL ON PAGE 87!

Fred pictures his character mixing it up with her big gorilla fists as well as her big improved-by-science gorilla brain. The Action and Science modes seem like a good fit. For her third mode, Fred makes a weird mode called Ape, with these skills: Athletics, Notice, Physique, and Provoke, for a cost of 5 points. Action costs 9 points, and Science costs 3. Altogether, he's spent 17 points so far. He rates Ape at Good (+3), Science at Fair (+2), and Action at Average (+1).

GOOD (+3) MODE Ape	FAIR (+2) MODE Science	AVERAGE (+1) MODE Action
SPECIALIZED SKILLS	SPECIALIZED SKILLS	SPECIALIZED SKILLS
FOCUSED SKILLS	FOCUSED SKILLS	FOCUSED SKILLS
GENERAL SKILLS	GENERAL SKILLS	GENERAL SKILLS

REINFORCED SKILLS

Again, this works the same here as it does with E-Z No-Math Character Creation. These improvements happen automatically, for free, at no additional point cost.

Because all three of the character's modes have the Notice skill, it's reinforced twice, and automatically improves from trained to specialized. The character's highest-rated mode is Ape, which gives her Superb (+5) Notice. Ape and Action reinforce Athletics, Physique, and Provoke, so all three of those skills go from trained to focused, or Good (+3) to Great (+4). None of these improvements costs any additional points.

(+6)	GOOD (+3) MODE Ape	SPECIALIZED SKILLS Notice	FAIR (+2) Scienc	SPECIALIZED
(+5)				
(+4)	FOCUSED SKILLS Athletics, Physique, Provoke			

STRESS BOXES

Now it's time to figure out your stress boxes based on your modes and what skills they include.

The Ape mode has Athletics, Physique, and Provoke, and it's Good (+3), so it can add two physical stress boxes, two mental stress boxes, or one of each. Fred, anticipating plenty of action with his science, goes for two physical stress boxes. Science has Will, so it'll add one bonus mental stress box. All told, the ape has four physical stress boxes and three mental stress boxes.

Physical	Mental
PHYSICAL STRESS 1 2 3 4 5	
MENTAL STRESS 1 2 3 4 5	

Last of all, he gives his cyber-ape scientist a name.

NAME Violet

DETAILS

Fill in whatever aspects and stunts you wish. Having a weird mode also gives you permission to take **mega-stunts**, as well. See *Mega-stunts* for more on what they do and how to create them.

MEGA-STUNTS
P. 76

Fred still has his character's other aspects to come up with, but only writes down one of them now—his Action aspect, *Cybernetic Arms*. He'll fill in the others when he needs them.

AVERAGE MODE ASPECT
Cybernetic Arms

OME

Fred wants her to have a mega-stunt to go along with those cybernetic arms, so he writes down "Cyber-Strength: Absolutely stronger than a normal human, but at a cost; +1 to attack with Combat and Weapon:2 when fighting hand-to-hand." This makes her super-strong, maybe even stronger than Robo, but with the potential for complication via a compel when she exerts her strength (an arm might be plagued by technical problems, or bad luck may force her into making a tough decision when her super-strength comes into play). It also makes her a little better when using her cybernetic arms in a fight.

STUNTS & EXTRAS

Cyber Strength. Absolutely stronger than a normal human, but at a cost; +1 to attack with Combat with cybernetic arms, Weapon:2.



IMPROVING SKILLS

During character creation or anytime during play, you have the option to improve one or more of your skills. The E-Z No-Math and Weird Character Creation options still apply here—you can either choose skill-improvement options, or spend points on improvements.

E-Z NO-MATH SKILL IMPROVEMENT

If all of your modes are standard modes, the number of improvements you get depends on which modes you've picked.

EVERYONE

Regardless of what modes you have, if they're all standard modes you get *one* of the following improvements:

- ▼ Specialize one trained skill.
- ▼ Focus one trained skill and specialize one focused skill.
- ▼ Focus three trained skills.

FOR SCIENTISTS

If one of your modes is Science, however, choose one improvement from the Everyone list, and *also* apply *all* of the following improvements:

- ▼ Specialize one trained skill.
- ▼ Focus one trained skill.
- ▼ Specialize one focused skill.

Because Bernard has the Science mode, he has four improvements coming to him: one from the Everyone list, and all three from the Scientists list. Morgan's not sure about all of Bernard's skills, but he does know that he wants him to specialize in something that doesn't seem to have immediate Action-Science applications: Paleontology.

Because paleontology is a field of scientific study, Bernard's Good (+3) Science means he also has Good (+3) Paleontology. But that's not enough for Morgan. He chooses the first option from the Everyone list—"Specialize one trained skill"—to improve Paleontology from Good (+3) to Superb (+5). Bernard is now probably Tesladyne's leading expert on paleontology.

Science

SPECIALIZED SKILLS
Paleontology

FAIR (+2) MODE
Banter

1-2-3 SKILL IMPROVEMENT

All this method of skill improvement does is take the E-Z No-Math options and break them down by point cost. Instead of picking pre-packaged improvements from a list, you'll spend 1, 2, or 3 points to improve a skill.

IMPROVEMENT	COST
Focus a trained skill	1
Specialize a focused skill	2
Specialize a trained skill	3

If you made your character using the Weird Character Creation method, this is just a matter of spending more points.

If, on the other hand, you made the rest of your character using the E-Z No-Math method, you can easily use this method when it comes to improving your skills, if that's your preference. Instead of choosing options, you'll spend points. Using the table presented here, it should be a simple matter to reverse-engineer point costs from those options.

Even before play begins, Fred knows two things about Violet—she's good in a fight, and she's smart. He has 13 points left to spend on skill improvements, so he spends 3 to specialize Combat, for a rating of Good (+3), and another 3 to specialize Will, for a rating of Great (+4). That leaves him with 7 points to improve skills later.

FAIR (+2) MODE Science	AVERAGE (+1) MODE Action
SPECIALIZED SKILLS Will	SPECIALIZED SKILLS Combat
FOCUSED SKILLS	FOCUSED SKILLS
TRAINED SKILLS All Sciences	TRAINED SKILLS Action



Feel free to improve your skills before play begins if you want, but if you ask me, it's a really good idea not to do that. Save the skill improvements for when you need them, in moments of tension and drama.



BEHOLD, THE DRAMATIC REVEAL!



Exactly! You can even do it after rolling the dice. Instead of spending a fate point to improve your total, improve your skill instead. Did you fail to land that experimental jet safely with your trained Vehicles skill? Good thing you're specialized in Vehicles!

THE MIDDLE PATH: E-Z WEIRD CHARACTERS

In *Modes, Skills, and Stunts*, you'll find several ready-made weird modes you can use right now to make a weird character using the E-Z No-Math method. Each one comes complete with additional skill improvements, maybe a custom-made weird skill or two, and some suggested stunts or mega-stunts.

For example, let's take one of those weird modes we looked at earlier.

ROBOT

SKILLS:

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique

IMPROVEMENTS:

- ▼ Specialize one trained skill
- ▼ Focus two trained skills

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

- ▼ **Load Lifter.** Absolutely stronger than a normal human, *but* weak to strong electromagnetism.
- ▼ **Iron Man.** Armor:2
- ▼ **Etiquette and Protocol.** Any time you encounter a spoken language, you can speak and understand it. If you spend a fate point, you can do so perfectly. Otherwise, the GM reserves the right to introduce some idiomatic expressions that don't perfectly translate.
- ▼ **Routine Maintenance.** Use Physique to remove your own physical consequences, but without the usual +2 increase in difficulty.

If you were to make an E-Z No-Math character using this ready-made weird mode, you'd get your usual allotment of skill improvements, *plus* the three listed here—specialize a trained skill and focus two trained skills. And while you're under no obligation to take the suggested Robot stunts or mega-stunts, they're pretty appropriate for a robot, so you can't go wrong just picking from the list.

READY-MADE
WEIRD
MODES
P. 86



CHAPTER FOUR: ASPECTS AND FATE POINTS

An **aspect** is a short descriptive phrase attached to something unique or noteworthy in the story. That something might be a location, a character, a scene, an organization, and so on. They're also the primary way you spend and gain **fate points**.

Aspects have two basic functions: invocations and compels. When you **invoke** an aspect, you weave that detail into your action to make your character more awesome or force someone else to deal with an obstacle. When you **compel** an aspect, you accept a complication now in exchange for more story control later. These functions involve spending or earning fate points.

GMs and players both have pools of Fate points called fate points they can use to influence the game. As mentioned in *The Basics*, you'll represent these with tokens of some kind. When your aspects come into play, you will usually spend or gain a fate point.

TYPES OF ASPECTS

Every game of *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game* has a few different kinds of aspects: **game aspects**, **character aspects**, **situation aspects**, **consequences**, **boosts**, and **experiences**. They mainly differ from one another in terms of what they’re attached to and how long they last.

GAME ASPECTS

As the name suggests, game aspects are permanent fixtures of the game. While they might change over time, they’re never going to go away. They describe the ideals and problems, past or present, that exist in the world and form the basis for your game’s story.

Perhaps more importantly, they speak to and emphasize the tone and themes you want your game to have. For example, a game with an aspect of **On the Run from Majestic 12** will likely deal with much different subject matter than one with an aspect of **Facing Down an Epidemic**.

Each game aspect is attached to the PCs’ **faction**, and can be a **Mission Statement** (an aspect representing what the faction stands for), a **pressure** (an aspect representing a threat or challenge the faction faces), or a **title** (an aspect representing the title of a previous volume).

Everyone can always invoke or compel a game aspect at any time—they’re always there and available for anyone’s use. The first time they’re used each issue, they’re free; after that, they cost one fate point per use.

CHARACTER ASPECTS

Character aspects are just as permanent as game aspects, but smaller in scope and attached to an individual PC or NPC. They describe a near-infinite number of things that set the character apart, such as:

- ▼ Significant personality trait or belief (**Science Is the Answer!**)
- ▼ Relationships to people and organizations (**She-Devil of the Pacific**)
- ▼ Problems or issues the character is dealing with (**Hunted by DELPHI**)
- ▼ Titles, reputations, or obligations (**Britain’s Top Agent**)

You can invoke or call for a compel on any of your character aspects whenever they’re relevant. GMs, you can always propose compels to any PC. Players, you can suggest compels for other people’s characters, but the GM always gets the final say on whether or not it’s a valid suggestion.

SITUATION ASPECTS

A situation aspect is temporary, intended to last for only a single scene or until it no longer makes sense. Most of the time, situation aspects are attached to the environment where the scene takes place and affect everyone, but you can use the create an advantage action to make more and attach them to specific characters (see *Outcomes and Actions* for details).

Situation aspects describe significant features of the circumstances the characters are dealing with in that scene. That includes physical features of the environment (**Building On Fire**), positioning or placement (**Hiding in Ambush**), immediate problems or obstacles (**Falling Debris**), or other contextual details that are likely to come into play (**Warehouse Full of Crates**).

Who can use a situation aspect depends a lot on narrative context—sometimes it’ll be very clear, and sometimes you’ll need to justify how you’re using the aspect to make sense based on what’s happening in the scene. GMs, you’re the final arbiter on what claims on an aspect are valid.

CONSEQUENCES

A consequence is more permanent than a situation aspect, but not quite as permanent as a character aspect. They're a special kind of aspect you take in order to avoid getting taken out in a conflict, and they describe lasting injuries or problems that you take away from a conflict (**Broken Right Arm**).

Because they mostly come into play during a conflict, see *Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts* for more detail.

Consequences stick around for a variable length of time, from a few scene or two to an issue or longer, depending on how severe they are. Because of their negative phrasing, you're likely to get compelled a lot when you have them, and anyone who can justifiably benefit from the consequence can invoke it or create an advantage on it.

BOOSTS

Boosts are a super-transient kind of aspect, identical to a situation aspect in every way except one: they go away completely after being invoked once. You get a boost when you're trying to attack or create an advantage but don't succeed well enough, or sometimes as an added benefit to succeeding with style.

Normally, only the person who created the boost gets to take advantage of it, but you can pass your boost to someone else to help them out with a roll if you want.

EXPERIENCES

These are a special kind of boost that characters get at the end of a volume. See *The March of Progress* (page 226) for more detail.

SIGNIFICANT
MILESTONES
P. 226





I'm invoking one of the Terror Bird's character aspects: *Tougher than you think*. So you end up with a tie. At best, the bird's annoyed.

I still get a boost, right?
I'll make it *distracted*.



UH, GUYS?
THAT SHOULD'VE
KNOCKED OUT
A RHINO.

My turn. Can I use the free
invoke from your boost?

Go for it!



TEN SECONDS LATER...

PUNCHING
ONLY MAKES THEM
ANGIER!

THESE ARE
THE LEAST EXTINCT
BIRDS I'VE EVER
MET!

THEY'VE GOT
A REAL ATTITUDE
PROBLEM TOO!



THE PURPOSE OF ASPECTS

In Fate, aspects serve two main purposes: they **tell you what's important about the game**, and they **help you decide when to use the mechanics**.

IMPORTANCE

Your collection of game and character aspects tells you what you need to focus on during your game. Think of them as a message from yourself to yourself, a set of flags giving you a recipe for having the most fun.

GMs, when you plan issues of your *Atomic Robo* game, you're going to use those aspects, and the connections between them, to generate the problems your PCs are going to solve. Players, your aspects are the reasons why your PC stands out from every other character who might have similar skills—lots of Action Scientists might have a high Combat skill, but not every Action Scientist is a **Bare-Knuckle Boxing Champ**. When that character's past as an anything-goes boxer comes into play, it gives the game a personal touch that it wouldn't have had otherwise.

The game aspects do something similar on a larger scale—they tell us why we care about playing this particular game in the first place, what makes it concrete and compelling to us. We can all say, “Oh, we like *Atomic Robo*,” but until we drill down to the specifics of a world where **Majestic 12 Is Always One Step Ahead** and **Helsingard's Still Out There**, we don't really have anything to attach our interest to.

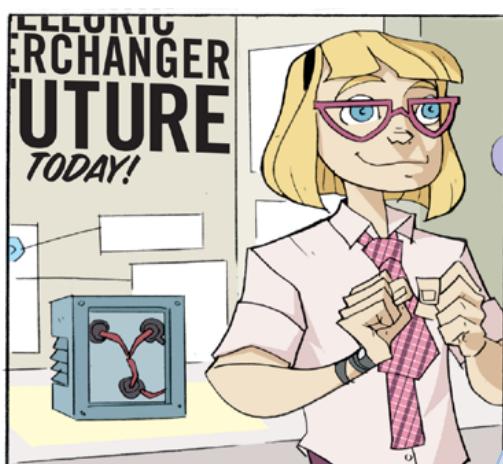
Situation aspects make the moment-to-moment interactions of play interesting by adding color and depth to what might otherwise be a boring scene. A fight in a tavern is generic by nature—it could be any tavern, anywhere. But when you add the aspect **Bubbling Vats of Chemicals** to the scene, and people bring it into play, it becomes “that fight we were in at the chemical plant, when I smashed that vat open and flooded the room with hydrochloric acid.” The unique details add interest and investment.

DECIDING WHEN TO USE MECHANICS

Because aspects tell us what's important, they also tell us when it's most appropriate to use the mechanics to deal with a situation, rather than just letting people decide what happens just by describing what they do.

GMs, this comes up for you most often when you're trying to figure out whether to require a PC to roll dice. If a player says, “I climb the ladder and grab the rocks,” and there's nothing special about the ladder or the rocks, then there's no real reason to require an overcome action to grab it. But if the situation aspects tell you that the ladder is a **Rotting Rope Ladder** and the rocks are actually **Dr. Dinosaur's Crystal Array**, then you suddenly have an element of pressure and risk that makes it worth going to the dice for.

Players, this comes up for you most often when invoking your aspects and considering compels. Your aspects highlight what makes your character an individual, and you want to play that up, right? So when the opportunity comes up to make your character more awesome by invoking, go for it! When you see an opportunity to influence the story by suggesting a compel for your character, do it! The game will be much richer for it as a whole.



MAKING A GOOD ASPECT

Because aspects are so important to the game, it's important to make the best aspects you can. So, how do you know what a good aspect is?

The best aspects are **double-edged**, **say more than one thing**, and **keep the phrasing simple**.

DOUBLE-EDGED

Players, good aspects offer a clear path of benefit to your character while also providing opportunities to complicate their lives or potentially be used to their detriment.

An aspect with a clear double-edge is going to come up in play more often than a mostly positive or negative one. You'll be able to use them more often to be awesome, and you'll be able to accept compels

from them, so the same aspect affects both parts of your fate point budget.

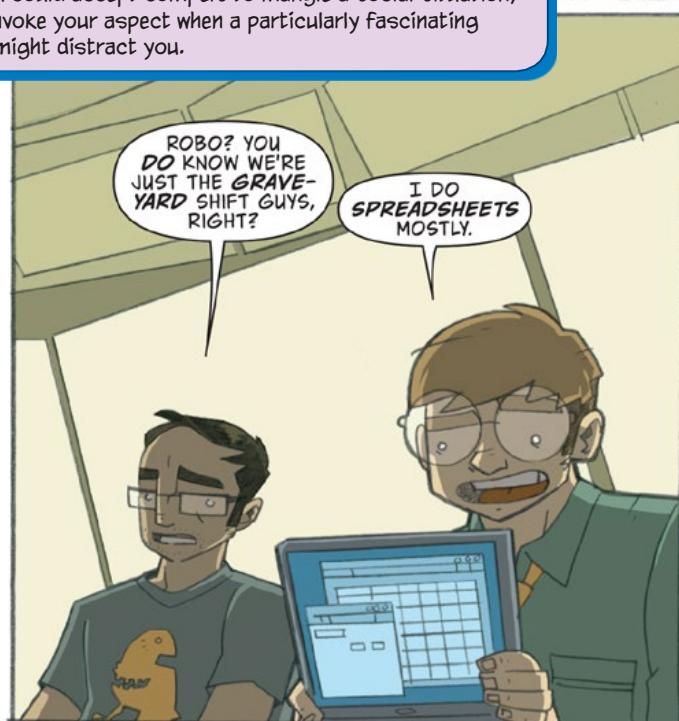
Try this as a litmus test: List two ways you might invoke the aspect, and two ways someone else could invoke it or you could get a compel from it. If the examples come easily to mind, great! If not, add more context to that aspect to make it work or put that idea to the side and come up with a different aspect.

GMs, this is just as true of your game and situation aspects. Any feature of a scene you call out should be something that either the PCs or their foes could use in dramatic fashion. Your game aspects do present problems, but they also should present ways for the PCs to take advantage of the status quo.



Let's look at an aspect like *Computer Genius*. The benefits of having this aspect are pretty obvious—any time you're hacking or otherwise working with technology, you could justify invoking it. But it doesn't seem like there's a whole lot of room for that aspect to work against you. So, let's think of a way we can spice that up a bit.

What if we change that aspect to *Nerdy McNerdson*? That still carries the connotations that would allow you to take advantage of it while working with computers, but it adds a downside—you're super nerdy. This might mean that you could accept compels to mangle a social situation, or someone might invoke your aspect when a particularly fascinating piece of equipment might distract you.



SAY MORE THAN ONE THING

Earlier, we noted at least four different types of things that a character aspect might be. The best aspects overlap across a few of those categories, because that means you have more ways to bring them into play.

GMs, for your situation aspects, you don't have to worry about this as much, because they're only intended to stick around for that scene. It's much more important for game and character aspects to suggest multiple contexts for use.



Now let's look at a simple aspect that a rookie Action Scientist might have: I Must Prove Myself.

You can invoke this whenever you're trying to do something to gain the approval of others or demonstrate your competence. Someone might compel it to bait you into getting into a fight you want to avoid, or to accept a hardship for the sake of reputation. So we know it has a double edge, so far so good.

But eventually, this aspect will run out of steam. It says just one thing about the character. Either you're trying to prove yourself, or this aspect isn't going to come up.

Now tie that aspect in with a relationship to someone else: I Must Prove Myself to Jenkins. Your options open up a great deal. Not only do you get all the content from before, but you've introduced a relationship with another character, suggesting a shared history and a host of other things. You can also invoke the aspect when dealing with Jenkins, Tesladyne, or with anyone else who might be affected by their reputation. Suddenly, that aspect has a lot more going on around it.

CLEAR PHRASING

Because aspects are phrases, they come with all the potential ambiguities of language. If no one knows what your aspect means, it won't get used enough.

That isn't to say you have to avoid poetic or fanciful expression. **Just a Simple Agriculturalist** isn't quite as fetching as **Child of Pastoral Bliss**. If that's the tone your game is going for, feel free to indulge your linguistic desires.

However, don't do this at the expense of clarity. Avoid metaphors and implications when you can get away with just saying what you mean. That way, other people don't have to stop and ask you during play if a certain aspect would apply, or get bogged down in discussions about what it means.

If you're wondering if your aspect is unclear, ask the people at the table what they think it means.



Take **Memories, Wishes, and Regrets**. There's something evocative about the phrase, a kind of melancholy about the past.

But as an aspect, what's it supposed to do? How does it help you? What are the memories of? What did you wish for? Without some concrete idea of what the aspect's referring to, invoking and compelling it is pretty much impossible.

Suppose that we talk about this some, and you specify that you were going for this idea that your character was scarred from years spent in the Korean War. You had to kill some people you didn't want to kill, saw things you didn't want to see, and pretty much had all your hope of returning to a normal life taken away.

This is all fantastic, so let's call it **Scars from the War**. Less poetic, maybe, but it directly references all the stuff you're talking about, and gives me ideas about people from your past the GM may be able to bring back into your life.

IF YOU GET STUCK

Now you know what makes for a good aspect, but that doesn't narrow down your potential choices any—you have a nearly infinite set of topics and ideas to choose from.

If you're still stuck about what to choose, here are some tips to make things a little easier on you.

LIVE IN THE NOW

While a new character should begin play with a concept aspect, you're under no obligation (or even *expectation*) to come up with all of your character aspects before play begins. Part of the point of playing your first couple issues with a new character is finding out who they are. Does the team need to figure out how to deal with a couple Helsingard warbots? Would it help if you were a **World-Renowned Robotician**? Congratulations, now you are.

In other words, when you play *Atomic Robo*, there's no need for a separate "character creation session"—playing is character creation, and vice-versa.

IDEA FIRST, REFINE LATER

Maybe you have a general idea of the aspect but don't know how to phrase it, or maybe you just have no idea. Don't sweat it. There's always room during the game to figure it out as you go.

KEEP YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

The same thing is also true if you have more than one attractive idea. Write them all down in the margins and see which one seems to really sing in play. Then fill the space in later, with the one that gets the most mileage.



ALWAYS ASK WHAT MATTERS AND WHY

Aspects tell you why something matters in the game and why we care about it. This is your primary compass and guide to choosing the best possible aspect. When in doubt, always ask: what do we really care about here, and why?

If there's more than one really juicy option, poll the other players and GM to see what they find interesting. Remember, you should all be helping each other out—the game works best if everyone's a fan of what everyone else is doing.

VARY IT UP

You don't want all your aspects to describe the same kind of thing. Five relationships means that you can't use your aspects unless one of them is in play, but five personality traits means that you have no connection to the game world. If you're stuck on what to pick for an aspect, looking at what kinds of things your other aspects describe may help you figure out which way to go for the current phase.

CROWD SOURCE IT

Because the game works best if everyone is invested in what everyone else is doing, you always have the option, especially with aspects, of simply asking the GM and other players to come up with something on your behalf. Let them in on your thought process, and ask them the same questions they're going to be asking of you. What matters to them? What are they excited about? What aspect do they think would be most interesting or appropriate?

You have the final decision as to what your character's aspects are, so don't look at it as giving up control. Look at it as asking your ever-important fan club and audience what they want to see, and using their suggestions to kick-start your own train of thought. If everyone has a bit of input on everyone else's characters, the game will benefit from that sense of mutual investment.

ASPECTS IN ACTION

Aspects have two basic functions: invocations and compels. When you **invoke** an aspect, you bring that detail into your story, making your character shine. When you **compel** an aspect, you encounter a complication now on the promise of more control later.

INVOKING ASPECTS

The primary way you're going to use aspects in a game of *Atomic Robo* is to invoke them. If you're in a situation where an aspect is beneficial to your character somehow, you can invoke it.

In order to invoke an aspect, explain why the aspect is relevant, spend a fate point, and choose one of these three options:

- ▼ Gain a **+2 bonus** to your current skill roll.
- ▼ **Reroll** all your dice.
- ▼ **Create an obstacle** for your opponent, represented by or related to the aspect, that adds +2 to the difficulty of whatever they're trying to do.

If you're invoking for a bonus or reroll, wait until after you've rolled the dice to see if you're going to need the benefit.

If you're invoking it to create an obstacle, there's no roll required, and you can do so at any time.

You can invoke multiple aspects on a single roll, but you *cannot* spend fate points to invoke the *same* aspect multiple times on a single roll. So if your reroll doesn't help you enough, you'll have to pick another applicable aspect (and spend another fate point) for a second reroll or that +2.



REROLL VS. BONUS

Rerolling the dice is a little riskier than just getting the +2 bonus, but has the potential for greater benefit. Typically, you'll want to reserve this option for when you've rolled a -3 or a -4 on the dice, to maximize the chance that you'll get a beneficial result from rerolling. Because the average dice roll is +0, the odds only favor a reroll when you roll worse than -2.

The group has to buy into the relevance of a particular aspect when you invoke it; GMs, you're the final arbiter on this one. The use of an aspect should make sense, or you should be able to creatively narrate your way into ensuring it makes sense.

Precisely *how* you do this is up to you. Sometimes, it makes so much sense to use a particular aspect that you can just hold up the fate point and name it. Or you might need to embellish on your character's action a little more so that everyone understands where you're coming from. Some groups will favor literal interpretations, while others will embrace aspects-as-metaphors and off-the-wall justifications. (That's why you should make sure that you're on the same page with the group as to what one of your aspects means—it makes it easier to justify bringing it into play.)

If the aspect you invoke is on someone else's character sheet, at the end of the scene they get the fate point you spent.



THE ELLIPSIS TRICK

If you want an easy way to ensure you have room to incorporate aspects into a roll, try narrating your action with an ellipsis at the end (...), and then finish the action with the aspect you want to invoke. Like this:

"Okay, so I line up my shot and..."
(rolls a -3) "...and it looks like I'm going to miss at first, but it turns out to be a trick shot, just the sort of thing you'd expect from Annie Oakley's Great-Granddaughter,"
(spends the fate point to reroll.)

FREE INVOCATIONS

You don't always have to pay a fate point to invoke an aspect—sometimes they're free.

When you succeed at creating an advantage, you "stick" a free invocation onto an aspect. If you succeed with style, you get two free invocations. The overcome, attack, and defend actions can also generate boosts, which are free to invoke.

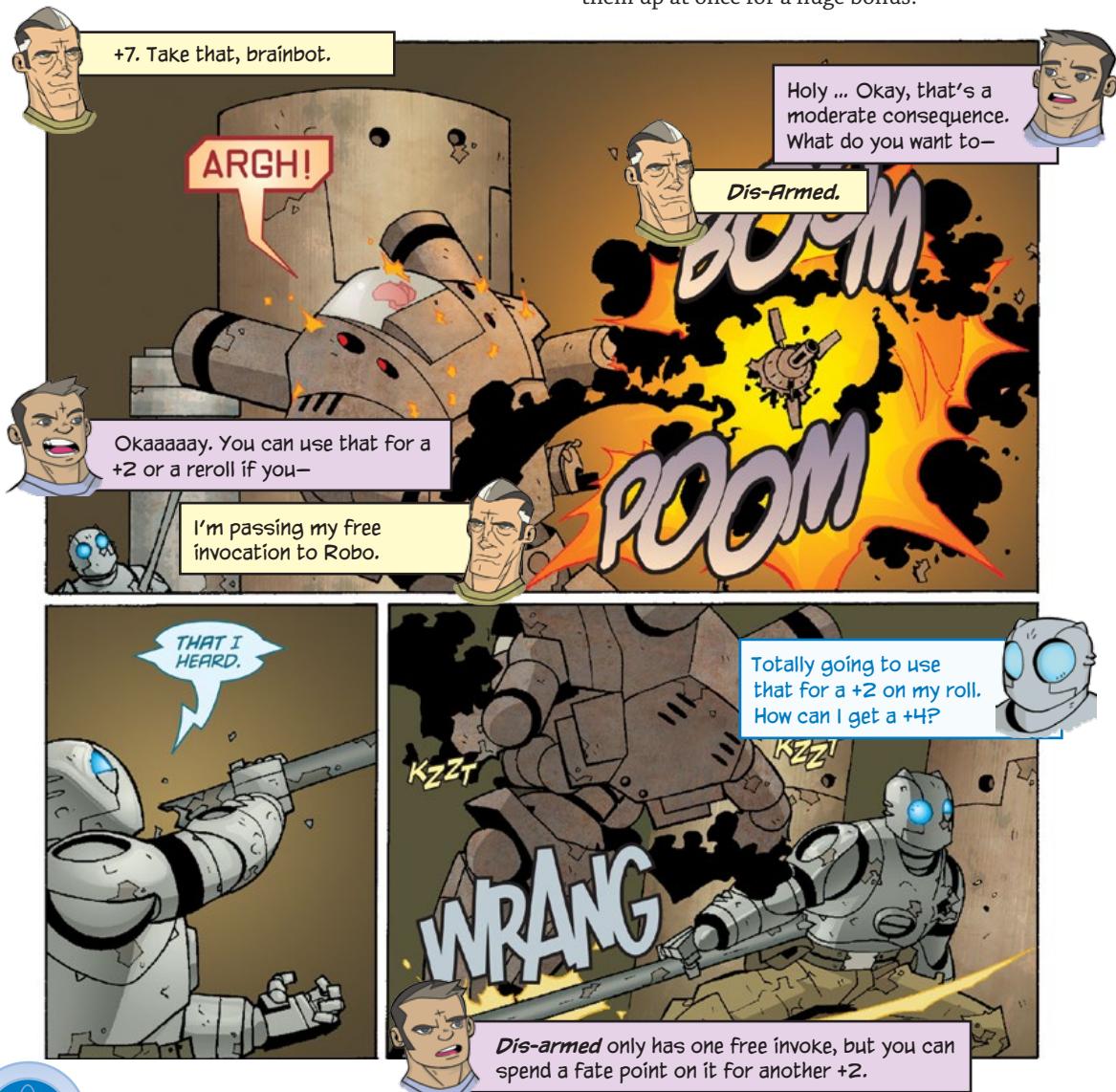
Every consequence inflicted in a conflict comes with one free invocation.

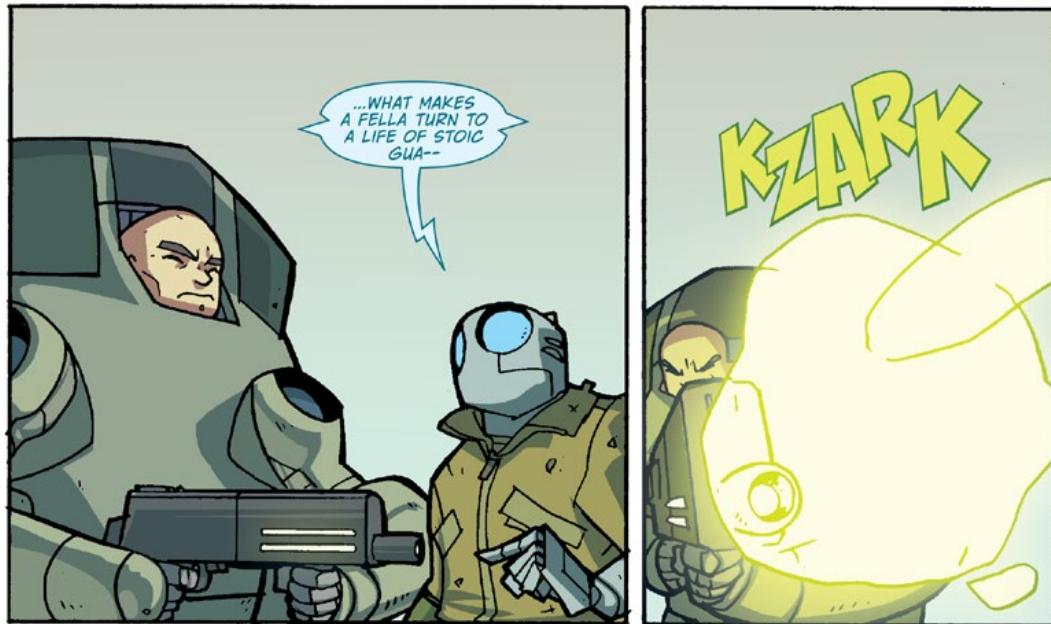
Free invocations work like normal ones except in two ways: **no fate points are exchanged**, and **any number of free invocations can be used on a single roll**. That means that if an aspect has two free invocations, you can use *both at once*

for a +4 bonus, two rerolls, a Great (+4) obstacle, or any combination of those. For example, you might use one of the aspect's invocations for a reroll, and a second for a +2 bonus to the new result.

After you've used your free invocations, if the aspect in question is still around, you can keep invoking it by spending fate points.

If you want, you can pass your free invocations to another character. That allows you to get some teamwork going between you and a buddy. This is really useful in a conflict if you want to set someone up for a big blow—have everyone create an advantage and pass their free invocations onto one person, then let that person stack all of them up at once for a huge bonus.





COMPELLING ASPECTS

The other way you use aspects in the game is called a **compel**. If you're in a situation where having or being around a certain aspect means your character's life is more dramatic or complicated, someone can compel the aspect. That aspect can be on your character, the scene, location, game, or any other aspect that's current available.

In order to compel an aspect, explain why the aspect is relevant, and make an offer as to what the complication is. You can negotiate the terms of the complication a bit until you reach a reasonable consensus, but ultimately the person being compelled gets to decide what's happening. Accepting a compel means committing to a complication, but it doesn't mean having the terms of that complication dictated to you.

Whoever is getting compelled then has two options:

- ▼ Accept the complication and receive a fate point.
- ▼ Pay a fate point to prevent the complication from happening.

The complication from a compel occurs regardless of anyone's efforts—once you've made a deal and taken the fate

point, you can't use your skills or anything else to mitigate the situation. You have to deal with the new story developments that arise from the complication.

If you prevent the complication from happening, then you and the group describe how you avoid it. Sometimes it just might mean that you agree that the event never happened in the first place, and sometimes it means narrating your character doing something proactive. Whatever you need to do in order to make it make sense works fine, as long as the group is okay with it.

GMs, you're the final arbiter here, as always—not just on how the result of a compel plays out, but on whether or not a compel is valid in the first place. Use the same judgment you apply to an invocation—it should make instinctive sense that a complication might arise from the aspect, or it should only require a small amount of explanation.

Finally, and this is very important: **if a player wants to compel another character, it costs a fate point to propose the complication.** The GM can compel for free, and any player can propose a compel on his or her own character for free.

TYPES OF COMPELS

There are two major categories for what a compel looks like in the game. Again, these are a tool to help you figure out what a compel should look like and help break mental blocks. Becoming good at quickly tossing out ideas for a compel is one of the primary skills you need to develop in *Atomic Robo*, so we're including slightly more advice than we did with invocations.

These categories are **decisions** and **events**.

DECISIONS

A decision is a kind of compel that is internal to the character. It happens because of a decision the character makes, hence the name. It looks like this:

▼ You have an aspect of _____ in _____ situation, so it makes sense that you'd decide to _____. This goes wrong when _____ happens.



Obviously, you're not obligated to follow the fill-in-the-blank approach to it if you don't want to, but if you're having a hard time making a compel work, try it.

So the real dramatic impact from these kinds of compels is not what decision the character makes, most of the time—it's how things go wrong. Before something goes wrong, the first sentence could be a prelude to making a skill roll or simply a matter of roleplaying. The complication that the decision creates is really what makes it a compel.

GMs, remember that a player is ultimately responsible for everything that the character says and does. You can offer decision-based compels, but if the player doesn't feel like the decision is one that the PC would make, don't force the issue by charging a fate point. Instead, negotiate the terms of the compel until you find a decision the player is comfortable making, and a complication that chains from that decision instead. If you can't agree on something, drop it.

The decision part should be very self-evident, and something that a player might have been thinking about doing anyway. The same goes for players trying to compel NPCs or each other—make sure you have a strong mutual understanding of what that NPC or other player might do before proposing this.

Players, if you need fate points, this is a really good way of getting them. If you propose a decision-based compel for your character to the GM, then what you're basically asking is for something you're about to do to go wrong somehow. GMs, as long as the compel isn't weak (as in, as long as there's a good, juicy complication), you should go with this. If the compel is weak, poll the rest of the group for ideas until something more substantial sticks.

If no one can agree on what the decision part should be, it shouldn't cost a fate point to counter—just drop it. Countering a decision-based compel should only mean that the “what goes wrong” part doesn't happen.

EVENTS

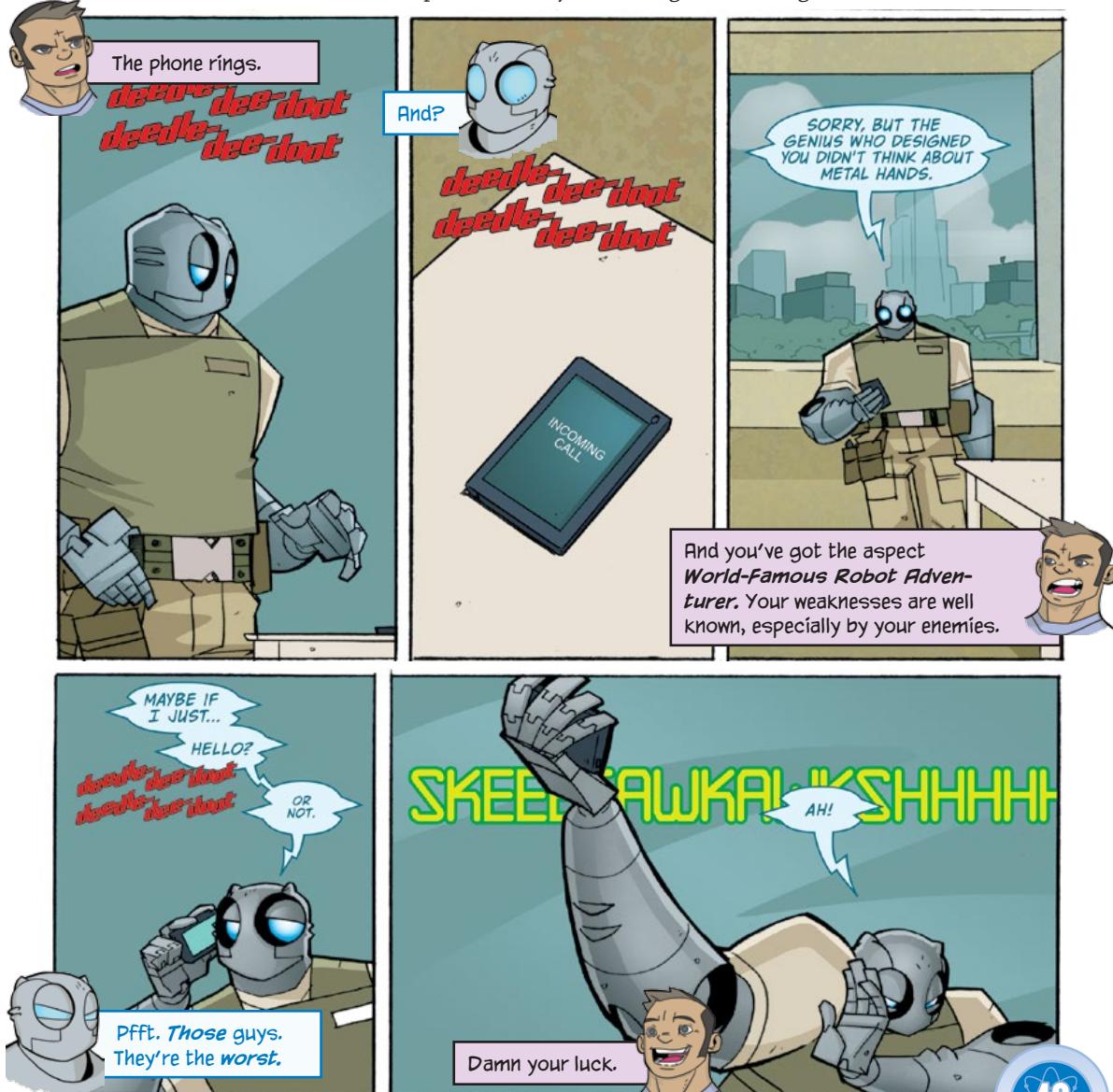
Event-based compels happen to the character in spite of themselves, when the world around them responds to a certain aspect in a certain way and creates a complicating circumstance. It looks like this:

▼ You are in _____ situation and have an aspect of _____, so it makes sense that, unfortunately, _____ would happen to you. Damn your luck.

As with decision-based compels, the real mileage is in the complication itself. Without that, you don't really have anything worth focusing on—the fact that the PCs continually have complicated and dramatic things happen to them is, well, exactly what makes them PCs in the first place.

GMs, event-based compels are your opportunity to party. You're expected to control the world around the PCs, so having that world react to them in an unexpected way is pretty much part and parcel to your job description.

Players, event-based compels are great for you. You're rewarded simply by *being there*—how much more awesome can you get? You might have a difficult time justifying an event-based compel yourself, as it requires you to assert control over an element of the game beyond your PC. Feel free to propose an event-based compel, but remember that the GM has the final say on controlling the game world and may veto you if she's got something else in mind.



COMPELLING WITH SITUATION ASPECTS

Just like with every other kind of aspect use, you can also use situation aspects (and by extension, game aspects) for compels. Because situation aspects are external to characters by default, you're almost always looking at event-based compels rather than decision-based ones. Refuse a compel on a situation aspect works like any other compel—accept a fate point and let it happen, or pay a fate point and prevent it.

RETROACTIVE COMPLETS

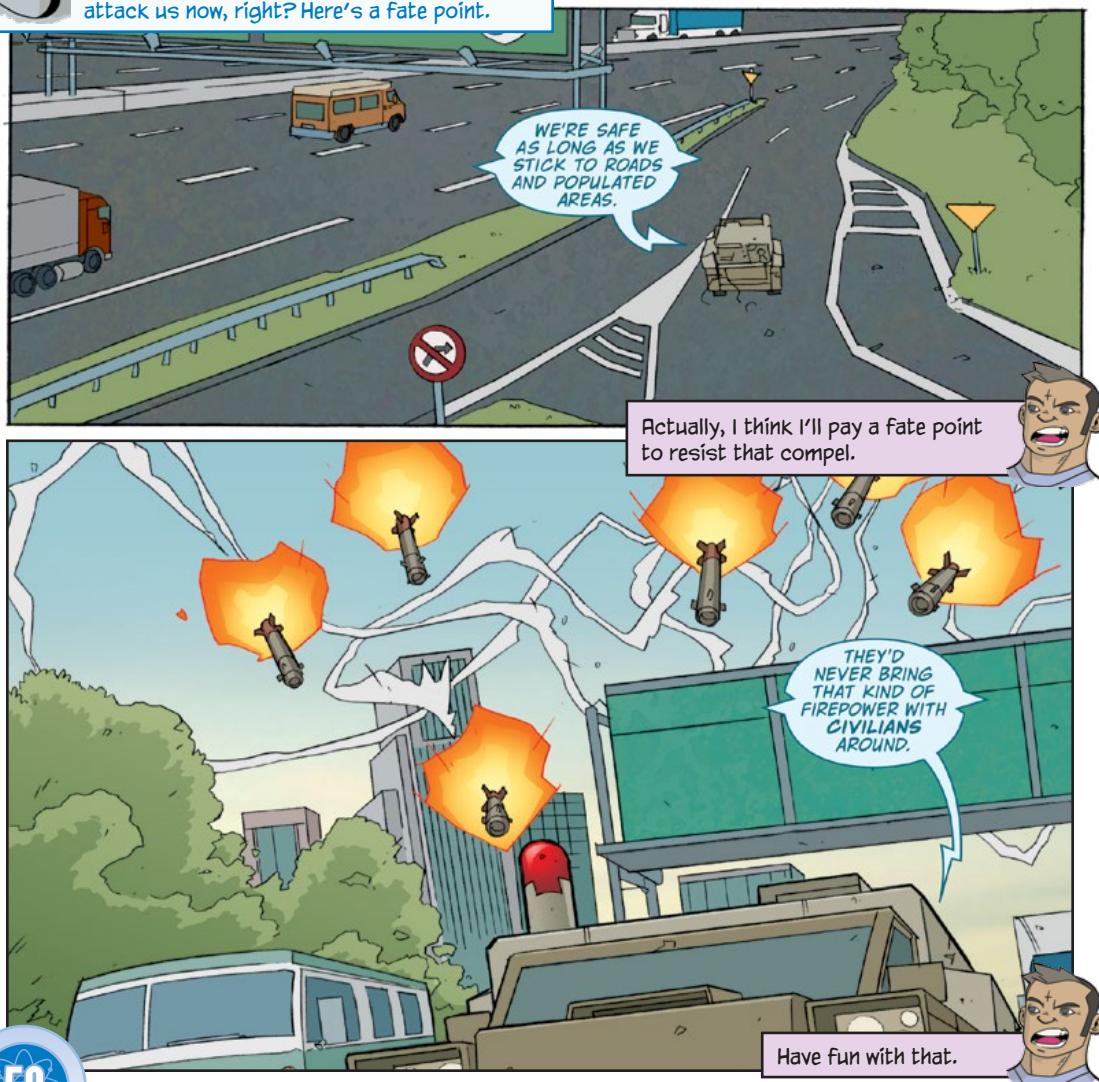
Sometimes, you'll notice during the game that you've fulfilled the criteria for a compel without a fate point getting

awarded. You've played your aspects to the hilt and gotten yourself into all kinds of trouble, or you've narrated crazy and dramatic stuff happening to a character related to their aspects just out of reflex.

Anyone who realizes this in play can make a mention of it, so that you can get retroactively awarded a fate point, treating it like a compel after the fact. GMs, you have final say here. It should be pretty obvious when something like this occurs, though—just look at the guidelines for event and decision compels above, and see if you can summarize what happened in the game according to those guidelines. If you can, award a fate point.



This is a *Crowded Freeway in Broad Daylight* right? Majestic 12 wouldn't dare attack us now, right? Here's a fate point.



USING ASPECTS FOR ROLEPLAYING

Finally, aspects have a passive use that you can draw on in almost every instance of play: as a guide to roleplaying your character. This may seem self-evident, but it's worth calling out anyway—the aspects on your character sheet are true of your character at all times, not just when they're invoked or compelled.

Think of your collection of aspects like an oracle, tarot spread, or tea leaves. They give you a big picture of what your character's about, and they can reveal interesting implications if you read between the lines. If you're wondering what your character might do in a certain situation, look at your aspects. What do they say about your character's personality, goals, and desires? Are there any clues in what your aspects say that might suggest a course of action? Once you find that suggestion, go for it.

Playing to your aspects also has another benefit: you're feeding the GM ideas for compels. You're already bringing your aspects into the game, so all she has to do is offer you complications and you're good to go.

GMs, you'll use your NPCs' aspects the same way, but you get an additional way of "reading the tea leaves"—you can also use them as a way of figuring out how the world reacts to the characters. Does someone have the aspect **Strongest Cyborg in the World**? That's a reputation that might precede that character, one that people might know about and react to. People might crowd in to see that character when he's passing through.

Also, it suggests something about that character's physical size and build. You know that most people are going to give that character a wide berth in a crowded space, and might be naturally intimidated. It's a super-strong cyborg! Who wouldn't be intimidated by that?

But no one's going to ignore that character. Inserting these kinds of aspect-related details into your narration can help your game seem more vivid and consistent, even when you're not shuffling fate points around.

CREATING AND DISCOVERING NEW ASPECTS IN PLAY

In addition to your character aspects, game aspects, and the situation aspects that the GM presets, you have the ability to create, discover, or gain access to other aspects as you play.

For the most part, you'll use the create an advantage action to make new aspects. When you describe the action that gives you an advantage, the context should tell you if it requires a new aspect or if it derives from an existing one. If you're bringing a new circumstance into play, like throwing sand in someone's eyes, you're indicating that you need a new situation aspect.

With some skills, it's going to make more sense to stick an advantage to an aspect that's already on some other character's sheet. In this case, the PC or NPC you're targeting would provide active opposition to keep you from being able to use that aspect.

If you're not looking for a free invocation, and you just think it'd make sense if there were a particular situation aspect in play, you don't need to roll the dice or anything—just suggest it, and if the group thinks it's interesting and appropriate, write it down.



EXTREMELY POWERFUL GM NINJA TRICK

So, if you don't have any aspects made up for a scene

or an NPC, just ask the players what kinds of aspects they're looking for when they roll to create an advantage. If they tie or succeed, write down something similar to what they were looking for and say they were right. If they fail, write it down anyway, or write another aspect down that's not advantageous to them, so as to contrast with their expectations.

SECRET OR HIDDEN ASPECTS

Some skills also let you use the create an advantage action to reveal aspects that are hidden, either on NPCs or environments—in this case, the GM simply tells you what the aspect is if you get a tie or better on the roll. You can use this to “fish” for aspects if you’re not precisely sure what to look for—doing well on the roll is sufficient justification for being able to find something advantage-worthy.

Generally speaking, you can assume that most of the aspects in play are public knowledge *for the players*. The PCs’ character sheets are sitting on the table, and probably the main and supporting NPCs are as well. That doesn’t always mean the *characters* know about those aspects, but that’s one of the reasons why the create an advantage action exists—to help you justify how a character learns about other characters.

Also, remember that aspects can only help deepen the story if you get to use them—aspects that are never discovered might as well never have existed in the first place. So most of the time, the players should always know what aspects are available for their use, and if there’s a question as to whether or not the character knows, use the dice to help you decide.

Finally, GMs, sometimes you’re going to want to keep an NPC’s aspects secret, or not reveal certain situation aspects right away, because you’re trying to build tension in the

story. If the PCs are investigating a series of technology thefts, you don’t exactly want the culprit to have **Techno-Thief** sitting on an index card for the PCs to see at the beginning of the adventure.

In those cases, **don’t make an aspect directly out of whatever fact you’re trying to keep secret**. Instead, make the aspect a detail that makes sense in context after the secret is revealed.

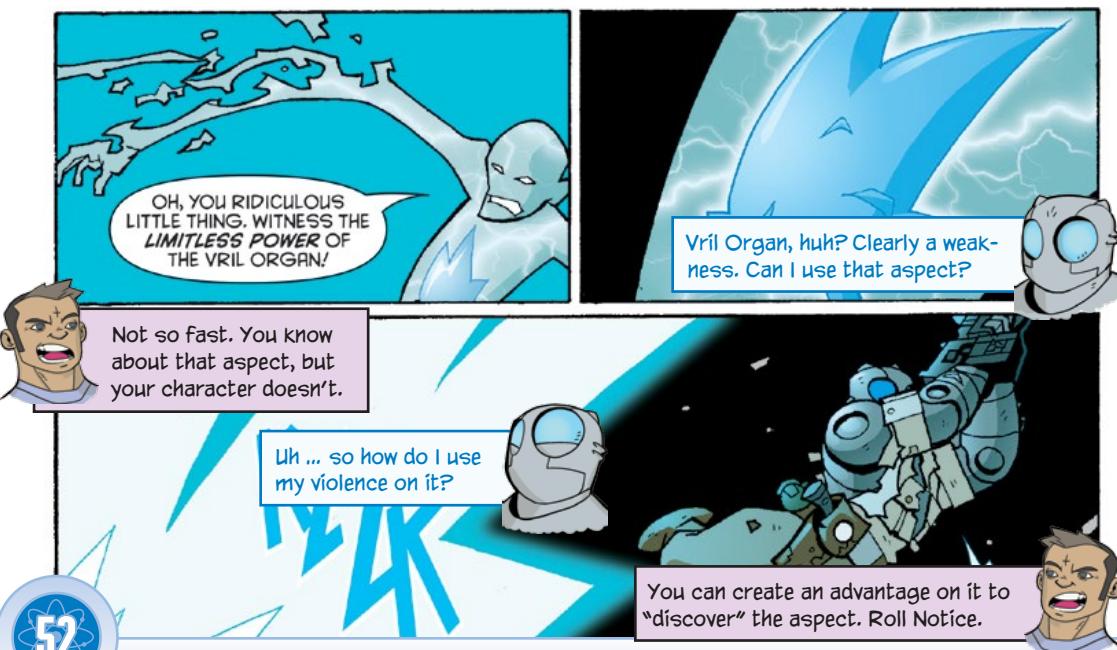


REMOVING OR CHANGING AN ASPECT

Game and character aspects can only change through advancement. See *The March of Progress* (page 223) for more.

If you want to get rid of a situation aspect, you have to tie (at a minimum) on an overcome action to do so. If a character can interfere with your attempt, they get to roll active opposition against you. Otherwise, GMs, it’s your job to set passive opposition. Of course, if there’s nothing risky or interesting in the way, just allow the player to do it without a roll.

Finally, if at any point it simply makes no sense for a situation aspect to be in play, get rid of it.



THE FATE POINT ECONOMY

For the most part, the use of aspects revolves around fate points. The best way to track your supply of fate points is with tokens, such as poker chips, glass beads, or some other sort of marker.

Ideally, you want a consistent ebb and flow of fate points going on throughout your sessions—players spend them in order to be awesome in a crucial moment, and they get them back when their lives get dramatic and complicated. So if your fate points are flowing the way they’re supposed to, you’ll end up with these cycles of triumphs and setbacks that make for a fun and interesting story.

STARTING FATE POINTS

At the beginning of a new issue, every player gets a number of fate points equal to the number of character aspects on their character sheet. For example, a character with three character aspects would start a new issue with three fate points.

During play, every time a player writes down a new character aspect on their character sheet, they get a fate point.

Most characters will begin play with only one aspect—their concept—and the player will invent the rest as needed over the course of the first issue or two.

When you write down a new character aspect, announce it to the table. This does two things: it lets the GM know you have a fate point coming to you, and it gives everyone else a chance to give you an attaboy for your cool new aspect.

If an issue stretches beyond a single session of play, you start the next session with however many fate points you had at the end of the last one. It’s only with the advent of a new issue that you reset to your usual starting allotment of one fate point per character aspect.

SPENDING FATE POINTS

You spend fate points in any of the following ways:

- ▼ **TO INVOKE AN ASPECT:** Invoking an aspect costs you one fate point, unless the invocation is free.
- ▼ **TO POWER A STUNT:** Some stunts are very potent, and as such, cost a fate point in order to activate. See *Modes, Skills and Stunts* for more info.
- ▼ **TO REFUSE A COMPEL:** Once a compel is proposed, you can avoid the complication associated with it by paying a fate point.

EARNING FATE POINTS

You earn fate points in any of the following ways:

- ▼ **WHEN YOU ACCEPT A COMPEL:** Agreeing to the complication associated with a compel yields a fate point. This may sometimes happen retroactively if the circumstances warrant.
- ▼ **WHEN SOMEONE INVOCS YOUR ASPECTS AGAINST YOU:** If someone pays a fate point to invoke an aspect attached to your character, you gain their fate point at the end of the scene. This includes character aspects, as well as any consequences you may have racked up.
- ▼ **WHEN YOU CONCEDE A CONFLICT:** You receive one fate point for conceding a conflict, as well as an additional fate point for each consequence that you’ve received in that conflict. (This isn’t the same as being taken out in a conflict, by the way; see *Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts* for more.)

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THE GM AND FATE POINTS

At the start of each scene, the GM gains a **budget** of one fate point per player at the table. The GM spends these fate points to invoke NPCs' and PCs' aspects, and to refuse compels on NPCs' aspects. In addition, the GM can also spend fate points to improve an NPC beyond their normal capacity, as described in *Running the Game* on page 175. (Compels on PCs' aspects do not come out of the budget—those are paid for out of an unlimited “slush fund.”) Any fate points from a scene's budget not spent before the end of that scene are lost.

The GM can also spend fate points from her **reserve** to increase her budget for any given scene. By default, this reserve starts at zero, but there are three ways a GM's budget can be increased—and two of them are in the players' hands.

BORROWING HARDWARE

PCs can choose to borrow equipment from their faction, such as top-of-the-line lab equipment or a lightning gun. When they do so, the players pay for it by increasing the GM's reserve. See *Tesladyne Industries* (page 218) for more detail.

PCS WITH MEGA-STUNTS

If a PC with mega-stunts has more than five stunts' worth of benefits, add one fate point to the GM's reserve for every benefit in excess of five. See *Mega-stunts* (page 76) for more on what this means and how mega-stunts work.

NPCS

When an NPC earns fate points the same way that a PC does—someone invokes one of their aspects, you concede a conflict on behalf of that NPC, or you accept a player-driven compel—those fate points go into the reserve. (See *Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts*, page 123, for more on conceding.)





Enter our four PCs: Robo, Jenkins, Lang, and Ada. Robo has 8 stunt benefits, so that's 3 fate points for my reserve. Jenkins has 10 stunt benefits, for 5 more fate points in my reserve, so I have 8 total.



I've already run through the 4 fate points I had budgeted for this scene, so if I want to invoke this Exo-Suit's aspect of *Heavy Hitter*, it'll have to come out of my reserve.



I'm going to spend a fate point from my reserve to give these Majestic 12 vehicles a stunt: *Explosive Rounds*: Weapon:4.



Worth it.



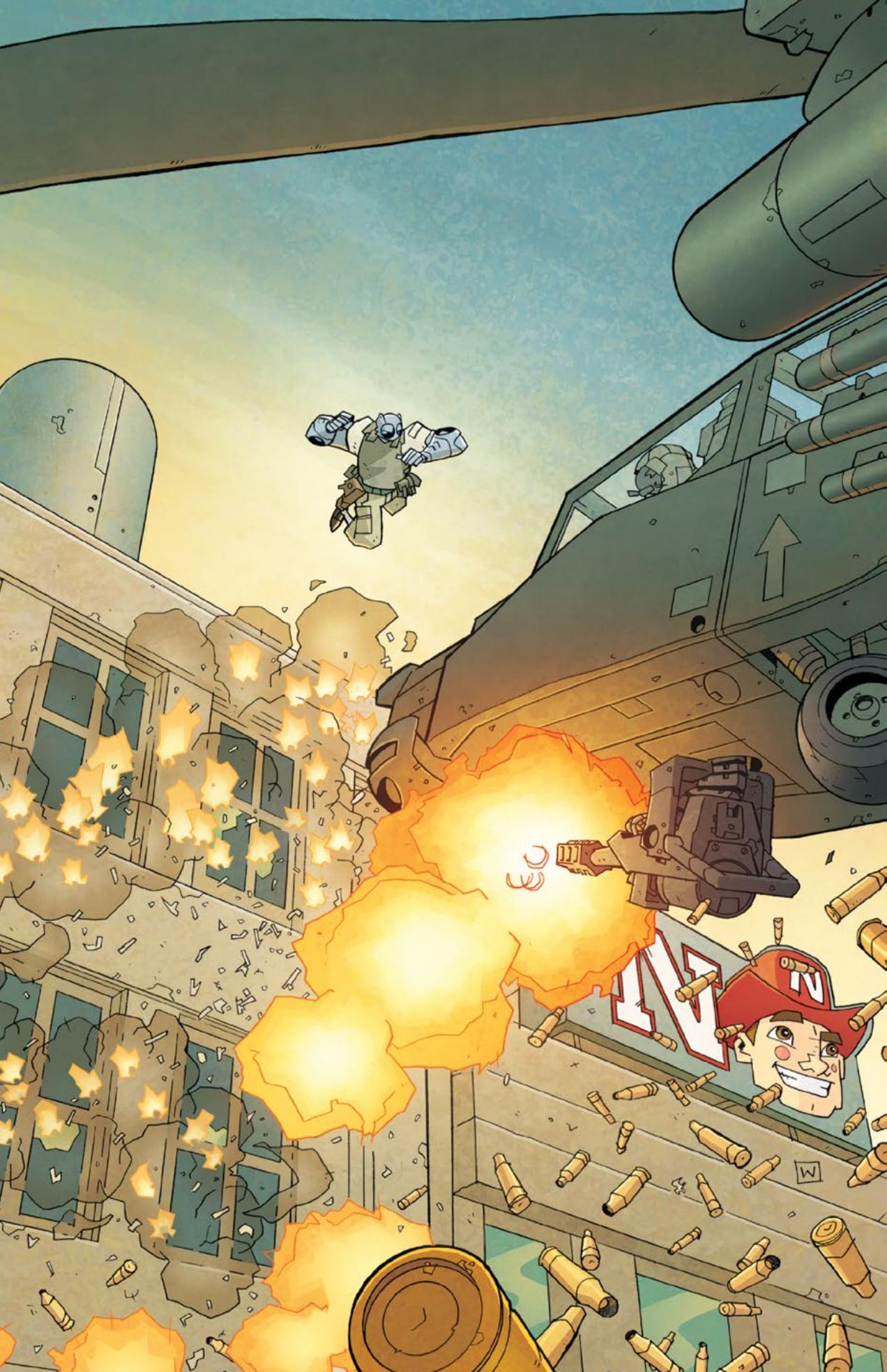
So worth it.

Several explosions later...



I know how M12 operates. I'm spending a fate point to invoke the soldiers' aspect of *Tactical Maneuvers* for another +2 on my attack.

And that fate point goes to my reserve.



CHAPTER FIVE: MODES, SKILLS, AND STUNTS

Modes, **skills**, and **stunts** govern how your character interacts with the mechanics behind your story. They also tell you and the GM who your character is, from the broad strokes (modes) to the fine details (stunts).

Your character will have three modes, each representing a broad skillset. You can pick from the four standard modes of Action, Banter, Intrigue, and Science, or you can make up your own weird modes if your character concept strays from your average Action Scientist. Regardless, you'll rate one mode at Good (+3), one at Fair (+2), and one at Average (+1).

A mode's rating is also the baseline rating of its skills. If simply being **trained** in a skill won't cut it for you, you can further improve them to **focused** or **specialized**.

Finally, your character can have up to five stunts—unique ways in which they bend or break the rules. If you have a weird mode, you might also have **mega-stunts** to represent things like super-strength or extreme training.

The best part is that after picking and rating your modes and defining your concept aspect, improving your skills and deciding on your stunts can easily be done during play, as you need them, so you can get right to the story.



MODES

WHAT MODES ARE

A **mode** is a broad area of competence, represented as a group of skills connected by a common theme. For example, the Action mode includes skills about things like running, fighting, and piloting, while the skills in the Banter mode are all about social interaction.

The four **standard modes**—Action, Banter, Intrigue, and Science—cover the usual skills an Action Scientist needs. These are discussed further later in this chapter.

Characters who don't fit neatly into the Action Scientist mold can have one or more **weird modes**. These are often player-defined, though you can find a number of ready-to-use pre-fab weird modes to drop into your character or serve as examples starting on page 86.

Every PC has three modes, whether standard or weird.

WHAT MODES DO

The primary function of modes is to make character creation quick and easy, especially when using the E-Z No-Math Method. Instead of picking and rating skills individually, you pick three modes, give each a rating, and get to playing.

Modes also serve as a way to quickly conceptualize or evaluate a character. A character's selection of modes gives you a good indication of what's important to that character's concept—what they're all about. Even if you didn't know anything else about Atomic Robo and, say, Dr. Dinosaur, a glance at their modes—Action, Science, and Robot for Robo, and Dinosaur, Action, and Crystals for Dr. Dinosaur—clearly shows they're very different sorts of characters.

Every mode has a rating. Of your PC's three modes, rate one at Average (+1), one at Fair (+2), and one at Good (+3). While you'll rarely (if ever) add your mode's rating directly to a roll, a mode's rating does affect the rating of its skills.

THE STANDARD MODES

These rules make the assumption that the default *Atomic Robo* PC is built using the **E-Z No-Math Character Creation** method described in *Making Characters* (page 30). Characters made this way are built on-the-fly, during play, with very little about them pre-determined before dice hit the table. For the sake of convenience and ease of use, all of these characters' modes are usually selected from the four standard modes:

▼ **ACTION:** Action-hero type stuff, like flying a plane, leaping over a chasm, or the aforesaid Nazi-punching. If you're being overtly physical or some kind of tough-guy, you're probably in the Action mode.

▼ **BANTER:** Interpersonal skills, polite and otherwise. This covers everything from reasoned persuasion to irrational intimidation and all points in between.

▼ **INTRIGUE:** Subterfuge, subtlety, and ventures of questionable legality. Stealth, disguise, and your standard B&E all fall under Intrigue.

▼ **SCIENCE:** All fields of scientific endeavor, whether you're rebuilding a transmission, hacking a Majestic 12 mainframe, or accelerating particles. If you're pitting your brain against an inanimate object, you're probably doing Science.

Even with just four modes, the player's choices of ratings allow for plenty of variety—and that's not even accounting for skills and stunts, which offer even more differentiation between PCs.





WEIRD MODES

Supplementing these are the **weird modes**. Optional and usually player-defined, weird modes serve two basic purposes. One, they cover unusual character concepts, like sentient robots or possibly psychotic dinosaurs. Two, they say something very specific about the character in question. If the standard modes describe ways of doing things, weird modes describe the character doing them. A weird mode might combine elements of two or more standard modes, or it might bear no resemblance whatsoever to the spectrum of typical human ability.

We'll unpack what all that means later on in this chapter, but for now here are some examples of weird modes.

- ▼ **ROBOT:** You're a mechanical artificial intelligence of some kind. Robo himself is the most obvious example, but that doesn't mean he has to be the only one.
- ▼ **DINOSAUR:** You're a throwback to a bygone age when thunder-lizards ruled the Earth and science was but a gleam in evolution's eye (or the apparent equivalent).
- ▼ **PSYCHIC:** You possess some sort of psychic ability, such as the ability to read minds or move objects using the power of sheer thought.
- ▼ **MUTANT:** You've been altered by science into something more (or less) than

human. Dr. Shinka's Biomega experiments are fine examples of mutants.

▼ **PILOT:** You're at home in the sky, at the stick of your flying contraption of choice, winging your way toward some exotic corner of the Earth—or perhaps dogfighting for your life.

▼ **SECRET AGENT:** You're an elite operative for a shadowy organization of one kind or another.

▼ **REPORTER:** You're a professional journalist of the investigative variety who relies on a sharp eye and sharper instincts to get to the bottom of things.

Some of these modes have a bit of thematic overlap, like Intrigue and Secret Agent. That's perfectly normal and nothing to worry about. No standard mode is wholly unique, and many weird modes will share something in common with one or more standard modes, or even another weird mode the character may have. It's actually beneficial when they do.

Note too that "weird" here doesn't necessarily mean genuinely *weird*—it's more like "not standard." A weird mode can just as easily represent a profession, like a pilot or a reporter, as it can something more bizarre, like a mutant or a psychokineticist.

You can find more than a dozen sample weird modes starting on page 86.

SKILLS

WHAT SKILLS ARE

If modes represent broad areas of competence, then **skills** are specialties within those modes. Even so, skills are still pretty broad themselves. For example, Combat is the skill for all manner of physical violence, and Vehicles is the skill for driving a car, flying an aircraft, or operating any other sort of vehicle.

Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game includes 13 standard skills, as follows:

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Burglary
- ▼ Combat
- ▼ Contacts
- ▼ Deceive
- ▼ Empathy
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique
- ▼ Provoke
- ▼ Rapport
- ▼ Stealth
- ▼ Vehicles
- ▼ Will

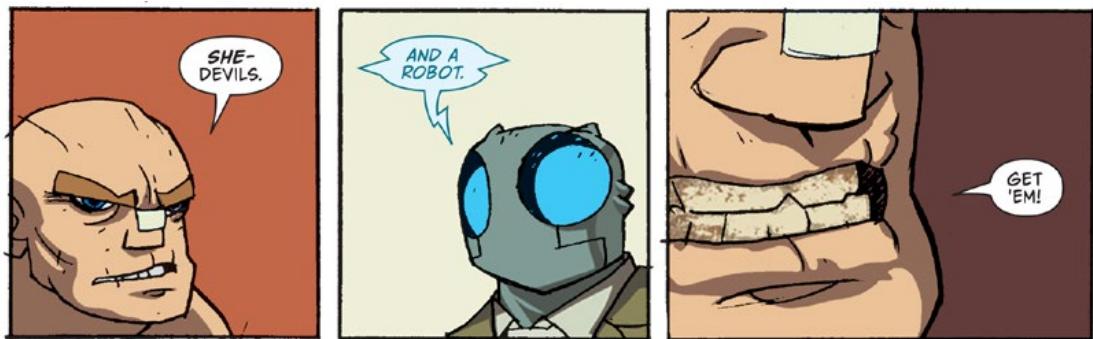


WHAT SKILLS DO

Skills are the basis for everything your character actually *does* in the game that involves challenge and chance (and dice). Like modes, skills are rated on the adjective ladder. The higher the rating, the more effective your character is with the skill.

A skill's rating is limited to three possibilities—equal to its mode's rating, one step higher than its mode's rating, or two steps higher than its mode's rating. No skill can be rated more than two steps higher than its mode's rating. This means that every skill on your character sheet will be at least Average (+1) and at most Superb (+5). See *Making Characters* (page 34) for more on improving skills, and *The Basics* (page 15) for more on how skills are used.





SKILL ACTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

We define a skill in two ways: in terms of the **actions** that you can take with the skill, and the **applications** of its use. While there are only four actions, as discussed in *Outcomes and Actions* (page 58), the number of potential applications is roughly infinite.

Setting aside the infinite for the time being, let's review the four actions. (*Outcomes and Actions* covers these in much more detail.)



OVERCOME: What it sounds like—getting past some kind of challenge, engaging task, or hindrance related to the skill. Your go-to for non-combat problem-solving.



CREATE AN ADVANTAGE: Using a skill to take advantage of the environment or situation you're in. This usually takes the form of either discovering an existing aspect or creating a new one, but you can also use this game action to make up new story details as well.



ATTACK: Harming someone in a conflict.



DEFEND: Preventing harm to yourself in a conflict, protecting someone or something else, or stopping someone from creating an advantage against you.

A skill's name provides context for its place in the story. Its listed actions tell you how it matters in game terms. The intersection of a skill's context and its actions gives you its applications—the circumstances under which it can be used.

For example, Combat's context is fighting, and Provoke's context is social interaction. Both skills have the attack action, but apply it in different ways. Combat's attack application involves inflicting physical harm with things like fists, guns, or Bucks, while Provoke's attack application involves inflicting mental harm via threats and intimidation.

STANDARD SKILL DESCRIPTIONS

The 13 standard skills are described in the following format:

NAME

General description and context for the skill.

ASSOCIATED MODES: The standard modes with which the skill is associated.



Action and application. If an action has more than one application, each action symbol indicates a separate application.



ATHLETICS

The Athletics skill represents your character's general level of physical fitness, whether through training, natural gifts, or unusual means (like cybernetic enhancement or genetic alteration). It's the skill that represents how good you are at moving your body.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Action, Intrigue



Deal with an obstacle that requires physical movement—jumping, running, climbing, swimming, etc. (This includes the sprint action.) If it resembles something you'd do in the decathlon, you should roll Athletics. You'd also roll to participate in any contests or challenges that rely on these types of activities. Note that conflicts aren't obstacles; those are handled by Defend (see below).



Maneuver to gain an edge, such as finding Higher Ground, forcing someone to be **Cornered**, or climbing a tree to get a **Bird's Eye View**.



Dodge close-quarters or ranged attacks in a physical conflict.



Counter efforts to create an advantage against you, if you're in a position to physically interfere with whomever's making the attempt, or to keep someone from moving past a certain point.

BURGLARY

The Burglary skill covers your character's aptitude for stealing things and getting into places that are off-limits. This skill also includes a proficiency in related tech, allowing the character to hack security systems, disable alarm systems, and the like.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Intrigue



Engage in theft or infiltration. Bypassing locks and traps, pickpocketing and filching, covering your tracks, and other such activities all fall under the purview of this skill.



Case a location. With Burglary, you can determine how hard it will be to break into the target and what kind of security you're dealing with, as well as discover any exploitable vulnerabilities. You can also examine the work of other burglars to determine how a particular heist was done, and discover aspects related to whatever evidence they may have left behind.



Make a building (or something else) secure with locks or traps. This includes foiling investigation efforts and blocking attempts at infiltration by others using the same skill.

COMBAT

The Combat skill deals in all manner of violence, unarmed or armed, close-quarters or ranged.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Action



Execute a maneuver or “special move” in combat, such as disarming your opponent, throwing sand in their eyes, striking nerve points, or laying down suppressive fire. On a successful roll, any of these maneuvers would result in an appropriate aspect. See *Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts* for examples of how that works.



Inflict some form of physical harm, whether hand-to-hand or ranged. Defend against Combat attacks with Combat or Athletics.



Counter hand-to-hand attacks in a physical conflict. Combat *cannot* defend against ranged attacks, however; use Athletics for that.



Counter an attempt to create combat-oriented advantages.



CONTACTS

Contacts is the skill of knowing people and making connections with them, especially in a pinch. The better you are with Contacts, the better your information network.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Banter, Intrigue



Poll your social networks for information. Whether that’s old-fashioned “man on the street” type of work or searching archives and computer databases, you’re able to hunt down information (or people). Note that in the case of finding a specific person, a successful roll doesn’t necessarily give you immediate access to them, depending on the situation. For example, if the research scientist in question is currently detained by the authorities, that’ll be a separate obstacle to overcome (maybe using Contacts, maybe using some other skill).



Leverage your contacts to create a story detail or create/discover an aspect. “Hey guys, my contacts tell me that Joe Steel is the **Best Mechanic For A Thousand Miles**—we should talk to him.”



Get the word on the street about a particular individual, object, or location, based on what your contacts tell you. These aspects almost always deal with reputation more than fact, such as **Known Sycophant** or **Notorious Swindler**. Whether that person lives up to their reputation is anybody’s guess, though that doesn’t invalidate the aspect. (People often have misleading reputations about themselves that complicate their lives.) Similarly, you can also use your information network to plant information or get you information to help in the conflict.



Counter an opponent’s attempts to create social advantages against you, provided your information network can be brought to bear in the situation.

DECEIVE

As might be expected, this is the skill of lies and misdirection. Whether spinning a convincing falsehood, crafting a disguise, or bluffing some poor dope who really ought to know better, it's all Deceive.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Banter, Intrigue



Bluff or give a false impression. These are situations in which the stakes aren't high enough for a contest or conflict, but you still want to roll to see if things get complicated or not. More complicated cons might involve a contest or a challenge, as you layer the deception to achieve your goal.



Create a convincing disguise, whether for yourself or others. You'll need to have the time and supplies to create the desired effect.



Obtain information from someone who (falsely) believes you to be trustworthy. This is more likely to get you story details than an aspect, but if the information represents a tangible advantage, it might net you an aspect.

By a similar token, the advantage might be an aspect you're putting forward as a false impression. For example, if you're undercover at a fancy corporate shindig, you might use Deceive to declare a **Wealthy Industrialist Cover Story** on the scene to help you mingle with the guests.



Distract or misdirect, similar to declaring a false impression above. This can also apply in physical conflicts for feints and fake-outs, allowing you to put an enemy **Off-Balance**.



Counter efforts to discern your true motives. This includes someone using Empathy against you, as well as throwing off investigation attempts with false information.



EMPATHY

Empathy involves knowing and being able to spot changes in a person's mood or bearing. It's basically the Notice skill (see below), but for people.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Banter



Perceive a change in someone's attitude or intent.



Remove mental consequences from yourself or others.



Read a person's emotional state and/or get a general sense of who they are. This presumes you have some kind of interpersonal contact with them. Most often, this will mean discovering their aspects, but you can also create new aspects for NPCs as well. If the target has some reason to be aware that you're trying to read them, they can defend with Deceive or Rapport. This includes the use of Empathy to try and discover what circumstances will allow you to conduct mental attacks against the target by figuring out their breaking points.



See through lies and deceptions to someone's true intent.



