

# FATE 3 Pulp SRD

## What is this?

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This is a System Reference Document to the *FATE 3* system as released in the pulp game *Spirit of the Century* (commonly abbreviated as *SotC*). As *Spirit of the Century* was released under the *Open Game License* the mechanical contents may be shared publically and such is the intent of this document.

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- The following chapters in their entirety:
  - “Introduction”
  - “Background”
  - “The Nether Agenda: A Sample Scenario”
  - “Secrets of the Century”.

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This document is based upon the *Spirit of the Century SRD* from Nick Moffitt and Harald Wagener. It can be found on the official *FATE* website at <http://www.faterpg.com/dl/sotc-srd.html>.

I hope you enjoy this Document and wish you a lot of fun with it.

Martin Nerurkar

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# 1. The Basics

## Things You Should Have

You'll need a few supplies along with these rules to play the game. Here's a list of mandatory items, as well as some recommended ones.

You'll **need**:

- Four Fudge Dice for each player and the GM. If you don't have Fudge dice, see Grey Ghost Games ([www.fudgerpg.com](http://www.fudgerpg.com)) or your local RPG dice supplier for a pack, or just substitute regular six sided dice.
- Some copies of character sheets or at least blank paper to record characters.
- Writing implements.
- Friends. (For running a game, the sweet spot's somewhere between two and six. For creating characters, the more the better – the more folks you have with characters, the easier it will be to put together a game whenever you feel like it.)

You'll find **useful**:

- A set of poker chips or glass beads (to use as fate points).
- Index cards to pass notes and to make notes on things that come up in play.
- Snacks.

## The Ladder

Most things in the system are rated according to the ladder below (when we say “**the ladder**” throughout the text, this is what we mean). Usually, the adjectives are used to describe things – someone might be a Good Pilot or Poor at Academics. The adjectives and numbers are interchangeable, so if a player or GM is more comfortable with numbers, it is equally valid to say Pilot: +3 or Academics: -1. The best compromise is often to use both, as in a Pilot: Good (+3) or a Academics: Poor (-1). On this scale, Average represents the level of capability that someone who does something regularly and possibly professionally, but not exceptionally.

Most people are Average at the things they do for a living, like Science for a scientist, and are Mediocre or Poor at most other things. It is only when they are driven to excel that they surpass those limits.

Pulp heroes push the very boundaries of what “normal” people are capable of, and as such, they tend to be Superb at whatever their central passion is. This means that pulp heroes are genuinely exceptional individuals, and are frequently recognized as such.

|            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| <b>+8:</b> | Legendary |
| <b>+7</b>  | Epic      |
| <b>+6</b>  | Fantastic |
| <b>+5</b>  | Superb    |
| <b>+4</b>  | Great     |
| <b>+3</b>  | Good      |
| <b>+2</b>  | Fair      |
| <b>+1</b>  | Average   |
| <b>0</b>   | Mediocre  |
| <b>-1</b>  | Poor      |
| <b>-2</b>  | Terrible  |

## Rolling the Dice

Whenever a player rolls dice, he rolls four Fudge dice (abbreviated as 4dF) to generate a result between -4 and +4. When reading the dice, a + equals +1, a - equals -1 and a 0 equals 0. Some example dice totals are shown to the right.

The total of the dice is then added to an appropriate skill to get a result. This

|         |      |
|---------|------|
| □ □ ▢ ▢ | = -2 |
| □ ▢ □ □ | = +1 |
| ▢ □ ▢ □ | = +0 |

result can be referred to as the **effort** made, but sometimes, it's just "the result".

If you find yourself without Fudge dice, then roll 4 six-sided dice. Any die showing a 1 or 2 is treated as -, and any die showing a 5 or 6 is treated as +.

## Difficulty

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When a character rolls for a result, he is trying to meet or exceed a target value, which is the **difficulty** for the roll. The difficulty indicates how hard it is to do something. Difficulties are measured on the same ladder as everything else. For instance, it might be a Mediocre (+0) difficulty to jumpstart a car, but a Good (+3) difficulty to repair that same car after a serious breakdown. Guidelines for setting difficulties are found in the GM's section of the book.

The difference between the difficulty and the result of the roll (the effort) is the magnitude of the **effect**, which is measured in **shifts**. Shifts are used, primarily by the GM, to determine the potency of a character's efforts and to govern the resolution of complex actions. We'll talk about shifts more in the coming chapters.

## Skills

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Characters have **skills**, like Drive and Guns, which are rated on the ladder (page 1). Considered on the most basic level, skills represent what your character can do. When a character rolls the dice, he usually is rolling based on his skill.

Nearly every action that the character might undertake is covered by his skills. If he doesn't have a skill on his sheet, either because he didn't take it or the skill itself doesn't exist, it is assumed to default to Mediocre.

Skills are covered in greater detail in their own chapter, beginning on page 44.

## Aspects

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Characters also have a set of attributes called **aspects**. Aspects cover a wide range of elements and should collectively paint a picture of who the character is, what he's connected to, and what's important to him (in contrast to the "what can he do" of skills).

Aspects can be relationships, beliefs, catchphrases, descriptors, items or pretty much anything else that paints a picture of the character. Some possible aspects are shown here.

- Quick Witted
- Sucker for a Pretty Face
- Rough & Tumble
- Dapper Devil
- Stubborn Like a Mule

For many, many more examples see the aspects section starting on page 17. An aspect can be used to give you a bonus when it applies to a situation. Doing this requires spending a fate point (see below). In this capacity, called invoking an aspect, it makes the character better at whatever it is he's doing, because the aspect in some way applies to the situation (such as "Dapper" when trying to charm a lady).

An aspect can also allow you to gain more fate points, by bringing complications and troubling circumstances into the character's life. Whenever you end up in a situation where your aspect could cause you trouble (such as "Stubborn" when trying to be diplomatic), you can mention it to the GM in the same way you mention an aspect that might help you. Alternately, the GM may initiate this

event if one of your aspects seems particularly apt. In either of these two cases, this is called **compelling an aspect**, and its effect is that your character's choices are limited in some way. If the GM initiates or agrees to compel the aspect, you may get one or more fate points, depending on how it plays out.

We'll talk more about fate points shortly.

## Stunts

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Stunts are those things that a character can do which stretch or break the rules. They are the special tricks the character has up his sleeves. Stunts have very specific uses and rules, and are detailed extensively in their own chapter (page 65). Starting characters will have five stunts.

## Fate Points

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Every player begins the first session of the game with a number of **fate points (FP)** equal to how many aspects he has, usually ten. Fate points give players the ability to take a little bit of control over the game, either by giving their character bonuses when they feel they need them, or by taking over a small part of the story. Fate points are best represented by some non-edible token, such as glass beads or poker chips. (Previous experiments with small edible candies have left players strapped for points!)

## Using Fate Points

Characters may, at any point, spend a fate point to gain a bonus, invoke an aspect, tag an aspect, make a declaration, or fuel a stunt.

### Gain a Bonus

A fate point can be spent to add 1 to any roll of the dice, or improve any effort (such as an attack or defense) by 1. In practice, this is the least potent way to use a fate point – you're usually much better off using one of the other applications, below. (Most games get rid of this rule once their players get comfortable using aspects; you can, too .)

### Invoke an Aspect

Aspects (see above, page 2) are those things that really describe a character and his place in the story. When you have an aspect that's applicable to a situation, it can be invoked to grant a bonus. After you have rolled the dice, you may pick one of your aspects and describe how it applies to this situation. If the GM agrees that it's appropriate, you may spend a fate point and do one of the following:

1. Reroll all the dice, using the new result, or
2. Add two to the final die roll (after any rerolls have been done).

You may do this multiple times for a single situation as long as you have multiple aspects that are applicable. You cannot use the same aspect more than once on the same skill use, though you may use the same aspect on several different rolls throughout a scene, at the cost of one fate point per use.

### Tag an Aspect

Scenes, other characters, locations, and other things of dramatic importance can have aspects. Sometimes they're obvious, and sometimes they're less so. Players can spend a fate point to invoke an aspect which is not on their own character sheet, if they know what the aspect is. This is referred to as tagging an aspect, and is covered in greater detail in the Aspects chapter, on page 17.

As a rule of thumb, tagging someone or something else's aspects requires a little more justification than invoking one of your own aspects. For scene aspects, it should be some way to really bring in the visual or theme that the aspect suggests. For aspects on opponents, the player needs to know about the aspect in the first place, and then play to it.

### Power a Stunt

Some stunts have particularly potent effects, and require spending a fate point when used. If a stunt requires a fate point to be spent, it will be made clear in the description. See the section on stunts (page 65) for more.

### Make a Declaration

You may simply lay down a fate point and declare something. If the GM accepts it, it will be true. This gives the player the ability to do small things in a story that would usually be something only the GM could do.

Usually, these things can't be used to drastically change the plot or win a scene. Declaring "Doctor Herborn drops dead of a heart attack" is not only likely to be rejected by the GM, it wouldn't even be that much fun to begin with. What this can be very useful for is convenient coincidences. Does your character need a lighter (but doesn't smoke)? Spend a fate point and you've got one! Is there an interesting scene happening over there that your character might miss? Spend a fate point to declare you arrive at a dramatically appropriate moment!

Your GM has veto power over this use, but it has one dirty little secret. If you use it to do something to make the game cooler for everyone, the GM will usually grant far more leeway than she will for something boring or, worse, selfish.

As a general rule, you'll get a lot more leniency from the GM if you make a declaration that is in keeping with one or more of your aspects. For example, the GM will usually balk at letting a character spend a fate point to have a weapon after he's been searched. However, if you can point to your "Always Armed" aspect, or describe how your "Distracting Beauty" aspect kept the guard's attention on inappropriate areas, the GM is likely to give you more leeway. In a way, this is much like invoking an aspect, but without a die roll.

### Refreshing Fate Points

Players usually regain fate points between sessions when a **refresh** occurs. If the GM left things at a cliffhanger, she is entitled to say that no refresh has occurred between sessions. By the same token, if the GM feels that a substantial (i.e., dramatically appropriate) amount of downtime and rest occurs in play, the GM may allow a refresh to occur mid-session.

The amount of fate points a player gets at a refresh is called his **refresh rate** and it is usually equal to the number of aspects the player has. When a refresh occurs, players bring their number of fate points **up to** their refresh rate. If they have more, their total does not change.

### Earning New Fate Points

Players earn fate points when their aspects create problems for them. When this occurs, it's said that the aspect **compels** the character. When the player ends up in a situation where his compelled aspect suggests a problematic course of action, the GM should offer the player a choice: He can *spend* a fate point to ignore the aspect, or he can act in accordance with the aspect and *earn* a fate point. Sometimes, the GM may also simply award a fate point to a player without explanation, indicating that an aspect is going to complicate an upcoming situation. Players can refuse that point and spend one of their own to avoid the complication, but it's not a good idea, as that probably means the GM will use things that *aren't* tied to you.

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This isn't just the GM's show; players can trigger compels as well either by explicitly indicating that an aspect may be complicating things, or by playing to their aspects from the get-go and reminding the GM after the fact that they already behaved as if compelled. The GM isn't always obligated to agree that a compel is appropriate, but it's important that players participate here. See the Aspects chapter on page 17 for a more detailed treatment of compels.

## 2. Character Creation

### Steps of Character Creation

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1. Think about your character concept, reviewing the ideas below.
2. Make up a cool pulp name for your character.
3. Go through the **phases** (see below) in order, picking two aspects each phase.
4. Assign your skills.
5. Select five stunts for your character.

### Character Ideas

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While players have the leeway to explore any ideas that interest them, it's worth remembering that the pulps have a handful of easily recognizable character types. While you are far from obliged to fit characters into these neat little "boxes", we encourage you to create characters that match the overall flavor. Beyond that, you're free to fill in details as you like. A pulp setting can support characters of almost every stripe, but there are a few common themes worth taking a look at.

#### Academic

The academic lives somewhere between the scientist and the explorer. The academic is compelled by his interest in his field, which is usually something like history, linguistics, anthropology or (most famously) archaeology. The academic knows that lost, hidden, and forgotten knowledge exists all over the world. Ancient ruins, obscure libraries, mysterious artifacts – all these can offer answers to questions that have not even been asked yet.

*What are **you** doing:* You are answering questions, finding what was lost, and trying to expand the breadth of human knowledge.

#### Explorer

Though much of the map of the world is filled in, much of it remains blank or is simply wrong. The explorer thrives on discovering who and what is in those unknown places. The khaki-clad, pith-helmeted image of the explorer is perhaps the most compelling, but the same spirit can beat in the hearts of ship captains, spelunkers, or even ambassadors.

*What are **you** doing:* You're discovering the world, opening new doors and seeking lost secrets and treasures.

#### Gadget Guy

The gadget guy is the recipient of the wonders of science. He is the keeper of a unique piece of technology, usually at the behest of its creator. The creator may or may not still be alive and serving as a patron for him (and in some cases, the creator and the gadget guy are the same person!). The device in question is usually quite potent, and serves as a signature for the character – something interesting and immediately recognizable, like a jet pack, a super car, or an exotic weapon.

*What are **you** doing:* With great technology comes great responsibility. Your gadget has made you more capable of taking action (whatever action you pursue), so you have embraced it.

#### Gentleman Criminal

Crime is usually a brutish thing, fueled by necessity, but for some it is the only true challenge available. Usually possessed of copious talents, enough that they have already found success elsewhere, gentleman criminals pursue a life of crime because of its excitement. Such characters enjoy the good life and civilization, so the adventures of exploration hold no appeal to them, especially when compared to the thrill of the chase, outwitting investigators, and similar brushes with danger.

Often, these criminals turn into sociopathic masterminds as they turn more and more to crime. But others maintain a certain basic, albeit twisted, honesty that informs their crimes. A burglar may have a strong code to harm no one, or may rob from the rich to give to the poor. An assassin may only accept contracts on those he feels society is better off without. Most such ethical criminals can be convinced to leave their past behind them and use their talents to more challenging, world-bettering ends, but true retirement is not often in their nature.

*What are **you** doing:* You're trying to find something worth doing. When you find it, you seize upon it with gusto.

## Jungle Lord

When we speak of the jungle lord, we're speaking of characters like Tarzan or Mowgli, a man raised by animals, possessed of great strength and ability to communicate with or command animals.

Usually awkward in the face of civilization, these heroes act with a simpler understanding of things like justice, but with time, they can become bridges between two worlds.

*What are **you** doing:* You're protecting your home and your pack, and attempting to understand the world outside.

## Man of Mystery

There is no magic, only things science does not yet understand – and there are a lot of those. The man of mystery has delved into these secrets, be they the true workings of the mind, the “kung fu” of the eastern warriors, or perhaps a handful of syllables of the true name of God.

Whatever this knowledge is, it separates him from his fellow man, often so much that the hero adopts a persona to allow separation between his heroic personality and his normal life.

There's a proximity to madness which mystery invites that can mean these heroes are of a darker, more disturbing character than the norm.

*What are **you** doing:* You've seen the darkness, and you're on a mission to strike it down. You're punishing those who think they're above punishment.

## Operator

The Operator is an agent, perhaps for a government agency that can't be acknowledged, perhaps for a secret organization. He may not know, himself. But it means he's connected (well connected), and is privy to secrets that others just don't know about.

His job? Whatever the agency says it is. Thankfully, that is usually exactly what the Operator would be interested in doing in the first place. When conflict eventually arises between the operator and the agency, it usually goes very badly indeed for one of them or the other.

*What are **you** doing:* You're serving a greater cause – perhaps for your government, or perhaps a higher or more secret authority than that.

## Plucky Reporter

One of the things that makes the world so much smaller is the news. A few decades back, if something happened a few states away, or anywhere else in the world, it would take time to trickle into the awareness of the average person.

Now, with the telegraph and radio, people know what's going on almost as soon as it's happened. The demand for regular news is fierce and competitive, and in this day and age, "The Scoop" means a substantial advantage for newspapers – if you've got the story, there's no alternative, so people buy papers.

With this in mind, newspapers are always looking for news of the exotic and interesting, and they're willing to tolerate a lot of foibles from a reporter who can bring in the big story.

*What are **you** doing:* You are finding out everything you can so you can share it with the world.

## Primitive/Foreigner

Usually of a people that some explorer has 'discovered', the primitive is an outsider in the world that other heroes operate in. The subject of condescension and curiosity, he is also the keeper of knowledge that has been lost, or not yet discovered, by the white man in his tall cities.

Perhaps this knowledge is some form of "magic" or something more recognizable as science, like a knowledge of botany far beyond what "modern" man has discovered. One way or another, the primitive is usually quite sophisticated, albeit in a way that most people don't recognize.

*What are **you** doing:* You are representing your people, looking for knowledge to take back to them, or perhaps trying to carve out a new life in exile.

## Science Hero

The science hero is the best way to summarize a character like Lester Dent's classic pulp hero Doc Savage: brilliant, tough, strong, basically better than you at everything, and made that way by science!

Thankfully, most science heroes are slightly less obvious examples of the superman incarnate. A science hero may be very much like a gadget hero, someone who has benefited from extreme science in some way – perhaps making them a little stronger, tougher or faster than they would have been. Such characters tend to be well rounded (though rarely to the somewhat silly level of a Doc Savage himself ) but their specific interests are frequently tied to their origin.

*What are **you** doing:* You do a bit of everything, taking all comers.

## Scientist

In pulp, everyone is a scientist. Science is the door to the future, and every educated man has an interest in it. Despite that, it is easy to spot the committed scientist, master of one or more fields, dedicating his time and effort to the pursuit of science. Whereas other heroes seek adventure and appreciate science, the scientist seeks science and appreciates adventure.

While the scientist may have richly appointed labs or shops, there is still too much to be found, too many theories to be tested, too much to do, to simply stay cooped up. Scientists can have one or more fields of interest, which will generally be reflected by their equipment. A chemist or botanist may have a steady supply of bizarre and unique concoctions, while an engineer might have exotic gadgets or weapons.

*What are **you** doing:* You're challenging assumptions and testing theories, bringing science out into the field with the intention of proving a theory that can solve a problem or create something new and beneficial to mankind.

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## Two-Fisted Pilot

The world is getting smaller as we watch, and aviation lies at the heart of it. Every year, the utility of planes is growing, and their range and power increases in kind. The pilot shares much of his spirit with the explorer, and in many ways is the next step in the chain of discovery. The explorer may find an exotic locale, but it is the pilot who ties it in to the rest of the world.

The Great War made pilots into dashing, romantic figures, and the commercial realities of the post-war era are making them more and more important.

*What are you doing:* You're connecting the world to itself. Your passion is in seeing all there is to see, going to strange and exotic locales and bringing the outside world along for the ride, and taking a piece with you when you leave.

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## Creating the Character

Character generation takes place over five *phases*. Each phase outlines events in that character's life. The first phase sets up their general background, concept, and early youth. The second covers the events of The Great War (the common term of the time for World War I), bringing them to adulthood. The new characters become adults in the final year of the War, and the last three phases delve into the character's post-War adventures.

As laid out, character creation is a group activity, done at the same time, with at least three players (remember, the more players for a *character creation session*, the better!) in addition to the GM. The character creation process includes a number of built-in ways to establish ties and history between the characters and the setting. Character creation can often take the time of a full session of regular play, and is a good opportunity to lay out the foundations of the setting, and allow everyone to establish a common understanding of each others' characters. During character creation, players are encouraged to talk out loud about their characters, make suggestions to each other, discuss how to make their characters intersect, talk about relationships and interactions between the characters, and otherwise establish some of the campaign background.

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## Preparation

Before the first phase, it's a good idea to think about the concept for your character. Your character could be modeled after a particular pulp hero, or could be based around some specific thing that you want to be able to do, like fly with a jetpack, blow things up, or break boards with your head. Pulp heroes can usually be described briefly, so try to think of a concept that you can express simply. If you can express it with an exclamation point at the end, all the better!

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## Names

Pulp names can be like any kind of name, but there is usually a particular cadence to them. The most common model is a short first name and a last name which is also a word (usually a noun or adjective, but sometimes a proper noun will be a good fit). This allows for simple, resonant names like "Drake Devlin", "Maggie Honor", "Jack Stone", and so on.

More "normal" names are fine too, but in the world of Pulp, they suggest a bit of removal from the action. Such names are more appropriate if your character also has an alias (a la Lamont Cranston and The Shadow) or is intentionally cultivating an aristocratic air.

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## Phases

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### Phase 1: Background

This phase covers the character's youth, from birth to age 14, but in a more abstract sense also covers the core concept for the character as a "normal person". While youth may be a time of adventure and excitement, it is also the time when we are most shaped by our family and environs. This phase is an opportunity to reflect the character's family and upbringing. When describing events in this phase, consider answers to the following questions:

- What were the family's circumstances like? Rich? Poor? Scholarly? Isolated? Pious? Political?
- How big is the family?
- How well does the character get along with his family?
- What nation is the character from? What region?
- How was the character educated?
- What were the character's friends like? Did the character get into much trouble?

### Player Rules

1. Write down a brief summary of the events of the phase.
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the phase, or the character's national, familial, or cultural upbringing.

## Phase 2: War

Phase two is World War I, or as it's called in the 1920s, The Great War. While the characters may technically have been too young to serve, they may have done so anyway; as exceptional individuals, it would not have been hard for them to fake their age. Because we're talking about pulp heroes here, while they may have spent some time in the trenches, it's more likely that they spent most of their time on top secret missions for elite soldiers, spies, researchers or pilots. Alternatively, they may have spent their time in other parts of the world, dealing with the end of colonialism, or exploring the mysterious East.

This is the time when the characters start coming into their own, and begin realizing their true potential.

Some questions to consider during this period:

- Did your character fight in the war? For whom? Where? In what capacity?
- Were you a member of any secret units? Did you meet any of the other characters there?
- Who was your patron? What happened to him or her?

### Player Rules

1. Write down a brief summary of the events of the phase. Include the name and fate of your mentor.
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the phase.

## Phase 3: Novel

Phase three is the character's first pulp novel, starring him or her! Each player needs to come up with a title for the novel starring his character, in a fashion reminiscent of the pulps. The general pattern is:

**Character Name** (vs./in.../and) *Adventurous Thing!*

As such, **Diego MacKinnon** and *the Spider's Web* or **Drake Devlin** in... *The Redemption Game* would be ideal.

Then, each player needs to think up a story to go with his title. The story doesn't need to have a lot of detail – in fact, it should be no more detailed than the blurb on the back of the paperback.

### Player Rules

1. Write down the title and back cover blurb (a couple sentences at most) for your character's pulp novel. Don't nail down all of the details of it yet (you'll find out why below).
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the novel. (You can delay doing this, wait to see how the next couple of phases play out, and then choose your aspects at the end).

## Phase 4: Guest Star

At the beginning of this phase, the GM writes down all the book titles on separate sheets of paper or a set of index cards, shuffles the stack, and hands them out. If a player gets his own novel, he should trade index cards with the person to his right until everyone has a title that isn't theirs. The title of the book a player is now holding is a book that his character had a supporting role in. For each index card, the involved players – the player whose book it is, and the player who has just received that book's index card – should discuss the story, and add one or two sentences to the description of the novel to reflect the supporting character's role.

### Player Rules

1. Add a sentence or two to the description of the pulp novel you're supporting cast in.
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the novel. (Again, you can delay doing this.)

## Phase 5: Guest Star

Phase five is identical to phase four, with the sole caveat that no character can costar in the same book twice.

### Player Rules

1. Add a sentence or two to the description of the pulp novel you're supporting cast in.
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the novel.

## Adding Characters Later

Players who join after the initial character creation session should ask for volunteers to be in their book (volunteers do not get additional aspects, however). They should also pick two books that sound interesting to costar in.

## Skills

- |                      |                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 skill at Superb:   | <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                     |
| 2 skills at Great:   | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                            |
| 3 skills at Good:    | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>                                                   |
| 4 skills at Fair:    | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| 5 skills at Average: | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

Once all players have mapped out their phases and chosen their aspects, it's time to pick skills. Each player gets to choose skills as shown here. Any skill the character does not explicitly take defaults to Mediocre. Because of the "shape" of this set of skills, this is sometimes referred to as the character's skill pyramid.

## Stunts

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Each player selects five stunts for his character. These are likely to be stunts that are associated with the character's most highly-ranked skills, but there is no restriction in that regard. In a number of cases, it may be fine to take a stunt that's tied to a skill that the player has left at the default, if the GM agrees to it.

For more on stunts and how they can affect the game, see the chapter on stunts

## Conclusion

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At the end of the character creation exercise, each player should now have a complete character with:

- A summary of his childhood (1900-1914)
- A summary of his role in The Great War (1914-1918)
- His pulp novel and two other novels he appeared in, establishing ties to at least two other players' characters
- Ten aspects
- Fifteen skills
- Five stunts

## Advice on Character Creation

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### Motivation

We keep coming back to this, but it's critical to determine why your character does what he does. *SotC* characters are exceptional, and they could very easily find success in less exciting fields than those that are likely to come the way of the characters, so it is on your head to figure out *why* your character is going to keep getting involved in these things. If you don't, the GM is under no obligation to go out of her way to make the game work for you – she'll be too busy with other players who made characters that have a reason to participate.

This may sound a little harsh, but there's a habit that a lot of smart, talented players develop over time that leads them to want to "win" the game. By having a character leave the adventuring life and become wealthy, powerful and successful elsewhere, they beat the system that otherwise forces them to constantly grind against an escalating scale of opposition for negligible rewards.

The thing to remember with *SotC* is that your character has already won. He's successful enough that he doesn't need to do anything adventurous with his life, so it's up to you to figure out why he does so.

One way or another, the answer almost always points to the idea that success is not a goal, it's a means. The true goal, whatever it is for the character, is something that calls for action. Once you have that pinned down, you almost definitely want to reflect it in your choice of aspects.

### Choosing Aspects

Aspects can be both useful and dangerous, but they should never be boring. Whenever you choose an aspect, stop a minute to think about what kinds of situations you can imagine using it for, and what kind of trouble it might get you into. The very best aspects suggest answers to both those questions, and an aspect that can answer neither is likely to be very dull indeed.

When you're picking aspects, one of the best ways to determine that you and the GM are on the same page is to discuss three situations where you feel the aspect would be a help or a hindrance.

This is especially handy if the GM suggests the aspect – she probably has a pretty clear idea of what it means when she suggests it, but that idea may not be immediately obvious.

## Powerful Aspects

At first glance, the most powerful aspects would seem to be things that are broadly useful with no real downside, things like “Quick”, “Lucky” or “Strong”, and a lot of players are tempted to go with those out the gate. **Resist that temptation!**

See, there are three very large problems with aspects like this: they're boring, they don't generate fate points, and they surrender your ability to help shape the story.

Boring is a pretty obvious problem. Consider a character who is “Lucky” and one who has “Strange Luck”. The latter aspect can be used for just as many good things as the former, but it also allows for a much wider range of possibilities.

You'll also want to have some room for negative results of aspects. This may seem counterintuitive at first, but remember that every time an aspect makes trouble for you, you'll receive a fate point, which is a pretty powerful incentive.

To come back to “Strange Luck”, it means that the GM can throw bizarre, even unfortunate, coincidences at the character, but **you get paid for it**. If this doesn't seem tempting enough yet, remember that the GM is probably going to do something bizarre to you anyway – shouldn't you benefit from it, and have some say in how it happens?

And that leads to the last point. When the GM sits down to plan an adventure, she's going to look over the aspects of the players involved. If one character has the aspect “Quick” and another has the aspect “Sworn Enemy of the Secret Brotherhood of the Flame”, which one do you think suggests more ideas for the GM?

Your aspects give you a vote in what sort of game you're going to be playing in, so don't let it go to waste. If nothing else, you have just established that the Secret Brotherhood of the Flame exists in the setting, and the GM will probably turn to you for the details.

So in the end, the most powerful aspects are easy to spot, because they're the most *interesting* ones. If you consider that you want an aspect you can use to your advantage but which can also be used to generate fate points, then it's clear you will get the most mechanical potency out of an aspect that can do both. What's more, aspects that tie into the world somehow (such as to a group, or a person) help you fill in the cast and characters of the world in a way that is most appealing to you.

Bottom line: if you want to maximize the power of your aspects, **maximize their interest**. For more extensive advice on choosing aspects, see the Aspects chapter, starting at [page XX](#).

## Fast Character Creation

Sometimes you simply do not have time to do a full character generation and you just want to get started. In those situations, simply begin with a blank character sheet, and ask each player to choose the following:

A name and brief description of their character

by brief we mean a sentence or two will suffice. The character may have a more detailed background, but this is not the time to go into it.

#### The character's apex skill

Whatever skill the character has at Superb should be selected and written down on the sheet – or, if you want a little more than that, the character's "top three" skills.

#### Two aspects

one should be something primarily positive about the character, while the other should be a weakness or flaw. This is not mandatory – they really can be any two aspects, but players will have an easier time if they have a little bit of a mix. For each aspect determined in advance, the character earns a fate point, so characters made with this method start with two fate points.

That's it. Players are free to fill in more details as they see fit, but that's all you need to do to start playing. If you're looking to make your game as much of a pickup game as it can be, this may be exactly what you need.

## Creation on the Fly

Once play begins, whenever the GM calls for a roll on a skill, each player has three options.

1. If they have the skill on their sheet, roll it normally.
2. If they don't have it on their sheet, they can write it down in any empty slot and roll it at the chosen level.
3. They can roll it at Mediocre.

This way, the player ends up filling out the skill tree over the course of play. Similarly, the player may write in aspects and stunts at the point where they would use them.

Every time you write down an aspect, take a fate point. This way, when you've filled in your 10th aspect, you'll have earned a total of ten fate points, just like other starting characters.

Players are still expected to come up with their character's novel and guest appearances in other novels, but this is also done on the fly. Players should feel free to think about their title of their novel over play, and at any point when they need a fate point they can launch into a flashback, generally prefaced by a statement line "This reminds me of \* <Title of their Novel> \* ". The players give a quick blurb of a salient point from their novel and how this reminds them of it, however tenuously. As soon as this is done, the player gains a fate point. If the player then immediately spends the FP to make a declaration about the scene, the GM may give it extra weight for falling in line with the flashback.

## Some Tips

- Make sure players get values set for Athletics, Endurance, Resolve, and Alertness early on. Those skills are important enough to things like combat that players will end up feeling frustrated if they don't think to pick those up until it's too late. A fighting skill like Guns, Weapons, or Fists may be important, too.
- Stunts are a lot harder to choose on the fly than skills are, so the GM needs to keep the character concepts in mind, and suggest stunts when the situation seems to dictate that it might be useful. Look at skills rated close to the top of the character's pyramid, then look to the stunts chapter (page XX) and locate the skill in question. Each skill has a few sets under it that are conceptually linked and can help quick picking. But for even faster picking, refer to our Quick Stunt Picks appendix, page XX.
- Don't worry about apparent contradictions, such as situations where a player picks a skill at a high level after rolling it at Mediocre several times, or chooses a stunt which would have

made an earlier scene play out differently. There is no contradiction. The character was playing their cards close to the vest, and like in much adventure fiction, their abilities only matter from the point where they're revealed.