Counter someone's attempt to create an advantage against you in a social context. Generally speaking, this usually requires direct contact with them. If you're working through an intermediary, Contacts is probably a more appropriate skill to use.

NOTICE

The Notice skill represents a character's overall perception, ability to pick out details at a glance, and other powers of observation.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Action, Intrigue, Science



Spotting or reacting to something in the environment, often in a timely manner. This includes hearing the faint sound of a twig snapping behind you, spotting a concealed gun in that mail carrier's waistband, and searching a cluttered room for the evidence you need.

Note that this isn't license for the GM to call for Notice rolls left and right to see how generally observant a character is; that's boring. Instead, call for a Notice roll when both success and failure would have equally interesting results.



Discover something new and advantageous in the environment via direct observation. You might look over a room for details that stand out, find an escape route in a debris-filled building, notice someone sticking out in a crowd, and so on. This advantage can often manifest as a situation aspect. For example, you might spy **Hidden Handholds** in a wall, find a **Weak Point** in a Laufpanzer's armor plating, or chance upon some **Distinctive Spoor** in the course of tracking the Jersey Devil.

When you're watching people, Notice can tell you what's going on with them externally; for subtler, more internal changes, use Empathy.



Watch over an area to detect people trying to use Stealth or Burglary to infiltrate it.

PHYSIQUE

Physique reflects the character's natural physical aptitudes, such as raw strength and endurance. Where Athletics is about skillful body movement and coordination, Physique is about door-busting power.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Action



Apply brute force to bypass obstacles like prison bars, locked gates, or a tree that's fallen across the road. An advantage or tool of some kind might be required to smash, break, or otherwise bypass something that's reinforced. Of course, Physique is the classic skill for arm-wrestling matches and other contests of applied strength, as well as marathons or other endurance-based challenges.



Apply brute force, often in a physical conflict, to gain an edge. Typically, this takes the form of grappling and holding someone in place, rendering them **Pinned** or **Locked Down**, but could also result in a situation aspect like **Crate-Choked Passage** or **I Loosened It Up For You**.



Counter attempts to create physical advantages against you, given the right circumstances. For example, you might interpose something heavy and brace it to block access, or push others out of the way of an incoming physical attack.





PROVOKE

Provokes covers your character's ability to inspire fear in others, effectively using the threat of violence to cow or manipulate them. Particularly heinous individuals might include torture as part of their Provoke attempts.

This skill required that your opponents can feel fear—for example, robots and water-clock zombies typically can't be intimidated. Usually, they can't deliberately intimidate you, either.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Action, Banter



Scare someone into getting what you want, if the situation is framed as an obstacle rather than a contest or a conflict. This will often happen when you're going up against nameless NPCs or it isn't worthwhile to play out the particulars.



Threaten. This could take the form of an aspect, such as discovering a target's aspects by seeing how they respond to your intimidation attempt. It could also take the form of psyching someone out in a conflict—forcing them into a defensive posture, startling them, or otherwise using your intimidating presence to create a momentary advantage. In mental conflict, it allows you to bring in particular threats or circumstances in the scene to enhance the effect of your efforts, like brandishing a weapon or reminding the target that there's no one around to help them.



Inflict mental harm by destroying the target's confidence and resolve. Keep in mind that your relationship with the target and the circumstances

you're in figure a great deal into whether or not you can use this skill.

However, Provoke doesn't require you to know how to get to your opponent beforehand—negative emotion is a universal enough language that as long as you're in the right situation, you can make mental attacks.

Not all attacks with Provoke have to take the form of cowering the opponent—you can also use it to bring about another uncontrolled, negative emotional response, like anger or loss of composure.

Defend against Provoke with Will.

EXCEEDING RECOMMENDED LIMITS

The actions and applications for each skill presented here only reflect their usual, reliable functions in the game. If a player wants to exceed these guidelines, that's totally cool—as long as it makes sense in context. But keep in mind when you do this that you're potentially setting a precedent

For example, Brian's playing Atomic Robo during his fighter-pilot days in the Pacific Theater. He wants to ram Robo's P-51 into a Japanese Zero, effectively using Vehicles as an attack. Unorthodox! The GM's fine with it, with two provisos: One, the P-51 will automatically take whatever damage the Zero does (as will Robo, unless he can eject in time), and two, he's going to need to invoke an aspect to do it.

Brian agrees. First he creates an advantage to put an aspect on his plane: Ramming Speed! Next round, he invokes that aspect for effect to temporarily add the Attack game action to Vehicles, and rolls his attack.

RAPPORT

Rapport is the art of influencing people and getting them on your side. Unlike Deceive, it mainly relies on the use of honest appeals and natural charisma, but don't let that fool you into thinking it's just for nice guys—people can manipulate and affect you by being straightforward just as much as they can by lying to you.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Banter



Get what you want out of people in situations where it's not interesting or dramatic to play out a contest or conflict. Whether it's convincing a cop to leave you alone via your charm, flattering a politician with just the right words, ingratiating yourself to the locals in a truck stop, or calming down an otherwise tense situation, Rapport is the skill to use. Many social contests default to Rapport.



Use your conversational skills to create new story details or aspects on the scene (or someone else). Having the benefit of a **Receptive Crowd**, putting across an **Unshakeable Air of Confidence**, or simply reminding your opponent that **You're Better Than This** can help you achieve your goals in a conflict.



Counter attempts to create advantages against you with Rapport or Deceive. Talking your way out of situations is Rapport's bread and butter, and as such, you can use it to turn hostile words against themselves. As long as the situation is verbal in nature, you can use this against Provoke as well.

You have to dig deeper in order to defend against mental attacks—see the Will skill for that.

STEALTH

Stealth is the skill of physical deception—sneaking, hiding, palming small objects—much like Deceive is the skill of social deception. As such, it pairs well with Burglary.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Intrigue



Get past any situation that primarily depends on not being seen or heard. Sneaking past sentries and security, hiding from a pursuer, keeping yourself from leaving evidence of your passage, and any other such uses all fall under the purview of Stealth, as does sleight of hand.

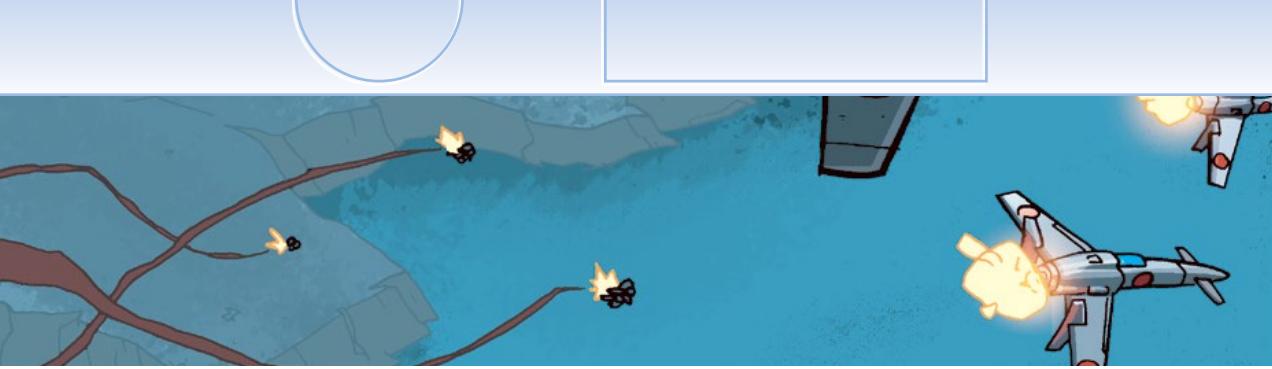


Put yourself in an ideal position for an attack or ambush in a conflict. That way, you can be **Well-Hidden** when the vampires pass by, or **Hard to Pin Down** if you're fighting in the dark.



Foil any attempt pinpoint your location, seek you out, or find evidence of your passage.





VEHICLES

As a skill, Vehicles is all about driving and piloting, whether the vehicle in question is a car, a tank, a Spitfire, or a jetpack. Characters in *Atomic Robo* who are adept at this sort of thing seem to have a broad facility with all manner of transportation, so one skill covers it all. It's just part of being an Action Scientist.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Action



Accomplish movement in the face of difficult circumstances, like rough terrain, turbulent conditions, tight clearance, or stunt driving. Obviously, Vehicles is also ripe for vehicle-oriented contests and challenges, such as a race.



Determine details or aspects about a route or another vehicle. This could take the form of an aspect like knowledge of a **Convenient Shortcut** or another vehicle's **Structural Defect**.

Otherwise, see the description of Athletics and make it about a vehicle instead. This skill typically creates advantages through good positioning (**On Their Six**), pulling off fancy moves (**Perfect Drift**), or putting your opponent in a bad spot (**Pull Up! Pull Up!**).



Counter attacks in a physical conflict. This is one of the most common uses of Vehicles.



Counter attempts to create an advantage against you. This may include using your vehicle to block passage or cut someone off, effectively impeding movement. You can't use this to get another vehicle out of harm's way, unless you can literally push their vehicle somehow with your own.

WILL

Will represents your character's general level of mental fortitude, the same way Physique represents your physical fortitude.

ASSOCIATED MODES: Banter, Science



Pit yourself against obstacles requiring mental effort. Puzzles and riddles can fall under this category, as well as mentally absorbing tasks like codebreaking. Use this skill when it's only a matter of time before you overcome the mental challenge, or a Science if it takes something more than brute mental force to get past it. Many of the obstacles that you go up against with Will might be part of a challenge, to reflect the effort involved. Contests of Will might also reflect particularly challenging games like chess, or competing in difficult exams.



Counter attacks in a mental conflict. In these cases, the attacker is usually using Provoke.



Counter attempts to create an advantage against you via Deceive or Rapport, representing you holding onto your convictions at all cost.





SCIENCE: IT'S SPECIAL

You've no doubt noticed that none of these standard skills is particularly scientific in nature (the "sweet science" of fisticuffs notwithstanding), nor is any of them apart from Notice and Will associated with the Science mode.

That's because each field of scientific study is its own skill—robotics, physics, hyperdimensional mathematics, exobiology, engineering, mechanics, chemistry, you name it—with the same two actions. And *all* of them are associated with the Science mode. In other words, the Science mode has a virtually unlimited number of associated skills, or at the very least way too many to list here.

When you write the Science mode on your character sheet and give it a rating, all of your Science skills—that includes all fields of science—have that same rating by default. For example, if you have Fair (+2) Science, that means you have Fair (+2) Robotics, Fair (+2) Physics, Fair (+2) Engineering, and so on. You don't have to write these individual sciences down on your sheet. You can just write something like "All Other Sciences" and leave it at that.

You can improve any of these Science skills just like you'd improve any other skill in any other mode. So if you have Fair (+2) Science and want to have better than Fair (+2) Robotics, you could bump your Robotics skill up to Good (+3) or Great (+4).

SCIENCE ACTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Every Science skill other than Notice and Will has the following actions and applications:

Know things and solve problems related to the scientific field in question.

Leverage your scientific knowledge to create or discover details or aspects related to your chosen field, whether by time-consuming research or by suddenly recalling vital information. This lets you do things like recalibrate complex machinery (**Hyper-Sensitive Sensors**), introduce a new algorithm to a robot's programming to change its behavior (**Human... Friend?**), or add a volatile compound to a rocket's fuel to improve its performance (**Almost Too Much Thrust**).



GETTING WEIRD

Players can also make their own skills and modes unique to their characters using the building blocks presented above, along with a couple more we haven't talked about yet.

As used here, "weird" is a relative term. A weird skill might reflect something as mundane as professional training, like Intel or Investigation, or something as exceptional as Telekinesis or Claws and Teeth. Likewise, weird modes can cover things like Secret Agent, Mechanic, or Con Artist—or Robot, Dinosaur, or Psychic. At the end of the day, all "weird" really means here is "player-defined."



Take note: E-Z No-Math Character Creation—making your character on the fly, during play, as part of play—assumes relatively real-world characters, like Action Scientists and associated tradespersons. If you're making a character with weird modes and skills, that's awesome, but you can expect to do at least some work on the front end before play begins. However, the pre-packaged weird modes starting on page 86 can help speed this along.



MAKING WEIRD SKILLS

Putting a weird skill together starts by thinking of ways you'd like to be able to use it, then choosing some actions and applications that fit. As seen earlier, a skill can have more than one application for a given action. For example, Athletics lets you defend against both physical attacks and attempts to create physical advantages against you—that's two applications for Defend. We mention this because the number of applications a skill has is important for weird skills.



I want to play a telepath who can project mental illusions into a target's brain. That's definitely a weird skill; I'll call it Hallucinations.

What game actions are a good fit for Hallucinations? One big use for the skill is probably going to be convincing people I'm someone other than myself. That sounds like an overcome action. Create an advantage is a good one, too—I can see using those illusions to distract my opponent with imaginary enemies or immobilize them in an imaginary pit. That also makes it sound like I could use it for defense against physical attacks by appearing to be a couple of feet in another direction, so I'll add defend to the list. And what kind of imaginary enemies can't cause imaginary wounds? That's definitely attack.

That's four actions in total (overcome, create an advantage, attack, and defend) with one application for each.

The standard skill descriptions go into a lot of helpful detail for each game action, but you don't need to be so in-depth when making your own skills. A brief phrase for each application should suffice—just enough to remind yourself and the GM how it works. For example, "Overcome: Create believable illusions" or "Attack: Hallucinatory damage."

SMASH



Each skill starts at a cost of zero character points and has two applications. Each additional application the skill has over two increases its character point cost by 1. (This means every Science skill costs zero points.)



Hallucinations has four applications, so it'll cost 2 character points. Done!



Incidentally, costs of standard skills are determined the same way, as you can see on page 72.

RESKINNING

You may find yourself wanting to rename a standard skill to better fit a weird mode instead of making a whole new weird skill. This is perfectly normal and nothing to worry about. Sure, Athletics and Physique make sense in your Robot mode, but they don't sound particularly robotic at all.

So if you want to rename skills, do that. Please do that, even. Just put the standard-skill equivalent in parentheses afterward, so everyone knows what it is under the hood. For example, "Servos (Athletics)" or "Chassis (Physique)".

MAKING WEIRD MODES

First, come up with a name for the mode that describes what it's going to let the character do. In other words, the name gives you a jumping-off point and a context in which you can use the skill.



I'm going to make a weird mode for my character called Psychic. Psychic's pretty broad, but it clearly indicates a set of contexts that go along with unusual mental abilities like my telepath has.

Next, look at the standard skill list. Pick out any that seem like they'd fit with the mode. You should be able to find at least a few, even for the weirdest of weird modes.



Looking over the list of skills, a few good candidates stand out for the telepath: Empathy (reading surface thoughts), Provoke (psychically-induced emotional reactions, like fear), Rapport (psychic super-likability), and Will (all that telepathy's built up his mental fortitude).

Third, total the cost of all skills in the mode, both standard and weird. The result is the cost, in character points, of the mode.

Point costs for standard skills are shown on the table below.

SKILL	COST
Athletics	2
Burglary	1
Combat	2
Contacts	1
Deceive	2
Empathy	3
Notice	1
Physique	1
Provoke	1
Rapport	1
Stealth	2
Vehicles	2
Will	1

A FINAL NOTE ON BEING WEIRD

Weird modes come with another important benefit: They give you access to superhuman (or supernatural) abilities in the form of **mega-stunts**. Robo's near-invulnerability to harm, Helsingard's vril-derived regeneration, Dr. Dinosaur's whatever-it-is he does with crystals—these are all mega-stunts. See the Mega-stunts section later this chapter for more information.



The Psychic mode ends up costing me 8 character points: 6 from the four standard skills (Empathy, Provoke, Rapport, and Will), and 2 from the weird skill, Hallucinations.



Note: Default character creation, also known as E-Z No-Math CharGen Creation, doesn't even acknowledge the existence of character points. No math!





STUNTS

WHAT STUNTS ARE

Stunts are special traits that bend the normal rules for a character. They can change the way a skill works, enhance a character's effectiveness in conflicts, or, in the case of mega-stunts, open up superhuman abilities not available to the average Action Scientist.

WHAT STUNTS DO

Each stunt confers a single benefit. This benefit reflects some special, privileged way a character uses a skill that is unique to whoever has that stunt. It might be due to special or elite training, exceptional talents, genetic alteration, innate coolness, or myriad other reasons. Some people just get more out of their skills than others do.

BUILDING STUNTS

In *Atomic Robo*, players are encouraged to create or pick stunts during play as needed, but there's nothing wrong with deciding on some or all of them before play begins. It's up to you.

While there's no definitive list of stunts—the possibilities being limitless, it would be folly to try to enumerate them all—there's absolutely a definitive list of what stunts can potentially *do*. When in doubt, look to these examples as guidance. In addition, the standard mode descriptions starting on page 82 and the pre-packaged weird modes starting on page 86 include a number of sample stunts.

A stunt only functions when the player wants it to. If for some reason you want to sidestep the advantage a stunt gives you, by all means do so.

ADD A BONUS

Gain a bonus in a narrow circumstance

BENEFIT: Gain a situational +2 bonus to one application of a skill.

If you phrase this as “+2 to [action] with [skill] when [situation occurs],” you pretty much can't go wrong.

EXAMPLES:

- ▼ **Friends in High Places.** +2 to overcome with Rapport when socializing at a fancy gathering, such as a ritzy corporate or government function.
- ▼ **I'll Take You All On.** +2 defend with Combat when outnumbered.
- ▼ **Checkmate.** +2 to create an advantage with Will when outsmarting someone.

Alternately, for a stunt with a little more breadth, you can split up that +2 bonus to one application into +1 bonus to *two* applications. Those applications can both be for the same skill, or you can assign them to two separate skills strongly connected by a common theme.

EXAMPLES:

- ▼ **Expert Marksman.** +1 to attack or create an advantage with Combat when using a firearm.
- ▼ **Martial Artist.** +1 to create an advantage with Combat or Athletics when fighting unarmed.
- ▼ **Majestic 12 Scientist.** +1 to overcome with Electrical Engineering or Physics when dealing with Tesla-tech.

ADD A NEW ACTION TO A SKILL

Use a skill in an unusual way

BENEFIT: Use a skill to do something it normally can't by adding a new game action to the skill in certain situations. This new action can be one that's already covered by another skill—effectively letting you use one skill in place of another for the specified circumstance—or one that's just not available to any skill.

EXAMPLES:

- ▼ **Backstab.** Use Stealth instead of Combat to attack when the target isn't aware of you.
- ▼ **We Are All Star Stuff.** Use Astrophysics instead of Rapport to persuade (overcome) when talking about science.
- ▼ **No Time to Bleed.** Use Will to defend against physical attacks if you've taken a consequence.
- ▼ **Let's Take It Outside.** Use Physique to defend against intimidation.

ADD A RULES EXCEPTION TO A SKILL

Bend the rules in your favor

BENEFIT: Make a single exception, in a narrow circumstance, for a single skill in a way that doesn't precisely fit any existing action.

This is admittedly a pretty wibbly-wobbly rule of thumb, but some stunts simply can't be classified neatly. For more dramatic effects, it's a good idea to balance this benefit by requiring the character spend a fate point, take a consequence, or sacrifice their next action. Otherwise, you may find that instead of making the character cooler, the stunt just makes the game less fun. And that's the opposite of what we're going for.

EXAMPLES:

- ▼ **Riposte.** When you use Combat to defend in melee and succeed with style, sacrifice your next action to immediately inflict an attack on your opponent at the shift value of your defense. For example, if you get four shifts on your defense, you'd deal a 4-shift hit to the attacker. You can't do this again until

you have another "next action" to spend (after your skipped turn goes by).

▼ **I'll Be Back.** Increase the difficulty of any Provoke-based opposition you create by +2. **Master of Disguise.** When you're in a situation where you're able to slip away unnoticed, you have the option to temporarily drop out of the game altogether. If you do, spend a fate point to reappear disguised as a faceless NPC already in the scene (a security guard, a lab-coated scientist, a DELPHI goon, etc.).

▼ **Mind Over Matter.** Once per scene, you may check a mental stress box to absorb physical harm.

HAVE A SIGNATURE ASPECT

Get a free invoke once per issue

BENEFIT: One of your character's aspects is so important to your character, so *integral*, that, once per issue, you can invoke it for free.

The flip side of this is that when the GM compels that aspect, she must offer you two fate points instead of one. However, should you want to refuse the compel, you have to match the GM's offer, one-for-one. That means you'd have to spend two fate points to refuse the initial compel.

Mark the aspect with an asterisk, or write "Signature" in parentheses next to it, as a reminder that it works a bit differently.

EXAMPLES:

- ▼ **Signature Aspect.** I Am the Atomic Robot.
- ▼ **Signature Aspect.** Britain's Most Dangerous Commando.
- ▼ **Signature Aspect.** Behold, the Power of Science!

PERSONAL HARDWARE

Own an important possession

BENEFIT: Your character has an iconic possession of some kind—Sparrow's armored jacket, Jack Tarot's Webley revolver, and the She-Devils' jetpacks are all examples.

This benefit lets you pick from two of the options in the sidebar. If that's not

enough to properly represent your personal hardware, you can take this stunt (and gain its benefit) multiple times.

In addition, your hardware includes any non-mechanical abilities that seem reasonable. For example, a two-way wristwatch radio gives you the ability to communicate over long distances, just as a jetpack gives you the ability to fly—no numbers or rolling required, unless doing so puts you at risk or in danger.

See *Let's Do Some Science* for more detail on hardware.

EXAMPLES:

- ▼ **Armored Jacket.** Armor:1
- ▼ **Knuckledusters.** +1 to Combat to attack when unarmed, Weapon:1
- ▼ **Two-Way Wristwatch Radio.** +2 to Stealth to defend against detection when using it surreptitiously
- ▼ **Jetpack.** (2 stunts) +2 to Vehicles to create an advantage when airborne, +1 to Stealth to defend when avoiding notice by radar, +1 to Combat to attack when airborne

PERSONAL HARDWARE OPTIONS

Pick two:

- ▼ +1 to one situational application of one skill
- ▼ +1 shift (or Weapon:1) on a success
- ▼ Armor:1 (counts as two picks)
- ▼ Add a new action to a skill

LET'S DO
SOME
SCIENCE
P. 131

WEAPON
AND ARMOR
RATINGS
P. 124



As an employee of Tesladyne, you're entitled to make use of its resources. That includes borrowing hardware when you need it! See *Tesladyne Industries* (page 218) for details.



MEGA-STUNTS

WHAT MEGA-STUNTS ARE

In most respects, mega-stunts are like stunts. They let you bend the rules in character-specific ways. But mega-stunts can also surpass what stunts normally offer—they can confer superhuman abilities, like extraordinary strength, enhanced sensory perception, or incredible toughness.

Moreover, unlike stunts, a single mega-stunt can provide more than one benefit.

However, you can't take a mega-stunt unless you qualify for it first—unless you have **permission**.

To have permission, your character needs a weird mode and an appropriate concept aspect. Both of these must suggest the sorts of benefits that mega-stunts can provide. In turn, your character's mega-stunts must be logical extensions of the mode and aspect.



I have a weird mode called Robot and a concept aspect of *I Am the Atomic Robot*. Both of these clearly suggest mega-stunts related to being a robot.

Each mega-stunt takes up one stunt slot, regardless of how many benefits that mega-stunt provides.



One of my mega-stunts is called Just Guns?, and has two benefits: it makes me bulletproof, and grants me an Armor rating against everything else. Just Guns? only takes up one of my stunt slots, even though it gives me two benefits.



WEAKNESSES AND COSTS

Some of these benefits are so powerful that they require a **weakness** or a **cost**. These provide a specific circumstance under which one of the PC's aspects can be invoked or compelled. So they're similar in function, but flavored in different ways.

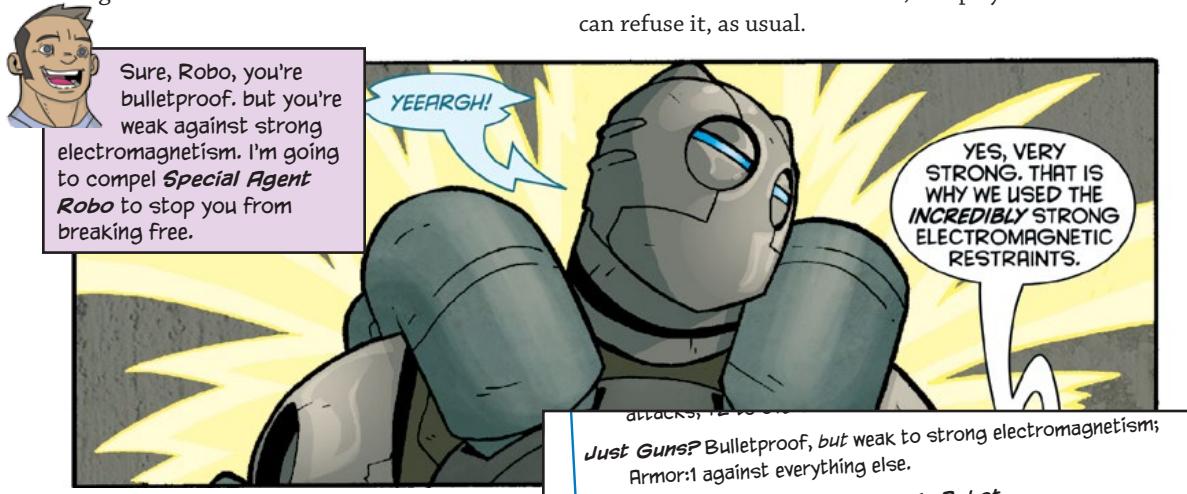
A **weakness** specifies an attack or effect against which you're vulnerable. When writing the mega-stunt on your sheet, indicate a weakness by writing "but weak against..." after the benefit.

A **cost** is a minor cost the GM can introduce by compelling your concept aspect. It's always a minor cost, but the exact form it takes depends on the PC's concept aspect, the circumstances, and common sense, and can differ from one instance to another. When writing the mega-stunt on your sheet, indicate a cost by writing "but at a cost" after the benefit.

MINOR COST
P. 98

When the GM initiates a compel that stems from a weakness or cost, the player can refuse it, as usual.

COMPEL
P. 47



STUNTS & EXTRAS

Atomic Strength. Absolutely stronger than any human (Physique), but at a cost; Weapon:2 with hand-to-hand



WHAT MEGA-STUNTS DO

Each benefit provided by a mega-stunt takes one of four basic forms. It can give the character a **Weapon or Armor rating**, provide an **absolute ability** with one skill to exceed what normal humans can do, render them **bulletproof**, or duplicate a **stunt benefit**.

WEAPON OR ARMOR RATING

Deal or absorb more damage in conflicts

BENEFIT: Gain a Weapon or Armor rating, whether from equipment or some inherent quality.

Normally, a Weapon or Armor rating is the result of special equipment, like from the Personal Hardware stunt (page 74). This benefit, however, is for characters who hit harder or are more resistant to damage simply because of their very nature.

If you choose a Weapon rating, specify the circumstances under which it applies, such as “when using strength” or “with eyebeams.” If you choose an Armor rating, specify physical or mental harm.

Here's one of my mega-stunts:

▼ **Atomic Strength.** Weapon:2.

This gives me Weapon:2 with attacks that rely on strength. Whenever I'm punching someone out, I'll deal another 2 shifts of harm on a successful Combat attack. However, when I'm firing a gun, my Weapon rating won't apply, because his strength just isn't relevant when it comes to guns.



ABSOLUTE ABILITY

Be superior to humans in one area

BENEFIT: Choose a skill. When using that skill for an overcome action, you can exceed what normal humans can accomplish. Under the specified conditions, that action is always considered a success, no roll required.

You can't apply this benefit to a skill without the overcome action, such as Combat. (In other words, no fair getting absolute accuracy with an attack.)

When using your absolute in an opposed roll against an opponent who isn't on your level—that is, one without an equivalent mega-stunt—you automatically win with a success (as opposed to a tie or a success with style).



Let's add another benefit to **Atomic Strength** to make me super-strong.

▼ **Atomic Strength.**

Absolutely stronger than any human (Physique), but at a cost; Weapon:2.

Now, I'm absolutely stronger than any normal human. If I'm trying to perform a feat of strength that a normal human could conceivably do, like kick in a door, I'll always succeed. If I get into an arm-wrestling match with anything that doesn't have some sort of superhuman strength of their own, I'll always win.

The GM is the final arbiter of where “normal human ability” ends and “superhuman ability” begins. Robo is stronger than the world's strongest human, sure, but is he stronger than the world's *ten* strongest humans, working together against him? Or a dozen rage-crazy vampires? When in doubt, make a skill roll. (Borderline cases are good opportunities to let the dice decide anyway.)

When you take this benefit, it always comes with a weakness or cost. (There's no getting around this—every absolute is required to have one or the other.)

BULLETPROOF

Ignore a type of damage

BENEFIT: Bullets? They bounce off of you. So do conventional weapons less-powerful than bullets, like swords and vampire teeth. You have Armor: ∞ against all of them.

Roll for the attack and defense as normal. If the attack ties, a succeeds, or succeeds with style, the attacker gets a boost. If the defense succeeds with style, the defender gets a boost.

Let your common sense draw the line between “conventional weapons” and “dangerously unconventional implements of destruction.” Take Robo as an example—pistols, rifles, and machine guns only annoy him, but a simple steel rod becomes a real threat to his safety when wielded by a super-strong Helsingard warbot, and a high-speed collision with a satellite is nearly enough to destroy him altogether.

And of course, if the attacker’s intent is to create an advantage, being Bulletproof is irrelevant.



Ha! My mega-stunt lets me shrug off conventional small-arms fire.



You still need to roll defense. You won’t take harm, but someone could still get a boost. Or they could be intending to create an advantage...



If you need to make a character even *tougher*, give them an Armor rating on top of Bulletproof that applies to attacks more powerful than mere bullets.

An mega-stunt with this benefit requires a weakness or cost, just as with absolute abilities.



Say Dr. Shinka has engineered a Biomega kaiju beast of frightening proportions—a towering bipedal reptilian, 30 stories high, atomic breath, the works. It has a mega-stunt called *Monstrous Size* with three benefits. One, it’s Bulletproof (one benefit) and has Armor: ∞ against everything else (another two benefits). Even if you manage to hit it with something that’ll actually have an effect, like ramming it with a freight train or a giant robot rocket-punch, you’ll still have to land at least a 3-shift hit to scratch it. If you hit, but not with enough shifts to penetrate its Armor, you get a boost, as usual.

OTHER -PROOFS

Between the *yatagarasu* “Buckethead” fighters of *Chokaiten*, all those iterations of Helsingard warbot, and the occasional biomega kaiju monster—not to mention Robo himself—being bulletproof is the most common type of -proof found in the pages of *Atomic Robo*. But you can easily repurpose the Bulletproof benefit to apply to other types of harm, like Fearproof (immune to threats and other fear-based mental attacks) or Fireproof (immune to fire and high temperatures). Apply the same common sense to these as you would to Bulletproof. For example, even a Fearproof character will have a hard time keeping it together when confronted by a truly extraordinary threat, such as the Shadow from Beyond Time. Under circumstances such as these, it’s totally fine to call for a roll despite the Fearproof mega-stunt.

STUNT BENEFIT

Do what a stunt does

BENEFIT: Choose one of these stunts: Add a Bonus, Add a Game Action, Add a Rules Exception, Personal Hardware. Add that stunt’s benefit to the mega-stunt.

PAYING FOR MEGA-STUNTS

To recap: Each mega-stunt takes up one stunt slot. Each PC has five stunt slots. A single stunt has a single benefit, but a single mega-stunt can have two or more benefits.

OPTION: VOLUNTARY WEAKNESSES AND COSTS

With this option, you can tack a weakness or a cost onto a mega-stunt even if it doesn’t require one. For each of these voluntary costs, reduce the number of fate points added to the GM’s reserve by one, to a minimum of zero. You can’t have both a weakness *and* a cost on the same benefit, though.

See the lightning gun for an example. Normally, it’s Weapon:4, but the wielder can increase that to Weapon:6 at any time by accepting a cost. This makes it worth only three more fate points to the reserve instead of four.

So while a character with only stunts and no mega-stunts can have a maximum of five benefits, a character with mega-stunts can easily end up with *more* than five benefits. For example, if a character has two stunts and three mega-stunts, and each of those mega-stunts has two benefits, that’s a total of eight benefits—three more than usual maximum.

When a character in an issue has more than five total benefits from stunts and mega-stunts, **add one fate point to the GM’s reserve for each benefit in excess of five.**

For example, that PC with the eight benefits? When he’s in an issue, the GM gets another three fate points for her reserve. The mere presence of this character means things are harder for everyone.

See *Aspects and Fate Points* for more on how the GM’s fate point budget and reserve work.

HARDWARE AS MEGA-STUNTS

Some hardware is so complex, advanced, or significant that it’s best represented as a mega-stunt.

In game terms, this is as simple as putting together some mega-stunts and giving the hardware two aspects: a **function** and a **flaw**. The function speaks to what it’s built to do, and the flaw reflects some inherent problem or difficulty. Essentially, the flaw is a consequence that never goes away—a purely negative aspect that’s highly unlikely to ever work in the owner’s favor.

REFLEX ARMOR

ASPECTS:

- ▼ Function: **High-Tech Battlesuit**
- ▼ Flaw: **Dr. Yumeno's Still Working Out the Bugs**

MEGA-STUNTS (5 BENEFITS):

- ▼ **Computational Mesh.** Armor:1.
- ▼ **Physical Enhancements:** +1 to overcome or create an advantage with Physique or Athletics; +2 to attack with Combat when fighting hand-to-hand.
- ▼ **Sensor Suite.** +2 to create an advantage with Notice when using the suit's sensors—for example, conducting microscopic or chemical analysis, or scanning for Biomega levels.

NOTES:

Designed by Dr. Yumeno to guard against the Biomega threat, a single layer of the Reflex Armor's meta-material computational fabric provides impressive stopping power and a suite of strength and sensory enhancements.

MAN-AMPLIFIERS ("ROBOT FISTS")

ASPECTS:

- ▼ Function: **Exo-Skeletal Mechanical Muscle**
- ▼ Flaw: **Heavy and Slow**

MEGA-STUNTS (2 BENEFITS):

- ▼ **Robot Fists.** +1 to attack with Combat when fighting hand-to-hand; Weapon:2.
- ▼ **Hydraulic Actuators.** Absolutely stronger than a normal human, but at a cost.

TESLADYNE CHARGED PARTICLE BEAM CANNON, A.K.A. THE LIGHTNING GUN

ASPECTS:

- ▼ Function: **ZKZZRAK!**
- ▼ Flaw: **Limited Battery Pack**

MEGA-STUNTS (3 BENEFITS):

- ▼ **Weaponized Electrolaser.** Weapon:4, or Weapon:6 but at a cost.
- ▼ **Obscenely Dangerous.** On an attack that succeeds with style, spend a fate point to prevent the target from checking a stress box to absorb harm.

NOTES:

"These are lightning guns. They collect electric charges from the air and boost them to obscenely dangerous levels through an even more dangerous process. Nothing unusual."

SHE-DEVIL JETPACK

ASPECTS:

- ▼ Function: **A Rocket Strapped to my Back**
- ▼ Flaw: **Hard to Control**

MEGA-STUNTS (3 BENEFITS):

- ▼ **Hell and Lightning.** During a physical conflict, using a free invocation on an aspect or boost gives you a +3 bonus instead of +2.
- ▼ **Dogfighting.** +2 to create an advantage or defend with Vehicles when up against conventional aircraft

NOTES:

Lauren's ingenious devices are the backbone of the She-Devils' operation. Their speed and low profile give the 'Devils an edge in their many air-to-air conflicts over the South Pacific.

STANDARD MODES

The modes here can be selected when making a character using E-Z No Math Character Creation. They're also options in Weird Character Creation.

Each lists the skills associated with the mode and some examples for aspects and stunts that fit that type of character.

ACTION!

Characters with this mode are good at fighting, leaping, car chases, and all that thrilling dare-devilry that looks so cool on comic book pages.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Combat
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique
- ▼ Provoke
- ▼ Vehicles

SAMPLE ACTION ASPECTS

- ▼ *In the Nick of Time*
- ▼ *Used to Box for Oxford*
- ▼ *Pain Is Weakness Leaving the Body*
- ▼ *Majestic 12 Combat Training*
- ▼ *Eagle-Eyed Marksman*
- ▼ *Not in the Face!*
- ▼ *I Coulda Gone Pro*
- ▼ *Hit Hard, Hit Fast, No Mercy*
- ▼ *Cocky Ace Pilot*
- ▼ *Drive It Like I Stole It (Because I Probably Did)*
- ▼ *Former Olympic Pentathlete*

▼ *I Only Need to Know One Thing—Where They Are*

▼ *Violence First, Science Later*

▼ *A Flexible View of Pacifism*

▼ *Two-Fisted Rocket Jockey*

SAMPLE ACTION STUNTS

▼ **Impeccable Timing.** As long as you haven't acted yet in the round, you may pay a fate point to go next.

▼ **Shake It Off.** Once per scene when you take a physical hit, you can check two physical stress boxes and add their values together to absorb that many shifts of harm.

▼ **Breakneck Pace.** +1 to overcome with Athletics or Vehicles when involved in a chase.

▼ **Feel the Burn.** Once per issue, when rolling to overcome with Physique, you may voluntarily take a consequence and add its value—+2 for mild, +4 for moderate, +6 for severe—to your total.

▼ **Standard-Issue Sidearm.** +1 to attack with Combat; Weapon:1.





BANTER!

Characters with this mode don't just have the witty one-liners—they're expert at using their words to get what they want. Still, their one-liners are quite witty.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Contacts
- ▼ Deceive
- ▼ Empathy
- ▼ Provoke
- ▼ Rapport
- ▼ Will

SAMPLE BANTER ASPECTS

- ▼ *I'd Rather Get Forgiveness Than Permission*
- ▼ *I Can Talk My Way Into Anywhere—and Sometimes Back Out Again*
- ▼ *Has to Have the Last Word*
- ▼ *Smooth-Talking Manipulator*
- ▼ *Subtle as a Sledgehammer*
- ▼ *Center of Attention*
- ▼ *Toastmasters Has Me on Speed Dial*
- ▼ *When I Want Your Opinion I'll Give It to You*
- ▼ *Wit of Newton, Charm of Hawking*
- ▼ *What A Scoop!*
- ▼ *Silver-Tongued Scoundrel*
- ▼ *Europe's Foremost Linguist*
- ▼ *Sometimes I Impress Even Myself*
- ▼ *Enough Talk!*
- ▼ *Nervous Bravado*

SAMPLE BANTER STUNTS

- ▼ **Chapter 1, The Early Years.** You are a master storyteller, and nearly anyone who listens to one of your tales can't help but pay rapt attention. When you spend at least a few minutes engaged in a pleasant conversation with someone, place a boost on them for free, such as *Lost in the Story*.
- ▼ **One Raised Eyebrow.** +2 to defend with Empathy when discerning truth from lies.
- ▼ **Passionate Orator.** When addressing a large crowd of people, you may use Will in place of any other Banter skill.
- ▼ **The Social Network.** When you arrive in a new town, city, port, or other sizable population center, you may roll Contacts against a difficulty of Great (+4). On a tie or better, write down an aspect that represents a friendly contact you have there. On a success, the aspect has one free invocation; on a success with style, two free invocations. You can invoke this aspect to have your friend take one risk on your behalf—fight for you, lie for you, and the like. When you spend a fate point to invoke this aspect, it goes away at the end of the scene, along with your friend.
- ▼ **Look Into My Eye.** Use Provoke to defend against threats and other fear-based attacks that deal mental harm.

INTRIGUE!

Characters with this mode have all the sneaky, crafty abilities of spies and master criminals.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Burglary
- ▼ Contacts
- ▼ Deceive
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Stealth

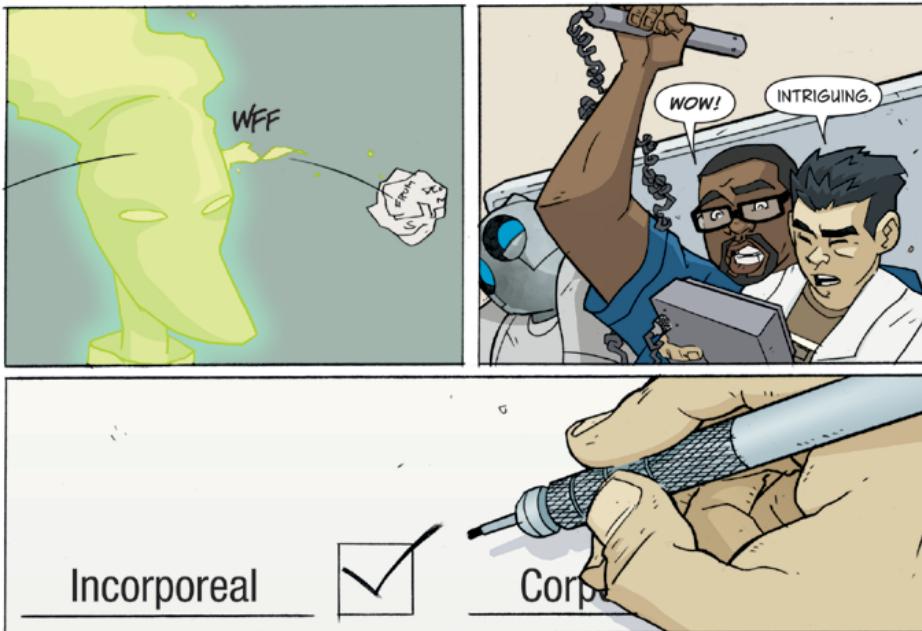
SAMPLE INTRIGUE ASPECTS

- ▼ *Keeper of Dangerous Secrets*
- ▼ *Former DELPHI Operative*
- ▼ *The Past Is a Mystery*
- ▼ *Nothing Gets By Me*
- ▼ *Code Maker, Code Breaker*
- ▼ *No Bucks, No Buck Rogers*
- ▼ *It's Just a Little Corporate Espionage!*
- ▼ *Woman of a Thousand Faces*
- ▼ *Private Eye with a Heart of Silver*
- ▼ *A Life Lived in Shadow*
- ▼ *What the Public Doesn't Know Won't Hurt Them*
- ▼ *Like a Thief in the Night*
- ▼ *No Lock Can Hold Me*
- ▼ *The "T" Stands for "Trustworthy"*
- ▼ *Just Another Face in the Crowd*

SAMPLE INTRIGUE STUNTS

- ▼ **Deep Cover.** When disguised as someone else, you can use Deceive in place of Provoke or Rapport, as long as you're acting "in character."
- ▼ **A Stab in the Dark.** +2 to create an advantage with Stealth when setting up an ambush.
- ▼ **Little Black Book.** When using Contacts to create an advantage, you can exchange a free invocation for an additional aspect. For example, on a success you could choose to get two aspects with no free invocations, and on a success with style you could choose to get two aspects and one free invocation or three aspects without any free invocations.
- ▼ **Master Plan.** When pulling off a heist you've planned, your allies who invoke a situation aspect you've created get a +3 bonus instead of a +2.
- ▼ **The Second-Story Job.** +2 to overcome with Athletics when climbing.
- ▼ **Lucky Break-In.** When making a Burglary roll to overcome, you can immediately improve a failure to a tie or a tie to a success as long as none of your dice is a **█**.





SCIENCE!

Characters with this mode are brainy with the specialized knowledge needed to save the world in so many ways.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Every field of scientific endeavor is its own skill, and all of them are associated with Science.
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Will

SAMPLE SCIENCE ASPECTS

- ▼ **A Thin Line Between Science-Fiction and Science Fact**
- ▼ **Sufficiently Advanced Technology**
- ▼ **The Secrets of the Atom!**
- ▼ **Scientific Learning Is a Life-Long Endeavor**
- ▼ **Basic Medical Training**
- ▼ **Trust Me, I've Done the Math**
- ▼ **Not a Mad Scientist—Just an Angry One**
- ▼ **Backups, Checks, and Protocols**
- ▼ **The Butterfly Effect**
- ▼ **Better Living Through Chemistry**
- ▼ **MIT Grad (Technically)**

▼ **Measure Twice, Explode Once**

▼ **The Right Tool for the Right Job**

▼ **With Violent Science**

▼ **Let's See What We Can Do to Physics Today**

SCIENCE:
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SAMPLE SCIENCE STUNTS

- ▼ **Theory In Practice.** Spend a fate point and choose any one non-Science skill. For the rest of the scene, treat that skill as if it were a trained Science skill.
- ▼ **Number Cruncher.** Spend a fate point and choose any Science skill. For the rest of the scene, you may use Will in place of that skill.
- ▼ **Mind Over Matter.** Once per scene, when you take a physical hit, you may check a mental stress box to absorb physical harm.
- ▼ **Publish Or Perish.** When you invoke an aspect you've created as part of a brainstorm, you get a +3 bonus instead of +2.
- ▼ **Portable Chemistry Set.** +1 to overcome or create an advantage with Chemistry.

READY-MADE WEIRD MODES

The pre-packaged weird modes in this section serve a few different purposes. You might use them as examples of what makes a good weird mode, stunt, or mega-stunt. Or you might use them to speed up weird-character creation by dropping them, in whole or in part, your own weird characters.

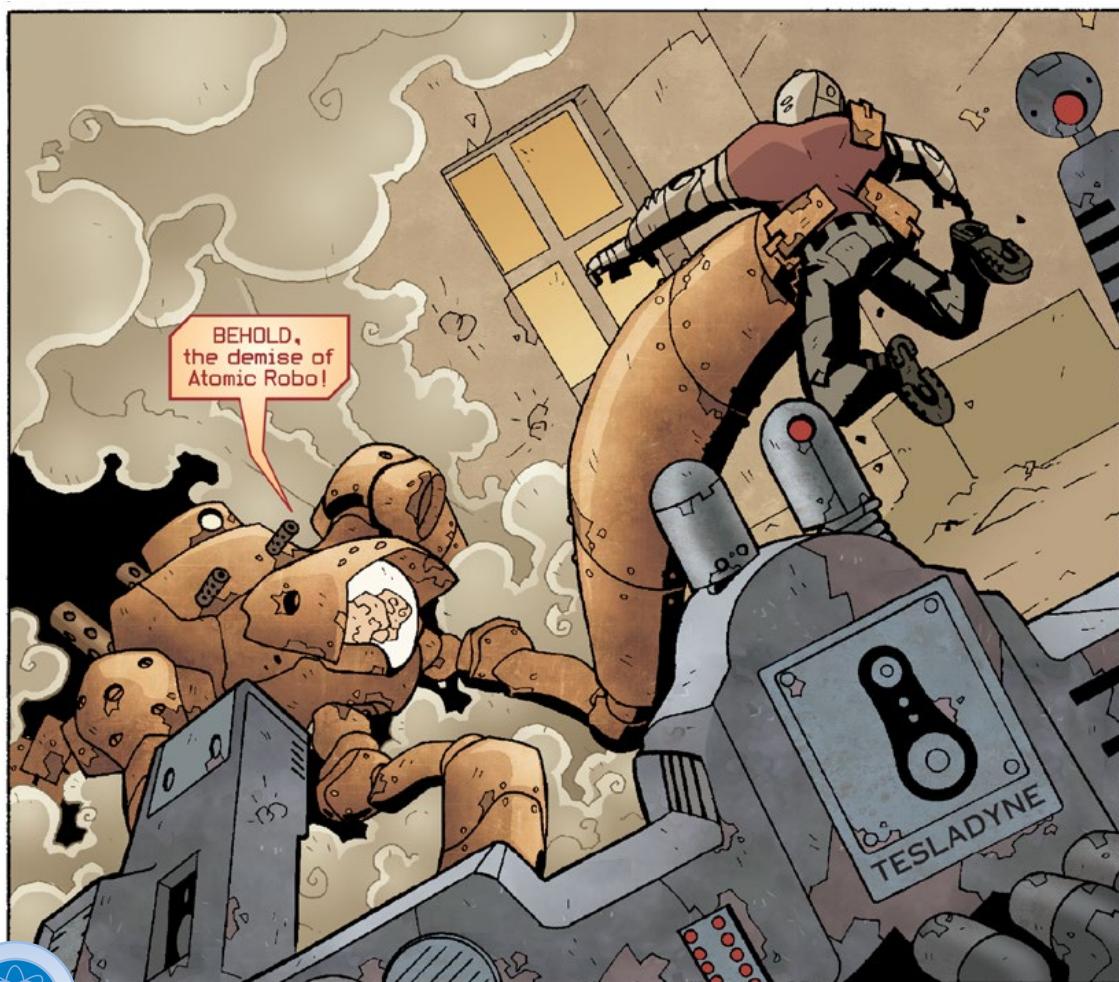
To this latter end, each of these weird modes includes the following:

- ▼ Skills associated with the mode, and which any character with the mode would almost definitely have to have.
- ▼ A sample weird skill, if appropriate.
- ▼ A list of pre-determined skill improvements, so you don't have to fiddle with character points if you don't want to. These are in addition to whatever

other improvements you may already have coming, in any mode.

- ▼ A few sample stunts and mega-stunts to choose from, so you don't have to fiddle with that, either.

Keep in mind that these are only examples of weird modes. They're meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive. If your idea of a martial artist doesn't gel with the one presented here, that's fine. They're templates, nothing more. Alter them as you like—but be aware that the more you do, the more work you may be making for yourself. Using the skill costs on page 72 and the improvement costs on page 226, though, even extensive changes shouldn't be any trouble (or involve double-digit arithmetic).





BEAST

A powerful animal of the wild, feral and untamed.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique
- ▼ Provoke
- ▼ Tooth and Claw

WEIRD SKILL: TOOTH AND CLAW



Cause harm with natural weaponry in physical conflicts.



Counter melee attacks in physical conflicts.

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Specialize one trained skill
- ▼ Focus one trained skill

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Top of the Food Chain.** +2 to overcome with Athletics when chasing prey.
- ▼ **I Smell Meat.** +2 to overcome with Notice when using your olfactory sense.
- ▼ **Bigger Than You.** Use Physique to defend against mental attacks.
- ▼ **Go for the Throat.** When you succeed with style on an attack with Tooth and Claw, spend a fate point to prevent your target from checking a stress box to absorb harm.

DINOSAUR

A prehistoric creature from the mists of time, impossibly alive in the modern era. Or an experiment in bioengineering gone seriously awry.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Tooth and Claw
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique

WEIRD SKILL: TOOTH AND CLAW



Use natural weaponry to unbalance, knock down, or otherwise gain an edge on your target.



Cause harm with natural weaponry in physical conflicts.



Counter melee attacks in physical conflicts.

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Specialize one trained skill
- ▼ Focus one trained skill

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Flyer.** Use Athletics to fly; ignore all ground-based obstacles when you do.
- ▼ **Fearsome.** Use Physique to make mental attacks when being loudly threatening.
- ▼ **Predator.** Weapon:2 when fighting unarmed.
- ▼ **Prey.** +2 to overcome with Athletics when being chased.



MARTIAL ARTIST

A paragon of self-discipline, physical training, and face-punching.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Combat
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique
- ▼ Stealth
- ▼ Will

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ None.

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Lightning Reflexes.** In a physical conflict, you always act first. If someone else in the conflict has a stunt that gives them the same ability, make an Athletics roll to see who goes first.
- ▼ **Iron Robe Technique.** Armor:2.
- ▼ **One With Everything.** Use Will to create an advantage through meditation or focus when you have a moment to breathe and concentrate.
- ▼ **Ten-Oxen Punch.** Spend a fate point to shatter, splinter, or otherwise ruin an inanimate object made of stone or wood.



MUTANT

“Mutant” is a pretty charged word and covers a wide range of possible characters. Almost by definition, no two mutants are going to be the same. For this reason, this treatment of the Mutant mode puts the emphasis on stunts and mega-stunts.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ None—while it’s certainly possible to have Mutant skills, the lack of commonality between various mutants makes it virtually impossible to cite even two or three skills that all mutants are likely to share.

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Specialize two trained skills
- ▼ Specialize one focused skill
- ▼ Focus one trained skill

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Chitinous Plates.** Armor:2.
- ▼ **Healing Factor.** Once per scene, spend a fate point to reduce one of your consequences by one degree of severity (severe to major, major to mild, mild to nothing).
- ▼ **Mutant Hearing.** +2 to defend with Notice when listening for covert activity.
- ▼ **Strong Mutant (2 benefits).** Absolutely stronger than a normal human, but at a cost; Weapon:2 with attacks that rely on strength.



PILOT

A trained, well-traveled pilot, professional or otherwise.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Contacts
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Vehicles

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Specialize one trained skill
- ▼ Focus two trained skills

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **She'll Hold Together.** Any aircraft you pilot has Armor:2.
- ▼ **Dogfighter.** Use Vehicles to attack in a physical conflict when piloting an aircraft, assuming that aircraft has something to attack with.
- ▼ **Barnstormer.** +2 to create an advantage with Vehicles when pulling off a fancy maneuver.
- ▼ **Fasten Seat Belts.** +2 to overcome with Vehicles when dealing with adverse environmental conditions.



PSYCHOKINETIC

A psychic with the power to move objects through sheer force of will.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Psychokinesis
- ▼ Will

WEIRD SKILL: PSYCHOKINESIS

- Same as Physique, but with psychokinesis instead of muscles.
- Same as Physique, but again, psychokinesis instead of muscles.
- Fling objects to cause harm.
- Counter physical attempts to create an advantage.

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Specialize two trained skills

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Kinetic Shield.** Use Psychokinesis to defend against physical attacks.
- ▼ **PK Precision.** +2 to attack with Psychokinesis when flinging an object.
- ▼ **Nosebleed.** +2 to defend with any Psychokinetic skill when doing nothing else in the round, but at a cost.
- ▼ **Flight.** Use Psychokinesis to fly; ignore all ground-based obstacles when you do.



REPORTER

Someone who makes it their business to know other people's business.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Contacts
- ▼ Empathy
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Rapport
- ▼ Stealth
- ▼ Will

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ None.

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **What A Scoop!** +2 to overcome with Stealth when eavesdropping.
- ▼ **Check The Archives.** When you conduct research—in the library, your news organization's archives, or the like—spend a fate point to use Will in place of any other skill to create an advantage. The advantage you create must make sense in the context of the research you're doing.
- ▼ **Something Stinks.** +2 to defend with Empathy when discerning lies.
- ▼ **Legwork.** When you use Contacts to create an advantage, on a success or a success with style you can choose to exchange a free invocation for an additional aspect. For example, on a success you could create two aspects, both without a free invocation. On a success with style you could create three aspects and no free invocations, or two aspects with one free invocation on one of them.

ROBOT

A generic robot, with no specific assumed function, although the stunts and mega-stunts can change that. Otherwise, your average automatic intelligence.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

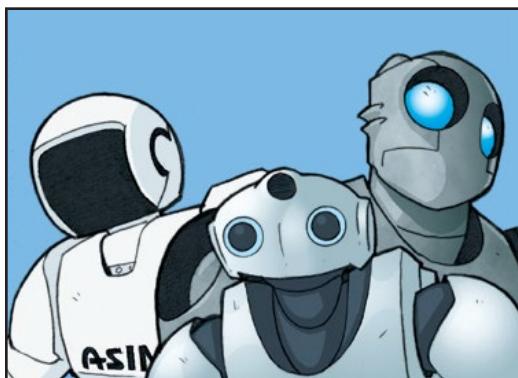
- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Specialize one trained skill.
- ▼ Focus two trained skills.

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Load Lifter.** Absolutely stronger than a normal human, but weak to strong electromagnetism.
- ▼ **Iron Man.** Armor:2
- ▼ **Etiquette and Protocol.** Any time you encounter a spoken language, you can speak and understand it. If you spend a fate point, you can do so perfectly. Otherwise, the GM reserves the right to introduce some idiomatic expressions that don't perfectly translate.
- ▼ **Routine Maintenance.** Use Physique to remove your own physical consequences, but without the usual +2 increase in difficulty.





SECRET AGENT

A covert operative for a covert agency.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Burglary
- ▼ Contacts
- ▼ Deceive
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Stealth
- ▼ Vehicles

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ None

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Cover Story.** Use Deceive to defend against mental attacks when being interrogated.
- ▼ **Trained Assassin.** Use Stealth to attack in a physical conflict against a target who isn't aware of you.
- ▼ **Die Another Day.** In a physical conflict, you can spend a fate point to concede even after you've rolled your defense.
- ▼ **Come Alone.** +2 to overcome with Contacts when meeting with a contact alone and in person.

SOLDIER

A skilled combatant with a military background.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Combat
- ▼ Contacts
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique
- ▼ Tactics
- ▼ Vehicles
- ▼ Will

WEIRD SKILL: TACTICS



Use your environment to your advantage in physical conflicts.



Counter attempts to create an advantage against you that involves maneuvering or positioning.

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ None.

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Heads Down.** +2 to create an advantage with Athletics when taking cover.
- ▼ **This Is My Rifle.** +2 to attack with Combat when using military-grade firearms.
- ▼ **Battlefield Commander.** When you use your turn to give an ally who can see and hear you an order that'll put them in immediate danger, they get +2 bonus to do it.
- ▼ **Remember Your Training.** When you invoke one of an opponent's aspects or consequences in a physical conflict, you get a +3 bonus instead of +2.



SPIRIT

An incorporeal entity—not a ghost, of course. Ghosts aren’t real.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Hover
- ▼ Provoke

WEIRD SKILL: HOVER

- ⊕ Cover ground, horizontally or vertically.
- ⊕ Positioning and maneuvering, including weird stuff like emerging from a wall.
- ⊕ Counter applicable physical attacks.
- ⊕ Counter attempts to create an advantage through movement.

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Specialize two trained skills
- ▼ Focus three trained skills

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Ethereal Form.** You can move through solid matter with ease. Ignore physical obstacles.
- ▼ **Otherworldly Presence.** +2 to create an advantage with Provoke when you rely on fear or awe.
- ▼ **Death Touch.** Use Hover to make physical attacks.
- ▼ **Fade Away.** You can choose to disappear—leave a scene—anytime. Spend a fate point to come back.



TELEPATH

An individual possessed of psychic abilities that center around telepathy.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Deceive
- ▼ Empathy
- ▼ Provoke
- ▼ Rapport
- ▼ Will

WEIRD SKILL: HALLUCINATIONS

- ⊕ Confuse or trick your target with mental illusions.
- ⊕ Make illusory attacks feel real via mental harm.
- ⊕ Counter attempts to locate you.



IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Focus one Trained skill or take the sample weird skill

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Mesmerist.** +1 to create an advantage with Deceive or Provoke when you have eye contact with your target.
- ▼ **Borrowed Knowledge.** Pick another character (PC or NPC) who's in the scene with you. You can use one of their skills for one roll in this scene, whether it's a skill you already have or not. When you do this, pay that character a fate point.
- ▼ **Mind Reader.** When you use Empathy to create an advantage by discovering another character's aspects, you don't need to speak with them and it takes virtually no time.
- ▼ **Remote Viewing.** Pick a character you've met (PC or NPC), whether or not they're in the scene with you. You can briefly perceive using their senses instead of your own. The clarity of your perception will depend on the distance involved and how well you know the other character. For example, if you're seeing through the eyes of your brother in the next room, it'll be crystal clear. If you're seeing through the eyes of a Majestic 12 guard several miles away with whom you spoke a few days ago, it'll be blurry and unreliable.

WARBOT

A robot designed with a very specific purpose in mind: killing things.

ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- ▼ Athletics
- ▼ Combat
- ▼ Notice
- ▼ Physique

IMPROVEMENTS

- ▼ Focus three trained skills

SAMPLE STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS

- ▼ **Armed.** Weapon:2
- ▼ **Armored.** Bulletproof but weak to strong electromagnetism.
- ▼ **30 Seconds to Comply.** Use Combat to make fear-based mental attacks.
- ▼ **Targeting Array.** +2 to overcome with Notice when locating a hidden or obscured target.





CHAPTER SIX: OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

Characters in *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game* solve their problems proactively. Players, during the game you’re going to do a lot—you might break into a DELPHI safehouse, pilot a P-51 through flak-filled skies, rally a labful of meek scientists, or poll a network of informants to get the latest word on the street.

Whenever you take action, there’s a good chance that something or someone is going to be in your way. It wouldn’t be an interesting story if the bad guys just rolled over and handed you victory on a plate.

That’s when it’s time to take out the dice.

- ▼ Choose the character’s skill that is appropriate to the action.
- ▼ Roll four Fate dice.
- ▼ Add together the symbols showing on the dice.
A  is +1, a  is -1 and a  is 0.
- ▼ Add your skill rating to the dice roll. The total is your result on the ladder.
- ▼ If you invoke an aspect, add +2 to your result or reroll the dice.



OPPOSITION

Whenever you roll dice, you're comparing your roll to your **opposition**. Opposition is either active, meaning it's another person rolling dice against you, or passive, meaning that it's just a set rating on the ladder which represents the influence of the environment or situation you're in. GMs, it's your job to set the level of passive opposition for any skill roll.

THE FOUR OUTCOMES

Every roll you make will result in one of four outcomes. Depending on what kind of action you're taking, the specifics may change a little, but they all fit this general pattern.

▼ **If you don't beat your opposition, you fail.** This means one of several things: you don't get what you want, you get what you want at a serious cost, or you suffer some negative mechanical consequence. Sometimes, it means more than one of those. It's the GM's job to determine an appropriate cost.

▼ **If your total equals your opposition's, you tie.** This usually means you get what you want, but at a minor cost, or you get a lesser version of what you wanted.

▼ **If your total is higher than your opposition's by 1 or 2 shifts, you succeed.** This means you get what you want at no cost.

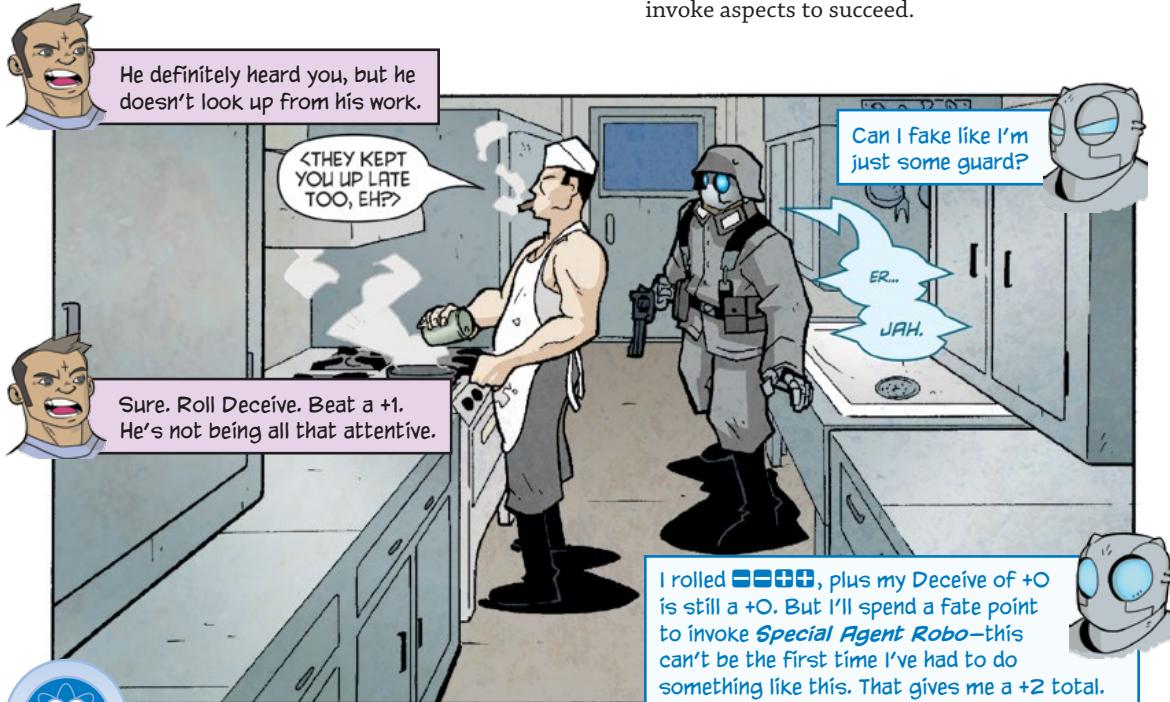
▼ **If your total is higher than your opposition's by 3 or more shifts, you succeed with style.** This means that you get what you want, but you also get an added benefit on top of that.

HOW HARD SHOULD SKILL ROLLS BE?

For active opposition, you don't really need to worry about how hard the roll is—just use the NPC's skill level and roll the dice like the players do, letting the chips fall where they may. See *Running the Game* (page 171) for guidelines about NPC abilities.

For passive opposition, you have to decide what rank on the ladder the player has to beat. It's more an art than a science, but we have some guidelines to help you.

Anything that's two or more steps *higher* than the PC's skill level (Fair (+2) skill and Great (+4) opposition, for example) means that the player will probably fail or need to invoke aspects to succeed.



Anything that's two or more steps *lower* than the PC's skill level (Fair (+2) skill and Mediocre (+0) opposition, for example) means that the player will probably not need to invoke aspects and will probably succeed with style.

Between that range, there's a roughly equal chance that they'll tie or succeed, and a roughly equal chance that they will or won't need to invoke aspects to do so.

Therefore, low difficulties are best when you want to give the PCs a chance to show off and be awesome, difficulties near their skill levels are best when you want to provide tension but not overwhelm them, and high difficulties are best when you want to emphasize how dire or unusual the circumstances are and make them pull out all the stops.

Finally, a couple of quick axioms:

- ▼ Average is called Average for a reason—if nothing about the opposition sticks out, then it doesn't need more than a +1.
- ▼ If you can think of at least one reason why the opposition sticks out, but otherwise just can't decide what the difficulty should be, pick Good (+3). It's in the middle of a PC's range of skills, so

it provides a decent challenge for every skill level except Superb (+5), and you want to give PCs a chance to show off their peak skill anyway.

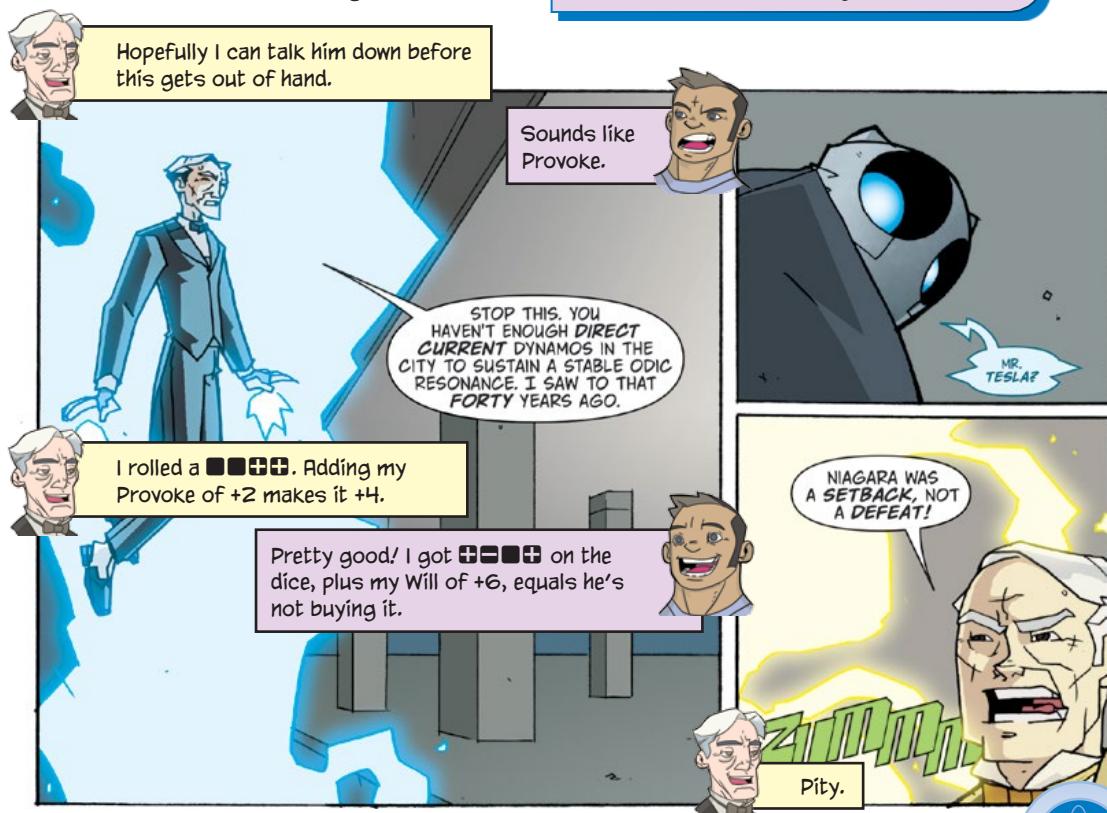
ACTIVE OR PASSIVE?

Any time the opposition comes from an important NPC (if they

have a proper name, it's a good sign they're probably important), you'll want to roll the dice to add tension to the scene, so always use active opposition in that case.

If it's an unimportant NPC, or the opposition comes from some obstacle in the world (like rough terrain, a complex lock, time running out, a situational complication, etc.), then use passive opposition.

Sometimes you're going to run into edge cases, where something inanimate seems like it should provide active opposition (like an automated gun) or an NPC can't provide proactive resistance (like if they're unaware of what the PC is doing). Follow your gut—it's okay to do this if you think it fits the circumstances or makes the scene more interesting.



SERIOUS COST VS. MINOR COST

When you're thinking about costs, think both about the story in play and the game mechanics to help you figure out what would be most appropriate.

A **minor cost** should complicate the PC's life. This focuses on changing up the situation a bit, rather than just negating whatever the PC wanted. Some suggestions:

- ▼ **FORESHADOW SOME IMMINENT PERIL.** *"The lock opens with a soft click, but the same can't be said for the vault door. If they didn't know you were here before, they sure do now."*
- ▼ **INTRODUCE A NEW WRINKLE.** *"Yes, he's able to put you in touch with an expert in the field—a Dr. Berthold Von Ericksson. You know him, actually, but the last time you saw him was years ago, when he accused you of stealing his research."*
- ▼ **PRESENT THE PLAYER WITH A TOUGH CHOICE.** *"You brace the collapsing ceiling long enough for two of the others to get through safely, but not the rest. Who's it going to be?"*
- ▼ **PLACE AN ASPECT ON THE PC OR THE SCENE.** *"Somehow you manage to land on your feet, but with a Twisted Ankle as a souvenir."*
- ▼ **GIVE AN NPC A BOOST.** *"Nikolai surprises you a bit by agreeing to your offer, but he does so with a wry smile that makes you uneasy. Clearly, Nikolai Has A Plan."*
- ▼ **CHECK ONE OF THE PC'S STRESS BOXES.** Careful with this one—it's only a real cost if the PC's likely to take more harm in the same scene. If you don't think that's going to happen, go with another choice.

A **serious cost** does more than complicate the PC's life or promise something worse to come—it takes a serious and possibly irrevocable toll, right now.

One way you can do this is by taking a minor cost to the next level. Instead of suspecting that a guard heard them open the vault, a few guards burst in the room, guns drawn. Instead of being merely cut off from their allies by a collapsing ceiling, one or more of those allies ends up buried in the debris. Instead of merely having to face an awkward situation with Dr. Von Ericksson, he's still angry and out for blood.

Other options could include:

- ▼ **REINFORCE THE OPPOSITION.** You might clear one of an NPC's stress boxes, improve one of their skills by one step for the scene, or give them a new aspect with a free invocation.
- ▼ **BRING IN NEW OPPosition OR A NEW OBSTACLE.** Such as additional enemies or a situation aspect that worsens the situation.
- ▼ **DELAY SUCCESS.** The task at hand will take much longer than expected. See *Using Story Time in Success and Failure* on page 156 for more details.
- ▼ **GIVE THE PC A CONSEQUENCE THAT FOLLOWS LOGICALLY FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES.** It's mild if they have that slot available, moderate if they don't.

If you're stuck for just how serious a serious cost should be, you may want to use the margin of failure as a gauge. For instance, take the vault-opening example, above—the one where the guards hear the PC and burst in the room. If the player failed their Burglary roll by 1 or 2, the PCs outnumber the guards. Not a tough fight, but a fight nonetheless. If they failed it by 3 to 5, it's an even match, one that's likely to use up resources like fate points or stress boxes. But if they failed by 6 or more, they're outnumbered and in real danger.

THE FOUR ACTIONS

There are four types of actions you can take in a game of *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*. When you make a skill roll, you have to decide which of these you're going to try. The skill descriptions tell you which action is appropriate for that skill and under which circumstances. Usually, the action you need to take will be pretty obvious from the skill description, your intent, and the situation in play, but sometimes you might have to talk it over with the group to find out which is the most appropriate.

The four actions are **overcome**, **create an advantage**, **attack**, and **defend**.



OVERCOME

Every skill has a certain niche of miscellaneous endeavors that fall under its purview, certain situations where it's an ideal choice. A character with Burglary tries to pick a lock or jimmy a window, a character with Empathy tries to calm the mood in a room, and a character with Athletics tries to leap to safety from the roof of a runaway train.

When your character is in one of these situations and there's something between you and your goals, you use the **overcome** action to deal with it. Look at it as the "catch-all" default action—if the action doesn't fall into any other category, it's probably an overcome action.

Use the overcome action to achieve assorted goals appropriate to your skill.

The opposition you have to beat might be active or passive, depending on the situation.

▼ **WHEN YOU FAIL:** you have two choices. You can simply fail, which means you don't attain your goal or get what you were after, or you can succeed at a serious cost.

▼ **WHEN YOU TIE:** you attain your goal or get what you were after, but at a minor cost.

▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED:** you attain your goal without any cost.

▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED WITH STYLE:** you get a boost in addition to attaining your goal.

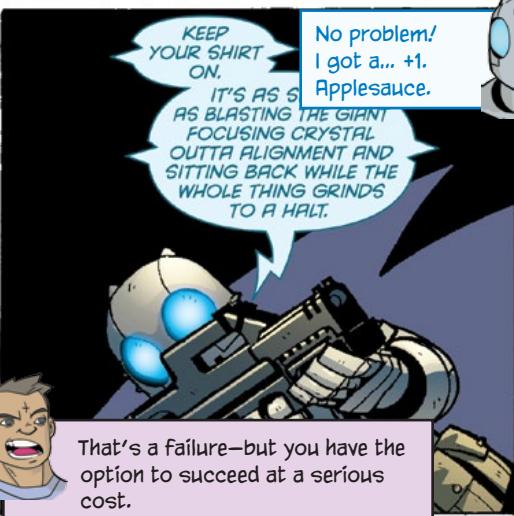
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You want to stop the pyramid? Overcome a Great (+4) obstacle with Engineering.



That's a failure—but you have the option to succeed at a serious cost.



KEEP YOUR SHIRT ON.
IT'S AS SIMPLE AS BLASTING THE GIANT FOCUSING CRYSTAL OUTTA ALIGNMENT AND SITTING BACK WHILE THE WHOLE THING GRINDS TO A HALT.



Serious cost, huh? Like what?



Like that.

99



CREATE AN ADVANTAGE

This action covers a broad range of endeavors as well, but unified around the theme of (hence the name) using your skills to take advantage of the environment or situation you're in.

Sometimes, that means you're doing something to actively change your circumstances (like throwing sand in an opponent's eyes or setting something on fire), but it could also mean that you're discovering sudden new information that helps you (like learning the weakness of a monster through research), or taking advantage of something you've previously observed (like your opponent's predisposition to a bad temper).

When you roll to create an advantage, you must specify whether you're creating a new situation aspect or trying to take advantage of an aspect that's already available—that could mean another situation aspect or one you can access on your target. You don't have to know

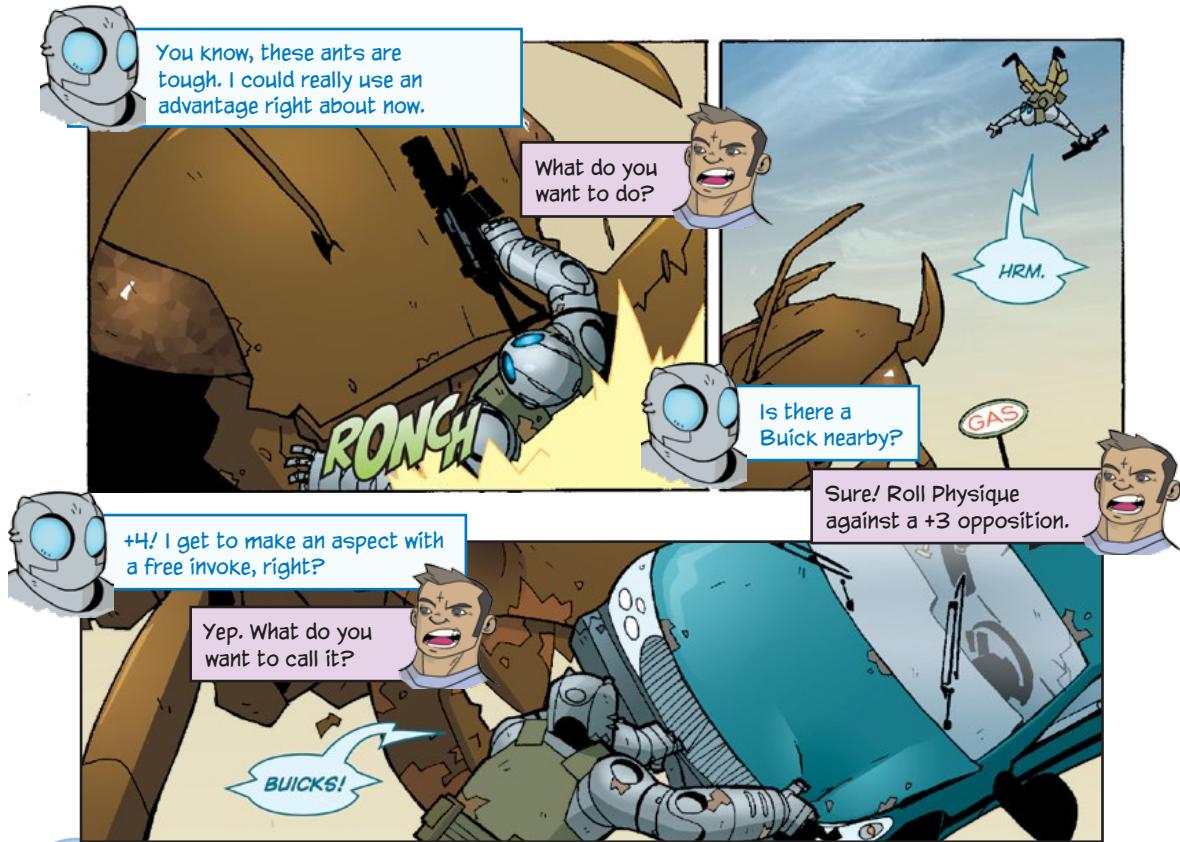
your target's aspects to try this, because some of your skills let you reveal a target's aspects as part of the action. You must also specify whether you're targeting a character or the environment.

Opposition might be active or passive, depending on the circumstances. If your target is another character, their roll always counts as a **defend** action.

Use the create an advantage action to make a situation aspect that gives you a benefit, or to claim a benefit from any aspect to which you have access.

IF YOU'RE CREATING AN ADVANTAGE TO MAKE A NEW ASPECT...

▼ **WHEN YOU FAIL:** you either don't create the aspect, or you create it but your opponent gets a free invocation on it. For example, if you create an aspect called **Toppled Crates** and it's your opponent who has the free invocation, it might

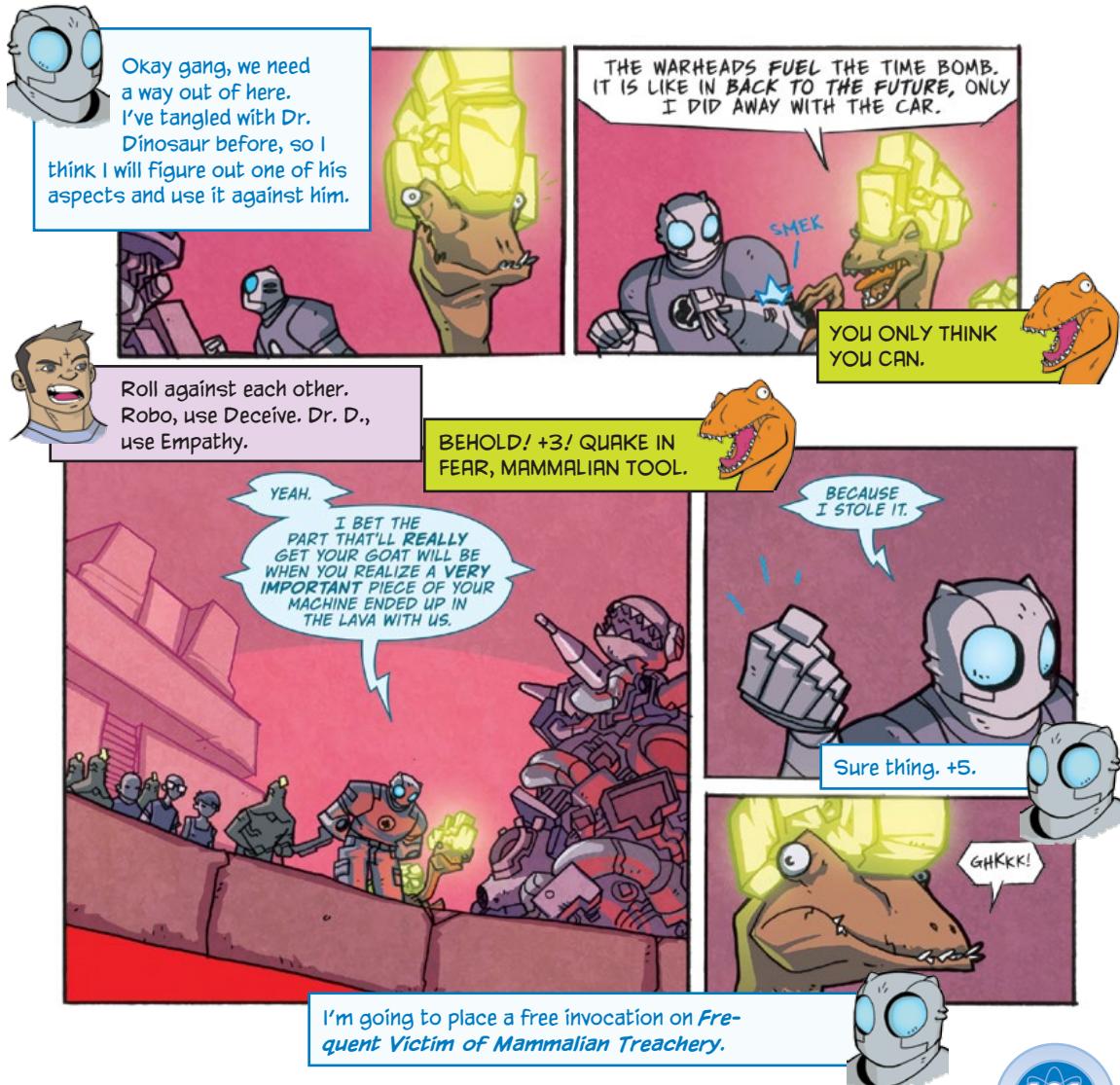


mean the crates are a bigger problem for you than for the other guy. You can still invoke the aspect if you'd like, but it'll cost you a fate point.

- ▼ **WHEN YOU TIE:** you get a boost instead—name the new aspect and invoke it once for free, but after that, the aspect goes away. (See *Aspects and Fate Points*.) This might mean you have to rename the aspect a bit to reflect its temporary nature (**Rough Terrain** becomes **Rocks on the Path**).
- ▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED:** you create a situation aspect with a free invocation.
- ▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED WITH STYLE:** it works like a normal success, except you get two free invocations instead of one.

IF YOU'RE CREATING AN ADVANTAGE ON AN EXISTING ASPECT...

- ▼ **WHEN YOU FAIL:** you don't get any benefit from the aspect. You can still invoke it if you'd like, at the cost of a fate point. If you're doing this on a target whose aspects are hidden from you, the GM can opt to keep the aspect a secret instead.
- ▼ **WHEN YOU TIE OR SUCCEED:** you place a free invocation on the aspect.
- ▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED WITH STYLE:** you place *two* free invocations on the aspect.



ATTACK

The attack action is the most straightforward of the four actions—when you want to hurt someone in a conflict, it's an attack. An attack isn't always physical in nature; several skills allow you to hurt someone mentally as well.

Most of the time, your target will actively oppose your attack. Passive opposition on an attack means you've caught your target unaware or otherwise unable to make a full effort to resist you, or the NPC isn't important enough to bother with dice.

In addition, the opposition always counts as a **defend** action, passive or not, so you can look at these two actions as being inexorably intertwined.

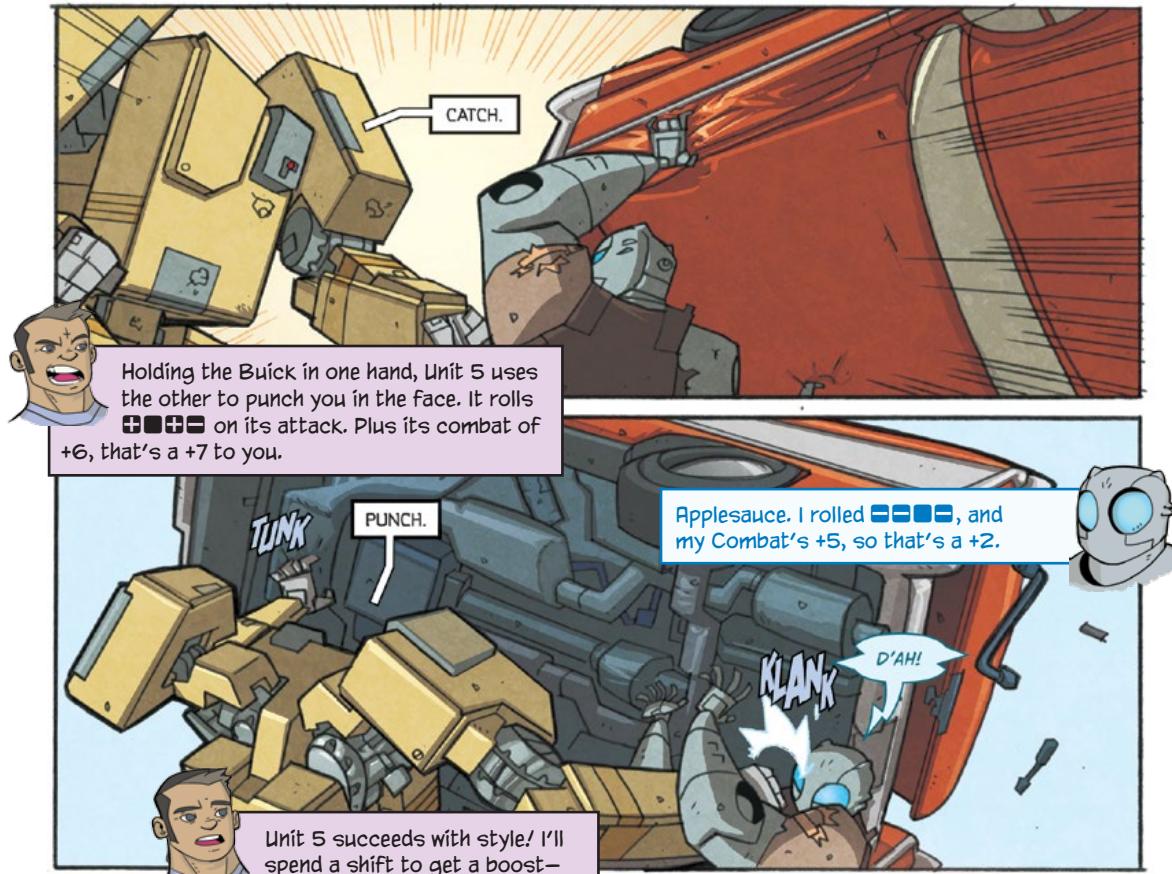
Use the attack action to harm someone in a conflict or take them out of a scene.

▼ **WHEN YOU FAIL:** you don't cause any harm to your target. (It also means that your target succeeded on the defend action, which might mean you get saddled with other effects.)

▼ **WHEN YOU TIE:** you don't cause harm, but you gain a boost. (Note: If your attack has a **Weapon rating**, you deal shifts of harm equal to that Weapon rating. If none of that harm gets through the target's **Armor**, you get a boost instead.)

▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED:** you inflict a **hit** on your target equal to the number of shifts you got. That forces the target to try and "buy off" the value of your hit by taking stress or consequences; if that's not possible, your target gets taken out of the conflict.

▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED WITH STYLE:** it works like a normal success, but you also have the option to spend one shift for a boost.



DEFEND

Whenever someone attacks you in a conflict or tries to create an advantage that sticks to you, you always get a chance to defend. As with attacks, this isn't always about avoiding physical sources of danger—some of the skills allow you to defend against attempts to harm your mind or damage your resolve.

Because you roll to defend as a reaction, your opposition is almost always active. If you're rolling a defend action against passive opposition, it's because the environment is hostile to you somehow (like a blazing fire), or the attacking NPC isn't important enough for the GM to bother with dice.

Use the defend action to avoid an attack or prevent someone from creating an advantage against you.



Not a chance I'm giving up. I rolled $\oplus \square \square \square$ and my Will is +3, so that's a +4—but I'll invoke *Preserving Tesla's Legacy* to make it +6.

I HAVE NOTICED ALL ARGUMENT FALLS ON DEAF EARS WHEN YOU POSSESS A WEAPON.

Attacking you with Provoke. I have a +6.



A tie. I get a boost—Two Steps Ahead.



NO STACKED EFFECTS!

You'll notice that the defend action has outcomes that mirror some of the outcomes in attack and create advantage. For example, it says that when you tie a defense, you grant your opponent a boost. Under attack, it says that when you tie, you receive a boost.

That doesn't mean the attacker gets two boosts—it's the same result, just from two different points of view. It's just written it that way so that the results are consistent when you reference the rule, regardless of what action you take.

▼ **WHEN YOU FAIL:** you suffer the effects of whatever you were trying to prevent. You might take a hit, or someone else might have an advantage over you.

▼ **WHEN YOU TIE:** you prevent the attack, but grant your opponent a boost. (Note: If your opponent's attack has a Weapon rating, they deal shifts of harm to you equal to that Weapon rating. If none of that harm gets through, because you have an Armor rating that absorbs it all, you get a boost instead.)

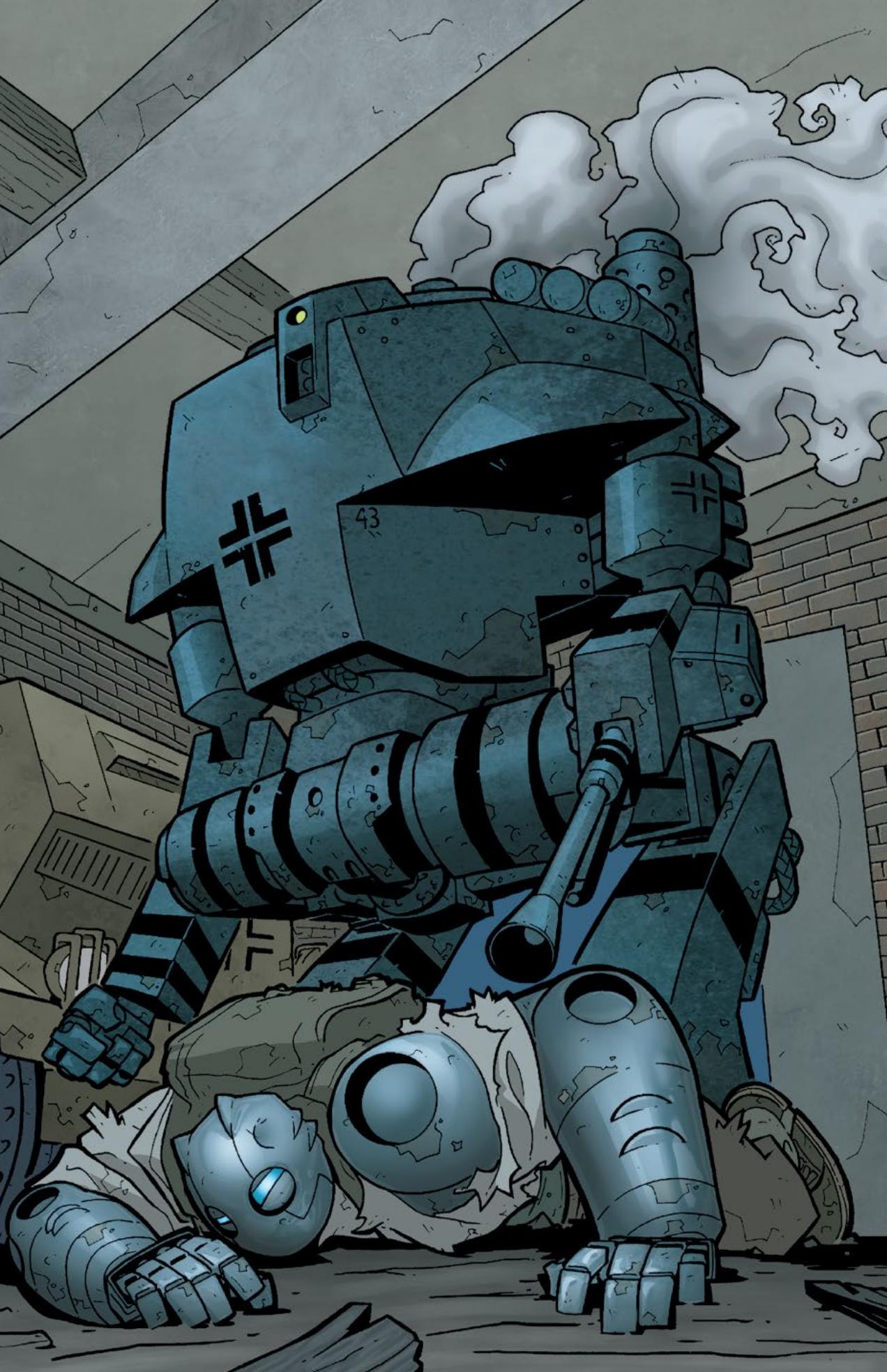
▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED:** you successfully avoid the attack or the attempt to gain an advantage on you.

▼ **WHEN YOU SUCCEED WITH STYLE:** it works like a normal success, but you also get a boost.

CAN I DEFEND AGAINST OVERCOME ACTIONS?

Technically, no. The defend action is there to stop you from taking stress, consequences, or situation aspects—to protect you against all the bad stuff.

But! You can roll active opposition if you're in the way of any action. If someone could fail an overcome action because you're in the way, you should say, "Hey, I'm in the way!" and roll to oppose it. You don't get the extra benefits the defend action gives you, but you also don't have to worry about the bad stuff if you lose.



CHAPTER SEVEN: CHALLENGES, CONTESTS, AND CONFLICTS

Most of the time, a single skill roll should be enough to decide how a particular situation in play resolves. You’re not obligated to describe actions in a particular timeframe or level of detail when you use a skill. You could use a single Athletics roll to find out whether you can safely navigate a rock face that will take days to climb, or use that same single skill roll to find out whether you can safely avoid a swiftly falling tree that’s about to crush you.

Sometimes, however, you’ll be in a situation where you’re doing something really dramatic and interesting, like pivotal set pieces in a movie or a book. When that happens, it’s a good idea to zoom in on the action and deal with it using multiple skill rolls, because the wide range of dice results will make things really dynamic and surprising. Most fight scenes fall into this category, but you can zoom into anything that you consider sufficiently important—car chases, trials, high-stakes poker games, and so on.

Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game provides three ways for you to zoom in on the action:

- ▼ **Challenges**, when one or more characters try to achieve something dynamic or complicated
- ▼ **Contests**, when two or more characters are competing for a goal
- ▼ **Conflicts**, when two or more characters are trying to directly harm each other



There are two more ways of zooming in called *brainstorms* and *invention*. Both are pretty specifically focused on science. See *Let's Do Some Science* (page 131) for more info.

CHALLENGES

A single overcome action is sufficient to deal with a straightforward goal or obstacle—the hero needs to bypass the security system, disarm this bomb, sift out a vital piece of information, and so on. It's also useful when the details of how something gets done aren't as important or worth spending an intense amount of time on, when what you need to know is whether the character can get something done without any setbacks or costs.

Sometimes, however, things get complicated. It's not enough to bypass security, because you also have to hold off those Biomega monsters long enough for your buddy to reverse the polarity of that ionic dispersal array. Just disarming the bomb won't cut it—because you also have to land this crashing blimp without injuring the unconscious scientist you're supposed to be rescuing.

A challenge is a series of overcome actions that you use to resolve an especially complicated or dynamic situation. Each overcome action uses a different skill to deal with one task or part of the situation, and you take the individual results as a whole to figure out how the situation resolves.

GMs, when you're trying to figure out if it's appropriate to call for a challenge, ask yourself the following questions:

- ▼ Is each separate task something that can generate tension and drama independently of the other tasks? If all the tasks are really part of the same overall goal, like "detaching the detonator," "stopping the timer," and "disposing of the explosive material" when you're disarming a bomb, then that should be one overcome action, where you use those details to explain what happened if the roll goes wrong.
- ▼ Does the situation require different skills to deal with it? Holding off the Biomegas (Combat) while foiling the security system (Burglary) and effecting that polarity-reversal (Engineering), all so that you can get away, would be a good instance for a challenge.

To set up a challenge, simply identify what the individual tasks or goals are that make up the situation, and treat each one as a separate overcome roll. (Sometimes, only a certain sequence for the rolls will make sense to you. That's okay too.) Depending on the situation, one character may be required to make several rolls, or multiple characters may be able to participate.

To conduct a challenge, call for each overcome action in whichever order seems most interesting, but don't decide anything about how the situation turns out until *after* you've collected all the results—you want to have the freedom to sequence the events of each roll in whichever order makes the most sense and is the most entertaining.

Players, if you get a boost on one of your rolls, feel free to use it on another roll in the challenge, provided you can justify it. If you have any boosts that went unused in the challenge, feel free to keep them for the rest of this scene or whatever scene you're transitioning to, if the events of the challenge connect directly to the next scene.



Vampires are pouring into this dimension somehow via something in Lab 3B. And everyone at Tesladyne's in danger, especially the NPCs. So stopping the vampires will be a challenge with three tasks: keep the scientists safe, get to the lab, and figure out how to stop the incursion. Where is everybody?



Me too. We're safe here, right?



+9



ADVANTAGES IN A CHALLENGE

You can try to create an advantage during a challenge, for yourself or to help someone else out. Creating an advantage doesn't count towards completing one of the challenge goals, but failing the roll could create a cost or problem that negatively impacts one of the other goals. Be careful using this tactic; advantages can help complete tasks more effectively and create momentum, but trying to create them isn't without risk.



RAISING THE STAKES

GM, it may seem as if you have very little to do in a challenge other than set difficulties. But when a character fails a roll, that's a good cue for you to step in and raise the stakes. By spending a fate point, you can introduce a new complication or increase the difficulty of an existing task or obstacle by +2.



I'm going to kick down this door to give us the *Element of Surprise*.



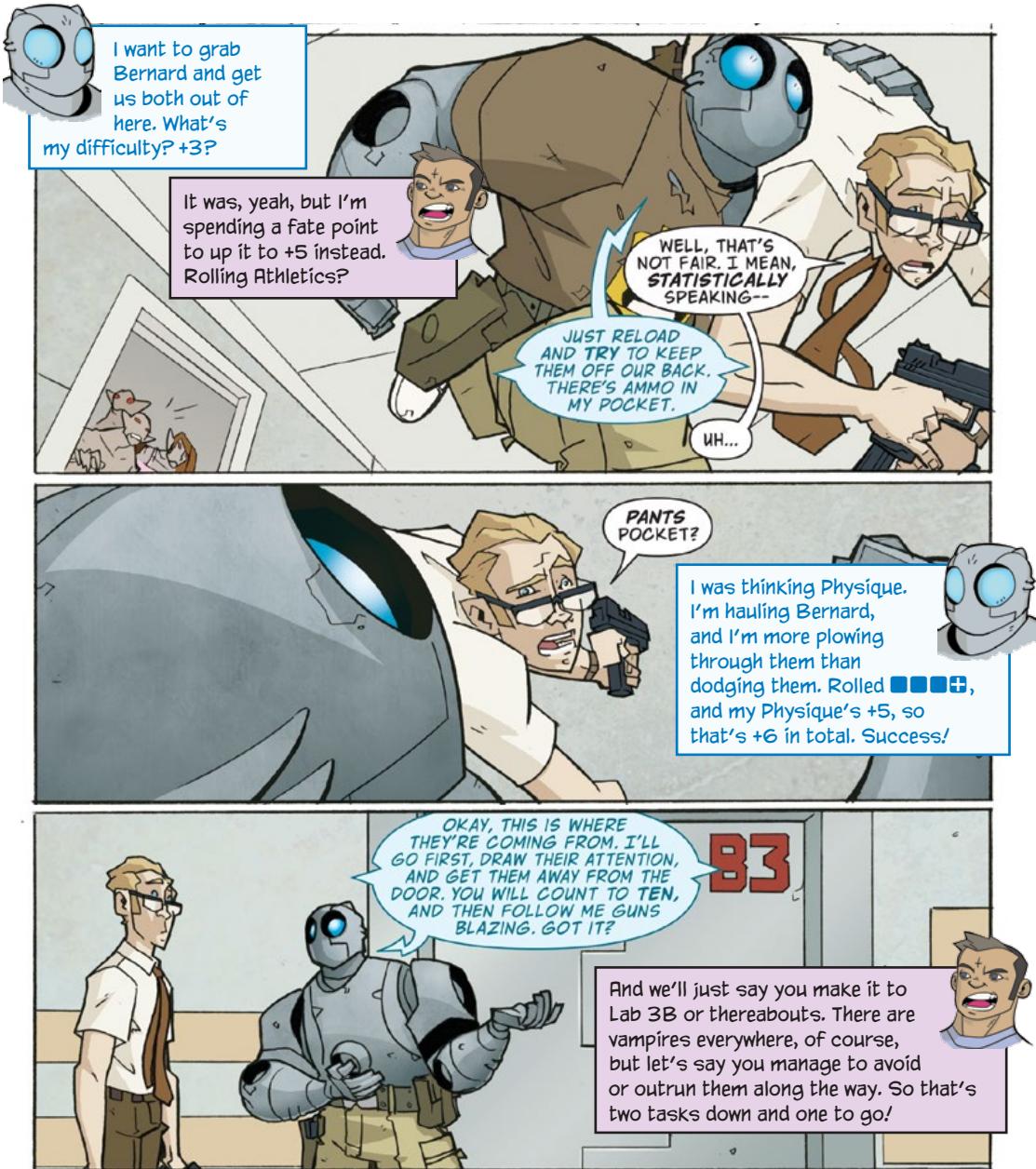
That won't achieve one of the goals, but it's a great advantage. Difficulty of +3.



I got a... +2.



the good news: the situation aspect has been created, the bad news: the vampires get the free invoke.



ATTACKS IN A CHALLENGE

Because you're always up against passive opposition in a challenge, you'll never use the attack action. If you're in a situation where it seems reasonable to roll an attack, you should start setting up for a conflict.





If you're in a challenge that could turn into combat, don't be too eager to make the jump. There are plenty of problems that can be solved with ingenuity and knowledge. For an Action Scientist, violence is a last resort.



THIS SHOEBOX FULL OF CH
SAYS DIFFERENT.

CONTESTS

Whenever two or more characters have mutually exclusive goals, but they aren't trying to harm each other directly, they're in a contest. Arm wrestling matches, races or other sports competitions, and public debates are all good examples of contests.

GMs, answer the following questions when you're setting up a contest:

- ▼ **WHAT ARE THE "SIDES"?** Is every character in the contest in it for herself, or are there groups of people opposing other groups? If you have multiple characters on a side, they roll together using the Teamwork rules.
- ▼ **WHAT ENVIRONMENT DOES THE CONTEST TAKE PLACE IN?** Are there any significant or notable features of that environment you want to define as situation aspects?
- ▼ **HOW ARE THE PARTICIPANTS OPPOSING EACH OTHER?** Are they rolling against each other directly (like in a straight sprint race, or a poker match), or all trying to overcome something in the environment (like an obstacle course, or a panel of judges)?
- ▼ **WHAT SKILLS ARE APPROPRIATE FOR THIS CONTEST?** Does everyone have to roll the same one, or do several apply?

Now you can get started.

A contest proceeds in a series of **exchanges**. In an exchange, every participant gets to make one skill roll to determine how well they do in that leg of the contest. This is basically an overcome action (see *Outcomes and Actions*).

Players, when you make a contest roll, compare your result to everyone else's.

If you get the highest result, you win the exchange. If you're rolling directly against the other participants, then that means you get the highest rank on the ladder out of everyone. If you're all rolling against something in the environment, it means you get the most shifts out of everyone.

Winning the exchange means you get to score a **victory** (which you can just

represent with a tally mark or check mark on scratch paper) and describe how you take the lead.

If you succeed with style and no one else does, then you get to mark two victories.

If there's a tie, no one gets a victory, and an unexpected twist occurs. This could mean several things depending on the situation—the terrain or environment shifts somehow, the parameters of the contest change, or an unanticipated variable shows up and affects all the participants. GMs, you should create a new situation aspect reflecting this change and put it into play.

The first participant to achieve three victories wins the contest.

CREATING ADVANTAGES IN A CONTEST

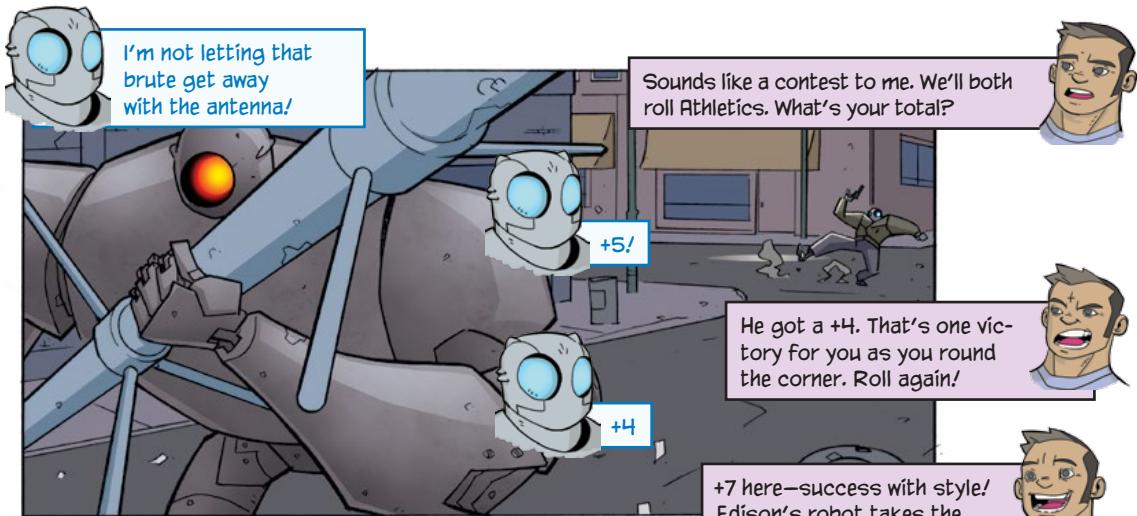
During any exchange, you can try to create an advantage before you make your contest roll. If you're targeting another participant, they get to defend normally.

However, doing so carries an additional risk—**failing to create an advantage means you forfeit your contest roll**, which means there's no way you can make progress in the current exchange. If you at least tie, you get to make your contest roll normally. If it's a contest between just two opposing sides and one side has forfeited their contest roll, the other side automatically earns one victory *instead of* rolling. If there are more than two sides to the contest and one of them has forfeited their contest roll, the remaining sides roll as usual.

If you're providing a bonus via the Teamwork rules, failing to create an advantage means the lead character doesn't benefit from your help this exchange.

ATTACKS IN A CONTEST

If someone tries to attack in a contest, then they're doing direct harm, and it ceases to be a contest. You should immediately stop what you're doing and start setting up for a conflict instead.



Well, I don't even have Combat, and I rolled a +2——but I'll spend a fate point to invoke Yearning For Adventure. Jack's been training me, after all. That's a +2!



He does, yeah. And reaches for a nearby automobile. They sure made 'em heavy in those days.

CONFLICTS

In a conflict, characters are actively trying to harm one another. It could be a fist fight, a shootout, or a sword duel. It could also be a tough interrogation, a psychic assault, or a shouting match with a loved one. **As long as the characters involved have both the intent and the ability to harm one another, then you're in a conflict scene.**

Conflicts are either physical or mental in nature, based on the kind of harm you're at risk of suffering in it. In physical conflict, you suffer bruises, scrapes, cuts, and other injuries. In mental conflict, you suffer loss of confidence and self-esteem, loss of composure, and other psychological trauma.

Setting up a conflict is a little more involved than either contests or challenges. Here are the steps:

1. Set the scene describing the environment the conflict takes place in, establishing who's participating and what side they're on (page 114), and creating situation aspects and zones.

2. Determine the turn order (page 114).

3. Start the first exchange:

A. On your turn, take an action and then resolve it.

B. On other people's turns, defend or respond to their actions as necessary.

C. At the end of everyone's turn, start again with a new exchange.

4. **The conflict is over when everyone on one side concedes or is taken out.**

This Helsingard bunker is *huge*. The main floor is two zones, each with an aspect of *Defunct Machinery*. Below that, there's the factory floor—that's another zone. You can only get down there via a hole in the main floor caused by years of rot and decay, so that zone has an aspect of *Ladder Access Only*.



SETTING THE SCENE

GMs and players, you should talk briefly before you start a conflict about the circumstances of the scene. This mainly involves coming up with quick answers to variations of the four W-questions, such as:

- ▼ Who's in the conflict?
- ▼ Where are they relative to one another?
- ▼ When is the conflict taking place? Is that important?
- ▼ What's the environment like?

You don't need an exhaustive amount of detail here, like precise measures of distance or anything like that. Just resolve enough to make it clear for everyone what's going on.

GMs, you're going to take this information and create situation aspects to help further define the arena of conflict.

SITUATION ASPECTS

When you're setting the scene, keep an eye out for fun-sounding features of the environment to make into situation aspects, especially if you think someone might be able to take advantage of them in an interesting way in a conflict. Don't overload it—find three to five evocative things about your conflict location and make them into aspects.

Good choices for situation aspects include:

- ▼ Anything regarding the general mood, weather, or lighting—dark or badly lit, storming, creepy, crumbling, blindingly bright, etc.
- ▼ Anything that might affect or restrict movement—filthy, mud everywhere, slippery, rough, etc.
- ▼ Things to hide behind—vehicles, obstructions, large furniture pieces, etc.
- ▼ Things you can knock over, wreck, or use as improvisational weapons—bookshelves, statues, etc.
- ▼ Things that are flammable

ZONES

If your conflict takes place over a large area, you may want to break it down into **zones** for easier reference.

A zone is an abstract representation of physical space. The best definition of a zone is that it's close enough to where you can interact directly with someone (in other words, walk up to and punch in the face).

Generally speaking, any given conflict probably shouldn't involve more than a handful of zones. Two to four is probably sufficient, save for really big conflicts. This isn't supposed to be a miniatures game—zones should give a tactile sense of the environment, but at the point where you need something more than a cocktail napkin to lay it out, you're getting too complicated.

If you can describe the area as bigger than a house, you can probably divide it into two or more zones—think of a cathedral or a shopping center parking lot.

If it's separated by stairs, a ladder, a fence, or a wall, it could be a zone, like two floors of a house.

“Above X” and “below X” can be zones, especially if getting there takes some doing—think of the airspace around something large, like a blimp.

When setting up the zones, note whether there are any situation aspects that make moving between those zones problematic. That'll be important later, when people want to move from zone to zone during the scene. If that means you need more situation aspects, add them now.

SITUATION ASPECTS AND ZONES IN MENTAL CONFLICTS

In a mental conflict, it might not always make sense to use situation aspects and zones to describe a physical space. It'd make sense in an interrogation, for example, where the physical features of the space create fear, but not in a really violent argument with a loved one. Also, when people are trying to hurt each other emotionally, usually they're using their target's own weaknesses against them—in other words, their own aspects.

So, you may not even need situation aspects or zones for a lot of mental conflicts. Don't feel obligated to include them.

ESTABLISHING SIDES

It's important to know everyone's goal in a conflict before you start. People fight for a reason, and if they're willing to get violent, it's usually an urgent reason.

The normal assumption is that the player characters are on one side, fighting against NPCs who are in opposition. It doesn't always have to be that way, however—PCs can fight each other and be allied with NPCs against each other.

Make sure everyone agrees on the general goals of each "side," who's on which side, and where everyone is situated in the scene (like who's occupying which zone) when the conflict begins.

It might also help to decide how those groups are going to "divvy up" to face one another—is one character going to get mobbed by the bad guy's henchmen, or is the opposition going to spread itself around equally among the PCs? You might change your mind once the action starts, but if you have a basic idea, it gives you a good starting point to work from.

TURN ORDER

Your turn order in a conflict starts with whoever initiates it. For example, if a conversation goes from argumentative to violent, whoever gets violent first ("Okay, that's it—I'm punching this jerk in the face") is the first to act.

If it's not clear who's initiating the conflict, the relevant characters roll whatever mode (not a skill—just a mode) seems most appropriate to the scene. Whoever has the highest total goes first. If it's a tie, the PC goes first. If it's a tie between two PCs, let them sort it out.

When it comes to the standard modes—Action, Banter, Intrigue, and Science—it'll usually be pretty obvious which one to go with. Is it an action-oriented scene?

Roll Action. Is the scene all about social interaction? Roll Banter.

If a player wants to use a weird mode they think is appropriate to the scene, it's up to the GM whether or not it applies. Let common sense be your guide. Generally speaking, a mode with Athletics or Notice is appropriate for physical conflicts, and one with Empathy or Will is good for mental conflicts.

Participants in the conflict take **turns** acting. The first person (player or GM) to go picks which character acts next, whether PC or NPC. Whoever controls that character picks the the next to act, and so on. A character who's already acted can't be picked to act again until everyone else in the conflict has had a turn. When everyone has acted, that marks the end of the **round**. The last character to have acted picks who acts first at the top of the *next* round. Repeat as needed until one side concedes or is taken out.



Try using index cards to keep this straight. Fold the card in half and write the character's name on one side. Put it on the table in front of the player, with the name facing out. When the character's acted, turn the card around. When picking which character acts next, you can only pick a character whose name is facing out. At the end of the round, everyone turns their cards name-out again.

Note that these choices are made on a character-by-character basis. This means that not all of the NPCs controlled by the GM will (or even should) act one after the other. Treat a mob of nameless NPCs (see *The Opposition in Running the Game*) as a single character.



Your attempt to distract Helsingard away from Ada has failed.



Well, at least I can have Ada go next.



Lightning gun time! With my dice roll and Combat skill, I have a total of +6 on my attack.



I'm spending a fate point to activate one of Helsingard's stunts. I'm immune to electricity.* And I'm defending with my +6 Physique, thanks to another stunt, for a total defense of +8. Who goes next?



I'd rather face those Autosoldats than Helsingard!



You sure about that?

See Helsingard's writeup on page 284. —Ed.

THE EXCHANGE

Exchanges in a conflict are a little more complicated than contests or challenges. An exchange lasts as long as it takes every character in the conflict to perform one action and respond appropriately to the actions of others. GMs, you get to go once for every NPC you control in the conflict.

If you have a lot of nameless NPCs in your scene, feel free to have them use passive opposition to keep your dice rolling down. Also, group nameless NPCs into mobs to keep things simple.

Most of the time, you're going to be attacking another character or creating an advantage on your turn, because that's the point of a conflict—take your opponent out, or set things up to make it easier to take your opponent out.

However, if you have a secondary objective in the conflict scene, you might need to roll an overcome obstacle action instead. You'll encounter this most often if you want to move between zones when there's a situation aspect in place which makes that problematic.

Regardless, you only get to make one skill roll on your turn in an exchange,

unless you're defending against someone else's action—you can do that as many times as you want.

FULL DEFENSE

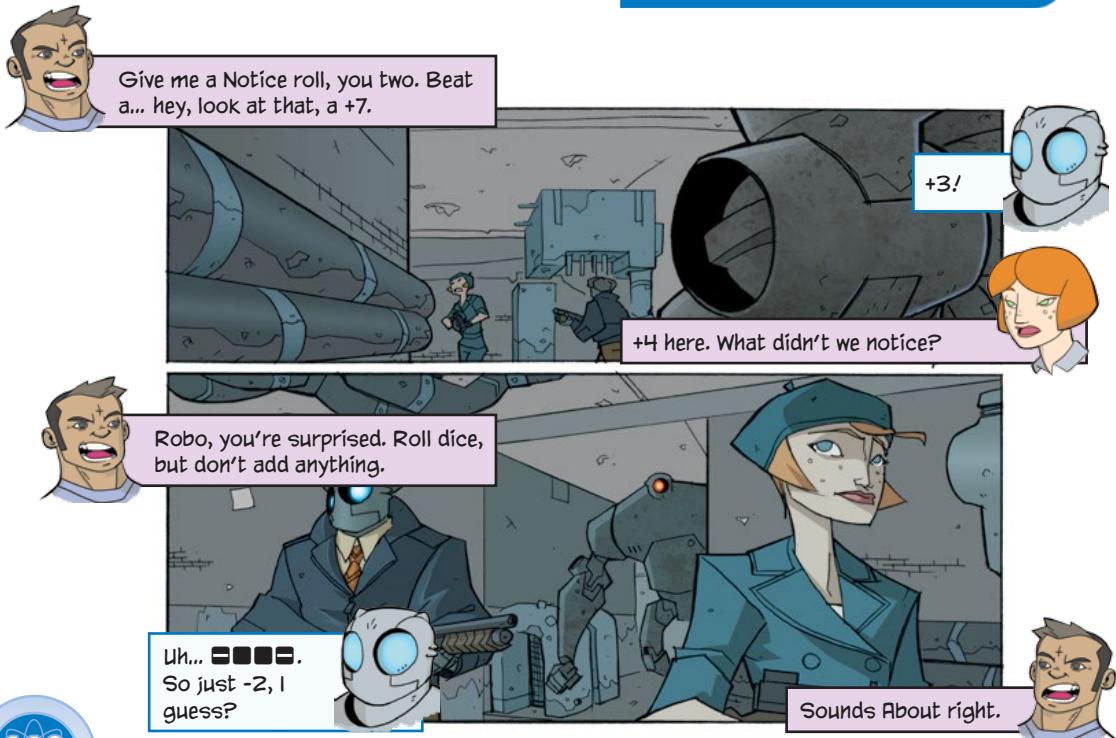
If you want, you can forgo your action for the exchange to concentrate on defense. You don't get to do anything proactive, but you do get to roll all defend actions for the exchange at a +2 bonus.

ATTACKING FROM SURPRISE

A defender who isn't aware of their attacker rolls four Fate dice, like always, but doesn't get to add a skill rating to the result. Stunts and mega-stunts still apply, so if the defender has an Armor rating, they still get to use it to absorb harm (unless it's contingent on being aware of an incoming attack, of course). See the descriptions of Notice (page 65) and Stealth (page 67) for more on being sneaky and not being seen.



Note that this only applies when acting *directly* against someone who's unaware of you—usually, by attacking them.



RESOLVING ATTACKS

A successful attack lands a hit which deals harm equivalent to its shift value on a target. So if you get three shifts on an attack, you land a 3-shift hit.

If you get hit by an attack, one of two things is going to happen: either you're going to absorb the hit and stay in the fight, or you're taken out.

Fortunately, you have two options to keep that from happening—you can check **stress boxes** or take **consequences** to stay in the fight. If you've been attacked and haven't rolled your defense yet, you can also **concede** a conflict before you're taken out, in order to preserve some control over what happens to your character.

STRESS

One of your options to mitigate the effect of a hit is to take **stress**.



IF YOUR INFERIOR SURVIVAL INSTINCTS FAIL YOU AND YOU CHOOSE TO TAKE A HIT (LIKE, SAY, TO INTERPOSE YOURSELF IN THE PATH OF RAMPAGING FUTURE-SAURUS REX THAT'S ABOUT TO TRAMPLE YOUR SNIVELING MAMMALIAN FRIEND STOP LOOKING AT ME IT WAS NOT MY FAULT), YOU CAN. BUT BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT DEFENDING, THE ATTACKER WILL ROLL AGAINST MEDIOCRE (+0) OPPOSITION. THIS MEANS IT'S PROBABLY GOING TO HURT.



Okay Robo, that's a +6 attack against your -2 defend. That's a 9-shift hit. How do you want to handle that?

By not getting hit, preferably. Let's see, my Armor of 1 brings that down to a 7-shift hit.



PHYSICAL STRESS 1 2 3 4 5
MENTAL STRESS 1 2 3 4 5



I'll check my third stress box, which brings the total hit down to 4 shifts.



CONSEQUENCES

The second option you have for mitigating a hit is taking a **consequence**. A consequence is more severe than stress—it represents some form of lasting injury or setback that you accrue from the conflict, something that's still going to be a problem for your character after the conflict is over.

Consequences come in three levels of severity and shift values—**mild (2 shifts)**, **moderate (4 shifts)**, and **severe (6 shifts)**. On your character sheet, you have three available consequence slots, in this section:

MILD (-2) CONSEQUENCE

MODERATE (-4) CONSEQUENCE

SEVERE (-6) CONSEQUENCE

When you use a consequence slot, you reduce the shift value of the hit by the shift value of the consequence, just like with stress boxes. But consequences have two notable differences.

- ▼ One, you can use more than one consequence at a time, and even combine the use of stress boxes and consequences if they're available.
- ▼ Two, using a consequence slot also means your character gains an aspect that represents the lasting effect incurred from the attack. Write that aspect in the consequence slot you're using. The opponent who forced you to take that consequence gets to invoke it once for free, and the aspect remains on your character sheet until you've recovered from that consequence. While it's on your sheet, it gets treated like any other aspect—but because it's going to be an unfavorable aspect, it's far more likely to be used to your character's detriment.

Unlike stress, consequences *cannot* be reused until you've recovered from them, which may be long after the conflict is over. Also unlike stress, you only have one set of consequences; there aren't specific slots for physical versus mental consequences. This



You've still got 4 shifts to deal with, Robo.



Sure thing.
Make it *Outclassed*.

Nobody likes a know-it-all. I figure I can handle the physical damage, but getting smacked around in front of Helen has left me pretty demoralized. I'll take a moderate consequence to soak up the last 4 shifts.



Applesauce.

MODERATE (-4) CONSEQUENCE
Outclassed ☹



Remember, you can combine taking a consequence with checking a stress box and stack their effects. I do it all the time!

means that if you have to take a mild consequence to reduce a mental hit and your mild consequence slot is already filled with a physical consequence, you're out of luck! You're going to have to use a moderate or severe consequence to absorb that hit (assuming you have one left).

Still, it's better than being taken out, right?

NAMING A CONSEQUENCE

Here are some guidelines for choosing what to name a consequence:

Mild physical consequences don't require immediate medical attention. They hurt, and they may present an inconvenience, but they aren't going to force you into a lot of bed rest. On the mental side, mild consequences express things like small social gaffes or changes in your surface emotions. Examples: **Black Eye, Bruised Hand, Winded, Flustered, Cranky, Temporarily Blinded.**

When it comes to moderate physical consequences, you're looking at fairly serious impairments that require dedicated effort toward recovery (including medical attention). Mentally, a moderate consequence could express something like damage to your reputation or emotional problems that you can't just shrug off with an apology and a good night's sleep. Examples: **Deep Cut, First-Degree Burn, Exhausted, Drunk, Terrified.**

Severe physical consequences warrant a trip to the emergency room—they're extremely nasty and prevent you from doing a lot of things, and will lay you out for a while—while a severe mental consequence includes things like serious trauma or relationship-changing harm. Examples: **Second-Degree Burn, Compound Fracture, Guts Hanging Out, Crippling Shame, Trauma-Induced Phobia.**

RECOVERING FROM A CONSEQUENCE

In order to regain the use of a consequence slot, you have to recover from the consequence. That requires two things—succeeding at an overcome action that allows you to justify recovery, and then waiting an appropriate amount of game time for that recovery to take place.

The action in question is an overcome action, and the obstacle is the consequence that you took. If it's a physical injury, then the action is some kind of medical treatment or first aid. For mental consequences, the action may involve therapy, counseling, or simply a night out with friends.

The difficulty for this obstacle is based on the shift value of the consequence. Mild is Fair (+2), moderate is Great (+4), and severe is Fantastic (+6). If you are trying to do the recovery action on yourself, add +2 to the difficulty.

Keep in mind that the circumstances have to be appropriately free of distraction and tension for someone to make this roll in the first place—you're not going to clean and bandage a nasty cut while a bevy of Helsingard Autosoldats are tromping through a subterranean complex looking for you. GMs, you've got the final judgment call on this.

If you succeed at the recovery action, or someone else succeeds on a recovery action for you, rename the consequence aspect to show that it's in recovery. So, for example, **Broken Leg** could become **Stuck in a Cast**, **Scandalized** could become **Damage Control**, and so on. This doesn't free up the consequence slot, but it serves as an indicator that you're recovering, and it changes the way the aspect's going to be used while it remains.

Whether you change the consequence's name or not—and sometimes it might not make sense to change the name—mark it with a star so that everyone remembers that recovery has started.

Then, you just have to wait the time.

- ▼ For a mild consequence, you only have to wait one whole **scene** after the recovery action, and then you can remove the aspect and clear the slot.
- ▼ For a moderate consequence, you have to wait one whole **issue** after the recovery action (which means if you do the recovery action in the middle of an issue, you should recover sometime in the middle of next one).
- ▼ For a severe consequence, you have to wait until the end of the **volume** after the recovery action.



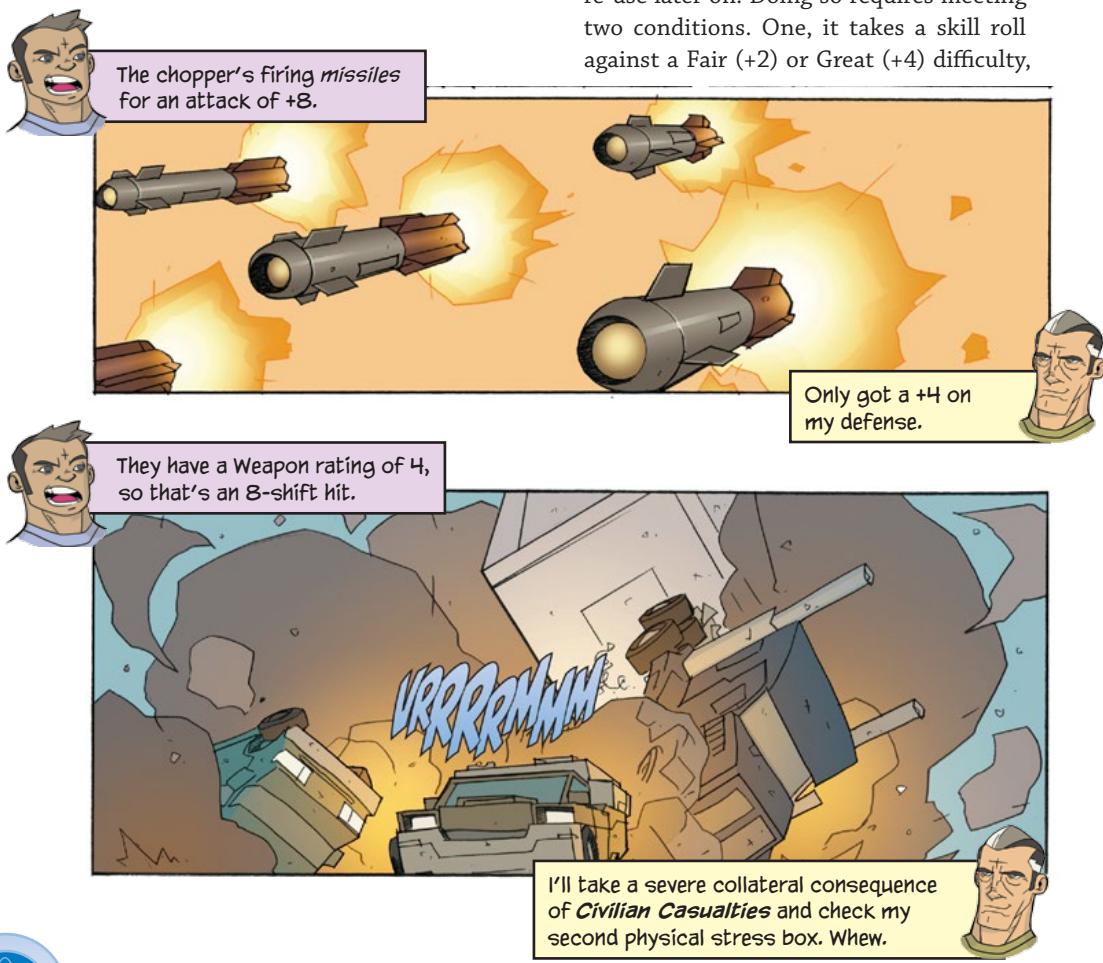
See *Running the Game* (page 155) for more information on what **scene**, **issue**, and **volume** mean in terms of game time.

COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES

Collateral consequences are a pool of four consequence slots—one mild, one moderate, one severe, and one extreme—shared by all players at the table (except the GM). They're a way of expanding the action out from the character and into the environment or the narrative as a whole. They're also a safety valve that lets a player translate certain doom into a cool new narrative monkey-wrench.

For the most part, taking a collateral consequence reduces shifts from a hit the same way a character's consequences do. The mild collateral consequence reduces a hit by 2 shifts, the moderate by 4 shifts, and the severe by 6 shifts. The extreme collateral consequence is stronger than any consequence on a character sheet; it reduces a hit by 8 shifts.

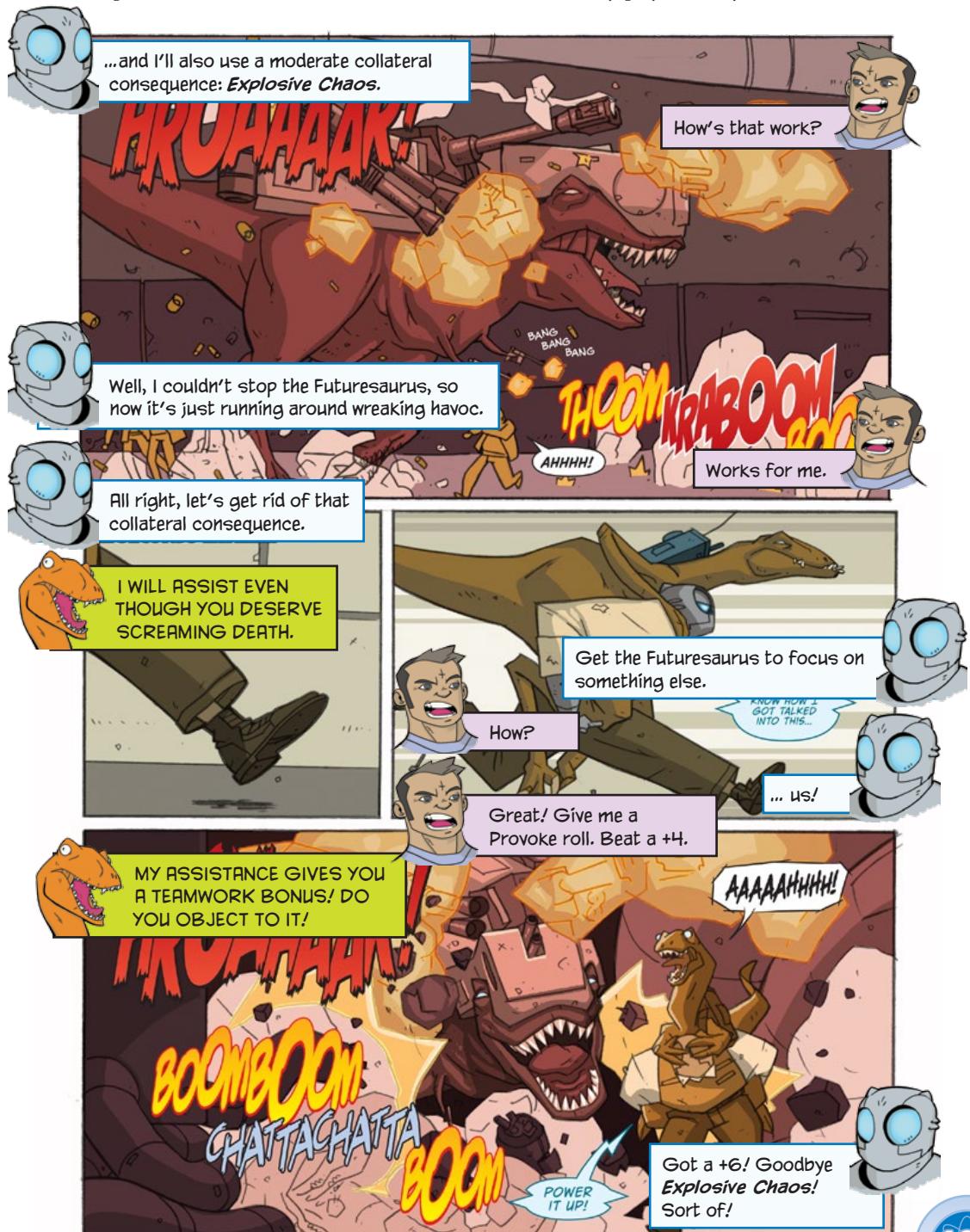
The mild and moderate collateral consequences can be removed by players, thus clearing those consequence slots for re-use later on. Doing so requires meeting two conditions. One, it takes a skill roll against a Fair (+2) or Great (+4) difficulty,



respectively. The GM and players pick the skill, depending on the circumstance. Two, the consequence *must* be cleared during the *same scene* in which it was acquired. Otherwise, it sticks around for the rest of the volume. As long as the characters keep cleaning up after their messes, they should always have at least a couple collateral consequences available.

Note that unlike a character's consequences, there's no recovery period for collateral consequences. Once a character takes an action that successfully removes a mild or moderate collateral consequence, it's just gone, right then and there.

Severe and extreme collateral consequences, on the other hand, *cannot* be removed by players. They stick around for



the length of the volume, at which point they're automatically cleared away. Even when they're not around anymore, these two collateral consequences have lasting ramifications for the people who incurred them—and their organizations.

When you clear the severe collateral consequence, at the start of the next volume one of your organization's pressures *must* reflect fallout from the incident.

Clearing the extreme collateral consequence works exactly the same way, with one additional caveat: each player has to alter one of their own character's aspects to reflect the trauma they've been through. This is permanent—the event leaves such an impression on everyone that they'll literally never be the same.

USING COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES

Just like personal consequences belonging to an individual character, the GM can invoke and compel collateral consequences. As always, this sort of thing has to make sense during the narrative. The characters are certainly going to have trouble sweet-talking the President of Egypt if they're carrying a collateral consequence of *We Blew Up a Pyramid*, but that's not going to be especially relevant when they're repairing Robo afterward.



Don't remind me. I'm still dealing with the consequences of that incident. Speaking of which, see *The March of Progress* (page 227) for more on the long-term effects of severe and extreme collateral consequences.



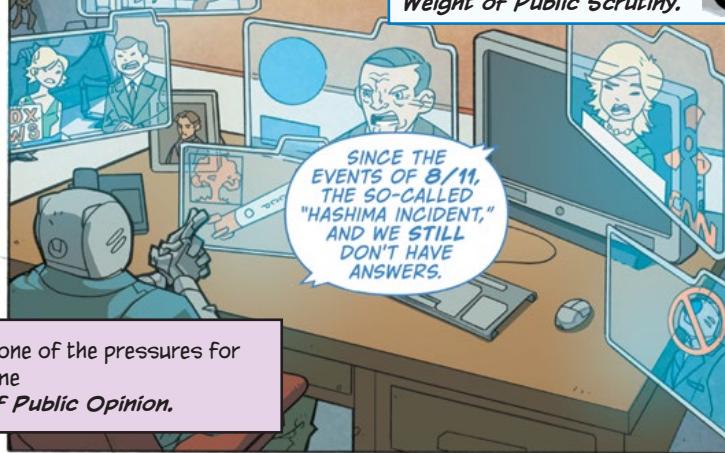
I was pretty beat-up even before this reactor blew. I'll have to take an extreme collateral consequence: *Branded a Terrorist*.



Now that we're in a new volume, you can clear that extreme collateral consequence, but you'll have to change one of your aspects.



Fair ball. I'll change my Omega aspect to *The Weight of Public Scrutiny*.



And I'll make one of the pressures for this new volume
The Court of Public Opinion.

SINCE THE EVENTS OF 8/11, THE SO-CALLED "HASHIMA INCIDENT," AND WE STILL DON'T HAVE ANSWERS.

CONCEDING THE CONFLICT

When all else fails, you can also just give in. Maybe you're worried that you can't absorb another hit, or maybe you decide that continuing to fight is just not worth the punishment. Whatever the reason, you can interrupt any action at any time to declare that you concede the conflict. This is super-important—once dice hit the table, what happens happens, and you're either taking more stress, more consequences, or getting taken out.

Concession gives the other person what they wanted from you, or in the case of more than two combatants, removes you as a concern for the opposing side. You're out of the conflict, period.

But it's not all bad. First of all, **you get a fate point for choosing to concede**. If you've sustained any consequences in this conflict, you also get one fate point for each one. These fate points may be used once this conflict is over.

Second of all, **you get to avoid the worst parts of your fate**. Yes, you lost, and you have to reflect that loss when

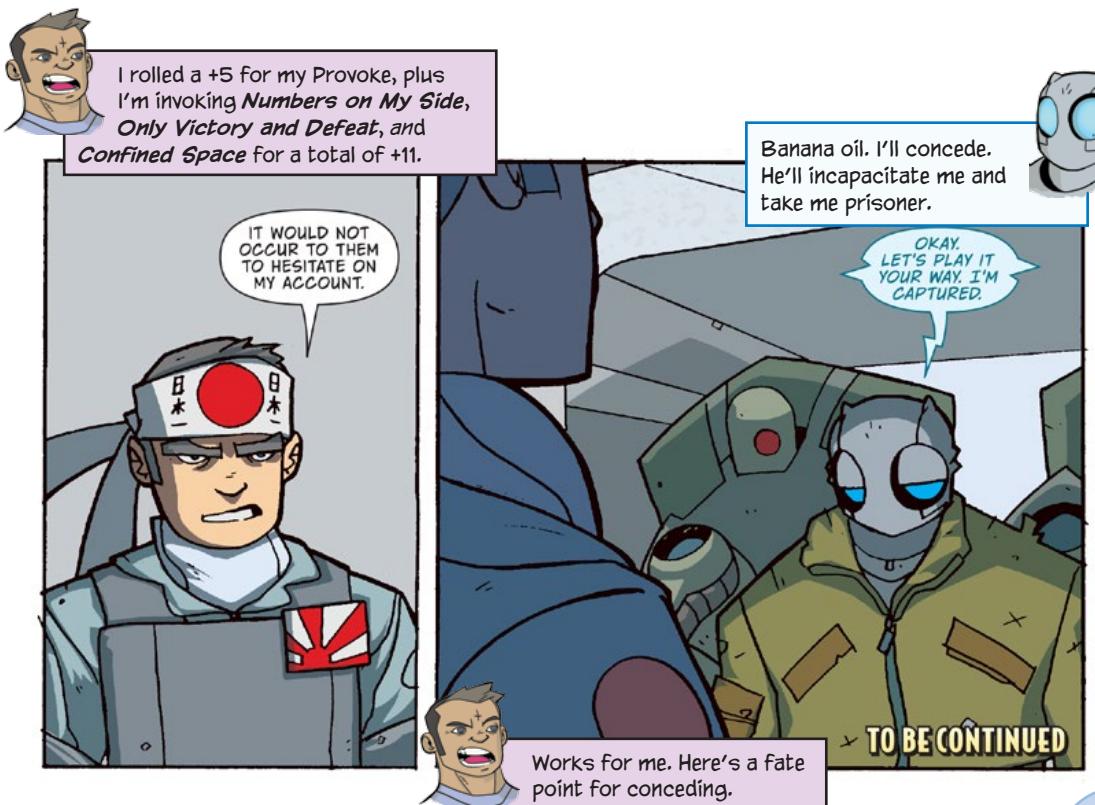
you narrate. You can't use this privilege to undermine the opponent's victory, either—the group has to pass muster on whatever you say happens.

But it can make the difference between, say, being mistakenly left for dead and ending up in the enemy's clutches, in shackles, without any of your stuff—the sort of things that can happen when you're taken out instead. That's not nothing.

GETTING TAKEN OUT

If you don't have any stress or consequences left to buy off all the shifts of a hit, that means you're taken out.

Taken out is bad—it means not only that you can't fight anymore, but that the person who took you out gets to decide what happens to you after the conflict and what your loss looks like. Obviously, they can't narrate anything that's out of scope for the conflict (like having you die from shame), but that still gives someone else a lot of power over your character that you can't really do anything about.





CHARACTER DEATH

So, if you think about it, there's not a whole lot keeping someone from saying, after taking you out, that your character dies. If you're talking about a physical conflict where people are using nasty sharp weapons, it certainly seems reasonable that one possible outcome of defeat is your character getting killed.

In practice, though, this assumption might be pretty controversial depending on what kind of group you're in. Some people think that character death should always be on the table, if the rules allow it—if that's how the dice fall, then so be it.

Others are more circumspect, and consider it very damaging to their fun to lose a character in whom they've invested hours and hours of gameplay, just because someone spent a lot of fate points or their die rolls were particularly unlucky.

However, consider this: most of the time, sudden character death is a pretty boring outcome when compared to putting that same character through hell instead. All the story threads that character was connected to just kind of stall with no resolution, and you have to expend a bunch of effort and time figuring out how to get a new character into play mid-stride.

That doesn't mean there's no room for character death in the game, however. Just save that possibility for conflicts that are extremely pivotal, dramatic, and meaningful for that character—in other words, conflicts in which that character would knowingly and willingly risk dying in order to win. Players and GMs, if you've got the feeling that you're in that kind of conflict, talk it out when you're setting the scene and see how people feel.

At the very least, even if you're in a hardcore group that invites the potential

for character death on any taken out result, make sure that you telegraph the opponent's lethal intent. GMs, this is especially important for you, so the players will know which NPCs really mean business and can concede to keep their characters alive if need be. You can hint at it—"The Murderbot invokes its aspect of **Merciless Killing Machine!**"—or you can outright tell the players what they're up against. "It looks like this guy will stop at nothing to kill you" may not be subtle, but it gets the point across.

WEAPON AND ARMOR RATINGS

A Weapon value *adds* to the value of a successful hit. A gun with Weapon:2 increases the value of any hit it deals by 2 shifts. A 1-hit shift becomes a 3-hit shift, a 2-shift hit becomes a 4-shift hit, etc.

If your attack has a Weapon rating and ties, you inflict a hit with a value equal to the Weapon rating. This is instead of getting a boost.

An Armor value reduces the value of a successful hit. So Armor:2 decreases any hit by 2 shifts.

If you hit, but the defender's Armor reduces the value of the hit to 0 shifts or below, you get a boost but don't do any harm.



Weapon ratings never add to your attack roll—just to the value of the hit you deal if your attack lands. And Armor ratings never add to your defend roll—they just reduce the value of the hit you take if your defense doesn't succeed or succeed with style.

MOVEMENT

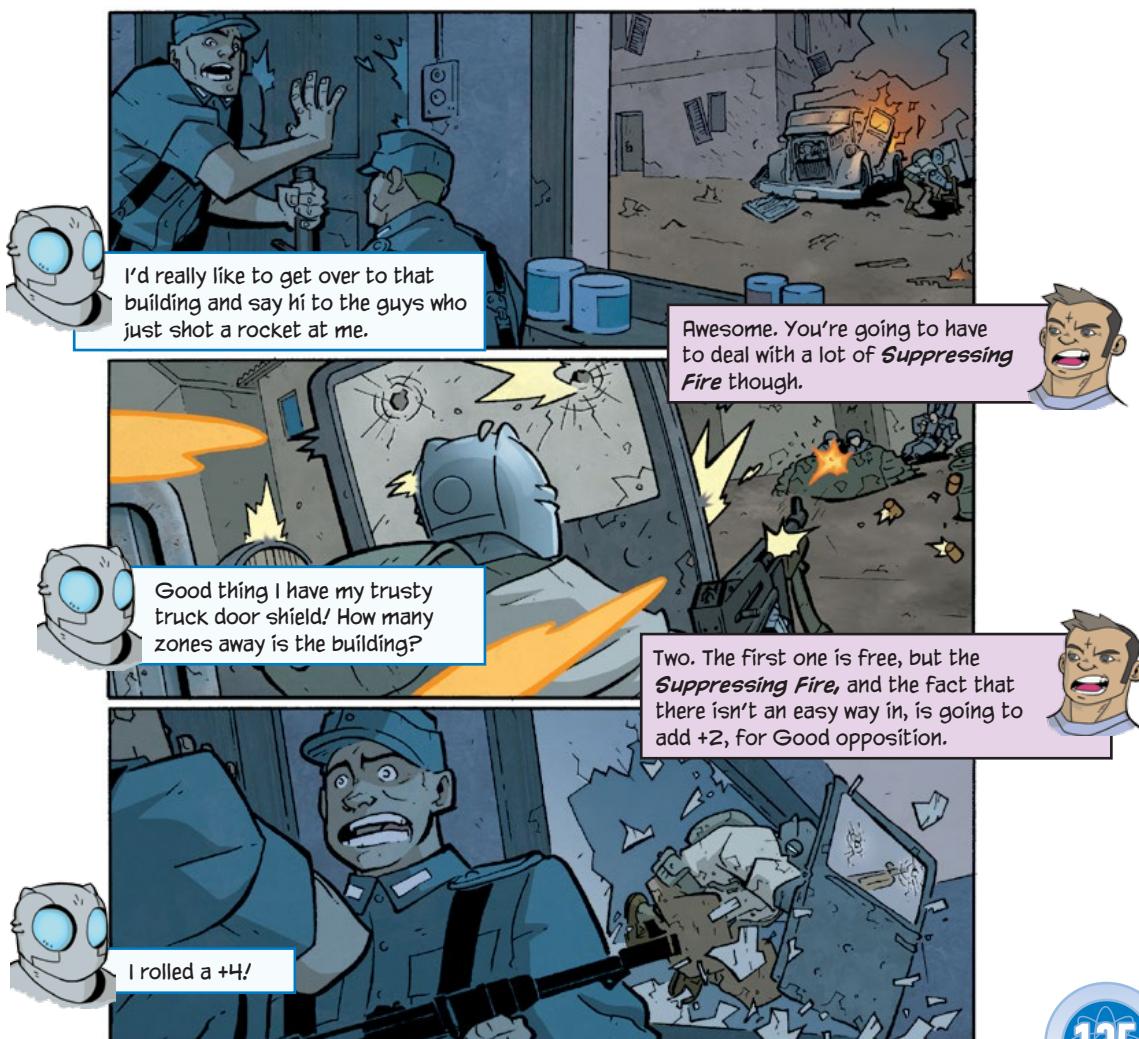
In a conflict, it's important to track where everyone is relative to one another, which is why we divide the environment where the conflict's taking place into zones. Where you have zones, you have people trying to move around in them in order to get at one another or at a certain objective.

Normally, it's no big deal to move from one zone to another—if there's nothing preventing you from doing so, you can always choose to move one zone in addition to your action for the exchange.

If you want to move more than one zone, a situation aspect suggests that it might be difficult to move freely, or another character is in your way, then you must make an overcome action using Athletics in order to move. This counts as your action for the exchange.

The distance you can move, in zones, depends on how many shifts you score on your roll. Spend one shift for each zone you wish to move into beyond the first. For example, moving two zones costs 1 shift, moving three costs 2 shifts, four costs 3 shifts, and so on. GMs, you're rarely going to set up a scene that has more than four or five zones, so a decent roll can probably let a character go anywhere on the map.

If you want to move into a zone with an aspect that would inhibit movement, it costs another 2 shifts to move into that zone for each such aspect the zone has. This is in addition to whatever the usual cost would be in shifts to move into that zone. For example, if you want to get to a control panel that's three zones away, it'd cost 2 shifts, but if the control panel's zone also has an aspect of **Crates and Boxes**, it'd cost 4 shifts.



ADVANTAGES IN A CONFLICT

Remember that aspects you create as advantages follow all the rules for situation aspects—the GM can use them to justify overcome actions, and they last until they’re made irrelevant or the scene is over. In some cases, they may even represent as much a threat to you as a consequence.

When you’re creating advantages in a conflict, think about how long you want that aspect to stick around and whom you want to have access to it. It’s difficult for anyone else besides yourself or anyone on your side to justify using an advantage you stick to a target, but it’s also easier to justify getting rid of it—one overcome action could undo it. Placing an aspect on the environment means that it’s harder to justify getting rid of it (seriously, who is going to move that **Huge Bookcase** you just knocked over?), but anyone in the scene could potentially find a reason to take advantage of it.

In terms of options for advantages, the sky’s the limit. Pretty much any situational modifier you can think of can be expressed as an advantage. If you’re stuck on an idea, here are some examples:

- ▼ **TEMPORARY BLINDING:** Throwing sand or salt in the enemy’s eyes is a classic action staple. This places a **Blinded** on a target, which could force them to do an overcome action for anything dependent on sight. **Blinded** might also come with opportunities for a compel, so keep in mind that your opponent might also be able to take advantage of this to replenish fate points.
- ▼ **DISARMING:** You knock an opponent’s weapon away, disarming them until they can recover it. The target will need an overcome action to recover their weapon.
- ▼ **POSITIONING:** There are a lot of ways to use advantages to represent positioning, like **High Ground** or **Cornered**, which you can invoke to take advantage of that positioning as context demands. In some cases, that aspect may also force an overcome action if the target wants to move away.

▼ **WINDED AND OTHER MINOR HURTS:** Some strikes in a fight are only debilitating because they’re painful, rather than because they cause injury. Nerve hits, groin shots, and a lot of other “dirty fighting” tricks fall into this category. You can use an advantage to represent these, sticking your opponent with **Pain-Blindness** or **Stunned** or whatever, then following up with an attack that uses it to do more lasting harm.

▼ **TAKING COVER:** You can use advantages to represent positions of cover and invoke them for your defense. This can be as general as **Found Some Cover** or as specific as **Behind the Big Oak Bar**.

▼ **ALTERING THE ENVIRONMENT:** You can use advantages to alter the environment to your benefit, creating barriers to movement by scattering **Loose Junk** everywhere, or setting things **On Fire**.

OTHER ACTIONS IN A CONFLICT

As stated above, you may find yourself in a situation where you want to do something else while your friends are fighting. You might be picking a lock or disarming a death trap, searching for a piece of information, conducting research under fire, or searching for hidden assailants.

In order to do something other than participate in the conflict, you must be in a position where you don’t need to roll a defend action for any reason. If someone attacks you, or tries to stick an advantage on you, you must deal with them before you do anything else.

Otherwise, GMs, set the player up with a modified form of contest—as long as the conflict continues, the player can continue to roll an overcome action every exchange. Every exchange that the player succeeds, grant one victory, or two for a success with style. The player will achieve the goal upon reaching three victories.

FREE ACTIONS

Sometimes it just makes sense that your character is doing something else in conjunction with or as a step toward their action. You draw a weapon before you use it, you shout a warning before you kick in a door, or you quickly size up a room before you attack. These little bits of action are colorful description more than anything else, meant to add atmosphere to the scene.

Don't fall into the trap of trying to police every little detail of a player's description. Remember, if there's no

significant or interesting opposition, you shouldn't require a roll and just let the players accomplish what they say they do. Reloading a gun or fishing for something in your backpack is part of performing the action, and you shouldn't require any mechanics to deal with that.