## Example Character: Sky Hobo

### Character Story Worksheet

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Character Name:</i> Diego MacKinnon, Sky Hobo                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                 |
| <b>Phase One (Origin)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                 |
| <i>Events:</i> Diego was born Lexington Becksmith. His family had made quite a lot of money from industrial inventions but no one ever realized that he rushed through his studies in order to disguise himself as a street urchin, stealing away to the streets of Manchester to run with the local boys.                                                                                              |                                                 |
| <i>First Aspect:</i> Engineering Prodigy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <i>Second Aspect:</i> Dandy Living Rough        |
| <b>Phase Two (The Great War)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                 |
| <i>Who inspired you to greatness?</i> He learned the tricks of the trade from Captain Jake Forsythe.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                 |
| <i>Events:</i> His father had taught him to see bureaucracies and societies and organizations as great machines. The right adjustment could improve their function or send them crashing down. In the Autumn of 1916, he boarded the ship with a new identity to fight in the trenches in Flanders.                                                                                                     |                                                 |
| <i>First Aspect:</i> Tinkerer in the societies of Men                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <i>Second Aspect:</i> Man of a thousand faces   |
| <b>Phase Three (Your Novel!)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                 |
| <i>Title of your Novel:</i> "Diego MacKinnon and the Spider's Web"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                 |
| <i>Guest Stars in your novel:</i> Drake Devlin, Maggie Honor                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                 |
| <i>Events:</i> As our hero tramps through the war-torn lands of Eastern Europe, he uncovers signs of a vast conspiracy. Diego comes within a hair's breadth of catching the dastardly Drake Devlin, but soon finds himself on the trail of the very core of the Khronos conspiracy.                                                                                                                     |                                                 |
| <i>First Aspect:</i> Catchin' out                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <i>Second Aspect:</i> Hobo Detective            |
| <b>Phase Four (Other Adventures)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                 |
| <i>Guest starring in...:</i> "The Struggle to Build Zeppelin City"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                 |
| <i>Events:</i> Diego stowed away in the great dirigible Indefatigable. His transport had joined an armada of independent craft. Diego joined the construction teams that connected the great ships together. It was a city beautiful, that offered little for the lowly prole. As with all systems in motion, it could be brought down with a single carefully placed blow. Or, a more subtle change... |                                                 |
| <i>First Aspect:</i> Clinging to life by a thread                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <i>Second Aspect:</i> My trusty hobo harpoon    |
| <b>Phase Five (Other Adventures)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                 |
| <i>Guest starring in...:</i> "Gerald Carter - The Heritage"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                 |
| <i>Events:</i> Living rough on the underside docks, Diego is witness to a cruel murder. Unable to let injustice persist, he moves to track down the killer. Eventually his investigations lead him to one Clyde Cummings, a ne'er-do-well after the Carter fortune. Diego helps Carter thwart the vile plan.                                                                                            |                                                 |
| <i>First Aspect:</i> "I built this city!"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <i>Second Aspect:</i> Protector of the citizens |

### Character Sheet

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Name:</b> Sky Hobo                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Age:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Player:</b>       |
| <b>Looks:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Fate Points:</b>  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Refresh Rate:</b> |
| <b>Aspects:</b><br>Engineering Prodigy<br>A dandy living rough<br>Tinkerer in the societies of men<br>Man of a thousand faces<br>Catchin' out<br>Hobo detective<br>Clinging to life by a thread<br>My trusty Hobo Harpoon<br>"I built this city!"<br>Protector of the citizens. | <b>Skills:</b><br>Superb (+5) Rapport<br>Great (+4) Endurance, Stealth<br>Good (+3) Investigation, Engineering, Deceit<br>Fair (+2) Athletics, Guns, Burglary, Mysteries<br>Average (+1) Sleight of Hand, Survival, Pilot, Resolve, Drive                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                      |
| <b>Stunts:</b><br>Jury-Rig [Engineering]<br>Mighty Leap [Athletics]<br>Danger Sense [Alertness]<br>Clever Disguise [Deceit]<br>The Hobo Harpoon [Gadget]                                                                                                                        | <b>Health</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/><br><b>Composure:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/><br><b>Consequences:</b> |                      |

|              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jury-Rig     | The character is adept at putting together small devices and quick contrivances using available materials. He never faces increased difficulty due to poor tools, and can assemble available materials into something of use one time increment faster than usual.                                 |
| Hobo Harpoon | This is a harpoon-gun that can be used like a weapon with the Guns skill. <b>Improvements:</b> <i>Additional Capability</i> (Grappling Hook); <i>Upgrade</i> (+2 bonus when using it to grapple onto something using Athletics); <i>Craftsmanship</i> (+1 to Weapons rolls when using as a weapon) |

## 3. Aspects

Characters have a set of attributes called **aspects**. Aspects cover a wide range of elements and should collectively paint a decent picture of *who* the character is, what he's *connected* to, and what's *important* to him. (By contrast, skills could be said to paint a similar picture of what the character can *do*.) Aspects can be relationships, beliefs, catchphrases, descriptors, items or pretty much anything else that paints a picture of the character.

Scenes also have aspects. Aspects in this context serve as a compact way to describe the relevant details of an environment, and can be used by the characters present in the scene. See Encountering Other Aspects, [page XX](#), for more.

In terms of game rules, aspects are the main avenue by which a player gains or spends **fate points**, a kind of currency that can be spent for bonuses or earned when aspects cause problems for the player. Some possible aspects for characters include:

|                               |                    |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Quick Witted                  | First on the Scene |
| Sucker                        | Girl in Every Port |
| Rugged                        | Silver Spoon       |
| Irish                         | Big Man on Campus  |
| "You'll never take me alive!" | Ivory Tower        |
| Stubborn                      | Honest             |

For many, many more examples, see the Sample Aspects section ([page XX](#)).

### Picking Character Aspects

More than anything else, aspects are a player's most explicit way of telling the GM, "This is the stuff I want to see in the game". If the player picks an aspect like "Death Defying", then he should be able to fully expect that the GM will put him in death-defying situations. GMs should want players to use their aspects; players should pick the ones they want to use, and GMs should encourage them to choose aspects that will be both interesting and useful.

Once a player decides on an idea for an aspect, he needs to figure out what aspect name best describes what he intends; there are usually many possible names for a desired aspect, which can make this choice somewhat difficult. However, most of the time, an aspect is going to be a **phrase**, a **person** or a **prop**.

A **phrase** can be anything from a descriptive phrase ("Strong As An Ox") to a simple descriptor ("Strong"), or even a literal quote ("No One Is Stronger Than Sledge!"). Phrase aspects come into play based on how well the situation matches them; a colorful phrase adds a lot of flavor and innately suggests several different ways to use it. This potentially makes phrase aspects some of the most flexible aspects in the game.

A **person** can be anyone important to the character. A friend, an enemy, a family member, a sidekick, a mentor – as long as someone matters to the character, he makes an appropriate aspect. A person aspect is most easily used when that person is in the scene with the character, but the aspect can come up in other ways, depending upon the person's history and relationship with the character. For example, if a character has his mentor as an aspect, that aspect might be useful for things his mentor would have instructed him on.

**Props** are things, places or even ideas – anything external to the character that isn't a person. A prop can be useful if it's something the character has with him, or if it's the crux of a conflict, but it may also imply things about the character, or even be useful in its absence (if only I had my "Trusty Toolbox"!).

These three categories of aspects aren't hard and fast. An aspect like "Maggie needs us *now*!" has elements of both a phrase and a person, and that's just fine. We've just provided these categories to help provide a way to think about how to frame aspects.

## Why Would I Want a Bad Aspect?

You may have noticed that a number of the aspects throughout this book are "bad" aspects – they indicate a downside for a character, either in their directly negative connotations, or in their two-edged nature. Aspects like Drunkard, Sucker, Stubborn, and Honest all suggest situations where the character will have to behave a certain way – making an ass of himself at an important social function, falling for a line of bull, failing to back down when it's important to do so, or speaking truth when truth is the path to greatest harm.

So why put such aspects on your sheet if they're only going to make trouble for you? Simple: you want that kind of trouble.

On a basic, game-rules footing, "bad" aspects are a direct line to getting you more fate points – and fate points are the electricity that powers some of the more potent *positive* uses of your aspects. We'll get more into how aspects can generate and use fate points later on in this chapter.

Outside of just the rules, a "bad" aspect adds interest and story to a character in a way that purely positive aspects cannot. This sort of interest means time in the limelight. If someone's trying to take advantage of the fact your character's a Sucker, that's an important point in the story, and the camera's going to focus on it. "Bad" aspects also immediately suggest story to your GM; they tell her how to hook your character in. From the perspective of playing the game to get involved and have fun, there's nothing but good in this sort of "bad".

Clever players will also find positive ways to use "bad" aspects. The Drunkard might get looked over more easily by prying eyes as "just a drunk"; someone who's Stubborn will be more determined to achieve his goals. This brings us the "secret" truth about aspects: the ones that are most useful are the ones that are the most *interesting*. And *interesting* comes most strongly from aspects that are *neither* purely good nor purely bad.

As a rule of thumb, when picking an aspect, think of three situations where you can see the aspect coming into play. If you've got one reasonably positive situation and one reasonably negative situation out of that set, you're golden! If they're all of one type, you may want to reconsider how you've worded your aspect – try to put a little of what's missing in there. Ultimately, though, one aspect that's "all good" or "all bad" isn't that much of a problem, so long as you have a good mix throughout your whole set.

## Jazzing It Up

Aspects are one of the major sources of flavor for your character; they're the first thing a GM will look at on your sheet when trying to work out what sort of stories to throw you into. This is powerful juju, and the best part is, you are in *total* control of it with the words you choose for your aspect.

Whenever you're writing down the name of an aspect, ask yourself, "how much flavor does this aspect suggest?" If it seems fairly colorless, then you might well be off the mark, and it's time to kick it up a notch. Certainly, don't feel like you have to do this with every aspect you take, but if your character is served up as a bland dish, you may discover that your GM is at loose ends for keeping him involved in the story.

A few "good – better – best" examples are pictured here.

|              |              |             |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| <b>Bland</b> | <b>Tasty</b> | <b>Bam!</b> |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|

|           |                 |                        |
|-----------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Strong    | Strong as an Ox | Man of Iron            |
| Dark Past | Former Cultist  | Eye of Anubis          |
| Swordsman | Trained Fencer  | Trained by Montcharles |

In each of these cases, the “bland” option certainly suggests its uses, but doesn’t really jump off the page as something that suggests story. The “tasty” option is certainly better by dint of being more specific; both GM and player can see some potential story hooks in these, and they serve to differentiate themselves interestingly from their blander predecessors. But the “bam!” options are where it’s at.

“Man of Iron” could easily be the phrase others use to identify the character, and suggests more applications than simple strength. “Eye of Anubis” names the cult the character was once a part of, sends the GM looking to ancient Egypt for some story ideas, and starts to put some NPCs onto the map. “Trained by Montcharles” gives the player plenty of opportunity for flashbacks to his time with Pierre Montcharles, which may include lessons and history that don’t *just* have to do with fencing, and also hints at the possibility of Pierre himself showing up in a story down the line. So when you pick an aspect, ask yourself: is this bland, is this tasty, or is this “bam!”?

## Story vs. Situation

Here’s a point to follow on the previous ones: more often than not, aspects tend to divide into another set of two camps – **story** and **situation** – and it’s a good idea to make sure you have aspects of each type.

**Story** aspects suggest one or more sources for stories involving the character, by bringing in an external element from the world at large. People and prop aspects are almost exclusively story aspects. Phrase aspects *might* be story aspects, but if they are, it’s usually because they mix in some elements of the other two Ps. You can most easily identify a story aspect by asking yourself if the aspect, independent of the character, is something other characters might interact with, affect, and change. Strange cults, lost artifacts, enemies, hidden lairs, foreign lands, spouses, and more, all fit into this category.

**Situation** aspects suggest the *kind* of situations a character might be in much more than they suggest the *origin* of those situations. Phrase aspects fall strongly into this camp, and they operate as a statement to the GM of the style of stories the player wants his character to be in. Phrase aspects like “Nick of Time”, “Stubborn as a Mule”, and “Last Man Standing” all suggest vivid situations – ones which should rightly repeat themselves over the course of playing the character – but don’t really suggest the *context* of those situations.

We’re taking a few moments to focus on the split between story and situation aspects, because it’s an easy one to miss if you’re not looking for it. You can very easily fall into the trap of creating a character who only has situation aspects. On the surface, situation aspects may be more attractive, since they usually apply in a multitude of circumstances; certainly, you’ll want to have at least a few situation aspects in your repertoire.

But if situation aspects are *all* that your character offers to the game, you run a real risk of being difficult to hook into the bigger storyline. This is why you should be certain to include a few story aspects on your character. Fundamentally, story aspects offer easy hooks to your GM to pull you into her story. You want this, since you came to the party to play the game. But it’s more than just that. By providing story aspects, you’ve provided some things which exist separately from your character. At the core of it, this means you’ve helped to build the game world. You’ve got ownership and stakes in the bigger picture. The GM will be grateful to you for it, and that kind of gratitude pays out in the form of a more satisfying game.

## Getting On the Same Page

You may have noticed that, so far, we're using a lot of ink to talk about how your aspects communicate things about your character to the GM. We mean it. Out of all the things in the game, aspects are probably the clearest message you can send to the GM about what you want from the game, short of walking right up to the GM and saying so. Also, in all likelihood, the GM is going to have copies of your character sheets when you're not around, so the aspects you've picked are going to represent you in absentia. Once you've picked all the aspects for your character, take a step back and look at them as a whole, and ask yourself if they make the kind of representation you'd want them to. If they don't, change them!

By themselves, aspects can't say it *all*, of course, and it's important to remember that. Short of making each aspect a paragraph or essay, you're dealing with a few short, catchy phrases and names here. You want them reasonably short, because you want to be able to talk about them casually without running out of breath.

But the brevity of an aspect's name means some things are left unspoken. Take the time with the GM to speak these unspoken things when you can. Both the player and the GM should look at an aspect not as the end of an idea, but the start of one. You're both going to bring your own ideas of what the aspect means to the table and, at least to some extent, you're both right. Usually this works out fine – the combined perspectives make the whole greater than the sum – but sometimes the GM and the player will have a radically different idea of what the aspect entails. Be clear with one another, and figure out how to iron out any differences – ideally, *before* the fate points start flying.

That said, after you've gotten one or more sessions of play under your belt, you might feel like you've picked one or more aspects that don't "feel right". We're sympathetic to that, and your GM should be, too. If an aspect doesn't seem to be working out well for you, you should feel free to ask your GM if you can change it.

## Using Aspects

The process of using an aspect begins by declaring that one is relevant. Either the player or the GM may make this declaration. Then, determine if the aspect's relevance is working for or against the character who has the aspect. As a *general* rule of thumb, if it's *for*, the owner spends a fate point. If it's *against*, the owner gains a fate point unless he pays to avoid it.

This is the guiding principle that all specific uses of aspects – invoking, tagging, compelling – start from. Each type of aspect use has specific rules governing how it functions, but if you ever find yourself confused about from there.

## Invoking Aspects

An aspect can be used to give you a bonus, when that aspect applies to the situation you are in. Doing this requires **spending a fate point** (see below), and is called **invoking the aspect**. In this context, the aspect makes the character better at whatever it is he's doing, because the aspect in some way applies to the situation. Invoking an aspect can be used to either:

- Pick up all the dice you rolled and re-roll them, or
- Leave the dice alone and add 2 to the result.

It is possible to use more than one aspect on a single roll, but you cannot use the *same* aspect more than once on the same roll or action; even if you've re-rolled the dice, that's still the "same roll". Re-rolls are riskier than just taking the +2 bonus – you can always end up worsening things or not making much improvement – but when a lot of [-] dice hit the table, a reroll can be a much cheaper way to recover.

The GM is the final arbiter of when an aspect is or is not appropriate (see “Getting On the Same Page”, [page XX](#)). Usually this means the player must invoke an aspect that is appropriate to the situation at hand. If the player wants to invoke an inappropriate-seeming aspect, he should be given a chance to describe how the action is appropriate to the aspect. The GM’s priority here is not to strictly limit the use of aspects but rather, to encourage their appropriate use by encouraging players to make decisions that keep their aspects interesting.

## Invoking for Effect

A player can also **invoke an aspect for effect**, using it for a related benefit that is not related to a die roll or skill use at all. This costs a fate point like any other invocation does. For example, a player could invoke a Secret Organization aspect to declare that the group has a chapter in town.

This is subject to the same sort of restrictions as spending fate points for minor declarations (see [page XX](#)) but is more potent due to the focus of the aspect. To be explicit, when an aspect is part of a declaration, it can make the less plausible more plausible, thus allowing the player to “get away with” more. The scope of the minor declaration can be ... well, less minor, and the GM is encouraged to keep this in mind.

For example, if the GM is inclined to hem and haw over whether or not the character can spend a fate point to declare that he arrives at the exactly right moment, invoking the character’s Perfect Timing or Grand Entrance aspect for that same effect should remove any of the GM’s doubts. That said, this is not a method for the players to get away with anything; as always, aspect invocation is only allowed when the GM approves.

## Encountering Other Aspects

The aspects on your character are not the only aspects that you can potentially use. Your fellow players’s characters have aspects, of course, as do some NPCs; sometimes even the **scene itself** may have aspects, like Dark or Cluttered.

To invoke an aspect other than your own, your character needs to directly interact with the object, location, or person that has the aspect you want to invoke, in a way appropriate to the action in progress. This means that if a scene has an aspect of Rigging (since it’s on a pirate ship), not only does that mean characters can be described as swinging from the ropes, but characters can invoke the Rigging aspect when they do so. And that leads us to...

## Tagging

**Tagging** refers to the act of invoking an aspect that isn’t your own; this includes scene aspects and aspects on other characters. In most respects this functions the same way as with an aspect on your own character’s sheet – spend the fate point, and get either a +2 bonus or a re-roll.

Taggable aspects are sometimes introduced into play as the result of your character’s action. This can happen due to a maneuver in a conflict (see [page XX](#)), a declaration of a previously nonexistent aspect (see [page XX](#)), or the assessment of a target and revelation of one of the target’s previously hidden aspects (see [page XX](#)).

Whenever an aspect is introduced into play like this, it’s because the character has made some sort of effort to bring it to the fore – he’s rolled well on whatever skill check brought the aspect onto the map. Because this is the case, he’s earned the right to tag the aspect in question once, without spending a fate point. In this way he’s able to turn his previous success into a momentary advantage without it hitting his fate point budget.

A free tag is subject to one key limitation: it must occur **immediately** after the aspect’s been brought into play. Some minor delay isn’t encouraged, but is acceptable. This usually means that the free tag must be taken within the **same** scene that the aspect was introduced.

The player who introduced the aspect has the option to pass his free tag to another character if he so wishes. This can allow for some great setup maneuvers in a fight; one person maneuvers to place an aspect on a target, then passes the free tag to an ally, who attacks, using the advantage. This can only be done, however, if it is reasonable that the advantage could be “passed off”. A sniper who uses a maneuver to aim his rifle at a target, putting an “In My Sights” aspect on it, can’t pass the advantage to someone else – the aspect placed is specific to him. But if one pugilist used a maneuver to put an “Off Balance” aspect on a foe, he could reasonably pass the advantage to his buddy who moves in for the knockout blow.

When the character does spend a fate point to tag another character’s aspect, it might mean that the character getting tagged is due a reward. If the character tagging is getting a benefit out of it that is to the tagged character’s *detriment*, then the fate point spent on the tag goes to the tagged character at the end of the exchange (i.e., he can’t use it until the next one).

Tagging often involves temporary aspects that result from maneuvers. Make sure you have a grasp on how temporary aspects behave; see the “How to Do Things” chapter, [page XX](#), for more. Many temporary aspects are fragile, and may disappear after their first tag (what does that mean exactly? – read that chapter!).

### ***To Catch a King (Tagging for Effect)***

It’s important to remember that the aspects which have been placed on a character can be invoked for effect just as easily as they can be invoked for a bonus. A classic example of this is from the play Hamlet, where Hamlet arranges a very specific play to test the king’s guilt. There, the performance by the actors was less about putting an aspect on the scene (see [page XX](#)), so much as putting a specific aspect on the king himself (such as “A Revelation of Murder”).

If a character is aware of such an aspect on another, he may tag for effect, **spending a fate point** to trigger (potentially) the circumstances of a compel (see “Compelling Aspects”, [page XX](#)) depending on what the player declares and the GM accepts.

If it does turn out to be a compel-worthy circumstance, then the GM may proceed with it. This is a chain reaction; the tag for effect occurs, and concludes with the GM indicating whether or not it struck home.

If it struck home, then it’s now the GM’s job to run the compel with the target – and since it’s a compel, it includes the option for the target to spend a fate point instead of receiving one, to buy out of it. Note that because this is a compel that is now in the GM’s hands, if the target buys out of the compel, the fate point spent does not go to the tagger!

As far as the *tagger*’s involvement is concerned, however, this is often happening as part of his “free tag” for placing or revealing the aspect on the target – so his own fate point liability is trivial.

Sadly for Claudius (and ultimately Hamlet!), he accepted the fate point (perhaps as a compel against his “Guilty Conscience”) and betrayed himself.

### ***Guessing Aspects***

Tags usually happen when the tagger has a clear idea of what aspect is there to be tagged. But this is not always the case; sometimes, the player’s making a *guess*. Guesses are allowed, but are subject to some special rules.

If the guess hits reasonably close to the mark conceptually, even if it doesn’t exactly match the aspect’s name, the GM should exercise some flexibility and allow it. For example, someone might guess that a scene has a Darkness aspect on it and ask if they can tag it for their Stealth roll. Even though the scene had the aspect “Shadowed Corners” instead, this is reasonably close to the mark; the GM should reveal that the aspect is Shadowed Corners, and allow the tag.

If the guess just plain misses the mark, and the fact that the mark was missed doesn't constitute a significant, potentially secret, piece of information, the player should get the chance to reconsider and take back his fate point. Using the same example, if the player was asking if the scene had a Darkness aspect, and the GM instead believes the scene is too well lit for that, she would simply tell the player it's a no-go. While the fact that the scene is well lit is certainly important, it's something the player could discover with a simple question and answer about the details of the scene, so it doesn't really rate as a secret; he shouldn't be charged a fate point for that.

If the guess misses the mark, but missing the mark tells the player something significant and potentially secret, the fate point is still spent. This sort of circumstance almost never comes up with scene aspects, but can come up when guessing at aspects on another character. For example, if a character is looking to tag someone's "Guilty Conscience" to help him intimidate that target, and it turns out that the target doesn't have that aspect for him to tag, the fate point stays spent, because it is significant and secret that the target does *not* have an aspect that's even in the ballpark of "Guilty Conscience".

In the worst case scenario, a character's guess misses the mark because he's been duped. This will most often happen as the result of a Deceit action (see [page XX](#)), although it might arise from other circumstances. In such a case, the deceiver has the option to return the fate point to the tagger, or to leave it spent. If he leaves it spent, the tagger just learned he was duped. The deceiver does not get this spent fate point for himself – it's simply gone. If he returns it to the tagger, things may actually be a bit worse for the tagger: the deceiver gets to place a temporary aspect on him (and the first tag's for free, as above), representing how the deceiver managed to snooker the target.

Regardless, guesses can't, and shouldn't, be made willy-nilly – there must always be a justification for making the guess. If the guess seems unjustified – if the player is "shotgunning" guesses to randomly try to figure out another character's aspects – the GM is completely justified in shutting that player down cold.

## Compelling Aspects

An aspect can also allow a player to gain more fate points, by bringing complications and troubling circumstances into his character's life. When this occurs, it's referred to as **compelling the aspect**. The GM performs compels; when she compels someone's aspect, she's indicating that the character is in a position where the aspect could create a problem. However, players can cause the GM to compel another character's aspects, via tagging, with a similar rationale and results (see "Tagging for Effect", above). The target whose aspect is compelled usually has the choice of **spending a fate point** and ignoring the aspect, or taking the consequences and limitations on his choices and **receiving a fate point**. When the target accepts the fate point, the aspect is officially **compelled**.

There are a couple of ways an aspect can complicate a character's life.

An aspect may limit actions and choice. If a character is given a situation where he would normally have a number of choices, and limiting those choices to act in accordance with his aspect is going to make more trouble for the character, that's grounds to compel the aspect. It's important to note that an aspect may dictate the *type* of action, but it usually shouldn't dictate the *precise* action, which is always the player's decision. In this way, the compel highlights the difficulty of the choices at hand by placing limits on those choices.

An aspect may also *complicate* a situation, rather than directly limiting a character's choices. If everything would be going along normally, and the aspect makes things more difficult or introduces an unexpected twist, that's also grounds for a compel. In some cases, complications may suggest that certain consequences are mandated, such as failing at a particular action – perhaps the character would succeed at a defense roll against a Deceit action, but his Gullible aspect is compelled, forcing a failure if accepted.

Sometimes the aspect may add a complication “offscreen”, such as when the GM decides to use a character’s personal nemesis as the villain for a session. In such a case the GM should remember to give the character a fate point. This is *technically* a compel – it does complicate things – but more practically it’s more of a “thank you” to the player for giving the GM a hook to build the adventure around, and is done without offering the player the option to buy out of it.

## Negotiating a Compel

In play, both the GM and players can initiate compels. When the GM initiates a compel, the process is very simple. The GM remarks that the aspect might be appropriate here, and offers the player a fate point and the player either accepts it and takes appropriate action or accepts appropriate consequence, or he pays one of his fate points to the GM and chooses not to accept the consequences of the compel.

In a perfect world, the GM is always aware of all aspects and always knows when they should be compelled and rewarded. In practice, the GM is keeping track of a *lot* of stuff, and may not realize that a player has an aspect that is appropriate to the situation. When that happens, the player should feel free to capture the GM’s attention and point to the appropriate aspect, and hold up a fate point, indicating that he thinks it’s time for a compel.

The GM will then do one of two things.

1. She may hold up a fate point of her own, as if she were compelling the aspect, offering the player a choice to pay or be paid.
2. She may defer, offering a brief explanation. The GM may defer for any reason – but doing so too often is potential grounds for gathering up a posse and driving the GM out of town covered in tar and feathers.

When a player calls attention to one of his character’s aspects, it may be as formal as “I think my Greedy aspect applies here” or it may be more conversational, like “Boy, this is tough. I mean, I am pretty \* Greedy \* ” (brandishes a fate point). There’s no one way to do it, and groups are encouraged to fall into whatever pattern is most comfortable for them.

## “Accidental” Compels

Sometimes characters simply play to their aspects without thinking to compel them. When that happens, the GM should make a note of it (sometimes with the player reminding her) and, if possible, award the player with a fate point retroactively. If it’s too late for that, the GM should make a note to give that player one extra fate point next session.

It’s important that the GM keep in mind what sorts of things would normally constitute a compel. Compels happen in order to make certain choices or situations more difficult or more dramatic for the compelled character. Certainly, staying in character and playing in a way that’s appropriate to a character’s aspects should be praised; but it should be rewarded only when the player’s aspect-consistent play has actively made his character’s choices more difficult.

## Conflicting or Contradictory Aspects

Occasionally a character’s aspects will be in head to head conflict with one another. This should not be seen as a problem — rather, it’s an opportunity for high drama! When two aspects are in conflict with one another, they are both subject to a compel. If the player can’t see a way to act in accordance with both aspects, he must buy off at least one of them. In a number of cases, this can lead to a “zero sum”, where one compel is accepted, gaining a fate point, and the other is refused, spending that fate point. If the player can see clear to acting in accordance with both – fantastic! He’s just gotten himself two fate points (and a world of trouble).

The GM needn't always press the issue in this fashion. Nothing says she has to compel both aspects. But occasionally it's more interesting if she does.

## Escalation

Rarely, in moments of high tension or drama, the GM can choose to **escalate** a compel. This is an *optional rule*, and really should only be used when the character getting compelled is having a *defining moment* in his or her story.

Escalation can occur only when a player has bought out of a compel. To escalate, the GM slides forward a second fate point, and prompts the player with something like, "Are you sure...?" If the player accepts, he'll get two fate points instead of one; if he refuses, it's going to cost him two fate points instead of one. In the rarest of cases, facing a second refusal, the GM may escalate a final time, making the reward and cost to buy out three fate points. If the player is willing to spend three to refuse this truly monstrous compulsion, the book is closed.

If a player's willing to step it up, he can prompt the GM to start an escalation as well. When sliding forward his first fate point to buy off a compel, the player should say something like, "I won't go along for one fate point..." Most GMs will look at the situation at that point and decide whether or not it's a moment of high drama; if it isn't, they'll take the proffered point, but if it is, the escalation's on!

Whatever the case, escalation should be done sparingly; it's best as a spice, and can be overwhelming as a main dish.

## Sample Aspects

To get a sense of how aspects might be used in play, consider the examples below. These are not "bam!" aspects in most cases (see [page XX](#)), and that's intentional; "bam!" only really works when an aspect is personalized.

### Anger

The character's rage simmers just below the surface, awaiting opportunity to burst. Sometimes his rage gives him the drive to see things through, but more often it leads him to rash action rather than forethought.

**A player might invoke this to:** Vent his frustration, usually through explosive action towards whatever he's mad at.

**The GM might compel this to:** Cause the character to lose his temper at an inappropriate moment. Interfere with any action that requires calm.

### Bookworm

The character is an academic, well versed in all manner of obscure lore. His knowledge, unfortunately, is almost entirely from books, and theory is not always the same as practice.

**A player might invoke this to:** Dig up an obscure fact or other bit of knowledge at the right time. Research like a fiend.

**The GM might compel this to:** Cause problems when the character is faced with the need to apply his knowledge under the stress of "real world" conditions.

### Cowardly

The character is a firm believer in the better part of valor, either out of meekness, deep self interest, or some other motivator.

**A player might invoke this to:** Run, hide, or otherwise get away from something dangerous.

**The GM might compel this to:** Inspire the character to flee when he really needs to stand his ground.

### **Duty**

The character owes a duty to some one or thing which should come out of creation. Alternately, the character may simply take all of his responsibilities very seriously.

**A player might invoke this to:** Perform an action which directly upholds the duty.

**The GM might compel this to:** Present a player a choice between upholding his duty or doing something more practical. Raise an issue of responsibility at an inconvenient moment.

### **Intelligent**

The character is smart, simple as that.

**A player might invoke this to:** Know useful things, or find them out if they aren't known.

**The GM might compel this to:** Unless there are monsters that specifically like eating big brains, there's not much the GM can do with this. Consider "Bookworm" instead!

### **Meticulous**

The character is very thorough in his approach to almost everything.