You know what's great fun to do in the middle of a fight?

Talk science! Seriously. See

Brainstorms on page 132 in
Let's Do Some Science for proof.



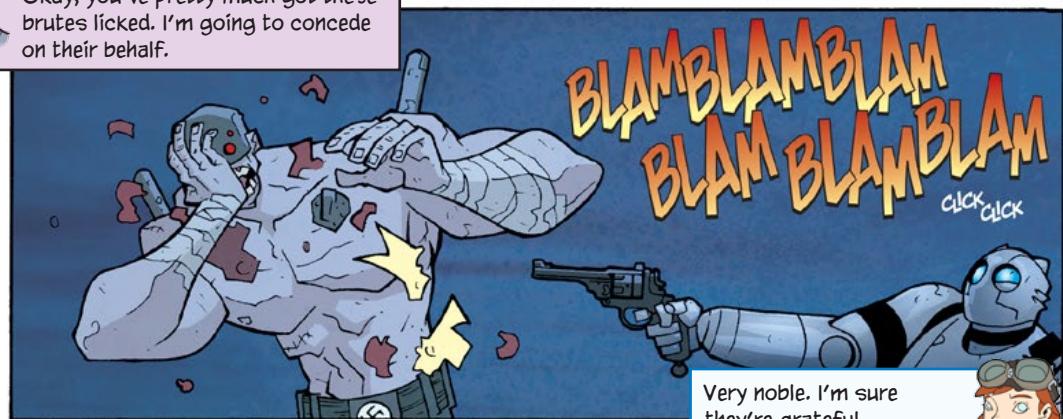
ENDING A CONFLICT

Under most circumstances, when all of the members of one side have either conceded the conflict or have been taken out, the conflict is over.

Once you know a conflict has definitively ended, GMs, you can pass out all the fate points earned from concessions, if any. Players, make a note of whatever consequences you suffered in the fight, and erase the checks in all your stress boxes.



Okay, you've pretty much got these brutes licked. I'm going to concede on their behalf.



TRANSITIONING TO A CHALLENGE OR CONTEST

You may find yourself in a conflict scene where the participants are no longer interested in or willing to harm one another, because of some change in the circumstances. If that happens, and there's still more to resolve, you can transition straight into a contest or challenge as you need. In that case, hold off on awarding the end-of-conflict fate points and whatnot until you've also resolved the contest or challenge.



And I'll add a couple of fate points to my reserve for the consequence that each brute took during the fight.



TEAMWORK

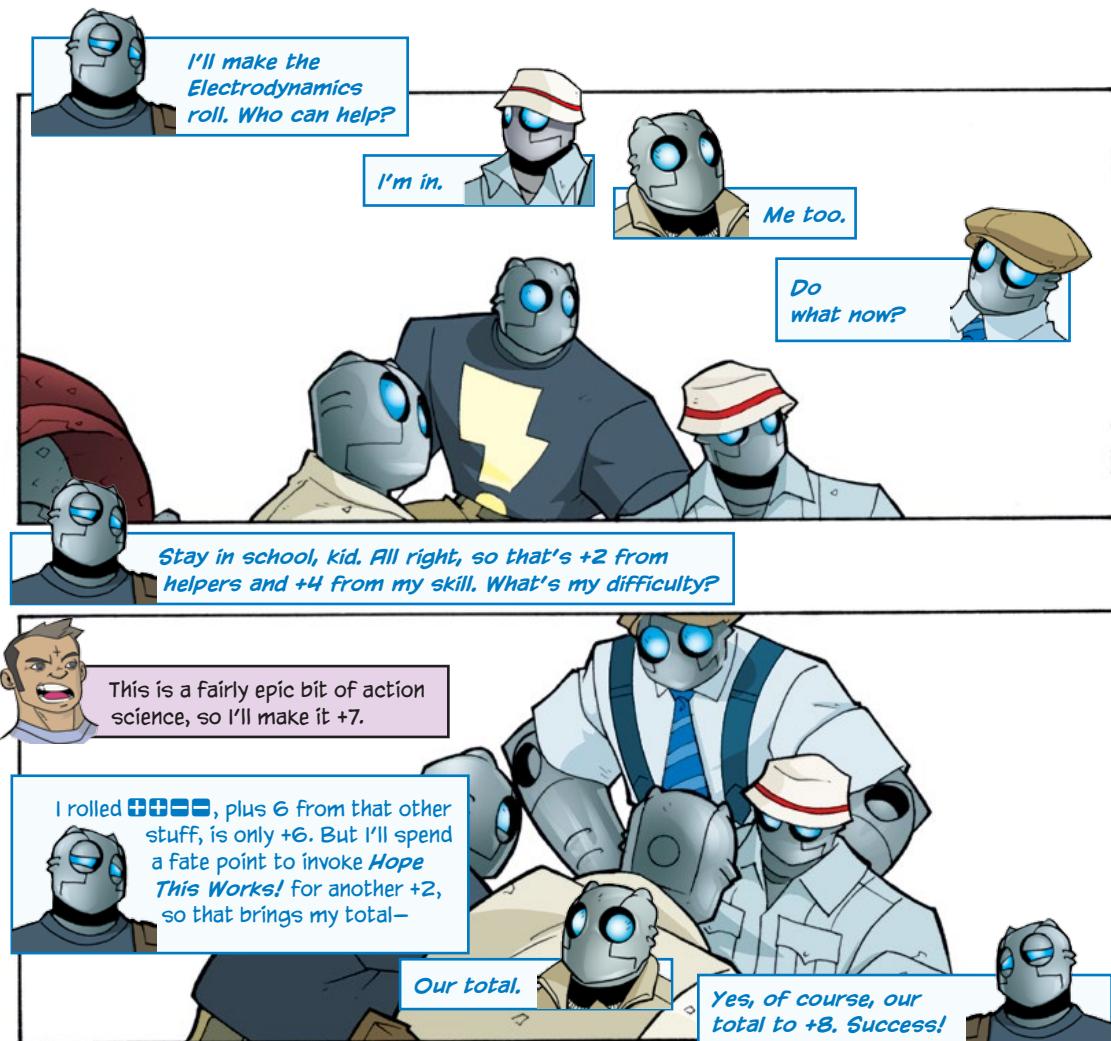
Characters can help each other out on actions. There are two versions of helping in Fate Core: combining skills, for when you are all putting the same kind of effort into an action (like using Physique together to push over a crumbling wall), and stacking advantages, for when the group is setting a single person up to do well (like causing multiple distractions so one person can use Stealth to get into a fortress).

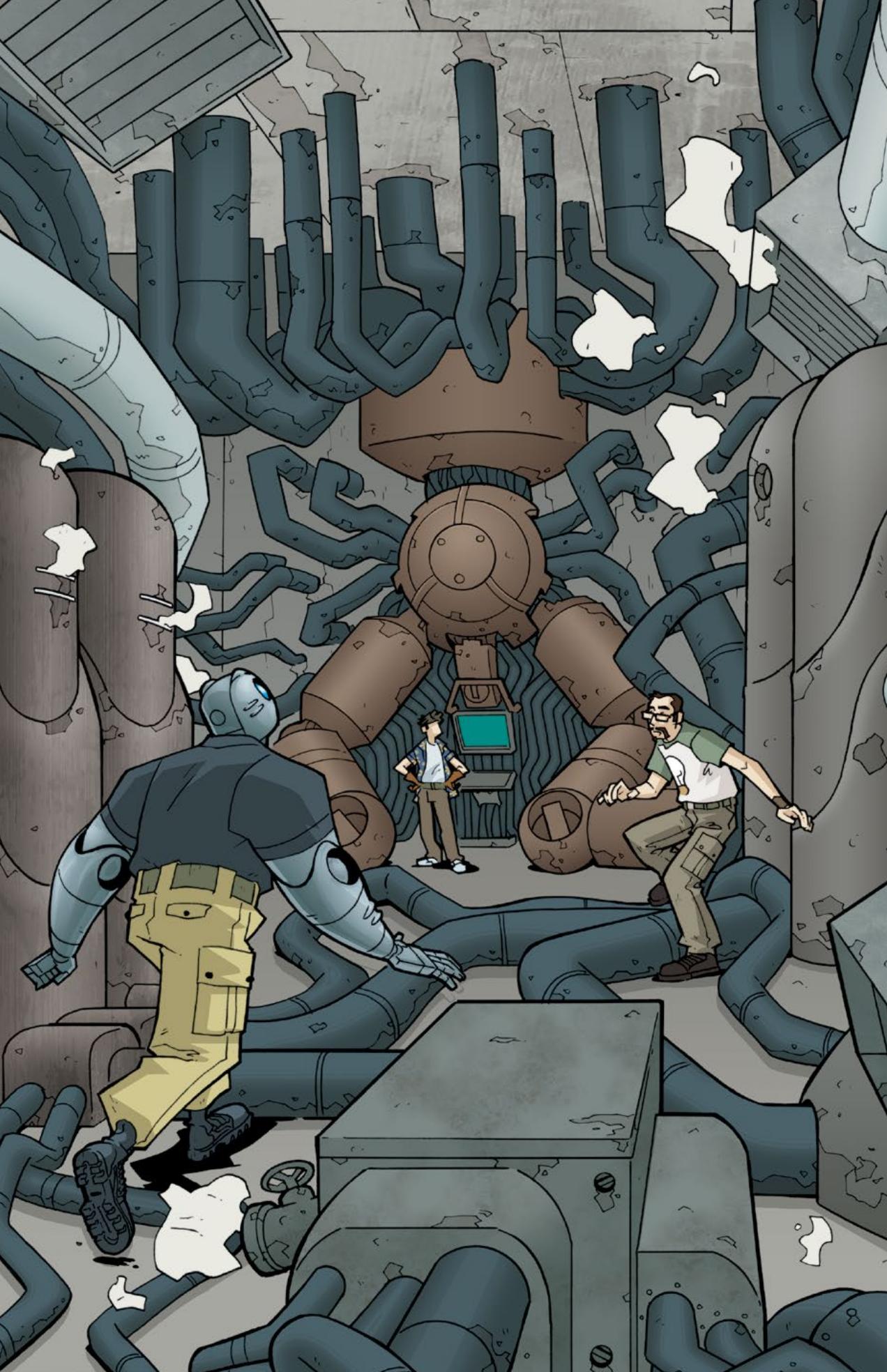
When you combine skills, figure out who has the highest skill level among the participants. Each other participant who has at least an Average (+1) in the same skill adds a +1 to the highest person's skill level, and then only the lead character rolls. So if you have three helpers and you're the highest, you'll roll and add your skill level +3.

If you fail a roll that's benefiting from combined skills, all of the participants share in the potential costs—whatever complication affects one character affects all of them, or everyone has to take consequences, etc. Alternately, you can impose a cost that affects all characters involved.

When you stack advantages, each person takes a create an advantage action as usual, and gives whatever free invocations they get to a single character.

Remember, you can stack all of those free invocations on a single roll for one massive total.





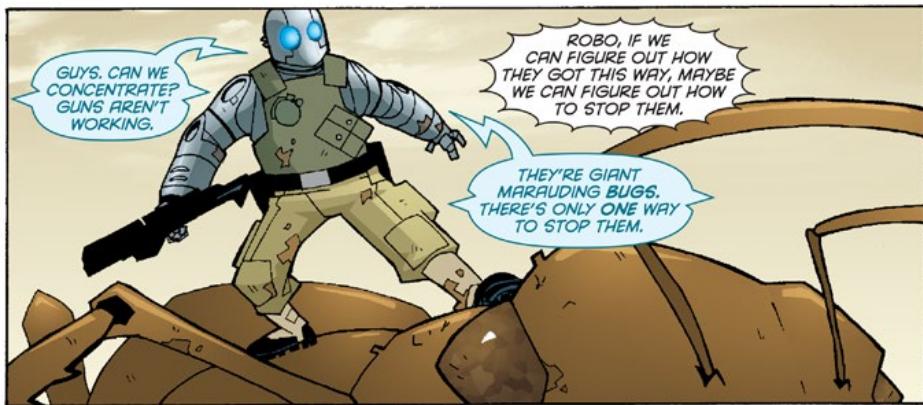
CHAPTER EIGHT: LET'S DO SOME SCIENCE

Sure, we all love a good explosion, but let's not forget the most important part of Action Science: the *science!* That's what Tesladyne was founded on, first and foremost, and anyone who works there had better have some scientific expertise to bring to the table. (Except Jenkins, obviously. No one's going to make him crack a book if he doesn't want to.)

Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game provides two ways for you to zoom in on the science:

- ▼ **Brainstorms**, when a group of characters works together to solve mysteries using science and players collaborate to steer the story in a new direction
- ▼ **Invention**, when one or more characters uses scientific know-how to create cutting-edge technology by injecting complications and drama into the story





BRAINSTORMS

Action Scientists confront seemingly inexplicable scientific phenomena on a fairly routine basis—it's kind of a big part of the job. Their usual response in these situations is to toss out theories and ideas in an attempt to understand what's happening before rushing off to do something about it. Sometimes this involves piecing clues together, as when Martin and Louis puzzle through what happened to Station X, or making a series of scientific observation, as when the team studies the ghost of Thomas Edison from behind an overturned table. Other times, such as when Vik and Lang debate about how those giant ants in Nevada got so giant, the process can be... less civil.

In *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*, these discussions are called **brainstorms**.

RUNNING BRAINSTORMS

In a brainstorm, the PCs (and their players) spitball, make observations, or run tests and/or experiments in an attempt to formulate a workable hypothesis about a phenomenon. This can take a few minutes, a few days, or a few weeks. It all depends on the context of the scene.

Ideally, the result of all of this is a **hypothesis**. And because we're talking about highly trained and talented Action Scientists, *it is always true*. In other words, whatever explanation the players collectively establish will steer the course of the story. This is accomplished through a short series of skill rolls (usually involving whatever sciences the PCs can bring to bear) made by all players at the table who choose to participate. Characters will try to establish facts about the situation, then use those facts to develop their hypothesis.

If they *don't* establish enough facts to come up with a workable hypothesis, then the problem remains a mystery, which the GM gets to enforce with an aspect.

STEP 1: BEGIN THE BRAINSTORM

Ideally, a brainstorm begins when one player uses a leading phrase in the course of normal conversation and roleplaying. This phrase could be something like "What do you think's going on here, Doctor?" or "So how do we stop it?" That's everyone's cue (but especially the GM's) to start brainstorming.

If this *doesn't* happen, though, that's okay. It's equally fine for the GM or a player to just come out and say, "Hey, how about a brainstorm?"

Everyone taking part cites a reason why they're getting involved by compelling one of their aspects. This will usually be a Science aspect, assuming they have one, but if not the player can compel some other relevant aspect. In other words, everyone gets a fate point just for participating, and everyone who wants to participate can come up with an excuse to do so with a little effort.

So how does a house just disappear, then?

Sounds like a brainstorm to me. Who's in, and what aspect are you compelling?

I'm in, obviously. As a Sparrow, I'm privy to *A Thousand Years of Secrets*—I have to get involved.

Sounds good. Here's your fate point. Who else?

Us! We are!

We're close by! Right up in Norway!

I'm *Destined For Greatness (Eventually)*. It was only a matter of time before Robo realized my potential was going to waste out here.

So, a transfer, I guess? Seems reasonable. Give me an aspect to compel.

My Science aspect, *Eliminating the Possible*. Puzzles, riddles, quantum decomputing—that's my jam, baby!

You've clearly been out here too long.

All right, I'll buy those. Have a fate point.

Can't believe *those* chuckleheads are the closest ones...

STEP TWO: ESTABLISH THE FIRST FACT

Next, all participants roll *simultaneously* to create an advantage using a relevant skill against a difficulty of Good (+3). Each player can (and is encouraged to) use a different skill, but this will almost always be a Science skill. The relevance of the skill here will depend entirely on the situation at hand. In any case, it should be a skill that covers something the player will want to talk about more, or that sparks an idea.

Whoever succeeds *and* has the highest result (make a note of number) is the "winner." The winner gets to do two things. First, they record one or more victories, depending on the margin of success.

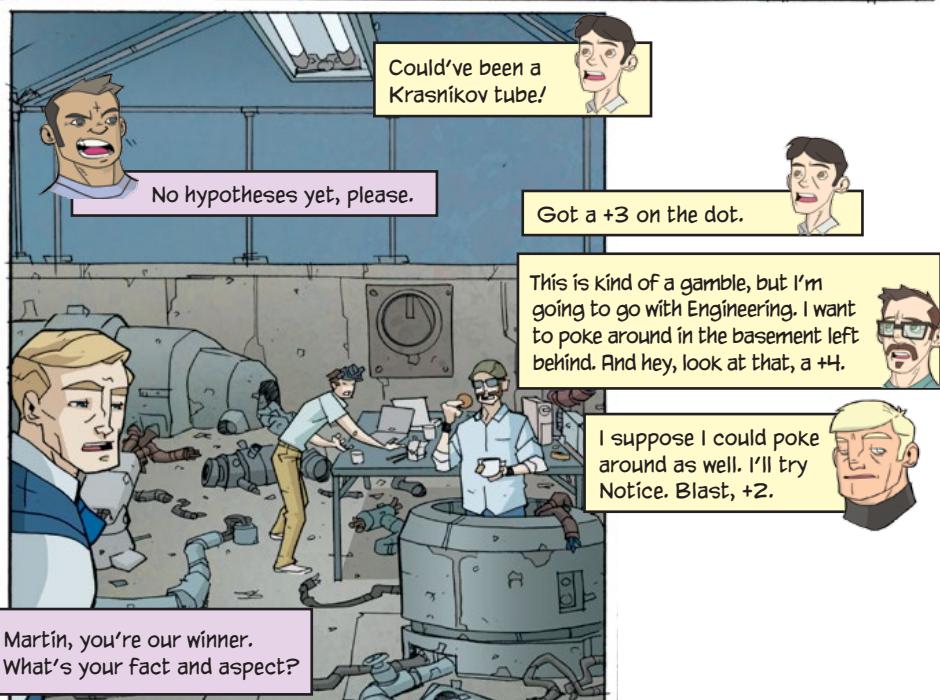


Let's establish the first fact and aspect. Tell me what skill you're using and what you get. The difficulty starts at +3, so if you at least tie that you've got a shot.

MARGIN	RESULT	VICTORIES
None	Fail	0
0	Tie	1, at a cost
1-2	Success	1
3+	Success with Style	2

The cost on a tie is up to the GM to determine (see *Outcomes and Actions*), but it should always be a minor cost.

Second, they get to introduce a **fact**. This takes the form of a situation aspect, and must follow three guidelines:



This is kind of a gamble, but I'm going to go with Engineering. I want to poke around in the basement left behind. And hey, look at that, a +4.

Martin, you're our winner. What's your fact and aspect?

I suppose I could poke around as well. I'll try Notice. Blast, +2.

I'm going to say that this basement is just a mess of all kinds of wiring from the '40s until today. My aspect will be *Baffling Basement Wiring*.

- ▼ It clearly derives from the skill used to create it.
- ▼ It clearly relates to the situation.
- ▼ It can be stated as an objective fact—an observation of something in the scene, a remembered bit of research, or some other piece of factual information that relates to the situation.

In any event, the fact doesn't have to be something previously established in the fiction. Whether it comes from something the team's already done or seen, or whether it's something the player has invented from whole cloth, it's equally valid in the brainstorm.

Conversely, the fact should *not* be:

- ▼ A hypothesis all on its own.
- ▼ A personal opinion instead of a fact.

If no one succeeds on the roll, nobody establishes a fact or places an aspect—nothing useful comes out of that segment of the discussion, and it's back to Square One.

If there's a *tie* for the highest total, each tying player gets to establish a fact, but only one victory is scored.



Facts first, then hypothesis.
Anything else is just bad science.

STEP 3: ESTABLISH THE SECOND FACT

Establishing a second fact proceeds much like establishing the first fact did: everyone picks a skill and simultaneously rolls it. It can be the same skill or a different skill, as long as it still makes sense in context.

The difficulty for this second roll is equal to the winning total from the *first* roll. For example, if the winner of the first roll got a Superb (+5), the difficulty for the second roll is also Superb (+5).

This represents the amount of effort everyone's putting forth to figure things out. Every victory scored represents a minor breakthrough.

If no one won the first roll, the difficulty for the second roll is Good (+3).

If a new situation aspect was created during the first roll, it can be invoked as

usual. If it has one or two free invocations, whoever created it gets first dibs, or they can hand it off to someone else.

The only restriction on using this new aspect is that if it's invoked by the winner of the second roll, the new fact and aspect they create `<st>must` take the invoked aspect into account. It can't contradict or wildly diverge from what the invoked aspect has established as a truth in the fiction.

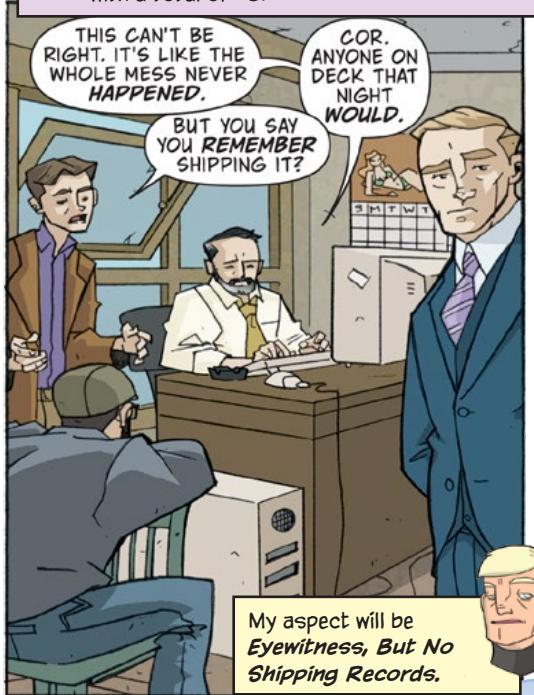
For example, if you invoke **Distinctive Energy Signature** and win the roll, you can't then put the aspect **Strange Lack of Energy Signatures** on the brainstorm.



When coming up with a fact, make it plausible, but don't feel constrained by stark reality. Scientific progress is dead without a willingness to embark upon at least a few *carefully calculated* ridiculous ideas.



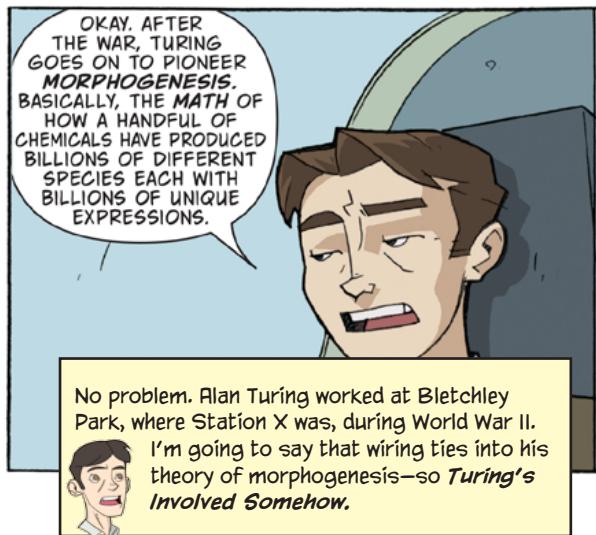
Sparrow's the winner for the brainstorm's second fact. Because the winning roll last time was a +4, the difficulty for this one was +4 too. But Sparrow's Contacts roll won out with a total of +5.



STEP 4: ESTABLISH THE THIRD FACT

Go back to Step 3, rinse, and repeat.

The difficulty for this roll is the winning total from the second roll, if there was one, or Good (+3), if there wasn't.



STEP 5: FORM A HYPOTHESIS

If the team racks up at least three victories, everyone rolls one last time. There's no difficulty number—all you care about is who has the highest total.

Whoever wins this final roll gets to come up with a hypothesis that dictates what's actually going on. *This becomes the truth of the situation.* The hypothesis must take into account and build on the facts already generated during the brainstorm.

In other words, it doesn't come out of nowhere—everyone who scored at least one victory in the brainstorm ends up having a hand in the hypothesis.

The hypothesis becomes an aspect, like **Station X Has Developed Artificial Intelligence**, or **Exposure to Radiation Has Turned the Ants into Giants!** All the situation aspects established during the brainstorm go away when the hypothesis aspect is placed. The hypothesis is an amalgam of all of those aspects.

The number of free invocations on the hypothesis aspect (if any) depends on how many total victories were scored in the brainstorm, as shown on the table.



SCIENTISTS DISAGREE

At times, the PCs may be less interested in working together like proper Action Scientists than in one-upping each other. No problem. Scientists disagree all the time, just like players. And because whoever gets to form the hypothesis at the end gets to steer the story in a particular direction of their choosing, players might very well want to vie for the privilege.

Using this optional rule, each player records their own victory total, separate from their colleagues. Everyone still rolls simultaneously.

Players can also choose to back someone else's horse by giving their victories to a colleague, so long as that colleague has already established a fact and placed a situation aspect on the brainstorm. This only applies to recording victories—the player who *wins* the roll still establishes a fact and an aspect. These *must* support whatever facts the colleague in question has already established during the brainstorm.

Be warned, though: all this competition will definitely draw out the brainstorm, so make sure you have a consensus before starting down this path.

VICTORIES RESULT

0-2	Failure—it's a mystery!
3	Tie—hypothesis aspect
4-5	Success—hypothesis aspect with one free invocation
6	Success with Style—as Success, but two free invocations

If the team *hasn't* scored at least three victories, the phenomenon defies scientific explanation, at least for now. The team has failed to shed any light on the situation, and now they're a little worse off for it.

In this case, instead of a hypothesis, the GM places an aspect on the game to reflect the team's utter lack of comprehension—something like **Science Can't Explain It!** or **Nobody Said Anything About Ghosts.**

Any situation aspects generated during the brainstorm go away, but the facts remain—the GM will need them (see below).



Three victories! That's enough for a hypothesis. Here's what you know.

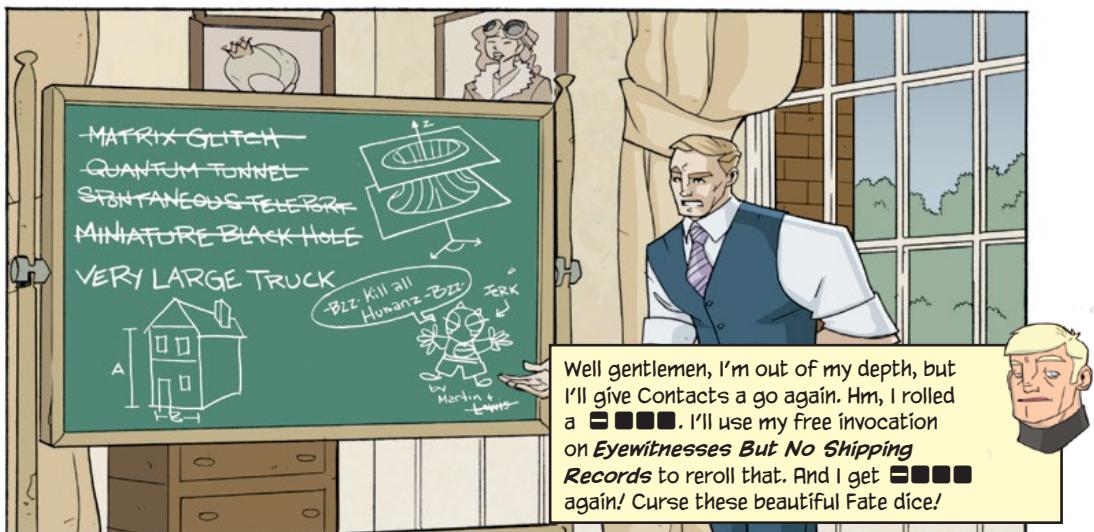
Everyone pick a skill and give me one last roll. Whoever gets the highest total gets to formulate the hypothesis, but it has to incorporate all of these facts.



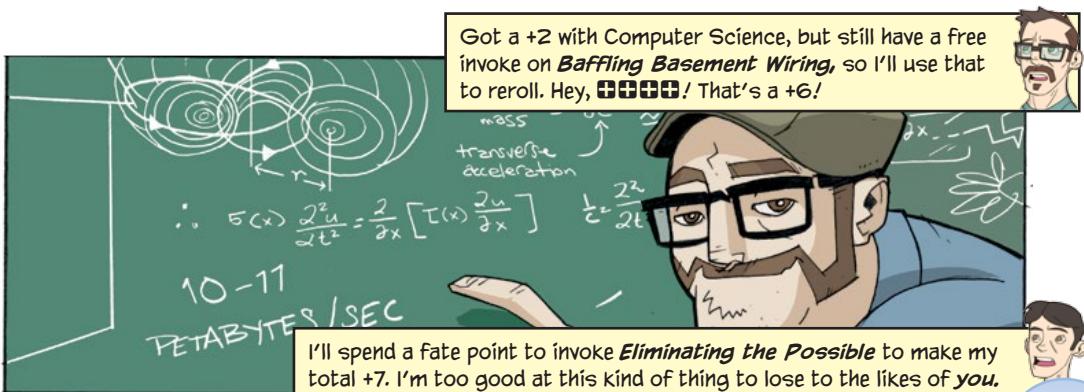
Computer Science.



Quantum Mechanics.



I got a +3 with Quantum Mechanics, plus I'll use my free invoke on **Turing's Involved Somehow** for another +2. Total of +5. Beat that.



YOU GOT YOUR ACTION IN MY SCIENCE!

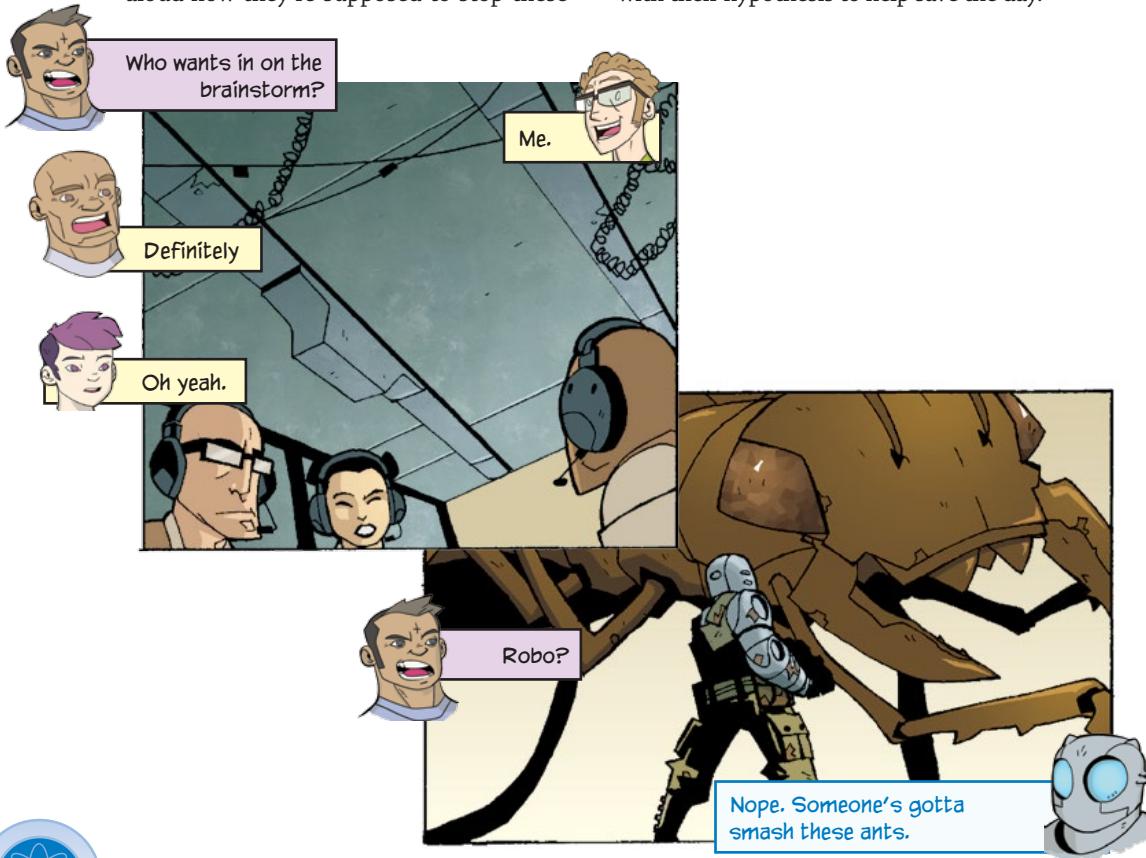
Lots of times, a brainstorm may come about as part of a lull in the action—the PCs are standing over the smoking wrecks of their vanquished robotic foes, and they start to ask questions, as people do. But what's even *better* is if you can get that brainstorm going while those robotic enemies are still on their robot-feet and causing trouble, cross-cutting between those who are fighting the robots and those who are trying to figure out why they're here and what's going on.

If you're the GM, it's pretty simple to do. With a little luck, someone playing a more science-oriented PC will give you an easy opening by saying something like, "I want to figure out where they came from" or words to that effect. That's your cue to offer a compel to anyone who wants to take part in the brainstorm. If a player *doesn't* step up like that, no problem—just go to the compel at a likely place in the action, like after a PC takes a hit and a player wonders aloud how they're supposed to stop these

things, or right as that aforementioned science-oriented PC takes their turn.

Everyone who accepts the compel and participates in the brainstorm doesn't take part in the "action" part of the scene anymore. Feel free to include their non-science-talk activities in the narrative for flavor purposes, but in game terms, they'll be using their science instead of their fists.

Stick with the regular rules for order of actions (page 114). Whenever a PC involved in the brainstorm takes their turn, follow the rules as presented above—everyone in the brainstorm rolls their chosen Science skill, a winner is determined (if any), and a fact is established (if applicable). Whenever a PC who *isn't* involved in the brainstorm takes their turn, cut back to the action. Keep cutting back and forth until the brainstorm has ended in either a hypothesis or a situation aspect from the GM. If the conflict's still happening, the brainstormers can jump right back into the action, newly armed with their hypothesis to help save the day.



THE GM'S ROLE

So if the players set difficulties and discuss possibilities and argue amongst themselves, what's your role in all this, GM, apart from sitting back and enjoying the show?

Right off the bat, let's establish that there's nothing wrong with sitting back and enjoying shows. That's just a given. You work hard, GM. No shame in taking a little break.

That said, pay attention to the facts and hypothesis the players come up with, because you're going to need to incorporate them into the story going forward. If you need a little time to determine how to do that, just let the players know. "Hey guys, you've kinda thrown me for a loop here. Let's take five so I can figure it out."

When the players are in competition, though, you'll have more of an opportunity to meddle in their affairs. It's easy to do: compel their aspects.

"Aren't you a **Self-Declared Expert in the Imaginary Sciences**? Are you really going to go along with this reasonable gobbley-gook your colleagues are spouting?"

"Seems like a **Team Player** wouldn't be so adamant about advancing his own ideas when another scientist's have already gained traction. I don't know; maybe it's just me."

"Strong and weak forces? Really? And not the Freemasons? Does that sound like something a **Conspiracy Theorist** would buy into?"

Mess with them as much or as little as you like—but be mindful of their reactions. If they're not on the same page as you, back off.

INVENTION

When the solution to a problem is some radical, innovative, or just plain dangerously untested piece of technology, people call Tesladyne. And if they don't, they should. Maybe you need a weaponized electrolaser on the quick, or an improvised jetpack. Or maybe you need a quantum decomputer for what is probably a very good reason. Whatever—an Action Scientist can get it done.

SCIENTIFIC DRAMA

Remember, PCs in *Atomic Robo: The Role-playing Game* are both competent and proactive. For example, if Ada the Action Scientist needs to create or invent a technological device, we're not interested in whether or not she can do it. Of course she can do it! She's an Action Scientist! Imagine you're reading an issue of *Atomic Robo* and hit eight straight pages of Ada unsuccessfully trying to build a machine. What a thrill and a chill! But this isn't some intense, moody character study. We're talking about *Atomic Robo* here.

Instead, we're only interested in what kind of *drama* this act of creation will inject into the PCs' lives. These rules are about using that act to generate story.

Now, if no one at the table's interested in that—if everyone just wants to say they're able to make this thing between issues or whatever and call it a day, and there's no real risk or adversity involved—then there's no need to apply these rules in the first place. Skip to the end. Just say they make it, and it's made.



Note that these rules aren't limited to actually "inventing" things—they apply equally well to recreating existing technology, whether strange or familiar.



This section makes frequent use of the hardware rules found in the *Mega-stunts* section (page 74) of *Modes, Skills, and Stunts*. If you're not already familiar with them, it'd probably be a good idea to go check them out before continuing.

FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

The process of inventing involves one or more PCs figuring out what needs to be built, what that thing will actually do in game terms, and what complications will arise as a result. All of this only takes one skill roll—the rest is making choices and playing out their ramifications.

We'll refer to the thing you're making as your **invention**, but don't take that too literally. It could just as easily be a never-before-seen technological wonder as it could a recreation of an existing piece of tech. Whatever it is, broadly speaking, your invention is an item that makes you better at doing something or gives you a new capability. It consists of three basic parts:

- ▼ A function aspect
- ▼ A flaw aspect
- ▼ One or more stunts or mega-stunts

Creating an invention happens in five steps:

- ▼ Determine the invention's function—its role in the story
- ▼ Define its capabilities—how it fulfills that role
- ▼ Put it together—make a skill roll
- ▼ Pay for it—what you'll have to do to create the invention
- ▼ Determine its flaw—nobody's perfect

STEP ONE: DETERMINE ITS FUNCTION

This may seem like a given, but before anything else you need to ask yourself what

the invention is meant to *do*. Think about what it's going to make possible (or impossible) in the story, and how it'll accomplish that. Based on your answer, come up with a short statement that addresses it, such as its intended purpose, a straightforward description, or even the invention's expected role in the story. Whatever it is, keep it brief and focused—**Retractable Hypo-Syringe** is good. **Secret Hidden Needle that has the Power to Poison or Heal** is maybe not so good.

Your answer to this question forms the basis of your invention's **function aspect**.

STEP TWO: DEFINE ITS CAPABILITIES

Now that you know the invention's purpose, it's time to decide how it actually works—in game terms, anyway. Don't sweat the actual science too much. Let the characters worry about that.

Defining an invention's capabilities is as simple as giving it stunt benefits, just like mega-stunts (see *Mega-stunts* on page 76). Pack on as many benefits as the invention needs to function the way you want it to, but be aware that the more benefits it has, the more complications it will throw into the story, as seen in Step Three: Make It and Step Four: Costs.

STEP THREE: PUT IT TOGETHER

Next, pick the Science skill that seems most relevant to the invention's construction. If more than one skill can reasonably apply, go with the one with the highest rating.

The difficulty for this roll starts at Mediocre (+0). Every stunt benefit the hardware has increases the difficulty by +2. The more benefits it has, the more complex it is, and the more complications its construction throws into the story.

Make a note of the roll's outcome, whether it's failure, a tie, a success, or a success with style. You'll need it for the next step.

Failing this roll does not mean you'll fail to make the thing. You *cannot* fail to make it. You're an Action Scientist, remember? We covered this already. The skill roll determines not whether you can make it, but what hoops you'll have to jump through to do so.



Thanks to some fancy hyperdimensional math, I already know when and where the Shadow From Beyond Time will appear next—but that alone won't do me much good. What I need is a means to capture the thing, like some sort of hyperdimensional anchor or prison. So my invention's function aspect is *Hyperdimensional Containment Cage*.



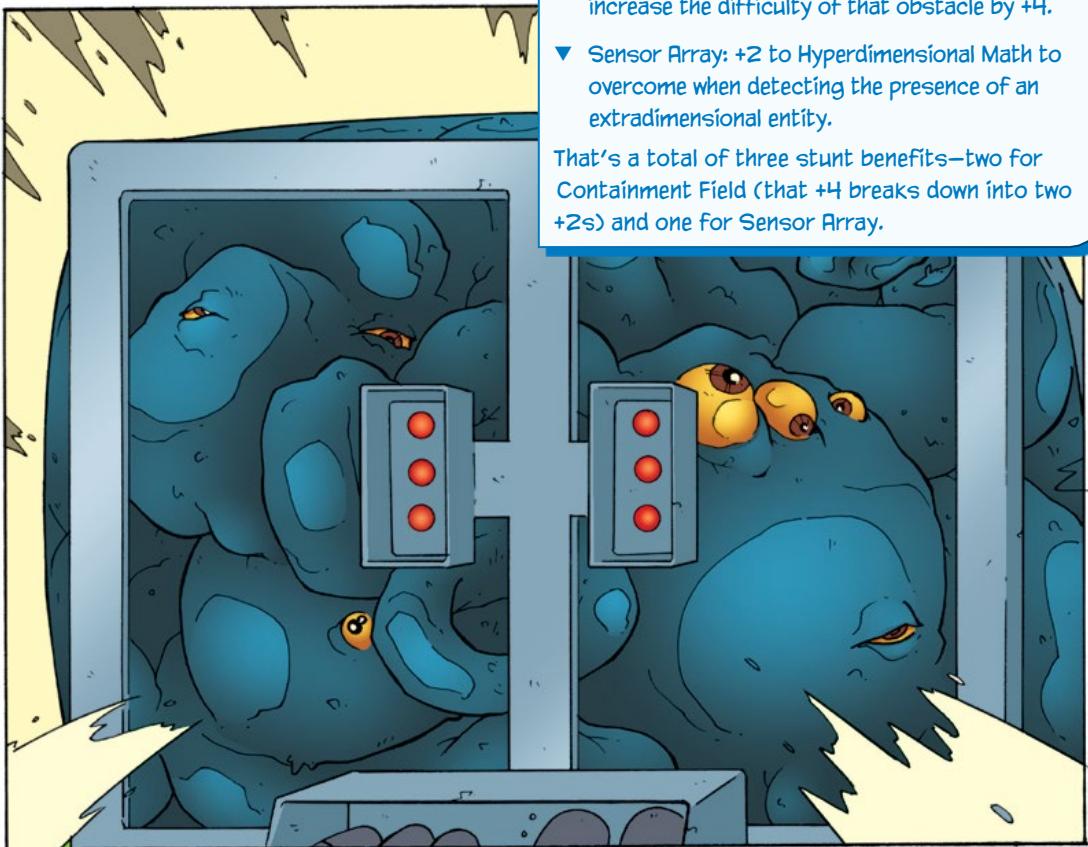
I need this hyperdimensional containment cage to restrain the Shadow From Beyond once it appears in our reality.

That sounds like using the create an advantage action to present it with an obstacle. It also needs to be able to detect the presence of the Shadow in the first place—the thing normally just pops into reality without any warning—which sounds like an overcome action.

So the cage's capabilities are:

- ▼ **Containment Field:** When creating an advantage with a Science skill to make an obstacle, increase the difficulty of that obstacle by +4.
- ▼ **Sensor Array:** +2 to Hyperdimensional Math to overcome when detecting the presence of an extradimensional entity.

That's a total of three stunt benefits—two for Containment Field (that +4 breaks down into two +2s) and one for Sensor Array.



TEAMWORK

Multiple PCs can work together to create the invention, using the usual teamwork rules (page 129), but with one variation. Each additional participating PC adds a +1 bonus to the roll only if they're bringing a *different* relevant Science skill to the task. In practical terms, this means there's one acknowledged "expert" who takes the lead, and others with expertise in related fields who lend a hand.

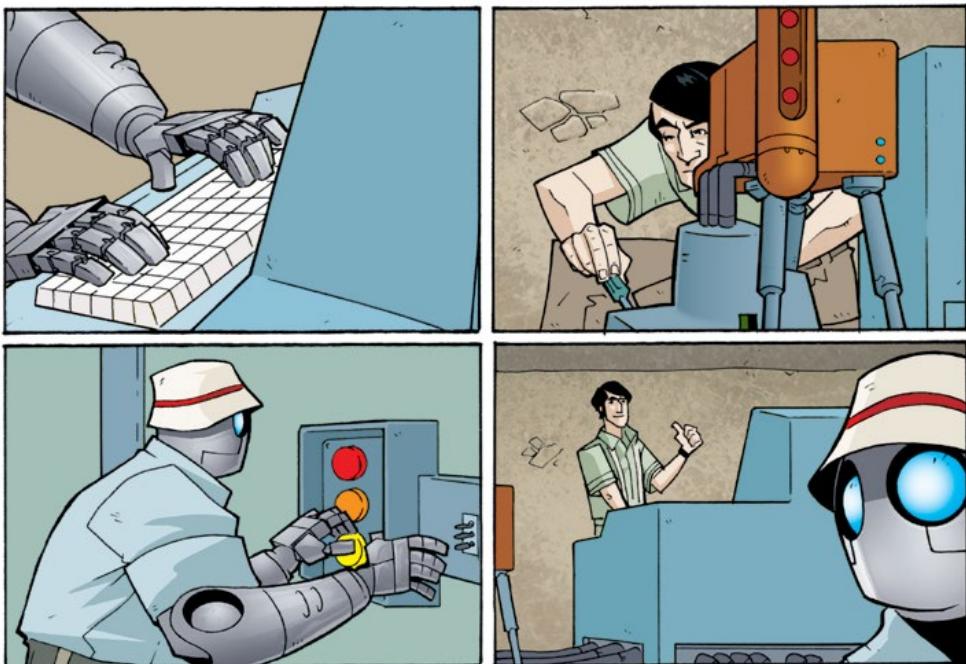
STEP FOUR: PAY FOR IT

To paraphrase a marketing genius with a questionable sense of ethics, every invention is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. We call the perspiration part a **catch**.

When we say you have to pay for your invention, it's not in terms of cash money, because that's not an especially exciting limitation. We can always assume the PCs will have one of two advantages that render monetary costs irrelevant. Either their faction will pick up the tab, or they already



The hyperdimensional containment cage has three stunt benefits, so the difficulty to construct it is Fantastic (+6). My most relevant skill is probably Hyperdimensional Math—there's a lot of engineering and physics knowledge involved, but it's all moot without the math. I get a +5 on my roll. Then I'll spend a fate point to invoke One of the Foremost Engineers in the World to bring that up to a +7. Success!



have the raw materials available and it's just a matter of putting it all together.

Instead, a catch is some complication or condition that'll have to be resolved before the hardware can be realized—a series of narrative hurdles that stand between the inventor and the invention.

Players render payment in two ways. One is increasing the GM's fate point reserve. The other is accepting one or more catches. We'll get to the former in a minute, but for now let's concentrate on the latter. A catch can include:

▼ **TIME:** Producing the invention will take long enough that the situation will worsen and/or someone will gain an advantage against you. Whatever the case, you'll still finish it in time for it to be useful.

▼ **MATERIALS:** One of the invention's components is something rare, under lock and key, or otherwise hard to acquire. Getting your hands on it may be an adventure in and of itself.

▼ **HELP:** You can't do it alone—you need assistance from an outside party, such as a notable expert in the field or another faction. They may require convincing, demand something in exchange for their involvement, or drag their own baggage into the project. Note: Another PC isn't "help." That's just another PC. (Although it's a good way to bring in a *new* PC, if a player's looking for a character to play.) This catch means going outside your usual circle of reliable associates.

▼ **LAB:** Producing the invention requires a specialized facility, one to which you don't normally have access. You may have to negotiate for that access, or you may gain it through more "creative" means.

▼ **ATTENTION:** The process of creating the invention will attract unwanted notice from someone or something whose notice you'd rather not attract. This unwelcome party will involve themselves in the events of the volume or otherwise complicate matters or hamper the PCs' efforts in some way.

▼ **BUG:** The invention has a glitch—either a weakness or a cost. (See *Mega-stunts* for more on weaknesses and costs.)

For every stunt benefit an invention has, there's a catch. For example, an invention with four stunt benefits will have four catches, selected from the list above.

Who chooses these catches? That depends on the outcome of the skill roll from Step Three.

EXAMPLES OF CATCHES

- ▼ The infection spreads rapidly while you're working, necessitating a quarantine.
- ▼ The robots dig in at several key locations in Manhattan before you can complete the device.
- ▼ The only expert who can help is ex-DELPHI.
- ▼ The only place with the right equipment to build the hardware is a rival in the tech industry.
- ▼ You know exactly what you need—and it's currently in the hands of Most Perfect Science Division.
- ▼ Majestic 12 "takes an interest" in your work.
- ▼ Nearby electronics sometimes shut down briefly when the invention's powered up and running.

OUTCOME

Fail

WHO CHOOSES?

The GM chooses them all.

Tie

The GM and player take turns choosing, starting with the GM.

Success

The GM chooses one and the player chooses the rest.

Success with Style

The player chooses them all.

SERIOUS CATCHES

If one of the invention's mega-stunts bundles two or more identical stunt benefits for a larger bonus, such as bundling two Add A Bonus benefits to grant +4 to an action instead of the usual +2, that bundle automatically comes with a **serious catch**—a more onerous version of the default.

EXAMPLES OF SERIOUS CATCHES

- ▼ The infection spreads rapidly while you're working, claiming some important would-be allies.
- ▼ The robots destroy half of Manhattan before you can complete the device.
- ▼ You need a sizable team of experts beyond what you have available.
- ▼ The only expert who can help is both high-profile and not a fan of your work.
- ▼ The only place with the right equipment to build it is the Cern labs in Geneva.
- ▼ You know exactly what you need—and it's in a Helsingard bunker.
- ▼ You don't just attract attention; you attract Dr. Dinosaur's attention.
- ▼ The device sporadically emits an unstable and potentially dangerous energy field within a radius of a few dozen feet. (It's not supposed to do that.)

CORNELL UNIVERSITY, 1971

DR. SAGAN,
MY TEAM AND I
WILL ENCOUNTER AN
EXTRATERRESTRIAL
LIFE FORM IN FOUR
MONTHS. WE'D LIKE
YOU TO DEVELOP
INSTRUMENTATION
TO STUDY IT.

MAYBE YOU
SHOULD'VE SAID
YOU WEREN'T A
NUT FIRST.

 Robo's Hyperdimensional Math roll was a success, so he gets to decide one of the two catches the hyperdimensional containment cage will entail. There'll be one normal catch (for Sensor Array) and one serious catch (for Containment Field and its two stunt benefits). He decides to choose the serious catch, and leave the other one up to the GM.

For Containment Field, he picks Help—a noted authority in physics would be appropriate, and whoever they are they'll definitely need convincing; what Robo's trying to do sounds utterly insane by any reasonable standard. So... why not Carl Sagan?

Because it's a serious catch, he'll be difficult to get a hold of, even more difficult to persuade, and probably more besides.

OKAY. WHATEVER WE
DISCOVER, WHEN WE NAME
IT, WELL PUT YOUR NAME
IN FRONT OF MINE.

ABOUT THAT.
ARE EVEN HALF
THOSE SENSORS
APPLICABLE? WE'RE
NOT LOOKING
FOR MOONS AND
SUPERNOVAE
HERE.

THESE ARE SOME
OF THE MOST SENSITIVE
INSTRUMENTS CONCEIVED
BY MAN. IF THERE'S A HINT
OF THE CREATURE, THEY
WILL FIND IT.

bdeet

 For Sensor Array, the GM picks Materials. The cage needs a highly sensitive sensory apparatus to detect the Shadow. Probably the most sophisticated such device at the time is the instrument complement from Pioneer 10. That's what he needs.

Finally, the containment cage has three stunt benefits and no Bugs, so the GM gets another three fate points for the reserve.

CATCHES AS ASPECTS

If it makes sense and everyone's agreeable, a catch can manifest as an aspect. This aspect sticks around for as long as it makes sense in the story. It comes with one free invocation (the GM has dibs), or two free invocations if it's the product of a serious catch.

Examples might include:

- ▼ **Down to the Wire** (Time)
- ▼ **Robot Army Has the Tactical Advantage** (Time)
- ▼ **Uneasy Working Relationship with Dr. Priddy** (Help)
- ▼ **Watched by Majestic 12** (Attention)
- ▼ **Dr. Dinosaur Has Taken an Interest** (Attention)
- ▼ **Fluctuating Energy Fields** (Bug)

THE GM'S RESERVE

The other payment for the invention is an increase in the GM's fate point reserve. Add fate points to the GM's reserve equal to invention's **quality**. This is equal to the number of the invention's stunt benefits *minus* the number of Bugs. These fate points come from the slush fund, not from the players. See *Aspects and Fate Points* (page 54) for more on the GM's reserve.

STEP FIVE: DETERMINE ITS FLAW

Nothing made by man or robot is *perfect* (but don't tell the robots that). Every invention will have some sort of drawback or problem associated with it. That's what your invention's **flaw aspect** represents.

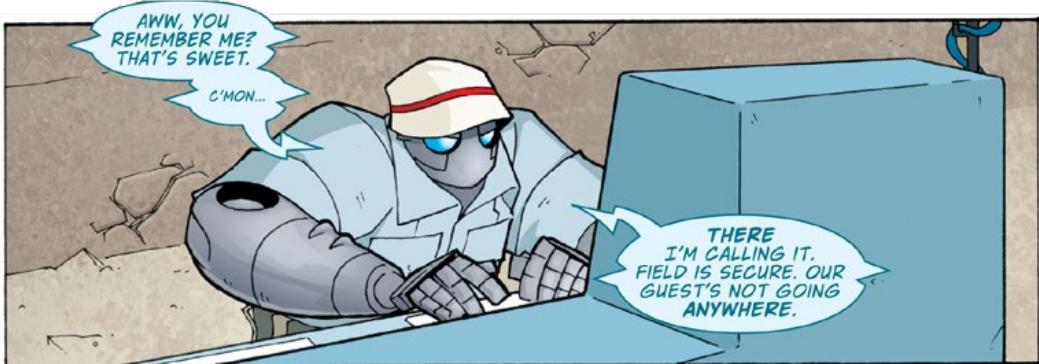
While the player determines the invention's function aspect, the flaw is up to the GM. The GM can either do this immediately, as soon as Step Four is complete, or pay a fate point from the reserve to the player to do it at a later point in the story.

Note that flaws aren't the same as Bugs as described in Step Four, above. Bugs are weird, unpredictable anomalies that plague the invention's function—more nuisances than anything else—whereas a good flaw is fundamental to the invention's construction or operation, or a necessary limitation of available technology. GMs, think of how you might compel the flaw aspect to put the players in an undesirable position or complicate that climactic scene when the invention takes center stage. Examples include:

- ▼ **Weighs a Ton**
- ▼ **Massive Power Requirements**
- ▼ **Distinctive Energy Signature**
- ▼ **Uses Broadband Radio Signals**
- ▼ **Strong Electromagnetic Field**



The hyperdimensional containment cage has three stunt benefits, so the difficulty to construct it is Fantastic (+6). My most relevant skill is probably Hyperdimensional Math —there's a lot of engineering and physics knowledge involved, but it's all moot without the math. I get a +5 on my roll. Then I'll spend a fate point to invoke One of the Foremost Engineers in the World to bring that up to a +7. Success!





CHAPTER NINE: RUNNING THE GAME

If you're the GM, then your job is a little different from everyone else's. This chapter is full of tools to make your life easier during play.

But what do you *do* as the GM? In brief, you **start and end scenes, play the world and the NPCs, judge the use of the rules**, and, of course, **give the PCs things to do**. You'll also be tasked with calling for dice rolls, setting difficulties, and spinning the players' failures and successes into satisfying storytelling. There are also solid guidelines here for dealing with aspects, including how to spot a reasonable invocation or a weaksauce compel.

The chapter continues with advice about creating and playing the opposition, from how to determine what kind of NPC a given NPC is (**nameless, supporting, or main**) to how to populate your scenario with a good mix of antagonists.



WHAT YOU DO

We already talked a little bit about the GM's job in *The Basics*, but let's take a more detailed look at your unique responsibilities.

START AND END SCENES

One of your primary responsibilities during the game is to decide definitively when a scene begins and ends. This might not seem like that big a deal, but it is, because it means that you're the person primarily responsible for the pacing of each session. If you start scenes too early, it takes a long time to get to the main action. If you don't end them soon enough, then they drag on and it takes you a long time to get anything significant done.

The players will sometimes help you with this, if they're keen on getting to the next bit of action, but sometimes they'll naturally be inclined to spend too much time bantering in character or focusing on minutiae. When that happens, it's your job to step in like a good editor and say, "I think we've pretty much milked this scene for all it's worth. What do we want to do next?"



There's more advice on starting and ending scenes in *Telling Stories the Atomic Robo Way* (page 183).

PLAY THE WORLD AND THE NPC'S

As the GM, it's your job to decide how literally everyone else and everything else in the world responds to what the PCs do, as well as what the PCs' environment is like. If a PC fails a roll, you're the one who gets to decide the consequences. When an NPC attempts to assassinate a PC's friend, you're the one who gets to decide how they go about it. When the PCs stroll up to a hot-dog vendor in Times Square, you get to decide what kind of day the vendor is having, what kind of personality he or she has, and so on. You determine the weather when the PCs pull up to that secret bunker.

The PCs' aspects also help you decide how to make the world respond to them. As stated in *Aspects and Fate Points* (page 42), the best aspects are double-edged. You have a lot of power to exploit that by using event-based compels (see page 49). That way, you kill two birds with one stone: you add detail and surprise to your game world while keeping the PCs at the center of the story you're telling.

DRAMA IS BETTER THAN REALISM

Don't get too bogged down trying to maintain absolute consistency in the world or adhere to a draconian sense of realism. The game operates by the rules of drama and fiction; use that to your advantage. There should be very few moments in the game where the PCs are free of conflicts or problems to deal with, even if it'd be more "realistic" for them to get a long breather.



When you're trying to decide what happens, and the answer that makes the most sense is also kind of boring, go with more exciting over more sensible! You can always find a way later on to justify something that doesn't make immediate sense.

LET THE PLAYERS HELP YOU

When it comes to making up new details about the world, the more collaborative you get with the players, the more emotional investment they'll have in the result, because they shared in its creation. Sure, we've given you a lot of information on Robo's world, but that's a starting point, not a straitjacket. The rest is up to you and your players.

If a character has an aspect that connects them to someone or something in

the world, make that player your resident "expert" on whatever the aspect refers to. So if someone has **Former DELPHI Double-Agent**, poll that player for information whenever DELPHI comes up in conversation. "You notice that this guy is obviously part of DELPHI's psi-corps. How do you know that? What gives him away?" Some players will defer back to you, and that's fine, but it's important that you keep making the offer so as to foster a collaborative atmosphere.

Also, one of the main uses of the create an advantage action (page 100) is precisely to give players a way to add details to the world through their characters. Capitalize on that when you draw a blank or simply want to delegate more control. One good way to do this during play is to answer the player's question with a question, if they ask for information.

This facet of your job also means that when you have NPCs in a scene, you speak for and make decisions for them like the players make for their PCs—you decide when they're taking an action that requires dice, and you follow the same rules the players do for determining how that turns out. Your NPCs are going to be a little different than the PCs, however, depending on how important they are to the story—see *Creating the Opposition* in this chapter, page 171.



JUDGE THE USE OF THE RULES

It's also your job to make most of the moment-to-moment decisions about what's legit and what's not regarding the rules. Most often, you're going to decide when something in the game deserves a roll, what type of action that is (overcome, attack, etc.) and how difficult that roll is. In conflicts, this can get a little more complicated, like determining just how far a zone border extends, or whether or not a player can justify making a particular maneuver.

You also judge the appropriateness of any invocations or compels that come up during play, as discussed in *Aspects and Fate Points*, and make sure that everyone at the table is clear on what's going on. With invocations, this is pretty easy—as long as the player can explain why the aspect is relevant, you're good to go. With compels, it can get a little more complicated, because you need to articulate precisely what complication the player is agreeing to.

You can find some more tips on judging the use of rules below, starting on page 152.



YOU'RE THE CHAIRMAN, NOT GOD

Approach your position as arbiter of the rules by thinking of yourself as “first among equals” in a committee, rather than as an absolute authority. If there’s a disagreement on the use of the rules, try encouraging a brief discussion and let everyone talk freely, rather than making a unilateral decision. A lot of times, you’ll find that the group is self-policing—if someone tries to throw out a compel that’s a real stretch, it’s just as likely that another player will bring it up before you do.

Your job is really to have the “last word” on any rules-related subject, rather than to dictate from your chair. Keep that in mind.

GIVE THEM THINGS TO DO

Finally, you’re responsible for making all of the stuff that the PCs encounter and react to in the game. That not only includes NPCs with skills and aspects, but it also includes the aspects on scenes, environments, and objects, as well as the dilemmas and challenges that make up an **issue** of *Atomic Robo*. You provide the prompts that give your group a reason to play this game to begin with—what problems they face, what issues they have to resolve, whom they’re opposing, and what they’ll have to go through in order to win the day.

This job gets a whole chapter all on its own. See *Telling Stories the Atomic Robo Way*, (page 179).



WHAT TO DO DURING PLAY

Let's take a detailed look at how to approach your various jobs during a session of play.

THE FIRST LAW OF GAMEMASTERING

Decide what you're trying to accomplish first, then consult the rules to help you do it.

This might seem like common sense, but the order is important. In other words, don't look at the rules as a hard limit on an action. Instead, use them as a variety of potential tools to model whatever you're trying to do. Your intent, whatever it is, always takes precedence over the mechanics.

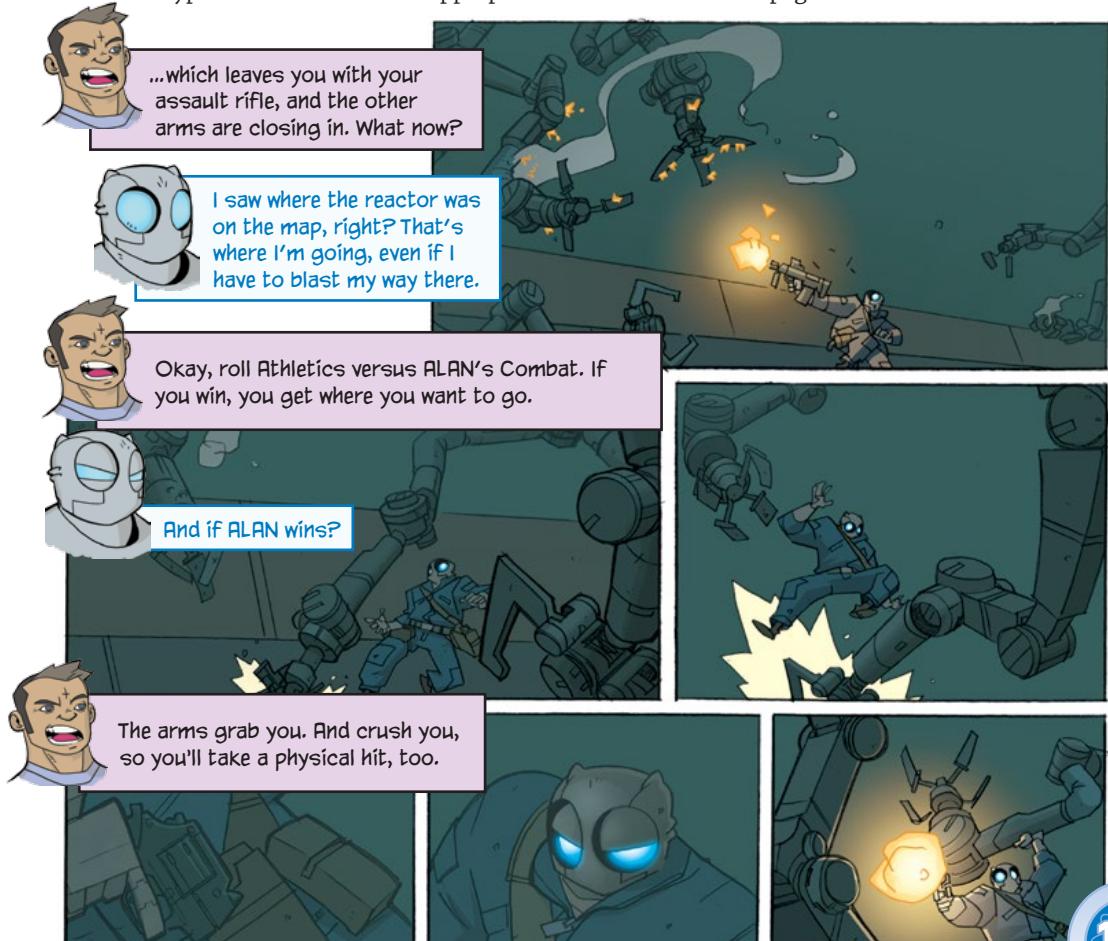
Most of the time, the very definition of an action makes this easy. Any time your intent is to harm someone, you know that's an attack. Any time you're trying to avoid harm, you know that's a defense.

But sometimes, you're going to get into situations where it's not immediately clear what type of action is the most appropriate.

As a GM, don't respond to these situations by forbidding the action. Instead, try to nail down a specific intent, in order to point more clearly to one (or more) of the basic game actions.

In this example, Koa decided to combine two actions—defend and attack—into one roll on behalf of ALAN, as well as the effects of an overcome and a defense on Robo's behalf. This is totally okay, because it fits their intent and it makes sense given the situation they described. He might have decided to do both rolls separately, and that would have been fine too—he just wanted to get it all into one roll.

If you're ever in doubt during play, come back to the First Law and remember that you have the flexibility to do the same kind of thing as you need to. Just make sure that when you do this, you and the players are on the same page.



THE SECOND LAW OF GAMEMASTERING

Never let the rules get in the way of what makes narrative sense.

If you or the players narrate something in the game and it makes sense to apply a certain rule outside of the normal circumstances where you would do so, go ahead and do it.

The most common example of this has to do with consequences (page 118). The rules say that by default, a consequence is something a player chooses to take after getting hit by an attack in a conflict.

But say you're in a scene where a player decides that, as part of trying to intimidate his way past someone, her PC is going to punch through a glass-top table with a bare fist.

Everyone likes the idea and thinks it's cool, so no one's interested in whether or not the PC actually pulls it off. However, everyone agrees that it also makes sense that the PC would injure his hand in the process (which is part of what makes it intimidating).

It's totally fine to assign a mild consequence of **Glass in My Hand** in that case, because it fits with the narration, even though there's no conflict and nothing technically attacked the PC.

As with the First Law, make sure everyone's on the same page before you do stuff like this.

WHEN TO ROLL DICE

Roll the dice when succeeding or failing at the action could each contribute something interesting to the game.

This is pretty easy to figure out in regards to success, most of the time—the PCs overcome a significant obstacle, win a conflict, or succeed at a goal, which creates fodder for the next thing. With failure, however, it's a little more difficult, because it's easy to look at failure in strictly negative terms—you fail, you lose, you don't get what you want. If there's nothing to build on after that failure, play can grind to a halt in a hurry.

The worst, *worst* thing you can do is have a failed roll that means *nothing happens*—no

new knowledge, no new course of action to take, and no change in the situation. That is totally boring, and it discourages players from investing in failure—something you absolutely want them to do, given how important compels and the concession mechanic are. Do not do this.

If you can't imagine an interesting outcome from both results, then don't call for that roll. If failure is the uninteresting option, just give the PCs what they want and call for a roll later, when you *can* think of an interesting failure. If success is the boring option, then see if you can turn your idea for failure into a compel instead, using that moment as an opportunity to funnel fate points to the players.

MAKING FAILURE AWESOME

If the PCs fail a roll in the game and you're not sure how to make that interesting, try one of the following ideas.

BLAME THE CIRCUMSTANCES

The PCs are extremely competent people. They aren't supposed to look like fools on a regular or even semi-regular basis. Sometimes, all it takes is the right description to make failure into something dynamic—instead of narrating that the PC just borked things up, blame the failure on something that the PC couldn't have prevented. There's a secondary mechanism on that lock that initially looked simple (Burglary), or the contact broke his promise to show up on time (Contacts), or the hard drive is just too damaged to salvage (Computer Science), or a sudden seismic shift throws off your run (Athletics).

That way, the PCs still look competent and awesome, even though they don't get what they want. More importantly, shifting the blame to the circumstances gives you an opportunity to suggest a new course of action, which allows the failure to create forward momentum in your story. The contact didn't make his appointment? Where is he? Who was following him to the rendezvous? The hard drive is toast? Maybe someone else can restore it. That way, you don't spend time dwelling on the failure and can move on to something new.

SUCCEED AT A COST

You can also offer to give the PCs what they want, but at a price—in this case, the failed roll means they weren't able to achieve their goals without consequence. See *Outcomes and Actions* (page 98) for more on success at a cost.

LET THE PLAYERS DO THE WORK

You can also kick the question back to the players, and let them decide what the context of their own failure is. This is a great move to foster a collaborative spirit, and some players will be surprisingly eager to hose their own characters in order to further the story, especially if it means they can keep control of their own portrayal.

It's also a great thing to do if you just plain can't think of anything. "Okay, you failed that Burglary roll by 2... so you're working the lock, and something goes wrong. What is it?" "You missed that Alertness roll. What don't you notice as

you're sneaking up to the cargo bay?" It's better if the question is specific, like those examples—just saying, "Okay, tell me how you fail!" can easily stall things by putting a player on the spot unnecessarily. You want to *let* the player do the work, not *make* them.

SETTING DIFFICULTIES

When you're setting difficulties for an action, keep in mind the difficulty "break points" mentioned in *Outcomes and Actions* on page 96—anything that's two or more steps above the PC's skill is probably going to cost them fate points, and anything that's two or more below the PC's skill will be a breeze.

Rather than "modeling the world" or going for "realism," try setting difficulties according to dramatic necessity—*things should generally be more challenging when the stakes are high and less challenging when they aren't*.



IMPORTANT: JUSTIFY YOUR CHOICES

Your only other constraint in setting difficulties goes back to the Second Law of Gamemastering above: you need to make sure that your choices make sense in the context of the narrative you're creating. While this doesn't mean you need to get crazy with trying to model the world too much and thus box yourself into a useless set of constraints ("Security subroutines in this lab's computers are generally of Good quality, because it's secretly conducting research for a DELPHI cell."), don't look at this purely as a numbers game either. If the *only* reason for setting a difficulty at Superb (+5) is because it's two higher than the PC's skill level and you want to bleed his fate points off, you strain credibility.

In that sense, you can look at setting difficulties as being a lot like invoking aspects—there needs to be at least some good reason why you can back your choice up in the story. It's totally okay if that justification is something you're about to make up, rather than

something you know beforehand. Scene aspects are a great tool for this—if the players already know that the cave they're in is *Pitch Black* and *Cramped as Hell*, it's easy to justify why it's so hard to stay quiet as they Stealth through the tunnels.

Either way, don't skip the justification part. Either let the players know what it is immediately when you tell them the difficulty, or shrug mysteriously and then let them find out soon thereafter (as in, the time it takes to think it up).

You might also try using "out of place" difficulties to indicate the presence of unanswered questions during the game—for some odd reason, the lab you're trying to break into has an Epic (+7) lock on the door. What could be so important in there that you don't know about?

Or maybe you're negotiating for a government contract, and the difficulty for the Rapport roll is only Fair (+2)—what's the deal? Is it rigged? Who pulled the strings on that? Or do they have some ulterior motive for giving Tesladyne the contract?

(Functionally, this is the same as setting a consistent difficulty and assessing a circumstantial penalty to the roll to reflect rushing the task or some other unfavorable condition. But psychologically, the difference between a high difficulty and a lower difficulty *with a penalty* is vast and shouldn't be underestimated. A player facing a higher difficulty will often feel like they're being properly challenged, while that same player facing a large penalty, likely chosen at the GM's discretion, will often feel discouraged by it.)

Setting a difficulty low is mainly about showcasing a PC's awesomeness, letting them shine in a particular moment and reminding us why this character is in the spotlight. You can also set lower difficulties during periods when you know the PCs are low on fate points, giving them the chance to take compels in order to get more. You should also set lower difficulties on anything that's in the way of the PC's getting to the main action of a scene—you don't want them to get stalled at the castle's drawbridge if the point of the scene is confronting Otto Skorzeny inside! (See *Telling Stories the Atomic Robo Way* on page 180 for more about establishing the point of a scene.)

Finally, some actions should take lower difficulties by default, especially if no one's contesting or resisting them. Unopposed efforts to create advantages in a conflict should never be harder than Average (+1) or Fair (+2), and neither should attempts to put an aspect on an object or location. Remember that opposition doesn't have to always take the form of an NPC getting in the way—if the criminally insane mastermind has hidden the evidence in his office from prying eyes, you might consider that a form of opposition, even though the mastermind might not be physically present.

If the PCs are overflowing in fate points, or it's a crucial moment in the story when someone's life is on the line, or the fate of many is at stake, or they're finally going against foes that they've been building up to for a scenario or two, feel free to raise difficulties across the board. You should also raise difficulties to indicate when a particular opponent is extremely prepared for the PCs, or to reflect situations that

aren't ideal—if the PCs are not prepared, or don't have the right tools for the job, or are in a time crunch, etc.

Setting the difficulty right at the PC's skill level is, as you might imagine, sort of a middle ground between these two extremes. Do this when you want some tension without turning things up to 11, or it's a situation where the odds are slightly in the PC's favor but you want a tangible element of risk.

DEALING WITH EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS

Sometimes, a PC is going to roll far in excess of the difficulty, getting a lot of shifts on the roll. Some of the basic actions already have a built-in effect for rolling really well, like hitting harder on a good attack roll or succeeding with style on a defense.

For others, it's not so clear. What's happens when you get a lot of shifts on a Notice roll or a Robotics roll? You want to make sure those results have some kind of meaning and reflect how competent the PC's are.

Here are a few choice options.

▼ **GO GONZO WITH THE NARRATION:** It might seem superfluous, but it's important to celebrate a great roll with a suitable narration of over the top success. This is a great time to take the suggestions above for *Making Failure Awesome*: and applying them here. Let the success affect something else, in addition to what the PC was going for, and bring the player into the process of selling it by prompting them to make up cool details. “Three extra shifts on that Burglary roll—tell me, is anyone ever going to be able to lock these doors again?” “So you got five shifts on that Contacts roll—tell me, where *does* Dr. Fink usually go when he's running out on his wife, and what do you say when you find him there?”

▼ **ADD AN ASPECT:** You can express additional effects of a good roll by placing an aspect on the PC or on the scene, essentially letting them create an advantage for free. “So your Rapport roll to bribe

the guard succeeded with four shifts. She'll let you through the gate all right, and she'll also act as **Available Backup** if you should need some help later."

▼ **REDUCING TIME:** If it's important to get something done fast, then you can use extra shifts to decrease the time that it takes to do an action. See *Dealing with Time*, below, for more information.

DEALING WITH TIME

Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game: recognizes two kinds of time: **game time** and **story time**.

GAME TIME

Game time organizes play in terms of the real players sitting at the table. Each unit of game time corresponds to a certain amount of real time. They are:

▼ **EXCHANGE:** The amount of time it takes all participants in a conflict to take a turn, which includes doing an action and responding to any action taken against them. This usually doesn't take longer than a few minutes.

▼ **SCENE:** The amount of time it takes to resolve a conflict, deal with a single prominent situation, or accomplish a goal. Scenes vary in length, from a minute or two if it's just a quick description and some dialogue, to a half hour or more in the case of a major setpiece battle against a main NPC (see page 180).

▼ **ISSUE:** The sum total of all the scenes you run through in a single sitting (usually), also called a session. A session ends when you and your friends pack it up for the night and go home. For most people, a session is about 2 to 4 hours, but there is no theoretical limit—if you have few obligations, then you're only really limited by the need for food and sleep. A minor milestone (page 225) usually occurs after a session.

▼ **VOLUME:** About five issues. Most of the time, the issues that make up a volume will definitively resolve some kind of problem or dilemma presented by the GM, or wrap up a storyline (see *Scenes*,

Issues, and Volumes for more on volumes). A significant or major milestone (page 226 and page 227) usually occurs at the end of a scenario, depending on what the GM feels is more appropriate. You can look at this like complete volume of *Atomic Robo*: (thus the name)—the number of issues it takes to tell one long story, like *Atomic Robo and the Dogs of War* or *Atomic Robo and the Savage Sword of Doctor Dinosaur*.

▼ **CAMPAIN:** The sum of all the time you've sat at a table playing this particular game of *Atomic Robo*:—every issue, every volume, every everything. Technically, there's no upper limit to how long a campaign can be. Some groups go for years; others get to the end of a volume and then stop. We presume that a typical group will go for a several volumes before having a grand finale and moving on to another game (might we recommend another Fate Core game?).

STORY TIME

Story time is time as the *characters* perceive it, from the perspective of being "in the story"—the amount of time it takes for them to accomplish any of the stuff you and the players say that they do during play. Most of the time, you'll do this as an afterthought, mentioning it in passing ("Okay, so it takes you an hour to get to the airport by cab") or mentioning it as part of a skill roll ("Cool, so after 20 minutes of sweeping the room, you find the following...").

Under most circumstances, story time has no actual relation to real time. For example, a combat exchange might take a few minutes to play out in real time, but it only covers what happens in the first few seconds of a conflict. Likewise, you can cover long swaths of time simply by saying that it happens ("Sparrow takes two weeks to get back to you—are you doing anything while you wait, or can we just skip to the meeting?"). When used this way, it's really just a convenience, a narrative device in order to add verisimilitude and some consistency to your story.

Sometimes, though, you can use story time in creative ways to create tension and surprise during the game. Here's how.

DEADLINE PRESSURE

Nothing creates tension like a good deadline. The heroes only have a certain number of minutes to disable the death trap, or a certain amount of time to get across the city before something blows up, or a certain amount of time to deliver the ransom before loved ones get aed by the bad guys, and so on.

Some of the game's default actions are made to take advantage of deadline pressure, such as challenges (page 106) or contests (page 110)—they each limit the number of rolls that a player can make before something happens, for better or for worse.

You don't have to limit yourself to using just those two, though. If you set a hard deadline for something bad in one of your scenarios, you can start keeping track of the amount of time everything takes, and use it as a way to keep the pressure on. ("Oh, so you want to browse the university's complete historical archives? Well, you have three days until the attack—I can give you a Will roll, but just the attempt is probably

going to eat up one of those days.") Remember, nearly everything takes time. Even a basic attempt to create an advantage using Empathy requires you to sit with the target for a little while, and if every action the PCs are taking is chipping away at a clock, it may be time they don't have.

Of course, it'd be no fun if there was nothing they could do to improve a deadline situation, just as it'd be no fun if the crawl toward the deadline was predictable.

USING STORY TIME IN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Therefore, when you're using story time to create deadline pressure, feel free to incorporate unpredictable jumps in time when the PCs do really well or really badly on a roll.

Taking extra time is a great way to make failure awesome as per the guidelines above, especially using the "Success at a Cost" option—give the players exactly what they want, but at the cost of taking more time than they were trying to spend, thus risking that their efforts will come too late. Or it could be the thing that pushes a deadline over the edge—maybe things



HOW MUCH TIME IS A SHIFT WORTH?

Just like with any other roll, the

number of shifts you get (or the amount you fail by) should serve as a barometer for just how severe the time jump is. So, how do you decide just how much to award or penalize?

It really depends on how much time you decide the initial action is going to take. We usually express time in two parts: a specific or abstract measure of quantity, then a unit of time, such as "a few days," "twenty seconds," "three weeks," and so on.

We recommend you measure in the abstract and express all the game actions as *half, one, a few, or several* of a given unit of time. So if you imagine something taking six hours, think of it as "several hours." If you imagine something taking twenty minutes, you can either call that "several minutes" or round up to "half an hour", whichever feels closest.

This gives you a starting point for moving up and down. Each shift is worth one jump from wherever your starting point is. So if your starting point is "several hours," and it benefits the PCs to speed things up, then it works like this: one shift jumps the time down to "a few hours," two shifts down to "one hour," and three shifts down to "a half hour."

Going past either end of the spectrum moves you down to several increments of the next unit of time or up to half the next unit of time, depending on which direction you're going. So four shifts on the aforementioned roll might jump you from "several hours" to "several minutes." Failing by one, conversely, might jump you from "several hours" to "half a day."

This allows you to quickly deal with time jumps no matter your starting point, whether the actions you have in mind are going to take moments or generations.

aren't completely hopeless, but now there are extra problems to deal with.

Likewise, reward extreme success by reducing the amount of time it takes to do something while the PCs are under deadline. That historical research (Will) that was going to take a day gets wrapped up in a few hours. While looking for a good supplier (Contacts) to outfit your field lab, you manage to find another one who can fulfill your order that same day rather than in a week.

If time is a factor, you should also be able to use invocations and compels to manipulate time, to make things easier or more complicated respectively. ("Hey, I'm a **Garage Bunny**, so fixing this car shouldn't take me that long, right?" "Oh, you know what? Your sheet says **I Can't Get Enough of the Fun and Games**... doesn't it make sense that if you're looking for a guy in a casino, it'd be easy to get caught up in distractions? All those machines and stuff....")

STORY TIME AND THE SCOPE OF AN ACTION

It's easy to think of most actions that a PC takes being limited to anything that the character can directly affect, and working on a "person-to-person" scope. And most of the time, that's going to be precisely the case—after all, *Atomic Robo* is primarily a game about individual Action Scientists shining in the face of dramatic adversity.

However, consider for a moment what a PC might do with *all the time in the world*

to accomplish a particular action. Imagine a month-long Rapport roll for a negotiation, where the PC gets to talk with every scientist in detail, rather than just focusing on a single meeting. Imagine going under deep cover with a weeks-long Deceit roll to infiltrate Majestic 12.

By allowing each roll to represent a long period of time, you can "zoom out" to handle events that reach far beyond the individual player making the roll to have a meaningful effect on the setting. That month-long Rapport roll might result in a new international organization dedicated to the advancement of scientific research. That Deceive roll might be the start of exposing Majestic 12 to the public.

This is a great way to make long breaks in story time more interactive, rather than bogging the game down with long narration or trying to retroactively come up with what happened during that time. If the PCs have long-term goals they want to accomplish, see if you can find a way to turn that into a contest, challenge, or conflict that covers the whole break, or just have them make a single skill roll to see if something unexpected happens. If they happen to fail the roll, whatever you invent as a consequence will make good material for the game going forward.

Remember that if you do this with a conflict or a contest, that you scale each exchange appropriately—if a conflict



is taking place over the course of a year, then each exchange might be a month or two, and everyone should describe their actions and the results of their actions in that context.

ZOOM IN, ZOOM OUT

There's no rule that says you're required to keep your rolls consistent in terms of story time. One cool trick is using the result of one roll to segue into another roll that takes place over a much smaller period in time, or vice versa. This is a great way to open a new scene, contest, or conflict, or just introduce a change of pace.





From where you are, you can see them dragging Robo away.



Whatever they want with him can't be good. I'll follow them. Sneaky-like.



How do you want to go about that?

I'll avoid the shore—

And up that tower.

—and climb up that cliff.

Aye, up the tower.

more athletic than stealth? It'll take a couple hours. let's cover all of the approach with one Athletics roll. It's not easy—beat a +6.

How's a +7?

Good enough! Let's cut to the chase. You get up there and kill your way through some surprised guards, only to find this.

Right! I shoot them with my Sten!

Sounds good! Roll Combat.

AUCH,
YE JOBBIE
RUMMELL!



JUDGING THE USE OF SKILLS AND STUNTS

By now, you pretty much have all the advice you need to deal with skill and stunt use—the individual descriptions in *Modes, Skills, and Stunts* (page 61), the action descriptions and examples in *Outcomes and Actions* (page 58), and the advice immediately above about setting difficulties and how to handle success and failure.

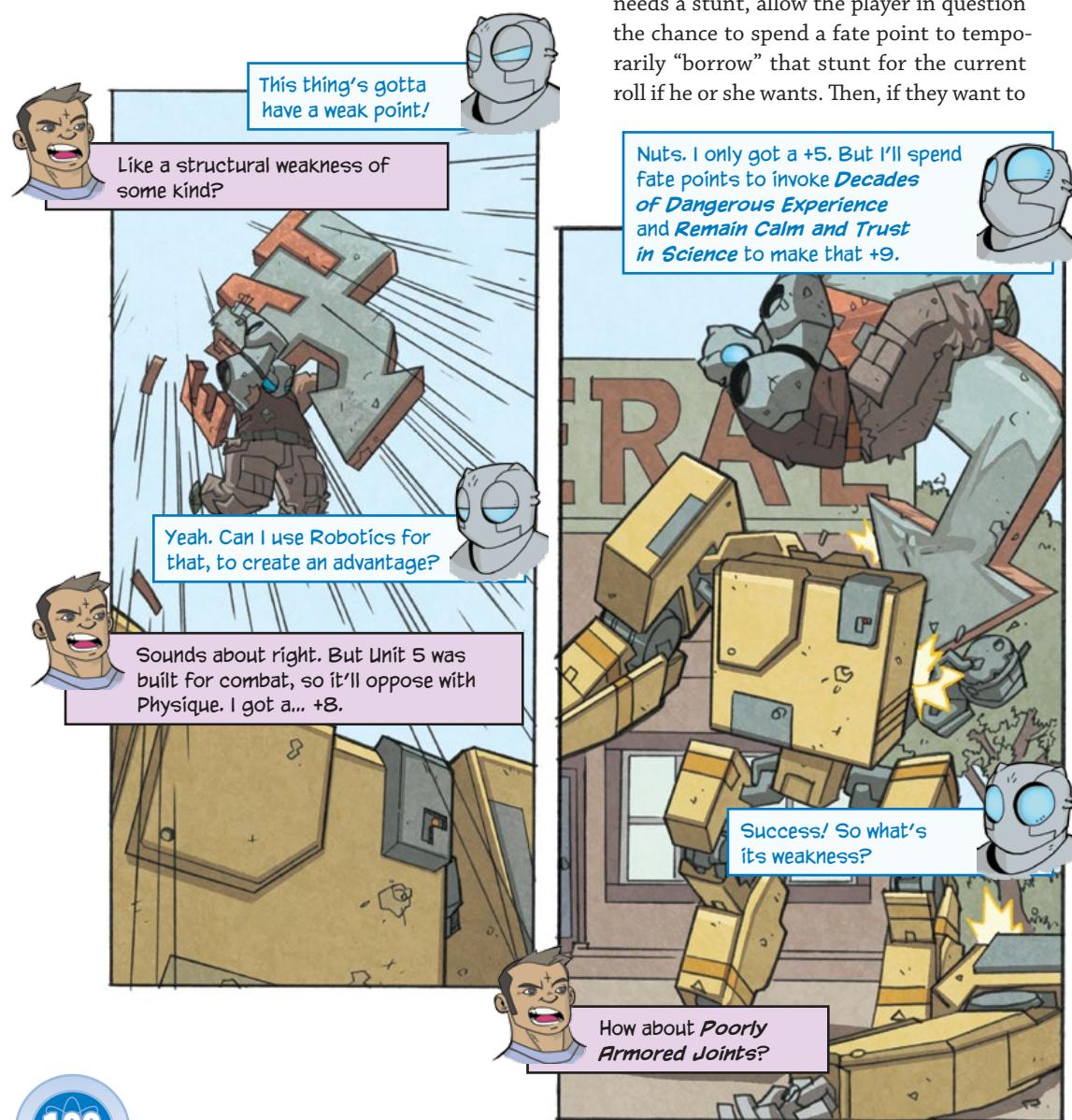
The only other major problem you'll have to worry about is when you run into an "edge case" with a skill—a player wants to use it for an action that seems like a bit of a stretch, or a situation comes up in

your game where it makes sense to use a skill for something that's not normally a part of its description.

When you run into this, talk it over with the group and see what everyone thinks. It's going to end up one of three ways:

- ▼ It's too much of a stretch.
- ▼ It's not a stretch, and anyone can use the skill that way from now on under the same conditions.
- ▼ It wouldn't be a stretch if the character had a stunt that allowed it.

If you decide that a certain use of a skill needs a stunt, allow the player in question the chance to spend a fate point to temporarily "borrow" that stunt for the current roll if he or she wants. Then, if they want to



keep the bonus, they can write it in a blank stunt slot, or, if they don't have one available, wait for a major milestone to swap out an existing stunt for the new one.

ASPECTS AND DETAILS: DISCOVERY VS. CREATION

From the player's point of view, there's almost no way to know what you've made up beforehand and what you're inventing in the moment, especially if you're the kind of GM who doesn't display or consult any notes at the table. So when a player tries to discover something you haven't made up yet, you can treat it as if they were making up a new aspect or story detail. If they succeed, they find what they're looking for. If they fail, you can use what they were looking for as inspiration to help you come up with the real information.

If you're really comfortable with improvising, this means that you can come to the table with very little prepared beforehand, and let the players' reactions and questions build everything for you. You may need to ask some prompting questions first, to narrow down the scope of what information the player's looking for, but after that, the sky's the limit.

SKILLS AND SPECIFIC MEASUREMENTS

Looking over the skill descriptions (page 61), you might notice that there are a few places where we abstract something that in real life depends on precise measurement. Physique and Athletics are strong examples—many people who are into strength training have some idea of how much weight they can dead lift, just as a sprinter knows how fast she can run a given distance to within a few seconds.

So how much can a character with Great (+4) Physique bench press? How fast can a character with Fair (+2) Athletics run the length of a football field?

The truth is, we have no idea, and we're reluctant to pursue a specific answer.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but when you create minutiae like that, it detracts from the verisimilitude of the game in play. As soon as you establish a detail like, "Great Physique can dead lift a car for five seconds," then you're cutting out a lot of the variability that real life allows. Adrenaline and other factors allow people to reach beyond their normal physical limits or fall short of them—you can't factor every one of those things in without having it take up a large amount of focus at the table. It becomes a thing for people to discuss and even argue about, rather than participating in the scene.

It's also boring. If you decide that Fair (+2) Athletics can jump 10 feet, then you've removed a great deal of potential for tension and drama. Suddenly, every time you have a jumping-based problem, it's going to hinge on the question of whether or not it's 10 feet across, rather than whatever the point of the scene is. It also turns everything into a simple pass/fail situation, which means you don't really have a good reason to roll the skill at all. And again, this is not realistic—when people jump, the distance they can cover is highly dependent on external factors too numerous to mention.

Remember, a skill roll is a *narrative tool*, meant to answer the following question: "Can I solve X problem using Y means, right now?" When you get an unexpected result, use your sense of realism and drama to explain and justify it, using our guidelines above. "Oh, you failed that Engineering roll to reassemble the device? That's weird—you felt certain you had everything you needed to do it, but you seem to be missing a key component. Hey, was that window up there always open like that, or has someone been in here?"

DEALING WITH CONFLICTS AND OTHER WEIRD STUFF

The most complicated situations you're going to encounter as a GM will be conflicts, hands down. Conflicts use the most rules in the game and pack them into a small amount of time compared to everything else in the system. They require you to keep track of a lot of things at once—everyone's relative position, who's acting against whom, how much stress and what consequences your NPCs have taken, and so on.

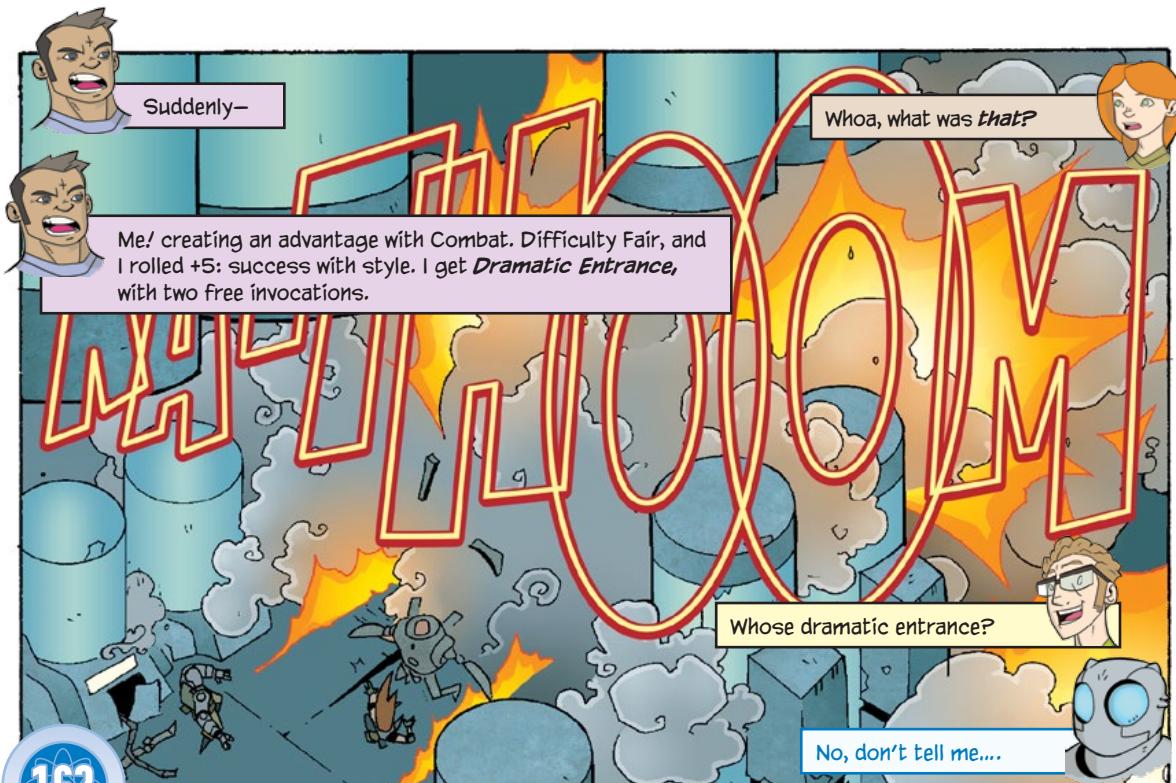
They're also where your movie-watching, comic-book-reading brain will come to the forefront, especially if your game features a lot of high-octane physical conflict. Action sequences you see in media don't always conform to a structured order of turns, so it can be hard to see how they correspond when you're trying to visualize what happens. Sometimes, people will also want to do crazy actions that you hadn't thought of when you were conceiving the conflict, leaving you at a loss for how to handle it.

Here are some tools to help you handle things with grace and speed.

AFFECTING MULTIPLE TARGETS

Invariably, at some point, someone's going to try to affect multiple people at once in a conflict. Explosions are a time-honored Tesladyne tradition, but are by no means the only example. Consider tear gas or some kind of high-tech stunner. You can extend this to mental conflict also. For example, you might use *Provoke* to establish dominance in a room with your presence, or to make an inspirational speech that affects everyone listening.

The easiest way to do this is to do create an advantage in the scene, rather than on a specific target. A **Gas-Filled Room** has the potential to affect everyone in it, and it's not too much of a stretch to suggest that the **Inspirational Mood** in a room could be contagious. In this context, the aspect presents an excuse to call for a skill roll (using the *overcome* action) from anyone in the scene who attempts to get past it. Generally speaking, it won't cause *damage*, but it will make things more difficult for those affected.





In the example above, Helsingard didn't care about that explosion affecting his Autosoldats, too—he's too megalomaniacal to have too much concern for his underlings. But let's say he did, and only wanted that explosion to affect the PCs. First, as the player controlling him, I'd have to justify *why* the explosion was so selective, or use a hail of machine-gun fire instead. Then, I'd take my Combat total of +5 and divide it between the targets in the zone, which in this case would be Robo, Ada, and Bernard. Say +2 to Robo, +2 to Ada, and +1 to Bernard (although Bernard, who probably has a *Grabbed* from the Autсолдат that's grabbing him, would be able to invoke that aspect to defend!). That's not much of an attack, so odds are good I'd spend fate points to invoke a few aspects, like *Built For Conquest*, *My Machinations Continue Unabated*, and/or *You Will Be Remembered Only for Your Defeat* to make it more of a threat.

Things get more complicated when you want to filter specific targets, rather than just affect a whole zone or scene. When that happens, divide your resulting total up against every target, who all get to defend as per normal. Anyone who fails to defend either takes a hit or gains an aspect,



COMPELS AND MULTIPLE TARGETS

Players who want to compel their way out of a conflict don't get a free lunch on affecting multiple targets, whether or not it's one aspect or several that justify the compel. One fate point compels one individual, period.

depending on what you were trying to do. (Note: If you create an advantage to put an aspect on multiple targets, you *do* get a free invocation for each one.)

Attacking a whole zone or everyone in a scene is something you're going to have to judge by circumstance, like any other stretch of a skill use (see page 160). Depending on the circumstances, this might be a totally normal thing to do (for example, grenades and explosives), it might be impossible, or it might require a stunt. As long as you can justify it, you don't need to apply any special rules—you roll for the attack, and everyone in the zone defends as normal. Depending on the circumstances, you may even have to defend against your own roll, if you're in the same zone as the attack!



Cripes, *more* of them?
Do I have some grenades or something?



Maybe. If you invoke *Special Agent Robo* to add that story detail, then definitely.



Grenades will be your narrative excuse to make one attack roll and apply it against every robot in the zone.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Not every participant in a conflict is another PC or NPC. Plenty of things without self-awareness can potentially threaten PCs or keep them from their goals, whether it's a natural disaster, a cunning mechanical trap, or high-tech automated security.

So, what do you do when the PCs go up against something that isn't a character?

Simple: treat it as a character. Give it a weird mode, aspects, a stress track—whatever makes sense.

- ▼ Is the hazard something that can harm a PC? Its mode has a skill with the attack action.
- ▼ Is it more of a distraction or harassment than a direct threat? Its mode has a skill with the create advantage action.
- ▼ Does it have sensors it can use to discover a PC's aspects? Its mode has a skill for that.



This Helsingard bunker's enormous, with lots of defenses and automated systems. I'm going to treat the whole thing as a character.



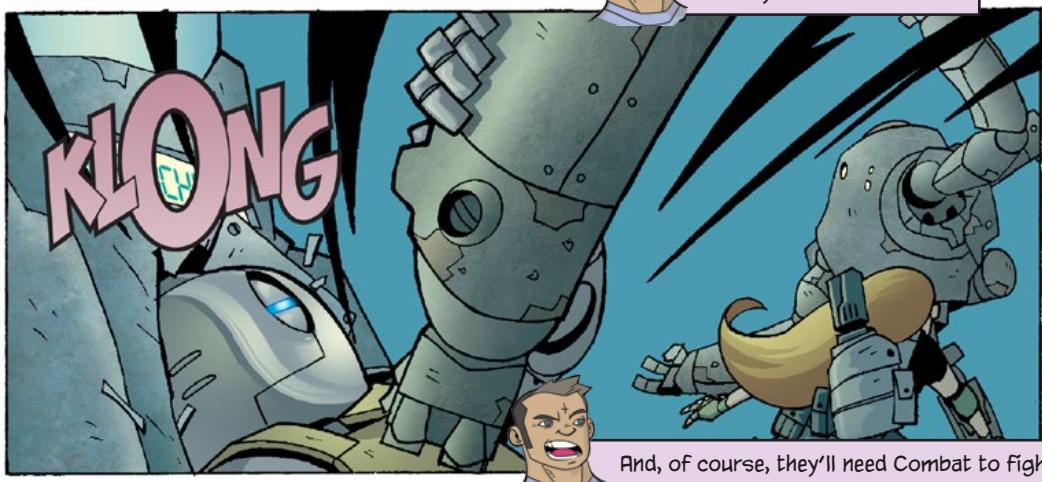
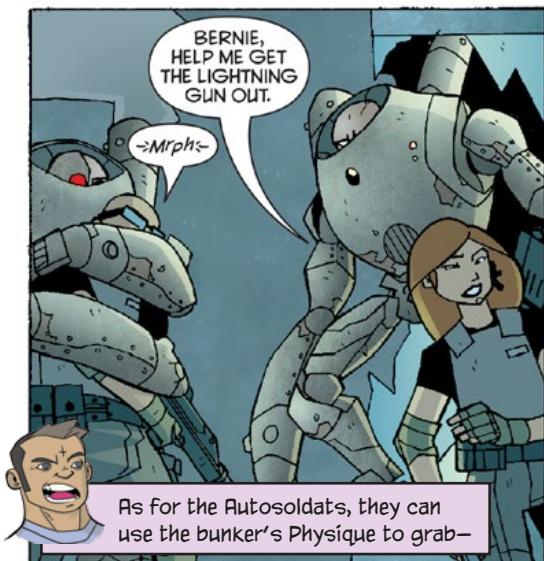
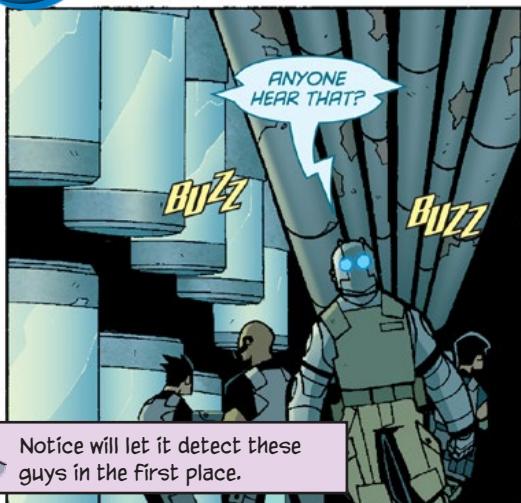
The bunker has one mode, Bunker. I'll give it Physique, so these steel doors can bar the exit.

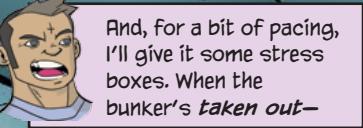


And in return, let the PCs use their skills against the threat just like they would an opponent. An automated security system might be vulnerable to “attacks” from a PC’s Burglary skill, or they might escape a trap by winning an Athletics contest. If it makes sense for the hazard in question to take a good deal of effort to surpass, give it a stress track and let it take a mild consequence or two. In other words, cleave to whatever makes narrative sense—if a fire is too big for a PC to put out, the scene should focus on avoidance or escape, and work like a challenge or contest (page 106).

THE THIRD LAW OF GAMEMASTERING:

You can treat everything like a character.

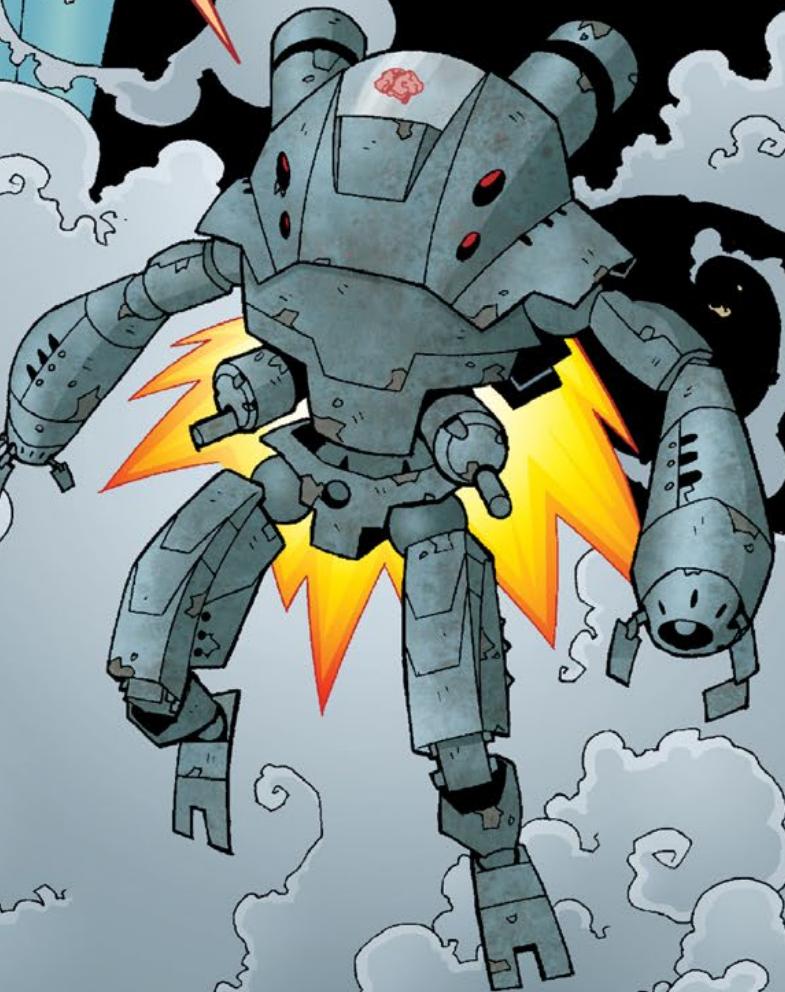




And, for a bit of pacing,
I'll give it some stress
boxes. When the
bunker's taken out—



At last, the
DEATH OF
ATOMIC ROBO!



—Helsingard shows up.



I want the bunker to be a challenge, so I'll rate its Bunker mode at Good (+3). Of its skills—Athletics, Combat, Notice, and Physique—Physique seems like it's the most important, because it's shared by two features of the bunker. Plus, when I get a chance to slam those steel doors shut, I want the players to regard escape as more or less impossible, so I'll improve that from trained to specialized. I also want the Autosoldats to be a credible threat, so I'll bump Combat up from trained to focused.

In the end, the Bunker mode looks like this:

Good (+3) Bunker

Superb (+5) Physique

Great (+4) Combat

Good (+3) Athletics, Notice

Physique? Compared to me? That bunker is looking awful blocky...



I'll call its stress track Minions. The minion-Autosoldats in question are really just a narrative device to let me describe how the bunker acts against the PCs, and not actually separate NPCs. I won't record damage for them or keep track of their exact numbers or give them a gang-up bonus or anything, because that stuff doesn't matter. Instead, when the PCs deal damage to those minion-Autosoldats, I'll check a Minions stress box and provide a vivid description of another one or two getting blown away, as usual. When the stress track's overwhelmed, the minion-Autosoldats are taken out, and then out comes Helsingard and his "personal retinue," who I'll treat as regular nameless NPCs.

Because Minions stress is a specialized way to think about physical harm, I'll make it analogous to the physical stress track. Seems reasonable that it should benefit from bonus stress boxes the same way a physical stress track would, so I'll give it four boxes.

I want the Autosoldats to be extra-good at capturing intruders, which sounds like creating an advantage. So let's give the bunker a stunt to that end, and another to make its minion-Autosoldats enough of a concrete problem that the PCs will have to care.

Seize Them!: When invoking an aspect to create an obstacle, get a +2 bonus to the difficulty of that obstacle.

Mindless Servants: Use Physique to defend against physical attacks.

Then a few aspects, some of which can serve as scene aspects:

- **Autosoldat Rush**
- **Bizarre Machinery**
- **Weak Floors**



DEALING WITH ASPECTS

As with skills and stunts, the entire *Aspects and Fate Points* chapter is designed to help you judge the use of aspects in the game. As the GM, you have a very important job in managing the flow of fate points to and from the players, giving them opportunities to spend freely in order to succeed and look awesome, and bringing in potential complications to help keep them stocked up on points.

INVOCATIONS

Because of that, don't apply extremely exacting standards when the PC wants to invoke an aspect—you want them to spend in order to keep the flow going, and if you're too stringent on your requirements, it's going to discourage them from that free spending.

On the other hand, feel free to ask for more clarification if you don't get what a player is implying, in terms of how the aspect relates to what's happening in play. Sometimes, what seems obvious to one person isn't to another, and you shouldn't let the desire to toss fate points around get in the way of just overlooking the narration. If a player is having a hard time justifying the invocation, ask them to elaborate on their action more or unpack their thoughts.

You might also have the problem of players who get lost in the open-ended nature of aspects—they don't invoke because they aren't sure if it's too much of a stretch to apply an aspect in a certain way. The more work you do beforehand making sure that everyone's clear on what an aspect means, the less you'll run into this. To get the player talking about invoking aspects, always ask them whether or not they're satisfied with a skill roll result ("So, that's a +4. You want to leave it at that? Or do you want to be even more awesome?"). Make it clear that invoking an aspect is almost always an option on any roll, in order to try and get them talking about the possibilities. Eventually, once you get a consistent dialogue going, things should smooth out.

COMPELS

During the game, look for opportunities to compel the PCs' aspects at the following times:

- ▼ Whenever simply succeeding at a skill roll would be bland
- ▼ Whenever any player has one or no fate points
- ▼ Whenever someone trying to do something immediately makes you think of some aspect-related way it could go wrong

Remember that there are essentially two types of compels in the game: decision-based, where something complicated occurs as a result of something a character does, and event-based, where something complicated occurs simply as a result of the character being in the wrong situation at the wrong time. (See page 48 for examples of each type.)

Of the two, you're going to get the most mileage out of event-based compels—it's already your job to decide how the world responds to the PCs, so you have a lot of leeway to bring unfortunate coincidence into their lives. Most of the time, players are just going to accept you doing this without any problems or minimal negotiation.

Decision-based compels are a little trickier. Try to refrain from suggesting decisions to the players, and focus on responding to their decisions with potential complications. It's important that the players retain their sense of autonomy over what their PCs say and do, so you don't want to dictate that to them. If the players are roleplaying their characters according to their aspects, it shouldn't be hard to connect the complications you propose to one of them.

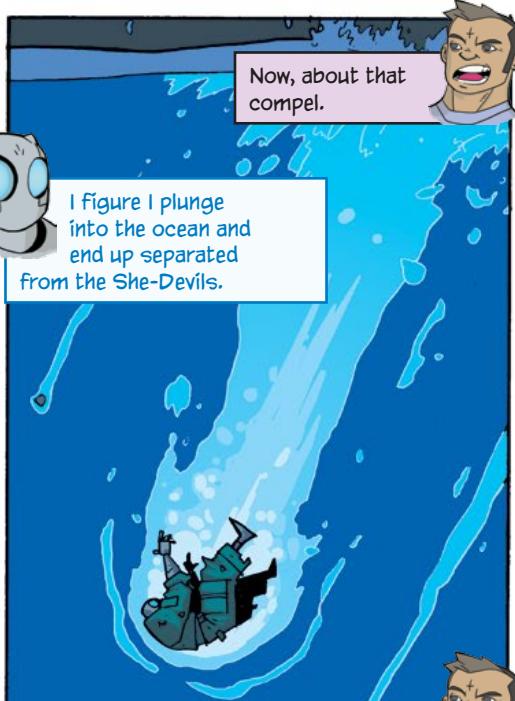
During play, you'll also need to make clear when a particular compel is "set," meaning that there's no backing out without paying a fate point. When players propose their own compels, this won't come up—they're fishing for the point to begin with. When you propose them, you need to give the players room to negotiate with you over what the complication is, before you make a final decision. Be transparent about when the negotiation phase has ended.



I'm going to compel my *Fighting the Good Fight* to do something heroic that may or may not also be stupid.

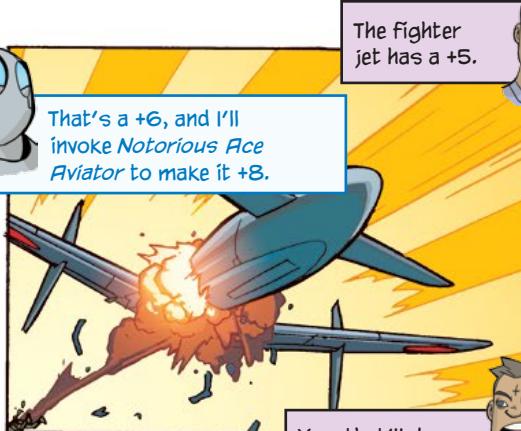


It's definitely at least one of those. Give me a Combat roll.



I figure I plunge into the ocean and end up separated from the She-Devils.

Now, about that compel.



The fighter jet has a +5.

That's a +6, and I'll invoke *Notorious Ace Aviator* to make it +8.

Yep, that'll do.



—and since you can't drown, it doesn't especially put you in any new danger.



That's not much of a compel, though. Seems like it makes things worse for the She-Devils, not you—

Thank you.

I see your point. Have a better idea?

I think I do, yeah.

WEAK COMPELS

In order for the compel mechanic to be effective, you have to take care that you're proposing complications of sufficient dramatic weight. Stay away from superficial consequences that don't really affect the character except to provide color for the scene. If you can't think of an immediate, tangible way that the complication changes what's going on in the game, you probably need to turn up the heat. If someone doesn't go "oh crap" or give a similar visceral reaction, you probably need to turn up the heat. It's not good enough for someone to be angry at the PC—they get angry *and they're willing to do something about it in front of everyone*. It's not good enough for a Department of Defense official to cancel off their contract—he cancels it *and tells the rest of the DoD to blacklist them*.

Also, keep in mind that some players may tend to offer weak compels when they're fishing for fate points, because they don't really want to hose their character that badly. When this happens, you can do two things. One is to push for something harder if their initial proposal doesn't actually make the situation that much more dramatic. Work with them to come up with a more troublesome version of the thing they originally suggested. The other option is to just go with it—but let them know that even though things might not seem so bad *now*, somewhere down the line it definitely will be. Maybe not this scene, maybe not next scene, but soon.

You can think of it like this: When you pay them that fate point, the thing you're

buying is a license to inject drama into their lives.

ENCOURAGING THE PLAYERS TO COMPEL

With five aspects per PC, it's prohibitively difficult for you to take the sole responsibility for compels at the table, because that's a lot of stuff to remember and keep track of. This is especially true when players are making their characters via the E-Z No-Math method. Instead, you need the players to be invested in looking for moments to compel their own characters.

Open-ended prompting can go a long way to create this habit in your players. If you see an opportunity for a potential compel, instead of proposing it directly, ask a leading question instead. "So, you're at a state function and you **Ain't Got No Use for Fancy Talk**. Tell me, do you think this is going to go smoothly for your character?" Let the player do the work of coming up with the complication and then pass the fate point along.

Also remind the players that they can compel your NPCs, if they happen to know at least one of an NPC's aspects. Do the same open-ended prompting when you're about to have an NPC make a decision, and ask the players to fill in the blanks. "So, you know that your buddy Corporal Pyres there is **Woefully Over-confident**... you think he's going to get out of this fight unscathed? How might that go wrong? You willing to pay a fate point to say it doesn't?"

Your main goal should be to enlist the players as partners in bringing the drama, rather than being the sole provider.



CREATING THE OPPOSITION

One of your most important jobs as a GM is creating and playing the NPCs who will oppose the PCs and try to keep them from their goals during your scenarios. The real story comes from what the PCs do when worthy adversaries stand between them and their objectives—how far they’re willing to go, what price they’re willing to pay, and how they change as a result of the experience.

As a GM, you want to shoot for a balancing act with the opposing NPCs: you want the players to experience tension and uncertainty, but you don’t want their defeat to be a foregone conclusion. You want them to work for it, but you don’t want them to lose hope.

Here’s how.

TAKE ONLY WHAT YOU NEED TO SURVIVE

First of all, keep in mind that you’re never obligated to give any NPC a full sheet like the ones the PCs have. Most of the time, you’re not going to need to know that much information, because the NPCs aren’t going to be the center of attention like the PCs are. It’s better to focus on writing down exactly what you need for that NPC’s encounter with the PCs, and then fill in the blanks on the fly (just like PCs can) if that NPC ends up becoming more important in the campaign.

THE NPC TYPES

NPCs come in three different flavors: **nameless** NPCs, **supporting** NPCs, and **main** NPCs.

NAMELESS NPCs

The majority of the NPCs in your campaign world are nameless—people who are so insignificant to the story that the PCs’ interactions with them don’t even require them to learn a name. The random shopkeeper they pass on the street, the researcher at the lab, the third patron from the left at the bar, the guards at Majestic 12. Their role in the story is temporary and fleeting. The PCs may encounter them once and will never see them again. Most of the time, you’ll create them simply out of reflex when you describe an environment.

On their own, nameless NPCs aren’t really meant to challenge the PCs. You use them like you use a low-difficulty skill roll, mainly as an opportunity to showcase the PCs’ competence. In conflicts, they serve as

a distraction or a delay, forcing the PCs to work a little harder to get what they want. *Atomic Robo* stories often feature master villains with an army of mooks. These are the mooks.

For a nameless NPC, all you really need is one or two modes based on their role in the scene—your average security guard only has Action, and your average clerk only has Banter. They never get more than one or two aspects, because they aren’t important enough. If they have a stress track, they only have one, and it only has one or two boxes.

Nameless NPCs come in three varieties, **Average**, **Fair**, and **Good**, as outlined below.

AVERAGE

- ▼ Rank-and-file order-takers
- ▼ Mostly there to make the PCs look more awesome
- ▼ One Average (+1) mode
- ▼ No stress track—one shift of harm is enough to take one out.

FAIR

- ▼ Trained professionals, like scientists and soldiers
- ▼ Minor drain on the players’ resources (one or two fate points, stress boxes, possibly a mild consequence)
- ▼ One Fair (+2) mode, possibly a second Average (+1) mode if appropriate
- ▼ Three points to spend on improving skills, or focus two trained skills.
- ▼ One stress track with one box—two shifts of harm is enough to take them out.

GOOD

- ▼ Tough opposition in numbers, like Vanadis' bioengineered brutes
- ▼ Moderate drain on the players' resources (as Fair, but more so)
- ▼ One Good (+3) mode, possibly a second mode at Fair (+2) or Average (+1), if necessary
- ▼ Five points to spend on improving skills, or specialize one trained skill and focus two trained skills.
- ▼ One stress track with two boxes—three shifts of harm is enough to take them out

MOBS

Whenever possible, identical nameless NPCs like to form groups, or **ombs**. Not only does this better insure their survival, it reduces the workload on the GM. For all intents and purposes, you can treat a mob as a single unit—instead of rolling dice individually for each of three thugs, just roll once for the whole mob.

Mobs get the same teamwork bonus PCs do (see *Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts*, page 129)—+1 for each NPC in the mob after the first. Note that this doesn't apply if being numerous wouldn't actually help. For example, a mob of three Average thugs blocking a doorway (Physique) would get a +2 bonus, but those same three thugs sneaking down an alleyway (Stealth) would not.

Generally speaking, it's best if you limit mobs to four or five Average nameless NPCs, three Fair nameless NPCs, or two Good nameless NPCs. Otherwise, you run the risk of turning the encounter from a quick knock-down-drag-out to just a drag-out.

OVERFLOW

When a mob takes a hit, shifts in excess of one NPC's stress track are applied to other NPCs in the mob, one at a time. In this way, it's entirely possible for a PC to take out a mob of four or five nameless NPCs (or more!) in a single exchange. When a hit or series of hits is enough to reduce a mob to a single NPC, try to have that orphaned NPC join up with another mob in the scene, if it makes sense. (If it doesn't, just have them flee. Nameless NPCs are good at that.)



Sod this—I'm attacking. I rolled a +5 with Combat, plus I get another +2 bonus from my *Commando Training* stunt when unarmed. Total of +7.



They're only Average goons, but there are four of them, so they get a +3 to their Combat roll to defend, for a total of +5. Two shifts—that'll take out two of them.



Nazi bastards.

NAMELESS NPCs AS OBSTACLES

An even easier way to handle nameless NPCs is simply to treat them as obstacles: Give a difficulty for the PC to overcome whatever threat the NPC presents, and just do it in one roll. You don't even have to write anything down, just set a difficulty according to the guidelines in this chapter and *Outcomes and Actions*, and assume that the PC gets past on a successful roll. If the situation is complicated, use a complex obstacle instead.

This trick is useful when you want a group of nameless NPCs more as a feature of the scene than as individuals. If the PCs are trying to convince a group of scientists that continuing their research will doom all mankind, for example, you might make a complex obstacle out of them. Set a difficulty for the Rapport (or Intimidation, or a Science skill, or whatever) roll, and require that they try to accumulate a certain number of shifts to disperse the mob before things get out of hand.

You can find more examples of nameless NPCs in *Character Writeups*, page 251.

SUPPORTING NPCs

Supporting NPCs have proper names, are a little more detailed than nameless NPCs, and play a supporting role in your scenarios (hence the name). Supporting NPCs often have some kind of strong distinguishing trait that sets them apart from the crowd, because of their relationship to a PC or NPC, a particular competence or unique ability, or simply the fact that they tend to appear in the game a great deal. Many action-adventure stories feature a "lieutenant" character who is the right-hand man of the lead villain; that's a Supporting NPC in game terms.

Supporting NPCs are a great source of interpersonal drama, because they're usually the people that the PCs have a relationship with, such as friends, sidekicks, family, contacts, and noteworthy opponents. While they may never be central to resolving the main dilemma of a scenario, they're a significant part of the journey, either because they provide aid, present a problem, or figure into a subplot.

THUG

MODES: Average (+1) Action

ASPECTS: *Hired Muscle*

STRESS: –

DEPARTMENT ZERO SCIENTIST

MODES: Fair (+2) Science (+3 [Scientific Field], Will), Average (+1) Banter

ASPECTS: *I'm an Expert in My Field*

STRESS: □

VALKYRIE BRUTE

MODES: Good (+3) Action (+5 Combat; +4 Athletics, Physique)

ASPECTS: *Tough as Nails, Monster Man of the Third Reich*

STRESS: □□



Supporting NPCs are made like nameless NPCs, but with a few more standard character elements, including:

- ▼ Three or four aspects, including concept
- ▼ Two or three modes
- ▼ Two or three of the following skill improvements (or 6-9 points):
 - ▼ Specialize one trained skill
 - ▼ Focus three trained skills
 - ▼ Specialize one focused skill
- ▼ One or two stunts
- ▼ Physical and mental stress tracks with two boxes each
- ▼ One or two consequences
- ▼ Any extra stress boxes from their modes

Supporting NPCs who are allied with the PCs should be their rough peers in skill level. (Another action-adventure trope is to make the “lieutenant” character better than the main villain at combat, the contrasting brawn to the villain’s brain.) However, they

should not fight to the bitter end, given the option. Have them concede on a regular basis. Not only does it ratchet up the drama, but it gives the PCs something else to worry about, produces additional complications that emerge naturally from the narrative, and can provide a compelling impetus going into the next scene.

Opposing supporting NPCs, however, can exceed an individual PC in power. They don’t have to play by the normal character-creation rules. If you want to make sure the PCs really have to work for a victory, give them a mode rated at Great (+4) or Superb (+5). That roughly translates to a free aspect invocation every exchange, so be aware that they’re likely to be pretty daunting in a conflict. If that’s what you want, perfect. If you find that they’re overpowered or that you overestimated the PCs, dial them back a rung or two on the fly. It’s okay. *Your players won’t know.*

By default, supporting NPCs only have one mild consequence available, but if you want to emphasize just how tough they are, give them a moderate consequence as well.



JAMES “SCOTTIE” MILLIGAN

MODES: Good (+3) Action (+4 Combat, +4 Physique), Fair (+2) Banter (+3 Will)

ASPECTS: *Irascible Scotsman, Tireless, Commando Training*

STUNTS:

▼ **Muckle Damn Obstacle.** Use Physique instead of Athletics to overcome when dealing with physical barriers.

▼ **Tough Guy.** Use Combat to defend against fear/threats.

STRESS:

▼ Physical

▼ Mental

CONSEQUENCES:

▼ Mild:

▼ Moderate:

MAIN NPCs

Main NPCs are the closest you're ever going to get to playing a PC yourself. They have full character sheets just like a PC does, with five aspects, three modes, skill improvements (or skill points, if they're weird), and up to five stunts. They are the most significant characters in your PCs' lives, because they represent pivotal forces of opposition or allies of crucial importance. With their full spread of aspects, they also offer the most nuanced options for interaction, and they have the most options to invoke and be compelled. Your main "bad guys" in a scenario or arc should always be main NPCs, as should any NPCs who are the most vital pieces of your stories.

Because they have all the same things on their sheet as PCs do, main NPCs will require a lot more of your time and attention than other characters. You can make main NPCs totally in advance or on the fly, just like PCs.

You could also upgrade one of your current supporting NPCs to a main using this method. This is great for when a supporting NPC has suddenly or gradually become—usually because of the players—a major fixture in the story, despite your original plans for them.

Main NPCs will fight to the bitter end if need be, making the PCs work for every step.

EXCEPTIONAL NPCs

As the GM, if you want to give an NPC in a story more stunts than they should normally have (more than zero for a nameless NPC, more than two for a supporting NPC, or more than five for a main NPC), that's fine. But it'll cost you—one fate point out of your reserve for each additional benefit.

If you have a group of *identical* nameless or supporting NPCs with additional stunt benefits, such as a bunch of Laufpanzers or elite Majestic 12 guys, you don't have to pay the fate point cost for each one. Group them into threes or fours and just pay the cost once per group.

Main NPCs are by their very nature unique. Their fate point costs have to be paid on an individual basis.



PLAYING THE OPPOSITION

Here are some tips for using the opposition characters you create in play.

RIGHT-SIZING

Remember that you want a balancing act between obliterating the PCs and letting them walk all over your opposition (unless it's a horde of nameless NPCs, in which case that's okay). It's important to keep in mind not just the power levels of the NPCs in your scenes, but their number and importance.

Right-sizing the opposition is more of an art than a science, but here are some strategies to help.

- ▼ Don't outnumber the PCs unless your NPCs have comparatively lower skills.
- ▼ If they're going to team up against one big opponent, give that opponent a peak skill two levels higher than whatever the best PC can bring in that conflict.
- ▼ Limit yourself to one main NPC per scene, unless it's a big climactic conflict at the end of an arc.
- ▼ Most of the opposition the PCs encounter in a session should be nameless NPCs, with a few supporting NPCs and main NPCs along the way.
- ▼ Nameless and supporting NPCs means shorter conflicts because they give up or lose sooner; main NPCs mean longer conflicts.

CREATING ADVANTAGES FOR NPCs

It's easy to fall into the habit of using the opposition as a direct means to get in the PCs' way, drawing them into a series of conflict scenes until someone is defeated.

However, keep in mind that the NPCs can create advantages just like the PCs can. Feel free to use opposition characters to create scenes that aren't necessarily about stopping the PCs from achieving a goal, but scouting out information about them and stacking up free invocations. Let your bad guys and the PCs have tea together and then bring out the Empathy rolls. Or instead of having that fight scene take place in the dark alley, let your NPCs show up, gauge the PCs' abilities, and then flee.

Likewise, keep in mind that your NPCs have a home turf advantage in conflicts if the PCs go to them in order to resolve something. So, when you're setting up scene aspects, you can pre-load the NPC with some free invocations if it's reasonable that they've had time to place those aspects. Use this trick in good faith, though—more than two or three such aspects is probably pushing the limit.



CHANGE VENUES OF CONFLICT

Your opposition will be way more interesting if they try to get at the PCs in multiple venues of conflict, rather than just going for the most direct route. Remember that

there are a lot of ways to get at someone, and that mental conflict is just as valid as physical conflict as a means of doing so. If the opposition has a vastly different skill set than one or more of your PCs, leverage their strengths and choose a conflict strategy that gives them the best advantage.



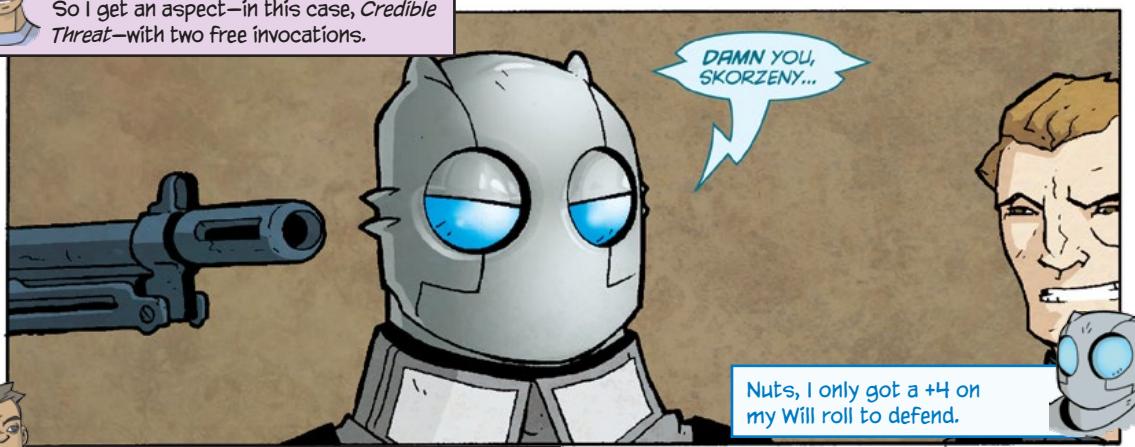
Skorzeny's using Provoke to create an advantage. I rolled +1, plus my Provoke of +5 gives me a +6—and I'm going to invoke your aspect *Virtually Indestructible* to make it +8.



That's the thing about being virtually indestructible—the people you care about aren't.



So I get an aspect—in this case, *Credible Threat*—with two free invocations.



And thanks to my *Cutting stunt**, I'll also spend a fate point to deal you a 4-shift mental hit. Looks like it's not your day, Herr Tesla.

* See Skorzeny's character sheet on page 289! —Ed.



CHAPTER TEN: TELLING STORIES THE ATOMIC ROBO WAY

GMs, by now you and your group have created the PCs (more or less), picked a point on the timeline to start your story, and set all the basic assumptions for the game you're going to play. You have a couple pressures waiting to make trouble and a Mission Statement to guide you, all brimming with dramatic potential and waiting to come to life.

What do you do with them?

It's time to get into the real meat of the game: creating and playing through stories.

SCENES

A **scene** is a foundational unit of game time lasting anywhere from a few minutes to a half hour or more, during which the players try to achieve a goal or otherwise accomplish something significant in a scenario. Taken together, the collection of scenes you play through make up a whole session of play, and by extension, also make up your issues and volumes.

You probably already have a good idea of what one looks like. It's not all that different from a scene in a movie or a few pages in a comic book—the main characters are doing stuff in continuous time, usually all in the same space. Once the action shifts to a new goal, moves to a new place related to that goal, or jumps in time, you're in the next scene.

As a GM, one of your most important jobs is to manage the starting and ending of scenes. The best way to control the pacing of what happens in your session is to keep a tight rein on when scenes start and end—let things continue as long as the players are all invested and enjoying themselves, but as soon as the momentum starts to flag, move on to the next thing. In that sense, you can look at it as being similar to what a good editor does—you “cut” a scene and start a new one to make sure the story continues to flow smoothly.

STARTING SCENES

When you're starting a scene, establish the following two things as clearly as you can:

- ▼ What's the **purpose** of the scene?
- ▼ What **interesting thing** is just about to happen?

Answering the first question is super-important. The more specific your scene's purpose, the easier it is to know when the scene's over. A good scene revolves around resolving a specific conflict or achieving a specific goal—once the PCs have succeeded or failed at doing whatever they are trying to do, the scene's over. If your scene doesn't have a clear purpose, you run the risk of letting it drag on longer than you intended and slow the pace of your session down.

Most of the time, the players are going to tell you what the purpose of the scene is, because they're always going to be telling you what they want to do next as a matter of course. So if they say, “Well, we're going to burrow into that sub-basement so we can hack into the DELPHI mainframe from there,” then you know the purpose of the scene—it's over when the PCs either get the information they want, or get into a situation where it's impossible to do so.

Sometimes, though, they're going to be pretty vague about it. If you don't have an intuitive understanding of their goals in context, ask questions until they state things directly. So if a player says, “Okay, I'm going to text my contact to see what he knows,” that might be a little vague—you know they're going to be a conversation, but you don't know what it's for. You might ask, “What are you interested in finding out? Have you negotiated a price for the information yet?” or another question that'll help get the player to nail down what he's after.

Also, sometimes you'll have to come up with a scene's purpose all on your own, such as the beginning of a new issue, or the next scene following a cliffhanger. Whenever you



have to do that, try going back to the volume's pressures and introducing a situation that's going to directly address one or both of them. If there's a collateral consequence in play, you can also draw on that. That way, whenever it's your job to start a scene, you're always moving the story along.

The second question is just as important—you want to start a scene *just before* something interesting is going to take place. Look at any issue of *Atomic Robo* and you'll see that it usually doesn't take six or seven pages before something happens to change the situation or shake things up.

“Cutting in” just before some new action starts helps keep the pace of your session brisk and helps hold the players’ attention. You don’t want to chronicle every moment of the PCs debarking from their cargo plane and driving across town to the disused warehouse—that’s a lot of play time where nothing interesting happens. Instead, you want to start the scene when they’re *at* the warehouse and staring at the chaotic jumble of trapdoor-hiding debris within.

If you get stumped by this question, just think of something that might complicate whatever the purpose is or make it problematic. You can also just ask the players leading questions to help you figure out the interesting thing that’s about to happen.

If you have a clear purpose going into every scene and you start just before some significant piece of action, it’s hard to go wrong.

COMPETENCE, PROACTIVITY, DRAMA

Whenever you’re trying to come up with ideas for what should happen in a scene, you should think about the basic ideas of Fate Core that we talked about in *The Basics*—competence, proactivity, and drama.

In other words, ask yourself if your scene is doing at least one of the following things:

- ▼ Giving your PCs the chance to show off what they’re good at, whether by going up against people who don’t hold a candle to them or by holding their own against worthy opponents.
- ▼ Giving your PCs the chance to do something you can describe with a simple action verb. “Try to find out information” is too muddy, for example. “Hack into the mainframe” is actionable and specific, as is “Get the rogue geneticist to talk” and “Take out those sentry robots.”

So I’m going to skip past gathering everyone together and ...



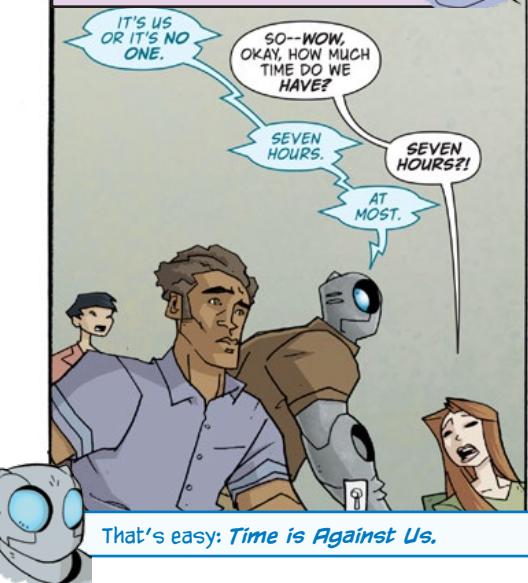
▼ Creating some kind of difficult choice or complication for the PCs. Your best tool to do this with is a compel, but if the situation is problematic enough, you might not need one.



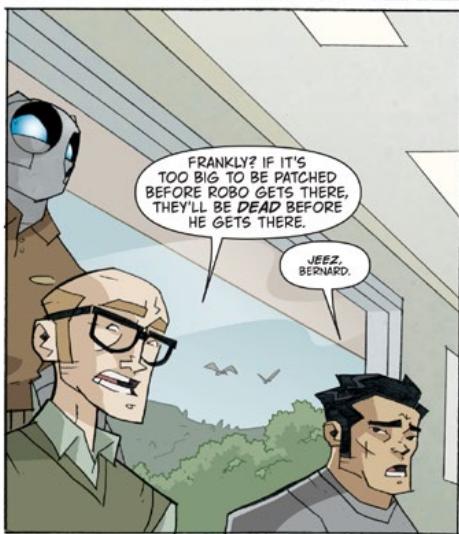
AN INCREDIBLY POWERFUL NINJA GM TRICK

Asking the players to contribute something to the beginning of your first scene is a great way to help get them invested in what's going on right off the bat. If there's anything that's flexible about your opening prompt, invite the players to fill in the blanks for you when you start the scene. Some players may even try to use it as an opportunity to push for a compel and get extra fate points right off the bat. We like to call this sort of player "awesome."

So Robo, what's the biggest problem facing you and your Action Scientists on this task?



That's easy: *Time is Against Us.*



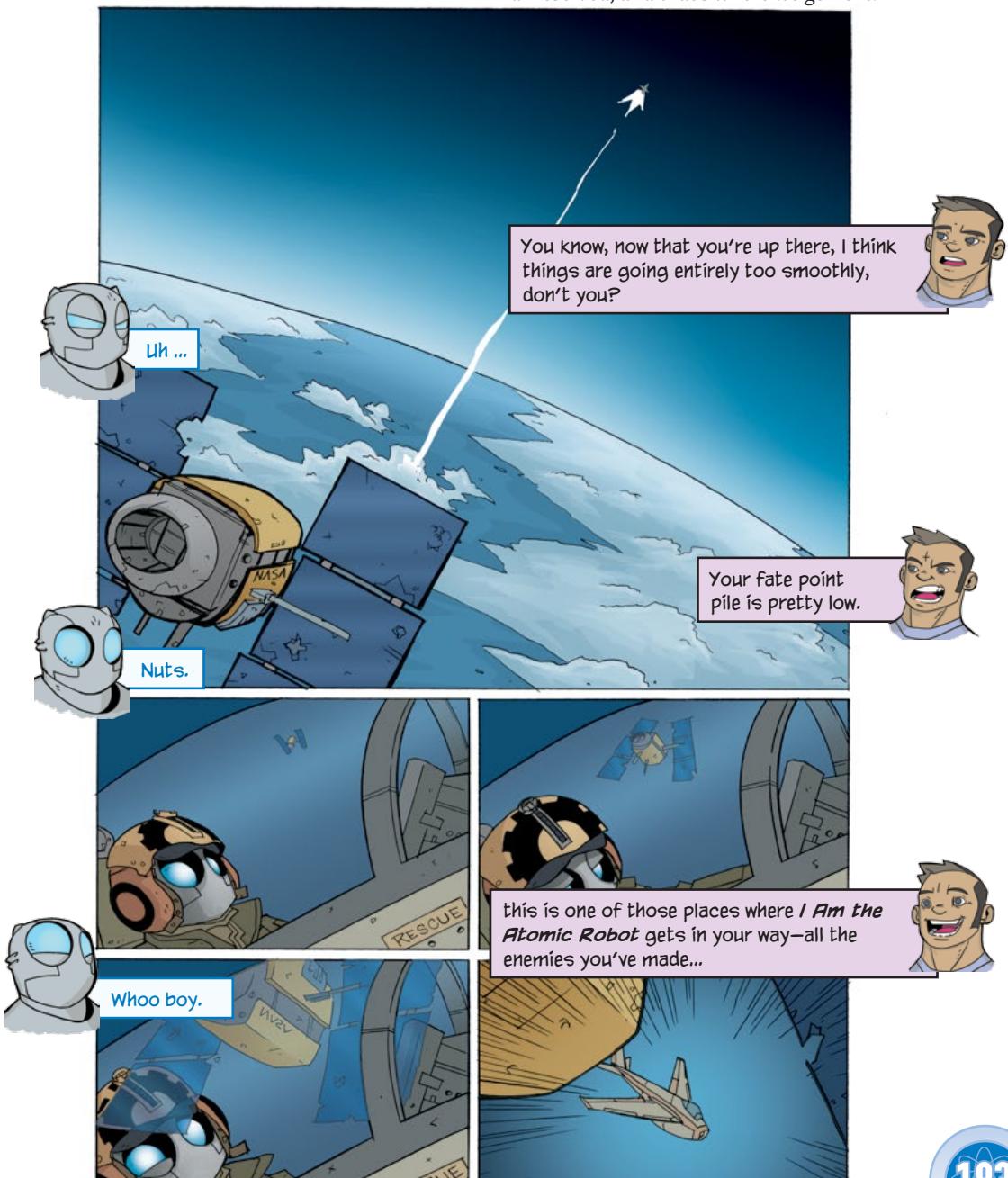
HIT THEIR ASPECTS

Another good way to figure out the interesting action for a scene is to turn to the PCs' aspects, and create a complication or an event-based compel based on them. If you can tie this into one of the volume's pressures, even better—it allows them to have some of the spotlight despite the fact that the overall story does not focus on them as much.

ENDING SCENES

You can end scenes the way you start them, but in reverse—as soon as you've wrapped up whatever your scene's purpose was, move on, and shoot for ending the scene immediately after the interesting action concludes.

This is an effective approach mainly because it helps you sustain interest for the *next* scene. Again, you see this all the time in *Atomic Robo*—a scene will usually end with a certain piece of action resolved, but also with a lingering bit of business that's left unresolved, and that's where we go next.



A lot of your scenes are going to end up the same way. The PCs might win a conflict or achieve a goal, but there's likely something else they're going to want to do after—talk about the outcome, figure out what they're going to do next, etc.

Instead of lingering at that scene, though, suggest that they move on to a new one, which helps answer one of the unresolved questions from the current scene. Try to get them to state what they want to do next, and then go back to the

two questions for starting scenes above—what's the purpose of the next scene, and what's the next bit of interesting action to come? Then dive right into that.

The one time you should exhibit restraint is if it's clear that the players are really, really enjoying their interactions. Sometimes people just want to yammer and jaw in character, and that's okay as long as they're really into it. If you see interest starting to flag, though, take that opportunity to insert yourself and ask about the next scene.

ISSUES

As mentioned in *Running the Game*, an **issue** is a unit of game time usually lasting one or two sessions of play, and made up of a number of discrete scenes. The end of an issue triggers a **minor milestone** (see page 225), allowing your players to fine-tune their PCs in response to the story.

In an issue, the PCs are going to face and try to resolve some kind of big, urgent, open-ended problem (or problems). The GM will typically open an issue by presenting this problem to the players, with subsequent scenes revolving around what the PCs do to deal with the it, whether that's researching information, gathering resources, or striking directly at the problem's source.

Along the way, you'll also have some NPCs who are opposed to the PCs' goals interfere

with their attempts to solve the problem. Could be your classic Chandler-esque “two guys with guns” bursting through the door to kill them. Could be someone with different interests who wants to negotiate with the PCs. Could be a psychotic dromaeosaurid with a thing for crystals. Whatever.

TO BE CONTINUED

The best issues don't have one particular “right” ending, so don't knock yourself out trying to think one up. Rather, as the issue progresses, think about how it might end if it were an actual issue of *Atomic Robo*. Picture the last page, or the last panel—what does it look like? Where might it leave things? How can it hint that things are far from over... or about to get much worse?



ATOMIC ROBO IN FOUR EASY STEPS

Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game works great with minimal planning. The nature of the system demands constant player input on the game world, and it's just a matter of the GM saying, "Yes, and..." or "Yes, but..." to keep the story going forward while they do all the hard work of figuring out the shape of what comes next.

But! Not everyone is into running a seat-of-your-pants experience. And it can be daunting to roll like that if you're new to that way of doing things. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind when thinking about your adventures.

All major *Atomic Robo* volumes break down into four simple steps.

1. Discover the conspiracy
2. Chase the conspiracy
3. Defeated by conspiracy
4. Triumph over conspiracy

Even if you're one of those *maniacs* who doesn't do any planning, these four steps provide a loose structure that can help you to keep things moving and interesting.



DISCOVER THE CONSPIRACY

Atomic Robo's world is a roiling pile of secret agencies and their hidden agendas. Something dangerous is *always* happening just out of sight. The PCs will intersect one or more of these things during the course of play, and the sooner the better. Maybe they're introduced to it immediately, say, in the from a mission briefing. Maybe they poke at the corners of a "mundane" mission already in progress and that leads them to the "real" problem.



Let's take a look at *The Ghost of Station X* through this lens. In the first issue,

Robo gets the call from Director Borden of NASA about the imminent crash of the Venture Orbiter and the five astronauts within. In the middle of this, he gets a call from Sparrow III about a missing building in Bletchley Park. He puts Martin and Louis on the case. The issue ends with a flurry of activity, a daring low-orbit flight in a prototype Aerospike—and a satellite slamming into Robo's plane. The last page of the issue depicts Robo plummeting from the atmosphere, seemingly unconscious, to the ocean below.

To Be Continued: Why did this happen? Where'd the building go? Can the team rescue Robo?

CHASE THE CONSPIRACY

The nature of these agencies and their agendas demands the bulk of their work to be conducted in secret, often in extreme seclusion. If your players are to disrupt these efforts, they've got to track them down first. This can take the form of hacking mainframes (it's always mainframes), vehicular chases, espionage, old fashioned

leg work, brainstorming, gun fights, or all of the above. Whatever it looks like, think of this section as a very abstract car chase. There are obstacles, innocent parties, authorities, the obvious path, shortcuts, wrong turns, dead ends, the bad guys, your team, and a lot of exciting camera angles.



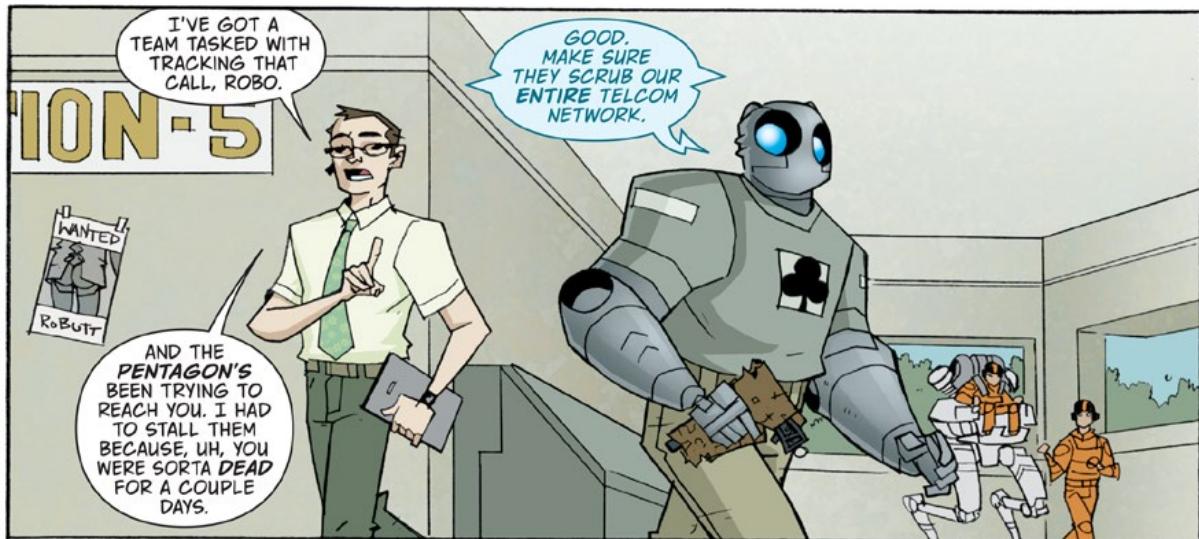
Issue #2 picks up right where #1 left off—with Robo falling, in pieces now, and Jenkins and a couple other Action Scientists racing to catch him in mid-air. They pull it off, but Robo's a mess. Meanwhile, Martin, Louis, and Sparrow start their investigation in earnest—a brainstorm that hits one dead-end after another. After Robo recovers, he learns that he's been tricked. Director Bolden never placed that call about the Venture in the first place, and that the orbiter was nowhere near the coordinates he was given. It was a trap all along. In the last panel, Robo declares that Tesla-dyne is under attack.

Issue #3 opens with another brainstorm, this time between the Action Scientists back at Tesla-dyne HQ trying to figure out who's

responsible. Thanks to Zack and the SigInt Department, they determine that it's Majestic 12. Robo and several Action Scientists gear up and head to an office building in Omaha. They're on the offensive.

Martin and Louis have a breakthrough too, when they stop scouring records and start talking to people. They track Station X down to Hashima Island, off Japan. No sooner have they told Robo about this new development than Majestic 12 shows up, right on cue, and a huge fight breaks out. The Action Scientists flee the scene, with M12 in hot pursuit. Very hot. *Civilian-casualties-hot.*

To Be Continued: How will the Action Scientists survive such a frontal assault? What does Station X have to do with Hashima Island?



DEFEATED BY THE CONSPIRACY

As your players close in on the conspiracy, especially if they reach its heart, they will inevitably be outgunned, outmanned, or both. They get captured, or the conspiracy has been on to their efforts from the start, or their big plan to thwart the baddies was based on misleading intel, or an outside factor derails the players' efforts, etc. The point is: your players experience a *major* setback. No one at the table wants the players to "lose," but this will definitely feel like a big loss. It's supposed to! If possible, though, try to end one session on a cliffhanger and open the *next* session on their major setback. That way your players have the whole night to claw their way back, and no one goes home feeling defeated.



In the opening pages of #4, the Action Scientists are under heavy fire in the middle of an explosive

(literally) chase scene. Majestic 12's tracking them unerringly via a satellite signal and some old Cold War technology, and there's just nowhere to run. Cut off from Tesladyne HQ or any other backup, the Action Scientists are forced to go to ground, improvise, and rely on the kindness of truckers. It's a serious setback and a huge risk. Jenkins leads M12 away from everyone else and it does not go well for those who find him. Robo's new best friend Tucker the Trucker taps into a friendly network of hackers and ham-radio enthusiasts, who track that troublesome signal to... Hashima Island. As the issue ends, Martin, Louis, Sparrow, and Robo are all en route to Japan—the former three in a private jet, and Robo hidden in a crate in a cargo plane.

To Be Concluded: What's on the island? Who's pulling the strings?



TRIUMPH OVER THE CONSPIRACY

Your players fought like Hell to get here. Then they were knocked down. *Then they came back.* That's something everyone at the table can cherish. Victory can be, but isn't necessarily, final. The End Boss can slip away. Collateral consequences can haunt the players. The conspiracy may live

even with the loss of central leadership. Or an element of the conspiracy's plot can fall into the hands of another group – M12, Project Daedalus, Department Zero, all these guys and more are working against one another just as much as they are against Tesladyne.



In the concluding issue of the volume, Robo, Martin, Louis, and Sparrow all meet on Hashima Island—where they find the missing Station X at last. When Robo enters to investigate, he meets ALAN, a highly sophisticated artificial intelligence that's been running, learning, and manipulating people and information for six decades. The building houses its brain, a mass of evolved circuitry so complex and intricate that it can't be replicated. ALAN reveals that it was behind not only the attempt on Robo's life and the Majestic 12 attack, but the the Cold War itself as well. It also reveals its plan to escape Earth in a nuclear-powered Orioncraft—a city-sized ship weighing millions of tons—before humanity destroys itself, and

ALAN along with it. Its launch will involve the extermination of nearly all life on the planet. And it's going to launch, with Robo aboard, in under an hour. The two AIs duke it out, in a manner of speaking, both physically and intellectually, but Robo gains the upper hand by dropping some C4 into the ship's reactor. Boom.

As the issue comes to a close, we find out that Robo's been charged with treason thanks to ALAN, though the charges apparently won't stick. We also learn that ALAN's still alive somehow, and may be interfacing with biological life forms.

The End: A great deal of suspicion has been cast upon Tesladyne and Robo. ALAN may not have prevailed, but its defeat seems to be a temporary condition.



ON CONSPIRACIES

Even though we're talking about "conspiracies," that doesn't mean you always need vast secret agencies sneaking around the shadowy corners your game. You see that most often in the pages of *Atomic Robo* because Brian and Scott have to leverage a lot of resources and endanger a lot of people to justify getting Robo

to bust heads in exciting ways for over one hundred pages.

But if you don't want your games to focus on the sprawling sinister influences of these factions, don't. Sometimes the big threat is nothing more than a mad scientist with weird ideas and a ray gun. Or a monster on the loose. Whatever the antagonistic forces of your adventure look like, it should be easy to apply the four steps to them.

KEEP IT MOVING

These four steps alone can't keep your game humming if your players are dragging their feet. Maybe they're being wishy-washy, or too cautious, or too paranoid, or they aren't clear where to go next. Hey, we've all been there. But you've got two great tools for overcoming these hiccups

The first is your most powerful way to jumpstart player action—**brainstorming**. If players get to define the boundaries of what to expect, they're going to be more confident and pro-active about moving toward their goals. (See page 132 for more on brainstorms.)

The second is something that's employed in *Atomic Robo* all the time. It's called **A BIG DAMN EXPLOSION**. The rules for A BIG DAMN EXPLOSION are a little looser than brainstorming: something that ought to not explode does. Maybe it's a car, or a rocket-propelled grenade, or a car that has been hit with a rocket-propelled grenade. Maybe it's a wall. And there's killer robots behind it. This is just spit-balling, but you get the idea here.