**A player might invoke this to:** Get a bonus to any task where he has the time and resources to do a thorough job, "discover" that he packed just the right tool.

**The GM might compel this to:** Interfere with the character being spontaneous.

### **Priest**

The character is a member of the priesthood, and is expected to support the appropriate dogma, as well as accept whatever duties, responsibilities and powers come with the position.

**A player might invoke this to:** Give a stirring sermon. Resist the powers antithetical to his faith. Attempt to use the resources of his church.

**The GM might compel this to:** Deliver inconvenient orders from a superior. Present temptations that contradict the Priest's Dogma. Raise the ire of opposed religions.

### **Self-Destructive**

For whatever reason, the character seeks his own destruction, although he is unwilling to take direct action to do something about it. Instead, he throws himself wholeheartedly into dangerous situations in the hopes that this time will be his last.

**A player might invoke this to:** Help the character do something stupid and dangerous.

**The GM might compel this to:** Make the character do something stupid and dangerous.

### **Family Estate**

This should be given the specific name of the character's family estate, it is a place of rest and refuge from the troubles of the world.

**A player might invoke this to:** Draw upon the resources of the house.

**The GM might compel this to:** Threaten the house, use the house as the scene of a murder (thus pulling the character in).

### **Treacherous**

The character has a knack for betrayal. He's the type of character who, when he shows up on the movie screen, everyone watching knows that he's the one who's going to whisper lies in the king's ear and try to seduce the naive princess. Betrayal comes easily to the character, and while he may be steadfast and true in the end, it would be so easy not to be.

**A player might invoke this to:** Lie, spy or generally connive.

**The GM might compel this to:** Incite suspicious reactions from NPCs, especially when the character is telling the truth. Offer opportunities to stab comrades in the back.

## Veteran

The character is the survivor of many battles, and the experience has shaped him. He probably was in the Great War, but may possibly have been elsewhere. This is appropriate for a seasoned campaigner who has seen many battles (in contrast to Gallipoli, below).

**A player might invoke this to:** Keep his wits about him in a fight. Assess a tactical situation. Pitch camp in unfriendly country.

**The GM might compel this to:** Invoke flashbacks. Introduce old rivals from the other side of the battlefield.

## Gallipoli

The battles over the Dardanelles, the straits separating the Ottoman Empire from Europe, were supposed to be easy, a swift strike at the soft underbelly of Europe against the virtually helpless Turks. The result was a long, brutal battle causing hundreds of thousands of deaths from fighting and disease on both sides, and striking a devastating blow to ANZAC, Great Britain's Australian and New Zealand Corps.

**A player might invoke this to:** As with Veteran, but also to know a bit about the Turks.

**The GM might compel this to:** As with Veteran, but also for many other consequences. For ANZAC members, this battle is the root of vast swaths of anti-British sentiment and inspiration for independence.

## Even More Examples

In case you end up hard up for an idea, consider this list:

|                                 |                        |                       |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| "Gimme a Minute"                | Enemy: Woodrow Wilson  | Nosy                  |
| Fearless                        | Eureka!                | On the Run            |
| Femme Fatality                  | "It Works on Paper!"   | One Step behind       |
| First on the Scene              | "Maggie's in Trouble!" | Over My Head          |
| Fly By Night                    | "Just Use More"        | Player or Pawn?       |
| Respectable                     | "Amazing Jetcar"       | Putting in Long Hours |
| Respected Authority             | Friends in Low places  | Raised by Wolves      |
| S.O.S. (Save Our Souls)         | Girl in Every Port     | "Return to Normalcy"  |
| "Something's Not Right"         | Glory is Forever       | "Manfred, Save Me!"   |
| "This is Bigger than I Thought" | Grease Monkey          | Scrappy               |
| Shattered                       | Gumshoe                | Great Expectations    |
| Haunted                         | Hard Boiled            | Sharpshooter          |

|                          |                       |                          |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| A Few Dollars More       | Short Fuse            | (Sword's Name)           |
| A Fistful of Truth       | Heart of Gold         | Silver Spoon             |
| A Good Day to Die        | Hidden Crush          | Social Chameleon         |
| Alone in a Crowd         | I Know a Guy          | Soft Hearted             |
| Amazing Jet Pack!        | Import/Export         | Something to Prove       |
| Architect of Destruction | Business              | Strength of the Earth    |
| Barbarians               | Interesting Times     | Sucker for a Pretty Face |
| Been There               | Intrepid Investigator | Sultan's Wrath           |
| Black Sheep              | It Wasn't My Fault    | The Awful Truth          |
| Bookworm                 | It'd Take a Miracle!  | The Granite Family       |
| Champion                 | I've Got an Angle     | The Names of Evil        |
| Chosen of the Dark       | Johnny on the Spot    | The Price of Glory       |
| Continent                | Knows Too Much        | Tongo, Witch Doctor      |
| Codebreaker              | Kung Lao              | Troublemaker             |
| Collector                | Man of Two Worlds     | Twitchy                  |
| Cutting it Close         | Marked by Destiny     | Two Fisted               |
| Death Defying            | Monkeywrench          | Uncivilized              |
| Deathbed Legacy          | Motorhead             | Unspoken Love            |
| Dogged                   | Muckraking            | War Buddies              |
| Dreamer                  | Mysteries of the East | Well Traveled            |
| Easy Mark                | Naïve                 | Work in Progress         |
| Eavesdropper             | Never Good Enough     |                          |

## 4. How to Do Things

Characters in your games are going to do a lot. For most things they do, there's no real need for rules. Characters can stand, walk, talk, go shopping and otherwise do normal things without needing to roll dice. They can even take actions that use their skill, like driving to work, without worrying about the dice. The dice only come out when there is an interesting challenge with meaningful consequences.

On the simplest level, when a character rolls the dice, if he matches or exceeds the difficulty, he succeeds; if he doesn't, he fails. When the issue is simple, then this may be all that's necessary, but sometimes you also need to know how well a character did or did not do. Clearly, if a character rolls three higher than the target, that's better than rolling only one higher.

The result of the roll is called the **effort**. Each point that the effort beats the difficulty by is one **shift**. If a roll is below the target difficulty, it's a failure and it generates no shifts – there are no “negative” shifts (if you flip the perspective, the opposition could be said to generate shifts – but this is rarely relevant). If a roll matches the target difficulty, it is a success but generates no shifts. If it beats it by one, it generates one shift; if it beats it by two it generates two shifts, and so on. The number of shifts generated by a roll is used as a measure of many elements, and is referred to as the **effect**.

### Using Shifts

Shifts may be spent to affect the outcome of a roll. Often, the GM will implicitly spend shifts in accordance with the player's description of his character's actions. Sometimes, players may explicitly spend shifts as well. Basic uses for one shift include:

|                                     |                                             |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>Reduce time required:</b>        | Make the action take less time.             |
| <b>Increase quality of outcome:</b> | Improve the quality of the job by one step. |
| <b>Increase subtlety:</b>           | Make the job harder to detect by one.       |

Exactly how shifts can be applied depends on the skill, and is detailed in the write-ups of the individual skills, beginning on [page XX](#). Later in this chapter, we'll also talk about how to deal with an excess of shifts, using the concepts of overflow and spin ([page XX](#)).

### Taking Action

Dice are used in one of three types of situations:

|                        |                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Simple Actions:</b> | Where the character is rolling against a fixed difficulty.                                                               |
| <b>Contests:</b>       | When two characters each roll, with high roll winning and generating shifts.                                             |
| <b>Conflicts:</b>      | When two or more characters act in direct opposition to one another, but where resolution is not as simple as a contest. |

### Simple Actions

Simple actions are rolled against a difficulty set by the GM and are used to simply see if a character can do something, and possibly how well he can do it. The GM describes the situation and the player chooses a skill to apply to it, and rolls against a difficulty determined by the GM (by default, Average). Some sample simple actions include:

- Climbing a wall
- Looking up an obscure fact
- Searching a crime scene for fingerprints

- Shooting a (non-character) target

## Contests

Contests are very much like simple actions, except the action is in direct opposition to someone else and easily resolved one way or another. Rather than setting a difficulty, each party rolls the appropriate skill, and the outcome is resolved as if the high roll had beaten a difficulty equal to the low roll. A tie means both succeed, but whether that means the outcome is a tie or if it calls for another roll depends on the situation. Some sample contests include:

- An arm wrestling match
- A footrace
- A shouting match

## Conflicts

Conflicts are what happen when two or more characters are in opposition in a fashion that cannot be quickly and cleanly resolved. A conflict is broken down into a number of exchanges where each party makes an effort to try to achieve their goal, taking turns to act. Opponents who stand in their way may be called upon to roll a response. They will accumulate success in the form of stress on opponents. Eventually, opponents will accumulate enough stress, or suffer enough consequences, to be taken out; alternatively, opponents may preemptively offer a concession.

Conflicts are the most involved actions, and an entire scene may revolve around a conflict. Conflicts include:

- Any kind of fight scene
- A political debate
- A long, tense staredown
- Trying to talk your way past a bouncer as he tries to scare you off

The complexity of conflicts is such that they merit an entire section detailing how they are handled.

## Running Conflicts

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Once a conflict begins, follow this regular pattern.

1. Frame the scene
2. Establish initiative
3. Begin exchange
  1. Take actions
  2. Resolve actions
  3. Begin a new exchange

## Framing the Scene

Over the course of a conflict, the elements in play in the scene can play a part in how the conflict unfolds. In framing the scene, the GM declares if there are any aspects on the scene, and lays them out for the players. (The use of scene aspects is detailed on [page XX](#).)

If the scene is taking place over a broad area, the GM also describes the zones the scene will be occurring in. Each zone is a loosely defined area where characters may directly interact with anyone else within that zone (which is a nice way to say talk to or punch them). Who is in what zone affects things like whether or not characters can attack each other or if they'll need to throw things or use

ranged weapons. At the outset, determining which zones characters start in should be reasonably intuitive, but if there is a question, the GM can rule on where the character starts.

When looking for a quick rule of thumb, remember that people in the same zone can “touch” each other, people one zone apart can throw things at each other, and people two (and sometimes three) zones apart can shoot each other. Any one given scene should not involve more than a handful of zones. Considering that guns easily operate over three zones, sometimes a few more, a comfortable number would be around three to five zones – but don’t feel like you’re forced to cram in more zones than the area readily supports.

## Establish Groups

Opposing individuals may all be detailed characters like the player’s characters, but often minions, mooks, or other faceless supporters will supplement the opposing force. These supporters are collectively called “minions” and are handled slightly differently than other characters (page XX). Minions divide themselves into a number of groups equal to the number of opposing characters. If a side is composed of a mix of characters and minions, characters may “attach” themselves to a group of minions, directing it and taking advantage of its assistance.

Dealing with large groups is a potentially complex exercise for the GM. We have several recommendations and strategies for making this a lot easier, later in this chapter (page XX).

## Establish Initiative

The order of characters’ actions is determined at the beginning of the conflict, with characters acting from highest to lowest Alertness skill (for physical conflicts) or Empathy (for social conflicts). This is referred to as the order of initiative (i.e., “who takes the initiative to go when”).

Ties in initiative are resolved in favor of characters with a higher Resolve. Any remaining ties are in favor of the player closest to the GM’s right.

When a character is attached to a group of minions, use the character’s initiative. Otherwise the group of minions has initiative as indicated by the quality of the group (as determined in “Minions”, page XX).

Once that order is established, that is the order in which actions are taken for the duration of the exchange. When the last person has gone, the exchange ends, and a new exchange begins with the first character acting again, and everyone else acting in the same order.

## An Alternative to Skills

For some play-groups the idea of using particular skills to determine initiative may seem “unbalancing”, or at least unpleasant, in that it tends to force certain skills to prominence in many a skill pyramid. Also, some GMs don’t like having to keep track of a detailed order of actions. If your group doesn’t like skill-based initiative, use this alternative method instead:

- At the beginning of each exchange, the option to go first moves one player clockwise around the table.
- Initiative for that exchange proceeds clockwise (and includes the GM).
- Thus, the person who went first on the prior exchange goes last on the next one, and the others get their turn one step sooner.

This simple method makes sure that everyone gets a chance to go first over the course of a game, and doesn’t require the players to make any sorts of special initiative-based decisions in their skill selections.

## Taking Action

When a player takes action, he describes what his character is doing and, if necessary, rolls an appropriate skill. Each action is resolved as either a simple action (if there is no opposition), or as a contest, with the details depending upon the specifics of the action.

Most actions in a fight will be either attacks or maneuvers.

## Attacks

An attack is an attempt to force the attacker's agenda on a target, by attempting to injure them, by bullying them, or by some other means. An attack is rolled as a contest, with the attacking character (the attacker) attempting to beat the defending character (the defender) in a roll of skills.

Not all attacks are necessarily violent. An attempt to persuade or distract someone is also a sort of attack. When determining whether or not the attack rules apply, simply look for two characters in conflict, an agenda (or "want") pushed by the acting character, and the target or obstacle to that agenda, the defending (or "responding") character. The skills used to attack and defend depend on the nature of the attacker's agenda. Here are some examples.

| The attacker wants... | So he uses...        | The defender can use...   |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| To physically harm    | Fists, Guns, Weapons | Fists, Weapons, Athletics |
| To deceive            | Deceit               | Resolve, Empathy          |
| To scare              | Intimidation         | Resolve                   |
| To charm              | Rapport              | Resolve, Deceit           |
| To force movement     | Might                | Might                     |

If the attacker wins the roll, his shifts may be spent to inflict stress on the defender (see "Resolving Actions", [page XX](#)). If the defender wins, the attack fails; if the defender wins significantly, he may even earn spin (see "Spin", [page XX](#)), which he can use to his advantage.

## Maneuvers

A maneuver is an attempt to change the situation in some way, affecting the environment or other people, but without damaging or forcing the target (if force is used or damage is dealt, it would be an attack). When a character tries to jump to grab a rope, throw dust in an enemy's eyes, draw eyes upon himself in a ballroom, or take a debate down a tangential path – that's a maneuver.

A maneuver is either a simple action or a contest, with the difficulty or opposition determined by the nature of the maneuver. A maneuver that doesn't target an opponent is resolved as a simple action. Most simple maneuvers like this result in a character rolling against a GM-set difficulty and doing something with the resulting shifts. A maneuver can also target an opponent, and, if successful, place a temporary aspect on him. Either kind can also be used to place a temporary aspect upon a scene. See the "Resolving Maneuvers" section later in this chapter ([page XX](#)) for details.

## Special Actions

### Free Actions

Some kinds of actions are "free" – they don't count as the character's action during an exchange, regardless of whether or not a roll of the dice is involved. Rolling for defense against an attack is a free action. So are minor actions like casting a quick glance at a doorway, flipping a switch right next to the character, or shouting a short warning.

There is no limit on the number of free actions a character may take during an exchange; the GM simply has to agree that each action is free, and should feel free to impose limits if it seems like someone is taking excessive advantage of this rule.

### **Full Defense**

A character can opt to do nothing but protect himself for an exchange. By foregoing his normal action, he gains a +2 on all reactions and defenses for that exchange. Characters who are defending may declare it at the beginning of the exchange rather than waiting for their turn to come around. Similarly, if they have not acted in the exchange at the time when they are first attacked, they may declare a full defense at that point, again foregoing their normal action for the exchange.

### **Hold Your Action**

A character can opt not to act when his turn comes around. When a character takes a hold action, he has the option of taking his turn any time later in the exchange. He must explicitly take his turn after someone else has finished their turn and before the next person begins. He cannot wait until someone declares what they're trying to do, then interrupt them by taking his turn.

### **Block Actions**

When the character's action is preventative – trying to keep something from happening, rather than taking direct action to make something happen – he is performing a block action. He declares what he's trying to prevent and what skill he's using to do it. Players may declare a block against any sort of action or actions and may theoretically use any skill, but unless the block is simple and clear, the GM may assess penalties based upon how hard it would be, or how much of a stretch it would be. Players should never be able to “cover all bases” with a single block.

A blocking character can declare that he is protecting another character. He makes this declaration on his turn, and rolls the skill he's using to block; the result is the block strength. When, later that exchange, any enemy tries to attack the protected character, the protected character gets the benefit of both the blocker's defense as well as his own, whichever is better. The attacker rolls his attack as normal. The defender rolls his defense as normal. If that defense roll is higher than the block strength, he uses the defense result; otherwise he uses the block strength. The attacker then generates shifts as normal.

For other types of blocks, the blocking character declares the block on his turn, and rolls the skill he's using to block, subject to any penalties imposed by the GM. The result is the block strength. Later that exchange, every time another character tries to perform the blocked action, he enters into a contest with the blocker. The character trying to get past the block rolls the skill he's using for the action (not a skill specifically appropriate to the block), and compares it to the block strength. If the attacker gets at least one shift, he successfully overcomes the block.

Trying to get past a block always takes an action, though the GM may grant similar latitude in deciding what skill is being used to get past it. Even if the action is normally “free”, getting past the block takes additional effort, and thus the GM can declare that it takes up the player's action for the exchange.

A variety of skills may be appropriate to getting past a block. Getting past a block may occasionally require rolling a skill modified by another, secondary skill, as demonstrated in this next example.

### **Supplemental Actions**

Sometimes a character needs to do something more complicated than just taking a single, basic action. Sometimes the complication is simple, like drawing a weapon and attacking; sometimes it's more complex, like composing a sonnet while fencing.

When the character performs a simple action while doing something else, like drawing a weapon and attacking, or firing off a signal flare while intimidating the snapping wolves at the edge of the firelight, it is a supplemental action, and simply imposes a -1 on the character's primary action roll (effectively spending one shift of effect in advance). When in doubt about which is the primary action and which is the supplemental one, the supplemental action is the one which would normally require no die roll.

Sometimes the GM may decide a supplemental action is particularly complicated or difficult, and may increase the penalty appropriately.

### *Movement*

Movement is one of the most common supplemental actions. When it is reasonably easy to move from one zone to the next, characters may move one zone as a supplemental action (see "Framing the Scene", above, for an explanation of zones). If they wish to move further than that, they must perform a primary (not supplemental) sprint action, which entails rolling Athletics and allowing the character to move a number of zones equal to the shifts generated.

Sometimes, it is more difficult to move from one zone to the next, such as when there is some sort of barrier (like a fence or some debris) or there is some other difficulty (like getting from a rooftop to the street below and vice versa). This movement complication is called a border. The numeric value of that border increases the penalty for a move action and subtracts shifts from a sprint action.

### **Combining Skills**

Sometimes the character needs to perform a task that really requires using two or more skills at once. You never know when a character is going to need to throw a knife (Weapons) while balancing on a spinning log (Athletics) or when he's going to need to explain germ theory (Science) to one of the Dead Gods (Resolve).

In those situations, the GM calls for a roll based on the main skill being used (the primary thrust of the action), but modified by a second skill. If the second skill is of greater value than the first, it grants a +1 bonus to the roll; if the second skill is of a lesser value, it applies a -1 penalty to the roll.

When the second skill can only help the first, which is to say it can only provide a bonus, it complements the skill. A complementing skill never applies a -1, even if it's lower than the primary skill. This usually happens when the character has the option of using the secondary skill, but doesn't have to bring it to bear.

If the secondary skill comes into play only to hold the primary skill back, it restricts the skill, meaning it can only provide a penalty or nothing at all. A restricting skill never applies a +1, even if it's higher than the primary skill. Often skills like Endurance or Resolve are restrictive skills – as you get more tired, you won't get better, but if you're resolute, you may not get worse.

In very rare circumstances, a primary skill may be affected by more than one secondary skill – say, a situation where a character needs to climb a wall (Athletics as primary), but is tired (Endurance restricts), but the wall's part of a building the character has been studying in order to burglarize (Burglary complements). In such cases, no matter the number of skills in play, the most the combination can produce is one +1 and one -1. This is actually very quick to reason out. First, look at all of the skills that modify or complement; if any of them are higher than the primary skill, a +1 is applied. Next, look at all of the skills that modify or restrict; if any of them are lower than the primary skill, a -1 is applied. This may mean that multiple skills all affecting a roll will result in no modification at all – both a +1 and a -1!

It's important to note that combining skills can never be done to perform two full actions at once – if that's the goal, it should take two exchanges. When skills are used in combination, one skill is almost always going to serve a passive role, as the thing the character needs to be able to do in order

to be able to perform the other skill. If a character is trying to throw a knife while balancing on a spinning log, Weapons is the main skill rolled, but Athletics restricts the roll, because without it, the character falls off the log, and his throw is moot. Similarly, if the character is gibbering before an ancient horror, his knowledge is simply not going to help him.

The difference between an action that combines skills, and a supplemental action, is not always obvious. In general, if both components of the action are something you'd expect to roll for if they were done separately, then it's time to combine skills. If the lesser part of the action is something that normally doesn't require a roll, just handle it as a supplemental action. Sometimes, an action will be both supplemental and modified – maybe the character is moving a little (supplemental), but is using his Athletics skill to get an edge (modifying the primary roll):

### *Long Conflicts*

When a character is in a position to control the pacing of a conflict (which generally requires the conflict be one on one, or ritualized in some way), he may stretch it out and try to wear down his opponent. When this happens, actions in a conflict start using the character's Endurance skill to restrict (see [page XX](#)) the skill used on any of his actions. Similarly, actions may be restricted by Alertness if the conflict starts having too many distractions, or restricted by Resolve if the conflict has become mentally fatiguing.

## **Resolving Actions**

### **Resolving Attacks**

A successful attack inflicts an amount of stress on its target equal to the number of shifts on the attack (the difference between the attacker's effort, and the defender's effort). Stress represents non-specific difficulties a character can encounter in a conflict.

In a fight, it's bruising, minor cuts, fatigue, and the like. In a social conflict, it's getting flustered or being put off one's game. In a mental conflict, stress might mean losing focus or running in circles.

Stress can usually be shaken off once a character has some time to gather himself, between scenes.

The type of stress that a character takes in a conflict should be appropriate to the type of conflict. Every character has two stress tracks. The first is the Health stress track, used for physical stress, such as wounds and fatigue. The second is the Composure stress track, representing the ability to "keep it together" in the face of social and mental injuries.

A character can only take so much stress before being unable to go on, represented by a stress track filling up. Each stress track defaults to 5 boxes, but the tracks can be increased by certain skills: Endurance can increase the Health stress track, and Resolve can increase the Composure stress track. See the skill descriptions of Endurance and Resolve on [page XX](#) and [page XX](#) for more details.

When stress is determined, the character should mark off that box on the appropriate stress track. For instance, if the character takes a three-point physical hit, he should mark off the third box from the left on the Health stress track.

At the end of a scene, unless the GM says otherwise, a character's stress tracks clear out; minor scrapes and bruises, trivial gaffes and embarrassments, and momentary fears pass away. Deeper issues resulting from attacks, called consequences, may last beyond the end of the scene, and are covered further below.

### **Consequences**

Stress is a transitory thing, but sometimes conflicts will have lasting consequences – injuries, embarrassments, phobias and the like. These are collectively called consequences, and they are a special kind of aspect. We'll talk more about what this means shortly.

Any time a character takes stress, he may opt not to check off a box and instead take a consequence. If the character takes a hit which he doesn't have a box for, either because it's higher than the number of boxes on his stress track, or because it rolls up past his last box, the character must take a consequence.

The exact nature of the consequence should depend upon the conflict – an injury might be appropriate for a physical struggle, an emotional state might be apt for a social one. Whatever the consequence, it is written down under the stress track. The first consequence a character takes is a mild consequence, the second is a moderate consequence, and any additional consequences are severe. (To understand exactly what these mean, "Removing Consequences", [page XX](#).)

Normally, the person taking the consequence gets to describe what it is, so long as it's compatible with the nature of the attack that inflicted the harm. The GM acts as an arbitrator on the appropriateness of a consequence, so there may be some back and forth conversation before a consequence is settled on. The GM is the final authority on whether a player's suggested consequence is reasonable for the circumstances and severity.

Characters may only carry three consequences at a time (barring certain stunts which allow more). If the character has already taken a severe consequence, then the only remaining option is to be taken out. We'll talk about that next.

But here's the thing about consequences being a special kind of aspect: As long as the consequences are on the character's sheet, they may be compelled or tagged (or invoked!) like any other aspect. This also means that opponents may start tagging those aspects pretty easily, since it's no secret that the consequence aspects are now on the character's sheet!

## ***Taken Out***

If a character takes a hit which takes him past a severe consequence, that character is taken out. The character has decisively lost the conflict, and unlike the other levels of consequence, his fate is in the hands of his opponent, who may decide how the character loses. The outcome must remain within the realm of reason – very few people truly die from shame, so having someone die as a result of a duel of wits is unlikely, but having them embarrass themselves and flee in disgrace is not unreasonable.

The option to determine how a character loses is a very powerful ability, but there are a few limits on it.

First, the effect is limited to the character who has been taken out. The victor may declare that the loser has made an ass of himself in front of the king, but he cannot decide how the king will respond (or even if the king was particularly bothered).

Second, the manner of the taken out result must be limited to the scope of the conflict. After the victor wins a debate with someone, he cannot decide that the loser concedes his point and the loser gives him all the money in his pockets – money was never part of the conflict, so it's not an appropriate part of the resolution.

Third, the effect must be reasonable for the target. People do not (normally) explode when killed, so that cannot be a part of taking someone out. Similarly, a diplomat at the negotiating table is not going to give the victor the keys to the kingdom – that's probably beyond the scope of his authority, and even if it's not, it's unlikely something he would give away under any circumstances. What he will do is make a deal that is very much in the victor's favor and possibly even thank him for it.

Lastly, players are not always comfortable with being on the receiving end of this and may, if they wish, spend all the fate points they have left (minimum one) and demand a different outcome, and the GM (or winning character) should then make every effort to allow them to lose in a fashion more to their liking. That said, if this is a real concern, the loser may want to concede somewhere before things reach this point (see “Concessions”, below).

### **Concessions**

Any time a character takes a consequence, he also has the option of offering a concession. A concession is essentially equivalent to surrendering, and is the best way to end a fight before someone is taken out (short of moving away and ending the conflict). The character inflicting the damage can always opt to not take the concession, but doing so is a clear indication that the fight will be a bloody one (literally or metaphorically). If the GM declares that the concession was a reasonable offer, then the character who offered it gains one fate point, and the character who refused it loses one.

The concession is an offer of the terms under which the character is taken out. If the concession is accepted, the conceding character is immediately taken out, but rather than letting the victor determine the manner of his defeat, he is defeated according to the terms of his concession.

Many conflicts end with a concession when one party or the other simply does not want to risk taking moderate or severe consequences as a result of the conflict, or when neither party wants to risk a taken out result that might come at too high a price.

### **Optional Rule: Grit**

Some NPCs may be listed as having a certain amount of grit, usually rated at 1 or 2. This represents how committed the character is to the conflict at hand, and is the number of consequences the character will take before offering a concession. It is fairly rare for a character to be willing to go to the mat over trivial matters, so grit is somewhat contextual. If the matter ends up being of direct importance to the NPC, his grit might be considered to be higher, but if the matter is trivial, his grit might be considered to be lower.

### **Removing Consequences**

Consequences will fade with time – characters heal, rumors die down, and distance brings perspective. How long this takes depends upon the severity of the consequence, which in turn depends upon how it was received.

Mild consequences are removed any time the character has the opportunity to sit down and take a breather for a few minutes. These consequences will last until the end of the current scene, and will usually be removed after that. The only exception is if there is no break between scenes – if the character doesn’t get a chance to take five, the consequence will remain in place.

Moderate consequences require the character get a little more time and distance. A good night’s sleep or other extended period of rest and relaxation is required. Moderate consequences remain in place until the character has had the opportunity to take several hours (at least 6) of “downtime.” This may mean getting sleep in a comfortable bed, spending time with a charming member of the opposite sex, reading by the fire, or anything else of that ilk, so long as it’s appropriate to the consequence. An afternoon of hiking might be a great way to get past a Heartbreak consequence, but it’s not a great choice for a Bad Ankle.

Severe consequences require substantial downtime, measured in days or weeks. Generally this means that such a consequence will linger for the duration of a session, but will be cleared up before the next adventure begins.

If the character is in back-to-back sessions where no in-game time passes between them, such as in a multi-part adventure, he gets a break – any consequences he begins the session with are treated as one level lower for how quickly they're removed.

Some skills (such as Science, [page XX](#)) and stunts (such as Bounce Back, [page XX](#)) can also reduce recovery time, as described in their write-ups.

## Resolving Maneuvers

There are three types of maneuvers – uncontested maneuvers (without an opponent), scene-altering maneuvers, and maneuvers that target another character.

If the maneuver is uncontested – for instance, the character is trying to grab an idol or swing from a rope – it is a simple action, resolved just like any other simple action. The GM sets a difficulty, and the character rolls his skill and applies the resulting shifts as normal.

A maneuver can alter the scene in some way. How hard this is to do can range from trivial (knocking over a candle in a hay loft to add an “On Fire!” aspect to the scene) to virtually impossible (flapping one's arms very hard to try to remove the “Foggy” aspect from a scene .) Whatever the result, the GM can decide whether or not the change the character makes merits adding or removing an aspect to the scene. The expenditure of a fate point can usually make a reasonable argument for making such a change; if the player's willing to spend the point, his character's actions to remove the aspect are invested with an unusual potency.

If the target is another character, the maneuvering character and the target make opposed rolls, using whatever skills the GM deems appropriate. Success is usually achieved if the maneuvering character generates at least one shift. A successful maneuver may add a temporary aspect to the targeted character; the target can either accept the temporary aspect, or spend a fate point to avoid accepting it. An aspect that results from a maneuver is temporary and does not last very long – we'll get to the duration in a moment. The temporary aspect may then be tagged for a bonus on a subsequent roll. The first tag usually doesn't cost the tagging player a fate point, but subsequent tags usually do (see the Aspects chapter, [page XX](#), for more on the methods of tagging aspects). If a character is simply trying to increase the difficulty of another target's action, this is considered a block action, and should be resolved as such; see [page XX](#).

Maneuvers can also have other special effects, as determined by the GM. Some examples of these kinds of maneuvers are given later in this chapter.

## Temporary Aspects

Temporary aspects that result from maneuvers are usually fragile. A fragile aspect only exists for a single tag, and may even be cleared away by a simple change of circumstances. Consider someone who uses a maneuver to take aim at a target, placing an “In My Sights” aspect on the target. Once the shot's taken, the aim goes away – this is clearly fragile. But it could get lost even before the first shot, if the character who (likely unwittingly) has the aspect on him manages to break line of sight or move significantly. Fragile temporary aspects are usually much easier to justify and pass muster with the GM.

Some aspects that result from maneuvers can be sticky. (Aspects that result from assessments or declarations, explained on [page XX](#), are also usually sticky .) Sticky aspects don't go away after they're first tagged, allowing people to spend fate points to continue to tag them. The GM is encouraged to be much more picky about whether or not to allow a sticky aspect to result from a maneuver.