One caveat: don't feel the need to enforce harm from A BIG DAMN EXPLOSION. It's there to motivate players, to force action from them. Sometimes, sure, that action can be a trip to the hospital, but

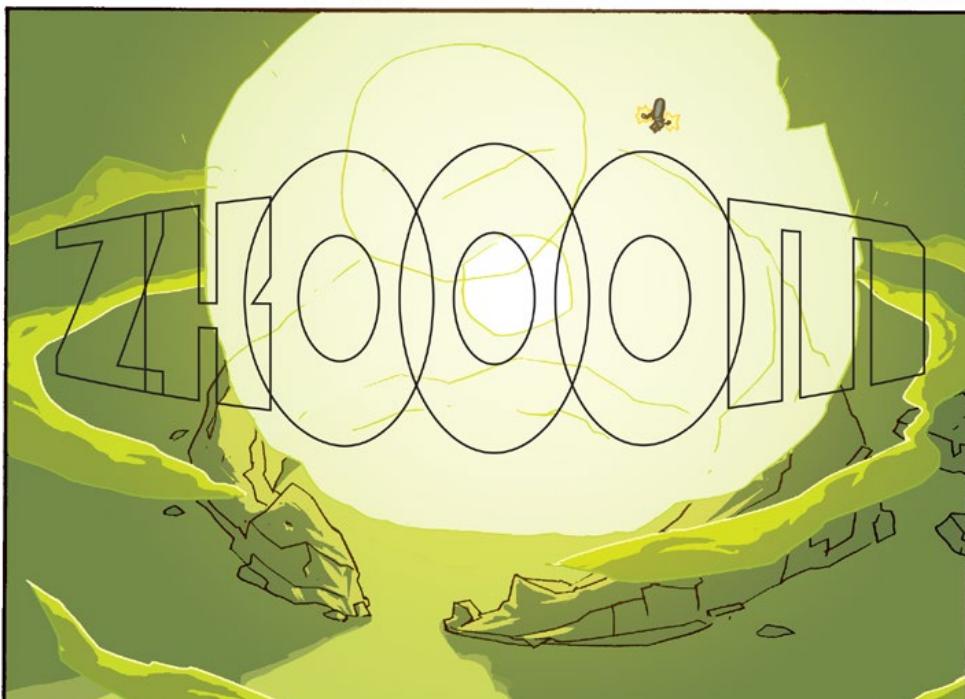
mostly you just want your players to get things rolling again by making some quick decisions while under (or on) fire.



YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO DESTROY THE WORLD

In *Atomic Robo*, not every urgent, consequential problem necessarily involves the fate of the world, or even a large portion of it. Interpersonal problems can have just as much of an impact on a group of PCs as stopping this week's bad guy—winning someone's respect or resolving an ongoing dispute between two characters can just as easily take the focus for a scenario as whatever grand scheme your badass villain is cooking up.

If you want a classic action-adventure story setup, see if you can come up with two main problems for the volume—one that focuses on something external to the characters (like the villain's scheme), and one that deals with interpersonal issues. The latter will serve as a subplot in your scenario and give the characters some development time while they're in the midst of dealing with other problems.



PROBLEMS

Every volume needs a good problem for the PCs to deal with. You want a problem that meets these criteria:

- ▼ It's relevant to the PCs.
- ▼ It can't be resolved without their involvement.
- ▼ It can't be ignored without dire consequences.

If you can put a check mark next to each of these, you're in good shape.

Now, that may seem like a tall order. Fortunately, you have some great storytelling tools to help you figure out appropriate problems for your game—the aspects in play, real-world history, and the agendas of the various factions in the world.

ASPECTS

Your PCs' aspects have a lot of story built into them—they're an indication of what's important about (and to) each character, they indicate what things in the game world the PCs are connected to, and they describe the unique facets of each character's identity. By exploiting the story potential of those aspects, you're going to make a game with rich, personal resonance for that particular cast of PCs.

You also have the aspects attached to your game—notably, the volume's pressures and the Mission Statement of the PCs' faction. Riffing off of those helps to reinforce the sense of a consistent, dynamic world, and keep your game's central premise in the forefront of play.



HISTORY

In *Robo's World*, we talked a bit about the role that history plays in both the *Atomic Robo* series and your game. If you want to know how to use history to drive the events of a volume, it's simple: steal it.

Start with a historical event that sparks your imagination. The timeline (page 235) was compiled with exactly this purpose in mind, in addition to providing a summary of *Atomic Robo* so far. Ideally, you'll want something that occurs over a relatively short span of time—no more than a year or two, preferably less than that—and that suggests a question or two. (That question might be as simple as "Whatever happened to that guy?" Good enough.)

But don't limit yourself to the timeline. There's also the list of inspirations on page 304. Whether it serves to remind you of some forgotten classics or introduce you to your new favorite movie/TV show/book/whatever, it's full of ideas waiting to be exploited.

Of course, a little searching around on the Internet will turn up more interesting historical oddities than you can use in a lifetime. You don't necessarily need something with a scientific bent, but it wouldn't hurt.

Once you have your event, it's just a matter of massaging it into a proper story hook. As yourself these questions, in no particular order:

▼ **WHO ARE THE MAJOR PLAYERS?** Whatever your event, people made it happen. If you can, pull an actual historical figure and turn them into the volume's antagonist. Do some research. Find one or more individuals involved in the event who have compelling personalities, strange pasts, or odd historical connections. You may be surprised how easy this is to do—generally speaking, interesting people make for interesting history, and vice-versa.

▼ **WHERE'S THE CONSPIRACY?** History books tend to leave out the most interesting part of history—the secret cabals calling the shots behind the scenes. As we said in *Robo's World*, conspiracies are great for connecting the protagonists

and antagonists of your story to a hidden world of danger and scientific irresponsibility. Check out *Conspiracies* on page 2, and give some thought to how a good conspiracy might enhance your story. Of course, the answer might be "It wouldn't," and that's okay too.

▼ **WHAT'S DIFFERENT?** In taking real-world history and turn it on its ear, you're creating a reality gap between your version of events and the "official" one. It's up to you and your players to fill in that gap. You may be tempted to fill in every nook and cranny in advance, but resist that—part of the fun of playing is discovering where those loose ends go during the game. Another way to think about this question might be "If this unusual thing is true, then what else is true?" Your answers might be relatively mundane, such as personal motivations or significant diversions from recorded history that are still within the realm of possibility. Or they might be more exotic, like killer robots, giant insects, or ghosts. Whatever it is, if you keep things consistent with the material laid out in *Robo's World*, you have a good shot at maintaining the tone of the *Atomic Robo* comics.



GUESS WHAT, HISTORY, YOU FORGOT ABOUT THE PROTOTYPE!

Basing your volume on a real historical event is a great way to give your game a good *Atomic Robo* feel. But history should be a tool, not an obligation. If you need to fudge dates here and there, no problem. After all, the real-world dates we're working with are merely what historians have chosen to record. There's no reason to feel bound by that, or even to assume that those historians were correct. Would it suit your story better if the first jet-powered aircraft made its maiden flight in 1931 instead of 1939? Go for it. Surely there was a decent working prototype!

FACtIONS

Majestic 12 has a mandate to acquire and militarize Tesliana. Helsingard's followers want to see their leader rule the world. Department Zero is full of Cold-War Soviet psychics. The list goes on. Any of these factions could—and often does—cause trouble in the pursuit of goals Tesladyne would rather not see them achieve.

Directly or otherwise, many tales from the pages of *Atomic Robo* are driven by one or more factions in the setting. Tesladyne Industries is the most familiar, but it's only one of many, as detailed in *Robo's World*.

While it's not *necessary* to get a faction mixed up in the events of your volume, it can certainly lend an air of authenticity to the proceedings, especially if you and your players are already fans of *Atomic Robo*. As the GM, factions can provide you with a clear agenda, motivated antagonists, and plenty of goons to throw at the PCs.

Below is a table of the various factions of the *Atomic Robo* universe you can use to randomly determine who's involved in your story. Roll on this table using four Fate dice, but instead of adding their results together, look at the dice individually.

■	■	+	+	+	+	+
■ Dr. Dinosaur	Old Ally	Daedalus	(Undead) Edison	New Player		
■ Old Enemy	Helsingard	Majestic 12	Big Science Inc.			
■ Department Zero / DELPHI	Majestic 12	Helsingard				
■ ALAN	Most Perfect Science División					
■ New Player						



There's no obligation to use this table—it's meant to be a source of inspiration and a way of spurring creativity, nothing more.

Likewise, assuming you do use it, if you get a result that plain doesn't

- ▼ Start in the upper left-hand square—Dr. Dinosaur.
- ▼ Move one column to the **right** for every **+** die.
- ▼ Move one row **down** for every the **■** die.
- ▼ (If you don't roll *any* **+** or **■** dice, it's Dr. Dinosaur.)



If you roll **■■■■**. The two **+** dice move you two columns over and the one **■** die moves you one row down. The result: Majestic 12.

Or let's say you roll **■■■■**. The **+** die moves you one column over and the three **■** dice move you three rows down. The result: Most Perfect Science División.

One more! You roll **■■■■**. The two **■** move you two rows down. The result: Department Zero or DELPHI.

make any sense, ignore it and roll again. For example, if your story is set in the 1930s and your roll result is Majestic 12, roll again. Majestic 12 didn't even come into being until 1947. Same with Dr. Dinosaur—he doesn't show up until 1999.

USING THE TABLE TO INFORM YOUR STORY

We're playing pretty fast and loose with terms, here. Some of the entities on this table aren't technically "factions." But whatever. They all serve the same function—an organization or individual likely to have a significant influence on the events of the issue or volume.

▼ **DR. DINOSAUR:** Dr. Dinosaur might not have a proper faction to call his own, but his ability to make trouble for Tesladyne—whether via a genetically engineered *Futuresaurus Rex* or the Rock People of Hollow Earth—is well-established. The presence of Dr. Dinosaur in an issue, let alone throughout an entire volume, signals a vacation from reality. Let's set aside for a moment the utter implausibility of his own backstory—when Dr. Dinosaur's around, things literally *cease to make sense*. It's all just "CRYSTALS!" and then something explodes. He represents *Atomic Robo* at its most gonzo. And as such, he's a lot of fun. Everyone loves Dr. Dinosaur! But for exactly these reasons, use him sparingly. He's a spice, not a protein. Part of his appeal is his relative scarcity, and the contrast he provides to other *Atomic Robo* stories, which are of course utterly grounded in science-based fact (ahem). You can find a writeup of Dr. Dinosaur on page 292.

▼ **(UNDEAD) EDISON:** Why is "Undead" in parentheses? It depends on when he shows up. If it's pre-1931, he's plain-old flesh-and-blood Thomas Edison, megalomaniacal inventor and entrepreneur. If it's 1999 or later, it's the "odic ghost" of Edison, commonly referred to as Undead Edison. Thomas Edison, the human being, is able to marshal considerable forces, albeit mostly of a corporate nature. As seen in *Deadly Art of Science*, however, he's more than willing to consort with some less-savory elements of society to further his goals. Although we haven't seen much of Undead Edison in *Atomic Robo*, it seems pretty unlikely that a man like Edison would let even death curb his ambition. His presence in a volume could mean a "guest appearance,"

or it could mean he's somehow found backing to continue his work. Roll again on the table, and think about what might motivate Undead Edison and this second faction to work together. You can find a writeup of Thomas Edison on page 269, and one of Undead Edison on page 270.

▼ **ALAN:** The Automated Learning Algorithm Network may have met defeat in *The Ghost of Station X*, but ALAN "lives" on. Like Undead Edison, it's wholly probable that ALAN would pick up right where it left off: manipulating the world from the shadows via information networks and other electronic means for its own ends. It's almost a given that ALAN's using another faction without that other faction's knowledge or consent. Look at how it used Majestic 12 to take down Tesladyne. Roll again on the table—how is ALAN using *that* faction? Unlike Dr. Dinosaur and Undead Edison, revenge isn't a very good motivator here—ALAN doesn't really experience emotions as we know them—but it'll still want to escape Earth before humanity destroys itself. You can use that goal to have ALAN cause any number of esoteric, covert, or just plain weird problems for your PCs. If your story takes place prior to the events of *The Ghost of Station X* and you want to conform to the continuity of *Atomic Robo*, either reroll this one or make sure ALAN stays well in the background. You can find a writeup of ALAN on page 297.



PUT A FACE ON IT

While not every crisis has to be directly caused by an NPC who serves as a "master villain" for the PCs to take down, it's often easier when it is. Factions are big and powerful, but the PCs don't deal with factions—they deal with people. At the very least, you should be able to point directly to an NPC who benefits a great deal from the situation not going the way the PCs want it to go.

▼ **OLD ENEMY:** Take someone from the past, either the comic or a prior volume of your own game, and bring them back somehow. If they weren't permanently defeated, great—now it's payback time, possibly in a shiny new metal body. If they *were*, then it's some progeny of theirs that's giving the PCs a hard time. This could be a vengeful relative, a clone, a monstrosity of science running amok without its master to supervise it, and so on. If the issue or volume is a flashback to an earlier era, they could even be the *predecessor* of an enemy in the "present."

▼ **OLD ALLY:** Similar to Old Enemy, but a friend instead of an antagonist. They're back to help the PCs, or maybe they call on the PCs to help them. If the former, what motivates them to get involved in the PCs' business? If the latter, what kind of trouble have they gotten themselves into, and why do they need the PCs in particular?

▼ **MAJESTIC 12:** In *Atomic Robo*, M12 is often cast as a villain. And for good reason: from its inception, this secret government agency has been nothing but trouble for Robo and Tesladyne. But when they're not doing that, Majestic 12's day-to-day operations can strongly resemble those of Tesladyne. Like Tesladyne, they investigate weird happenings around the globe and push the boundaries of science. Plus, they don't shy away from a fight—they're extremely well-equipped for their missions, whether that means assault rifles and attack choppers or cutting-edge powered armor suits. Two key factors set Majestic 12 apart from Tesladyne, though. One, they're often working with technology—specifically, Tesla-tech—they don't fully understand. Two, they're more interested in military applications and US national security than in scientific inquiry for its own sake. Taken together, these make for a lot of friction with Tesladyne, and increasingly so as time goes by. If Majestic 12 is involved in your volume and the year is 1997 or earlier, it could be they've gotten themselves in over their heads and need Tesladyne's help. They could just as easily be out-and-out enemies of Tesladyne, as in *The Ghost*

of *Station X* and *The Savage Sword of Dr. Dinosaur*. You can find a writeup of some Majestic 12 guys on page 286.

▼ **HELSINGARD:** Baron Heinrich von Helsingard—Lord Helsingard, to his many minions—played a role in nearly every major development of the first half of the 20th century, so naturally it makes sense that he'd meddle with your story as well. As a series of cloned brains housed in robotic bodies, Helsingard makes for an interesting and varied antagonist. Because each brain thinks it's the *true* Helsingard, destined to rule the world and so on, each one can have fairly different methodologies and plans. You might even have two such brains in conflict with one another, each thinking the other a base imposter. The trappings of Helsingard, however, are nearly always the same—subterranean bunkers, loyal minions (cloned, mechanical, or fanatic—take your pick), and technology way ahead of its time. As for motivation, Helsingard's brain-clones don't even get out of bed for less than a shot at either global domination or the destruction of Atomic Robo himself. You can find a writeup of a Helsingard warbot on page 285.

▼ **DAEDALUS:** Just as Majestic 12 was founded in response to Nikola Tesla, Daedalus was founded because of Baron Helsingard. However, unlike their M12 cousins, the operatives of Daedalus actually know what they're doing with their stolen tech—largely because by 1980, the Helsingard clone brain known as Prime has surreptitiously taken control. As a consequence, Daedalus is more about refining and advancing Helsingard's inventions rather than trying to understand them. That means two things that can result in them crossing paths with Tesladyne: unearthing lost Helsingard bunkers, and experimenting on unwitting subjects. Daedalus is big on covert activity, which means more men-in-black conspiracy clichés you can muster. Add to these tropes plenty of genetic engineering, cybernetics, and human-machine hybrids. That's Daedalus.

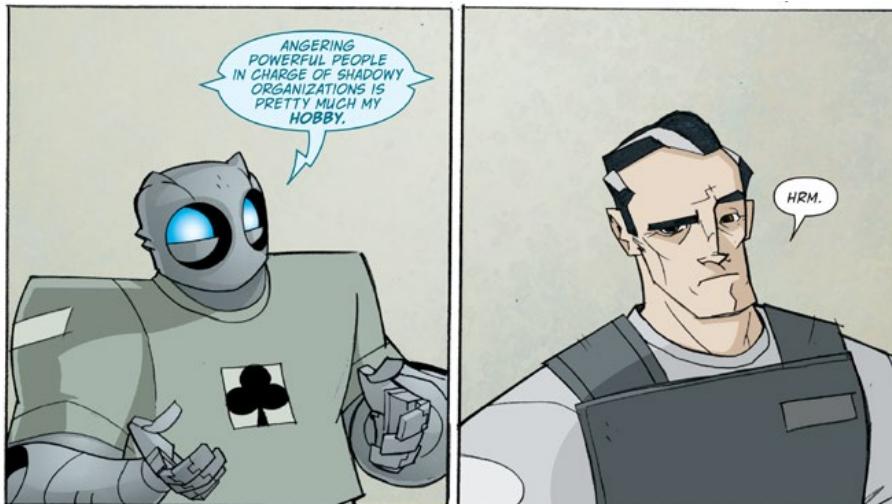
▼ **DEPARTMENT ZERO / DELPHI:** Rather than a single faction, Department Zero is actually a collection of disparate Cold War-era Soviet agencies concerned with weaponizing Tesla-tech. By the end of the Cold War, these number in the dozens, all pursuing similar ends in secret and in competition with one another. It's possible that some remnant of Department Zero persists in some form after the balkanization of the Soviet Union—perhaps as independent agencies absorbed by new countries sympathetic to their cause, or simply cut adrift and left to their own devices (literally). Among these, the counterintelligence agency DELPHI is a standout. In the '60s, it's like SMERSH with an emphasis on weird science. In the '70s, their emphasis shifts to psychic ability—remote sensing, telekinesis, and the like. It's during these decades that DELPHI is at its most effective and organized. However, over time DELPHI's cells of agents become so secretive and isolated that by the fall of the Berlin Wall they're acting completely independently from one another. Once a serious player in global espionage, now they're part of a fractious fringe, working with limited resources toward increasingly unpredictable ends.

▼ **BIG SCIENCE INC.:** Unlike most of the other factions here, Big Science Inc. actually has a solid relationship with Tesladyne. If these guys are involved in your story, it's almost a lock that Biomega mutants will be as well. Maybe Tesladyne's dealing

with a Biomega threat and decides to call in the big guns—Science Team Super Five—or maybe it's the reverse. Regardless, the presence of Big Science Inc. is likely going to mean a team-up against some other problem. Break out the *kaiju* and let them loose on the PCs.

▼ **MOST PERFECT SCIENCE DIVISION:** The inner workings of China's MPSD are hidden behind a wall—a *great* wall, even—of bureaucracy, propaganda, and secrecy. Like several other factions, it has some things in common with Majestic 12, in that its purpose is to weaponize Tesla-tech. However, MPSD's interests lie in Tesla's most famous creation, Atomic Robo—so much so that they've created robotic drones, remotely operated by personnel trained in kung fu. Involving MPSD in your story has the potential to open a door to all kinds of kung fu and *wuxia* tropes, if you so choose.

▼ **NEW PLAYER:** The story involves a new antagonist or ally, a previously unknown person or faction. Admittedly, by telling you to make up your own faction, we're kinda punting on this one—but you shouldn't get the idea that Robo's world is this tightly defined thing that can't expand beyond what we've seen in the comics. Look to the inspirations on page 304 to get your imagination firing, or dig into history—or just reroll, if you really don't want to come up with your own thing. It's your game, after all. This is meant to help, not hinder. See *Making New Factions*, below, for some helpful guidelines.



MAKING NEW FACTIONS

But maybe you want new factions in your game to antagonize your players. Or for them to join. Or for them to join and then to be antagonized by their IT guy.

There are two great ways to build new factions.

REAL CONSPIRACIES + CREATIVE LICENSE + SCIENCE.

Secret societies flourished across Europe during the Renaissance and reached their zenith on both sides of the Atlantic in the 19th century. The goals of these groups were as far reaching as the total restructuring of civilization to getting very, very drunk. And, in a few cases, both.

You don't have to be a Victorian or Renaissance Man though. Or anywhere in the Western Hemisphere. Human beings of every era of history and in every corner of the globe always had the same basic capacity for genius. Every culture solved the problems it faced with equal brilliance. Atomic Robo's world just gives you an opportunity to amp up those solutions.

Secret societies have always been around in one form or another. The founders of secret societies, especially in the 19th century, projected the origins of their groups into the real and fictitious secret societies of the ancient world, and often the East, to borrow some legitimacy. This can work for your game too!

There are dozens of books listing conspiracies and secret societies from across history. Failing those, you've got Google and Wikipedia. You don't need an in depth understanding of these things, you're just looking for broad strokes to get your imagination going. Do some reading and find a group that appeals to you. Maybe their origin—actual or purported—their philosophy or internal hierarchy could easily hook into something about your game. Or maybe you just think they have a neat name!

What's important is that something about the organization stands out to you. Whatever that thing is, amplify it. Remove anything and everything that gets in the way of it. You're building a weird sci-fi history, you have permission to destroy anything extraneous so you can make it as cool as possible.

Next, ask what might happen if the secret knowledge, magical insights, or powers this group claimed to possess actually informed secret technologies and techniques. The key to this step is to abandon realism and to embrace plausibility. It's not realistic to propose that Hassan-i Sabbah's 11th century Assassins invented retractable wrist-mounted blades and parkour. But ultra-concealed weapons and advanced exfiltration techniques are certainly plausible, so they totally did all that!

You may find by this point that your game's version of the society is so divorced from reality that you've invented a whole new group. There's nothing wrong with that! If you started with the Freemasons and ended with a cult seeking insights from the secret geometry of a hidden universe, you can keep calling them Freemasons or go with something like Acolytes of the Cryptohedron. (Not that though. That's pretty good. We're using that.)

Now you've got a secret organization. They've got a history, goals, tools, and weird ideas. Now project these things into your game's era. Would they have clashed with other conspiracies? Been inspired or changed by them? Or by a new technology? Have they splintered into smaller factions? What if they were on the verge of accomplishing their ultimate goal? What would that look like? How might that intersect with your players? What other organizations—conspiratorial, governmental, academic, or corporate—might notice?

WORKING BACKWARDS

You've already got some weird tech, or weird ideas, or a secret cataclysmic plot to unleash on your players. Great! But it doesn't fit any of the de facto factions of *Atomic Robo*. Crud! Okay, so now you need someone to carry these plans to their natural conclusions. Who are they, why are they, and where did they come from, what drew them to this life?

The first method is about using real world conspiracy theories and secret societies to inform the realization of an original faction for your game. This method starts with a picture of what your original faction should look like and then works backward to inform how it got there.

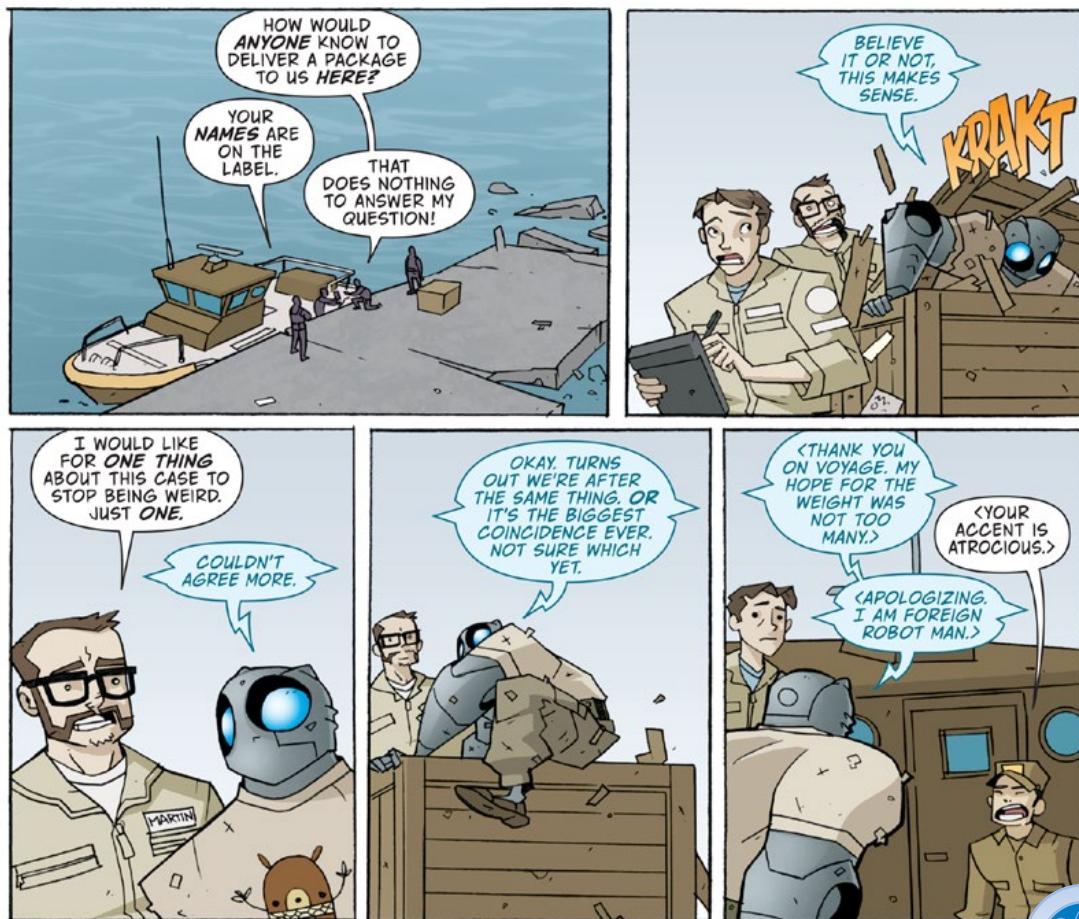
Do what modern secret societies do: borrow a much older tradition! Whether it was real (Freemasons), sort of real (what Freemasons are in conspiracy theories), or a blatant fiction that sounds good (Crypto-hedron). It's all valid for your game!

Or skip other conspiracies and secret societies altogether. Hang the origin of

your new faction on a piece of history—real, popularly thought to be real, or entirely made up.

Think about how they remained hidden. What, if any, participation they may have had in larger events of history, be they wars or cultural transformations. Did the organization start with completely different aims? Maybe a series of changes (or challenges!) to leadership and/or the introduction of new technologies diverted the energies of this faction toward their current endeavors.

However you come about making your original factions, don't sweat getting too detailed about them. Secret societies are secretive. You shouldn't know everything about them. Maybe no one does, even within the organization itself. Plus, if there's ample room for your players to fill in some blanks during play, the faction will be that much more important to them, and amore interesting facet of your game.



MARKERS

To mix things up a bit more in your stories, consider including a **marker**—an unusual little quirk, theme, or incident. A good marker can serve to distinguish this story from the last one, without being something that overshadows the big picture. Use them to introduce new wrinkles, complicate existing conflicts, or inspire other ideas.

▼ **STRANGE BEDFELLOWS:** Odd as it may seem, two factions in your story who normally bear ill-will toward one another are working together toward a common end.

▼ **PUBLIC MENACE:** Somewhere in the story, the actions of a faction will endanger the lives of innocent bystanders. The PCs might be the only ones who can help... or it might be their fault to begin with.

▼ **CRYPTID:** Some sort of cryptozoological creature is involved in the story, such as Sasquatch or Ogopogo. Might be real, might be a hoax.

▼ **A GIANT THING:** Take a thing, like an ant or a robot. Now make it a *giant* version of that thing. Bring Buicks.

▼ **MAN-MADE MONSTERS:** The story includes products of genetic engineering, or perhaps less-subtle methods of physiological enhancement. Helsingard's zomborgs and Dr. Valkyrie's Monster-Men are good examples.

▼ **MYSTIC HOKUM:** A character in the story has a thing for some poorly understood corner of pseudoscience, such as Vril or the Odic Force.

▼ **OUTMODED TECHNOLOGY:** Someone in the story's using outdated tech, like a Model T, a water clock, or Windows 3.1, but doing so in a surprisingly effective and/or dangerous way.

▼ **FLASHBACK:** A significant part of the story takes place in another time, usually in a way that offers a fresh perspective on "modern-day" events. You might flash back to the recent past (a few months, a few years, etc.), or to another era, such as from the '80s to the '40s. See *Across the Fourth Dimension* (page 209) for more on how to handle this kind of thing.

▼ **DOUBLE-CROSS:** Someone in the story betrays someone else. This will probably directly involve the PCs, but it might not. It could end up being in their favor, or it could be the pivot upon which their lives take a turn for the worse. GM, if you're thinking it might be fun if it's a PC who does the coat-turning, that's fine—it might very well be. But if that's the case, then this marker is more about driving toward a good *reason* for that character to double-cross their fellow PCs. Ultimately, it's in the hands of the player. They might go for it, or they might take the moral high-ground. Either way, it'll make for a memorable wrinkle in the story.

■	+	+	+	+	+
Strange Bedfellows	Outmoded Technology	Double-Cross	Cryptid	Mystic Hokum	
Flashback	A Giant Thing	Man-Made Monsters	Public Menace		
Public Menace	Flashback	A Giant Thing			
Cryptid	Man-Made Monsters				
Mystic Hokum					

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

GM, you can gin up a story pretty quickly by combining a historical event, a faction or two, and a pressure. That last one's fairly easy to generate by smashing together the previous two. What role did this faction secretly play in this historical event? The answer to that is the basic premise of your story. Why is that a problem for the PCs? Phrase the answer to that as an aspect, and you have a pressure. It doesn't have to address the problem *directly*—in fact, it probably shouldn't, because that would be too limiting—but as long as it relates to it somehow you and your players will be able to make good use of it during the story.

There's no particular order for establishing these, nor do you absolutely *need* to have anything more than a pressure. Sometimes you'll know what you want one of the volume's pressures to be in advance,

then find a suitable faction and wrap it around a point in history that feels right. You could Or you might start with a particular faction or two in mind, then spin a pressure out of that and drop the history component altogether.

Incorporating history and factions with your pressure is more likely to result in a story that *feels* like it's come from the pages of *Atomic Robo*—these guidelines have been written with the source material firmly in mind. That said, there's nothing saying your story necessarily has to have the same feel as *Atomic Robo*. It's your game, after all.

But if you're going for *Atomic Robo*—and odds are good you are—then throw everything in there, at least for your first volume or two. We're going to proceed as if that's exactly what you're doing.





Let's roll for a faction before anything else. I get **⊕⊕⊕■**, so it's "(Undead) Edison."

Right off the bat, that limits the story to 1931 or earlier, or 1999 or later. (I'm a stickler for *Atomic Robo* canon.)

I'll go with the still-living Thomas Edison—my players want to play a game set in Robo's youth and I'm interested in the War of the Currents. Of course, it's also over and done with in the 1880s, long before Robo's even a glint in Tesla's eye. But I'm fascinated with the fallout from this very public conflict. Exploring the ramifications of that could make for a really compelling game.

What if these two men were in constant conflict with one another, covertly or overtly, for the rest of their lives? Did the War of the Currents ever really end? Edison died more than a decade before Tesla—does that mean Tesla "won" that conflict? History says Edison died from complications of diabetes in 1931, but that's pretty boring, so I'm sure history's wrong on that front. After all, one was a wizard and the other a mad scientist—this should be a battle for the ages.

Now I have a faction and an event: Edison, and his death in 1931.

To spark some ideas, I'll roll for a couple markers. I get **⊕⊕⊕⊕**—Mystic Hokum—and **■■■■**—Public Menace.

I think I have a problem for the volume: High in the Empire State Building, Edison's building an immortality machine powered by the Odic Force, a highly unscientific energy that is nonetheless a real thing in the game. If the process works, it'll have the nasty side-effect of killing everyone in New York City. That gives me one pressure, and also the name of the volume: *The Deadly Art of Science*.

That's a fine hook for Robo. *Science!* But two of my players want to play a father-and-daughter vigilante team—Donovan and Helen McAllister, also known as Jack Tarot and Nightingale—so he adds a criminal element to the story. There might be "equipment" that simply can't be obtained quickly enough or through legitimate means, like... maybe an ancient artifact of mystical significance. Would a man of Edison's ambitions let that stop him? A little more poking around in history turns up the Crystal Skull of Lubaantun, a reportedly powerful item recovered from South America in the 1920s. Better yet, in 1931, it's even located in New York City. So maybe Edison's criminal connections have stolen a bunch of high-tech stuff plus the Crystal Skull. Perfect bait to draw in a crimefighting duo. That gives me the other pressure for the volume: *Bizarre String of Thefts*.

THE DEADLY ART OF SCIENCE: PROBLEM

"The year is 11930. The place is New York City. Thomas Edison has been secretly orchestrating a series of thefts involving high-tech equipment and the Crystal Skull of Lubantun. In addition to working with organized crime, he's backed up by a sizable 'legitimate' staff and a seemingly unstoppable giant robot of his own design. It's all in service of finally realizing his master plan: using Manhattan's direct-current power plants and preponderance of metal structures to turn the city into a focal point for Odic Energies for the purpose of achieving immortality. This will also effectively destroy New York City. The thefts have attracted the attention of Jack Tarot and Nightingale. And their involvement has attracted a naïve, adventure-starved atomic robot who chafes against his workaday life as Nikola Tesla's assistant."

STORY QUESTIONS

Now that you have a really urgent problem that demands the PCs' attention and cannot be ignored without dire consequences, take that problem and use it to create a series of open-ended questions that you want the volume to answer. We call these **story questions**, because the story of your game will naturally emerge from the process of answering them.

If you only have one story question to answer, it's likely that you'll be able to wrap things up in a session. If you want to draw things out longer than that, then you should have at least three story questions, if not more.



If you end up with a really large number of story questions (like eight or more), keep in mind that you don't necessarily have to answer them all in one volume. You can bring up the questions you don't answer, either as foreshadowing or to set up stuff you're going to do in the following volume.

FROM PROBLEM TO QUESTIONS

In order to make a story question, look at the problem you got from juxtaposing an event and a faction. Break that problem down into a smaller set of specific conflicts or obstacles that the PCs would have to deal with in order to resolve it. Each one of those specific conflicts is a story question, which you're going to format by default as "Can X accomplish Y?", where X is either the PCs or a specific PC, and Y is whatever the specific conflict is. (You don't have to follow this exact phrasing and can spruce it up a little to add nuance to your story; see the example below.)

At least one of these should be very obvious: "Can the PCs resolve the problem?" But you don't want to push straight for that, because that's the last question you're going to answer in the volume. Use

the other questions to build up to that final question. Ask yourself, "In order for this to happen, what *else* needs to happen?"



DEADLY ART OF SCIENCE: SAMPLE STORY QUESTIONS

Let's look over the problem and start thinking about potential story questions for the upcoming scenario. Each question needs to revolve around a specific conflict related to putting a stop to Edison's plans.

- ▼ Can the McAllisters discover who's behind the thefts?
- ▼ Can Robo help the McAllisters without compromising their secret identities?
- ▼ Will Robo's interest in vigilantism put him in conflict with his creator?
- ▼ Will Tesla leave the comforts of home and do something about all of this?
- ▼ Can the PCs prevent more thefts from occurring before it's too late?
- ▼ Can Edison's giant robot be stopped?
- ▼ Will Edison succeed?

Notice that each of these questions has the potential to significantly shape the scenario's plot. Right off the bat, if Robo accidentally blows the McAllisters' cover, you have a very different situation than if he plays it cool. If the McAllisters' investigation gets them captured or arrested, then stopping Edison might end up being a moot point. If Tesla absolutely forbids Robo from associating with the McAllisters, then that's going to be another source of trouble.

Also notice that a few of the story questions have something else that modifies the basic "Can X accomplish Y?" format. The reason why you want to do this is the

same reason you want to avoid rolling dice sometimes—black and white success/failure isn't always interesting, especially on the failure side.

Look at the second question: "Can Robo help the McAllisters *without compromising their secret identities?*" Without the emphasized part, it'd be kind of boring—if he can't help them, then we've pretty much dropped that plot thread, and part of the game stalls out. No good.

The way it's phrased, though, it's not about whether he can help, but about

what's at stake—the private lives of Donovan and Helen, as opposed to Jack Tarot and Nightingale. This gives us something more interesting to work with. It's entirely possible that Robo is an effective investigator, but that his inexperience accidentally results in leading the cops or Edison's goons back to their secret hideout.

There's also some room to extend material from this volume into the future. What if they don't deal with that giant robot? What'll happen to him, and where will he pop up next? What if they stop Edison's plans, but Edison himself gets away?



ESTABLISH THE OPPOSITION

You might have already come up with an NPC or group of NPCs who is/are responsible for what's going on when you made up your problem, but if you haven't, you need to start putting together the cast of characters who are the key to answering your story questions. You also need to nail down their motivations and goals, why they're standing in opposition to the PCs' goals, and what they're after.

At the very least, you should be able to answer the following questions for each named NPC in your scenario:

- ▼ What does that NPC *need*? How can the PCs help her get that, or how are the PCs in the way?
- ▼ Why can't the NPC get what they need through legitimate means? (In other words, why is this need contributing to a problem?)
- ▼ Why can't they be ignored?

Wherever you can, try and consolidate NPCs so that you don't have too many characters to keep track of. If one of your opposition NPCs is serving only one purpose in the volume, consider getting rid of that NPC and folding their role together with another NPC. This not only reduces your workload, but it also allows you to develop each NPCs personality a bit more and make them multi-dimensional, as you reconcile their whole set of motives.

For each NPC that you have, decide whether you need to make them a supporting or main. Stat them up according to the guidelines given in *Running the Game*.



DEADLY ART OF SCIENCE: OPPOSITION

Now let's look over the story questions and think of the NPCs we'll need to answer them. Here's a list of the obvious suspects, and some that just strike my fancy.

- ▼ Thomas Edison (main)
- ▼ Edison's robot (supporting)
- ▼ Edison's right-hand man (supporting)
- ▼ Theodore Edison (supporting)
- ▼ Crime boss (not appearing)
- ▼ A couple people to interview during the investigation (supporting)
- ▼ Gangsters (nameless)
- ▼ Edison's staff (nameless)
- ▼ Police (nameless)
- ▼ Nikola Tesla (supporting)

That's six or seven distinct NPCs—two groups of nameless NPCs, four supporting, one main, and one that probably isn't going to show up. But I don't want to keep track of five NPCs, so I'll consolidate.

I think I'll make Edison's right-hand man his son, Theodore. Does Theodore share his father's wild ideas about the Odic Force? Or is he just a loyal son? We'll figure it out in play. Plus, it's a chance to include another real-life historical figure.

I'll only plan for one interviewee: the owner of the Crystal Skull of Lubaantun. In real-life, this was Frederick Mitchell-Hedges. He's perfect as an NPC—colorful, dramatic, and by many accounts an inveterate liar. Not only that, he's a great way to impart some useful info about the skull to the players without it feeling too contrived.



REMEMBER, THE PLAYERS CAN SAVE YOU WORK

When you're establishing your NPCs for your volume, you don't have to have everything set in stone when you get to the table—whatever you don't know, you can always establish by turning it over to the players to declare story details, as per our advice on page 161. Also see page 171, for advice about winging it during play, and *Brainstorms* on page 132 in *Let's Do Some Science*.

PAGE ONE, PANEL ONE

First, review what we said about scenes at the beginning of this chapter, on page 180. All of that applies to the volume's first scene, too. But the first scene demands a bit more.

Don't be afraid to start things off by being as unsubtle as possible—take one of your pressures, come up with something that will bring it into sharp relief, and hit your players over the head with it as hard as you can. Show the players that the pressure demands action.

That way, you're setting an example for the rest of the session and getting the momentum going, ensuring the players won't dither around. Remember, they're supposed to be proactive, competent people—give them something to be proactive and competent about right from the get-go.

If you're in an ongoing campaign, you might need the first scenes of a session to resolve loose ends that were left hanging from a previous session. It's okay to spend time on that, because it helps keep the sense of continuity going from session to session. As soon as there's a lull in momentum, though, hit them with your opening scene fast and hard.



DEADLY ART OF SCIENCE: OPENING SCENE

Time to look over my questions and think about what I want as the opening scene. A couple of obvious suggestions come to mind:

- ▼ Jack Tarot's in a dramatic shoot-out or car chase (or both?) with a criminal directly connected to Edison's plot.
- ▼ Atomic Robo comes face-to-face with Edison's robot when the latter is engaged in the theft of some valuable technology, possibly even from Tesla.

I'll go with the former, for two reasons. One, it's right in the McAlisters' wheelhouse, and will give both of them a chance to shine, whether through violent action or thoughtful investigation, as applicable. By contrast, at this point in his life, Robo's still basically Tesla's immortal, bulletproof lab assistant; throwing him into an action scene might be too much too soon for the story. Two, if the shoot-out car-chase—let's go with both—takes place right outside Tesla's lab, then Robo can see it and get involved, which would be a fun way for him to meet Jack Tarot.

That doesn't mean I'm going to just toss the scene with Robo and the big robot aside—it's just better suited for a scene later in the story.

THE VOLUME IN PLAY

So, now you should be ready to begin: you have a problem that can't be ignored, a variety of story questions that will lead to resolving that problem one way or another, a core group of NPCs and their motivations, and a really dynamic first scene that will get things cooking.

Everything should be smooth sailing from here, right? You present the questions, the players gradually answer them, and your story rolls into a nice, neat conclusion.

Only it never happens that way.

The most important thing to remember when you actually get the scenario off the ground is this: *whatever happens will always be different from what you expect*. The PCs will hate an NPC you intended them to befriend, have wild successes that give away a bad guy's secrets very early, suffer unexpected setbacks that change the course of their actions, or any one of another hundred different things that just don't end up the way you think they should.

This doesn't mean you should prepare by predetermining what scenes and locations are going to be involved in your scenario—most of the time, you're going to throw out most of that material anyway, in the face of a dynamic group of players and their choices.

Not all is lost, however—the stuff you *have* prepared should help you tremendously when players do something unexpected. Your story questions are vague enough that there are going to be multiple ways to answer each one, and you can very

quickly axe one that isn't going to be relevant and replace it with something else on the fly without having to toss the rest of your work.

Also, knowing your NPCs' motivations and goals allows you to adjust their behavior more easily than if you'd just placed them in a static scene waiting for the PCs to show up. When the players throw you a curveball, make the NPCs as dynamic and reactive as they are, by having them take sudden, surprising action in pursuit of their goals.



I had expected that the scene where Jack Tarot and Robo meet would result in the two of them working together for the first time to capture and interrogate a fleeing crook, followed by Robo meeting Helen McAllister and everyone gelling into a team.

Right? No.

First, Jack kills the criminal he's chasing, much to Nightingale's chagrin. Then, when Robo approaches, instead of accepting him as an ally Jack rejects his help—with a bullet. Robo's unharmed, of course, but the scene ends without having produced anything resembling a team of three PCs.

I see a few ways to go from here.

- ▼ Another car chase, another chance meeting between Robo and one or two of the other PCs.
- ▼ Robo runs into Edison's robot, and Jack and/or Nightingale happen to be nearby to help.
- ▼ Compel Robo's *Adventure-Starved Eight-Year-Old* aspect to not take "No!" for an answer.

I decide on the third option. It's not a sure thing, of course, but I trust Robo to come up with an entertaining follow-up—which he of course does. In the next scene, when Robo follows Jack's tire tracks back to the pair's HQ and forces open their secret door, not only is it funny, it inextricably sticks Robo right in the middle of the McAllisters' lives.

TO BE CONCLUDED

A volume ends when you've run enough scenes to answer most of the story questions you came up with earlier. Sometimes you're able to do that in a single issue—a one-shot—if you have a lot of time or only a few questions. But if you have a lot of questions, it'll probably take four or five sessions to get through them all.

Don't feel the need to answer every story question if you've brought things to

a satisfying conclusion—you can either use unresolved story questions for future issues or volumes, or let them lie if they didn't get a whole lot of traction with the players.

The end of a volume usually triggers a **significant milestone** (see page 226). When this happens, you should also name the volume that just concluded—see page 229 for more on that.



CHAPTER ELEVEN: ACROSS THE FOURTH DIMENSION

Part of the charm of reading *Atomic Robo* is the way Robo's various adventures play out over a historical backdrop covering more than a hundred years. Any given volume, he might be punching out Nazis in World War II, visiting Mars in the '70s, confronting an extra-dimensional threat to reality in the Roaring '20s—the list goes on. And there's no requirement for any of these storylines to follow one after the other in a linear fashion. For example, in *Other Strangeness*, the fourth volume of *Atomic Robo*, we meet Undead Edison and learn a bit about the incident that made him what he is—but it isn't until the following volume, *Deadly Art of Science*, that we actually go back to 1931 and see how it happened.

Even if no one's playing a functionally immortal robot in *your* games, it's a still a great storytelling device for providing context, serving up loose ends to be tied later, or just exploring whatever corners of history strike your group's fancy. We call it a **flashback**, and this chapter's all about using it in your own stories.

PRINCIPALS AND FLASHBACKS

In talking about all of this, as a matter of convenience we're going to use the terms **principal** and **flashback** to differentiate between eras. Principal refers to your game's "regular continuity": the PCs the players normally play are the principal PCs, and the era in which your volumes are normally set is your principal era. (At the very least, the principal PCs are the characters played in the last issue or volume.) Flashback refers to, of course, the flashback itself: the PCs created specifically for the it—or the past-version equivalents of the principal PCs—are the flashback PCs, and the era to which you're flashing back is the flashback era.

It's entirely possible for the principal and flashback PCs to be more or less the same people—say, if the flashback doesn't flash back very far. But usually, they're different enough that separate terms for them are useful.

And yes, it's entirely possible to flash *forward* instead of back. There's even a brief instance of that at the end of one issue of *Atomic Robo*, when a one-page flash-forward jumps ahead to the year 2021. But we're still calling this thing a flashback.

WHY FLASH BACK?

Good question! It certainly isn't necessary for a great ongoing campaign of *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*. However, there are some compelling reasons to consider it.

▼ **REAL LIFE:** GM, say not everyone shows up this week, and the key character you were going to use to anchor this session isn't there. Sure, you *could* just scrub the session and play *Race To Adventure!*—but it's also a perfect time for a flashback to some past event that's influential to the story. And when the gang's all there next time, that flashback will provide an added sense of context and history to the proceedings.

▼ **EXPLORING HISTORY:** Sometimes it's all about that sense of context and history—you want to discover what kind of backstory lies behind what's happened in your campaign so far. You might flash back a few years to younger versions of the PCs for a story that sets up the events of the volume you just concluded. Then again, you might go back yet farther, to the early days of Tesladyne or even Tesla himself, with a whole new set of protagonists, to explore how something that happened way-back-when has affected the here-and-now.

▼ **HEY, WHY NOT?:** Maybe a throwaway remark about the Hollow Earth fires everyone's imagination. Maybe someone asks, "If Dr. Dinosaur's a genetic experiment gone wrong, he can't be the *only* one, right?" Or maybe it just sounds like fun, skipping over to a new set of characters for a volume to see what things were like in a distant time or place.



FLASHBACK BASICS

First, make sure everyone's on board. This may seem like a bit of obvious advice, but if even one of the people at your table isn't down with setting their current character aside and playing, if not an entirely different character, then at least a different *version* of the character they know and love, it's going to be a bad time. And if they're not into it, well, you know your group better than we do. So again: **make sure everyone's on board.**

DURATION

Assuming you have buy-in from the group, figure out how much time you want to devote to your temporal excursion. (Not how far back you want to go—just how long you want to stay there.) This affects not just the scope of the flashback, but also what characters, and maybe what *kinds* of characters, will be appropriate.

▼ **ONE-SHOT:** If you're just going for a one-shot—say, one or two issues—and it's in a past distant enough to exclude the principal PCs (or at least most of them), gin up some new ones using E-Z No-Math Character Creation discussed in *Making Characters* (page 30). Start with the broad strokes and use the flashback to zero in on something that makes the new PC interesting and potentially worth visiting again. Be a character actor. Of course, if your PC is long-lived enough to be personally involved in the flashback, like Robo or a rogue Helsingard brainbot, or just a regular Action Scientist if the flashback doesn't dip too far back into the past, it's perfectly cromulent to play a past version of them; see *Altering Existing Characters*, below.

▼ **VOLUME:** If you're in for a full volume-long story arc, on the other hand, character creation is likely to be a more involved affair, because the players are going to stick with the same PCs for several consecutive issues. Not that that's a problem, but it's something the group should consider. You're probably going to end up resetting the premise to a

degree, which itself may even require different PCs. "In this volume, the PCs are part of Tesla's Seven," or "Let's go back to 1926 and see how Tesla and three-year-old Robo secretly end up involved with Goddard's first rocket launch," or "You two said you used to be in Majestic 12 together before signing up with Tesladyne—let's see what you got up to back then." Again, if it makes sense to just use younger versions of existing PCs, use the guidelines below to do just that.

CONSTANTS

Oftentimes, it's a good idea to make use of a constant of some kind—a link between past and present, something to provide an explicit throughline between the events of different eras. One, it's a good way to keep the players and action focused on the point of the flashback. Two, when you return to your current time, assuming you do, everyone will have a new perspective on the link itself.

The most obvious constant used in *Atomic Robo* is, of course, Atomic Robo. The entire book is basically confined to his 90-odd years of existence, barring the occasional foray into Tesla's adventures in the 19th century or the bright future of Tesladyne in the year 2021. We've included a few different writeups of Robo from various points in his life (starting on page 252), which makes his role as a constant even easier to incorporate, if you so choose.

Tesladyne's another good candidate for this purpose—or, if you go back far enough, Tesla Heavy Industries, or even Tesla himself. If the principal PCs and the flashback PCs are all employees of Tesladyne, but separated by a few decades, that



The story told in *Atomic Robo and the Shadow from Beyond Time* starts at Tesla Heavy Industries in 1926, then skips ahead to involve iterations of Tesladyne in 1957, 1971, and 2009.

can easily be enough to provide that sense of connection you're looking for.

You could also go with Robo or Tesladyne's opposite—a longtime antagonist, such as Majestic 12, Project Daedalus, or Baron Von Helsingard. This way, the flashback PCs could be almost anyone, but as long as they're struggling against the same enemies the principal PCs face, there'll be a sense of continuity. Even better, if when you get back to the principal PCs they're throwing down with the contemporary version of the flashback antagonist, the players will relish a second chance to trounce them.



The first volume of *Atomic Robo* does this. In the premiere issue, Robo defeats Helsingard, only to face him again, many decades later, in issues five and six.

IMMEDIACY

How far back in time will you flash back?

▼ **LATERAL MOVE:** Technically, this is flashing sideways, not back, but it's the same basic idea. Instead of exploring a different time, you're exploring a different place, usually to see what was going on somewhere else in the world while the principal PCs were dealing with the events of the last volume. You might be Science Team Super Five, Daedalus agents, or some other Action Scientists in a foreign research station.

▼ **YOUNG ACTION SCIENTIST CHRONICLES:** Origin stories! What were the principal PCs like in the past? It's probably not

feasible to do this with all of the principal PCs at once. You might pick just one, and have the other players whip up new characters to fit in with their past. Or you might run an issue for each of the principal PCs to give everyone equal time. For most PCs, this will mean flashing back in time a few decades tops, so this sort of flashback is also ideal for reliving your youth. All of *Atomic Robo and the Deadly Art of Science* is basically the story of Robo's youth. It even ends with the words "The Beginning"!

▼ **PREVIOUS GENERATION:** Go back to a time in which most of the PCs probably weren't even alive, let alone old enough to be in the Action Science business. Maybe the PCs are working for Tesladyne in the '60s, flying with the She-Devils in the '50s, part of a special Allied unit in World War II, or daring adventurers exploring Mount Roraima in the '30s.

▼ **SECRETS AND LEGENDS:** The flashback PCs are people the principal PCs know of, if they know of them at all, only by reputation or half-believed stories passed down over the years. Look at the Centurions of Science from *Real Science Adventures*. Who today would believe that Nikola Tesla, Annie Oakley, Wong Kei-Ying, Harry Houdini, Charles Fort, George Westinghouse, and Winfield Scott Lovecraft ever teamed up to fight injustice at the end of the 1800s? Or go back even farther—who were the Sparrows of centuries past? The timeline (page 235) has a ton of story hooks, but there's a lot of implied history there as well to dig into.



ALTERING EXISTING CHARACTERS

If you're flashing back to a past recent enough that you're dealing with younger versions of one or more of the principal PCs, it's only natural to want to make adjustments to account for those lost years. In every respect that matters, the flashback PC is a new character, albeit one with similarities to the principal PC.

Don't get too caught up in the details. These rules won't tell you to lose X skill points for every 10 years younger the character is or something. That's needlessly restricting and misses the point of why you're flashing back in the first place.

Instead, think about what would be interesting about this younger, less-experienced version of the principal PC, and focus on that. Here are a few angles to consider.

▼ **A WORK IN PROGRESS:** Draw a clear line between the younger and older PC to explore how the former grew to become the latter. In essence, you're looking for a powered-down version of the principal PC—similar, but not the same.

What was Jenkins like as a raw recruit in Majestic 12, long before that ill-fated visit to the Vampire Dimension?

▼ **A STUDY IN CONTRASTS:** Show how different the character used to be. Maybe she was a bright-eyed idealist after college, but now she's into fringe science and wild conspiracy theories. The eight-year-old Robo of *The Deadly Art of Science* doesn't bear much of a resemblance to the confident 90-year-old ass-kicker of *Ghost of Station X*.

▼ **A MOMENT OF CHANGE:** Find the incident in the character's past that prompted an important change and helped make them who they are. In some ways, this is a variation on the previous two ideas—the flashback PC probably starts as a markedly different take on the character, but by the end of the flashback is a primordial but recognizable version of the principal PC.

Regardless, for most characters you can follow these guidelines. We'll use Atomic Robo himself as an example. See (page 252) for the four character sheets referenced here.

CONCEPT ASPECT

Come up with a new concept aspect to reflect how the flashback PC differs from its principal counterpart. If you don't think the concept aspect should change, that's fine—but be aware that your flashback PC is probably going to be more *interesting* for you to play if it's driven by a different concept.

▼ **1920s:** Robo's brand-new, and mostly notable for *what* he is, not *who* he is, so his concept aspect is ***I Am the Atomic Robot***.

We haven't seen it in the comic (not yet, anyway), but the death of Sparrow's older brother—a.k.a. the previous Sparrow—that drives her to take up the name and avenge him would make for a fantastic flashback.

▼ **1930s:** Nothing's really changed here, and won't while Tesla's still alive. His concept aspect remains the same.

▼ **MID-CENTURY:** Undertaking that first mission for the US military against Baron von Helsingard in '38 kicks off several decades of adventure around the globe, many of them on behalf of his country and the United Nations. His concept aspect changes to ***Special Agent Robo***.

▼ **MODERN DAY:** At the end of the 20th century, when Robo sees first-hand that Majestic 12 has been secretly using him for his own ends, he swears off the government work. Now renowned around the globe for his many years of exploits, he's become a ***World-Famous Robot Adventurer***.

MODES

Unless there's a significant divide between your flashback and principal PCs, you can keep the same modes. Switch their ratings as necessary to accommodate whatever change you want to emphasize. You may want to think about swapping out one mode for another. For example, Bernard (page 257) has the Action mode *now*, after his decade-plus of adventure and hair-loss with Tesla-dyne, but were we to flash back to his college days, it's a pretty good bet his flashback self wouldn't. If there is a big difference between the two versions of the PC—like maybe the principal PC is a cyborg, but the flashback PC isn't—then swapping out one of their modes is going to be a virtual necessity.

▼ **1920s:** Tesla builds Robo in 1923 to be a scientist, or at least an assistant to one, and in his early life the young robot really doesn't have any other influences. Being a super-strong, nearly invulnerable, immortal robot, he's certainly physically capable, but he's inexperienced, and with no real training in anything especially adventurous. Maturity-wise, he's basically a wide-eyed kid—enthusiastic and eager to meet people and experience the world, but with few sustained social interactions outside the lab. His modes are Good (+3) Science, Fair (+2) Robot, and Average (+1) Banter.

▼ **1930s:** After being trained by Donovan McAllister and having a few adventures of his own (not that being swallowed by an extradimensional being from beyond time and space doesn't count as "an adventure"), Robo's a bit of a different robot. He's still living with and studying under Tesla in New York, but his life's considerably less sedentary now. His modes are Good (+3) Science, Fair (+2) Action, and Average (+1) Robot.

▼ **MID-CENTURY:** Robo's adventuring career kicks off in earnest with his defeat of Baron von Helsingard (the first of many) during World War II, an act which earns him his citizenship and recognition of "personhood," first on behalf of the United States and then the United Nations. He becomes an accomplished pilot and

soldier, and even travels to Mars. After Tesla's death, he strives to uphold his father's legacy and build the aerospace firm that eventually grows into the Tesla-dyne of today, but despite accomplishments like the discovery of a fifth cardinal direction, the focus definitely shifts to action heroics over scientific endeavor. His modes are Good (+3) Action, Fair (+2) Robot, and Average (+1) Science.

▼ **MODERN DAY:** While refusing to do any further work for the US military hardly diminishes the adventure quotient in Robo's life—he's certainly kept busy with mobile pyramids, giant ants, sociopathic AIs, and much, much more—his attention returns to improving and expanding Tesla-dyne. His modes are Good (+3) Action, Fair (+2) Science, and Average (+1) Robot.

SKILLS

Messing around with your modes is, of course, also going to affect your skill ratings. Leave them where they are for now and just improve them during play. If you have three standard modes, you have the usual improvements to spend (see *E-Z No-Math Character Creation*, page 30). If you have one or more weird modes, use *Weird Character Creation* (page 32) to figure out how many points you have to spend on improving skills. Either way, treat this character as a new character in terms of the improvements or points you have to spend. The flashback PC predates the principal PC, after all, so any benefits accrued from milestones (*The March of Progress*, page 225) wouldn't apply to them anyway.

▼ **1920s:** Robo spends the vast majority of his time studying or helping Tesla conduct experiments. It's no wonder he earns his doctorate in physics in fewer than five years—thus, his Superb (+5) Physics. He also has Good (+3) Rapport and Fair (+2) Empathy, but that's less about social savvy than it is about him essentially being a well-liked kid, albeit a famous robotic one. Just like his dad, he has a bit of the ol' Tesla charm. The gear doesn't fall far from the clockmaker.

▼ **1930s:** By now, Robo's gained expertise in a number of scientific fields, but the main ones we care about are his Superb (+5) Electrical Engineering (after another decade with Tesla) and Great (+4) Hyperdimensional Mathematics, which he begins to investigate after his encounter with the Shadow from Beyond Time. His Great (+4) Athletics and Physique reflect his super-strength, but his Great (+4) Combat and Good (+3) Provoke and Vehicles derive more from his vigilante training and increasing experience as an Action Scientist.

▼ **MID-CENTURY:** Robo has become a full-time, globe-trotting problem-puncher. His Superb (+5) Combat and Vehicles show his confidence and experience both as a soldier and as an accomplished fighter pilot; the rest of his Action skills are basically continuing to develop in the same direction as they were before. Science may not be his focus anymore, but his broader experience base in a wider variety of applied sciences gives him Good (+3) Engineering—he displays expertise in electrical, mechanical, and aeronautical engineering, among others—and of course there's no getting away from those hyperdimensional mathematics.

▼ **MODERN DAY:** Little changes for Robo in terms of his skills from the previous version to this. With a sizable team of Action Scientists at his command to do the grunt work, his Science skills—Good (+3) Physics and Hyperdimesional Mathematics—have a more theoretical emphasis, but that's about it.

EVERYTHING ELSE

Use common sense here—keep what still fits and nix the rest. After altering your concept aspect, modes, and skills, you should have a pretty good idea of where that line is. When in doubt, lose it. You can always fill it in later.

▼ Some of Robo's other notable changes over the years include acquiring his Webley Mark VI revolver in the 1930s, the appearance of his Flying Tiger stunt after World War II, and his Team Player stunt in his final (?) version.

BRINGING IT BACK

When your flashback's come to an end—assuming it does—you'll return to your principal PCs—assuming you do. You might not, but let's proceed with that assumption for now. Here's what that means for everyone in your principal era.

VOLUME ASPECT

If your flashback has constituted a full volume, every faction involved gets a volume aspect, as usual (see *The March of Progress*, page 229)—both in the flashback era *and* the principal era. If you decide to return to that flashback era, the volume aspect will be there to give what happened last time some teeth. In the principal era, the volume aspect brings the past into the present.

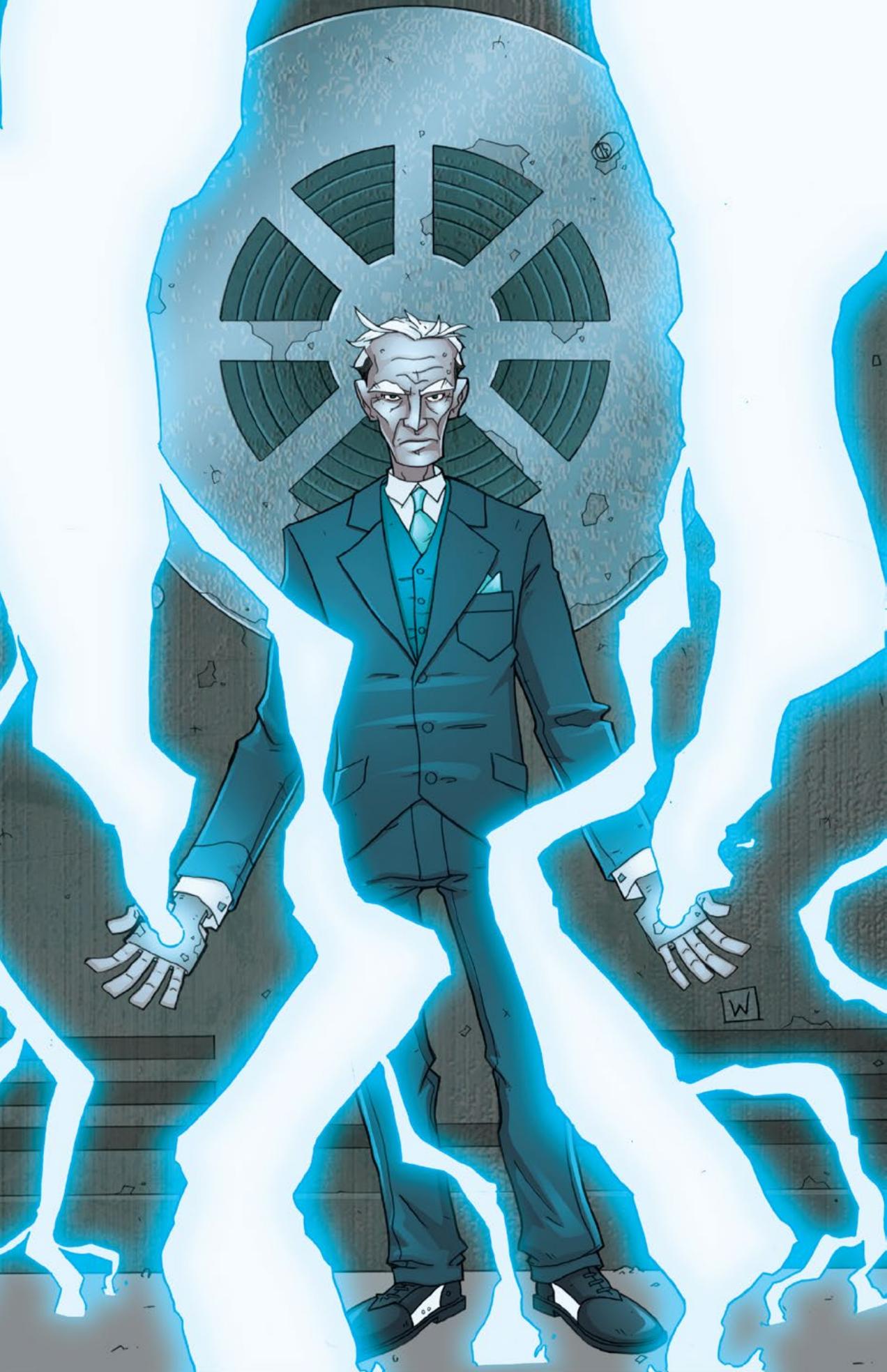
MILESTONES

Flashback PCs benefit from meeting milestones like usual, as outlined in *The March of Progress* on page 225. In extraordinary circumstances, it's possible for the principal PC to gain these rewards as well, if the player can make a convincing case for it and everyone thinks it's reasonable. For the most part, though, it doesn't make much sense—you've already established who that principal PC is. Plus, there's nothing less *Atomic Robo* than a ret-con.



In *Atomic Robo* continuity, *Other Strangeness* takes place in 1999 and *The Ghost of Station X* takes place in 2011. In between is a flashback to the early '30s, *The Deadly Art of Science*.

At the end of the volume, the PCs' faction in the flashback, Tesla Heavy Industries, gets a volume aspect of *Old War of the Currents Business*. At the start of the next volume, set in 2011, Tesladyne gets a volume aspect of *The Deadly Art of Science*.



CHAPTER TWELVE: TESLADYNE INDUSTRIES

For an Action Scientist in the field, Tesladyne offers a number of valuable resources, from intangibles like intelligence and scientific know-how to very real and dangerous tangibles like attack helicopters and lightning guns.

From its humble beginnings in Nikola Tesla's lab on Houston Street in New York City, Atomic Robo has built the company formerly known as Tesla Heavy Industries into the global phenomenon it is today. Following Tesla's death in 1943, Robo founded Tesladyne to continue his creator's work and insure his legacy. Since then, it's been an aerospace firm, a government contractor, an independent paramilitary think-tank... and, most recently, accused of international terrorism by some vocal pundits and politicians.

In some ways, Tesladyne is a character without a player. It has a mode (but only one—Resources) and a number of skills. It has aspects, though not as many as a character. It also has its own supply of fate points. What it *doesn't* have are stunts, stress tracks, or consequences.



THE RESOURCES MODE

Tesladyne has only one mode, **Resources**, with four associated skills: Armory, Intel, R&D, and Transport.

ARMORY

Tesladyne's facility with and access to weaponry. As can be seen repeatedly in *Atomic Robo*, Tesladyne has an impressive stockpile of armaments, and the capacity to make more.



Craft or repair weapons or armor, especially of the experimental variety. See *Invention* (page 139) in *Let's Do Some Science* for more on how this works.



Analyze implements of war to determine the method of their construction, their potential weaknesses, and so on. This will result in a story detail or an aspect, as the player desires and the situation warrants.

SPECIAL: This skill also indicates the quality of weapons and armor Tesladyne is able to make available to the PCs. When borrowing hardware from Tesladyne, the hardware's rating can't exceed the rating of Tesladyne's Armory. For example, if Tesladyne has Great (+4) Armory, a PC can borrow weaponry rated anywhere from Average (+1) to Great (+4), but not Superb (+5) or higher—Tesladyne simply doesn't have anything that sophisticated "in stock." This is likely to be the most common way players use this skill.

INTEL

Tesladyne's intelligence-gathering and analyzing capabilities.



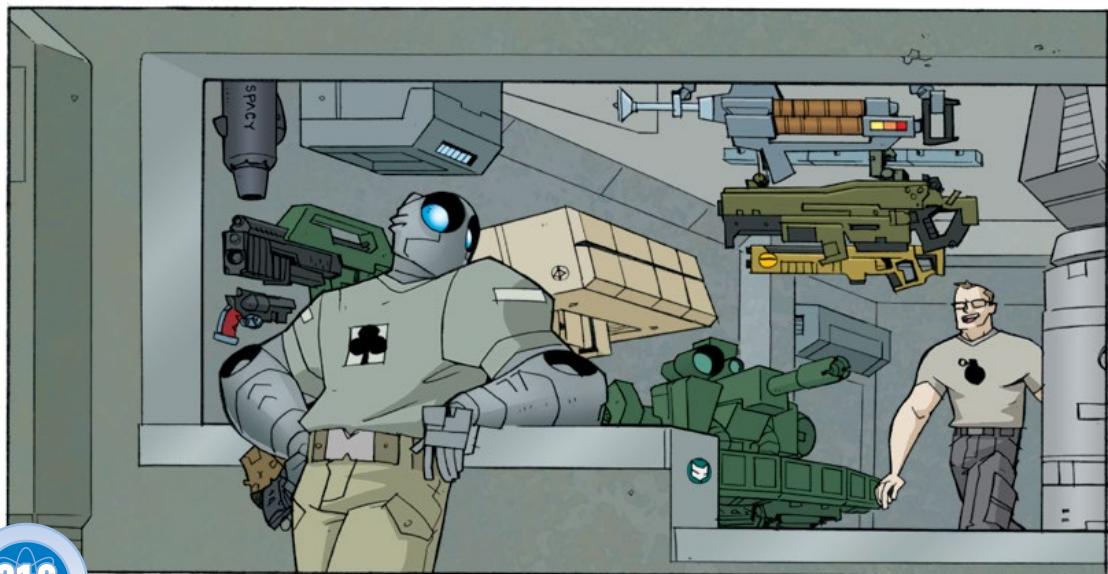
Trace signals, crack codes, crunch numbers, and other corporate-espy stuff, especially where they intersect with science and technology.



Intel is an extremely versatile skill when it comes to creating an advantage. As long as you're willing to take the time required, you can find out just about anything about anything. Likewise, it provides players with a lot of power to make up a wide range of story details, assuming they could reasonably unearth them. That might sound broad, but consider just a few of the possibilities: intercepting a phone conversation, using satellites to track a target's movements, conducting field surveillance, examining records—the list goes on.



Counter-intelligence—defend against another faction's use of this skill to either overcome or create an advantage.





R&D

Research and design. This is Tesladyne's all-purpose science skill, including its capacity for both producing new technology and making sense of whatever its Action Scientists bring back to the lab.



Overcome an obstacle related to scientific or technical knowledge, from figuring out how a high-tech device works to actually creating high-tech devices. This includes hardware, as detailed under *Invention* in *Let's Do Some Science* (page 139). If it can be built, broken, fixed, or analyzed, and it doesn't fall under the purview of another Resource skill, it's R&D.



Create aspects representing parts or features of a device, whether that's something useful (**Highly Sensitive Instruments, User-Friendly**) or problematic (**Hasty Work, Structurally Unsound**).

TRANSPORT

Tesladyne's fleet of transportation services, from its motorpool to its airstrip to (presumably) its submarine bay. This skill has a lot in common with Armory, but in a different context.



Craft, modify, or repair any sort of vehicle. See *Invention* (page 139) in *Let's Do Some Science* for more on how this works. Don't use this skill to determine how quickly the PCs can get from one place to another—it's not a substitute for the Vehicles skill.



Analyze a vehicle to determine its method of construction, potential weaknesses, and so on. This will result in a story detail or an aspect, as the player desires and the situation warrants.

SPECIAL: This skill also indicates the quality of vehicles Tesladyne is able to make available to the PCs. When borrowing this sort of hardware from Tesladyne, the hardware's rating can't exceed the rating of Tesladyne's Transport skill. For example, if Tesladyne has Good (+3) Transport, a PC can borrow a vehicle rated anywhere from Average (+1) to Good (+3), but not Great (+4) or higher—that's just beyond the scope of what Tesladyne can provide. This is likely to be the most common way players use this skill.



TESLADYNE IN PLAY

As an Action Scientist, you'll normally rely on Tesladyne HQ in two ways—for its knowledgeable Resident Scientists, and as a source of field-ready hardware.

RESIDENT SCIENTISTS

If the PCs can get in touch with the staff at HQ and feed them the necessary data, Tesladyne's Resident Scientists can make skill rolls all on its own. If the PCs are at HQ, however, they can really make the most of Tesladyne's resources by working with the Resident Scientists in person. A PC can make skill rolls using their own applicable skills *plus* Tesladyne's skills—add both skill ratings together for the roll.



Lang's found a DELPHI hard drive that's protected by some serious encryption software. She doesn't have the tools necessary to deal with it in the field. If she transmits the data back to HQ, she'll roll Tesladyne's Intel skill. If she takes it there herself and helps out with the work, she'll roll her own Cryptography skill and get Tesladyne's Intel rating as a bonus.

Clearly, working with the Resident Scientists can lead to some pretty sizable skill bonuses. But that's okay. In addition to emphasizing the importance of Tesladyne and what it can offer, it's a valuable reminder that the Action Scientists aren't the only hot-shots around.



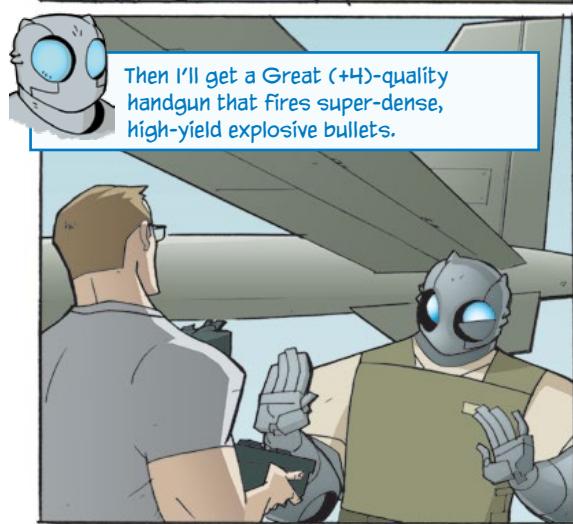
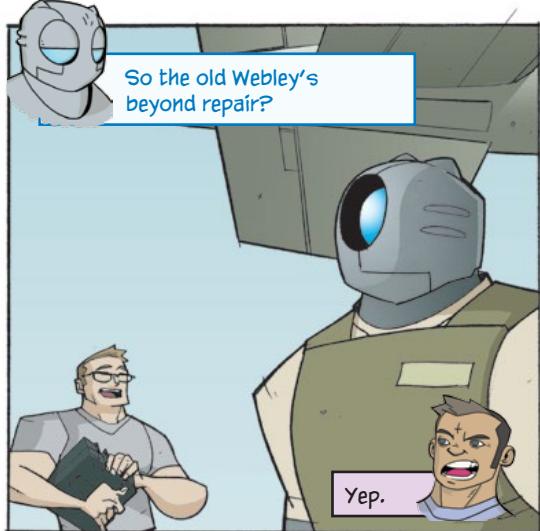
BORROWING HARDWARE

When they're at Tesladyne, either HQ or a branch office, the PCs can stock up on whatever hardware Tesladyne can provide. See *Mega-stunts* (page 76, in *Modes, Skills, and Stunts*) and *Invention* (page 139, in *Let's Do Some Science*) for details on hardware and how it works.

In part, players pay for hardware they borrow the same way they pay for inventions they create—by increasing the GM's fate point reserve (*Invention*, page 139). Unlike inventions, though, borrowed hardware doesn't come with any catches. It's assumed that someone else already went through all that trouble when they made it in the first place.

While Tesladyne has branch offices and research stations spread throughout the world—specifically, wherever it'd be convenient to have one for the sake of your story—only Tesladyne HQ is well-stocked in terms of hardware and Resident Scientists. Elsewhere, knock Tesladyne's Armory and Transport skills down by one or two steps, depending on how remote the location is.





ANTI-MATERIEL HANDGUN

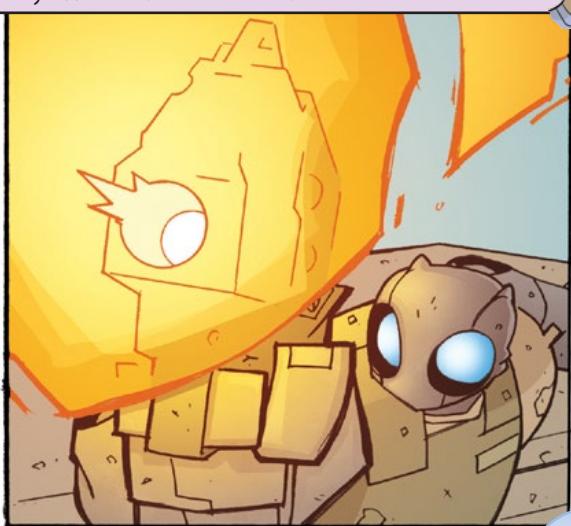
FUNCTION: *Serious Firepower*

FLAW: *Limited Ammo*

MEGA-STUNTS:

- ▼ **High-Explosive Rounds.** +2 to create an advantage with Combat. Weapon:4.
- ▼ **Anti-Materiel.** On an attack that succeeds with style, ignore the target's Armor rating, if any.
- ▼ **BKOOM!** Spend a fate point to (very loudly) destroy an inanimate object.

Good thivng you're at Tesladyne HQ. If you'd been at a branch office, the effective Armory rating would've only been Fair (+2) or Good (+3).



TESLADYNE'S ASPECTS

Tesladyne starts with three aspects. One of these is a **Mission Statement**, the factional equivalent of a character's concept aspect. The other aspects are the volume's two **pressures**—the external forces of immediate or lasting concern for Tesladyne and the PCs that will drive the volume's central conflicts.

Tesladyne gains additional aspects over the course of a campaign. At the end of a volume, erase both pressures and add a **title aspect**—the title of the volume that just concluded, and reflective of what happened during it.

When the next volume begins, fill in those two pressures again. See *The March of Progress* (page 227) for factors that influence a volume's pressures.

At the start of an issue, each of Tesladyne's aspects starts with one free invocation.

FACTION SHEET

FACTION NAME Tesla Heavy Industries

MISSION STATEMENT Science while you wait! **SUPPLY**

MODE AND SKILLS

Resources (+1)

R&D (+3)

Armory, Intel, Transport

PRESSESSES

The Deadly Art of Science

Bizarre String of Thefts

TITLE ASPECT(S)

COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES

MILD (-2)

MAJOR (-4)

SEVERE (-6)

EXTREME (-8)

TESLADYNE AND FATE POINTS

Tesladyne starts each volume with a number of fate points equal to the total number of its aspects, including its Mission Statement, its pressures, and its title



Let's go back to Lang and her encrypted hard drive. Whether she gets it back to Tesladyne and has the Resident Scientists crack it or she takes it there personally and deals with it herself, she has Tesladyne's supply of fate points to draw from. If she decides to handle it in the field, without relying on Tesladyne, she's on her own.



Tesladyne's supply of fate points is a good indicator to the GM of how to portray day-to-day operations at HQ. When Tesladyne's supply is at or near its usual starting total, it means there are plenty of Resident Scientists to go around. There might be only a few high-priority projects happening, or maybe whatever the PCs have going on is a top priority. The fewer fate points Tesladyne has in its supply, the more its resources are stretched. Things are hectic at HQ—there's just a lot of science to be done, or some sort of political or legal matter has everyone working extra hours.

aspects. This cache of fate points is called its **supply**. Players can spend from the supply instead of their own fate points when the PCs are at HQ and using Tesladyne's resources in some way. This could be anything from invoking an aspect when rolling one of Tesladyne's skills to spending a fate point to introduce a story detail.

In no case do they *have* to spend from the supply; it's just an option.

ADVANCING TESLADYNE

Both the events of a volume and the decisions of the PCs can have an effect on Tesladyne's skills. See *Advancing Tesladyne* (page 229) in *The March of Progress* for details.

You can find a few different faction sheets for Tesladyne's various incarnations over the years in *Character Writeups* (page 251).





CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE MARCH OF PROGRESS

When you sit down to play *Atomic Robo: The Roleplaying Game*, you're probably not sitting down to play a single issue before moving on to something else. That's a viable way to play the game and works well in a variety of instances, of course, but let's assume that you want the game to go a bit longer.

A **volume** is a complete storyline with its own themes, situations, antagonists, innocent bystanders, and endgame, told over the course of several **issues**—usually between four and six. Don't worry about having everything planned out in advance. In fact, given that no meticulously planned story ever survives contact with the players, you probably shouldn't. However, you *do* need to have an idea of where things begin, where you expect them to end, and what might happen in the middle.

To draw a parallel with the *Atomic Robo* comic series, “And Then There's the Robots” and “Nemesis” are issues, while *Dogs of War* is the name of the volume that includes those issues, as well as three other issues: “Operation Husky,” “Going Off Track,” and “It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow.” Each of those issues has its own story, but together they form a volume about some of Robo's run-ins with Otto Skorzeny and Dr. Vanadis Valkyrie during World War II.



WHAT IS A CAMPAIGN?

When you play through multiple volumes, you have a **campaign**. Campaigns are long, taking months or even years to complete (if you ever do).

Of course, that doesn't need to be as scary as it might sound. Yes, a campaign is long and large and complex. You don't, however, need to come up with the whole thing at once. As with a volume, you may have an idea where it begins and ends (and that can be helpful), but you really only need to plan a volume at a time.

See, the players are so prone to shaking things up and changing things on you that planning more than one volume at a time is often frustrating and futile. Planning the second volume of a campaign based on the events of the first volume, how it turned out, and what your players did, though... well, that can make for very satisfying play.

ADVANCEMENT AND CHANGE

Your characters aren't going to remain static through the entire campaign. As their stories play out, they'll have the chance to grow and change in response to the events that happen in the game. The conflicts they face and the complications they overcome will alter your sense of who they are and push them toward new challenges.

In addition to your characters, the game world will change also. You'll resolve threats as you play, and probably stir up new ones. You might change the face of a faction, or make such an impact on the world that one of a volume's pressures will change as a result. Your faction will grow and change alongside your character.

Character advancement in Fate Core comes in one of two flavors: you can either change something on your sheet to something else that's equivalent, or you can add new things to your sheet. The opportunities you get to do this are collectively called **milestones**.



WHAT IS A MILESTONE?

A milestone is a moment during the game where you have the chance to change or advance your character. We call them milestones because they usually happen at significant “break points” in the action of a game—the end of an **issue** or **volume** (see the *Telling Stories the Atomic Robo Way* chapter, page 184, for more info on what those terms mean).

Usually, those break points immediately follow some significant event in the story that justifies your character changing in response to events. You might reveal a significant plot detail or have a cliffhanger at the end of a issue. You might defeat a major villain or resolve a plotline at the end of a volume, or even resolve a major storyline that shakes up the campaign world.

Milestones come in three degrees of importance: minor, significant, and major.



I'm going to swap my Fair (+2) Deceive with my Good (+3) Provoke. I don't think I'm much for provoking people.



I'M GOING TO CHANGE MY SCIENCE ASPECT FROM A PRODUCT OF MAD SCIENCE TO BETTER LIVING THROUGH GENETIC EXPERIMENTATION. MY SELF-IMAGE IS BETTER THAN IT USED TO BE.



Y'know what? I'm fine with the way things are. I'm not going to change anything.

MINOR MILESTONES: MAKING AN ADJUSTMENT

When an issue concludes, you've reached a **minor milestone**. This gives you a chance to make an adjustment—less an improvement than a course correction. Think of it as a chance for you to fine-tune the character you've made so far, should you want to do so. Sometimes it won't really make sense to take advantage of a minor milestone, but you always have the opportunity if you should need to.

A minor milestone gives you the chance to do *one* of the following:

- ▼ You may swap the ratings of any two skills within a single mode.
- ▼ You may replace a stunt with another stunt, or a mega-stunt with another extra.
- ▼ You may rewrite one aspect that isn't your concept aspect.

In addition, you can also rename any moderate consequences you have, so that you can start them on the road to recovery, presuming you have not already done so.

This is a good time to make slight character changes, if it seems like something on your character isn't quite right—you don't end up using that stunt as often as you thought, or you feel you've resolved the **I Must Prove Myself** aspect that you had and thus it's no longer appropriate, or any of those changes that keep your character consistent with the events of play.

In fact, you should almost always be able to justify the change you're making in terms of the game's story. You shouldn't be able to change **I Want To Believe** to **Certified Skeptic**, for example, unless something happened in the story to inspire a serious change of heart—you revealed a convincing fraud, or had a traumatic experience, or whatever. GMs, you're the final arbiter on this, but don't be so much of a stickler that you sacrifice a player's fun for consistency.

RECOVERY
P. 119

SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

When a volume concludes, you've reached a **significant milestone**. Something important has happened, for good or ill, and your character grows as a result. Unlike minor milestones, which are primarily about change, significant milestones are about learning new things—dealing with problems and challenges has made your character generally more capable at what they do.

A significant milestone means:

- ▼ You earn one point. Points can be accumulated over time—you don't have to spend them all at once, and can save leftover skill points to spend later—and are spent to improve skills (as shown in the sidebar). You can also spend them to add new skills to a weird mode, if you have one.
- ▼ You gain an **experience**—a boost related to the events of the volume. This can reference a notable act, a lesson learned, a loss suffered, or anything else that happened during the volume that's worth writing down.

When you gain an experience, it sticks around until you use it, even if that means it's on your sheet through multiple issues or volumes. In every other respect, an experience is just like a boost. After invoking an experience, draw a line through it, but leave it on your character sheet. When you have three crossed-out experiences at the end of an issue, erase them all. You can never have more than three recorded experiences.

IMPROVEMENT	POINT COST
Focus a trained skill	1
Specialize a focused skill	2
Specialize a trained skill	3
Add a new skill to a weird mode	The cost of the skill



Bernard, Violet, and Robo have hit a significant milestone together, but each has chosen to improve themselves in different ways.

Bernard spends his single point to improve his Fair (+2) Contacts to Good (+3). He decides his experience for this volume will be *They Also Serve Who Only Stay in the Truck and Analyze Samples*.

Violet, who has saved up 2 points so far, adds a new skill to her Ape mode—Stealth, a 2-point skill. She may be a 500-pound ape, but she knows how to move. Her experience for this volume is *Cyber-Apes Are People Too*.

Robo opts to save the point earned from this milestone for later. As for his experience, he goes with *Always Put Guns on the Prototype*.

MAJOR MILESTONES: SHIFTING PRIORITIES

When you ~~erase three crossed-out experiences~~, you reach a **major milestone**. This is an opportunity for more meaningful change and growth. You've been through the wringer, and the lessons learned from your past experiences have served you well.

A major milestone means:

- ▼ You earn one point.
- ▼ You may swap the ratings of any two of your modes, if doing so can be justified through the events of the volume, either immediately or at the end of the issue.



After having used three experiences each, Bernard, Violet, and Robo have all hit a major milestone.

Bernard saves his point for later and leaves his modes as-is. Not big on change, that Bernard.

Violet also saves her point from this milestone, but decides to swap the ratings of her Ape and Action modes, with the rationalization that the past few volumes have seen her acclimating to society more and more.

Robo follows their example and banks his point for later, then swaps the ratings of his Science and Robot modes.

MILESTONES STACK!



That's right! When you reach the end of a volume, that's also the end of an issue, so you get the benefits of both a minor milestone and a significant milestone. And if you have three crossed-out experiences, you get a major milestone, too.

COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES AND FALLOUT

In addition to these milestones, ending a volume with a severe or extreme collateral consequence carries its own effects for the campaign. The actions of the PCs have caused enough trouble, indirectly or otherwise, that it's going to come back and bite them sooner or later.

However, those same actions took *guts*. Maybe some tough decisions were involved, or the PCs barely made it out alive. Despite their downsides, severe and extreme collateral consequences can result in—or be the result of—transformational experiences. They quite literally *build character*.

When a volume ends with a severe collateral consequence, each player may rewrite any one aspect, *including* their concept aspect. **When a volume ends with an extreme collateral consequence**, you *must* rewrite one of your aspects. This can include your concept aspect.

In addition, whether the collateral consequence was severe or extreme:

- ▼ Each player earns one point.
- ▼ Each player may replace one mode with another, if doing so can be justified through the events of the volume.

When you rewrite one of your aspects as a result of a collateral consequence, the new aspect *must* be consistent with both the consequence and the events of the volume.

THESE STACK TOO!



These benefits also stack with milestones, so if you end a volume with three crossed-out experiences and a severe or extreme collateral consequence, you'll get the effects of a minor, a significant, and a major milestone, plus you'll earn another point and have the option to swap out a mode.



The PCs have barely escaped the perils of the Hollow Earth with their lives, more or less, but with an **extreme** collateral consequence to show for it. A few

things happen because of this. One, everyone has to rewrite an aspect. Two, everyone earns a point (2 points, including the significant milestone they just hit), and three, everyone can replace one mode with another mode, if they can justify doing so using the narrative so far.

Bernard decides his time down below has left him a changed man. He replaces his Average (+1) Intrigue mode with Action, then spends the 2 points he's accrued to focus both Athletics and Combat, making them Fair (+2). Finally, he rewrites his Science aspect to *The Things I've Seen*. Seems like he's really turned a corner.

Violet banks the 2 points for later, but changes her Omega aspect from *I'll Sit Where I Like to Haunted by a Brush with Death*. No more happy-go-lucky cyber-ape.

Robo, of course, was taken out by that huge explosion at the end there, but he can change an aspect, spend his points, or swap out a mode when we get back to... wherever it is he ended up.

FALLOUT

When you end a volume with a severe or extreme collateral consequence, there's always **fallout** as a result.

GMs, when you end a volume like this, think about the potential ramifications of the the collateral consequence that's just been removed. Whom is it going to rile? Whose attention will it get? What are they going to do about it? That's your fallout.

At the start of the next volume, this fallout becomes one of the volume's two pressures. That trouble the PCs caused that's going to bite them sooner or later? Yeah, turns out it's sooner.



Remember when Jenkins took that severe collateral consequence of *Civilian Casualties* in *The Ghost of Station X*? (See the example on page 120 of *Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts* for a reminder.)

Well, that did not look good for Tesladyne—Majestic 12 saw to that. And it'll cause trouble for Tesladyne in the next volume. That collateral consequence will inspire one of the volume's two pressures. *The Court of Public Opinion* sounds good. The public's never really turned against Robo before, but that's all about to change....



ADVANCING TESLADYNE

Most of the time, Tesladyne Industries is nothing more than an Action Scientist's support system—it provides them with hardware, backs them up with labsful of Resident Scientists, and gets them from Point A to Point B. But it's also the repository for shared history of those very same Action Scientists. Their adventures in the field leave an indelible mark on Tesladyne.

Over time, Tesladyne can change and advance right alongside the scientists affiliated with it. Similar to PCs, these changes mainly occur as a result of milestones and collateral consequences.

TESLADYNE AND SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES

When you reach a significant milestone:

- ▼ Tesladyne gains a **title** aspect—the title of the volume that just wrapped up. This aspect is permanent, and starts each volume with one free invocation.
- ▼ You may swap the ratings of any two Resources skills.



The players kibbitz for a bit brainstorming volume names—*Atomic Robo and His Adventures Under the Earth, Beyond the Crystal Caverns*, and so on—until reaching consensus on *The Savage Sword of Dr. Dinosaur*.

They *could* swap the ratings of two of Tesladyne's skill, but decide to leave them where they are for now.

TESLADYNE AND COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES

Sometimes, the trouble a team of PCs can cause in the field can be so serious, so *problematic*, that the ramifications can permanently shift their faction's focus, aims, or philosophy.

When a volume ends with an extreme collateral consequence, rewrite the faction's Mission Statement. It's up to the players to hash this out. Whatever the new Mission Statement ends up being, it *must* reflect the circumstances of the extreme collateral consequence that prompted the change.



The extreme collateral consequence they took is also going to have a big effect on Tesladyne. They've been forced out of their HQ on Tesladyne Island, and the Action Scientists are basically scattered to the four winds. Tesladyne's current Mission Statement is *Remain Calm and Trust In Science*, but that'll have to change.

The players settle on a new Mission Statement: *Remain Alert and Trust No One*.



Man, this next volume's gonna be *dark*.



IMPROVING TESLADYNE'S SKILLS

Tesladyne didn't grow from a relatively small aerospace firm to the action-science powerhouse it is today without the help of a lot of dedicated people over the years. At its root, Tesladyne is those people working together to make things happen.

Players always have the option to spend points they've earned to improve Tesladyne's skills. Story-wise, it's a matter of the PCs pouring time and effort into developing and enhancing the facilities and people "behind the scenes" rather than themselves.

Numbers-wise, spending earned points to improve one of Tesladyne's skills works just like it does for improving a PC's skills, with two exceptions. One, it costs twice as much, as shown on the table below. Two, the players can't improve more than one of Tesladyne's skills per significant milestone.

IMPROVEMENT	POINT COST
Focus a trained skill	2
Specialize a focused skill	4
Specialize a trained skill	6

Factions aren't independent entities—without this commitment from the PCs, the faction's skills will remain where they are.



All right. *Here's* where I'm spending my points. It all goes back into Tesladyne, starting with improving R&D from focused to specialized, making it Great (+4) instead of Good (+3). That's four points.

We'll hire more Resident Scientists and spend a small fortune upgrading our lab facilities. It's what Mr. Tesla would've wanted.

IMPROVING TESLADYNE'S RESOURCES

Altering Tesladyne's Resources rating, however, is a much less concrete matter. The big-picture success or failure of a faction can't be definitively tied one way or the other to the mere passage of time, or even to the efforts of a handful of its operatives.

Instead, at each significant milestone, the GM should look to the events of the concluded volume to determine whether or not—and how—a faction's fortunes will change. Sometimes, the events of the volume will make this a fairly easy call. In these cases, the GM should feel free to bump that Resources rating up or down by 1.

If things aren't so one-sided, however, the GM can turn to the three factors shown below—the faction's assets, the PCs' performance, and the nature of the volume's conclusion. For each of these, choose one of the listed options and write down the corresponding number (-1, +1, or +0).

ASSETS

Did the actions of the faction's PCs...

- ▼ ...cause the faction to spend or lose significant assets? *If so*, -1.
- ▼ ...result in the faction acquiring significant new assets? *If so*, +1.
- ▼ ...result in neither of these? *If so*, +0.

PERFORMANCE

In the course of pursuing their objectives, did the faction's PCs...

- ▼ ...fail to prevent innocent deaths, the destruction of public property, or other bad stuff in such a way that people in general sit up and take notice? *If so*, -1.
- ▼ ...save lives, protect property, or otherwise do conspicuous good? *If so*, +1.
- ▼ ...do most of their work in a secret bunker, a remote island, or somewhere else devoid of any third-party witnesses? *If so*, +0.

CONCLUSION

Thanks to the actions of the faction's PCs, did the volume conclude in a way that...

- ▼ ...strongly favors other factions or entities opposed to the PCs' faction, or that paints the PCs' faction in an unfavorable light? *If so*, -1.
- ▼ ...strongly favors the PCs' faction? *If so*, +1.
- ▼ ...doesn't really favor anyone in particular or anyone else? *If so*, +0.

Now total your three answers.

- ▼ If your total is **positive**, increase the faction's Resources by 1.
- ▼ If your total is **negative**, decrease the faction's Resources by 1.
- ▼ If your total is **zero**, do nothing.

Regardless, the maximum Resources rating is +3.



In *Atomic Robo and the Fightin' Scientists of Tesladyne*, Tesladyne doesn't really gain or lose any significant assets. We did spend about three issues in a couple Helsingard bunkers, but we also got outside long enough to blow up a priceless mobile pyramid in Egypt—and very likely saved the lives of millions in Luxor by doing so. However, that didn't completely mollify the Egyptian president, let me tell you.

For Assets, that's a +0. Gaining or losing assets wasn't really a focus of the story.

For Performance, that's a +1. Saving half a million lives carries more weight than destroying a pyramid. It's a close one, though.

For Conclusion, that's a -1. Tesladyne may have won a moral victory, but blowing up a pyramid is something of a PR disaster in Egypt.

Our three answers total +0, so Tesladyne's Resources rating remains where it is.



ADVANCING NPCs

Who would would Robo be without antagonists like Helsingard and Dr. Dinosaur?

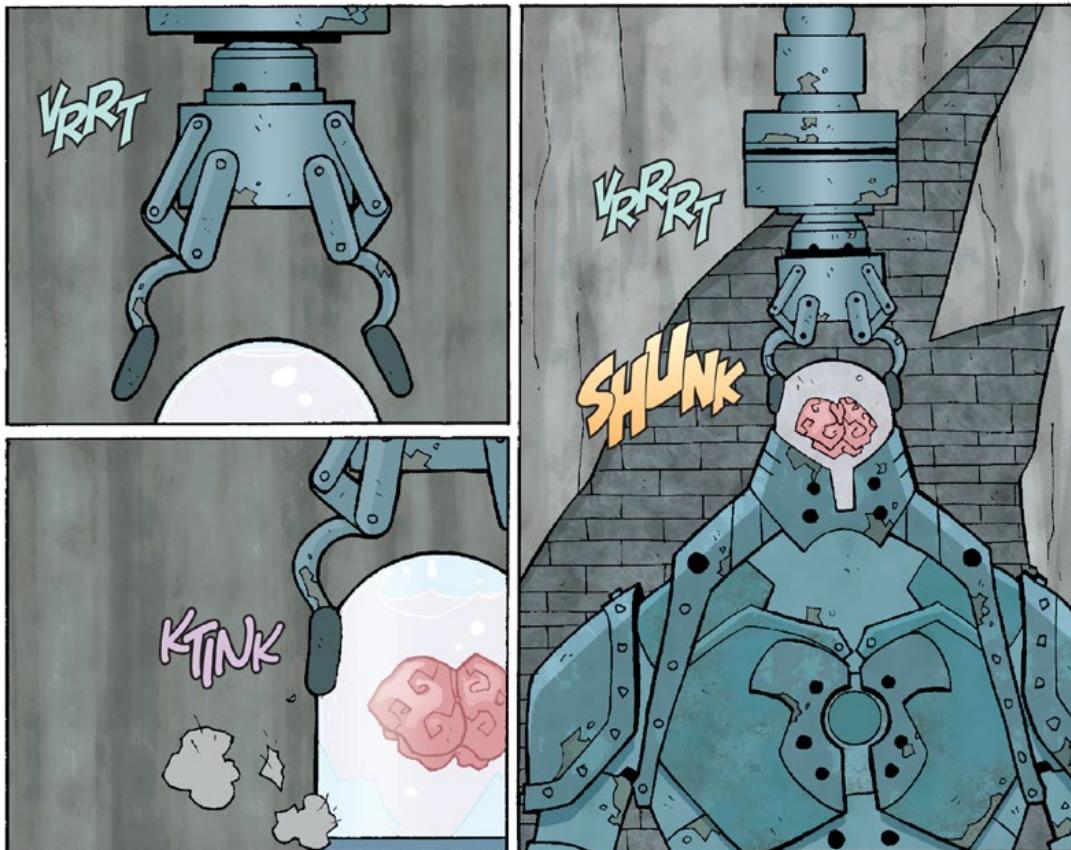
Would we even recognize him without these villains who oppose him? *Can there be light without shadow?* Probably, yeah. We're not exactly talking about Batman here.

Still, recurring NPCs who grow and change alongside the PCs are often a key factor in turning a series of issues or volumes into a genuine *campaign*.

There are essentially two ways to reuse NPCs. You can either use them to *show how the PCs have grown since they started*, or use them to *show how the world is responding to their growth*.

With the former, you don't change the NPC, because that's the point—the next time the PCs meet them, they've outclassed them, or they have new worries, or they've somehow grown past that NPC, who remains static. Maybe you even change the category they're in—where they were once a main NPC, now they're a supporting NPC because of how the PCs have grown.

With the latter, you allow the NPC to advance like the PCs have—you fiddle with their modes and skills, change their aspects around, give them a stunt or two, and otherwise do whatever is necessary to keep them relevant to the PCs' endeavors. This kind of NPC might be able to hang around as a nemesis for several volumes, or at least provide some sense of continuity as the PCs become more powerful and influential.





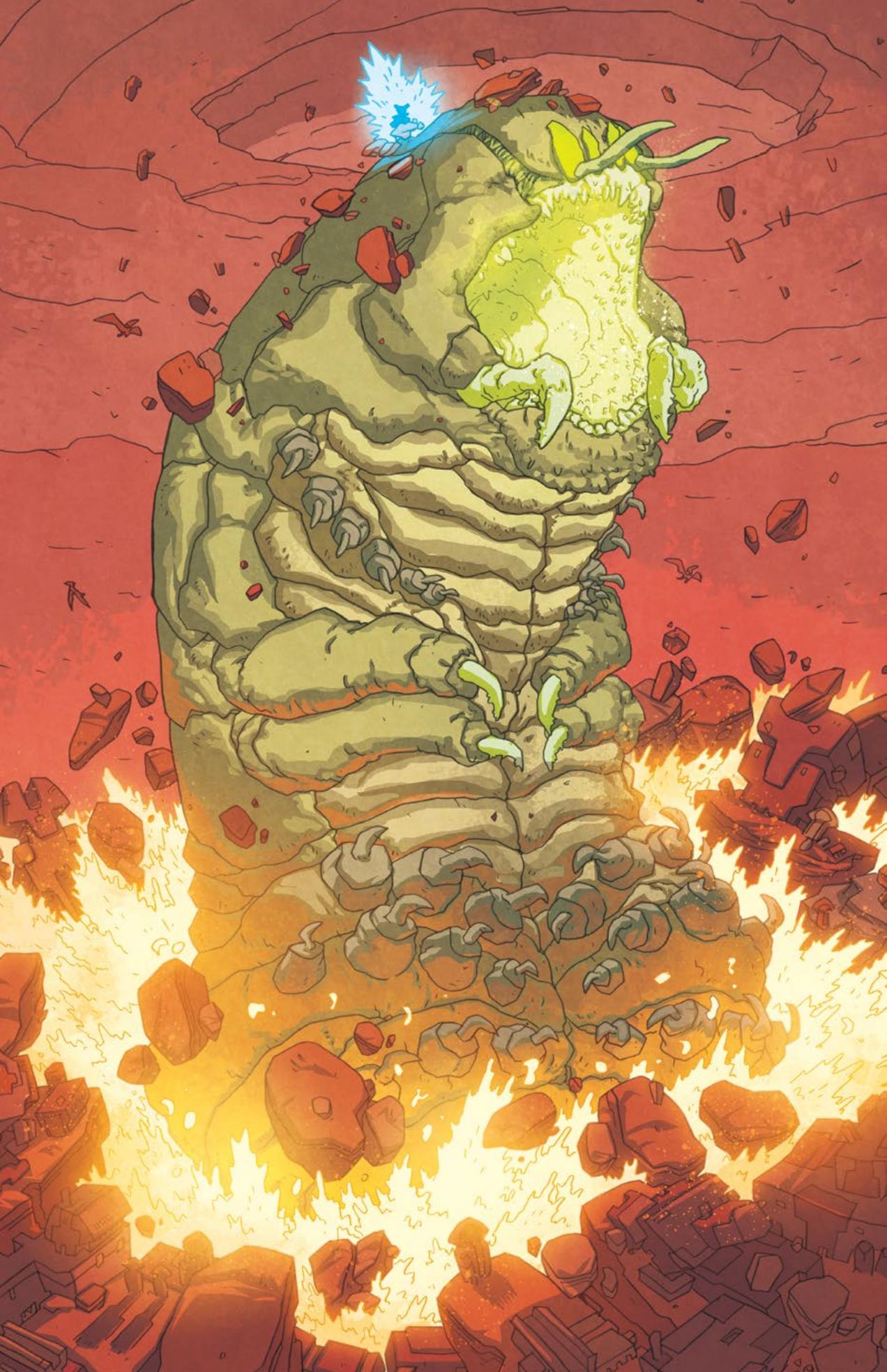
Let's say instead of being defeated and exploded by Action Scientists, a Helsingard warbot survives to machine another day. But every incarnation of Helsingard is a little different than the one before. The next time the players encounter him, I want to mix it up a bit.

First thing I'll do is improve his *Provoke* to +6. He's survived an encounter with *Atomic Robo*—that's gotta have a positive effect on his ego, and make him more of a psychological threat to the PCs. And I'll change his omega aspect to ***Defeated Atomic Robo***. (Survived, defeated... what's the difference to a megalomaniac like Helsingard?)

If I were feeling especially challenging, I could tack on a stunt to give him a bonus to Combat or Provoke when facing enemies he's faced before. And maybe I'll swap out the Autosoldats for a genuine, cult-like following of loonies dedicated to restoring Helsingard to his former glory.

It may seem like that'd limit his faithful to the truly insane, but think about it. He's a scientific genius, and the only being on Earth who knows the secrets of vril. We may not go for it, but a lot of people would be *very* interested in what he has to offer. Instead of hiding out in a bunker, he could be the power behind the throne of a powerful corporate CEO or unpredictable world leader—all of which would make for a much different story and antagonist. The players might not even know they're up against him until the very end!

 ATOMIC ROBO THE ROLEPLAYING GAME	
NAME Helsingard	
AFFILIATION	
CONCEPT ASPECT <i>The True Heir to the Helsingard Empire</i>	
GOOD MODE ASPECT	
GREAT (+4) MODE Warbot SPECIALIZED SKILLS: Combat, Physique FOCUSED SKILLS: Athletics, Provoke TRAINED SKILLS	
GOOD (+3) MODE Science SPECIALIZED SKILLS: Engineering, Robotics FOCUSED SKILLS: Notice TRAINED SKILLS	
FAIR MODE ASPECT	
AVERAGE MODE ASPECT	
OMEGA ASPECT	
SEVERE (-6) CONSEQUENCE	
MODERATE (-4) CONSEQUENCE	
MILD (-2) CONSEQUENCE	
FANTASTIC (+6)	
SUPERB (+5)	
GREAT (+4)	
GOOD (+3)	
FAIR (+2)	
AVERAGE (+1)	
MEDIocre (+0)	
STUNTS & EXTRAS <i>Warbot Weaponry:</i> Absolutely stronger than any human, but weak to strong electromagnetism; Weapon:2 when strength would matter; +1 to attack or create an advantage with Combat when attacking at range. <i>Warbot Armor:</i> Bulletproof, but weak joints; use Physique to defend against all other physical attacks.	
EXPERIENCE	
EXPERIENCE	
EXPERIENCE	
PHYSICAL STRESS <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MENTAL STRESS <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
EXPERIENCE	



CHAPTER FOURTEEN:

TIMELINE

In this chapter, you'll find a broad timeline of major events of Atomic Robo's lifetime, whether depicted in the comics or merely implied. It's great for tying your adventures into the larger world and history of *Atomic Robo*. Think of it as a series of plot hooks and dangling loose ends arranged in chronological order. Each of these entries asks an unanswered question, if you look at it from a certain perspective. Answering even one of them can produce an entire volume of new stories.

That said, it's important to note that the intent of this timeline is to *inform* and *inspire* your stories, not constrain them in a straitjacket woven of rigid canon. There's plenty of room for more adventure in between these entries. In fact, the creators of *Atomic Robo* invite you to go hog-wild with your deviations from the source material. Fight Nazis in Hollow Earth. Fend off an invasion of Helsingard's *Vermachstellung* tripods in 1938 New Jersey. Defend the Opening Ceremonies of the 1984 Summer Olympiad from the forces of a Department Zero splinter group. Whatever floats your boat.



If you're in need of more guidance, *Telling Stories the Atomic Robo Way* (page 179) has tips on how to use this timeline in creating your stories.

1883: A SKY OF IRON

Helsingard constructs the aeroship *Basilisk* at an unknown location presumably near the nation's industrial heart of Ohio. *Basilisk*, a heavily armored and weaponized variant of Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin's proposed airship designs, is the most advanced instrument of war ever conceived. It is capable of transporting hundreds of tons of materiel and deploying them from well beyond the retribution of conventional weaponry. *Basilisk* is to be the vanguard of Helsingard's conquest of the American West starting with California. It crashes on its maiden flight at Groom Lake, Nevada. The explosion is so large it is witnessed as far away as the sleepy town of Las Vegas.

Federal investigators eventually find the crash and the United States' first secret military weapons program, Project Daedalus, is established at the crash site. The location acquires several names during the 20th century, including Paradise Ranch and Home Base, but the most ubiquitous is Area 51.

1800

1800S: CENTURY OF PROGRESS

The Age of Enlightenment. The Industrial Revolution. Technology changes more, and in more ways, than ever dreamt possible. Every facet of society is changed, and the rate at which humans must cope with the continued acceleration of these changes *itself* accelerates.

This era sees the zenith of the Gentleman Adventurer and their Explorers' Clubs, only to watch them wane as ever-increasing mechanization allows corporate influence and governmental power to expand into every sphere of modern life.

1850: HELSINGARD BEGINS

Approximate birthdate of Baron Heinrich von Helsingard, the Emperor of Crime.

1880S: THE WAR OF THE CURRENTS

The public sees it as a battle between famous industrialists Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse over the best method to distribute electricity—direct current (DC) or alternating current (AC). In reality, there's something much weirder at stake. DC generators harmonize with the Od, a worldwide field of energy Edison hopes to manipulate in a bid for immortality. Nikola Tesla invents AC and teams up with Westinghouse to promote it to put a stop to Edison's mad plans.



1893: THE TRIUMVIRATE

A cabal of industrialists plot to flood Manhattan via the abandoned pneumatic tube network and sink the entire island. This will devastate the struggling economy and plunge national morale to lows not seen since the Civil War. The industrialists would then use the popular unrest to justify their overthrow of the United States government via a secret high tech army they'd been training for years. The combined efforts of Nikola Tesla, Winfield-Scott Lovecraft, Wong Kei-Ying, Annie Oakley, George Westinghouse, Charles Fort, and Harry Houdini put an end to this plot and save the people of Manhattan Island from certain doom.

1895: NEMESIS

Helsingard's second aeroship. The Warzeppelin *Nemesis* is constructed in secret at Bermeja Island in the Gulf of Mexico. Its mission to carpet bomb major capitol and industrial centers of the East Coast is thwarted by Nikola Tesla's so-called "Centurions of Science" aboard the experimental electric "sky schooner" *Intrepid*. The *Nemesis* suffers a catastrophic series of explosive engine failures and crashes into the Gulf.

"NIKOLA TURNED HIS GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT AND HIS DREAM OF FREE ENERGY FOR THE WORLD INTO A RAY CANNON TOO POWERFUL TO LET STAND."



1900

1905: THE MIRACLE YEAR

In the space of this single year, German-born physicist and patent clerk Albert Einstein receives his PhD at the University of Zurich and publishes groundbreaking papers on mass and energy equivalence, special relativity, Brownian motion, and the photoelectric effect. Taken together, these works revolutionize conventional views on space, time, and matter. Over the course of the next three years, he is widely regarded as one of the leading scientists in the world.

1908: THE SHADOW FROM BEYOND TIME

Charles Fort and Winfield Scott Lovecraft confront Tesla at his NYC laboratory with evidence of an entity from outside the universe that will breach our reality and devour it backwards through time. Tesla is able to convert the Wardenclyffe Tower into a prototype weapon to distort space and time for a fraction of a second to "repel" the entity via explosive force. The immense shockwave is felt for miles and becomes known as the Tunguska Event. Much of the equipment at Wardenclyffe is melted or otherwise ruined. It will never function again.

1916: SPACETIME

Einstein publishes his general theory of relativity, linking space and time with energy, matter, momentum, and radiation via 10 equations based on Newton's law of universal gravitation and Einstein's own special relativity. In many ways, it marks the beginning of modern physics.

1924: THE GHOST OF RASPUTIN

Thomas Edison uses his increasing mastery of the Odic Field to summon the "ghost" of legendary Russian monk and all-around weirdo Rasputin in an attempt to assassinate Atomic Robo.

1923: THE ATOMIC ROBOT

Nikola Tesla is 67 years old. His days of adventure are long behind him. His reputation is still in ruins after Wardenclyffe's spectacular failure to produce results. His career is in its twilight. Then he reveals his greatest invention, an automatic intelligence named Atomic Robo.

Robo is a controversial figure, and lacks both citizenship and human rights. Industrialists such as Thomas Edison and Henry Ford decry him as a hoax by even as they plot to steal and dissect him for their own purposes.

1926: THE SHADOW RETURNS

First of Atomic Robo's several confrontations with the "exoversal" entity first encountered by Charles Fort, Winfield Scott Lovecraft, and Nikola Tesla. This event leads Atomic Robo to pioneering "Zorth Cartography," the study of the so-called fifth cardinal direction.

1929

"STRATEGY? EVEN IF TESLA WERE HERE AND COULD STOP IT AGAIN, WE DON'T KNOW WHEN OR WHERE IT'LL COME BACK! IT'S HOPELESS! WE CAN ONLY HOPE TO DELAY IT."

"BALONEY. YOU FIGURED OUT ITS APPEARANCE OVER TUNGUSKA AND YOU FIGURED OUT IT WAS BACK NOW."

FWAARG

1930: DEADLY ART OF SCIENCE

A series of robberies involving obscure scientific gear and a mysterious crystal skull from South America draw the attention of Jack Tarot, vigilante scourge of the underworld.

1936: THE TURING MACHINE

Thirteen years after the creation of Atomic Robo, mathematician Alan Turing proposes an “automatic machine” that employs logical algorithms to perform calculations. It is the birth of computer science and an important first step toward developing an artificial intelligence that *isn’t* Atomic Robo.

1930

1931: THE WIZARDS DUEL

High above Manhattan in the Empire State Building, Tesla and Edison finally clash face-to-face, bringing their full scientific capacities to bear—one using electricity, the other, Odic Energies. Edison is vaporized in an explosion of those very same energies.

1932: CHADWICK'S DISCOVERY

English physicist James Chadwick discovers a previously unseen subatomic particle, one without a positive or negative charge—the neutron. Within the space of a decade, this leads to the development of the first nuclear bomb.



1937: SCIENCE CITY

Guglielmo Marconi fakes his death to oversee the development of the world's most advanced (and secret) research facility, Science City, built within Mount Kukenan deep in the Venezuelan wilderness.

1939: THE GENIUS OF BLETCHLEY PARK

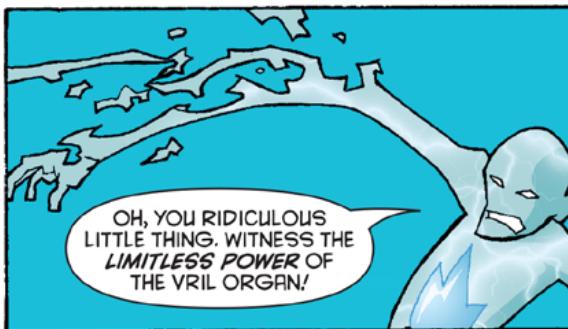
The day after the United Kingdom declares war on Germany, Alan Turing starts work at Bletchley Park as a cryptanalyst. Within weeks of his arrival, he devises an electromechanical device for decoding Germany's Enigma machine. Turing dubs his creation the Automated Learning Algorithm Network, or ALAN. Throughout World War II, Turing's contributions to cryptanalysis prove invaluable to the Allied effort.

1938: THE VRIL TO POWER

Helsingard is tracked to a remote Himalayan mountain complex where he is spearheading research into the recently uncovered "vril organ" of Hollow Earth. Atomic Robo is sent to stop the program before the vril organ can be used to imbue Hitler with otherworldly powers. Helsingard implants the organ into himself, as he had planned to do all along, and is transformed into pure energy. Atomic Robo destroys the entire complex in a tremendous explosion that vaporizes the top quarter of the mountain. He is the only survivor.

1940: SECRET WEAPON

Influenced by the events of the war, Science City has shifted focus. Its new primary objective is to construct and launch an orbital bombardment weapon platform to force unconditional Allied surrender no later than December 1943.



1941: FLYING TIGERS

Atomic Robo does not return to the United States following his Himalayan adventure. He travels across India and China, becomes a pilot, and joins the American Volunteer Group to help defend China against the Japanese military.

1942: CITIZEN ROBO

In recognition of his efforts against Helsingard four years prior, Atomic Robo gains full American citizenship and “personhood.” He goes on to serve his country in a variety of special operations throughout World War II.

1941

1942: THE DOGS OF WAR

Atomic Robo is transferred to the European Theater when the AVG comes under command of the U.S. Army Air Corps. His superhuman endurance, strength, and durability make him ideal for extended operations deep behind enemy lines, including the critical role he plays in destroying the Laufpanzer “walking tanks” of Otto Skorzeny. By 1943 all known Laufpanzers are destroyed; Skorzeny, however, escapes. Robo helps British special operative the Sparrow to defeat the Monster Men of Dr. Vanadis Valkyrie. In the aftermath, no one’s able to make a full accounting of Dr. Valkyrie’s altered test subjects.

1943: DEATH OF A GIANT

Nikola Tesla dies in a mysterious explosion at his New York City home and laboratory. The FBI secretly collects all surviving notes and equipment before Atomic Robo is able to disengage from his wartime operations. Tesla’s death sparks a covert movement among a number of governments worldwide to acquire and weaponize his inventions.



1945: OPERATION PAPERCLIP

Atomic Robo is recruited by the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency to collect scientific personnel from various Nazi “wonder weapon” programs to prevent them from falling into Soviet hands. The success of Paperclip relative to Russia’s efforts leads directly to the establishment of Department Zero.

1947: THE MAGIC SPACESHIP

Jack Parsons, rocket scientist and occultist, conducts a combination experimental manned rocket flight and magical Thelemic ritual in the skies over Southern California’s Mojave Desert. He believes this ritual, if successful, will transform him into a god. It will also mean crashing into the city of San Bernardino and killing thousands. He’s stopped in mid-air by Atomic Robo, who loses an arm in the process.

1945: THE COLLAPSE OF SCIENCE CITY

Marconi successfully launches the orbital weapon system, “The Spear of Destiny,” days after German surrender. The launch triggers an earthquake that buries Science City, all personnel, and the Spear’s remote command center. The Earth’s first artificial satellite, beating Sputnik by twelve years, orbits in silence and secrecy.

1949: THE FALL OF FORRESTAL

After nearly two years of various personal difficulties, Forrestal meets his end when he plummets from the 16th floor of the US Naval Hospital at Bethesda, Maryland. His death is declared a suicide, though the exact circumstances behind his demise are uncertain. Conflicting stories emerge, running the gamut from Communist assassins to UFOs. Truman confiscates Forrestal’s private journals, some 3,000 handwritten pages in loose leaf binders, the contents of which remain unknown.

1947: MXII

At the urging of James Forrestal, America’s first Secretary of Defense, President Truman signs the order to establish Majestic 12, a beyond-secret government agency dedicated to researching and weaponizing the salvaged remains of Tesla’s lab. Oversight of Majestic 12’s formation is limited to Forrestal, Truman, Dr. Vannevar Bush, and the Director of the CIA.

1949

1951: THE FLYING SHE-DEVILS OF THE PACIFIC

Atomic Robo's test flight of Tesladyne's new aerospike propulsion system takes him to uncharted waters of the South Pacific where pirates and mercenaries jockey for abandoned WWII materiel. One pirate band, The She-Devils, take Robo in. Together they thwart a rogue Japanese military unit's plot to sink California and render 80% of North America uninhabitable using Earthquake Bombs pioneered by Tesla's work. The loss of the aerospike pushes Tesladyne to the brink of bankruptcy.

1953: HELSINGARD TAKES MANHATTAN

A large multi-legged Helsingard warbot attacks Tesladyne HQ in the Empire State Building. After a protracted, destructive battle, Atomic Robo manages to blow it up. This does nothing to help Tesladyne's fledgling finances.

1950

1955: PROJECT AQUATONE

The CIA transforms much of Project Daedalus into Project Aquatone to design the what will become the U-2 spy plane. The remaining Daedalus personnel shift their attentions to Helsingard's more esoteric technologies, most notably direct human-machine interfaces.

1961: VOSTOK 1

Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin becomes the first human being to travel into outer space and to orbit the Earth aboard the Vostok 3KA. From launch to landing, Gagarin's voyage lasts only 108 minutes.

1954: OBNINSK ONLINE

The Soviet Union debuts the first civilian nuclear power station to supply energy to a power grid, in Obninsk, one of the USSR's major "science cities." The facility doubles as a training base for the K-3 Lениnsky Komsomol, the first Soviet nuclear submarine.

1957: THE SHADOW OVER CLOVERDALE

Robo and three Tesladyne employees—Mac, Ira, and Slim—confront the Shadow in Oregon. This incident marks the beginning of Tesladyne's transition from an aerospace firm into a scientific think-tank and troubleshooter. It's also around this time that Robo starts to become more critical of the US government and the Cold War.

1961: THE Czar Bomb

The Soviet Union's greatest nuclear weapons genius conducts work so top secret that his very existence is erased from all records and he is sequestered in the Arctic Circle for thirty years. He has access to an unlimited budget, but Soviet paranoia and bureaucracy slows his work to a crawl and allows other scientists to make the breakthroughs he could have. He constructs the most powerful nuclear weapon ever conceived to ignite the entire atmosphere and render the Earth a dead rock. Atomic Robo is sent to stop him on what will become his final official mission for the military.

1962: CENTRALIA, POP. 2,104.

Robo crashes a secret Project Daedalus facility underneath Centralia, Pennsylvania. In the process, he destroys dozens of clandestine experiments and may or may not have triggered a subterranean coal fire in the mines that that rages to this day. Robo never finds out what Daedalus was up to.

1967: ZORTH REVEALED

After half a century of research, Robo discovers the fifth cardinal direction, the Zorth Axis, hyperspatially curled up next to the other four. This might be the most significant cartographic discovery since longitude, but Robo keeps it to himself for another four years.

1969: ACCOLADES AND HONORS

In recognition of Robo's assistance preventing World War 3, the United Nations sanctions Tesladyne to act as an independent paramilitary body dedicated to investigation into and defense against anomalies and threats of a scientific nature.

1968: THE SPEAR OF DESTINY

Dr. Vanadis Valkyrie reactivates Marconi's "Science City," the heart of the Nazi space program hidden in the mountains of Venezuela. The base controls the Spear of Destiny orbital weapon system. Dr. Valkyrie will use it to start World War 3 so Helsingard can emerge to rule the new world. Atomic Robo and two generations of Sparrows are able to divert the Spear of Destiny so that it instead attacks and destroys Science City itself.

1969: A GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND

Aided by a computer less sophisticated than a typical digital watch, American astronaut Neil Armstrong becomes the first human being to set foot on another world—the Moon—as part of the Apollo 11 spaceflight. He is joined by Buzz Aldrin. The two spend approximately two and a half hours on the lunar surface.

1969

1970S: BETTER, FASTER, STRONGER

Project Daedalus' refinements of Helsingard's bio-mechanical innovations continue unabated. By the middle of the decade, agents routinely undergo mechanical augmentation.

1970: LEAPING METAL DRAGON

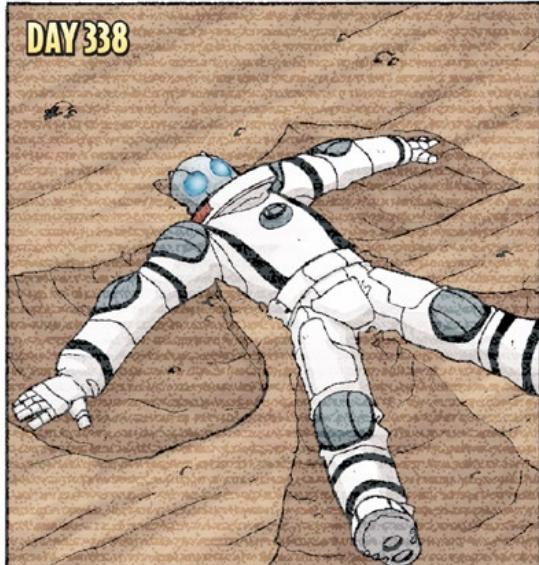
Robo travels to Hong Kong to train with martial-arts legend Bruce Lee. While there, the two end up in conflict with criminal kingpin Tao Jones and his Ice Devil Gang.

1971: THE SHADOW OVER PERU

With the reluctant help of Carl Sagan, Robo manages to capture the Shadow From Beyond Time in a hyperdimensional containment field using highly untested theories derived from his studies of the Zorth Axis.

1970

DAY 338



1974: HAWKING AND THE ROYAL SOCIETY

A year after publishing his first book, *The Large-Scale Structure of Space-Time*, Stephen Hawking demonstrates that black holes emit radiation, now known as Hawking radiation. Soon thereafter, he receives a Fellowship in the Royal Society; at 32 years of age, he's one of the youngest scientists to be so honored.

1974: A VIKING ON MARS

Atomic Robo is the secret envoy to the Viking I mission to Mars. Stephen Hawking, embroiled in a continuing rivalry with Robo over their competing cosmological theories, attempts to drive Robo insane from the extreme isolation by sabotaging his supply of media. Robo exacts his revenge by spending the duration of the mission spelling STEPHEN HAWKING IS A BASTARD on the surface of the planet in letters large enough to be visible from orbit.

1984: THE MIRRORSHADE OVERDRIVE

Project Daedalus, now completely controlled by their Helsingard brain, attempts to hijack the Strategic Defense Initiative Phase 2 Architecture—an array of secret orbital lightning guns—to hold the world hostage.

1985: HELSINGARD IN FRANCE

Atomic Robo and his Action Scientists confront another Helsingard warbot in France. They successfully blow it up.

1990: THE ULTIMATE MAP

An international coalition of scientists begins the Human Genome Project in an attempt to more fully understand the human species by identifying and mapping the approximately 25,000 genes of the human genome.

1993: SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

The Soviet “Dead Hand” doomsday weapon malfunctions and begins ticking down to an automated nuclear holocaust. Atomic Robo gathers the world’s top experts on the Dead Hand system: the retired rogues and secret operatives who conducted the original mission to disable it ten years previously.

1996: THE SURVIVOR

The Many Worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics is valid, and the “closest” world to ours is filled with mindless super-strong cannibal monsters swarming over the ruins of a charred Earth. Majestic 12 calls Robo in a last ditch effort to salvage their exploratory mission into this “vampire dimension.” The man known as Jenkins is the only survivor.

1999: OTHER STRANGENESS

It's a weird year for Tesladyne. First, a Heim-Droescher experiment at HQ accidentally opens a portal to the Vampire Dimension. Thanks to brute force, action geology, and Jenkins, the Earth isn't overrun by millions of bloodthirsty monsters. Then, during Robo's visit to Big Science Inc. in Japan, the first Biomega incident in 15 occurs. Science Team Super Five manage to take down a number of Biomega drones and Dr. Shinka himself, now hideously mutated into a Biomega "Shinka-beast." Shortly thereafter, on Taravai Island, Robo has his first run-in with noted lunatic and violence-enthusiast Dr. Dinosaur. As if the year hadn't been bizarre enough, back at HQ, the consciousness of Thomas Edison, dispersed throughout the Earth's Odic Field for nearly 70 years, coalesces at the Empire State Building. He vows revenge against Atomic Robo and disappears. Eventually he retreats to an abandoned Majestic 12 facility in Montauk, New York.

1999

2000: SEX AND THE COSMOS

Neil deGrasse Tyson—respected author, holder of two advanced degrees in astrophysics from Columbia University, and heir apparent to Carl Sagan's legacy as America's preeminent science communicator and advocate—is named the Sexiest Astrophysicist Alive by *People Magazine*.

2009: FROM BEYOND

The Shadow from Beyond Time intersects with 2009—six years ahead of schedule, according to Robo's calculations—thanks in part to Martin and Louis' quantum decomputer, which may or may not be evil. It takes the combined efforts of four Atomic Robos from 1926, 1957, 1971, and 2009, plus some trademark violence from Jenkins, to properly blow up the Shadow and defeat it for all times. Literally.

2005: HELSINGARD UNEARTHED

A detachment of Action Scientists investigates a Helsingard bunker beneath an uncharted village in the Apennine Mountains of Italy. The place is a virtual museum of Helsingard's many engineering achievements. It's also home to dozens of hibernating Autosoldats and a vengeful Helsingard brain in a warbot, which the team defeats by blowing it up.

2007: THERE'S A PYRAMID IN EGYPT

Tesladyne is called into action when an Egyptian pyramid becomes distressingly mobile. Worse, it's armed with a solar-powered death ray and headed straight for the city of Luxor. Robo infiltrates the pyramid and finds that it is powered by steam, staffed by a small army of clockwork mummies, and carrying out a 5,000-year-old water clock program that's just now reached completion. It's an astounding technological achievement. Atomic Robo stops it by blowing it up. For this, he and Tesladyne are subsequently banned from Egypt. The purpose of the pyramid's program remains a mystery.

2011: THE GHOST OF STATION X

The Automatic Learning Algorithm Network has been using its influence to prolong the Cold War so it could slowly bleed nuclear material from the U.S. and Soviet stockpiles to fuel the giant "orioncraft" it secretly built under Hashima Island, Japan so it could escape the inevitable collapse of human civilization projected to occur no later than 2025. The radioactive fallout from this launch would kill 99% of all life on the surface. Robo is forced to destroy ALAN's "brain" to stop the launch.

2011: ROBOT OF INTEREST

ALAN, in a desperate bid to stop Robo from reaching it, uses its influence over worldwide bureaucratic infrastructure to conjure evidence that Robo had spent several decades illegally trafficking nuclear material. The charges are dropped in the wake of ALAN's defeat when physical evidence fails to align with ALAN's trumped up paper trails. Even so, the scope of the charges and the speed with which they are dismantled only fuels the suspicions of some in the government and media that there is "obviously" an even larger and more dangerous terrorist conspiracy with Robo at its center.

MARCH 2013: CENTRALIA, POP. ALL GONE!

Geology becomes **action** geology when Robo, Lang, and Bernard's "routine" visit to Centralia runs afoul of the Yonkers Devil. The team also meets future Action Scientist Elizabeth Foley—in the course of saving her life—for the first time.



2013

JUNE 2013: TESLADYNE UNDER SIEGE

Taking advantage of Robo's absence, Majestic 12 forces, acting on behalf of the Department of Energy thanks to top secret bureaucratic chicanery, raid Tesladyne Island. Within 24 hours they seize all Tesladyne property and personnel—mostly. Some of the latter manage to escape with some of the former, and scatter to the winds. They await word from Robo, Jenkins, anyone. For now, the future of Tesladyne, and Tesla's legacy, remains uncertain.

JUNE 2013: THE SAVAGE SWORD OF DR. DINOSAUR

The outrage-based wing of the 24 hour news cycle continues to "just ask questions" about Robo's involvement with the hijacked nuclear material found during the Hashima Incident. Robo, in an effort to get away from the media circus, joins a field team investigating cryptid sightings uncomfortably near the remains of Science City in the Venezuelan wilderness. There, Robo and his field team discover an entrance into Hollow Earth where a crystal-silicate based ecosystem has evolved independent of the solar-carbon ecosystem of the rest of the Earth. And Dr. Dinosaur is there too. He has built a Time Bomb to destroy or rewrite the previous 65 million years so the dinosaurs never became extinct. Atomic Robo is last seen attempting to disarm the Time Bomb just moments before its detonation. On the bright side, the Time Bomb appears to have no effect on the timeline. Because that's not how explosions work.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN:

CHARACTER

WRITEUPS

Unless otherwise labeled as an NPC, the characters presented here are intended to be played as PCs. Several of the main NPCs in the following pages have mode ratings that exceed the norm for PC—for example, Great (+4), Good (+3), and Fair (+2) instead of Good (+3), Fair (+2), and Average (+1). This is to make them more of a threat to the PCs they'll face. However, you can turn these NPCs into PCs fairly easily by dropping their mode ratings to PC-levels. They're otherwise built just like PCs.

NPCs with more than five stunt benefits have a listed cost in fate points, like “2 points from the GM's budget.” Bringing the NPC into the game, as written, costs that many fate points, to be paid from the GM's scene budget, the reserve, or some combination of the two.

A NOTE ON SKILLS

Only focused and specialized skills are shown for these characters. Any “missing” skills not listed under a given mode are assumed to be trained. For example, if a character with Good (+3) Action has Superb (+5) Notice and Great (+4) Athletics, but that's it, you can take it as a given that her other Action skills—Combat, Physique, Provoke, and Vehicles—are all trained, and rated at Good (+3).



KID ROBO

THE 1920S

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE

FAIR (+2) ROBOT

AVERAGE (+1) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Physics, Will

Great (+4):

Athletics, Physique

Good (+3): Rapport

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Notice

Fair (+2): Empathy

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *I Am the Atomic Robot**

SCIENCE: *Full-Time Student*

ROBOT: *The New Wonder of the World*

BANTER: *Well-Meaning Kid*

OMEGA: *Yearning For Adventure*



STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

ATOMIC STRENGTH: Absolutely stronger than any human (Physique), but at a cost; Weapon:2 with hand-to-hand attacks; +2 to overcome with Athletics when jumping.

JUST GUNS?: Bulletproof, but weak to strong electromagnetism; Armor:1 against everything else.

SIGNATURE ASPECT. *I Am the Atomic Robot*

(Total Benefits: 6 – 5 = 1 fate point added to the reserve)



STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

MILD:

MODERATE:

SEVERE:

TEEN ROBO

THE 1930S

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE

FAIR (+2) ACTION

AVERAGE (+1) ROBOT

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Physics, Electrical Engineering

Great (+4):
Athletics, Combat, Physique

FOCUSED

Great (+4):
Hyperdimensional Mathematics, Will, Notice

Good (+3):
Provoke, Vehicles

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *I Am the Atomic Robot**

SCIENCE: *There Are No Failures in Science*

ACTION: *Built Like a Tank*

ROBOT: *Tesla's Finest Creation*

OMEGA: *Mentored by Jack Tarot*



STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

ATOMIC STRENGTH: Absolutely stronger than any human (Physique), *but* at a cost; Weapon:2 with hand-to-hand attacks; +2 to overcome with Athletics when jumping.

JUST GUNS? Bulletproof, but weak to strong electromagnetism; Armor:1 against everything else.

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *I Am the Atomic Robot*

WISEACRE: +2 to create an advantage with Provoke when cracking wise.

WEBLEY MARK VI REVOLVER. +1 to attack with Combat; Weapon:1

(Total Benefits: 8 – 5 = 3 fate points added to the GM's reserve)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

MILD:

MODERATE:

SEVERE:

SPECIAL AGENT ROBO

MID-CENTURY

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) ACTION FAIR (+2) ROBOT AVERAGE (+1) SCIENCE

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5):

Combat, Vehicles

FOCUSED

Great (+4):

Athletics, Provoke, Notice, Physique

Good (+3): Will

Fair (+2): Electrical

Engineering, Hyperdimensional Mathematics

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Special Agent Robo**

ACTION: *Fighting the Good Fight*

ROBOT: *Virtually Indestructible*

SCIENCE: *One of the Foremost Engineers in the World*

OMEGA: *Notorious Ace Aviator*



STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

ATOMIC STRENGTH: Absolutely stronger than any human (Physique), but at a cost; Weapon:2 with hand-to-hand attacks; +2 to overcome with Athletics when jumping.

JUST GUNS?:

Bulletproof, but weak to strong electromagnetism; Armor:1 against everything else.

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *Special Agent Robo*

WISEACRE: +2 to create an advantage with Provoke when cracking wise.

FLYING TIGER: +1 to overcome or create an advantage with Vehicles when piloting

(Total Benefits: 8 – 5 = 3 fate points added to the GM's reserve)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

MILD:

MODERATE:

SEVERE:



ROBO THE VETERAN

MODERN DAY

MODES AND SKILLS:

	GOOD (+3) ACTION	FAIR (+2) SCIENCE	AVERAGE (+1) ROBOT
SPECIALIZED	Superb (+5): Combat, Notice, Vehicles	Great (+4): Hyperdimensional Mathematics, Physics	
FOCUSED	Great (+4): Athletics, Provoke, Physique	Good (+3): Will	

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *World-Famous Robot Adventurer**

ACTION: *Decades of Dangerous Experience*

SCIENCE: *Hope This Works!*

ROBOT: *Virtually Indestructible*

OMEGA: *Preserving Tesla's Legacy*



STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

ATOMIC STRENGTH: Absolutely stronger than any human (Physique), but at a cost; Weapon:2 with hand-to-hand attacks; +2 to overcome with Athletics when jumping.

JUST GUNS?: Bulletproof, but weak to strong electromagnetism; Armor:1 against everything else.

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *World-Famous Robot Adventurer*

WISEACRE: +2 to create an advantage with Provoke when cracking wise.

TEAM PLAYER: Invoking a situation aspect created by an ally gives you a +3 bonus instead of +2. (Total Benefits: $8 - 5 = 3$ fate points added to the GM's reserve)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

MILD:

MODERATE:

SEVERE:

JENKINS

A former member of the Majestic 12 extra-planar exploratory division “First Earth Battalion.” The first mission was a disastrous excursion into the so-called “vampire dimension.” M12 called upon Atomic Robo to secure as many survivors as possible. Jenkins was the only one to make it back. He left Majestic 12 and became Atomic Robo’s personal bodyguard.

A LOOK AT JENKINS’ WEIRD MODES

- ▼ **Jenkins Mode:** Athletics, Combat, Notice, Physique, Provoke, Stealth, Vehicles, Will
- ▼ **Survivor Mode:** Athletics, Notice, Physique, Will

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) JENKINS

FAIR (+2) ACTION AVERAGE (+1) SURVIVOR

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Athletics, Combat, Notice, Physique, Will

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Provoke, Stealth, Vehicles



ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Tesladyne’s One-Man Army*

JENKINS: *A Cultivated Air of Terror*

ACTION: *Grimly Pragmatic*

SURVIVOR: *The Vampire Dimension Couldn’t Kill Me*

OMEGA: *Jenkins Doesn’t Sleep—He Holds Back*

STUNTS:

EX-SEAL BERET DELTA: +2 to attack with Combat when unarmed, with melee weapons, or with firearms; +2 to create an advantage with Stealth when sneaking up on someone.

HARD TO KILL: Once per scene, when you take a physical hit, you can check two physical stress boxes and absorb shifts of harm equal to their total. You also have Armor:1.

TACTICAL ADVANTAGE: In a physical conflict, before rolling dice on your turn, you can remove a boost from play.

OUT OF NOWHERE: As long as you’re not being directly observed and there’s a reasonable way to leave, you can disappear from a scene. Spend a fate point later (in the same scene or a subsequent one) to reappear in an unobserved spot.

COMBAT KNIFE: Your attacks with this weapon can damage Bulletproof targets.

(Total Benefits: 10 – 5 = 5 fate points added to the GM’s reserve)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

MILD:

MODERATE:

SEVERE:

THE FIGHTIN' SCIENTISTS OF TESLADYNE

The Action and Resident Scientists presented here are “proto-PCs”—sketches of characters with plenty of room for player customization. Each consists of the following:

- ▼ Two aspects—a concept aspect, and one other aspect. Fill in the rest during play.
- ▼ Three standard modes—no weird modes.
- ▼ A number of skill improvements, as shown for each character.
- ▼ One stunt. Fill in the rest during play.
- ▼ Stress boxes.
- ▼ Consequences *aren't* listed, but these characters are intended to be played as a PCs, so each has the standard complement of mild, moderate, and severe consequences.



BERNARD FISCHER

A paleontologist, paleobotanist, and geologist by trade, Bernard was attracted to a career at Tesladyne because its then-New York City base of operations would have been close to his mother. Bernard's near sightedness, slight asthma, poor marksmanship, age, and physical fitness make him an unlikely candidate for action science. But his quick and lateral thinking have earned him a place as one of Robo's most trusted agents to accompany him personally on all manner of field missions.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE

FAIR (+2) BANTER

AVERAGE (+1) INTRIGUE

SPECIALIZED **Superb (+5):** Paleo-botany, Paleontology

FOCUSED **Great (+4):** Geology, Notice, Will
Good (+3): Contacts, Deceive

- ▼ Skill Improvements (2 points): Focus two trained skills.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Mild-Mannered Action Scientist*

OMEGA: *Wrong Place, Wrong Time*

STUNTS:

LATERAL THINKER: During a brainstorm, you may use Will in place of any other Science skill.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

KOA

A native of Maui, Koa's childhood interests in hiking and nature led to his early work in pursuing environmentally friendly weapons of mass destruction. He was approached by a number of high-level military R&D firms during an industry-wide fad attempt to sell the public on less-apocalyptic visions of total warfare, but he found a home at Tesladyne where his unconventional approach to problem solving has been consistently put to non-WMD use.



MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) ACTION

FAIR (+2) SCIENCE

AVERAGE (+1) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

Great (+4):

Solar Energy Technology

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Notice

Good (+3): Will

▼ Skill Improvements (6 points): Specialize two trained skills.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Thinks Outside the Box*

ACTION: *Beat Megaman 2 Without Getting Hit*

STUNTS:

PHD IN DEATHRAYS: +1 to create an advantage or attack with Combat when using experimental or unconventional weaponry.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

VIKRAM ABASI

The son of a Kenyan cosmologist and Pakistani quantum mechanic studying abroad in the U.S., Vikram was exposed to wild ideas about the nature of reality from an early age. Today he is known as Tesladyne's fringe theory "early adopter." Some mistake this as a gullibility on his part, but Vikram is simply excited where new and unproven ideas may yet lead. His current obsession is with the Imaginary Physics school of Grand Unified Theory.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) BANTER

FAIR (+2) SCIENCE

AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED

Great (+4):

Imaginary Physics

FOCUSED

Great (+4):

Provoke, Will

Good (+3): Notice

Fair (+2): Combat

▼ Skill Improvements (5 points): Specialize one trained skill, specialize one focused skill.



ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Unconventional Idealist*

SCIENCE: *I Reject Your Reality*

STUNTS:

WILD THEORIES: +2 to all Science skills during a brainstorm when developing your own hypothesis instead of cooperating with everyone else.



STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

ADA BIRCH

Though named after her grandmother, it was a childhood encounter with the biography of yet another Ada, in this case Lovelace, that led her to a career in electrical engineering and computer science. Ada is Tesladyne's chief techie. She prefers to work at HQ, but understands the value Robo places on her contributions to field missions.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE FAIR (+2) BANTER AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED **Superb (+5):**

Computer Science

FOCUSED **Great (+4):**

Notice, Will

Good (+3):

Provoke

Fair (+2): Athletics,

Combat, Vehicles

▼ Skill Improvements (3 points): Specialize one focused skill, focus on trained skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Tesladyne's Chief Techie*

SCIENCE: *Give It To Me In Zeroes and Ones*

STUNTS:

THERE'S AN ALGORITHM FOR THAT: When using a technological device that has a computerized component—even a single microchip—spend a fate point to operate it using Computer Science instead of whatever other skill would normally apply until the end of the scene.



STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

BENJAMIN SMITHFIELD

A northern California native, Benjamin grew up in the shadow of Silicon Valley. He developed an early interest in technology that began with fixing his father's ancient and unused HAM radio set and soon led to dismantling the family computer. Ben's interest in dissecting complex systems brought him into the late '80s / early '90s hacking scene. Ben hacked to demonstrate limitations of software and hardware, and the absurdity of legislation being proposed to make up for them. He went "straight" when he was accepted into Stanford where his loose approach to conventional practices kept him skirting the edge of disciplinary action. Ironically, it was this very reputation that kept him from working in the Valley and made Tesladyne his home.



MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) ACTION

FAIR (+2) SCIENCE

AVERAGE (+1) INTRIGUE

SPECIALIZED

Great (+4):
Computer Science

FOCUSED

Great (+4):
Athletics, Notice

Good (+3):
Will

▼ Skill Improvements (6 points): Specialize one trained skill, specialize one focused skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Mischiefous Streak*

SCIENCE: *Hacker Mentality*

STUNTS:

ADMIN ACCESS: Use Computer Science instead of Burglary to overcome computerized security systems.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

BAO LANG

The daughter of Hong Kong Royal Navy officers, Bao is direct. She speaks her mind with a confidence that many mistake for aggression. Her fields of expertise are mechanical engineering and materials science. Her Tesladyne training revealed an untapped talent for marksmanship that, when coupled with her scientific specialties, produced one of Robo's most dangerous combatants.



MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) ACTION FAIR (+2) BANTER AVERAGE (+1) SCIENCE

SPECIALIZED

Good (+3): Material Science

FOCUSED

Great (+4):
Combat, Notice

Good (+3): Will

Fair (+2): Mechanical
Engineering

▼ Skill Improvements (4 points): Specialize one focused skill, focus two trained skills.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Tesladyne's Second-Most Dangerous Employee*

BANTER: *Not Afraid to Speak Her Mind*

STUNTS:

UNTAPPED TALENTS: Once per scene, spend a fate point and choose a skill. For the rest of the scene, you have a +1 bonus to that skill's rating, to a maximum of Fantastic (+6).

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

DEAN LOUIS

Co-chair of Tesladyne's Exotic Physics department. Dean's earliest memories are of reading every astronomy book on the shelves of his local library. As a Theoretical Astrophysicist, he investigates models of the structure of our universe and the theoretical structures of potential alternative universes. He and Dr. Martin designed the quantum decomputer to resolve quantum gravity with special relativity. It remains the only computer to have nearly devoured the world.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Leaps Before He Looks*

BANTER: *An Angry, Angry Man*

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE FAIR (+2) BANTER AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Astrophysics, Quantum Mechanics

FOCUSED

Great (+4):
Notice, Will

Good (+3):
Provoke

▼ Skill Improvements (3 points): Specialize one focused skill, focus one trained skill.

STUNTS:

CO-CHAIRS: Invoking an aspect belonging to or created by Martin gives you a +3 bonus instead of +2.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL:

MENTAL:



ROBERT MARTIN

Co-chair of Tesladyne's Exotic Physics department. Robert's grade school science fair project to model the atom began as an excuse to play with a bunch of papier-mâché, but it sparked a lifelong obsession with the subatomic world. As a Quantum Chronodynamitician, he investigates the peculiar properties of the fundamental forces and elements binding reality together.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE

FAIR (+2) BANTER

AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5):

Subatomic Physics,
Quantum Mechanics

FOCUSED

Great (+4):

Notice, Will

Good (+3): Provoke

▼ Skill Improvements (3 points): Specialize one focused skill, focus on trained skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Destined for Greatness (Eventually)*

BANTER: *Doesn't Know When to Quit*

STUNTS:

CO-CHAIRS: Invoking an aspect belonging to or created by Louis gives you a +3 bonus instead of +2.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL



PHIL BROUGHTON

Born in Florida's Space Coast, raised among the redwoods of California, Phil earned a nuclear engineering PhD from UCSC and Oregon State University. He would later bartend at McMurdo Station in Antarctica while maintaining the most remote Nuclear Test Ban Treaty monitor post in the world. Today, as a Resident Scientist, Phil is Tesladyne's Radiation Safety Officer and liaison with the Department of Energy and Nuclear Regulatory Commission. His primary concern is the maintenance of Atomic Robo's engine and the safe storage of its fuel. This involves a tremendous amount of paperwork and some fudging of details since no one, Phil included, is entirely sure how Robo's "heart" works.



MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) ACTION FAIR (+2) SCIENCE

AVERAGE (+1) BANTER

SPECIALIZED **Superb (+5):**
Nuclear Physics

Great (+4):
Provoke

Good (+3): Intrigue

FOCUSED **Great (+4):**
Notice, Will **Good (+3):** Contacts,
Deceive

▼ Skill Improvements (3 points): Specialize one trained skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Tesladyne's Chief Nuclear Physicist*

BANTER: *Zero to Pissed Off in Eight Seconds*

STUNTS:

CLOSE ENOUGH FOR GOVERNMENT WORK: +2 to defend with Deceive when "fudging" documentation.

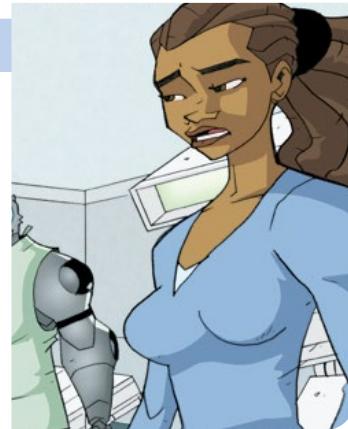
STRESS:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

JULIE WALKER

Viewing the first few minutes of *Star Wars* as a child set the course of Julie's life: twenty years later, she became one of the world's foremost experts in robotics and non-invasive human augmentation. Elements of her pioneering early work can be found in a dozen high-profile DARPA programs. Julie accepted a position as a Resident Scientist at Tesladyne when it became clear that it was the only place she could work without worrying about whether or not her research would be sold to the military-industrial complex. On paper, Julie is Robo's Chief Physician. In reality, she and Robo are conducting the first ever comprehensive survey of his internal systems. The hope that this information will lead to faster repair times and less maintenance for Robo, as well as a revolution in the capabilities and availability of commercial prosthetics.



MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE

FAIR (+2) BANTER AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Robotics, Biomedical Engineering

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Neuroprosthetics, Notice, Will

Good (+3): Provoke

▼ Skill Improvements (2 points): Focus two trained skills.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Tesladyne's Chief Roboticist*

SCIENCE: *For the Betterment of Humanity*

STUNTS:

BETTER THAN NEW: When you use Robotics to remove a consequence, your "patient" also gets a boost called **Better Than New**. This boost lasts until the issue ends or it gets used, whichever comes first.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

IRA STEIN

A member of the American Interplanetary Society and the Institute for Advanced Study, Ira was one of the top "rocket men" in the United States at the onset of World War II. During the war, he maintained artillery tables and bomb sights as close to the front lines as possible to minimize equipment downtime. As the furthest-deployed Allied rocket scientist, Ira was selected to join Atomic Robo's vanguard unit of Operation Paperclip. Ira would later join Robo as one of the original Science Agents of Tesladyne. His knowledge of advanced propulsion systems would prove to be invaluable in the aerospace firm's early years.



MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE

FAIR (+2) BANTER AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED **Superb (+5):** Rocket Science

FOCUSED **Great (+4):** Aerospace Engineering, Propulsion Systems Engineering, Notice, Will
Good (+3): Provoke

▼ Skill Improvements (2 points): Specialize one focused skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Straight-Laced Rocket Scientist*

SCIENCE: *Ignorance Cannot Dictate The Course Of Mankind!*

STUNTS:

IT'S NOT EXACTLY ROCKET SCIENCE: During a brainstorm, you may use Rocket Science instead of any other Science skill.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

CURTIS "MAC" MACDONALD

Mac's cavalier disregard for paperwork, acumen behind the wheel, and fearlessness at the front lines allowed his team of tank mechanics to maintain the fastest turnover times in the European Theater. Mac's applied mechanical know-how and plainspoken demeanor made him an ideal representative for Tesladyne's outlandish theories.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) ACTION

FAIR (+2) BANTER AVERAGE (+1) SCIENCE

SPECIALIZED **Superb (+5):** Combat

FOCUSED **Great (+4):** Notice, Provoke, Vehicles
Good (+3): Rapport, Will
Fair (+2): Mechanical Engineering

▼ Skill Improvements (2 points): Specialize a focused skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Better a Good Solution Now than a Perfect One Later*

BANTER: *Let Me Break It Down For You*

STUNTS:

BUCKLE UP: +2 to create an advantage with Vehicles when operating a ground vehicle.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

JOHN "SLIM" SIMMONS

Slim spent most of World War II conducting test flights of America's most advanced air-frames. Near the close of the war Slim was selected to fly Atomic Robo's unit deep behind German lines as the vanguard of Operation Paperclip. Slim would later become one of the original Science Agents of Tesladyne. His personal expertise in the cutting edge of aeronautics technology and the limits of the human body would serve the firm well in its early days.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) BANTER

FAIR (+2) SCIENCE

AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Will

Great (+4):

Aeronautical Engineering

FOCUSED

Great (+4):

Provoke

Good (+3): Notice

Fair (+2): Vehicles

▼ Skill Improvements (4 points): Specialize one focused skill, focus two trained skills.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Former Test Pilot*

SCIENCE: *Fictional, Theoretical... What's the Difference?*

STUNTS:

TEST PILOT: +1 to overcome or create an advantage with Vehicles when flying an aircraft.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL



THE McCALLISTERS

DONOVAN "JACK TAROT" McCALLISTER

Donovan inherited the McAlister Import/Export Exchange at the age of 19 when his parents died in a plane crash. A rebellious youth with no interest in the family business, Donovan took to a life of travel and adventure until his own plane crashed in the Himalayas. He awoke in a monastery. Though he'd intended to return to "civilization," the young man found a strange peace in the seclusion and hard work of monastic life, as well as their meditative art of Zen Archery. Donovan returned to Chicago to helm the McAlister family's various enterprises, but found the city's entrenched political and corporate collusion with

criminal elements unbearable. Thus began his one-man war against the city's barons and bosses as vigilante Jack Tarot.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) VIGILANTE

FAIR (+2) ACTION AVERAGE (+1) INTRIGUE

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Will, Athletics, Combat, Notice

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Contacts, Provoke, Vehicles

A LOOK AT JACK TAROT'S WEIRD MODE

▼ **Vigilante:** Athletics, Combat, Contacts, Notice, Provoke, Vehicles, Will

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Scourge of the Underworld*

VIGILANTE: *Secret Identity*

ACTION: *Misspent Youth in the Far East*

INTRIGUE: *The Dark, Secret Corners of the World*

OMEGA: *Protective of Helen*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

ZEN GUNFIGHTER: +2 to attack or create an advantage with Combat when using firearms.