In many cases, the GM may require that the maneuvering character use spin (see [page XX](#)) in order to succeed at placing a sticky aspect. Sticky aspects may be easier to place on a location or scene than on another character, especially when they potentially offer complications to everyone present,

on both sides – such as a maneuver to add an “On Fire!” aspect to a scene. It may be possible to remove a sticky aspect via a successful maneuver.

### *Some Example Maneuvers*

This is not a comprehensive list of all possible maneuvers, but the examples provided below should cover a wide range of circumstance and provide the tools needed to cover unexpected situations.

#### Blinding

Whether it's throwing sand in someone's eyes, spraying someone with a harsh chemical or tossing a can of paint in his face, the goal is the same: keep him from being able to see. This likely involves the attacker rolling Weapons and the defender rolling Athletics, with the maneuver succeeding if the attacker gets at least one shift. A successful maneuver puts the aspect “Blinded” on the target, which may be compelled to add to the defense of their target, or to cause them to change the subject or direction of an action. It can't force them to take an action they don't want to (so a blinded character can't be compelled to walk off a cliff if the character is not moving around).

#### Disarming

A successful disarm maneuver forces the target to drop his weapon or otherwise renders the weapon temporarily useless. The target must either spend an action to become re-armed, or pick up the weapon as a supplemental action. A supplemental action is normally a -1 penalty to the main action, but when a disarm maneuver is used, the shifts on the maneuver increase the penalty. For example, if the disarm attempt succeeds with three shifts, when the target tries to recover his weapon, he'll be at -4 (-1 for the usual penalty, plus an additional -3) to his action that exchange – essentially the disarm maneuver has resulted in a block. His defensive rolls are not directly affected by this penalty, but they are indirectly affected; without a weapon in hand, he can't use the Weapons skill to defend (Athletics and Fists are still options).

#### Indirect Attacks

Sometimes a character wants to do something like push a stack of boxes down on an opponent, or scatter marbles across the floor to trip him up. While this can potentially be an attack, it is usually meant as an inconvenience. If it's an attack, it's treated like any other attack. If it's an inconvenience, the attacker has two options. The first option is to make an opposed roll (such as Might to knock over the bookcase versus Athletics to dodge) and generate at least one shift, allowing a temporary aspect (such as “Pinned”) to be placed on the target. The other option is to create a block (such as using Might to knock over the bookcase, with the value of the roll representing the block strength created by the scattered books, causing an opponent to have to roll Athletics in order to move through the mess).

#### Carrying

When the character carries something heavy, the penalty for a supplemental action is increased by the weight factor of the target (see [page XX](#)) for each zone he moves.

#### Pushing

Pushing a target requires a successful attack (usually Fists or Might) and must generate a number of shifts equal to the weight of the target +1 for each zone the target will be pushed (the +1 is basically the usual -1 for moving). While a throw or knockback moves the target to a different zone, a push moves both the target and the acting character into the destination. Because of this, the “cost” in shifts for pushing remains flat, while the cost for body-throwing and knockback increases over distance (see below). Any applicable border conditions affect the roll to push.

## Throw or Knockback

It's possible for a character to knock something or someone away from himself, without moving. Knockback covers any maneuver that can accomplish this, including throws. To knock something back one zone requires the maneuver have a success of 1 plus the weight factor of the target (a normal person has a weight factor of 2, see [page XX](#)). Each additional zone costs as much as the previous zone did, plus one, so that the cost increases dramatically over distance.

## Marking

Every now and again a character just needs to carve his initial on someone's chest, as simple as that. While it's not a damaging attack, it's a demoralizing one, and it adds a temporary aspect "Marked" which can be tagged to take advantage of the opponent's reduced morale or appearance. The attack and defense roll for this is whatever's appropriate to the situation – probably Weapons versus Athletics.

## Minions

The term minions is used to refer to the large number of "faceless" followers of more important, "named" characters in a scene. The named characters are the villains of the piece; the minions are the bodies of the faithful (or at least the hapless) that the heroes must climb over to take on the named characters.

Minions have two important statistics, quality and quantity. The GM may build their villains' minion mobs using stunts – see [page XX](#) – but should feel free to be a little loose with the rules if looking to size the minions appropriately to the opposition.

Minions may be either Average, Fair or Good quality. This quality denotes their base effectiveness in one sort of conflict (physical, social or mental), as well as their capacity for stress. Average minions can take one box of stress, Fair can take two, and Good can take three.

The quantity of minions is simply the number of minions present, but together, minions act in one or more groups, each of which is treated as single characters in a conflict. This allows the GM to minimize the number of die rolls she's making, even when her heroes are facing off against a group of twenty frothing cultists. This shorthand technique also makes it a touch easier for the heroes to eliminate several minions in a single action.

Minions who act together as a group are much more effective than individual minions. When there are two or three minions in a group, the group receives a +1 bonus to act and react. If there are four to six minions in a group, the bonus is +2; seven to nine minions get a +3 bonus, and any single group with ten or more members gets +4.

As a rule of thumb, when a GM has a large number of minions, she should split them up into several smaller groups – preferably one group for each player character they face. These groups don't necessarily need to be equal in number; sometimes it makes sense to pit the largest group of minions against the most capable opponent.

When minions take stress, it is applied sequentially (i.e., filling all boxes instead of just a single one). Damage that overflows one minion is applied to the next minion. This means a solid enough effort can take out an entire swath of minions.

## Mixed Groups

One of the main uses for minions, be they ninjas or yes-men, is to improve the effectiveness of their leader. Whenever a named character and a group of minions are attacking the same target, they are considered to be attached. This has two benefits for the leader: he receives a bonus based on the group size (including him), and damage is applied to minions before it's applied to him. It has no

benefits for the minions, who give up their ability to act independently, but that's more or less their job (see the Leadership skill for more, [page XX](#)). Leaving or attaching to a group is a free action, and a character may detach from a group automatically by moving away from it.

## Companions

Companions are characters who are a little more important than minions but are not quite full-fledged named characters in their own right. They are attached to named characters in the same way minion groups are, and grant a +1 in appropriate conflicts due to group size. Companions do not have stress boxes, like minions do; instead, they give the character the ability to withstand an additional consequence – specifically, the consequence that the Companion is taken out, kidnapped, or otherwise removed from the conflict.

| Type      | Conflicts        |
|-----------|------------------|
| Sidekick  | Physical         |
| Aide      | Social           |
| Assistant | Mental/Knowledge |

Companions are either granted as a short-term story element by the GM, or are established through the purchase and use of a number of stunts. By default, a companion is of Average quality and can assist in one type of conflict. The type of conflict that the Companion can assist with determines her type.

A companion can have a number of advances, with each advance making her more capable. Usually, when a named character gains a sidekick, aide, or assistant (through a stunt), the companion gets a number of advances to begin with, and the named character can buy more advances with additional stunts.

An advance can do one of the following:

### Quality

Improve the quality of a companion by one step (from Average to Fair, Fair to Good, and so on). This advance may be taken several times up to the companion's maximum quality, one step lower than that of her partner. (characters usually top out at Superb, so the most one of their companions could be is Great.)

### Scope

Improve the scope of a companion, allowing them to assist in an additional type of conflict (e.g., Physical and Mental, Physical and Social, Social and Mental). This may be taken twice, allowing the companion to be effective in all three scopes.

### Independent

The companion is able to act independently of her partner, allowing the character to send the companion off to perform tasks. An independent companion is treated as a minion if she's caught out on her own (quality in this case indicates her capacity for stress), and is not useful for much unless she's also skilled (see below).

### Skilled

The companion may buy skills of her own. If attached, the companion may use these skills on behalf of her partner, instead of the partner using his skill at his rating. If the companion has also taken the Independent advance (above), the Skilled advance the companion can also use these skills when not attached. One advance can buy one skill at the companion's quality, two skills at quality -1, or three skills at quality -2. The Skilled advance can be bought multiple times, but a different skill or set of skills must be chosen each time.

### Keeping up

If the companion's patron has a means of locomotion or stealth that makes it hard for the companion to keep up with him, then the companion with this advance has a similar ability, but it is useful only for keeping up with her patron when attached, and for no other purpose.

### Communication

The companion has some means of communicating with her patron in even the strangest of circumstances – using secret decoder rings, ancient Atlantean secrets of telepathic trances, or what-have-you. This isn't a guarantee, and without an aspect invested in a companion, a player isn't going to get compensated on the occasion that the GM decides to short out the method of communication. Still, GMs should think twice before cutting off a character from his companion, when this advance is in play.

While characters are not obliged to take their companion as an aspect, it is highly recommended. Companions are the first people villains choose as hostages and targets, and by choosing to take an appropriate aspect, the player ensures that he'll be rewarded for the inconvenience.

### Minions vs. Companions: Who Gets Them

Unspoken in the above is a simple assumption, which you may choose to make use of or ignore as you see fit, and it's this: minions are for bad guys – or at least NPCs – while companions are for the players. There will most certainly be exceptions – companions are the most able to show up in both – but very often it simply isn't thematically appropriate for a player's character to run about with twenty-odd minions at his beck and call. A plucky sidekick, on the other hand, is entirely in keeping...

### Overflow

When a character takes an action (an attack or a maneuver) against groups of minions, he will occasionally succeed by far more than anticipated. This leaves him in a situation where he has a large number of "wasted" shifts. These surplus shifts are called overflow, and can be used in an immediate, follow-up action so long as it's not as another attack or other offensive maneuver. To put it simply, overflow is used to take supplemental actions.

When fighting "named" (non-minion) characters, overflow exists only as the number of shifts that are left over after the minimum number are used to produce a taken out (or consequence-producing) result.

### Spin

In its broadest sense, spin is a special effect that occurs whenever a character scores a significant or better success (3 shifts or more). That special effect may simply be color – it may mean the character looks particularly cool, or is due some recognition for excellence. However, in some cases, gaining spin can result in an actual game effect.

Specific to combat, spin is a minor, defensive form of overflow (see above) used to represent minor changes in the cadence of a conflict. Applied to a defense, when a character who successfully defends against an attack roll by three or more, he gains spin.

Having gained spin, the character has the option to apply a bonus or penalty to the next roll that occurs. Defensive spin must be used on the very next action taken by anyone in the scene (whether it's a hero's action or villain's action). Used this way, spin either adds one or subtracts one from any roll involved in that action (e.g., either the attack roll or the defense roll).

The player who gained spin on his defense chooses how that spin works into the scene. Thus, the only qualifier for using spin is that the character must explain how he was able to help or hinder,

even if it's just as simple as shouting some encouragement or providing a distraction. A player might not always be able to justify using spin. Spin that isn't used on the next action simply goes away.

Note that spin, when used, is an effect that occurs instead of overflow. For example, someone might succeed on a defense by 3 shifts, generating spin. He could use his spin to give someone else a +1 as described above, or he could instead treat those three shifts as overflow, using it to dive clear of an impending explosion, or some other supplemental action.

Spin may affect certain maneuvers; see "Temporary Aspects" earlier in this chapter (page XX). And there are other applications of spin, found throughout this book. In general, spin serves as an easy way of making note that a character has done particularly well on a roll. In particular, skill and stunt uses might also create spin and utilize spin in special ways; see the individual descriptions for more details. The "+1 on the next action" effect of spin, however, only occurs as a result of a defensive roll in a conflict. This is because defensive rolls don't usually get to use shifts when they succeed; spin allows for a particularly good roll to be recognized, and not to go "wasted".

## Using the Environment

In the Aspects chapter, we've already talked about tagging scene aspects for bonuses. Another thing that scene aspects can be used for is the occasional use of one skill in lieu of another, in a way that skill wouldn't normally be used. To do so, invoke the aspect (spend a fate point) to create a reasonable justification for the unusual skill's use; the character may use the new skill for as long as the GM considers appropriate. If the new skill has a dramatic impact that is potent for its novelty, it is probably only appropriate for one roll, but sometime the skill may be appropriate for the entire scene.

## 5. Skills

| Skill           | Group             |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Academics       | Knowledge         |
| Alertness       | Perception        |
| Art             | Craft/Knowledge   |
| Athletics       | Physical          |
| Burglary        | Subterfuge        |
| Contacting      | Social            |
| Deceit          | Social            |
| Drive           | Mundane           |
| Empathy         | Social/Perception |
| Endurance       | Physical          |
| Engineering     | Craft             |
| Fists           | Combat            |
| Gambling        | Mundane           |
| Guns            | Combat            |
| Intimidation    | Social            |
| Investigation   | Perception        |
| Leadership      | Social            |
| Might           | Physical          |
| Mysteries       | Knowledge         |
| Pilot           | Mundane           |
| Rapport         | Social            |
| Resolve         | Social            |
| Resources       | Mundane           |
| Science         | Knowledge         |
| Sleight of Hand | Subterfuge        |
| Stealth         | Subterfuge        |
| Survival        | Mundane           |
| Weapons         | Combat            |

This chapter is focused on getting an idea of what each skill does and why someone might want a particular one for a character. This means that the information offered here is player-focused; it offers a “I have this, what can I do with this” perspective.

Skills can be enhanced by the addition of stunts; stunts are covered in their own chapter (page XX). There are also additional concerns for the GM involving adjudication of the use of these skills; that’s covered in the chapter on “Running the Game” (page XX).

Here, each skill has a description of what it does, and a write-up of how it is most commonly used.

Each skill also has a number of trappings, which are the rules for how to use the skill in certain specific circumstances. Whenever you encounter a trapping, you'll see the eye glyph } next to it. We've given these circumstances names in order to make them easier to reference. In some ways, trappings are like stunts which anyone with the skill can perform. The specific rules governing setting difficulties for these various trappings of a skill are not covered here. You'll find those guidelines in the Running the Game chapter (starting on [page XX](#), but we'll cross-reference it for you on a per-skill basis). Here, we're simply focusing on giving you an idea of what the trappings are.

## Assessment and Declaration

Skills can sometimes be combined (see [page XX](#)). It's also possible to use one skill to set up a situation that another skill can take advantage of, via maneuvers and temporary aspects (see [page XX](#)). Finally, skills can sometimes be used in partnership with one another, via assessments and declarations.

Sometimes skills will be used in careful assessment well in advance of taking action – maybe as part of putting together a plan, or simply observing the target long enough to learn something that would be a critical advantage. This approach is most often used with skills that have an element of perception – including Investigation, Empathy, and even Burglary. Here, the skill is not used to place a temporary aspect so much as discover an existing one. The character making the assessment still can tag this aspect for free, but is still subject to the usual limitations of a free tag – they must do so immediately after revealing it. This usually means that the free tag must be taken within the same scene as the assessment or, if the assessment takes longer than a scene to perform, in the scene which immediately follows. This provides a reward to balance out the time the player might otherwise spend talking through a more cautious plan.

All assessment efforts require the use of a significant chunk of time, usually indicated in the skill write-up. This can allow skills that usually can't come to bear in more time pressure environments (like a fight) to come to bear thanks to the time invested in advance.

Perception skills only allow the discovery of what already exists. By contrast, knowledge skills will often allow declaration – in other words, using a knowledge skill successfully can allow a player to introduce entirely new facts into play, and then use those facts to his advantage. The new facts take the form of a temporary aspect. The GM is encouraged to use creativity as her primary guideline, when judging the use of knowledge skills. Creative and entertaining facts will be more likely to result in a successful use of a knowledge skill, and thus give rise to a temporary aspect, than boring facts will. For example, an anthropologist with a solid Academics skill might use the declaration ability to state new truths about a tribe the characters have just encountered – and if successful, suddenly the scene or the tribe has an aspect on it in keeping with the fact the player just invented. As with maneuvering and assessment, the first tagging of this aspect is free.

Unlike assessment, declaration doesn't take any actual in-game time at all – just the knowledge skill to make use of it.

### Example for Declaration

A player, whose character is an expert in architecture, attempts declaration: "Many houses of this type have historically had secret doors in the bedrooms to escape police pursuit" The GM allows it, the player succeeds at the roll and 'creates' a secret door that the GM didn't plan. The player and the GM discuss where it ought to lead, etc. PC: "There might be a secret door somewhere near this wall... <thump thump> ah, here it is! Now, to find out how to open it..."

Any aspects brought into play by these methods do not have to go away after they're used, if the GM wishes them to persist (or if circumstances merely make it reasonable that they hang around). Any subsequent uses of such aspects, however, will cost (or grant!) a fate point, as usual. This does mean that occasionally maneuvers and assessments and declarations will backfire, leading to a compel. Since aspects are involved, such things are easily double-edged!

Finally, when dealing with a target that has multiple aspects on it due to assessment and/or declaration, it is not possible to use multiple "free" tags at the same time. On a given roll, only one "free" tag may be used. Fate points may be spent to tag the other aspects that have been assessed or declared on the same roll, and later rolls may use other free tags.

## Academics

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Academics is a knowledge skill. It measures the character's "book learning". Any knowledge that would not explicitly fall under Science, Mysteries, or Art falls under this skill (though some overlap may exist among all of those). Characters with high Academics include scholars of antiquity, professors and know-it-alls.

The main use of Academics is to answer a question. Questions covered by Academics include those of history, literature, sociology or any of the "soft" sciences – in short, most information that is neither art nor science.

The player can ask the GM "What do I know about this subject?" or "What does this mean?" Often, there will be no need to roll, especially if the subject is within the character's specialty (see Scholar, [page XX](#)) but if the GM feels the information is something that should be hard to attain (such as a clue) then she may call for a roll against a difficulty she sets. If the character succeeds, he receives the information. If he fails, he does not, but he may still attempt to research the topic (see below) – or, perhaps more entertainingly, may stumble onto a false lead that gets him deeper into trouble.

### Research [Academics]

Researching a topic is frequently a time-consuming and arduous task, and exactly the sort of thing worth skimming over with a few quick dice rolls. It is treated as an extension of what knowledge the character has – he can answer some questions off the top of his head, and other questions because he knows what book to find the answer in.

As such, research is something that can happen when a character fails an Academics check. Provided the researcher is willing to spend time researching (and that the answer can be found) the only question is how long it will take and how good a library they have access to (more on libraries in a bit).

One important note: because the GM is not always obligated to reveal the difficulty of a given roll, players may not know how much they failed it by, which means they don't know how long they'll need to research. Usually they'll just research until they find the answer, but sometimes, when time is tight, they may be limited to less time. GMs are encouraged to read "Setting Difficulties" ([page XX](#)) before making any decision about how to deal with a failed roll.

Academic research requires a library. The quality of the library determines the hardest possible question that can be answered within it (so a question of Good difficulty requires a Good library or better). If a character is attempting to answer a question in a library that's not equipped to answer it, the GM is encouraged to be up-front about its shortcomings.

Most schools and private individuals have Mediocre, Average, or Fair libraries. Small colleges often have Good libraries while larger institutions may have Great ones. Superb and better libraries are few and far between. Many Libraries also have a specialty or two where they are considered one

step higher – for example, Georgetown’s library specializes in law, so it has a Great Library, which is treated as Superb for questions of law. Characters may own libraries of their own; see the Resources skill (page XX) for more.

## Exposition and Knowledge Dumping [Academics]

Sometimes the GM just needs to give the group a lot of information, and the character with a high knowledge skill tends to be the conduit of that. When the GM needs to drop a lot of information on the group, she may ask the character with the most knowledge if she can use them as a mouthpiece. Assuming the player agrees, the GM can share all appropriate background, and is encouraged to give the player a fate point for having his character temporarily commandeered by the GM.

## Declaring Minor Details [Academics]

The character may use his knowledge to declare facts, filling in minor details which the GM has not mentioned. These facts must be within the field of Academics, and the GM has the right to veto them. However, if the GM is all right with it, she may let the player make a declaration and roll Academics against a difficulty she sets. If successful, the fact is true, and if not, the character is mistaken. Like most Academics rolls, the GM may or may not wish to share the difficulty, so the character may not know if he succeeded.

This is a straight up declaration action, as described earlier (see page XX). If the academic or another character takes action based on the declared fact, that person can tag the aspect that has been introduced. If the academic is wrong, there is no penalty, but there may be complications – at her option, the GM could place a temporary “mistaken” aspect on the academic, compelling it to represent the fall-out (and netting the mistaken academic a fate point!). If the academic was right, the aspect is placed, and is taggable as described earlier – first one being free.

For GM advice on setting difficulties for declarations, see page XX.

## Languages [Academics]

Languages are part of a good classical education. A character may speak a number of additional languages based on his Academics score. Each step of Academics above Mediocre gives the character knowledge of one additional language (so one at Average, two at Fair, and so on). The player does not need to choose the languages when the character is created; instead, he may simply choose languages in the course of play, as is convenient.

## The Truth [Academics]

Under normal circumstances, the character may know the answer or not, but will not get a wrong answer. A wrong answer should only be a result of one of two things. First, it may be the result of the compelling of an aspect – the player may be offered a fate point for his character to go haring off on a tangent or to reach the wrong conclusion. Alternately, it may be as a result of an active deception, such as someone planting bad information.

To plant bad information, a character must decide what question (in general) they’re providing false information about. The character must have access to the target’s library (see Research, page XX) and make an Academics roll modified by Deceit (see “Combining Skills”, page XX) in addition to whatever rolls he may need to get in and out of the place where the information is stored.

The result of that roll is the difficulty to spot the false information. When someone tries to discover information that is affected by this deception, he must make an Academics roll as usual. If that roll less than the difficulty set by the deception, then the false information is discovered one step earlier than the real information might be. If the failure is significant (missing the mark by three or more),

then the true information may simply be unavailable. If the researcher meets or exceeds the roll for the deception, he finds the false information and recognizes it for what it is.

## Alertness

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Alertness is a measure of the character's regular, passive level of awareness. Specifically, it is the perception skill to notice things the character is not looking for. In an exchange where characters are surprised (and as such, are prevented from choosing which skill to roll), Alertness is the skill which is rolled. In conflicts of an active, physical nature, Alertness determines initiative. Characters with high Alertness include bodyguards, outdoorsmen and criminals of a sneaky variety.

Players will rarely ask to roll Alertness – if they are actively looking for something, Investigation is usually more appropriate. Alertness is more appropriate for things that players and characters do not expect or are not looking for, such as whether they notice a surprise, or if they happen to spot a hidden clue. In short, it is reactive perception. As such, it's a skill that, more often, the GM calls for people to roll.

### Avoiding Surprise [Alertness]

Whenever ambushed (see Stealth, [page XX](#)), a character may make one final Alertness check against the Stealth of his attacker, in order to see if he is surprised. If he fails this check, his defense skill is considered to be Mediocre for the first exchange.

## Art

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Art measures the character's overall artistic ability, covering the gamut of endeavors, from painting to dance to music. This includes knowledge, composition, and performance. Characters with high Art include artists (obviously), aristocrats, and those of the avant garde.

Art is usually either used as a knowledge skill, for knowledge about art, artists, and what it takes to make art, or as a crafting skill, to create a work of art, or as a social skill to entertain.

### Art as Knowledge [Art]

As a knowledge skill, Art is basically identical to Academics, though the fields it applies to are more limited and more focused – a few shifts of success on an Art roll may “pay out” more information than if someone applied Academics to the same art-related problem.

### Art as Craft [Art]

As a crafting skill, Art is fairly straightforward – characters can make art of virtually any type of a quality equal to their skill. Without stunts, none of them will be masterpieces, but any art that's Mediocre or better can be displayed without any real embarrassment.

Sometimes, however, creations must be improvised, and that can be a little more fast and furious. This usually takes a few minutes, and the character can make a roll to create their piece. Generally speaking, for the duration of the scene where it is displayed, the quality of the piece is equal to their roll, with it degrading one step in each subsequent scene.

### Art as Communication [Art]

While Academics covers the technical building blocks of communication, language, grammar and the like, Art covers the expression of ideas, and as such, covers most means of broad

communication, like writing. These are not “pure” art forms, however, and a character’s other skills play a role in their application, so a character’s writing is usually modified by their Academics. There are exceptions, such as dry, academic documents (which use pure Academics) and poetry (which uses just Art).

Public speaking is a similar creature, but it is more beholden to the charisma and presence of the speaker – in those cases, Art modifies whatever skill (Rapport, Intimidate, Leadership or Deceit) the character is using, as long as there is a creative aspect to the communication.

## Art as Performance [Art]

Art can also be used to shape the mood of a group. Whenever a group is exposed to an artist’s work, such as at a performance or a show, the scene may gain an aspect appropriate to the performance. Normally, this aspect only remains on the scene for the duration of the performance, but some stunts allow this to extend into subsequent scenes.

In effect, this is a declaration on the part of the artist, but limited to declaring mood and emotional impact, rather than anything specific. In general, art inspires passion in a broad sense; for example, it may make someone feel hopeful, but not determine what he’ll feel hopeful about. When making a standard performance, any temporary aspects that result – either by treating the performance as a maneuver, or as an attack yielding consequences – must also be broad and nonspecific. “Hopeful” is good; “Hopeful That Doktor Herborn Will Be Defeated” is not. There is an exception; a performance that very clearly has a target, such as a satire, may plant fairly specific opinions of a target, with the difficulty based on the status of the target.

## Forgery [Art]

Imitation has a long-standing place in the art world, and thus Art is quite good at making fakes, be they “lost” symphonies or falsified documents. When a character uses Art to make a forgery, the difficulty depends on the complexity of the thing being duplicated. Having an original on hand can help reduce the difficulty. Deceit should also be used to complement the effort.

For more on how forgery difficulties are set, see [page XX](#).

## Athletics

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

This measures the character’s general physical capability, excepting raw power, which is a function of Might. Athletics covers running, jumping, climbing, and other broadly physical activities you might find in a track and field event. Characters with high Athletics include athletes, soldiers and outdoorsmen.

Athletics is often the “when in doubt” physical skill, and it can get a lot of use. There’s sometimes confusion as to when to use Athletics and when to use Might. As a rule of thumb, Athletics is used to move yourself, Might is used to move other things and people. When an action calls for both, they may modify one another. If there is no clear indication which should be primary, default to Athletics as primary and Might as secondary.

## Jumping [Athletics]

This is not the Olympics – jumping is something one does to get over obstacles or across bottomless chasms, and in those situations the GM will set a fixed difficulty to be met or exceeded. Generally, that difficulty is going to be the bare minimum to clear the distance, so beating that by a few shifts is often a good idea. Outside of that, jumping is often just considered an extension of normal movement. For GM advice on setting difficulties and designing jumping challenges, see [page XX](#).

## Sprinting [Athletics]

A character may use their Athletics to move faster by taking a sprint action. Normally, characters may only move one zone on their turn by turning over one of their shifts as a supplemental action. Characters who spend their entire action moving are sprinting; rolling Athletics against a target difficulty of Mediocre, they may cross a number of zones and borders equal to or less than the total shifts of effect. In the absence of borders, characters can always move a minimum of one zone. See [page XX](#) for additional details.

## Climbing [Athletics]

Athletics is the skill for climbing. The GM will set a difficulty for how hard it is to climb a given obstacle. At the GM's option, shifts may be used to speed the process if the character succeeds. For GM advice on setting difficulties and designing climbing challenges, see [page XX](#).

## Dodging [Athletics]

Athletics can be used as a defensive skill to respond to attacks in physical combat, and works very well in conjunction with taking a full defense action (yielding a +2 to the roll; see [page XX](#)). The one important thing to note is that taking a defense action means that you can't use Athletics for other things, like sprinting.

## Falling [Athletics]

When characters fall, they bypass the physical stress track entirely, and hop right to a consequence, with the severity of the consequence being determined by length of the fall. Characters who fall can roll Athletics to try to limit the severity of the result. For guidelines on the severity of falls, please see the chapter on Running the Game, [page XX](#).

## Burglary

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

The ability to overcome security systems, from alarms to locks, falls under the auspices of this skill. This also includes knowledge of those systems and the ability to assess them. Characters with a high Burglary include burglars, private eyes and even some cops.

## Casing [Burglary]

Burglary can also be used as a very specialized perception skill, specifically to assess the weaknesses and strengths of a potential target. Here, the character is trying to determine the existence of inobvious or hidden aspects, using assessment (see [page XX](#)). This usage of Burglary can be blurred together with something like declaration, if the player comes up with an entertaining new aspect to place on the target of his future burglarizing. Thus, either the GM can indicate that some flaw exists and has been discovered, or the player can make a declaration about a flaw in the security that he intends to defeat.

Regardless of the method, the character then makes a roll against a difficulty determined by the GM, and if he succeeds, that fact is true, and may grant a +2 bonus to a roll where that information is useful. When a player is making declarations, casing follows the same guidelines as the minor details trapping for Academics ([page XX](#)), but is limited to security facts (including potential escape routes). As in either case this reveals an aspect waiting to be tagged, the first +2 is free, and subsequent uses on other rolls cost a fate point, as always.

## Contacting

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Contacting is the ability to find things out from people. A character may know a guy, who knows a guy, or maybe he just knows the right questions to ask. Whatever his methods, he knows how to find things out by asking around. Characters with high Contacting include reporters, private eyes and spies.

A character with a high Contacting skill knows a wide variety of people and has at least a mild amount of connection with virtually any organization. There are Contacting stunts which give a character deep ties to a specific field like crime or business, and those allow a deeper level of contact within that field.

Contacting does not work in a vacuum. The character needs to be able to get out and talk to people for it to be useful, and when that isn't possible, neither is Contacting. Contacting is also limited by familiarity – a character finding himself in an entirely unfamiliar environment may encounter difficulties increased by as much as +4. Thankfully, Contacting also covers the skill for building new social networks, so if a character stays in an area for any amount of time, he can diminish the difficulty by one per week spent.

## **Gather Information [Contacting]**

As with the research trapping from Academics ([page XX](#)), gathering information begins with a question, except the character goes out and talks to people, trying to find the answer to a question like, “Who’s trying to kill me?” The player describes where his character is going to talk to folks (usually “the street”), the GM sets the difficulty, and the player rolls at normal, at which point the GM passes on whatever the player has discovered. If the Skills roll fails, then the research time investment table may be applied; instead of needing a library, the character needs people to talk to. These people must have the right level of access to answer the question; this corresponds to the “quality” of a library. If the character is being “shut out” for one reason or another, no amount of dogged persistence through time investment is going to help. When that happens, it usually means there’s another problem the player needs to solve first.

One important warning about authenticity – being the most informed guy and knowing all the latest gossip isn't necessarily the same thing. Contacting finds out what people know, and people always have their own biases. Information is only as good as the sources it comes from. Contacting rarely tests the veracity of the information provided – save by the discovery, through several sources, that contradictory answers are coming from different sources. If a character wants to determine the truthfulness of the information he's finding, that's a more in-depth conversation, and may involve Empathy, Rapport, Deceit, and more.

## **Getting the Tip Off [Contacting]**

Contacting also keeps the character apprised of the general state of things, and acts as a sort of social Alertness, keeping the character abreast of things that might be coming his way. It's far from foolproof, and like Alertness, the GM is usually the one to call for a roll – a player can't go out looking for a tip off (though he can tell the GM he's going out talking to his contacts just to check on what's up, which is a good hint that he'd like a tip off).

## **Rumors [Contacting]**

Contacting is also useful for planting rumors, not just for ferreting them out. The player simply tells the GM what rumor he wants to plant, and the GM may assign bonuses and penalties based on how preposterous or reasonable the rumor is. The GM then uses the final roll to determine what the result of the rumor is.

It's worth noting: the character's roll is also the target for someone else's Contacting roll to find out who's been spreading rumors, so be careful!

## Deceit

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Deceit is the ability to lie, simple as that. Be it through word or deed, it's the ability to convey falsehoods convincingly. Characters with high Deceit include grifters, spies, and politicians.

For simple deceptions, a contest between Deceit and an appropriate skill (usually Empathy, Alertness or Investigation) is all that is necessary, but for deeper deceptions, like convincing someone of a lie or selling someone the Brooklyn Bridge, a social conflict is appropriate, complete with Deceit attacks and social stress being dealt. Sometimes, Deceit is the undercurrent rather than the forefront of an action, and as such, the skill may be used secondarily to modify, restrict, or complement another skill's use.

### Disguise [Deceit]

Deceit does cover disguises, using the disguised character's Deceit skill against any attempts to penetrate the disguise. Such disguises are dependant upon what props are available, and won't hold up to intense scrutiny (specifically, an Investigation roll) without the use of stunts, but they're fine for casual inspection (Alertness rolls).

### False Face Forward [Deceit]

A character with Deceit may opt to use Deceit instead of Rapport to defend against another character using Empathy to get a read on him. This roll is modified by Rapport.

If the character loses his defense roll, then the Empathy reader may proceed as usual – in attempting to hide himself, the character has blundered and revealed a truth. If the character wins the roll, however, he may provide a false aspect to the reader, sending her off with an utterly fabricated notion of him.

When a character tries to take advantage of an aspect that they falsely think is there, it can end up being a waste of a fate point or worse! (See Guessing Aspects, [page XX](#))

### Cat and Mouse [Deceit]

Deceit can be used for more than just dodging attention; it can be used to riposte a social query with a web of deception. When another character initiates a social contest, including an Empathy read, the character turns the tables, using his Deceit as an offensive skill, and representing any Skills particularly convincing lies as consequences. This is a dangerous game though, as the deceiver is opting not to put his false face forward, and if his opponent succeeds, he'll hit upon the truth. However, if the deceiver outclasses his opponent significantly, this can be a powerful technique.

## Drive

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Drive is the ability to operate a motorcar, one of the greatest inventions of recent memory. Mister Ford has put these all over the roads of America, and the first folks truly comfortable behind the wheel are emerging. Why, the most daring speed-demons among them can make the most of its 20 horsepower, nearing speeds of 45 miles per hour! Characters with high Drive include chauffeurs, racers and getaway drivers.

Drive is pretty easy to use. Trying to do something in a car? Roll Drive, simple as that. If a character trying to do something fancy, like drive and shoot at the same time, Drive will restrict the skill being used (not modify, as a high Drive skill won't make someone a better shot).

## Chases [Drive]

Cars inevitably lead to chases, one of the major trappings of this skill. In a chase, a character's Drive skill is used to close the distance between him and the car he's chasing (or increase the distance if he's the one being chased!). It's also used to bring quick resolution to the issues brought up by terrain and other obstacles. For an extensive treatment of car chase rules, see the GM section on [page XX](#).

## Empathy

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

This is the ability to understand what other people are thinking and feeling. This can be handy if a character is trying to spot a liar or wants to tell someone what that person wants to hear. Empathy is usable as a defense against Deceit, and is the basis for initiative in a social conflict. Characters with a high Empathy include gamblers, reporters and socialites.

## Reading People [Empathy]

Empathy can be used to figure out what makes another character tick.

Given at least a half hour of intense, personal interaction, a character may make an Empathy roll against the target's Rapport roll (see [page XX](#) for more on Empathy vs. Rapport when reading people). This is an assessment action (see [page XX](#)). If he gains one or more shifts on the roll, he discovers one of the target's aspects which he is not already aware of. It may not reveal the aspect in precise detail, but it should paint a good general picture ; for instance, it might not give the name of the character's brother, but it will reveal that there is someone with that relationship. This process may be repeated, taking longer each time and ultimately can reveal a number of aspects equal to the character's Empathy skill's value (minimum one) – so, a Fair skill (value 2) would allow two aspects revealed through at least two different rolls.

## Endurance

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Endurance is the ability to keep performing physical activity despite fatigue or injury. It's a measure of the body's resistance to shock and effort. In addition to fatigue, Endurance measures how well a character shrugs off poisons and disease (for a treatment of poisons, see [page XX](#)). Characters with a high Endurance include explorers, athletes, and sailors.

Endurance is a passive skill. Players will very rarely need to ask to roll Endurance; instead, the GM will call for rolls when appropriate.

Endurance can particularly come into play in long-term actions, as a secondary, restricting skill, where the character's ability to keep performing at peak is limited by how able he is to overcome fatigue and pain; this is why top athletes have their Endurance skill on par with (or better than!) their Athletics skill. Someone without a solid Endurance skill may be a good sprinter, but will find themselves winded and falling behind in a marathon.

Endurance also determines a character's Health capacity (the length of a character's Health stress track), since Health stress represents physical wounds and fatigue.

By default, players have 5 boxes for their Health stress track. Better-than- Mediocre Endurance increases the number of boxes as shown here.

| Endurance         | Health |
|-------------------|--------|
| Average-Fair      | +1     |
| Good-Great        | +2     |
| Superb -Fantastic | +3     |

## Engineering

(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#); Gadgets and Gizmos, [page XX](#))

Engineering is the understanding of how machinery works, both for purposes of building it and taking it apart. While it is complimented by an understanding of Science, Engineering can just as easily be the result of getting one's hands dirty and having a natural feel for how things work. Characters with a high Engineering include inventors, mechanics, and frequently, drivers and pilots.

### Building Stuff [Engineering]

An engineer with time and tools can build a variety of items. For details on how to go about that, check out the Gadgets and Gizmos chapter (see [page XX](#)).

### Fixing Stuff [Engineering]

Engineering can be used to repair devices, given the right tools and enough time. Details on difficulties are in the GM's guidelines (see [page XX](#)).

### Breaking Stuff [Engineering]

Engineering is also the skill for unmaking things. Given time and tools, an engineer can topple virtually any building or structure. In those circumstances, Engineering works like a very peculiar combat skill, possibly resulting in maneuvers or weirdly indirect attacks (like setting up a bridge to collapse when someone walks across it).

## Fists

(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

This is the ability to hold one's own in a fistfight, with no weapons available but one's two mitts and a load of attitude! With specialized training, this may include the practice of more disciplined fisticuffs, such as the martial arts of the Orient. As a combat skill, Fists allows characters to defend themselves as well as attack. Fists fighters are also well-versed in a variety of fighting styles from all over the world, and may use this skill as a limited sort of knowledge skill covering those areas. Characters with high Fists include sailors, thugs, and martial artists.

## Gambling

(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Some games are pure luck, but a good gambler doesn't play those. Gambling is the knowledge of how to gamble and moreover, how to win when gambling. It also includes knowledge of secondary things like bookmaking. Characters with a high Gambling include gamblers and dapper secret agents.

## Playing the Game [Gambling]

A gambler can usually find a game when he's short on cash – or just in the mood for sport. Finding a game, or obtaining an invitation to one, requires a Contacting roll (complemented by Gambling), with a difficulty equal to the quality of the game (page XX). Characters with the Big Man stunt (see page XX) can automatically find a game with a quality up to their Gambling skill, but such a game is automatically high stakes (see below).

The quality of the game determines the base value of its pot, unless the gambler declares he's looking for a high stakes game, in which case the pot is two steps higher. However, a high stakes game also includes the potential for complications, like sore losers, or strange table stakes. Once at the table, the gambler's Gambling skill roll will determine if he wins or loses, and if the pot is bigger than his Resources, that might be a problem. The particulars of running a Gambling focused scene are covered in the GM's section, page XX.

## Guns

(Stunts, page XX; Adjudication, page XX)

Sometimes characters just need to shoot things. Thankfully, there's a skill for that. With a gun, characters can shoot up to two zones away – three if it's a rifle (borders may or may not count, depending on their nature). Unfortunately, without a gun in hand, or at least close at hand, the skill isn't much use.

Guns can also be used to cover non-gun weapons that shoot at a distance, such as bows and strange electrical spears that shoot lightning, though usually with a small penalty. If, at the time the player takes the skill, he decides the character is focused on using a method of shooting other than a gun, he may rename this skill to something more appropriate (e.g., Bows) and instead face the familiarity penalty when using actual guns. Under such an Skills option, most Guns stunts are still available (though Two Bow Joe might be a little tricky).

The Guns skill does not allow characters to defend themselves as well as attack; it trades the a defense component for ability to act over greater range. A character who's both a good shot and good at getting out of the way will also want to invest in either Athletics or Fists (or both!).

Guns users are also well-versed in a variety of small arms, large arms, and ammunitions, and may use this skill as a limited sort of knowledge skill covering those areas.

Characters with high Guns include soldiers, assassins, and hunters. If someone is devoted to using Guns as a strong component of their fighting style, it can safely be assumed that they possess at least one or two guns, regardless of Resources rating (though whether or not they will be allowed to such things wherever they go is another matter entirely). This is, of course, subject to the rigors of character concept and GM approval.

## Intimidation

(Stunts, page XX; Adjudication, page XX)

There are more graceful social skills for convincing people to do what a character wants, but those skills tend not to have the pure efficiency of communicating that failing to comply may well result in some manner of harm. Nothing personal.

Using Intimidation is a blatant social attack, which someone can defend against with their Resolve. This is the skill for interrogation (as opposed to interviewing) as well as scaring the bejeezus out of someone. Even without a basis for fear, Intimidation can occasionally be used as provocation, to produce a strong "burst" of negative emotional response (such as provoking someone into a fight, or at least to anger). Regardless, it's never pretty.

Characters with high Intimidation include mob enforcers, bouncers and “bad” cops.

## Threat of Violence [Intimidation]

If there is a reason for the target to believe that the intimidating character is capable of harming the target when they can’t do anything about it, such as if the target is unarmed and the intimidator is wielding a weapon, it is worth a +1 bonus, +2 if the target is completely helpless. Conversely, if the target is the armed one, his defense roll is likely at +1, and can be at +2 or more if the target is very secure in their position (such as being behind something solid, or having lots of backup). If these circumstances suddenly change, it’s certainly call for another Intimidation roll!

The lesson here is simple: Intimidation works best from a position of power. Achieve that position first, then apply the skill.

## Brush Off [Intimidation]

If things get to the point of a face off, there are a lot of other actions an opponent can do other than stand there and be intimidated, such as disengage or pull out a weapon. However, one of the real strengths of Intimidation is at the first flash of contact, when people instinctively get out of the way of someone intimidating. Intimidation can establish a powerful, menacing first impression. If the character is actively doing something intimidating, he may roll a quick contest of Intimidation against the opponent’s Resolve. If successful, the target is taken aback for a moment, generally long enough to brush past them, though usually with plenty of time to call for help if appropriate. This cannot be done in a fight, or against any target who is already ready for a fight, but in those “first contact” situations, Intimidation is gold for control.

## Investigation

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Investigation is the ability to look for things and, hopefully, find them. This is the skill used when the character is actively looking for something, such as searching a crime scene or trying to spot a hidden enemy. Characters

Investigation is the skill most commonly called for when the character wants to look for something like clues. It is also useful for eavesdropping or any other activity where someone is trying to observe something over a period of time. When looking for deep patterns and hidden flaws, Investigation may be used as an assessment action (see above, [page XX](#)).

This makes Investigation the flipside of Alertness; it is mindful, deliberate perception, in contrast to Alertness’s passive mode of operation. This also means that an equivalent Investigation effort is nearly always going to yield better, more in-depth, information than an Alertness effort would; the downside is that Investigation is far more time consuming.

## Leadership

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Leadership is a multi-faceted skill. A good leader knows how to direct and inspire people, but he also understands how to run an organization. As such, the Leadership skill covers acts of both types. Characters with a high Leadership include military officers, politicians, bureaucrats, and lawyers.

## Administration [Leadership]

Any organization which the character is in charge of uses his Leadership as its default value for any question of how organized it is. This establishes the difficulty for things like bribery or theft, and also gives a general sense of how quickly and efficiently the organization acts.

## **Bureaucracy [Leadership]**

A good leader has knowledge of organizations and the rules that govern them, including knowledge of laws, bribery and other means of dealing with red tape; this is why Leadership is a key skill for lawyers. Leadership serves as an all-purpose knowledge skill for knowing how to act in a given organization, including important things like how much to bribe.

## **Command [Leadership]**

Leadership can be used to direct troops, workers or any other group activity. Any time the character is in a position to give orders to a group of minions, he may apply his Leadership as a modifying secondary skill on the minions' skill roll. In a conflict, offering this assistance takes the character's action, but can affect the minions attached to him. While attached minions cannot normally act, when they are being directed by the character with leadership, they act as if they were not attached.

## **Might**

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

This is a measure of pure physical power, be it raw strength or simply the knowledge of how to use the strength one has. For lifting, moving and breaking things, Might is the skill of choice. Might may be used indirectly as well, to modify, complement, or limit some skill uses. Characters with a high Might include strongmen, laborers, and lords of the jungle.

## **Fighting People [Might]**

In combat, Might can be used to help with particular applications of Fists and Weapons – if force is a very significant element at play, Might will modify the primary skill. Furthermore, someone successfully engaging an opponent in a one-on-one exchange can potentially switch from Fists to Might, if executing a hold or other wrestling move where it's less about hitting someone as it is about overwhelming them with physical force. Such a switch would result from a maneuver of some sort.

## **Breaking Things [Might]**

Might is the skill of choice for applying brute force to break things in halves or smaller pieces, and includes breaking boards, knocking down doors and the like. Using Might, items can be damaged over time or broken with a single dramatic blow. (For guidelines on breaking things, see [page XX](#).)

## **Lifting Things [Might]**

Might also controls how much the character can lift or move. The weight of the thing being moved sets the difficulty for the roll. (For a discussion of weight and the lifting of heavy things, see [page XX](#).)

## **Mysteries**

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

There is more to the world than science has explained yet. Ethereal photography, mesmerism and other mentalist tricks, rituals of lost pre-Roman empires, secrets of the distant East – all these and

more are known to a master of Mysteries. Characters with high Mysteries include mystics, explorers, and adventurous archaeologists.

The actual use of Mysteries is fairly flexible – in appropriate situations it can serve as a knowledge skill like Academics, a perception skill like Alertness, or even something else entirely.

## **Sixth Sense [Mysteries]**

The GM may occasionally call upon a character to roll Mysteries in the same way she might ask for Alertness rolls. As the name implies, this will tend to be for things that are strange and mysterious, so predicting when it's applicable can be hard to do. Occasionally, it may allow the player an assessment action to discover hidden aspects of a locale that are shrouded in mystic and arcane ways.

## **Mesmerism [Mysteries]**

Mysteries can be used for hypnosis. This is more of a parlor trick than anything else, useful on the weak minded when you've got lots of time to put on a show.

Technically speaking, Mesmerism is a basis for a mental conflict, but practically speaking, both parties need to be willing participants, so it's not really a conflict at all. People are hypnotized because they want to be, and they suffer no lasting consequences. There are no post-hypnotic suggestions or other mind control tricks (though certain mesmerism-focused Mysteries stunts break this rule).

Despite those limitations, mesmerism does have some practical uses. First, it can be useful to recover lost memories. A mesmerist can put another character in a trance and give them a chance to try to remember a scene more precisely.

Additionally, a Mesmerist can put a willing subject into a calming trance to help them ignore external distractions. This can be very useful in leading a panicked arachnophobe through a room full of spiders or the like.

## **Arcane Lore [Mysteries]**

Mysteries can be used in the same way Academics can, for research of exceptionally esoteric topics. The main limitation is that libraries necessary for this sort of research are few and far between, though characters may have an Arcane Library of their own if they have sufficient Resources (see [page XX](#)).

## **Fortune-Telling [Mysteries]**

Casting tarot, throwing chicken bones or reading horoscopes – a character can use Mysteries to try to make guesses about the future. The knowledge gleaned is never terribly specific, but it allows the player to determine if a course of action is auspicious. The character should summarize the fortune as best they can, ideally to something that could go on a fortune cookie. The fortune may be general (“The cock will crow when the thunder strikes”) or about a specific target (“You will meet a tall, dark stranger”) but that's the limit on the specificity. The GM can guide a player through building a proper fortune, using her guidelines ([page XX](#)).

Fortune-telling is a form of declaration. The character may, once per session, make a prediction, and make a roll against a difficulty set by the GM. If the roll is successful, it's a true fortune, and there is now an aspect that represents it. If the target of the fortune was a person, they receive the temporary aspect for the duration of the adventure. If it was a general prediction, it is considered to be a scene aspect on every scene for the duration of the adventure.

## Artificing [Mysteries]

Mysteries can be used to create artifacts and talismans in much the same way that Engineering can. This requires an Arcane Workshop of appropriate level, but otherwise follows most of the same guidelines as Engineering (see [page XX](#)).

## Pilot

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Perhaps even more exciting than the automobile is the airplane. The Great War brought numerous advances in aviation into the world, and the pilot is still a dashing, heroic figure. With the end of the war, the commercial and practical applications of aviation are beginning to be explored.

Characters with a high Pilot are usually professional pilots, though it is sometimes the domain of the idle rich. In play, the trappings of Drive can easily apply to Pilot as well.

Pilots with a low Resources skill probably don't own their own aircraft, but it is entirely likely that they can charter one.

Alternately, certain stunts may lead to the possession of an aircraft, regardless of Resources.

## Rapport

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

The flipside of Intimidation, this is the ability to talk with people in a friendly fashion and make a good impression, and perhaps convince them to see one's side of things. Any time a character wants to communicate without an implicit threat, this is the skill to use, which makes it appropriate for interviewing. Characters with high Rapport include grifters, reporters, and good cops.

### First Impressions [Rapport]

The first time a character meets someone, the GM may call for a quick Rapport roll to determine the impression the character makes. For more guidelines governing first impressions, see [page XX](#).

### Closing Down [Rapport]

Rapport controls the face the character shows to the world, and that includes what they choose not to show. As such, when a character tries to use Empathy to get a read on a character, it is opposed by Rapport. If the character wishes to simply reveal nothing, they may use Rapport and take the equivalent of a defensive action, gaining a +2 on their roll.

This is over and above the "default" of a Rapport defense because it is openly obvious: the character is wiping all emotions off of his face. It also requires that the character be consciously aware that someone's trying to get a read off of him. If the character is trying not to look like he's actively warding off the read, or isn't really aware he's being read, then he isn't taking a full defensive action, and does not get the +2.

### Opening Up [Rapport]

Characters skilled in Rapport are able to control which side of their personality is shown to others, seeming to open up while actually guarding their deepest secrets. Since true things are still revealed about the character, this is not an inherently deceptive action. When a character opens up, he defends against an Empathy read with Rapport, as usual. If his opponent succeeds and generates at least one shift, he finds something out, as usual. If not, he still discovers an aspect – but it's one of the defending character's choice.

This can effectively be used to stonewall someone without the obvious poker face of Closing Down. On top of it all, the character opening up can always choose to reveal something that the other character already knows about.

## Resolve

(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Resolve is a measure of a character's self-mastery, as expressed through things like courage and willpower. It's an indicator of coolness under fire and also represents the drive not to quit. It plays a key part in efforts to resist torture or the strange mental powers of psychic villainy.

Resolve is almost always rolled in response to something, rather than on its own. Its primary role is as defense against most kinds of social manipulation or distraction. Resolve also shines in situations which have spun very much out of control. Characters with a high Resolve have a distinct advantage in continuing to keep their head about them and respond calmly. Similarly, when all seems lost, a character with a strong Resolve is often capable of soldiering on. Resolve is the mental or social parallel to physical Endurance.

Resolve also determines a character's Composure capacity (the length of the Composure stress track), indicating the character's resilience in the face of mental, emotional, and social stress. By default, players have a Composure capacity of 5, but they may increase that capacity based upon their Resolve. Better than Mediocre Resolve adds more boxes to the stress track as shown here.

| Resolve           | Composure |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Average-Fair      | +1        |
| Good-Great        | +2        |
| Superb -Fantastic | +3        |

## Resources

(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Usually Resources is simply a measure of available wealth, but the specific form this takes, from a secret family silver mine to a well invested portfolio, can vary from character to character (and may be indicated and enhanced by their aspects). Usually this skill passively informs the GM what the character's available resources are, but Resources may still be rolled for large expenditures, like purchases and bribes. Some large-scale conflicts may be about trying to out-spend the other guy; here, Resources can act as an attack or defense skill.

Note: characters who have access to a fairly sized organization's resources can act as if they have Resources at Fair and, with the backing of the organization, can potentially make bigger purchases. These expenditures are tracked by the organization, and as such, if subterfuge is important, personal resources are a wiser choice.

Characters with high Resources include robber barons, aristocrats and successful criminals.

## Spending Money [Resources]

The cost of items is measured on the adjective ladder (for an examination of the costs of things, please see [page XX](#)). Characters can buy reasonable quantities of anything of a value less than their Resources without worrying about it. For items greater than or equal to their Resources, they need to roll against the cost of the thing. If successful, the character can afford the item; if not, they can't. Characters can only make one Resources roll per scene.

Characters are generally assumed to have all the tools they would normally need to do their job, whether that job is fixing engines or shooting people. Still, sometimes a situation will arise where something needs to be bought. When that happens, the price is measured in terms of how much Resources it requires.

## Lifestyle [Resources]

Characters are assumed to live in accordance to their means, which may mean that rich characters may not even need to go shopping. Generally speaking, if something costs two steps less than the character's Resources skill, he probably has one already, assuming it's something that would make sense for him to have previously obtained.

## Workspaces [Resources]

Part of the passive measure of Resources is the tools and spaces the character has access to. Workspaces are environments where a character can perform a certain type of work, and owning and maintaining a world-class lab or library requires a certain amount of resources.

Characters may use their Resources to set up the tools they need for their job. A character's home may have, for free, a single Library, Lab, Workshop, Arcane Library or Arcane workshop of a quality equal to their (Resources-2). As described in Academics, above, the quality of a workplace determines the highest possible difficulty of a "question" or project that can be pursued there.

For the various types of skills which need workspaces, the breakdown is as shown in the following table. See the respective skills for more details.

| Skill       | Work              | Workplace       |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Academics   | Academic Research | Library         |
| Science     | Lab Work          | Lab             |
| Engineering | Gadgeteering      | Workshop        |
| Mysteries   | Arcane Research   | Arcane Library  |
| Mysteries   | Artificing        | Arcane Workshop |

If the character wishes to have a specialized workspace, such as a workshop that can only work on guns, they may have it at a quality equal to their (Resources-1) instead. Higher quality workspaces may be constructed, but will require a Resources roll with a difficulty equal to the quality +2 (or only +1 in the case of a specialized space), and will not be made immediately available at the time of purchase (though additional shifts may be spent to reduce time, as usual).

## Science

(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

Not just science, but "Science!" Science holds the promise of revealing all the world's secrets to mankind. This skill represents a broad knowledge of entific method, and includes the field of medicine. Characters with a high Science include scientists and physicians, but any gentleman of quality has at least some familiarity with the sciences.

## Lab Work [Science]

Science can be used to answer all manner of questions, provided there's time and equipment to look into them. A scientist looking to solve a problem should figure out what question he's trying to answer, like "What killed this man?" or "What is this object composed of?". The GM will call for a

roll to see if the character can answer the question. This will require a lab of some sort, and it's possible that some questions can't be answered without the right equipment. In the end, this functions the same as Academics performing research in a library (see [page XX](#)).

## Medical Attention [Science]

Pulp scientists are broadly versed, and this includes a basic understanding of medicine. A character can use the Science skill for first aid and more advanced medicine. See [page XX](#) for a discussion of the difficulties in using Science for medical purposes.

## Science! [Science]

More importantly, Science here means pulp science. Do mathematical equations Is there a cure for lycanthropy and vampirism? Of course there is, and Dr. Thanatos has a glowing syringe to prove it in his bag! Is phlogiston, the subatomic particle of fire, a valid theory? My friend, not only is it valid, but I'd like to show you my phlotomic bomb!

In practice, this simply means nearly anything can be explained with "Science!" It may not necessarily make sense to anyone other than the person doing the explaining, but it at least sounds authoritative, and sometimes it's even right. When confronted with a challenge, the character can apply a scientific explanation, and roll against a difficulty set by the GM. This is a declaration action. If a character acts in accordance with the resulting scientific advice, and he succeeds on the roll, he gains a +2 bonus or a reroll on the action, by tagging the aspect he's introduced. The science of this declaration doesn't really need to be accurate to the real world – it just needs to sounds scientific, and can even just be regular advice using long scientific words. Since the bonus comes from tagging an aspect, the first one's free, and subsequent uses will cost a fate point.

## Sleight of Hand

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

The hand can certainly be quicker than the eye. This skill covers fine, dexterous activities like stage magic, pickpocketing, and replacing an idol with a bag of sand without tripping a trap. While Athletics is appropriate for gross physical activities, most things requiring manual speed and precision falls under this skill (that said, if you're picking a lock, use Burglary). Characters with a high Sleight of Hand include stage magicians, pickpockets, and jugglers.

## Pickpocket [Sleight of Hand]

Picking a pocket is a quick contest between Sleight of Hand and the target's Alertness (which may be complemented by the target's own Sleight of Hand). Due to the difficulty of this sort of work, the target usually receives a +2 bonus, as if he were performing a full defense against the action. If the target is distracted by something else, he loses the +2 bonus. If anyone else is in a position to observe the attempt, they also may make Alertness rolls to spot the attempt (though they don't gain the +2).

## Art of Distraction [Sleight of Hand]

Characters may use Sleight of Hand to try to hide things in plain sight, and may use Sleight of Hand to oppose any perception check for something that they could try to hide, misplace, or distract attention from. When a character uses this skill to hide something, his skill roll indicates the difficulty of any Investigation rolls to find it.

## Stealth

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

This is the ability to remain unseen and unheard. Directly opposed by Alertness or Investigation, this ability covers everything from skulking in the shadows to hiding under the bed. Characters with a high Stealth include burglars, assassins, and sneaky children.

## Hiding [Stealth]

When a character is hiding, he's remaining perfectly still and (hopefully) out of sight. Lighting, obstacles and other environmental factors can affect the player's roll, and the result of his Stealth roll is the basis for any contest with a searcher's Alertness or Investigation.

## Skulking [Stealth]

Skulking is the art of moving while trying to remain unnoticed. It uses many of the same rules as Hiding, but is somewhat more difficult for obvious reasons.

## Ambush [Stealth]

While we can be sure that heroes would never strike an opponent from ambush, they may end up on the receiving end of such nefarious actions! When a strike is made from ambush, the target gets one last Alertness check to see if he notices something at the last moment. On a success, the target(s) can defend normally. If that Alertness roll fails, the attack is made with the target's first defense roll at Mediocre.

## Survival

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

This is the skill of outdoorsmen. It covers hunting, trapping, tracking, building fires, and lots of other wilderness skills that a civilized man has no use for. Characters with a high Survival include explorers, hunters, scouts, and lords of the jungle.

## Animal Handling [Survival]

Survival also covers the breadth of interaction with animals, from training them to communicating with them, albeit in a limited fashion. This includes handling beasts of burden and carriage animals, as well as common pets. Survival serves as a stand-in for all social skills when dealing with animals. Not to say animals are great conversationalists, but when one is trying to soothe or stare down an animal, Survival is the skill to roll.

## Riding [Survival]

The horse is not yet absent from the landscape, and other exotic beasts occasionally need riding across deserts and through time-forgotten jungles. The Survival skill may be used for riding animals, and should operate much as Drive does when it comes to chases.

Survival also covers the basics of riding. Characters looking to be accomplished horsemen should consider the Equestrian stunt from Athletics ([page XX](#)), but for getting by and not falling off a horse, Survival does the job.

Whether the character personally commands a mount may be subject to character concept or judicious application of the Resources skill. Truly exceptional mounts are the domain of stunts.

## Camouflage [Survival]

Survival can be used to construct blinds and other ways to help remain hidden outdoors. On a Mediocre roll, a character can build a blind or otherwise create a place to hide, which lets Survival modify Stealth rolls. Such a construction takes a few hours to build, and will last a day, plus one extra day per shift.

## Scavenging [Survival]

If characters need to scrounge up something from the wilderness – sticks, bones, sharp rocks, vines that can serve as rope and so on – they can roll Survival to find these things.

## Weapons

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(Stunts, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

This is the skill for fighting with weapons, from swords to knives to axes to clubs to whips. The exact weapon is more of a choice of style than anything else, as this covers everything from fencing in European salons to sailors using knives and batons on the docks.

The Weapons skill also covers the ability to throw small handheld weapons up to one zone away, or to use weapons (like a whip) with unusually long reach to attack adjacent zones, so a character would use this skill to be a good knife fighter and knife thrower. This gives Weapons-focused characters a small leg up on folks who fight with their Fists, with the downside that a Weapons user needs to have a weapon in hand in order to make much use of the skill.

As a combat skill, Weapons inherently carries the ability to defend oneself in a fight and as such, may be rolled for defense. Weapons users are also well-versed in a variety of fighting styles and weapons, and may use this skill as a limited sort of knowledge skill covering those areas.

Characters with high Weapons include sailors, fencers, and some kinds of athletes and circus performers.

If someone is devoted to using Weapons as a strong component of their fighting style, it can safely be assumed that they possess the sufficient weaponry in order to make use of the skill, regardless of Resources rating. This is, of course, subject to the rigors of character concept and GM approval.

## 6. Stunts

### What Stunts Do

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Stunts exist to provide guaranteed situational benefits, or special abilities or minor powers, under particular circumstances.

A stunt may grant a character the ability to use a skill under unusual circumstances, such as using it in a broader array of situations, substituting it for another skill, or using it in a complementary fashion to another skill. A stunt might allow a character to gain an effect roughly equal to two shifts, when used in a specific way, or otherwise grant other small effects. Put more simply, stunts allow the usual rules about skills to be broken – or at least bent.

Some stunts may have prerequisites (other stunts or even aspects). Particularly potent stunts may also require the use of a fate point in order to activate. In general, a character should not take a stunt tied to a skill he does not have at least at Average.

What follows is not a comprehensive list of stunts. GMs (and players under GM supervision) are encouraged to create their own to fit their game. The important thing to keep in mind is that entry level stunts – without prerequisites – are the baseline; if the effect of the stunt is really unusual or particularly potent, it may be somewhere down the line of a chain of stunts.

The stunts in this chapter are presented skill by skill, and under each skill they are further divided into thematic groups. Each group usually has one or more “entry level” stunts – ones that don’t have prerequisites – and several which require one or more of those entry level stunts to be taken first.