STUNT DRIVER: +2 to overcome or create an advantage with Vehicles when driving an automobile.

RELUCTANT MENTOR: You may forfeit your turn to tell an ally to do something that'll put them in harm's way. If they obey, they get a +2 to do it.

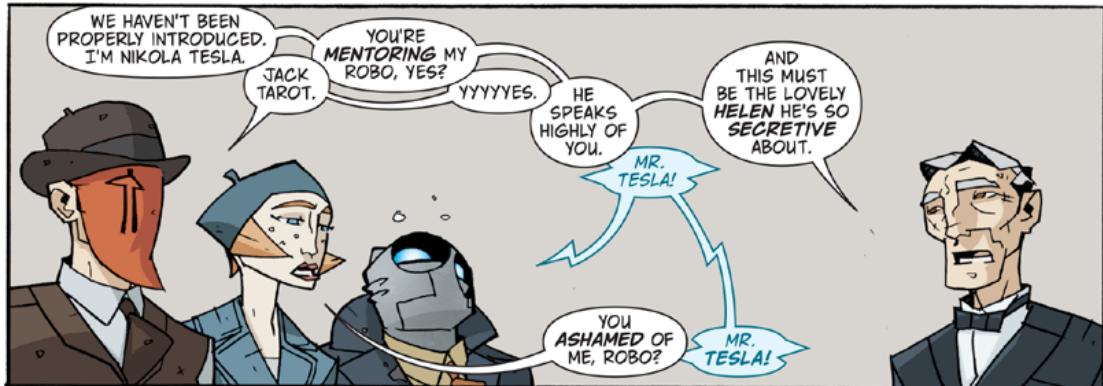
ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA TO CARRY A SPARE: Once per issue, spend a fate point to have a gun hidden somewhere on your person, even if it seems highly unlikely (but not outright impossible) for you to have one.

FEEL THE NOOSE TIGHTEN: When you leave a tarot card behind to mark your work, you can use Provoke to make a mental attack against whoever finds it, even if you're not around. (Total Benefits: 7 - 5 = 2 fate points to the GM's reserve).

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL



HELEN "NIGHTINGALE" MCALISTER

Upon his return to the United States, Donovan met artist, socialite, and aviatrix Dominique La Chance. A whirlwind romance and marriage soon followed, as did Helen McAlister. Dominique, however, died during childbirth. But Helen proved to be a bright and inquisitive child with a keen interest in mathematics. The McAlister name and fortune allowed her to receive the finest education in mathematics and engineering money could buy. Her talents enabled her father's crime fighting activities via the development of all manner of specialized gadgetry and weapons.

A LOOK AT HELEN'S WEIRD MODE AND WEIRD SKILLS

▼ **Brains:** Electrical Engineering, Mechanics, Radio Communications, Will, Underworld

RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

- ⌚ General knowledge about radio technology.
- ⌚ Find and/or decrypt radio transmissions to gain useful information.
- ⌚ Spread the right information (or misinformation) at the right time.
- ⌚ Encrypt radio transmissions.

UNDERWORLD

- ⌚ Know who the players are and where they can be found.
- ⌚ Uncover details about criminals you can use to your advantage.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) BRAINS

FAIR (+2) BANTER AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Mechanics, Radio Communications

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Electrical Engineering, Will

Good (+3):

Provoke, Rapport

Fair (+2): Notice

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *The Brains of the Outfit*

BRAINS: *Gadgets and Gizmos*

BANTER: *Better with Machines than People*

ACTION: *I Can Take Care of Myself!**

OMEGA: *Protective of Her Dad*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

SHARP TONGUE: +2 to create an advantage with Provoke when pushing someone's buttons.

A DANGEROUS LIFE: Use Will to defend against physical attacks when you can see them coming.

I HAVE JUST THE THING: Once per issue, spend a fate point to have just the right piece of hardware, either on you or accessible nearby.

THE REAL WORK: Any aspect or boost you create with Radio Communications that relates to ferreting out secrets gives a +3 when invoked instead of +2.

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *I Can Take Care of Myself!*



STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

CELEBRATED SCIENTISTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

THOMAS EDISON

The “Wizard of Menlo Park.” Edison’s rise from poverty to millionaire inventor is the stuff of the classic American Self-Made Man mythos. Edison claimed more than a thousand patents, his technicians and engineers pursued thousands more projects. Little did they suspect that much of the work in fact investigated the Odic Force, a field of energy variously understood as the source of life or the fundamental element of reality itself. It became Edison’s lifelong obsession to unlock the secrets of Od and to turn it into an immortality formula. These efforts culminated in 1931 when Edison attempted to draw the entire Odic Field of the Earth into a singular point. He died in the explosion.

A LOOK AT CELEBRITY MODE

The scientists presented here—Edison, Hawking, Sagan, and Tesla—pursue different avenues of scientific exploration, but all three have one thing in common: they’re all famous.

▼ **Celebrity:** Contacts, Empathy, Rapport

MODES AND SKILLS:

GREAT (+4) SCIENCE

GOOD (+3) CELEBRITY

FAIR (+2) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

Fantastic (+6):

Electrical Engineering, Will

FOCUSED

Superb (+5):

Odic Field Theory

Great (+4):

Contacts, Empathy, Rapport

Good (+3):

Deceit, Provoke

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *The Wizard of Menlo Park**

SCIENCE: *Guiding the Course of Human Affairs*

CELEBRITY: *Self-Made Man*

BANTER: *Driven by Fierce Ambition*

OMEGA: *1% Inspiration, 99% Perspiration*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *The Wizard of Menlo Park*

WELL-EARNED ARROGANCE: +2 to attack with Provoke when belittling or insulting the target.

ALWAYS IMPROVING: Once per volume, choose a piece of hardware that’s been in your possession for a while, and reveal that you (or your staff) have already made some “improvements” to it. Add another stunt benefit to it, or replace one it already has.

IDEAS FROM EVERY SOURCE: When you’re using a Science skill and receive assistance from at least one other person, you get an additional +2 on your roll.

THERE ARE NO RULES: Once per scene, when you invoke one of your aspects, instead of getting a bonus or a reroll, you may swap out a Fate die for a *regular six-sided die*—the kind that are numbered one through six.



UNDEAD EDISON

In 1999, the consciousness of Thomas Edison coalesced out of the Odic Field near the very site where he was killed decades prior. This just happened to be the lobby of Tesladyne's offices in the Empire State Building. "Undead Edison" is presumed to have dissolved back into the Odic Field.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GREAT (+4) SCIENCE

GOOD (+3) SPIRIT FAIR (+2) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

Fantastic (+6):

Odic Field Theory,
Electrical Engineering, Will

Superb (+5):

Hover, Provoke

FOCUSED

Good (+3): Deceive

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *The Ghost of Menlo Park**

SCIENCE: *Death Hasn't Dulled My Genius*

SPIRIT: *A Being of Pure Od*

BANTER: *Cantankerous Spirit from Another Time*

OMEGA: *Bouts of Melancholy and Rage*

FOR DETAILS
ON THE
SPIRIT MODE
AND THE
HOVER
SKILL, SEE
PAGE 92.

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

INCORPOREAL: You can move through solid objects with ease. Ignore physical obstacles. Under normal circumstances, you are also immune to all physical harm. It's like the Bulletproof benefit, but much more all-encompassing. However, while in this state, you can't interact with the physical world in any way. In addition, a combination of the proper equipment, the right conditions, and a precise application of energy of a specific frequency along the Odic Medium (in other words, a compel on *The Ghost of Menlo Park*) can force you into a corporeal state. This causes you to lose the benefits of this stunt *and* the use of the Hover skill until the end of the scene, at which time you revert to incorporeality again.

FADE AWAY: While incorporeal, you can choose to disappear—leave a scene—anytime. Spend a fate point to come back.

ONE WITH THE OD: When using a free invocation on an aspect or boost related to the Odic Force, you get a +3 bonus instead of +2.

THAT OLD EDISON CHARM: +2 to attack with Provoke when belittling or insulting the target.

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *The Ghost of Menlo Park*

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

NIKOLA TESLA

A Serbian-American inventor and physicist known for his development of alternating current and his contributions to electrical engineering, Tesla's early career revolutionized electrical generation, storage, and transmission. Moreover, Tesla was the father of modern robotics and electrical computation. Tesla often worked in seclusion and rarely produced notes or designs, facts that only made the public more fascinated with his abilities. In 1888, Tesla and his business partner George Westinghouse co-founded a loose association of American scientists and

adventurers dedicated to the application of genius toward the public good—the Centurions of Science. The group disbanded in 1908 amidst the controversial destruction of the Wardenclyffe Tower. Tesla became increasingly reclusive and his public claims became increasingly esoteric. By 1920 he was considered a quack by the scientific community and press. The public debut of the Atomic Robot automatic intelligence in 1923 catapulted Tesla's career into a second golden age that would last until his death twenty years later.

MODES AND SKILLS:

	GOOD (+3) SCIENCE	FAIR (+2) BANTER	AVERAGE (+1) CELEBRITY
SPECIALIZED	Superb (+5): Electrical Engineering, Physics, Robotics, Will	Great (+4): Contacts	
FOCUSED		Good (+3): Empathy, Rapport	

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Eccentric Inventor of Beautiful Electrical Apparatuses*

SCIENCE: *My Method is Different*

BANTER: *That Old Tesla Charm*

CELEBRITY: *Creator of Atomic Robo*

OMEGA: *In the Twilight of His Years*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

TELLURIC SUIT

FUNCTION: *The Earth Is My Circuit*

FLAW: *Not Even a Little Safe*

HARMONIC LEVITATION: You can fly, which lets you ignore all ground-based obstacles. If you need to do something risky or dangerous in flight, use Electrical Engineering to overcome or create an advantage.



CURRENTS OF WAR: When you're not using the suit to fly, you can attack using Electrical Engineering to shoot a bolt of lightning, *but* at a cost. You also have Armor:2 against energy-based attacks, such as those that rely on electricity or the odic force.

OBSCENELY DANGEROUS: When you attack with the suit and succeed with style, you may spend a fate point to prevent the target from checking a stress box to absorb harm.

MEGA-STUNTS:

VISIONARY INVENTOR: +2 to Electrical Engineering when inventing (page 139). If one of the invention's catches is serious time, you may add one more benefit for free (without a catch).

THE MAGNIFICENT THREE: When using a Science skill, if exactly three of your dice show the same result, you get a boost for free. For example, **+++■** would get you a free boost, as would **■■■+** or **■■■■**, but not **■■■■■**, **■■■■■■**, or **■■■■■■■**.

(Total Benefits: 7 – 5 = 2 fate points added to the GM's reserve).

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL □□

MENTAL □□□□□

CARL SAGAN

Dr. Sagan's early work in astrophysics and the origins of life on Earth naturally led to investigating the possibility of life on other planets. This made Dr. Sagan the ideal candidate to help Atomic Robo study the "extraversal" entity when it would next intersect with our universe in 1971. The data collected during the encounter would lead to the Sagan-Tesla Special Topography theory of cosmology. Today it is an obscure school of thought in part due to strong opposition from Dr. Stephen Hawking and a general impression among the scientific community that the theory's mathematics are needlessly obtuse in light of modern cosmological theories. Dr. Sagan contributed to many of NASA's robotic exploratory missions. He was perhaps best known for his efforts to popularize scientific interests and pursuits through mass media.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE FAIR (+2) BANTER AVERAGE (+1) CELEBRITY

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Astrophysics, Cosmology, Will

Great (+4): Contacts, Rapport

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Astronomy

Good (+3): Empathy

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *A Candle in the Dark*

SCIENCE: *Extraordinary Claims Require Extraordinary Evidence*

BANTER: *America's Foremost Science Communicator*

CELEBRITY: *Turtleneck-Clad Cultural Icon*

OMEGA: *Know the Past to Understand the Present*

STUNTS:

WE ARE MADE OF STARSTUFF: You are a compelling speaker, and may use Cosmology to create an advantage in social situations if you can make it about science somehow.

PEOPLE ARE NOT STUPID: +2 to overcome with Rapport when persuading someone in a way that respects their beliefs.

CONFIRMED SKEPTIC: Use Will to see through a lie with a logical or scientific basis.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES: Once per issue, when you have the time and opportunity to meet with your contacts in the scientific community, you can spend a fate point to acquire a cutting-edge or top-notch piece of technology. Once per volume, if done as part of creating an invention (page 139), this can satisfy a serious catch.



A FEW MINOR ADJUSTMENTS: Given almost enough time and serviceable tools, you can replace one (and only one) of a hardware's stunts or mega-stunts with another of your choosing. If the new extra adds more benefits than it had before you messed with it, each additional one costs a fate point. This new stunt or extra lasts until the end of the issue, then vanishes.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

STEPHEN HAWKING

British author, theoretical physicist, and cosmologist. Dr. Hawking is one of the most popular and influential scientists of the 20th and 21st centuries. His rivalry with Atomic Robo stems from their competing cosmological theories. Dr. Hawking's found acceptance across the mainstream scientific community.



MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SCIENCE

FAIR (+2) CELEBRITY

AVERAGE (+1) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Theoretical Physics, Cosmology, Will

Great (+4): Contacts

FOCUSED

Good (+3): Rapport

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Brilliant Mind, Broken Body*

SCIENCE: *Seeking a Complete Understanding of the Universe*

CELEBRITY: *It's Not Enough to Wear a Wig—the Wheelchair Gives Me Away*

BANTER: *Lively and Witty Personality*

OMEGA: *Above All Else, Don't Give Up*

STUNTS:

IN MY MIND I AM FREE: Use Will to overcome when removing your own mental consequences.

A BRIEF HISTORY: Invoking a pressure aspect, a title aspect, or an experience gives you a +3 bonus instead of +2.

TRUST ME, I'M STEPHEN HAWKING: Use Contacts to overcome when relying on your status as a respected scientist to deceive someone or falsify documentation.

GOD PLAYS DICE: When you invoke an aspect to reroll a Science skill, roll six Fate dice and keep the best four Fate dice for your result.

MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE: +1 when using Theoretical Physics or Cosmology during a brainstorm.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

THE SPARROW

The origins of the Sparrow legacy range from Arthurian myth to the Crusades (several) to the Elizabethan court. What can be said with certainty is that the Sparrow title was earned by gallant action to save the life of a King or Queen of Britain in antiquity, that it is inherited to the first born regardless of sex, and that it is the Sparrow's role to defend the Crown—be it as a spy, courtier, diplomat, privateer, soldier, or any combination thereof. The Sparrow answers directly and only to the ruling monarch.

SPARROW I

Sparrow I, who inherited the title upon her brother's death, first crossed paths with Atomic Robo in 1943 while on unrelated missions to disable advanced Nazi war technologies. They did not get along. She was one of the most feared commandos of WW2 and among the first combatants in what would become known as the Cold War. Her principal concern was to suppress Teslatech proliferation and retro-engineering after WW2. In 1965 she retired from field work to become the first chief of Section 13, a branch of MI-6 established to assist the Sparrow.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) ACTION

FAIR (+2) COMMANDO

AVERAGE (+1) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Athletics, Combat, Notice, Provoke, Vehicles

Good (+3): Contacts, Stealth, Will

Fair (+2): Empathy,

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Britain's Top Agent**

ACTION: *Fearless in the Face of Danger*

COMMANDO: *The Most Dangerous Allied Commando*

BANTER: *"Shut your damn gob!"*

OMEGA: *Driven by Vengeance*



STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *Britain's Top Agent*

COMMANDO TRAINING: +2 to attack with Combat when unarmed; +2 to Stealth to overcome when sneaking.

PAIR OF HANDGUNS: Weapon:2

ARMORED JACKET: Armor:1

STANDARD NAZI BASTARD PROCEDURE: Even though you don't have the Science mode, you can always participate in a brainstorm using Contacts, and with a +2 bonus, if the situation involves Nazis.

(Total Benefits: 6 – 5 = 1 fate point added to the GM's reserve)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

SPARROW II

Daughter of Sparrow I, one of the few Sparrows to inherit the role while the previous Sparrow was still able-bodied, and the first Sparrow to benefit from the larger intelligence capability of Section 13. Sparrow II first encountered Atomic Robo while attempting to thwart Dr. Vanadis Valkyrie's plot to begin World War 3 in 1968. She retired to head of Section 13 in 1995.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) ACTION

FAIR (+2) SCIENCE AVERAGE (+1) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

Great (+4):

Chemistry

FOCUSED Great (+4): Athletics,
Combat, Notice, Provoke,
Vehicles

Good (+3): Will

Fair (+2): Deceive

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Britain's Top Agent**

ACTION: *Mistress of the Martial Arts*

SCIENCE: *A Keen and Inquisitive Mind*

BANTER: *Rapier-Sharp Wit*

OMEGA: *Underestimate Me at Your Peril*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *Britain's Top Agent*

JUDO BLACK BELT: When defending with Combat, on a success with style you may spend a fate point to deal a 3-shift physical hit to the attacker (instead of getting a boost).

SWORD UMBRELLA: You often carry an umbrella that secretly serves as a sheath for a hidden and slender sword blade. It's the '60s; none of this is quite as ridiculous as it sounds. The sword has Weapon:2.

BEAUTY AND THE BLADE: +2 to attack or create an advantage with Combat when wielding a sword.

WRECKLESS DRIVER: Once per scene, when driving a car, you can reduce the harm dealt by an attack by up to 4 shifts by letting the attacker have a situation aspect with one free invocation.

(Total Benefits: 6 – 5 = 1 fate point added to the GM's reserve)



STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

SPARROW III

Son of Sparrow II. Section 13's ability to sift through data, both from its now-digitized records archiving a thousand years of secrets and its realtime access to worldwide intelligence networks has turned Sparrow III into a surgical instrument of counter-intelligence that can be deployed to any point in the globe in a matter of hours. Sparrow III first encountered Atomic Robo during a worldwide intelligence community effort to defuse a hijacked Soviet "doomsday" weapon system. Sparrow III also played a pivotal role in tracking ALAN to Hashima Island before it could launch itself into space and leave the Earth a dead, irradiated rock.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SPECIAL AGENT FAIR (+2) ACTION AVERAGE (+1) INTRIGUE

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5):Notice

FOCUSED

Great (+4):

Contacts, Deceive, Stealth,
Vehicles, Will

Good (+3):

Combat

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Britain's Top Agent**

SPECIAL AGENT: *A Surgical Instrument of Counter-Intelligence*

ACTION: *License to Kill*

INTRIGUE: *A Thousand Years of Secrets*

OMEGA: *The Burden of Legacy*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *Britain's Top Agent*

EXPERT MARKSMAN: +1 to attack or create an advantage with Combat with firearms; when attacking with firearms, invoking an aspect you've created (including a consequence) gives you a +3 bonus instead of +2.

LET ME MAKE SOME CALLS: +2 to create an advantage with Contacts when you have access to Section 13 HQ, even via phone.

MEGA-STUNT GEAR: Once per volume, spend a fate point to reveal that you have some high-tech piece of spy hardware from Section 13. The hardware's quality can't exceed your Contacts rating.

ANTI-BALLISTIC STEALTH SUIT: Armor:1; +2 to create an advantage with Stealth when hiding.

(Total Benefits: 7 – 5 = 2 fate point added to the GM's reserve)



STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

BIG SCIENCE INC.

In some ways, BSInc. can be seen as Japan's answer to Tesladyne, but with a much greater focus on research and design. The chief achievement in this vein has been the meta-material computational fabric woven into Reflex Armor™. As well, whereas Tesladyne's defense actions are authorized and partly funded via the United Nations, BSInc's activities are entirely domestic, self-funded, and, since the 1980s, geared specifically to counter biomega attacks.

DR. JUNJI YUMENO (SUPPORTING NPC)

Dr. Yumeno began his work at Big Science Inc. as an intern. A brilliant physicist, he soon found himself on a fast track to the company's most prestigious research position as a member of Science Team Super Five. Dr. Yumeno was acting "Guardian Red" when the true extent of Dr. Shinka's work was revealed, and it was he who finally ended the madman's campaign of biomega terror. Yumeno was soon



promoted to replace Shinka as Director of BSI. Yumeno was the first to realize that without biomega activity to repel, BSI and STS5 would lose the funding needed to conduct their research. He capitalized on the public's fascination with the team's exploits by licensing television shows, comics, video games, and toy lines. This allowed the firm to fund several breakthroughs, including the revolutionary Reflex Armor™ and Mecha Robo Project. As a former Guardian Red, Yumeno is one of the most hands-on BSI directors in history. He personally selects every member of STS5, guides their research, and mentors them through their ongoing program of anti-biomega training.

MODES: AND SKILLS:

Good (+3) Science (+5 Biomega, Physics; +4 Notice, Will); Fair (+2) Banter (+4 Rapport; +3 Provoke); Average (+1) Action

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Director of Big Science Inc.*

My Principal Genius is Recognizing Genius in Others

Respected Mentor and Consultant

Yes, Like in the TV Show

STUNTS:

I KNOW BIOMEGA: +2 to overcome or create an advantage with Biomega when directing Science Team Super Five in action.

FORMER GUARDIAN RED: +1 to attack or defend with Combat when fighting unarmed.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

SCIENCE TEAM SUPER FIVE

The five senior scientists of Big Science Inc. make up Science Team Super Five. Members cycle in and out of the group every few years—similar to the Action Scientists of Tesladyne, but better equipped due to BSInc's focus on developing practical applications of the fringe sciences they investigate.

The team that springs into action in the second issue of *Other Strangeness* is only the most-current five good-looking young scientists from all walks of life to be recruited by Dr. Yumeno. They're archetypes more than fleshed-out characters, patterned after the classic "five-man band" trope, so that's how they're presented here.

To make a STS5 Guardian, pick one of the mode packages below, one of the five aspect pairs, and stick on the Reflex Armor mega-stunt (see page 81 for details). As PCs, each also has a mild, moderate, and severe consequence, though they're not listed. As always, you can fill out the rest during play.

GUARDIAN MODE TRIOS

AGGRESSIVE GUARDIAN

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SENTAI

FAIR (+2) SCIENCE

AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Athletics,
Combat, Vehicles, Will

Good (+3): Notice

▼ Skill Improvements (11 points): Specialize two trained skills, specialize two focused skills, focus one trained skill.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

CHARISMATIC GUARDIAN

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SENTAI

FAIR (+2) SCIENCE

AVERAGE (+1) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5): Will

▼ Skill Improvements (11 points): Specialize two trained skills, specialize two focused skills, focus one trained skill.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

TRICKY GUARDIAN

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SENTAI

FAIR (+2) SCIENCE

AVERAGE (+1) INTRIGUE

SPECIALIZED

FOCUSED

Great (+4):

Athletics, Will

Good (+3): Notice

▼ Skill Improvements (11 points): Specialize two trained skills, specialize two focused skills, focus

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

GUARDIAN ASPECT PAIRS

GUARDIAN RED (DR. OKITA HOKUTO)

CONCEPT: *Leader of Science Team Super Five*
SENTAI: *We've Trained for This!*

GUARDIAN BLUE (DR. SHIMA KOUJI)

CONCEPT: *The Strong and Silent Type*
OMEGA: *Actions Speak Louder Than Words*

GUARDIAN PINK (DR. TOCHIBANA SAYOKO)

CONCEPT: *The Heart of the Team*
SCIENCE: *Critical Thinker*

GUARDIAN GREEN (DR. HARUTA RYU)

CONCEPT: *Gentle Giant*
SENTAI: *Big Bruiser*

GUARDIAN YELLOW (DR. TOKITA KOSAKU)

CONCEPT: *Resident Smart-Aleck*
OMEGA: *That's Not Luck, That's Skill!*



THE SHE-DEVILS OF THE PACIFIC

Like the Action Scientists (page 257), the She-Devils presented here are proto-PCs, with a few bits filled in and room for customization. Each has the following:

- ▼ Two aspects—a concept aspect, and one other aspect. Fill in the rest during play.
- ▼ Three modes.
- ▼ A number of skill improvements to be spent, as shown for each character.
- ▼ One or two stunts, one of which may be a jetpack (see page 81). Fill in the rest of the stunts during play.
- ▼ Stress boxes.
- ▼ Consequences *aren't* listed, but these characters are intended to be played as a PCs, so each has the standard complement of mild, moderate, and severe consequences.

THE SHE-DEVIL MODE

- ▼ **She-Devil:** Athletics, Combat, Contacts, Notice, Vehicles, Will

CAPTAIN CATHERINE MARIE "MAY" CARTER

May was a test pilot in her civilian life. She joined the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron in 1942, which in 1943 merged with the Women's Flying Training Detachment to become the Women Airforce Service Pilots. She delivered aircraft and supplies to the shifting frontlines of the Pacific. The WASPs were disbanded in December of 1944. May, then stationed in the remote South Pacific, refused to heed the call home. She gathered likeminded WASPs and servicewomen. These "Flying She-Devils," as they came to be known, were an infamous group of women air pirates who terrorized the mercenaries, pirates, and warlords of the Pacific.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SHE-DEVIL FAIR (+2) ACTION AVERAGE (+1) INTRIGUE

SPECIALIZED

Superb (+5):

Athletics, Notice

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Combat,

Contacts, Vehicles, Will

Good (+3): Provoke

- ▼ Skill Improvements (2 point): Specialize one focused skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Captain of the Flying She-Devils*

SHE-DEVIL: *Ethical Pirate*

STUNTS:

GIVE 'EM HELL: Use Will to create an advantage when leading the Flying She-Devils into action.

SHE-DEVIL JETPACK: See page 81 for details on the She-Devils' jetpacks.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL MENTAL



HAZEL LEE

Hazel had grown up in Texas where she first fell in love with aviation and learned to fly. She was a civilian pilot living in Hawaii when the Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor. Hazel sought to join the American war effort immediately, but was stymied because of racist attitudes about her loyalty and ethnicity. Hazel was never known to give up without a fight and she was able to get into the Women Airforce Service Pilots program by pretending to be Chinese. She was among the first WASPs to join Captain Carter after the war and became an indispensable component of the Flying She-Devils.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) INTRIGUE

FAIR (+2) SHE-DEVIL

AVERAGE (+1) BANTER

SPECIALIZED

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Athletics, Deceit, Notice

Good (+3): Will

▼ Skill Improvements (1 point): Focus one trained skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Spitfire in Spectacles*

INTRIGUE: *Behind Enemy Lines*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

WHERE'S HAZEL?: As long as you're not being directly observed and there's a reasonable way to leave, you can disappear from a scene. Spend a fate point later (in the same scene or a subsequent one) to reappear disguised as a faceless NPC already in the scene, like a security guard, a lab-coated scientist, or a mechanic.

SHE-DEVIL JETPACK: See page 81 for details on the She-Devils' jetpacks.



STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL MENTAL



LAUREN FINCH

The daughter of a junkyard manager, Lauren displayed a talent for all things mechanical at an early age. Her interest soon turned to speed, and from there aeronautics. Institutional sexism was a constant obstacle to her radical ideas, but it only made Lauren more determined to stick to her guns. Lauren joined the Women Flying Training Detachment as a mechanic. When the WFTD and WAWS merged into the WASP, Lauren was stationed in the Pacific where she repaired and maintained every type of military aircraft in the Theater. She saw Captain Carter's offer as an opportunity to explore her mechanical and aeronautic theories in an environment where perceptions about her gender would not get in her way.

A LOOK AT LAUREN'S WEIRD MODE

Lauren's Gearhead mode is basically a version of the Science mode customized for her particular talents and the role she plays in the She-Devils.

▼ **Gearhead:** Aeronautical Engineering, Jet Propulsion, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Vehicles, Will

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) GEARHEAD

FAIR (+2) BANTER

AVERAGE (+1) SHE-DEVIL

Superb (+5):

SPECIALIZED
Aeronautical Engineering,
Jet Propulsion,
Mechanical Engineering

FOCUSED

Great (+4): Vehicles, Will

Good (+3):
Contacts

▼ Skill Improvements (0 points): None.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *The She-Devils' Resident Grease-Monkey*

GEARHEAD: *Mechanical Genius*

STUNTS:

IMPROVISATIONAL WIZARD: When creating or altering an invention or piece of hardware, it can have one benefit for free (no catch attached) as long as you have access to a sufficient quantity of salvage or scrapyard junk.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL **MENTAL**

VALERYA "VAL" AKILINOV

The last of pilot to join the Flying She-Devils and the only one not to be recruited by Captain Carter directly. Valerya was a Russian pilot, one of the notorious "Nacht Hexen," or Night Witches, during World War 2. She stole a plane to escape the turmoil of her homeland after the war and soon found herself alone in the Pacific living day-to-day as a mercenary pilot. Rumors of the Flying She-Devils did not take long to reach her ears and she immediately sought them out.

A LOOK AT VAL'S WEIRD MODE

A lot is made of the fact that Val's Russian in *Atomic Robo and the Flying She-Devils of the Pacific*, so... let's give her a weird mode for that.

▼ **Russian:** Combat, Contacts, Physique, Provoke

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) SHE-DEVIL FAIR (+2) ACTION AVERAGE (+1) RUSSIAN

SPECIALIZED **Superb (+5):**
Combat, Vehicles **Great (+4):** Provoke

FOCUSED **Great (+4):** Athletics,
Contacts, Notice **Good (+3):** Physique

▼ Skill Improvements (3 points): Specialize one focused skill, focus one trained skill.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *What Does Not Kill You Makes You Stronger*

RUSSIAN: *Former Night Witch*

STUNTS:

SHE'S RUSSIAN, SHE'S FINE: You may ignore the deleterious effects of alcohol, unless you choose not to. *Then* you're drunk.

SHE-DEVIL JETPACK: See page 81 for details on the She-Devils' jetpacks.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL



HELSINGARD

Baron Heinrich von Helsingard was born to one of the wealthiest noble families of Europe in 1850 while the Helsingards frequently traveled between their Germanic, Austria, and Hungarian estates to escape the political turmoil plaguing Europe after Napoleon's fall. A quiet and studious child, Heinrich was fluent in seven languages by the age of eight, an accomplished botanist by ten, biologist by twelve, mechanical engineer by fifteen, and historian by eighteen. By twenty he had inherited the Helsingard fortune. He had a dim view of modern civilization, seeing everywhere the needless waste of politics, religion, and war, and dedicated his life to uniting mankind like a modern Alexander or Genghis Khan.

Helsingard spent the next seventy years attempting to covertly overthrow every government in the world through a global network of criminal and corporate empires fueled by advanced technologies of his own design. By 1900 Helsingard focused on Europe after several failed attempts to conquer the Americas with autosoldats and war zeppelins. He used his influence to ignite The Great War so he could sell materiel to both sides during the conflict.

And it worked. By the end of the war, Helsingard had become the richest person in history. His criminal empire became a worldwide collection of independent cells to be "activated" in stages to sow dissent, chaos, or open rebellion in a grand scheme to conquer the globe amidst the chaos of what would become the Second World War. Helsingard's ambitions at last came to an end in 1938 when he was killed in an accident in a Nazi research station deep in the Himalayas.

But death would not be his final chapter. Helsingard cloned multiple copies of his own brain to carry on his work in the event of his own demise. A critical flaw resulted in all of them becoming "active" simultaneously, each one believing himself to be the "true" Helsingard and the others to be usurpers. These Helsingards spent the rest of the 20th century wasting Heinrich's accumulated resources in a shadow war against one another. The cells

OPTIONAL WARBOT MEGA-STUNTS

Below are a number of optional mega-stunts to slot into Helsingard warbots. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it should give you a good place to start. You can choose mega-stunts before or during play, as you wish, but in either case you're under no obligation to fill all three remaining stunt slots, or even to use any of these at all. The number of fate points in parentheses is the cost for each extra from the GM's budget.

BRILLIANT DEFENSES (1 FATE POINT): Spend a fate point to gain an additional -Proof until the end of the scene. For example, you might gain Heatproof to be immune to high temperatures and incendiary attacks, or Electroproof to be immune to electrical attacks. You don't need an additional weakness or cost for this.

THROUGH THEIR EYES (2 FATE POINTS): Whatever your Autosoldats see, you see as well. You can make Notice rolls, using your own Notice skill, from your Autosoldats' perspective. If you have multiple perspectives in a zone, you gain a +2 to your Notice rolls in that zone.

JET POWERED (1 FATE POINT): You can fly using Athletics. Ignore all ground-based obstacles.

ESCAPE POD (2 FATE POINTS): Instead of conceding, you can spend a fate point to immediately leave the scene. At least, your brain does, in a little jet-powered, flying escape pod. The rest of your body's left behind. The escape pod doesn't have any other stunts and can't take consequences. Another character in the scene can attempt to stop you from flying away by taking an overcome action. Defend against this action using Athletics with a +2 bonus.

EXTRA LIMBS (2 FATE POINTS): +2 to overcome or create an advantage with Physique when having extra limbs would matter.

MISSILE LAUNCHER: When attacking with Combat at range, you can choose to have Weapon:2, and to apply your attack roll against every target in a single zone.

unaffiliated with any particular Helsingard brain eventually dissolved due to lack of centralized leadership. By the 21st century the Helsingard empire is nothing but a strange echo.

HELSINGARD WARBOT

Each of Helsingard's brain-in-a-jar cyborgs—commonly called warbots—has its own strengths, weaknesses, and unique design. This is represented by each warbot's selection of stunts and mega-stunts. Every warbot has the first two listed mega-stunts—Warbot Weaponry and Warbot Defenses. Fill the other three stunt slots with the three of the options listed in the sidebar.

MODES AND SKILLS:

	GREAT (+4) WARBOT	GOOD (+3) SCIENCE	FAIR (+2) ACTION
SPECIALIZED	Fantastic (+6): Combat, Physique	Superb (+5): Engineering, Robotics	
FOCUSED	Superb (+5): Athletics, Provoke	Great (+4): Notice	

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *The True Heir to the Helsingard Empire*

WARBOT: *Built For Conquest*

SCIENCE: *My Machinations Continue Unabated*

ACTION: *You Will Be Remembered Only for Your Defeat*

OMEGA: *Brain in a Jar in a Bot*

STUNTS:

WARBOT WEAPONRY: Absolutely stronger than any human, *but* weak to strong electromagnetism; Weapon:2 when strength would matter; +1 to attack or create an advantage with Combat when attacking at range.

WARBOT ARMOR: Bulletproof, *but* weak joints; use Physique to defend against all other physical attacks.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

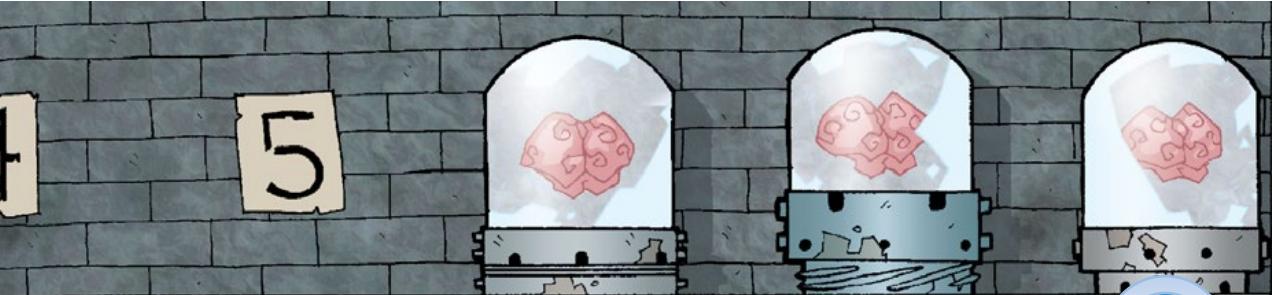
MENTAL

HELSINGARD AUTOSOLDAT (NAMELESS NPC)

Modes: *Fair (+2) Action*

Aspects: *Armored Body, All Hail Lord Helsingard!*

Stress:



MAJESTIC 12

See page 5 for information about Majestic 12.

M12 INFANTRY (NAMELESS NPC)

Modes and Skills: **Fair (+2) Action**

Aspects: **Well-Armed Soldier, Tactical Maneuvers**

Stress: **0**

SPECIAL ASSETS UNIT (SAU) (SUPPORTING NPC)

MODES AND SKILLS:

Good (+3) Exo-Suit (+5 Physique; +4 Athletics, Combat); Fair (+2) Action

ASPECTS:

Concept: **Power-Armored Soldier**

Majestic 12's Elite

Heavy Hitter<

STUNTS:

Exo-Amp Servos: **Absolutely stronger than any human**, but **at a cost**.

Loaded For Jenkins: **+1 to attack with Combat when using onboard firepower.**

Weapon:1.

Armor Plating: **Bulletproof**, but **weak against electronic intrusion**.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL



PROJECT SAINT UNIT 5 BOXBOT (SUPPORTING NPC)

Majestic 12 developed the Unit 5 as a Robo-buster in 2010 under the guise of a DARPA project. The “boxbot” proved ineffective in a one-on-one field test with Robo—but then again, it was never designed to take him on alone.

MODES AND SKILLS:

Great (+4) Warbot (+6 Combat, Physique; +5 Notice); Good (+3) Action

Points spent: 4

SEE PAGE 93
FOR THE
WARBOT
MODE.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Majestic 12 Anti-Robo Drone*

CATCH-PUNCH-CRUSH

Programmed For Destruction

Poorly Armored Joints

STUNTS/HYPER-STUNTS:

BULLETPROOF: Bulletproof, *but* weak in the joints.

FULLY WEAPONIZED: +1 to attack or defend with Combat; Weapon:2

FULLY NETWORKED: +1 to overcome or defend with Notice when one or more Unit 5s are nearby.

Invoking an aspect or boost created by another Unit 5 gives you a +3 bonus instead of +2.

(Total Benefits: 4 – 2 = 2 fate points from the GM’s reserve).

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL □□□□□ **MENTAL** – (As a mindless machine, the Unit 5 doesn’t take mental harm.)

OTHER ROBOTS

STANDARD-ISSUE WARBOT (NAMELESS NPC)

For when you need violent robots in a hurry and aren’t picky about their specs.

Modes and Skills: **Fair (+2) Action (+3 Combat, Physique)**

Aspects: **Built For War, Arms and Armor**

Stress: **0**

See the Warbot (page 93) and Robot modes (page 90) for some examples of stunts and mega-stunts you can bolt on. Every stunt benefit you give to this character costs a fate point from the reserve, as detailed on page 175 under *Exceptional NPCs*.



EDISON'S ROBOT (SUPPORTING NPC)

Driven by Edison's own Dynamic Electro-Consciousness Engine, this robot is the blunt instrument Edison sometimes needs to deal with problems that can't be solved in a lab. However, none of that explains its fondness for hats.

MODES AND SKILLS:

Great (+4) Robot (+6 Physique; +5 Athletics, Notice);
Good (+3) Thief (+5 Stealth)

A LOOK AT EDISON'S ROBOTS WEIRD MODE

▼ **Thief:** Athletics, Burglary, Notice, Stealth

ROBOT
MODE
P. 90

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Edison's Electro-Conscious Enforcer*

The Strong and Surprisingly Silent Type

His Master's Voice

Punishing Fists

STUNTS:

JUST ANOTHER MACHINE: +1 to overcome or create an advantage with Stealth when surrounded by industrial equipment or machinery.

STEEL SINWS: Absolutely stronger than a normal human, *<but>* weak to attacks targeting the head. Use Physique to both make and defend against physical attacks.

(Total Benefits: 4 – 2 = 2 fate points from the GM's reserve).

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL □□□□□

MENTAL – (As a mindless machine, Edison's Robot doesn't take mental harm.)



WORLD WAR II BAD GUYS

SS-OBERSTURMBANNFÜHRER OTTO SKÖRZENY

One of the most accomplished feared commandos of the Nazi war effort, Skorzeny participated in a variety of top-secret, high-priority missions culminating with his command of the Special Weapons Program's Laufpanzer, or "walking tank," project. The Laufpanzer could have won the war, but the project was never fully funded and the prototypes were eventually destroyed by Allied commando actions—specifically, by Atomic Robo and British special operative Sparrow. Skorzeny would go on to play a pivotal role in ODESSA's efforts to allow high-ranking Nazi officers to escape punishment for their war crimes.

MODES AND SKILLS:

	GREAT (+4) SCIENCE	GOOD (+3) ACTION	FAIR (+1) BANTER
SPECIALIZED	Fantastic (+6): Engineering, Will	Superb (+5): Provoke	
FOCUSED	Superb (+5): Military Science	Great (+4): Combat	

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Megalomaniacal Nazi Special Weapons Expert*

SCIENCE: *Genius, Ambition, and Cruelty in Equal Measure**

ACTION: *Dueling Scar*

BANTER: *Pain Is Fleeting but Glory is Forever*

OMEGA: *The Liberator of Mussolini*

STUNTS:

FENCING CHAMPION: +2 to create an advantage or attack with Combat when wielding a sword.

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *Genius, Ambition, and Cruelty in Equal Measure*

CUTTING WORDS: When you invoke one of a target's aspects as part of creating an advantage with Provoke, spend a fate point to also deal them a mental hit equal to the number of shifts you obtain on the roll.

RIPOSTE: When wielding a sword, if you defend using Combat and succeed with style, spend a fate point to deal a 3-shift physical hit to your opponent.

EXACTLY AS PLANNED: At any time, you may reveal that you just happen to have precisely the right piece of technological hardware on hand, whether a weapon or something else. You can reveal as many pieces of such hardware as you like during the course of a volume, but their combined qualities can't exceed your Engineering, and every benefit must be paid for as usual—by increasing the GM's reserve), if played as a PC, or by spending fate points out of the reserve, if an NPC.

Total Benefits = 6 – 5 = 1 fate point added to (if a PC) or lost from (if an NPC) the GM's reserve)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL



LAUF PANZER (SUPPORTING NPC)

Although the Laufpanzer is a vehicle, its driver is so well-protected from harm that the Laufpanzer itself must be taken out before they even have a chance to suffer any harm. Use either the driver's Vehicles or the tank's Athletics, whichever is higher, whenever one of those skills would come into play. Do likewise with Combat—either the driver's or the Laufpanzer's. For *mental* conflicts, use the *driver's* skills, mental stress track, and consequences.

As presented here, the Laufpanzer has two stunt benefits too many. The Walking Tank extra is free; including the other two stunts costs one fate point each from the GM's fate point reserve.

MODES AND SKILLS

Great (+4) Tank (+6 Physique; +4 Athletics, Combat, Provoke)

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Heavily Armored War Machine*
Heavy-Caliber Guns
Surprisingly Agile
Limited Visibility

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

WALKING TANK: Use Physique to defend against physical attacks; Armor:1

WHAT IS THAT THING?: +2 to create an advantage with Provoke when facing enemies who've never seen a Laufpanzer before.

INCENDIARY ROCKETS: When you deal a physical hit with Combat at range, spend a fate point to prevent the target from using stress boxes to absorb harm.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL:

MENTAL: (USE THE DRIVER'S MENTAL STRESS TRACK)

LAUF PANZER: CHARACTER VS. HARDWARE

Though the Laufpanzer is obviously a piece of hardware operated by a human being, it's written up here as a character instead. Why? Well, in the source material, the capabilities of the Laufpanzer drivers don't seem to matter, really. One ends up trapped inside his vehicle when Robo incapacitates it, and the only reason we even see another driver is because Robo rips open his Laufpanzer and drags him out. In other words, when a Laufpanzer is defeated, so is its driver.

If, on the other hand, you want to put more focus on the driver, it's pretty simple to do. Use the Laufpanzer's Physique skill, stunts, stress boxes, and consequences, and rely on the driver for everything else, like Combat and Athletics skills. When the Laufpanzer takes harm, use its stress track and consequences, not the driver's—the driver is totally protected until they actually leave the vehicle.



DR. VALKYRIE (SUPPORTING NPC)

Dr. Valkyrie was Baron Heinrich von Helsingard's personal liaison to the Nazi Party starting in 1935 and soon became his protégé. Upon his death in 1938, Dr. Valkyrie was selected to take over the Soldier Augmentation projects Helsingard had begun for the Nazi military. During the war she became one of the top scientists of the German Special Weapons Program. After the war she escaped to South America via ODESSA. Dr. Valkyrie spent the next fifteen years pursuing her augmentation experiments and searching for Marconi's Science City hidden deep in the Venezuelan wilderness where she would re-activate a lost Nazi doomsday weapon to start World War 3.

MODES AND SKILLS:

Great (+4) Science (+6 Biomechanics; +5 Notice, Will); Good (+3) Banter; Average (+1) Action

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *All Hail Lord Helsingard*

Ruthless Ambition

Arrogant Scientist

STUNTS:

OPEN CONTEMPT: +2 to Will to defend against intimidation attempts.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

VALKYRIE BRUTES

See page 173 in *Running the Game* for a writeup of Dr. Valkyrie's Brutes.

GENETIC EXPERIMENTS AND OTHER STRANGENESS

VAMPIRE (NAMELESS NPC)

Not a *vampire*-vampire, of course—just a super-strong, rage-fueled, pointy-eared biological eating machine from an another dimension. Every now and then, they manage to find a way into ours and cause trouble.

If you use vampires in your story, don't just have a few. Throw a whole mess of them in. They're at their most dangerous in large numbers, imperiling innocent bystanders everywhere at once.

THE VAMPIRE MODE

▼ **Vampire:** Athletics, Combat, Notice, Physique

(Say, whatever happened to Rex Cannon, anyway?)

Modes: **Fair (+2) Vampire (+3 Combat, Physique)**

Aspects: **Ageless Super-Strong Monster, Insatiable Hunger for Living Flesh**

Stress:

DR. DINOSAUR

Dr. Dinosaur—a.k.a. “H’ssssk”—first appears on uninhabited Taravai Island of French Polynesia in 1999. He is a self-professed super-genius who claims to have escaped the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction via a time machine of his own design. Note that no one has seen this thing and that Dr. Dinosaur appears to the completely fictional *Jurassic Park*-style *Velociraptor*. It is much more likely that Dr. Dinosaur is the result of illegal genetic experimentation conducted in the mid to late 1990s and that his origin story is the inane babbling of a fevered mind. Moreover, he is convinced the Large Hadron Collider is/was/will be the source of the Great Extinction he fled 65 million years ago, and has thus declared open war on all of mankind. This tends to consist of attacking worldwide laboratories, LHC facilities, and Atomic Robo at random.

Dr. Dinosaur's whole shtick is that he routinely and casually breaks reality more times before breakfast than most mammals do all day. His mere presence is enough to change the tone of a story from pulp science adventure fairly grounded in scientific principles to an insane (with genius!) and bordering-on-silly defiance of everything science holds dear. In his claws, common items such as masking tape, a rotary switch, and a blue light bulb—and a few crystals—combine to form an anti-gravity bottle. How? Don't ask. It just works. It's Dr. Dinosaur.

You can find some advice for how to use Dr. Dinosaur as an NPC on page 193 of *Telling Stories the Atomic Robo Way*.

MODES AND SKILLS:

GOOD (+3) DINOSAUR FAIR (+2) CRYSTALS AVERAGE (+1) ACTION

SPECIALIZED	Superb (+5): Athletics
FOCUSED	Great (+4): Combat, Notice, Good (+3): Will Physique, Provoke

▼ Skill improvements (9 points): Specialize one trained skill, specialize three focused skills.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: Time-Traveling Velociraptor (Or Not)

DINOSAUR: *Vastly Superior Reptilian Intelligence*

CRYSTALS: Is There Anything They Can't Do?

ACTION: *As Seen in Jurassic Park*

OMEGA: Frequent Victim of Mammalian Treachery

A LOOK AT DR. DINOSAUR'S WEIRD MODES

▼ **Dinosaur Mode:** Athletics, Combat, Notice, Physique, Provoke.

▼ **Crystals Mode:** This is Dr. Dinosaur's version of the Science mode, with Notice, Will, and all the sciences. The only difference is that the sciences of Crystals aren't really "sciences" at all—they're Dr. Dinosaur's bizarre pseudo-science equivalents to *actual* fields of scientific study. When you improve and name one of these pseudo-science (and even calling them that lends them just a little too much legitimacy), call it something that sounds just bat-guano crazy that bears a passing resemblance to the actual science it's aping, like Time-Space Flow Inversion, Crystal-Resonance Mechanics, or Timevolution Theory. Don't worry if the players look at you like you're crazy; you don't have to explain every little impossible thing to them.

STUNTS:

AN ORDINARY MOTORIST: Inexplicably, though you absolutely appear to be a dinosaur, wearing a couple pieces of ordinary clothing—a hat and trenchcoat, a hardhat and lab coat, a helmet and flight jacket, and the like—is enough for you to pass as a human being to pretty much anyone who isn’t a PC. When thusly attired and non-violent, you can always refuse a compel that would reveal your true nature *without* spending a fate point. When you *do* choose to reveal yourself to an NPC who wasn’t previously aware of your true nature, you gain a +2 bonus to your first skill roll against them.

SO MANY CRYSTALS!: When you create an invention with more than one extra, you can ignore one of its catches as long as the invention incorporates crystals somehow.

BEHOLD MY SUPERIOR AGILITY: +2 to create an advantage with Athletics when running; +2 to defend with Athletics.

REPTILIAN CUNNING: At the beginning of an issue, you may roll Will vs. a difficulty of Great (+4) to create an advantage in the form of a situation aspect called ***All of My Plans Are Brilliant!*** This aspect lasts until the end of the issue. In addition to its usual uses as an aspect, you can invoke it to act against another character, even if you aren’t anywhere near or immediately aware of them, as if you were face-to-face—provided that it’s at least a *little* reasonable that you could’ve planned for their presence there (probably with booby-traps). In addition, your reptilian cunning gives you the option to concede a physical conflict *after* you’ve already rolled your defense against an attack.

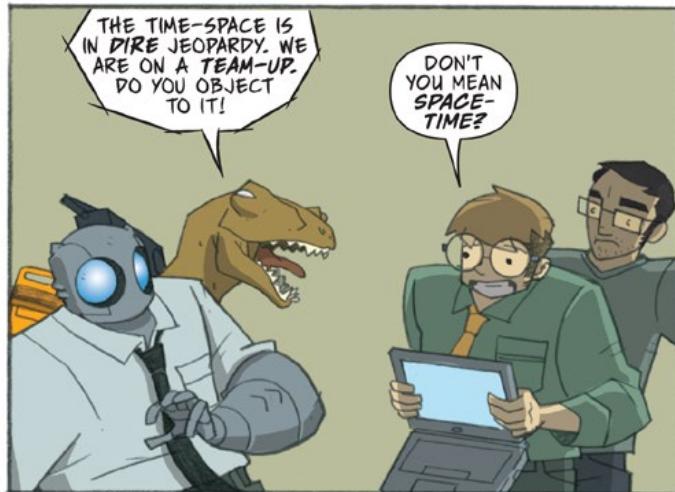
HUGE WEAPON STOCKPILES: You often go around with an odd collection of stuff on your back, and that collection usually includes some heavy firepower. Spend a fate point to reveal a previously unseen (or just ignored) military-grade weapon, like an assault rifle, a few grenades, or a rocket launcher. The weapon gives you either +2 to attack with Combat and Weapon:2, or Weapon:4. It sticks around until the end of the scene or until it’s destroyed, whichever comes first.

Total Benefits = 8 – 5 = 3 fate points added to (if a PC) or lost from (if an NPC) the GM’s reserve)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL



DR. SHINKA

Dr. Kiyutaro Shinka was a gifted biologist and director of Big Science Inc. from 1972 to 1979. Dr. Shinka became obsessed with unlocking the full potential of genetic structure when untethered from the environmental and temporal constraints of evolution. This involved a great deal of radical and illegal experimentation on living beings. When the extent of his “biomega” experiments was uncovered by the then-current Science Team Super Five, Dr. Shinka was removed from Big Science Inc. and placed under arrest. He soon escaped the authorities and continued to perfect his biomega procedure in secret. Dr. Shinka tormented the people of Japan with his enormous monster attacks until he was killed (supposedly) in 1984 by Dr. Junji “Guardian Red” Yumeno, the twenty-first century director of Big Science Inc.



MODES AND SKILLS:

	GREAT (+4) SCIENCE	GOOD (+3) ACTION	FAIR (+2) MUTANT
SPECIALIZED	Fantastic (+6): Biomega, Biologist, Will	Superb (+5): Athletics, Combat, Provoke	
FOCUSED	Superb (+5): Notice	Great (+4): Physique	

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Mad Science, Mad Ambition*

SCIENCE: *Biomega Is the Future**

ACTION: *Reign of Terror*

MUTANT: *Not Merely a Man—Not Anymore*

OMEGA: *Bringing Mankind Into a New Age*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

JOIN ME OR DIE: +2 to create an advantage with Provoke when addressing a large group of people.

UNSTABLE PHYSIOLOGY: Once per scene, spend a fate point to reduce one of your physical consequences by one degree of severity (severe to major, major to mild, mild to nothing).

FUSED WITH BIOMEGA: The biomega in your genetic code is still in flux, and the effects are unpredictable. Once per volume, give yourself a new extra, plus a *sixth* aspect that describes the transformation you’re undergoing. These last until the end of the volume, then vanish.

YOU CANNOT STOP ME: Once per scene, you can check a mental stress box to absorb physical harm. If you do, you get a free boost.

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *Biomega Is the Future*

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

BIOMEGA DRONES (NAMELESS NPCs)

Mode: **Average (+1) Action**

Aspect: **Strength in Numbers**

BIOMEGA KAIJU MONSTER

MODES AND SKILLS:

SUPERB (+5) KAIJU

GREAT (+4) MUTANT GOOD (+3) DINOSAUR

SPECIALIZED

Epic (+7): Atomic Breath, Physique, Provoke, Tooth and Claw

FOCUSED

Superb (+5): Athletics

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *City-Stomping Prehistoric Monster*

BEAST: *Slow But Powerful*

MUTANT: *The Horrors of Biomega*

DINOSAUR: *Towering Tortoise*

OMEGA: *Terrifying Roar*



A LOOK AT BIOMEGA KAIJU MONSTER'S WEIRD MODES AND SKILLS

▼ **Kaiju mode:** Physique, Provoke, Tooth and Claw, Atomic Breath

ATOMIC BREATH

A white-hot jet of pure Biomega energy.

- ➊ Destroy physical barriers or structures.
- ➋ Leverage the destruction you cause to create advantages in the environment, such as blocking avenues of escape with fallen power lines or huge chunks of rubble.
- ➌ Cause harm to targets at range.

Note: Every kaiju will likely have its own kaiju power, whether it's a powerful sonic attack, a poison stinger, or laser-beam eyes. The power for the particular kaiju statted up here just happens to be Atomic Breath.

See page 88 for the Mutant mode and page 87 for the Dinosaur mode.

If you do the math, you'll see that this Biomega Kaiju Monster has a lot of leftover points—its three modes don't cost a whole lot, and it doesn't have a lot of skills to improve. In fact, the only skill that hasn't been improved already is Notice. Don't worry about it. It's enough of a threat as written, and it's only meant to do one thing anyway: be a big city-stomping monster. Having leftover points is okay.

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

30 STORIES HIGH: Bulletproof and fearproof, *but* weak against extreme cold and attacks targeting dorsal fins. Use Physique to defend against everything else. Weapon:4 with attacks that rely on strength. Ignore all ground-based obstacles smaller than a mid-sized office building.

WAKE OF DESTRUCTION: When you succeed with style on a Tooth and Claw attack, spend a fate point to also inflict a collateral consequence (of the lowest available severity) *in addition* to any other stress or consequences the target has taken.

TAIL SWIPE: Before rolling for a Tooth and Claw attack, spend a fate point to apply your full attack against every target in one zone you can reach (which will probably be just about any zone).

BIOMEGA INSIDE: Weapon:4 with Atomic Breath.

HEALING FACTOR: Once per scene, spend a fate point to reduce one of your consequences by one degree of severity (severe to major, major to mild, mild to nothing).

(Total Benefits: $10 - 5 = 5$ fate points from the GM's budget.)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

ALAN

The Automatic Learning Algorithm Network was designed and built by the father of computer science and computation, Alan Turing, in 1951 in secret at Bletchley Park. ALAN was Turing's second and final attempt to build an automatic intelligence. Early progress was promising, but Turing was arrested under Section 11 of British Law. He was stripped of all security clearances and chemically castrated. He committed suicide in 1954. For the next fifty years ALAN quietly pursued its programming. It used its secrecy, governmental bureaucracy, and Cold War paranoia to socially engineer thousands of upgrades to itself as well as hundreds of projects and scientific studies around the globe. This culminated in ALAN's plan to leave Earth in 2011 via a ship designed to specifications first described in 1958 by Project Orion. The fuel required for launch was stolen from nuclear arsenals of both sides of the Cold War which ALAN had been manipulating since 1960 to guarantee a fuel supply.

As a character, ALAN is weird. And not “weird” in the sense we’ve been using the word so far in this book. Like, genuinely *weird*. It’s a purely digital intelligence that exists everywhere and nowhere at once. It doesn’t have a physical form, but it’s able to dupe others into unwittingly doing its bidding, thanks to an ever-more-powerful worldwide telecommunications industry. You can blow it up, but you can’t kill it—and the last panel of *Ghost of Station X* implies that its existence might not even be limited by the digital realm. There’s no telling how, where, or when ALAN will turn up, or in what form, or who will be its pawns, or what esoteric ends they’ll accidentally pursue on its behalf.

So, GM, in game terms, it’s presented here as a few aspects. If ALAN’s a part of your story, consider these to be story-long situation aspects only available to you, and that can be invoked for some special effects—some examples are given below. All of these special invocations have to be paid for out of the reserve, *not* your scene budget.

ASPECT: Guided by a Digital Hand

Invoke when the PCs are traveling and guided by electronic means—flying on autopilot, following a GPS, etc.—to have ALAN reroute them to another destination.

ASPECT: Everything’s Just Zeroes and Ones

Invoke when the PCs communicate with someone electronically—over the phone, online, or the like—to have ALAN hijack the conversation without their knowledge.

ASPECT: Changing the World with a Few Bytes of Data

Invoke to feed the PCs misinformation from an otherwise-reliable source, as long as they’re accessing that information through electronic means, or to spread misinformation about the PCs through—again—respected and reliable media outlets.

ASPECT: Organic Chess Pieces on a Meatspace Board

Invoke to give NPCs a bonus or reroll when the timing of their entry into the story is critical, such as when they’re attacking by surprise—or arbitrarily declaring that they *do* attack by surprise.

Note that ALAN works best when you bend the rules a bit about how aspects are invoked. Normally, when you invoke an aspect, you call it out and tell the players what it is. But ALAN’s most effective when pulling strings from behind the scenes. Feel free to be a more secretive with these. Don’t reveal them to the players. Pay for the invocation long after it’s taken effect instead of right away—surreptitiously set the fate point apart from the rest in your reserve, or lump it in with another fate point the next time you invoke an aspect.

You’re probably also reading these thinking, “Yeah, but couldn’t I do these anytime anyway?” Indeed, you could. But most of these special invocations kinda screw over the players a bit, especially in the context of how *Fate Core* is usually played. These all border on

GM-as-antagonist, which isn't the ordinary state of affairs. ALAN's presence gives you more of a justification to do these things. Just make sure the players eventually find out what's been going on—otherwise, what's the point?—so they know it wasn't you being a jerk. It was *ALAN*.

On the other hand, if that style of play doesn't work for you or your players, that's fine too. Play it out in the open, let them in on it, and trust them to help you create that air of paranoia and oh-God-we're-always-two-steps-behind-these-guys that should characterize a good *ALAN* story.

CHOKAITEN

TAKESHI HAYOTO

Takeshi served with distinction during the Japanese invasion of China and became one of the most decorated aces of the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service. He was the only enemy pilot to shoot down Atomic Robo—twice. He was selected to join Chokaiten, “The Great Heaven Shakers,” which kept him from participating in World War II. Takeshi commanded Chokaiten’s “Yatagarasu” jetpod fighter squadron, and was to personally deploy the Earthquake Bomb that would destroy California and render much of North America a seismically unstable wasteland.

A LOOK AT TAKESHI'S WEIRD MODE

▼ **Fighter Pilot:** Athletics, Combat, Notice, Vehicles, Will

MODES AND SKILLS:

GREAT (+4) FIGHTER PILOT **GOOD (+3) BANTER** **FAIR (+1) ACTION**

SPECIALIZED **Fantastic (+6): Vehicles**

FOCUSED **Superb (+5): Athletics, Combat, Notice, Will** **Great (+4): Empathy, Provoke** **Good (+3): Physique**

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *The Way of the Warrior*

FIGHTER PILOT: *The Top Ace Pilot of World War II—On Either Side*

BANTER: *Implacable in the Face of Death*

ACTION: *Victory Is Measured in Blood**

OMEGA: *In Pursuit of Ever-Greater Glories*

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

SIGNATURE ASPECT: *Victory is Measured in Blood*

QUICK RECOVERY: Once per scene, you may invoke a boost to remove a mild physical consequence.

TERROR OF THE SKIES: +1 to create an advantage or defend with Vehicles when dogfighting. Using a free invocation gives you a +3 bonus instead of +2 when dogfighting.

WE ARE ALREADY DEAD: When you would be taken out in a physical conflict, you can immediately pay a fate point to ignore it and stay in the conflict until the end of your next turn. (If you're a PC, pay the fate point into the GM's reserve). If you're an NPC, pay it from the GM's reserve.) You can do this multiple times to ignore being taken out, but each time the cost increases by one fate point (2 fate points the second time, 3 on the third, and so on). Once you don't or can't pay the cost, you're *really* taken out.

CEREMONIAL SWORD: +1 to attack with Combat; Weapon:2
(Total Benefits: 6 – 5 = 1 fate point from the GM's budget)

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

CHOKAITEN PILOT (NAMELESS NPC)

Mode: **Fair (+2) Action (+4 Vehicles)**

Aspects: **Best of the Best, Committed to the Cause**

Stress:

YATAGARASU JETPOD FIGHTER

FUNCTION: Peerless High-Tech Fighter Jet

FLAW: Blind From Above

MEGA-STUNTS (5 BENEFITS):

- ▼ **These Things Are Tough:** Armor:2. Once per scene, when you take a physical hit, you can choose to reduce that hit by 2 shifts. If you do, the attacker gets a boost after the exchange.
- ▼ **Flying Saucer:** During a physical conflict, before rolling dice on your turn, you can remove a boost from play.
- ▼ **Assault Craft:** Use Vehicles to make physical attacks; +1 to attack with Vehicles, Weapon:2

YATAGARASU: CHARACTER VS. HARDWARE

Like the Laufpanzer, the Yatagarasu could be written up as either a character or hardware. But unlike the Laufpanzer, which are depicted as basically machines that just happen to have humans inside, the source material gives us a better sense of who the operators are—especially Takeshi. When it comes to the Yatagarasu, variation in skill from pilot to pilot is clearly a factor.



CHOKAITEN HEAVY MARINES (SUPPORTING NPC)

MODES AND SKILLS:

Good (+3) Power Armor (+4 Combat, Physique); Fair (+2) Action

ASPECTS:

The Big Guns, Clanking Steel-Clad Guard

STUNTS/MEGA-STUNTS:

ARMOR PLATING: Defend against physical attacks with Physique; Armor:2

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

Note: Chokaiten typically arms its heavy marines with lightning guns (page 81)



ADMIRAL GORO SHIMADA (SUPPORTING NPC)

Admiral Shimada was a veteran battleship captain during the first World War and submarine captain during the interwar years. He was selected by Emperor Hirohito himself to command Project Chokaiten, an elite Naval Group made up of top Japanese scientific and military talents selected to design and deploy superweapons—among them ion rifles, jetpods, jet suits, electro-gravity propulsion, and the devastating Earthquake Bomb—to solidify Japan's hold over the Pacific Ocean and China. Shimada oversaw the secret construction of these technologies, and more, all while maintaining the morale of the men under his command in the face of Japan's defeat and the debut of America's successful superweapon project, the atomic bomb. Logistic and scientific bottlenecks delayed Chokaiten's mission until 1950.

A LOOK AT ADMIRAL SHIMADA'S WEIRD MODE

▼ **Commander:** Deceive, Empathy, Notice, Provoke, Tactics, Will

See the Soldier sample weird mode on page 91 for an explanation of the Tactics skill.

MODES AND SKILLS:

Good (+3) Commander (+5 Provoke, Tactics; +4 Deceive, Empathy, Notice, Will); Fair (+2) Banter; Average (+1) Action (+2 Combat)

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: Stoic Commander of Project Chokaiten

Long Years in the Shadows

The Emperor's Will Manifest in Steel

Keen Military Mind

STUNTS:

ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET: When commanding a vehicle operated by a crew, instead of doing anything else on your turn, you may use your Tactics skill in place of their Vehicles skill.

WAIT FOR IT: When determining order of actions, if you choose an enemy to go next, you may give one ally a boost called **Perfect Timing**.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

300

DENIZENS OF HOLLOW EARTH

Far beneath the world you think you know lies *the Hollow Earth*, an endless expanse of tunnels and caverns carved out by the Immortal Magma Worm, a vast maze filled with lava and monsters, inhabited by a sentient species of silicon-based humanoids whose origins can be traced to the very formation of the Earth. Nice place to visit, but you wouldn't want to die there.

ROCK PERSON (NAMELESS NPC)

The Rock People of Atvatabar are strange and inscrutable to most surface-dwellers' eyes, descended as they are from an extraterrestrial planetoid that impacted Earth some 4 billion years ago. Their chest-inset mouths seem incapable of speech, but they can apparently store memories in the glowing crystals that dot their vast city. Their warriors fight with broad-bladed crystalline swords of various designs.

Modes: **Average (+1) Action**

Aspects: **Silicate Body, Exceedingly Strong**

ROCK MONSTER

The Rock Monsters of Hollow Earth come in many forms, from weird huge crab-like things to weird huge bear-like things. All of them are fairly terrifying.

MODES AND SKILLS:

SUPERB (+5) BEAST

SPECIALIZED **Epic (+7):** Physique, Athletics, Tooth and Claw

FOCUSED **Fantastic (+6):** Notice, Provoke

SEE PAGE 87
FOR BEAST
MODE.

ASPECTS:

CONCEPT: *Gigantic Subterranean Monster*

BEAST: *ROARRR!*

OMEGA: *Descended of the Immortal Magma Worm*

STURTS:

EARTHBORN MIGHT: Absolutely stronger than a normal human, *but* at a cost. Weapon:4.

TOO BIG TO FEEL IT: Bulletproof, *but* weak against ultraviolet light. Armor:2. Defend against physical attacks and intimidation with Physique.

FETCH: When your Tooth and Claw attack succeeds with style, instead of spending a shift to get a boost, you can choose to throw the target 2 zones instead.

SCION OF THE IMMORTAL MAGMA WORM: You can burrow through earth and rock with ease.

Total Benefits: $9 - 5 = 4$ fate points from the GM's reserve

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

1 mild, 1 moderate, 1 severe



THE CRYSTAL HELM OF ATVATABAR

At first glance, the *crystal helm of Atvatabar* is nothing more than a 10-kilogram headpiece made of green crystal. When donned, however, its true nature becomes clear. Anyone who wears the *helm* can not only communicate psychically with the silicate-based beings of Hollow Earth, but command them as well. In addition, the wearer can utilize the inherent crystalline energy (or something) of the Rock People to attack at range using their very bodies as weapons.

FUNCTION: *Powerful Crystalline Artifact of Hollow Earth*

FLAW: *Easily Knocked Off*

STUNTS:

- ▼ **Hear and Obey:** You have a sort of passive command over Hollow Earth creatures in general—they come when you call, treat you as a respected (or feared) leader, and won't give you any guff. Complicated orders that call for advanced intellect, such as those involving Surface Earth technology, will be ignored or subverted. Others can attempt to free the creatures under your thrall. This is an opposed overcome action using Will vs. Will. Each shift they obtain on this roll is another rock-being freed (your choice).
- ▼ **Face Lasers:** You can make a ranged Combat attack through the head crystals of any Rock People in the immediate area (within 2 zones).

THE YONKERS DEVIL (SUPPORTING NPC)

This great feral beast has had multiple run-ins with Tesladyne, but other than the fact that it lays rock-like eggs, it remains a mystery to modern science. Unbeknownst to the Action Scientists, the creature hails from Hollow Earth.

MODES AND SKILLS

Great (+4) Beast (+6 Physique; +5 Athletics, Provoke, Tooth and Claw; +4 Notice)

ASPECTS:

Concept: *Galumphing Monster of Hollow Earth*

Everything's Food
Big and Weird-Looking
Great Gaping Maw

STUNTS:

Monster-Strong: ***Absolutely stronger than a normal human, but at a cost. Bulletproof, but weak against bright light. Weapon:2.***

Total Benefits: $4 - 2 = 2$ fate points from the GM's reserve.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES:

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

1 mild, 1 moderate

TESLADYNE

Below are three versions of Tesladyne, covering three broad periods of the 20th century: Tesla Heavy Industries (1920s and '30s), Tesladyne Aerospace (mid-20th century), and Tesladyne Industries Inc. (late 20th and early 21st centuries).

TESLA HEAVY INDUSTRIES

After creating Robo, Tesla's interests were deep in fringe-science territory. He fixated on the strange and theoretical over the practical and profitable, always in search of new insights and understanding.

Mode: **Average (+1) Resources (+3 R&D)**

Mission Statement: **Science While You Wait!**

TESLADYNE AEROSPACE

After Tesla's death, Robo takes his inheritance and transforms Tesla Heavy Industries into a cutting-edge aerospace firm, with a more militaristic bent and a new breed of employee: the Science Agent.

Mode: **Fair (+2) Resources (+4 Transport; +3 Armory, R&D)**

Mission Statement: **Higher, Faster, Better**

TESLADYNE INDUSTRIES INC.

As the 20th century wears on, Tesladyne evolves into a paramilitary scientific think-tank sanctioned by the UN to investigate the strange and unusual. With dozens of Action Scientists and Resident Scientists deployed at satellite offices and research stations around the world, the company that Nikola Tesla built has never been bigger.

Mode: **Fair (+2) Resources (+4 Armory, R&D; +3 Intel, Transport)**

Mission Statement: **Remain Calm and Trust in Science**



APPENDIX: INSPIRATIONAL MEDIA

"So, like, where do you get your ideas? I steal them!" — Brian Clevinger

COMICS

Atomic Robo and *Real Science Adventures*. Well, you're not going to find a better representation of the Atomic Robo universe than the comic books dedicated to them. The series is written in distinct volumes that tell a specific story or deal with a specific era. So, you can start with any *Robo* book and read the rest in any order without ever being lost. Volumes of *Real Science Adventures* collect shorter stories from all over Robo's world and history. So, you don't have to read those in order either!

Planetary. Warren Ellis and John Cassaday's journey through the secret sci-fi pulp history of the 20th century. Easily the largest influence on the focus and structure of *Atomic Robo* stories.

The Authority. Warren Ellis, Bryan Hitch, and occasionally a few others. Though the tone and scope are about a million miles from the pages of *Atomic Robo*, its wall-to-wall action, team dynamics, and solving of incomprehensible problems while under fire all belong in this game.

Tom Strong. Alan Moore and Chris Sprouse's tales of a classic pulp scientist hero across the 20th and 21st centuries, among others, and a few universes too. Full of fun, imagination, history, and big problems that need punching. Everything an adventure story should be.

League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Vol 1 and Vol 2. Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's alternate history where the fiction of the Western world was all true. The action here pre-dates the default settings of *Atomic Robo*, but you'll be hard-pressed to find a better collection of science weirdos bickering their way to saving the world.

MOVIES

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension. Super scientist rockstar and his team of adventurers travel the globe pushing the boundaries of knowledge and saving the world from weird sci-fi threats. This is easily the most Atomic Robo-iest thing ever filmed. And that includes movies with robots.

The Ghostbusters. Four guys with some weird ideas about nuclear forces and their interactions with the soul get a business loan and invent the supernatural investigations and defense industry. A great model for running a Tesladyne field office.

Indiana Jones and the Lost Ark and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Archaeology, adventure, Nazis, cults, secret agents, and powerful artifacts. Plus the perfect mix of humor and action. *Temple of Doom* is a little more bearable if one remembers it's the prequel to *Raiders*, but it's fairly problematic throughout and the tone never quite jives with *Atomic Robo*. And then they never made a fourth one!

The Rocketeer. A jetpack prototype lands in the lap of an ordinary Joe. The perfect example of a single ingenious

piece of technology becoming the solution to and source of a host of sci-fi adventure problems.

BOOKS, NON-FICTION

Everything by Carl Sagan. But maybe start with *The Demon Haunted World*. His books, often co-written with Ann Druyan, are full of an enthusiasm for the pursuit of science that leaps right off the page.

Charles Fort, anything. You only need one book by Fort, and any of them will suffice, but you've got to read something of his. Turn to any page and start reading. His texts are immensely playful in an oddly postmodern way, so you're not quite sure where his jokes begin or when they end.

Lost City of Z by David Grann. Principally about attempts to explore the Amazon, it also touches upon the drive to explore, the nature of obsession, and the dark side of scientific pursuit and Imperialism.

Turing's Cathedral by George Dyson. A history of mechanical and electronic computation. It starts a little dry, but once the main players start to pop up things get cooking.

Red Moon Rising by Matthew Brzezinski. A history of the early American and Russian rocketry programs starting with the rivalry for Nazi scientists to Sputnik, the Cold War, and nuclear proliferation. Oh, and space exploration as a kind of side effect.

TV

Cosmos: A Personal Voyage. Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan's 13-part series exploring the history of scientific thought and our then-current understanding of the origins of the universe, its current structure, life, its origins, evolution, and more (spoiler: almost everything still applies). This is the series that really planted Sagan on the map of popular consciousness. An amazing resource for big ideas about reality, history, and the enthusiasm of scientific pursuits. And check out the sequel series, hosted by Neil DeGrasse Tyson.

Connections. James Burke's 10-part series exploring the complex web of historical interconnectedness that produced modernity. Presented with Burke's signature wit, charm, and amazing late '70s fashions. This was a huge influence on how the history of *Atomic Robo* was fleshed out. *Connections 2*, and *Connections 3* are worth watching. There's a ton of material on Burke's YouTube Channel — <https://www.youtube.com/user/JamesBurkeWeb>

Eureka. Perhaps more in its concept than its execution, but a top secret DARPA town full of super geniuses fiddling with stuff Man Was Not Meant To Fiddle With is absolutely up the alley of this game. Lots of inspiration for how experiments can go disastrously/hilariously awry, and how even the Action mode guy can help with brainstorming.

The X-Files. A show chock full of conspiracies and sci-fi weirdness being investigated. Also a perfect example of how brainstorming can lead to ridiculous results if you leave it up to the crazy guy.

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NAME

AFFILIATION



CONCEPT ASPECT

GOOD MODE ASPECT

FAIR MODE ASPECT

AVERAGE MODE ASPECT

OMEGA ASPECT

GOOD (+3) MODE

MILD (-2) CONSEQUENCE

SUPERB (+5)

SPECIALIZED SKILLS

FAIR (+2) MODE

MODERATE (-4) CONSEQUENCE

GOOD (+3)

FOCUSED SKILLS

FAIR (+2) MODE

SEVERE (-6) CONSEQUENCE

FAIR (+2)

FOCUSED SKILLS

SEVERE (-6) CONSEQUENCE

AVERAGE (+1)

STUNTS & EXTRAS

SEVERE (-6) CONSEQUENCE

PHYSICAL STRESS **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**

MENTAL STRESS **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**

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