When building a character quickly, take a look at these groups – you may find it easiest to simply take all the stunts within a group, as they are all thematically similar, and can quickly establish what your character’s niche is. As mentioned in Character Creation, characters start with five stunts. As you’ll see later in the Tips and Tricks chapter, characters may be able to gain additional stunts as the game progresses.

In order to help separate the stunts from the skill and category headings, you’ll see a star symbol next to each stunt listed.

### Academics

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### Languages

#### Linguist [Academics]

Normally, someone may only speak a number of additional languages equivalent to the value of his Academics skill. With this stunt, your character may speak five additional languages.

#### Gift of Tongues [Academics]

Requires Linguist.

There is no “mainstream” earthly language you cannot read or speak – no need to pick your languages. In addition, you may use your usual language “slots” to read and speak languages you have no business having learned, such as languages from lost fantastic cultures (Atlantis, Erehwon, Lemuria), of extraterrestrial or extradimensional origin, etc.

Your slots remain increased by the Linguist stunt, so someone with Average Academics and these two stunts can speak every normal language on the planet, plus six (1+5) very unusual ones. The Linguist stunt may be taken multiple times in order to increase this number.

## Memory

### Walking Library [Academics]

The character's prodigious reading has paid off in spades, and he is able to recall minute details from even the most obscure literary works. The character is always considered to have a library on hand of a quality equal to his Academics skill, enabling him to answer questions with a base difficulty less than or equal to his Academics skill, using nothing other than his brain and some time for contemplation. Additionally, any research performed by this character in a real library automatically takes one unit less time (see "Taking Your Time" on [page XX](#)), and any libraries with a quality less than his Academics skill do not limit the difficulty of the question asked, as they normally would.

### Photographic Memory [Academics]

Requires Walking Library.

If you've read it, you remember it. If the answer lies in something you've read before (this must be reasonable), then any research effort takes an additional two units less time – stacked on top of the benefit of Walking Library, this means that a half hour's worth of research in books you've already encountered can be resolved in a matter of seconds, and a day's worth covered in a mere hour. See the time table on [page XX](#) for more.

### Studied Recall [Academics]

Requires Photographic Memory.

Your photographic memory extends outside of books. Once per scene, you may spend a fate point and roll Academics against a difficulty of Mediocre. Each shift you generate may be used to specify a target that you wish to memorize as you might a book – returning later, in your mind, to assess new details (using an appropriate perception skill, usually Investigation).

This ability differs from Investigation's Eye for Detail stunt in that Eye for Detail covers the entire location, after the fact, whereas Studied Recall requires you to specify which individual pieces of a location you are studying, while you are still in that location.

## Scholarship

### Scholar [Academics]

Your character is a respected authority in a specific academic field. Possibilities include history, English, archeology, mathematics and so on. In the elite circles of that particular field, you are recognized for your expertise. Even if your skill level is low, it merely means you are towards the bottom of that particular group of the elite.

When you make an Academics roll pertaining to your general area of expertise, you automatically receive a +1 bonus. Beyond this, you should pick a specific specialization within that area (like ancient Sumerian history, or cryptography). When an Academics roll involves that specialization, you gain an additional +1 bonus (for a total +2 to the value of the research effort).

Any research efforts involving the specialization take one unit less time; this may be combined with Walking Library, in the Memory group of stunts, for lightning-fast research. When taking part in an academic conference or otherwise interacting with others in the field, you may use Academics to

complement your social skills (Rapport, Empathy, Deceit, etc). Your skill is considered elevated by these bonuses, so someone with Good Academics, acting in his area of specialization, would complement skills as if his Academics were Superb (Good+2).

This stunt may be taken more than once, each time for an additional field. The bonuses may not overlap, however.

### **Dizzying Intellect [Academics]**

Requires Scholar.

Your area of knowledge is so advanced, there's usually no one around who can tell if you're making things up. Whenever your area of expertise (as defined when you took the Scholar stunt) comes to bear, and you would use Academics to modify Deceit, you may use your Academics skill instead of Deceit, gaining its full value rather than a simple +1. If you've taken Scholar multiple times, this stunt applies to all covered areas.

### **It's Academic [Academics]**

Requires Scholar.

Your specialized knowledge gives you flashes of insight into all manner of things.

Once per session, you can use this ability when you are about to perform an action which your academic field touches upon. The connection can be tenuous, provided you can explain to the GM how it might apply.

Make a declaration attempt as described under "Declaring Minor Details" (see [page XX](#)). If you get at least one shift, you successfully declare one aspect; for every two shifts you gain beyond the first, you may declare one additional aspect about the subject in question (so two aspects total at 3 shifts, three aspects total at 5 shifts, etc). If you opt to declare only one aspect in total, you may instead convert these additional shifts into non-aspect facts.

## **Alertness**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Reflexes**

#### **On Top Of It [Alertness]**

You may spend a fate point to go first in an exchange, regardless of your initiative. If multiple people with this stunt exercise this ability, they go in turn of their normal initiative, before those who don't have the stunt get a chance to act. If the exchange has already started, and you have not yet acted, you may instead spend a fate point to act next, out of the usual turn order.

This may only be done between character's actions, and cannot be done as an interruption of any kind (so if you spend the fate point to do this while someone else is acting, you must wait until they're done). Your character must not have acted yet in the exchange in order to use the ability in this way. If your character's turn has passed, and you elected to hold your action, then there's no need to activate this stunt; use the held action rules normally ([page XX](#)).

#### **Ready for Anything [Alertness]**

Requires On Top Of It.

The character's senses are so keyed into minute changes that he is able to respond more quickly to new details. The character's Alertness skill is considered to be one higher for purposes of

determining initiative (allowing someone with Superb Alertness to have Fantastic initiative). This stunt breaks ties whenever facing opponents with the same initiative. This stunt may be taken multiple times, each time increasing the character's initiative one step.

### **Cut Off [Alertness]**

Requires On Top Of It.

The character's always watching for his opponents to try to get something past him, and can cut that option off, even when he fails in his primary effort against them. Whenever your character attacks an opponent (or performing an attack-like maneuver), then no matter how well the opponent rolls on his defense, the opponent does not generate spin, and thus can't provide a +1 in his side's favor (see [page XX](#)).

### **Run Interference [Alertness]**

Requires Ready for Anything.

Normally, a character who has held his action cannot interrupt another's action at all; he must allow the action to finish before acting. If your character has this stunt, you may bend that rule.

Whenever you choose to hold your action, you may spend a fate point before someone acts to have that person truthfully declare what he is about to do. You may then use your held action to block (see [page XX](#)) the action your target has declared, using whatever skill is appropriate to create the block. If you are not opting to block the effort, you may not use your held action before your target, and your target may proceed. If you commit to performing a block action regardless of what your target declares, before he declares it, you do not need to spend the fate point. Be clear about this when you make your demand!

Regardless, if you do act and your most recent target then changes his mind based on that block, he must do so as a supplemental action ([page XX](#)), putting him at a -1. If he continues his declared course of action despite what you did, he must overcome the block.

## **Vigilance**

### **Danger Sense [Alertness]**

The character maintains a quick and easy awareness of ambushes and other nasty surprises – perhaps preternaturally, perhaps simply due to finely tuned mundane senses. Whenever ambushed (see [page XX](#)), the character is able to take a full defensive action, gaining a +2 on his defense roll, regardless of whether or not he's surprised (if he is surprised, dropping his base defense to Mediocre, this stunt takes his base defense up to Fair).

### **Saw It Coming [Alertness]**

Requires Danger Sense.

The character is never surprised; he may always take a full defensive action when ambushed, and his base defense is never reduced to Mediocre by surprise.

### **Constant Vigilance [Alertness]**

Requires Saw It Coming.

Not only is the character never surprised, he is never forced onto a defensive footing by an ambush. The ambush rules simply do not apply to him; in the first exchange, where others may normally only defend (if that), he may act freely, in normal initiative order.

## Take It All In [Alertness]

Requires two other Alertness stunts.

The character has tuned his Alertness to the point where, if he takes a normal Investigation length of time to open his senses to a location, he can gather an Investigation level of detail about it, without really going through the motions of a methodical search. When acting in this fashion, he may use Alertness instead of Investigation (which, really, is nearly all of the cases where he might use Investigation).

The trick with the results, here, is that they may come to the character with a different set of details than a methodical approach would yield. Conclusions may precede supporting details; the GM might choose to describe the middle part of a piece of information before the beginning or the end. Such are the hazards of Alertness.

## Art

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### Appreciation

#### The Artist's Eye [Art]

The artist is always examining the world for the creative hand at work. Even in endeavors which have nothing to do with art, he can recognize the elements of personality – the “signature”, if you will – of those at work.

While this does not reveal identity, it does allow the artist to determine common traits, themes, and behaviors with ease. Whenever making a determination as to the source of something (its “author”, after a fashion), characters with this stunt may use their Art instead of the usual skill that would be rolled. If the character has encountered several products of the same person, he may see past those things to the person – thus confirming a common source.

Furthermore, the character's keen eye enables him to connect the metaphor of the artist – his work – with the artist himself. When encountering a work of art in any form, the character may roll Art to gain insight into the artist behind the work, as if he were using the Empathy skill on the actual artist (resisted by the usual skills). This stunt may only be used once per piece of art.

Taken as a whole, this stunt allows the artist to make assessment efforts against his target in absentia.

### Creation

#### Virtuoso [Art]

The character is a master of some specific form of art – painting, composition, singing, conducting or playing music, or the like. The character is a virtuoso in his field and recognized worldwide for his skill. Even if his actual skill level is not high, he is still on the list of the finest artists in the world, just not necessarily at the top of it. The character receives a +1 knowledge bonus when performing his art form. He may also pick a specialty (such a specific instrument or a specific school of painting) for which he receives a +1 specialty bonus. When applicable, the virtuoso may produce works of art one time increment faster than would normally take.

#### Moving Performance [Art]

Requires Virtuoso.

Whenever the artist uses his art to place an aspect on the scene, the aspect remains in place in any subsequent scenes involving the audience, up to a day from the end of the performance. At its best, this can essentially move such an aspect from a scene to the story itself, persisting across many scenes and many office members.

## Persona

### Razor Tongue [Art]

The artist has a way with words, and knows how to craft the most exquisite insults. Whenever making a social roll that uses such words, he may automatically complement the effort with his Art skill – this is particularly potent when complementing Intimidation to get a rise out of someone, and in such a case, grants an additional +1 regardless of the level of skill.

### Poison Words [Art]

Requires Razor Tongue.

The artist's skill at satire is so profound as to take the whole audience with him. The artist may choose a target normally, and that target need not be in the audience (though it should be one familiar to the audience). Normally, aspects resulting from a performance may not be specific; with this stunt, however, the player may specify the target in any aspect he puts on the scene. Thus, while an artist might normally be able to add the "Hate" aspect to a scene, but one with this stunt may make it "Hate Lord Octavian".

### Stage Presence [Art]

Requires Virtuoso.

The artist's works cannot be ignored. The character halves any additional difficulty bonuses due to distractions (rounded down); see [page XX](#) for details.

### All the World's a Stage [Art]

Requires one other Art stunt.

Normally, acting is somewhat obvious for what it is, meant for a stage and not elsewhere, but with this stunt, the character's talent is natural and unquestionable, and he may easily, convincingly adopt a persona off-stage. At that point, normally it would stop being a performance and be more about trying to fool someone – crossing over to Deceit. With this stunt, however, whenever asked to make a Deceit roll to convince a target he is someone he isn't, the artist may choose to roll Art instead.

## Reputation

### Commissions [Art]

Requires Virtuoso.

Your works and performances are heavily sought out, and there are those who will pay handsomely for it. Once per session, you may use your Art skill instead of Resources, representing a successful past commission.

### Do You Know Who I Am? [Art]

Requires Virtuoso.

Your widespread name and your art are interlinked as one. When identifying yourself in order to get your way in a social or other applicable situation, you may complement Rapport, Intimidation, Deceit and Contacting rolls with your Art skill.

### **Weight of Reputation [Art]**

Requires Do You Know Who I Am?

Your reputation as an artist is so well known that it occasionally covers up for your social shortcomings.

For a fate point, you may use your Art skill instead of Rapport, Intimidation, Contacting, or Deceit, provided those you are dealing with are aware of your reputation (a second fate point will nearly always assure that they are).

## **Athletics**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Gymnastics**

#### **Contortionist [Athletics]**

You can fit into and through spaces and shapes that no normal human readily can. Normally, contorting tasks are impossible to attempt, or at best default to a (non-existent) Contortion skill rated at Mediocre. With this stunt, you can use your full Athletics score instead, and have rationale to attempt feats of contortion that are simply unavailable to others.

#### **Acrobat [Athletics]**

You are able to perform any number of impressive acrobatic feats. Difficulties assigned for complex maneuvers while acting (e.g. walking on a tightrope, doing brain surgery while hanging from a trapeze) are reduced by two. Falling rolls gain a +2 bonus. When used acrobatically, your Athletics skill can never be used to restrict another skill, only complement it.

#### **Safe Fall [Athletics]**

Requires Acrobat.

The character can skip effortlessly down sheer surfaces without harm, allowing him to safely fall great distances. When the character falls, but is near a solid surface, such as the wall of a shaft, or has sufficient other things like ropes to offset his fall, all falls are treated as two categories shorter (and may be reduced another step with Athletics as normal).

#### **Slippery [Athletics]**

Requires at least one other Athletics stunt.

You gain a +2 to all attempts to defend against knockback or push attacks, as well as any attempts to escape from bonds.

## **Speed**

#### **Marathon Training [Athletics]**

You know how to conserve your energy when undergoing lengthy athletic activity (long-distance running, multi-day climbs, etc). You may use Athletics instead of Endurance under such circumstances, and in most other cases may complement any Endurance rolls with your Athletics.

**Fast as a Leopard [Athletics]**

Requires Marathon Training.

You are incredibly fast on your feet. Whenever taking a sprint (but not move) action using Athletics, the value of that action is improved by two. Alternately, you may set aside this bonus in order to be considered on an “even footing” in a race with a mounted beast or a car (in 1920, cars aren’t that fast).

**Faster than a Leopard [Athletics]**

Requires Fast as a Leopard.

You are simply, astonishingly fast. Whenever you roll to sprint, it’s at +4; you can reduce this to +2 and be considered on an even footing with a horse or a car. Furthermore, you face no penalties for moving one zone as a supplemental action.

**Uncommon Movement****Human Spider [Athletics]**

The character can climb surfaces he oughtn’t be able to. He receives a +2 bonus on any climb, and by spending a fate point, he may eliminate the effects of all difficulty modifiers resulting from the environment or the characteristics of the thing he’s climbing (so he can climb a slick, mostly flat surface in a rainstorm at much less difficulty).

**Mighty Leap [Athletics]**

The character’s leaping ability borders on the superhuman. The character may reduce any height related borders (see [page XX](#)) by up to three.

**Equestrian [Athletics]**

The character can use Athletics instead of Survival for all maneuvers when riding horses or other riding animals.

**Burglary**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

**Perspective****Criminal Mind [Burglary]**

You have an acute understanding of what it takes to burglarize a place, and can investigate such crimes from the perspective of the criminal instead of the cop. You may use your Burglary skill instead of Investigation when investigating a theft or other act (such as arson) committed by someone using the Burglary skill. If the crime closely matches one the character has himself committed before, he gets a +1 bonus for familiarity right off the bat (it’s the GM’s job to factor this in).

**Tripwire Sensibilities [Burglary]**

You’ve run into enough traps that you’ve developed an instinct for avoiding them. You may roll Burglary instead of Alertness or Investigation in order to uncover or otherwise avoid stumbling onto a trap. When your GM calls for an Alertness roll, be sure to make her aware that you have this stunt – it may change the skill to roll.

## **Trespass Tempo [Burglary]**

Requires Tripwire Sensibilities.

Whenever you're running a burglarizing operation, you operate on very precise internal clock. You are always aware of exactly how much time has passed, and further, may use Burglary instead of Alertness as your initiative skill while everything is going to plan.

## **Technique**

### **Hatpin Maestro [Burglary]**

The character's skill with improvisation when bypassing a lock or similar contrivance is improved, so long as he has something that could pass as a tool, such as a hatpin. Characters with this stunt never suffer an increased difficulty for lacking proper tools on a Burglary roll, and when given proper tools, can defeat locks at one time increment faster than usual.

### **Mental Blueprint [Burglary]**

You're highly skilled at visualizing the whole of a target based on just a part of it. When casing a location, you receive a +2 bonus on your roll.

### **The Big Heist [Burglary]**

Requires Mental Blueprint and at least one other Burglary stunt. When the character is casing a location (see "Casing", [page XX](#)), he normally reveals or declares only one aspect about the location, in advance. With this stunt, however, if the character gains spin on his roll, he may reveal or declare one or more additional aspects (one additional aspect at 3 shifts, two at 5 shifts, or three at 7 or more shifts).

Further, regardless of spin, if the player is using the declare method with this stunt, he may save off from making his declarations until he's already in the middle of making the heist – in essence, retroactively introducing elements he'd "already planned for". Only one such retroactive declaration may be made per scene, but in the truly big heists, the job rarely lasts only one scene.

Alternately, the character may trade in one of his "retroactive" aspect picks in order to declare up to three non-aspect-based lesser details about the scene. This may be done in addition to making an aspect pick for the scene.

## **Contacting**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

## **Companions**

### **Contact [Contacting]**

At the time your character takes this stunt, you must define a specific contact, with a name, a brief sentence about the contact's personality, and her relationship to your character. This contact is a companion as described on [page XX](#), willing and capable to accompany you on your adventures, with three advances for you to spend as you wish. For maximum effect, you may wish to allocate one of your aspects to this contact as well. This stunt may be taken multiple times, defining a different contact each time.

### **Close Contacts [Contacting]**

Requires at least one Contact.

When you select this stunt, you may spread three additional advances out amongst your existing contacts, creating unusually talented companions. You may take this stunt multiple times, but can't ever apply more than six additional advances (for a total of nine) to any one contact.

### **Network of Contacts [Contacting]**

Requires at least one other Contacting stunt.

The character can choose from a large number of companions available to him when he needs them. With this stunt, when the character begins an adventure, his companion doesn't need to be defined. Instead, at the point where he decides he needs the companion, he may reveal her, giving her a name and a few brief cues to the GM to base a personality on.

This companion starts out at Average quality and may have up to two advances.

If the character takes this stunt more than once, he has two additional advances which he may use to reveal an additional companion, or combine together to create a more capable companion on the fly.

Only one "reveal" of this kind may be done per scene. Once revealed, the companion will be involved and reasonably available at least until the end of the adventure.

If, instead, you choose to have the companion available to you for only one scene before the companion is called away to other things, you may build the companion with three advances instead of two. Once the scene ends, the companion is removed from the adventure, one way or another.

## **Connections**

### **I Know a Guy Who Knows a Guy [Contacting]**

Sometimes it's not who you know, but who the people you know, know. Many of your contacts are, themselves, very well connected. The breadth of your contacts make all Contacting rolls take one unit less of time, and you gain a +2 on any "second roll" efforts made to corroborate information you've gotten from another of your contacts. Consequently, this bonus is useful on a follow-up, but not on the initial roll.

### **Insider [Contacting]**

The character is able to navigate bureaucracies easily, not because he understands them, but because he knows people embedded in the bureaucracy who can provide shortcuts. Normally, a character must roll Leadership in order to deal with any sort of bureaucratic entanglement (see [page XX](#)). With this stunt, the character may roll Contacting instead.

### **Walk the Walk [Contacting]**

The character's travels have taken him to every corner of the globe. His familiarity with the streets and peoples of the world allow him to function easily, at home and abroad. The character never suffers any additional difficulty from unfamiliar circumstances when Contacting.

## **Reputation**

### **Big Man [Contacting]**

When selecting this stunt, the player picks a specific field (Criminal, Business, Politics, Espionage and Occult are the most common); this stunt is often written with that field incorporated, e.g., Big Man in Politics. The character is not merely well connected in that community, he is actually a person of great importance within that area; for maximum benefit, this should be paired with an aspect that indicates similar things.

In addition to the narrative benefits of such a position, the character may use his Contacting skill in lieu of the Resources skill for anything which might fall under the auspices of members in that field. This stunt may be taken multiple times, each time for a different field.

### **Talk the Talk [Contacting]**

Requires Big Man.

Whenever dealing with members of your chosen field, you put out all the right signals, say all the right things. In such circumstances, you may roll your Rapport at +2, or, alternatively, use your Contacting instead of Rapport, in order to get a favorable reaction.

### **Big Name [Contacting]**

Requires Big Man.

You're so well known that an awareness of your name has crossed over into other areas as well. The first time you deal with someone who's heard of you (spending a fate point can assure that they have), and you're using your name, you get a +2 bonus to a Rapport or Intimidation roll.

### **Big Reputation [Contacting]**

Requires Big Name.

Your reputation has reached great proportions, and people are willing to believe all sorts of things about you.

For a fate point, you may use your Contacting skill instead of Rapport, Intimidation, Deceit, Leadership, or Resolve, provided those you are dealing with are aware of your reputation (a second fate point will nearly always assure that they do).

This stunt combines with the bonus from Big Name, getting the character a +2 to Contacting when using it instead of Rapport or Intimidation.

## **Deceit**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

## **Confidence**

### **Con Man [Deceit]**

You are a bona fide confidence man, and that lets you get a read on people, easy.

You may use your Deceit instead of Empathy to get a "read" on someone (see [page XX](#)), but the type of aspects that may be revealed are limited only to things like character weaknesses, never strengths or other advantages (unless you win the contest or are otherwise in control of which aspect is revealed).

Some aspects will completely miss you; a Good Hearted Person might just fly right over your head.

### **The Fix Is In [Deceit]**

Requires Con Man.

The character is adept at cheating, so much so that he may use his Deceit skill instead of Gambling whenever he chooses.

When he does so, he is cheating, which means if he fails, he's caught, and the game's loss is treated as if it were a high stakes game, even if it wasn't.

**Sucker [Deceit]**

Requires Con Man.

You've got this guy completely suckered – or at least, if he's on to you, he's rich enough that he doesn't care. Design a companion (page XX) with two advances. In addition, he is automatically Fair quality, and Skilled with Resources. He tends to buy things for you, along with whatever else it is he does.

The downside is that he's a sucker – you hooked him in, but he is a Poor difficulty target for anyone else looking to sucker him too (although if you when that happens).

Heck, you may even have some fondness for the guy – you certainly won't leave him hanging out to dry, and that's not just because he pays for everything – but, still, the relationship's not entirely honest.

**Big Sucker [Deceit]**

Requires Sucker.

You hit it big – this guy's loaded. Your companion's Resources skill is considered to be two steps higher than his quality; if you've advanced him to a maximum quality of Great, this means he's running around with Fantastic Resources. You may also spend one additional advance on him. He's not just about the money, you know.

**Disguise****Clever Disguise [Deceit]**

Normally, a character cannot create a disguise that will stand up to intense scrutiny (see page XX). With this stunt, he may defend against intense scrutiny (anything short of physically trying to remove the disguise) with his full Deceit skill. Furthermore, he may assemble disguises of this quality in a matter of minutes, provided he has a well-equipped disguise kit on hand.

**Mimicry [Deceit]**

Requires Clever Disguise.

Deceit can be used to convince people you are someone you aren't – but usually only in a general sense. You can seem to be a cop, an author, et cetera, but you can't seem to be a specific person without a lot of work (and an elevated difficulty). With this stunt, you can easily imitate the mannerisms and voice of anyone you've had a chance to study – removing another potential cause to have a disguise examined, or perhaps convincing someone who can't see you that you're someone else even though you're undisguised.

Studying someone usually requires only an investment of time, and not a roll of the dice – at least half an hour of constant exposure. This timeframe can be reduced, but will require an Empathy, Investigation, or Deceit roll against a target of Mediocre, increased by one for each step faster on the time chart (page XX).

**Master of Disguise [Deceit]**

Requires Clever Disguise and Mimicry.

The character can convincingly pass himself off as nearly anyone with a little time and preparation. To use this ability, the player pays a fate point and temporarily stops playing. His character is presumed to have donned a disguise and gone "off camera". At any subsequent point during play the player may choose any nameless, filler character (a villain's minion, a bellboy in the hotel, the cop who just pulled you over) in a scene and reveal that that character is actually the PC in disguise!

The character may remain in this state for as long as the player chooses, but if anyone is tipped off that he might be nearby, an investigator may spend a fate point and roll Investigate against the disguised character's Deceit. If the investigator wins, his player (which may be the GM) gets to decide which filler character is actually the disguised PC ("Wait a minute – you're the Emerald Emancipator!").

### **Infiltrator [Deceit]**

Requires Master of Disguise.

While the character is disguised (see Master of Disguise) he may make a single Investigation roll against at target of Mediocre. Each shift gained can be used to do one of two things: gain a useful (but general) piece of information about the area or group being infiltrated, or leave a clue, hint or message for the rest of the player characters without revealing himself.

### **Disguise of the Mind [Deceit]**

Requires Master of Disguise and a Deceit skill of Great or better.

You inhabit your disguises so completely that you can actually fully inhabit another persona and unlock hidden skills and knowledge you don't normally possess. While in a disguise, you may roll your Deceit minus two (so Fair if Great, or Good if Superb) instead of any other skill the disguised persona might reasonably possess. If you are outright imitating someone specific, sometimes this might give you a higher effective skill than they actually have – which is fine. You're not a mind-reader, you're simply so good at pretending that you can actually, temporarily unlock a skill that you believe your persona could have.

Any time you use this stunt, you must pay a fate point; if you do not wish to pay a fate point, you may instead roll your Resolve against a difficulty equal to the "false" skill. If you miss that target, you become lost in the persona for a time, and may be subject to one no-fate-point compel before you break out of it. The aspect compelled might not even be one of your own – it may be one possessed by the persona you're mimicking!

## **Falsehood**

### **The Honest Lie [Deceit]**

The best lies are the ones that contain a healthy dose of truth. Whenever the character incorporates a hefty portion of the truth into a lie, he gains a +2 bonus. The truth must be relevant, not unimportant, and significant, not trivial – it must be on par with (or bigger than) the lie, or at least in the ballpark.

### **Takes One to Know One [Deceit]**

As an accomplished liar, you're especially able to figure out when someone else is lying as well. You may use your Deceit skill instead of your Empathy skill when trying to figure out if someone is lying. This is not the same thing as getting "a read" on someone, as with the Con Man stunt, above; instead, it's a quick check: Is this guy lying? Is it a big lie or a small one? Is he mixing in the truth or is it all fabrication?

### **Clever Facade [Deceit]**

Requires either The Honest Lie or Takes One to Know One.

Whenever the character is the target of an Empathy "read", and decides to put a false face forward (see [page XX](#)), and wins the contest, he not only provides a false aspect to the reader, he also gets a read on the reader himself (revealing an aspect). The reader has fallen for your clever little trap!

## Drive

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### Cars

#### Custom Ride [Drive]

You've been gripped by the American fascination with the automobile early on, and have one car in particular that you take special care of. When driving that car, you receive a +1 bonus (it's assumed to have the craftsmanship improvement – see [page XX](#)).

Additionally, you've added (or had added) a little something extra to the car, and you may, once per session, spend a fate point and declare that the car has some extra device (such as an oil slick, speed boost or the like) – for guidelines, see the Universal Gadget stunt ([page XX](#)). You can't go too crazy with the improvements on this on-the-fly gadgetry – many forms of miniaturization and futurization, and several kinds of alternate usage and additional capability, are disallowed at this level of the stunt. To drive a truly unusual car, you must also take Prototype (below).

#### Prototype Car [Drive]

Requires Custom Ride.

You have a one-of-a-kind vehicle. For starters, your once-a-session gadget, as described above, can have any kind of improvement – the restrictions described in Custom Ride do not apply.

Secondly, your vehicle has three additional built-in improvements you may select. These improvements must be defined in advance of a session (only at the beginning or end), but you needn't pick all of them at the time you take this stunt. Once they're picked, they're set, until an engineer can get a chance to work at changing them.

Your vehicle is instantly recognizable as something unusual, unless you spend one of your improvements on making sure that it looks just like any other vehicle of its base type. Regardless, once people learn of its nature, there's almost certain to be attempts to steal it or otherwise learn its secrets. You'd be well advised to take an aspect tied to your vehicle, so you can get fate points when this happens!

#### Car Mechanic [Drive]

Requires at least two other Drive stunts. Your character may not understand the broader aspects of engineering devices and such, but when it comes to cars, he knows them inside and out. Whenever working on a car, you may use your Drive skill instead of Engineering. Due to common principles, you may also use your Drive skill to work on other vehicles, at a -1.

### Tricks

#### Defensive Driving [Drive]

You're good at keeping your car in one piece. Whenever attempting a driving maneuver in a chase (see [page XX](#)), you may treat the difficulty as if it were one lower. The difficulty of the maneuver itself is not affected, however, for any cars that might be chasing you.

#### One Hand on the Wheel [Drive]

Driving while doing some other action normally results in a -1 penalty. With this stunt, you don't suffer that penalty, regardless of whether you are rolling Drive (driving is your primary action, and the supplemental action is something minor), or rolling some other skill (you're taking some other

primary action, but keeping the vehicle on the road isn't all that challenging, allowing driving to be the supplemental action). Furthermore, if Drive would be a secondary skill that restricts or modifies a primary skill, but your Drive skill is lower than the primary skill you're using, your Drive skill has no negative effect.

### **Turn on a Dime [Drive]**

Requires Defensive Driving.

Somehow, no matter how crazy you drive, you always seem to pull it off. You're always able to make very tight turns and drive through very narrow spaces without suffering any sort of increased difficulty due to environment, unless it is in fact physically impossible for your vehicle to fit. In many ways this functions like the Defensive Driving stunt, but instead of lowering many difficulties by one, it potentially lowers these specific difficulties quite significantly.

### **Unsafe at Any Speed [Drive]**

Requires at least one other Drive stunt.

The character is the bane of curbside markets and rickety struts holding up awnings. The value of any damage this character does to the environment (but not characters or their vehicles) when driving a vehicle is doubled. Any time an object is taken out by the damage, the result should be spectacular – an explosion or collapse. This is not guaranteed to always fall in the character's favor (though it often can, and should)!

## **Empathy**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Intuition**

#### **Ebb and Flow [Empathy]**

The character is so aware of the social currents in a situation that he is able to see something of what's coming before it arrives. At the beginning of any social exchange, before proceeding with the usual initiative order, the character may spend a fate point and attempt a quick read – looking for surface moods and other social cues – on any one target of his choosing, as a free action. He may then act normally on his turn as usual.

#### **Preemptive Grace [Empathy]**

Requires Ebb and Flow.

You are so tuned into social situations that you may act quickly and decisively to shape the situation to your liking. Empathy is used to determine initiative in a social conflict, the same way Alertness is used in a physical one. With this stunt, your Empathy is considered two higher for the purposes of initiative. If you're tied for initiative with someone who does not have this stunt, this stunt breaks ties.

#### **Track the Soul [Empathy]**

Your understanding of people you've met is sufficiently strong that it gives you an easy sense of how to find them. In any situation where you're tracking down or otherwise trying to find someone you've met before, you may roll Empathy instead of Investigation.

#### **The Skeptic's Ear [Empathy]**

Requires at least one other Empathy stunt.

The world is full of lies and liars, and your character is always on the lookout for them. The character always knows when someone is using the Deceit skill on him, and may take full defensive actions (getting a +2) with his Empathy if appropriate.

Normally, the use of deception is not so easy to spot in advance, and thus justifying full defensive actions is difficult. Successfully determining that something is trying to deceive you is not the same as revealing the truth, however, no matter how well you do.

## Insight

### Cold Read [Empathy]

Normally, to use empathy to get a read on someone it requires at least a few minutes of conversation, if not more (see [page XX](#)). Characters with this stunt may do so after much less time – two or three steps faster on the time table (see [page XX](#)).

### Heart's Secret [Empathy]

You have an instinct for going right to the heart of a person and finding out what matters most to them. Whenever you make a successful Empathy read on someone (see [page XX](#)), the GM must select from the aspects that are of the utmost importance to the character, unless you explicitly instruct her otherwise. Normally, the GM has a freer rein in her selection.

While this still can't get you to trip over anything that's truly still a secret to you (this isn't an instant mystery solving stunt!), it should at least put you as close to the core truth about a character.

### Hit Them Where It Hurts [Empathy]

Your skill at reading people makes you adept at provoking a strong emotional response if you're trying to get them angry, depressed, or something similar. Normally, the Intimidation skill would be used for such efforts; however, if you've succeeded at any Empathy roll against the target previously, you may use Empathy to wage such psychological warfare instead. In the hands of a character with high Empathy, this is especially lethal when combined with a successful read on someone that reveals an aspect.

### A Peek Inside [Empathy]

Requires at least two other Empathy stunts.

Once you get an insight into someone, you may try to look much deeper than one normally can. Trying to learn something specific and concrete about another person can be a lot like trying to catch a specific raindrop – you can be sure you got wet, but figuring out if you actually got the one you were going after is another matter. In the best case scenario, you've revealed one of the target's aspects.

With this stunt, however, you achieve such a strong understanding of your subject that you can start to make some fairly accurate guesses about his behavior.

After you have successfully gotten a "read" as described in the Empathy write-up ([page XX](#)), you may immediately ask the GM a hypothetical question about the target's motives, which the GM must be able to answer with yes, no, or maybe, to the best of her ability. The question must speak to the kind of person the target is, not things they've done, though it may ask if they are capable of doing such things. If the GM answers with a maybe, you may ask a second question to get clarification. This second question may seek details, rather than another one-word answer.

### Uncanny Hunch [Empathy]

See Investigation, [page XX](#).

## Endurance

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### Persistence

#### Last Leg [Endurance]

The character may spend fate points to keep standing. Any time the character would be taken out by (or otherwise suffer a consequence from) a physical hit he may spend a fate point to remain standing or otherwise defer a consequence or concession for one more exchange, or until he's hit again, whatever comes first. Once the extra time he's bought is up, all effects he has deferred come to bear at once. He may keep spending fate points in this fashion until he runs out, each time the time limit expires.

This means that with a whole handful of fate points he might go on for three exchanges with no consequences or collapse impeding him, and then suddenly keel over, revealing Multiple Bruises and a Broken Rib and a few surplus consequences – which would suggest an immediate taken out result to be determined by his attacker, even if that attacker has been defeated in the intervening time!

#### Feel the Burn [Endurance]

The character can push through incredible pain in order to reach his goal. The character can take one extra moderate, physical consequence (see [page XX](#)) before moving on to a severe physical consequence, allowing him to take a total of four consequences in a physical conflict.

#### Face the Pain [Endurance]

Requires Feel the Burn.

The character is able to lessen the effects of physical injury thanks to his incredible stamina. Once per scene, he character may spend a fate point, and remove move any single check mark from the injury track.

#### Tireless [Endurance]

Normally, someone who has not gotten a regular night's sleep takes a consequence indicating his lack of rest, which cannot be removed save with the requisite amount of sleep. Not so for the character with this stunt.

Whenever this character would need to sleep, he may roll Endurance (see below for the difficulties) and spend shifts to reduce the amount of time he needs for a regular night's rest. Each shift spent reduces the time increment (to get a full night's rest) by one. One shift gets from 6-8 hours down to 3-4; two gets it down to an hour; three gets it to half an hour; four gets it to a few minutes.

The character may continue sleeping past that point, but if awoken suddenly, he does not face any issues due to insufficient sleep – he is refreshed and alert. Normally the difficulty for the Endurance roll is simply Mediocre, but if the character chooses to skip a night of sleep, the difficulty of the roll is increased by one step each night. Once he fails the roll, he must get a full, normal (6-8 hours) night of sleep to “reset” the clock; if he succeeds on subsequent nights, and chooses to sleep, he can still sleep for the truncated amount of time.

## Recovery

### **Bounce Back [Endurance]**

The character heals faster than the norm, which has the effect of reducing the severity of consequences resulting from physical injury. On some characters this means no matter how bad of a beating they seem to have taken, they shrug it off. When considering the amount of time it takes to recover from a consequence of a particular severity, reduce the timeframe by two steps on the time chart (page XX). This means that mild physical consequences will be removed between scenes even if there's no "break" between them, moderate consequences will take about an hour of rest instead of six, and severe consequences may be reduced from months to weeks, weeks to days, or days to the length of an afternoon!

### **Death Defiance [Endurance]**

If the character is ever taken out away from the view of other characters and death appears imminent, certain, or absolute, (such as from dropping off a cliff, apparently failing to escape from an exploding building and so on) then coincidence will conspire to keep the character alive. This stunt does not protect the character from dying "on camera".

The player then spends half of his remaining fate points, rounded up (he must have at least one to do this), and may watch play and think of a good explanation for how he survived.

Once he has a story, he may re-enter play in any subsequent scene in as dramatic a fashion as he sees fit, with all of his physical stress cleared and a single consequence to reflect the dangers survived.

### **Developed Immunities [Endurance]**

Requires at least one other Endurance stunt.

Whether through natural aptitude or careful exposure and development, the character is quite simply immune to most common poisons, and terribly resistant to uncommon ones.

He may resist any uncommon poison he has not previously encountered at a +2 to his Endurance roll. If he has previously encountered the poison, even in trace amounts, this bonus increases to a +6.

## **Toughness**

### **One Hit to the Body [Endurance]**

When the character takes a hit which would roll up, he may instead choose to fill in any number of lower wound boxes that total the value of the hit. Thus, if the character took a 4 point hit, but the 4th box was already filled, he could either roll up to the 5th box, or he could check off the 1st and 3rd box.

### **Thick Skinned [Endurance]**

Requires One Hit To The Body.

This character just doesn't feel pain and can take more punishment than a lesser man. A character with this stunt gets one additional stress box beyond those normally granted by his Endurance score – meaning a character with Superb Endurance can have a top physical stress capacity of nine.

### **Man of Iron [Endurance]**

Requires Thick Skinned.

The character's physical injuries roll down rather than up. Whenever the character takes a hit which would fill a box that has already been checked off, they check off the next lower box that has not

been checked off. If no lower boxes are available, hits roll up as normal. Very simply, this means that the character doesn't start picking up consequences unless someone hits him for more than his capacity (difficult at best!) or all of his boxes are filled up.

### **Now You've Made Me Mad [Endurance]**

Requires two other Endurance stunts.

Once per scene, the character may turn a wound he has taken into pure motivation. After the character takes physical stress, spend a fate point and the character gets to add the value of the wound (the original value, not the box it was recorded in, if it rolled to a different box) to an action in the next exchange taken against the person who inflicted the stress.

## **Engineering**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Devices**

#### **Personal Gadget [Engineering]**

You have a personal gadget based on an existing (or potentially existing) piece of technology, with three improvements. You must define at least the basic nature of the gadget, and one or two of the improvements, at the time you take this stunt. You may take this stunt several times, either for several personal gadgets, or to provide additional improvements to the same gadget. See [page XX](#) for detailed gadget design rules.

#### **Universal Gadget [Engineering]**

A universal gadget is, essentially, a personal gadget that you may design on the fly, in the middle of a situation, as if your character happened to have "just the thing" in his satchel at the precise moment when it was needed. This gadget follows the same design rules as a personal gadget (above), but is only allowed two improvements, not three. Once defined, the gadget is locked in for the remainder of the session. As with personal gadgets, see [page XX](#) for detailed gadget design rules.

The trade-off is that you can define the gadget on the fly and in the moment, as something your character already happened to have on hand (or just whipped up in a matter of seconds). As with personal gadget, you may take this stunt multiple times.

### **Methods**

#### **Demolitions [Engineering]**

The character is an expert with explosives. Any time he can take the time to properly set up charges, the resulting explosion's force rating is increased by three, by placing the bombs at the exact weak points of the targeted structure.

This benefit does not apply without preparation, a target structure, and a chance to study the target. Thus, it doesn't apply in situations such as setting charges hastily or lobbing explosive devices at zombies.

#### **Architect of Death [Engineering]**

Requires one other Engineering stunt.

You have an innate knack for crafting weaponry. Whenever dealing with an Engineering roll involving a weapon – repairing, designing, upgrading, etcetera – your difficulties are reduced by one, and additionally, the time to get the work done is reduced by one step on the time table (see [page XX](#)).

### **Grease Monkey [Engineering]**

Requires one other Engineering stunt.

If it has an engine and wings, propellers, or wheels, you “get” it, intuitively and completely. Whenever dealing with a Engineering roll involving a vehicle – repairing, designing, upgrading, etcetera – your difficulties are reduced by one, and additionally, the time to get the work done is reduced by one step on the time table (see [page XX](#)).

### **Mister Fix-It [Engineering]**

The character’s talented at getting things repaired under time-critical circumstances. The time it takes to get something fixed by the character is reduced by two steps. If the situation is already operating on the fastest possible amount of time the difficulty of the repair effort is reduced by one. These bonuses stack with Grease Monkey (above)!

### **Thump of Restoration [Engineering]**

Requires Mister Fix-It.

Sometimes a bunch of repairs can get short-handed with a good swift thump. A character must spend a fate point to activate this ability, and roll Engineering. He then hits a device or other contraption that isn’t working, and it starts working immediately, regardless of the difficulty rating to repair it under time pressure. It will continue work for a number of exchanges equal to the shifts gained on the Engineering roll (vs. a target of Mediocre). Once the time is up, the device stops working again, and any efforts to repair it are at a one step higher difficulty (since, after all, you hit the thing). If the character wishes to thump again, he may do so for another fate point, but the difficulty for the Engineering roll increases by one on each subsequent attempt.

## **Fists**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Brawling**

#### **Brawler [Fists]**

You’re at home in any big old burly brawl, with multiple opponents and ideally some beer in you.

Whenever you are personally outnumbered in a fight (i.e., when someone gets to attack you at a bonus due to a numerical advantage) your defense rolls with Fists are at +1. When fighting two or more minions, you deal one additional stress on a successful hit.

#### **Dirty Fighter [Fists]**

Requires Brawler.

Your character has a talent for fighting dirty and is experienced in pulling all manner of tricks in order to get the upper hand on his opponents. By exploiting an opponent’s weakness, you are able to strike deep and true. Any time you tag an opponent’s aspect in a fight, you get an additional +1 on the roll.

## **Crippling Blow [Fists]**

Requires Dirty Fighter.

When you injure an opponent with your Fists, you may spend a fate point to force the target to take a consequence rather than check off a box. This can only be done once per opponent in a given fight scene. The target may choose not to take the consequence if he is willing to concede.

## **Signature Strike [Fists]**

Requires Crippling Blow (above) or Fist of Death (below).

Your character has a specific attack which he has honed to devastating perfection. It may be a formalized punch with an appropriately dramatic name (Thousand Whirlwinds Strike As One!) or may be as informal as complete mastery of the kick in the crotch.

Once per fight scene, the character may use this strike. To do so, the player must clearly describe whatever posturing or preamble the strike requires, declare he's using the strike, and roll the dice.

If the strike successfully damages the opponent (inflicts stress or a consequence by itself), it imposes a consequence in addition to treating the attack normally (such as checking off a box due to stress inflicted). This means that if the stress would normally produce a consequence, the victim will end up taking two consequences.

## **Mix it Up [Fists]**

Requires Brawler.

Overwhelming odds are your bread and butter. You are used to dodging and twisting, keeping multiple opponents in each other's way. You actually get better the more people pile onto you. You may save up your spin whenever you gain it on a defense, and apply it to your next attack, no matter how many other actions happen in between. Multiple successful, spin-generating defenses may allow you to save up multiple points of spin, for a single large bonus on your next attack.

## **Army of One [Fists]**

Requires Mix it Up.

You are a one-man army; the odds don't matter to you. Whenever you are attacked, opponents simply do not get a bonus to their attacks due to an advantage of numbers.

## **Whatever's on Hand [Fists]**

Requires Brawler.

The character is skilled in the use of improvised weapons, and may use Fists instead of the Weapons skill when using an improvised weapon. Improvised weapons tend to break, and thus don't usually last for more than one exchange, so players are encouraged to choose weapons which smash dramatically.

## **Fists of Fury [Fists]**

Requires Brawler.

Swinging wildly and with force, the character strikes at an opponent over and over again, wearing down his defense with each blow. Against such an onslaught, there is simply no good defense. Opponents who attempt to use an all-out defense against your Fists attacks do not get a +2 bonus.

## **Kung Fu**

## **Martial Arts [Fists]**

Your training in the martial practices of the Far East have honed your abilities with your Fists into a finely disciplined form that is part combat skill, part art form. This gives you an acute insight into the means and methods of barehanded warfare.

You may use your Fists skill to study an opponent by engaging him and testing his defenses with your own martial techniques. You must do this as a full action during an exchange. Your target must defend against this action, which is essentially a maneuver, with his Fists skill.

If you succeed, you have gained insight to your target's fighting techniques, and may place an aspect on the target, as with a successful maneuver. Whenever you tag this aspect, you gain an additional +1 to your roll, for a total of +3 instead of the normal tagging bonus of +2.

## **Brickbreaker [Fists]**

Requires Martial Arts.

You are able to focus the force of your blows into a concentrated, small area that is devastating to solid materials. Any stress you deal to a non-character target with Fists is doubled, once per exchange.

## **Demoralizing Stance [Fists]**

Requires Martial Arts.

As a trained fighter, you are able to adopt a stance that makes it unequivocally clear how capable you are of handing someone his ass. Whenever displaying your fighting stance or techniques, you may roll Fists instead of Intimidation.

## **Flying Kick [Fists]**

Requires Martial Arts.

You are able to leap through the air, leading with a powerful kick that can lay an unsuspecting opponent out. You may move one zone and launch a Fists attack without taking a penalty for moving, or you may move two zones and make an attack at -1. All other actions, including those with Fists, that are not a Fists attack described as a flying kick, require a roll at -1 if you move a single zone on your action, as normal.

## **Flow like Water [Fists]**

Requires Martial Arts.

Whenever you mount a full defense, you gain an additional +1 to your Fists rolls, for a potent total defense bonus of +3.

## **Bend like the Reed [Fists]**

Requires Flow Like Water.

You have a flexible martial arts style that allows you to turn an opponent's force against himself. Whenever you gain spin on a defense, you may immediately take a free action against the attacker to make a throw maneuver (see [page XX](#)).

## **Lethal Weapon [Fists]**

Requires Martial Arts.

Your martial skill is dedicated to dishing out punishment, and your hands are practically illegal in most civilized countries. Any time your opponent opts to take a mild or moderate consequence from

a blow you have dealt, you may spend a fate point to increase the severity of that consequence by one step, increasing mild to moderate and moderate to severe. The opponent may then reconsider whether to take the consequence, or instead offer a concession. You may not do this to an opponent who is already taking a severe consequence.

### **Fist of Death [Fists]**

Requires Lethal Weapon.

By concentrating your force into a powerful blow, you may devastate even the most potent of opponents. Once per opponent per fight, you may spend a fate point after landing a successful blow to fill your opponent's highest unchecked stress box, regardless of how much stress you would normally inflict.

### **Signature Strike [Fists]**

As with the stunt of the same name, above (page XX).

## **Gambling**

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(Skill, page XX; Adjudication, page XX)

### **Luck**

#### **Gambling Man [Gambling]**

Requires one or more compellable aspects related to gambling.

As a gambling man, the character is rarely able to turn down a bet or an opportunity to take a risk. Compels involving your gambling aspects automatically start out at a point of escalation – you must either spend two fate points to avoid them, or gain two fate points if you accept them, right at the outset.

#### **Double or Nothing [Gambling]**

Requires Gambling Man.

When it comes to head to head conflict, the character's skill at gambling and taking risks is paramount.

Once per scene, after the gambler has lost a Gambling roll, he has the option to declare "Double or Nothing!" This is a call for both sides to reroll (and as such doesn't involve fate points). If the gambler wins the next roll, the initial exchange is treated as a scratch (no loss to any participants), but if he loses (by whatever amount) he takes a hit equal to double the value of the initial loss. Regardless, such a move often elevates the stakes of a game. This can turn a regular stakes game into a high stakes one, and a high stakes game into a matter of life and death.

#### **The Devil's Own Luck [Gambling]**

Requires Gambling Man and at least one other Gambling stunt. On games of pure chance, like roulette, where a character could not normally roll a skill to affect the outcome, the character may use his Gambling skill at its full value (otherwise he'd be rolling Mediocre or worse instead).

### **Skill**

#### **Know When to Fold 'Em [Gambling]**

Whenever gambling with NPCs, the player may ask that the GM roll the NPC's Gambling in advance. Whenever the GM does this, the roll is automatically considered to be secret – she doesn't have to show it to anyone.

The twist is that the GM must indicate to the player whether the NPC's roll is above or below the player's character's Gambling skill – just not by how much. Given this knowledge, the player may then choose whether his character participates, or excuses himself, from the Gambling contest. If the player's character does participate, the GM reveals the value of the roll, and may still spend fate points on behalf of her NPC as usual once the contest starts in earnest.

### **Never Bluff a Bluffer [Gambling]**

The character's experience with Gambling gives him an occasional insight into other parts of life. Whenever dealing with a bluff of some kind, he may use Gambling instead of Deceit (to run a bluff) or instead of Empathy (to see through one). The player should remind the GM that he has this stunt whenever he's the target of something that might be a bluff, so that the GM knows to call for the correct skill to be rolled.

### **Winnings [Gambling]**

The character wins more than he loses, and is often flush with cash. Once per session, he may use Gambling instead of Resources to represent these winnings, so long as he hasn't recently experienced a loss. The player must provide a quick one-sentence explanation of what the resource is and how he won it, when using this stunt.

### **Players' Club [Gambling]**

Requires at least one other Gambling stunt.

You've played in so many games, and in so many places, that it's rare that you can't find someone who knows you. You may use your Gambling skill instead of Contacting whenever making a Contacting roll – though doing so invariably colors the results with the nature of Gambling.

### **Gambling Buddy [Gambling]**

Requires Players' Club.

Once per session, you may introduce a companion character into a scene, on the fly, as suits the convenience of the moment. This companion character has the Skilled (Gambling) advance for free, and two other advances which you may define at the moment of the reveal, or after the fact as you travel around with your buddy.

## **Guns**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Aiming**

#### **Long Shot [Guns]**

For whatever reason, you're always able to take shots at a greater distance than you should be. You can use pistols up to three zones away (instead of two); furthermore, rifles and other such weaponry reach an additional zone (or two, if the GM feels generous).

#### **Shot on the Run [Guns]**

The character is light on his feet with a gun in his hand, able to keep the gunplay going while evading attempts to harm him.

This character may use Guns as a defense skill against physical attacks; normally, Guns cannot be used defensively.

### **Stay on Target [Guns]**

Taking slow and careful aim can be done as a maneuver, placing an aspect on your target (such as “In My Sights”).

Whenever performing an aiming maneuver against a target, you may roll your Guns at +1 to place the aspect, +2 if you’ve brought along a targeting scope or similar aiming device (in addition to whatever bonuses the scope itself provides).

### **Trick Shot [Guns]**

Your character gains +2 on the roll for any Guns action that involves shooting an inanimate object. While this cannot be used to actually attack another character, it can be very useful for indirect effects, like shooting down a chandelier.

## **Ammunition**

### **Fast Reload [Guns]**

Normally, reloading your guns is considered a part of the normal ebb and flow of combat and doesn’t become an issue until something happens to make it relevant. A lack of ammunition can show up one of two ways. First, “out of ammunition” can often show up as a minor consequence for someone with a gun. With this stunt, the character may spend a fate point in order to remove this consequence immediately, at the end of any exchange.

The character is still considered to have taken a minor consequence for purposes of determining whether his next consequence is moderate – the minor consequence simply won’t be there.

Second, “out of ammunition” can show up as a temporary aspect resulting from a maneuver (to try to get someone to use up his shots). Whenever this character is the target of such a maneuver, he may defend at +2.

### **One Shot Left [Guns]**

That last bullet has a kind of magic to it. A character with this stunt may declare that he is on his last shot, and may make any single Guns attack at +3. This is the character’s last shot – its use means that there’s no more ammo, no holdout guns or the like. The only way the character is going to be able to use his Guns skill in the scene is if he takes an action acquiring a new weapon or ammunition, which may not always be possible. Even the Fast Reload stunt cannot be used to remedy this situation; you really are out of ammunition.

### **Rain of Lead [Guns]**

Your character is skilled at laying down a scathing hail of suppressive fire. When using Guns to perform a block (see [page XX](#)), the character can ignore up to two points of penalties imposed by the GM due to the complexity of the block.

## **Draw**

### **Quick Draw [Guns]**

This allows a character to bring his gun or guns to his hand so fast it's as if by magic. The character takes no penalty for drawing a gun as a supplemental action; if someone is actively blocking such an action (see [page XX](#)), you may treat that block as if it had a value two steps lower.

### **Lightning Hands [Guns]**

Requires Quick Draw.

The character and his gun are as one; the thought to take aim and fire is the same as the action. With this stunt, the character may use his Guns skill to determine initiative, instead of Alertness.

### **Snap Shot [Guns]**

Requires Lightning Hands.

Once per exchange, between or before other characters' actions, the character may spend a fate point to preempt the usual turn order and act next.

The action taken must involve a roll with his Guns skill – usually an attack. This may be done in addition to the character's normal action, but each time it's done in the same scene, the fate point cost increases by one.

## **Firepower**

### **Gun-Crazy [Guns]**

The character's so thoroughly into the modern phenomenon of gunsmithing that he's developed a focused talent for working on the things.

Whenever working with guns specifically, this character may use Guns instead of Engineering.

### **Custom Firearm [Guns]**

Requires Gun-Crazy.

You have one special gun that you hold above all others. This is a gadget, which automatically has the craftsmanship improvement (see [page XX](#)), as well as two other improvements which you may change between sessions. In addition, the gun is so well-made that it never needs repairs of great length if it's damaged; reduce the time it takes you to repair it by four steps.

### **Two Gun Joe [Guns]**

Normally, shooting with two guns just looks cool without providing a bonus. With this stunt, a character firing two weapons has a decisive advantage.

Any time this character uses two guns and hits a target for at least one stress, the stress of the hit is increased by one (meaning, essentially, that he never hits a target for less than two stress, when he hits).

Furthermore, any defense against maneuvers to deprive the character of either of his guns is improved by one. The two belong together, after all, in the hands of a Two Gun Joe.

## **Intimidation**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

## **Control**

### **Infuriate [Intimidation]**

Intimidation gives you a real talent for scaring people, but sometimes fear isn't an option. That doesn't mean you can't still get up someone's nose, so long as you're willing to sacrifice a bit of the control that fear gets you.

Whenever deliberately trying to get someone angry with you, you receive a +2 bonus. If this results in an attack or other action against you by your target, you may use Intimidation to complement the skill you use on the first exchange, no matter the circumstance – after all, you made it happen, so you were ready for it.

### **Subtle Menace [Intimidation]**

The character exudes menace far in excess of his capability to act. Even bound and behind prison bars, the character is so ripe with the promise of the awful things he could do that he's still scary. This character may use Intimidation no matter what the power imbalance in the situation is, and reduces his target's bonuses for acting from a superior position by 2 (to a minimum of +0).

### **The Serpent's Tongue [Intimidation]**

Requires Subtle Menace.

It's hard not to talk to this character. Not because he's approachable, but because it seems like such a bad idea not to. Fear makes people uncomfortable, and they occasionally let things slip they would not otherwise.

The upshot is that the character may use Intimidation in lieu of Empathy or Rapport when trying to get information out of someone in a "softer" fashion. If successfully used in this way, the target is definitely rattled – so it certainly doesn't leave the target in the same pleasant state he might be left by one of those other skills. If used to get a "read" on a character, the aspects revealed are limited only to those which might be expressed in the language of fear.

### **Unapproachable [Intimidation]**

It's difficult to try to manipulate someone when you're constantly reminded of how scary they are. A character with this stunt may use his Intimidation in lieu of their Resolve to defend against Rapport, Deceit, and Empathy.

## **Fear**

### **Scary [Intimidation]**

This character is just someone you don't want to cross, and that's clear even to other intimidating folks. Normally, Intimidation attempts are resisted by Resolve; with this stunt, the character can use his Intimidation skill to resist Intimidation attempts.

### **Aura of Menace [Intimidation]**

Requires Scary.

Characters with an Aura of Menace are the terror of all those who oppose them. Others are often powerless to describe what exactly it is about the character that is unsettling, but regardless, it has the effect of rooting them to the spot and believing the threats the guy makes.

Once per scene per target, the character may spend a fate point to intimidate a target as a free action, no matter what the circumstances, immediately (if between actions), or immediately after the current action underway.

This free action takes place in addition to any other action the character might take during the exchange.

### **Aura of Fear [Intimidation]**

Requires Aura of Menace.

The character's intimidating appearance and attitude is potent, making him able to intimidate entire crowds. As a full action, and only once per scene, the character may spend a fate point and make an intimidation attempt against all opponents in the scene. The effort is made at a -2 to the roll, but the character only rolls once, essentially setting the defensive difficulty that everyone must beat. If the effort at least beats the quality level of the minions present in the scene, at least half their number are automatically affected by the Intimidation effort regardless of their roll. This effect on minions may be cancelled if they have a leader with Leadership present, who may take a second defensive action on their behalf, using that skill.

### **The Promise of Pain [Intimidation]**

Requires Scary.

The character makes a promise (really, a threat) to a target, and makes an attack using Intimidation. If he scores a successful hit of one or better on the target's mental stress track, he may spend a fate point to immediately force a psychological consequence instead. The consequence must represent an appropriate response (such as folding up in fear, or a broken spirit) to the threat.

### **Steely Gaze [Intimidation]**

Requires Scary.

Your character's unflinching gaze can lock an opponent in place. When a character with this stunt looks an opponent in the eyes and makes an Intimidation check, it locks the two of them into a contest that will last until either something interrupts it or one of them flinches. Both characters are locked in a contest of wills, and can only take Intimidation actions against each other until one or the other either takes a consequence, concedes, or is interrupted (by, say, a gunshot). Any defense rolls either makes against an interrupting action while this is in effect is at -2.

### **Fearsome Gaze [Intimidation]**

Requires Steely Gaze.

Your character's gaze is so terrifying that those faced with it can end up paralyzed with fear. This stunt is used in the same fashion as Steely Gaze, but if the opponent loses to the point of taking a consequence, he takes two consequences, one right after the other, immediately. Even if this means he's taken out, the target retains the option to concede after recording the consequence, thus keeping his right to define the nature of his defeat (subject to the gazer's approval).

### **Master of Fear [Intimidation]**

Requires Fearsome Gaze and Aura of Fear.

Your character is a master of the terrifying, and can have an entire room cowering within moments. When this character uses the Aura of Fear stunt, he does not take the -2 penalty.

Furthermore, minions (see [page XX](#)) whose quality level is beat by the roll fail entirely and may not even roll to defend unless their leader discards his next action for the exchange to roll Leadership to defend them. Without a capable leader, these minions simply flee, faint, or otherwise take an immediate consequence, to the last man.

## **Investigation**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

## Contemplation

### Scene of the Crime [Investigation]

The character has a strong visual memory, and whenever he revisits a place where he has used Investigation before, he may make an immediate use of Investigation in a matter of seconds in order to determine what changed since he was last there, as if it were an unusually detailed Alertness check.

### Eye for Detail [Investigation]

Requires Scene of the Crime.

Your character's visual memory is so strong that with a little concentration, he can revisit any place he's been to in his memory in exacting detail.

Sometimes, he can even pick up on details that he hadn't consciously realized before.

To use this ability, the character spends a fate point, and may make a single perception based roll (usually Investigation, but not necessarily limited to that) to find things out as if he were still in the location, no matter how long ago he left the scene.

### Uncanny Hunch [Investigation]

Requires at least one other Investigation stunt and one other Empathy stunt.

Sometimes your guesses play out to great advantage. Once per scene, you may make a guess about what the "deal" is with a particular character, object, location, or situation.

Do not speak this guess aloud; write it down on a piece of paper and give it to the GM. The GM must accept it as a valid hunch that would be something of a revelation if true (i.e., no "I'm convinced that moon orbits the Earth!" – that's too obvious). If, at some later point, your hunch proves to be correct, you may use your Investigation or Empathy skill instead of any other skill, where that target is concerned, for one exchange. (A savvy GM will occasionally alter her characters' motives to match your hunches; if she does, that's absolutely perfect!)

## Observation

### Lip Reading [Investigation]

The character may use Investigation to eavesdrop on conversations he can only see. If the GM would normally allow someone to attempt to read lips, the difficulty is reduced by two; otherwise, you may simply roll Investigation when others may not.

### Focused Senses [Investigation]

The character is skilled at concentrating on one of his senses to the exclusion of all others. The sense must be specified at the time this stunt is taken. With a few moments of concentration, the character may enter a focused state. So long as he remains in that state, for as long as the character uses nothing but Investigation, all Investigation actions the character takes that use the specified sense gain a +2 bonus. While in this state, if the character needs to make a non-Investigation roll, that roll is at -2 due to this intense focus.

This stunt may be taken multiple times, each time for a single sense. If the character has specified multiple senses, his focus may cover all of them at once.

### Impossible Detail [Investigation]

Requires Focused Senses.

When paying attention, the character's senses operate at a profound level of focus, allowing him to pick up on details that, very simply, no one else easily or even possibly could.

With this stunt, the character faces no increased difficulties due to a physical detail being too small or subtle. As an example, this can reduce the difficulty to detect the presence of nearly any poison to Mediocre (as, honestly, subtlety is all it has to conceal itself ).

The use of this stunt may color what details a GM chooses to reveal to a character as well, on a successful Investigation roll. Make sure to let the GM know you have this stunt whenever rolling Investigation.

As this involves a use of Investigation, it must still be a deliberate exploration, rather than a casual use better suited to Alertness.

### **Quick Eye [Investigation]**

The character is able to investigate a location much more quickly than others, while still being very thorough.

All Investigation efforts the character makes happen one to two time increments (page XX) faster than usual, allowing him to make one or two additional rolls in the same amount of time, or simply conclude his investigation faster than he would otherwise.

## **Leadership**

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(Skill, page XX; Adjudication, page XX)

### **Followers**

#### **Personal Conspiracy [Leadership]**

Taking this stunt is an explicit indication that you are a member of some manner of global conspiracy; it's probably worth making sure you have an aspect indicating as much. This stunt functions identically to the Network of Contacts stunt for Contacting (see page XX), but in a fashion that is both more and less powerful than that stunt.

Whenever you call upon a functionary or thrall of your conspiracy, creating a companion on the fly, the companion is created with only one advance. If, instead, you're looking to call upon one of the movers and shakers in the conspiracy – not a peer, per se, but at least someone who's significantly more capable than a functionary – you may create the companion with one additional advance, instead. This companion receives the Independent advance for free.

Doing so, however, means that your conspiracy now has one or two needs you must fulfill – you immediately gain a temporary aspect related to these needs, determined by the GM, and may not refuse compels of this temporary aspect whenever it comes up. Occasionally this temporary aspect may instead reflect a hidden agenda on the part of your momentary companion, rather than an explicit “need”.

#### **Lieutenant [Leadership]**

You must take this stunt two or three times.

You have a single, exceptional companion, well equipped to handle leadership duties in your stead. He is Fair quality, and has the Independent and Skilled (Leadership) advances for free (see page XX).

This stunt must be taken multiple times, either two or three, in order to build an exceptionally capable companion. Taken twice, this stunt lets you define 4 advances beyond the two free base

advances. Taken three times, the stunt allows you to define 2 additional advances and, in addition, promote your lieutenant to Good quality. If you've already promoted your lieutenant to Good quality, you may take a different advance.

### **Minions [Leadership]**

You have minions – lots of them. As a default, in a scene, you may have the bare minimum of minions easily on hand – two or three of Average quality (page XX).

You may make three upgrades to improve your minions, spent at the point you bring them into the scene. Each upgrade either by adds three more to their number, or boosts the quality of three of them by one step (no minion can be more than Good quality).

This stunt may be taken multiple times to increase the starting number of minions (taking it twice means you start out with five or six of Average quality) and the number of upgrades (taking it twice also means you have six upgrades). You must spend all of your upgrades at the start of the scene when you bring in your minions, but you needn't bring them all in right away.

### **Reinforcements [Leadership]**

Requires Minions.

During a fight, you may spend a fate point to call in reinforcements. The reinforcements show up at the beginning of the next exchange. You may replace up to half your lost minions by doing so.

## **Law**

### **Legal Eagle [Leadership]**

You are very-well acquainted with the law in any place you've spent a significant amount of time, and are skilled at exploiting loopholes in it. You gain a +2 whenever using Leadership to deal with the law under such circumstances. Further, you are able to get legal paperwork processed one time increment (page XX) faster than normal.

### **World Court [Leadership]**

Requires Legal Eagle.

Your exposure to international law is so extensive that you're at ease in any situation involving legal wrangling, wherever you are. You never suffer any increased difficulty from a lack of familiarity with the laws of your locale; your experience is so broad that you've either know it already, or can make highly educated guesses about how it functions.

## **Organizations**

### **Funding [Leadership]**

You head an organization that is profitable and generates some of its own cash. Your organization may draw on an effective Resources skill equal to your Leadership minus two, regardless of whether or not you're present. When you personally make use of these resources it may take some time to filter through the power structure to reach you; the GM may increase the time it takes to acquire something by one step.

### **Instant Functionary [Leadership]**

You're skilled at seeing the shape of an organization from the underside, and in organizations of sufficient size, you can easily convince anyone that you're just another cog in the machine. This

allows you to substitute your Leadership skill for Deceit whenever pretending to fill the role of a minor functionary of a target organization.

### **Center of the Web [Leadership]**

Whether or not you lead it, you are like the spider at the center of a web regarding any organization of which you are a part. Information about the organization flows your way naturally, taking one time increment less to reach your attentive ears than it would normally, and so long as you are able to make any sort of contact with the outside world, you are quickly able to find out information about your organization's dealings. Your Leadership shifts may be spent to improve the speed of information by up to two additional steps with GM's approval.

### **Ubiquity [Leadership]**

Requires Center of the Web.

First, this stunt steps up the intensity of your Center of the Web stunt – information flows your way a total of two time increments faster. Second, this stunt removes the restriction “so long as you are able to make any sort of contact with the outside world.” Your ties into the organization are so thoroughly widespread that the outside world makes every reasonable effort to stay in contact with you. For a fate point, your organization can even make some fairly unreasonable efforts to stay in contact.

## **Might**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Force**

#### **Herculean Strength [Might]**

The character is incredibly strong, capable of lifting great weights. All weight-based difficulties that don't involve combat are reduced by two steps. See [page XX](#) for more on weights.

#### **Piledriver [Might]**

Requires Herculean Strength.

The character is capable of landing powerful blows with hammer-like force. At their best, these blows can rip apart steel cages and knock down walls. A character with Piledriver adds four to his attacks with Might against inanimate targets.

#### **Unbound [Might]**

If you are physically restrained in some fashion – be it by chains or a mob of people – you receive a +2 bonus to your Might in your efforts to break out of those bonds.

Combined with Piledriver (above), the character simply cannot be held in place by most mundane methods.

#### **Unstoppable [Might]**

Requires Herculean Strength and at least one other Might stunt.

Once in motion, this character is very difficult to stop due to his sheer muscular force.

The character may use Might rather than Athletics for move actions; this includes sprinting (see [page XX](#)). Furthermore, all blocks to his movement, including borders which can be “smashed” through, are considered to be two lower.

## Wrestling

### Wrestler [Might]

Requires one other Might Stunt.

The character is a trained wrestler. The character may use their Might skill instead of Fists.

### Body Toss [Might]

Requires Wrestler.

You know how to apply your strength in a fight to take people off their feet. Whenever making a throw or a push maneuver (page XX), you may consider the target to weigh one weight factor (page XX) less than usual.

### Hammerlock [Might]

Requires Wrestler.

Whenever you perform an action block (see page XX) by personally grabbing hold of someone, you do so at +1. Any time that person tries to break through the block and fails, you may inflict a single point of stress.

## Mysteries

(Skill, page XX; Adjudication, page XX)

## Artifacts

### Artificer [Mysteries]

The character is capable of using Mysteries to improve artifacts (mystic gadgets, essentially) in the same fashion that Engineering does, albeit on radically different principles (see Gadgets and Gizmos, page XX). “Devices” worked on in this fashion will be clearly arcane in appearance and will work on principles that may make no sense to logical men. You may include some advances that are not available to “normal” Engineering.

This sort of work requires an arcane workshop in the same way that engineering requires a regular workshop (page XX).

### Personal Artifact [Mysteries]

An artifact is a magical item or device that does... something. As far as game rules go, it is identical in function to a gadget (see the stunt by that name under Engineering, page XX), though you may have some broader leeway to describe what it can do, given that it's based on magic instead of technology. Certain unusual upgrades may be incorporated into the design as well.

This stunt may be taken multiple times, but multiple Artifacts may not be combined the way Personal Gadgets can be (as described in the stunts on page XX).

### Rare Artifact [Mysteries]

You may introduce an artifact that you design on-the-fly, in a fashion similar to the Universal Gadget stunt (see page XX).

Because this is an artifact, however, a few differences exist. The artifact gets three improvements, same as a Personal Artifact, instead of only two improvements, the way a Universal Gadget does.

Furthermore, this stunt may be taken multiple times and, unlike a Personal Artifact, may combine those improvements into a single, more potent artifact.

There is, however, a downside...

All Rare Artifacts inevitably have origins shrouded in darkness and mystery. In order to introduce such an artifact into play, the character must take on a temporary aspect which vaguely, colorfully references the secret (and unknown) past of the artifact. The GM may then incorporate its dark past into the storyline, hitting the character with compels as appropriate.

If the player's uninterested in having his impromptu artifact misbehaving on occasion, he may spend a fate point to avoid the temporary aspect's placement. And that might just be a good idea. .. Beware the sinister secrets of the arcane!

## Hypnosis

### Mesmerist [Mysteries]

The character is adept at using his Mysteries skill as described under Mesmerism (page XX). When helping another character to remember things with hypnosis, the other character's skills are not limited in any way, and in fact may be complemented by the hypnotist's Mysteries skill.

Further, rolls with a willing target – even if that target is not actively participating – are always at +2, as if the target was actively participating (see page XX). Finally, the time it takes to put someone into a trance is reduced by one step, if applicable.

### Hypnotic Speech [Mysteries]

Requires Mesmerist.

When interacting with others socially, you are able to weave the patterns and methods of mesmerism into your words, potentially putting someone you're talking to into a partial trance – even without them realizing.

Provided you have had several minutes of calm conversation with another character as a preamble, you may start using your Mysteries skill instead of Rapport or Deceit. You may not make such a substitution if the conversation becomes strongly charged with emotion or if other distractions surface to break the air of calm. This stunt works even when dealing with an unwilling subject (in part because it simply allows you to substitute Mysteries for the perfectly normal functions of Rapport and Deceit).

### Mind's Shadow [Mysteries]

Requires Mesmerist.

Whenever you have someone in a full trance, you may plant false memories, or remove existing memories. The partial trance resulting from the Hypnotic Speech stunt does not count – this must be a full trance, which is usually only possible with a willing target. Unwilling trances resulting from the Entrall stunt do, however, count.

To use this ability, for each memory to be planted or removed, roll your Mysteries skill. The result indicates the difficulty for someone to recognize the memories as missing or false, as well as the difficulty – for the subject or another mesmerist – to penetrate the shadow you have lain over their mind.

### Entrall [Mysteries]

Requires Mind's Shadow and Hypnotic Speech.

You are able to place even unwilling subjects into a hypnotic trance by using Mysteries as an out-and-out attack.

This works best with a restrained subject, but so long as a target can hear the sound of your voice, you have a chance to begin your workings upon him. Targets who are not restrained or forced to be a captive audience defend with their Resolve at +2, though a full defense action does not help them further.

You may approach this mental assault in one of two ways – either as a maneuver, placing a temporary aspect that will only last the scene, or as an attack that inflicts composure stress.

Maneuvers will be short-lived, but may be easier and more useful for immediate effects. If you're looking to lay on something more profound, you must attack for stress instead.

If you inflict enough stress to indicate a consequence, concession, or taken out result, the results must “play along” with the goals of your hypnotic attack. Such results still can't force a character to do something completely contrary to his nature, but there should still be a lot of latitude in terms of what sorts of compulsions you can place in the mind of your victim.

It's easy to use this stunt improperly... and if you do, people are in the right to label you as a villain.

## Secrets

### Fortuneteller [Mysteries]

The character is unusually adept at predicting the shape of future events. With this stunt, he may make two predictions per session, instead of the usual one.

### Herbal Remedies [Mysteries]

You have specialized in non-traditional medicine to such an extent that it is many ways superior to modern medicine – even if most might scoff or not understand.

In the wilderness, you can find medical supplies easily, and may roll Mysteries instead of Survival to find such things; further, you may roll Mysteries instead of Science in order to perform first aid or proper medical care (see [page XX](#)). Using this stunt, you face no penalties for using unorthodox “tools”.

### Palm Reader [Mysteries]

Using palm reading or other techniques of personal examination (such as phrenology and aura consultation), you may make a single Mysteries roll as if you were using Empathy. This usually only takes a few minutes, so if you can get someone to be willing to be read, it can sometimes yield information faster than a standard Empathy read would.

At the player's option, this may be combined with a second Mysteries roll to make a fortune-telling prediction, either before or after the palm-reading roll, so long as the player's not past his per-session limit. Such predictions must focus on the character being read.

### Secrets of the Arcane [Mysteries]

The character is respected authority in a specific occult field. Possibilities include ancient mythology, psychic phenomena, cryptozoology, and so on. In the elite circles of that particular field, the character is recognized for his expertise. Even if his skill level is low, it merely means he is towards the bottom of that particular group of the elite.

This stunt is, essentially, the Mysteries parallel of the Scholar stunt, under Academics (see [page XX](#)). When the character makes a Mysteries roll pertaining to his general area of expertise, he

automatically receives a +1 knowledge bonus. Beyond this, the character should pick a specific area of specialization within that area (like extraterrestrial demonology, or xenomorphic symbology – the more syllables the better). When a Mysteries roll involves that specialization, he gains an additional +1 bonus (for a total +2 to the value of the research effort). Any research efforts involving the specialization take one unit less time.

## Spirits

### Psychic [Mysteries]

You are open to the strange and paranormal – though sometimes that means letting in the Unpleasant Things from the Darkness and other such nuisances.

Normally, a character may be called upon by the GM to roll Mysteries as a kind of paranormal Alertness skill, to pick up on the surface strangeness in a place. With this stunt, you may deliberately use your Mysteries skill to gain some mystic or terrible insight into the occult “climate” of an area, as if it were Investigation – using a similar time-frame and gaining a similar level of (paranormal) detail.

This also means that you may use Mysteries instead of Alertness when surprised, if the origin of the surprise is in some way supernatural, and can even use Mysteries as your initiative skill when locked in a conflict with otherworldly forces.

Used with this stunt, Mysteries can give you access to information that would normally be impossible to get – though the GM is under no obligation to give you that information in any clear fashion. Muddled riddles and vague intimations are the mode of the day.

There is an additional catch: Using this ability may open you up to an unpleasant psychic attack by the presence or residue of Unnatural Creatures that have touched the area ... but at least you’ve learned something.

### Spirit Companion [Mysteries]

You have a companion with three advances (as described on [page XX](#)). This companion is vulnerable to the flux of the spiritual aether, however, and must be summoned into your presence – either pay a fate point to get his immediate manifestation or take roughly a minute to roll Mysteries against a target equal to the companion’s quality as a more gentle summoning.

This companion can never act in physical conflict, but may be visible to others; this may limit what skills he can use with the Skilled advance. He automatically gains the Independent advance as well. The companion will need to take Skilled (Stealth) if he wishes to be undetectable on occasion; otherwise, visible or not, his presence in a location is an immediate call for people to roll Mysteries to notice something amiss.

If you take this stunt a second time (the maximum) you may provide another three advances to your companion. If you have not yet increased the companion’s quality to at least Fair, you must spend one of your advances to do so.

### Voices from Beyond [Mysteries]

Requires Psychic.

Given time to prepare and perform the ritual, the character may perform a real, functioning séance to try to call out to spirits dead or never living. A Mysteries roll must be made against a difficulty set by the GM, in order to cause a particular spirit to manifest.

Summoned spirits are not under any sort of compulsion to be cooperative, and may have their own agendas, but once summoned, they may speak through the character with others in attendance. At

the GM's option, especially if the summoner gains spin on her Mysteries roll, the spirit may even manifest visibly.

Should the spirit be malicious in any fashion, or wish to escape the summons, the character may use Mysteries or Resolve as his skill of choice when struggling with the spirit.

### **Words on the Wind [Mysteries]**

Requires Psychic.

There are patterns to things that are not always obvious, even to the wise.

This character looks in the right places, and hears the right things. Once per session, when he is not otherwise occupied, he may request an omen from the GM, and roll Mysteries against a target of Mediocre. The GM will use the results to guide her decision about how obscure the information gained is. It may be as arcane as a snippet of a riddle, or as mundane as news that a strange shipment is coming into the docks at midnight.

## **Pilot**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Flight**

#### **Barnstormer [Pilot]**

This pilot can squeeze his plane through places where it has no business fitting. Normally, a pilot can spend a fate point for a coincidence or declaration to assure that the plane has enough clearance space to fly through. Characters with this stunt never need to spend a fate point: if it could fit, it can. What's more, if your character does spend a fate point, he can fit the plane in places it absolutely should not be able to. This stunt is also useful for landing planes in improbably tight quarters.

#### **Flawless Navigation [Pilot]**

The skies are an open map in the character's mind. Unless bizarre circumstances are afoot, he can never get lost in flight. If something strange is happening – such as when flying through the Bermuda Triangle – the difficulties to his Pilot rolls are never reduced by more than 2.

#### **Fly by Night [Pilot]**

Whether in dead of night or during a storm, your character's piloting skills remain true. The character never faces increased difficulties due to environmental factors (darkness, weather) when flying. This does not protect his plane from taking damage from the environment – but his skill remains unreduced.

#### **Flying Ace [Pilot]**

The character is a skilled combat pilot, and may use his Pilot skill to attack in a dogfight, assuming the plane is suitably armed. Normally, a pilot uses Pilot on his defense actions, and must use Guns in order to attack (similar to someone on foot using Athletics for defense and Guns for offense).

#### **Death From Above [Pilot]**

Requires Flying Ace.

The character's combat flight experience makes him a deadly force when he gets the upper hand. While in flight, if he is able to make an attack on another flying target from an elevated position, he does two additional points of stress on a successful hit.

This stunt can't be used two exchanges in a row; whenever making such an attack, the acrobatics take him out of his position of advantage.

### **Walk Away From It [Pilot]**

Requires at least two other Pilot stunts.

The character has a great instinct for crash-landing planes, and is able to walk away from even the most catastrophic-seeming landings. While the character is piloting a plane into its crash landing, he and his passengers get the benefits of the Death Defiance stunt (see [page XX](#)), and are all considered "out of sight" when the plane crashes.

## **Planes**

### **Personal Aircraft [Pilot]**

You have a personal aircraft that you own or have the exclusive right to fly. In all respects, this stunt functions like the Custom Ride stunt ([page XX](#)). Please refer to that stunt for details.

### **Prototype Aircraft [Pilot]**

Requires Personal Aircraft.

Identical to the Prototype Car stunt (on [page XX](#)), but for your plane.

### **Plane Mechanic [Pilot]**

Requires at least two other Pilot stunts.

Your character may not understand the broader aspects of engineering devices and such, but when it comes to planes, he knows them inside and out. Whenever working on a plane, you may use your Pilot skill instead of Engineering. Due to some shared principles, you may work on other vehicles at a -1.

## **Rapport**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

## **Charisma**

### **Best Foot Forward [Rapport]**

You're adept at making first impressions – sometimes you might not improve the preconceived attitude someone holds towards you, but you can at least assure you don't get off on the wrong foot when you meet for the first time.

Whenever rolling to make a first impression with an NPC, no matter how severe the failure, you cannot cause them to have a lower or more negative opinion of you than they already had, unless you're making an active effort in that direction.

In rules terms, this means that if your target ever gains spin on an impression "defense" (see [page XX](#)), it does not cause his attitude to degrade by one step.

### **Five Minute Friends [Rapport]**

For a fate point, you can make a steadfast friend in a place you've never been, given a chance for five minutes of conversation. This stunt makes nearly impossible opportunities to make friends merely improbable, improbable opportunities probable, and probable opportunities outright certain.

**International [Rapport]**

The character's mastery of etiquette leaves him comfortable, and even glib, in any situation. The character never suffers any penalties or increased difficulty from unfamiliarity with his setting, making it easy to maneuver through local customs he hasn't encountered before, and to cover up any gaffes with a laugh and a sparkle in his eye.

**Ladies' Man/Popular Gal [Rapport]**

You're adept at catching the eye of the opposite sex, and keeping it once you've got it. Any seduction attempts you make with Rapport receive a +2 technique bonus provided the target is someone who could be receptive to it (this is not always a simple case of gender and preference).

**Wordplay****Blather [Rapport]**

It's not that you're a good liar – possibly far from it. It's more that you have a skill at talking so fast, and not letting the other guy get a word in edgewise, that he doesn't ever get the chance to figure out if you're lying or not.

With this stunt, so long as you can keep talking, you can cover up increasingly ludicrous lies. Start your fast-talk conversation with your target as a contest between your Rapport and their Resolve or Rapport. If you win, the conversation continues, and you repeat the roll on the next exchange. If you fail, no matter how poorly, you can spend a fate point to continue the conversation as if you had won.

So long as you can keep talking uninterrupted and continue to spend fate points to defer any failures, your endless blathering will prevent your target from realizing quite what you're doing. For the duration of the conversation, the difficulty of any perception (usually Alertness) checks by the target are based off your base Rapport skill, or your last successful roll, whichever value is higher.

The target of this effort is by no means helpless – if they are attacked or otherwise disturbed they may respond normally, and they will respond to obvious stimuli (friends being attacked in their line of sight, fire alarms going off and such). However, the target is definitely distracted. When using this ability on multiple opponents at once, they each get to defend, and you take a -1 penalty for each opponent past the first.

Of course, once you stop talking, it may be time for a quick exit.

**Heart on My Sleeve [Rapport]**

You're a regular stand up guy with no secrets, at least so far as anyone can tell. But even so, you're in control of which part of your best face you're putting forward.

Whenever using the Opening Up tactic (see [page XX](#)) to “defend” against an Empathy read, you gain a +1 on your Rapport roll. If you gain spin on your defense, you may substitute one alternate true, non-trivial fact about yourself instead of revealing an aspect.

The reader must still get an insight into you if you're providing a fact; it's just not necessarily one that has the weight of an aspect.

**The Right Questions [Rapport]**

Smaller parts of a larger truth can contain a blueprint of the whole – and as a skilled conversationalist, you are adept at pulling the larger truth out of a single individual. Provided the person you're talking to is at least neutral towards you, you may use your Rapport skill instead of Contacting for any effort to gather information (see [page XX](#)). The results are limited and colored

by the knowledge available to your chat partner, but it's always possible he doesn't know that he knows certain things, and as such, your acquaintance effectively acts as a small "cluster" of contacts.

### **Smooth Over [Rapport]**

You're adept at stepping into a bad situation and dialing it down to something more reasonable. So long as you are not the direct reason someone is upset, your attempts to calm them down using your Rapport receive a +2 bonus.

## **Resolve**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Cool**

#### **Smooth Recovery [Resolve]**

While most characters with Resolve can keep things together under stress, for your character it is second nature, allowing him to regain his footing in the face of even the direst of outcomes outside of physical conflict. This stunt allows the character to take one additional moderate, social or mental consequence than normal, allowing him to take up to four total consequences of that variety.

#### **Cool Customer [Resolve]**

Requires Smooth Recovery.

The character is so at ease in times of social stress that nothing seems to dent his calm regard of the situation. The character may take a full action once per exchange to roll his Resolve against a target of Mediocre.

If successful, he may remove a checkmark in his first mental stress box (at the one-point stress position). If he desires, after a successful roll, he may instead spend a fate point and remove any single composure stress track box of a value equal to or less than the shifts he gained on his roll.

#### **Aplomb [Resolve]**

Requires Smooth Recovery.

When possible, the character's composure stress track rolls down instead of up. Whenever the character's composure stress would roll up to the next empty box, it instead rolls down to the first empty box of a lesser value. If there are no available boxes of a lesser value, the stress rolls up normally.

#### **Unflappable [Resolve]**

Requires Smooth Recovery.

The character is simply not prone to fear. While Intimidation efforts against him might provoke other emotions, they can rarely scare him; he gains a +2 to his Resolve when defending against a purely fear-based Intimidation action.

#### **Right Place, Right Time [Resolve]**

Requires Unflappable.

The character seems to always be in a safe spot, without moving in any obvious way. When engaged in physical combat, characters with this stunt may use Resolve as their combat skill when

defending, and may also use it to move or take cover (so long as they merely saunter; no sprints allowed).

To the outside world, it appears that the character is simply staying put and unfazed as gunfire and other attacks miss him by scant inches, or is picking up his undisturbed martini as the werewolf rushes past. Circumstance conspires to leave the character undisturbed so long as his defense is not beaten.

## Tenacity

### Inner Strength [Resolve]

Whenever someone is trying to get inside your head – be it through psychic means (as with some mesmerism stunts), or through extensive torture – you receive a +2 to your Resolve defense even without resorting to a full defense action. If you do go for a full defense, you may, but it only nets you a +3 in total.

### Iron Determination [Resolve]

It is apparent to all around you exactly how far you are willing to go in order to get what you want. You may, when you bluntly speak your true intentions in a social interaction, trigger the effects of this stunt, immediately gaining a +1 bonus which applies to all subsequent Intimidation or Resolve rolls, as well as any social defense, in that scene. However, if you do this, you may no longer use Rapport with the same audience, as you have peeled away the façade of civility.

### Still Standing [Resolve]

Requires Inner Strength.

This character simply does not know when to quit. The character may take one additional moderate consequence of any type. This allows the character to take a total of four consequences in any conflict and, if combined with Feel the Burn (page XX), can allow the character to take up to five in a physical conflict. Similarly, it may be combined with Smooth Recovery (page XX) to take up to five consequences in a social or mental conflict.

### Driven [Resolve]

Requires Still Standing.

The character draws inspiration from his setbacks, no matter what the circumstances. A character with this stunt is always considered to have an “inspiration” rationale to spend fate points to invoke any of the consequences he has taken for rerolls and bonuses; no other justification is necessary.

### Unyielding [Resolve]

Requires Driven.

The character’s force of will is enough to keep him going in the direst of circumstances. Any time the character takes health stress (any one hit), he may spend a fate point to instead take two 1-point hits of composure stress (subject to roll-up).

## Resources

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(Skill, page XX; Adjudication, page XX)

## Advantage

### **Grease the Wheels [Resources]**

Money talks, especially in the halls of bureaucratic power. Whenever the character is in a situation where bribes will be accepted, he may use his Resources skill whenever he would otherwise use Leadership instead.

### **Money Talks [Resources]**

Rather than go looking for something, one can always just offer a reward. The character may spread some money around and use Resources in lieu of Contacting to attempt to find somebody or something. He doesn't literally need to offer a reward, but it is necessary that he make an obvious display of wealth in some venue or another, preferably waving crisp money in the face of people in the know (or people who know people in the know). The downside of this approach is that it tends to be highly public, at least within some circles, and anyone interested will know what the character is looking for.

## **Comfort**

### **Home Away From Home [Resources]**

Normally, a character may have a single Library, Lab, Workshop, Arcane Library, or Arcane Workshop of a quality equal to his Resources-2 (see page 109). With this stunt, he has a second such property in a different location; he may specify the location during play (at which point it becomes locked in), or in advance.

### **Headquarters [Resources]**

One of your character's properties – one location that functions as a Library, Lab, Workshop, Arcane Library, or Arcane Workshop (see [page XX](#)) -- qualifies as a full-blown private headquarters, such as a mansion or a secret cave. The quality of this facility is automatically increased by two (such that it is equal to your Resources skill or Resources+1 in the case of a specialized function).

In addition, the headquarters may include one of the following extra elements:

#### *Expert Staff.*

Your headquarters has a small staff of competent individuals: two with Average skill at something (choose the skill when defining the staff member), and a head or lauded functionary with a peak skill of Fair. These are, within the bounds of your headquarters, companions whom you may call on to assist you. They are bound to the location, and can't ever leave it without losing their companion qualities (they effectively drop to Mediocre outside of their home environs). With another stunt, you may convert one of these staff members into a Trusted Employee (see [page XX](#)).

#### *Secondary Facility.*

Your base facility normally serves one primary function – Library, Lab, Workshop, Arcane Library, or Arcane Workshop. This extra allows you to define a second function that operates at a quality level equal to your Resources minus 3.

#### *Extensive Security.*

Security measures make your headquarters difficult to compromise. All difficulties for bypassing your headquarters' security are increased by one.

#### *Utmost Secrecy.*

The location of your headquarters is tantamount to a state secret. Few know of it, and even those located nearby may be unaware. The difficulty of any Investigation or Contacting roll to find the location of your lair is equal to your Resources.

### *Communications Center.*

Your headquarters is the nerve center of a number of vital channels of communication. Any communications routed to, from, or through your base take one time increment less to get to where they're going, due to the efficiencies offered.

### **Lair [Resources]**

Requires Headquarters.

The character's headquarters has three elements (rather than one).

### **Stately Pleasure Dome [Resources]**

Requires Lair.

The character's lair is very much a wonder of the world. Not only does it have all of the possible elements listed above, but one of them may be traded out for something unique and distinctive, such as:

- A world class lab (adding another 2 to the quality of one of the facilities and speeding the rate of research by one increment).
- An exotic location (just outside Atlantis, on the moon, etc.), including a means of dedicated transport for reaching it.
- A larger and highly competent staff (the facility head is of Good quality, and there are two Fair and three Average staff members).

It's even possible that this distinctive element is something weird, like having your headquarters be mobile (movement is slow; the rate of movement will never compete with a full-on vehicle or plane, and finding places to park is an absolute pain).

### **Trusted Employee [Resources]**

Requires a Headquarters with the Expert Staff element.

Choose one member of your staff – usually the person who qualifies as head of the facility. This person may now accompany you as a full-on companion (see [page XX](#)), including retaining her companion status outside your headquarters. She automatically has the quality level indicated by your headquarters stunts, and the Independent advance; you may choose three other advances for her as well (including increasing her quality to Good, if you haven't done so through the other stunts).

## **Liquidity**

### **Best That Money Can Buy [Resources]**

You have a discerning taste and a natural instinct for spending your money to get exactly the best and nothing less. You are at +1 to your Resources whenever making a purchase of something that would be considered "the best." While this may seem like a discount, it's not, really, since seeking out the best may mandate a price mark several steps above the baseline; still, this stunt helps to soften the blow.

### **Long Term Investment [Resources]**

You've had your money for a while now, and you've had a chance to make several strategic investments which you can cash in on when pressed for money. Once per session, you may sell one of these investments to get a +2 to any one Resources roll, as if you had spent a fate point to invoke an aspect.

### **Money Is No Object [Resources]**

Requires two other Resources stunts.

Once per session, when called on to roll Resources, you may spend a fate point and simply act as if you had rolled ++++ on the dice. You may do this after the fact on a roll, and further may combine this with the effect from Long Term Investment to easily achieve a result of your Resources +6 (and, if it's the Best That Money Can Buy, +7) – usually good enough to purchase almost anything.

If you use this stunt, your Resources skill will then operate at -2 for the rest of the session; you've simply tapped into everything at your disposal to make the purchase.

## **Science**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Medicine**

#### **Forensic Medicine [Science]**

Your skill with Science gives you a distinct insight into certain kinds of investigations. When appropriate, you may use your Science skill instead of Investigation, particularly when the subject involves medical evidence. If the GM believes that you would normally roll Science for such an effort (such as performing an autopsy) then the difficulty of the investigation drops by two steps (but never below Mediocre).

#### **Doctor [Science]**

The character has a singular ability to help the wounded recover from their ills. Whenever rolling Science to provide first aid or proper medical attention (see [page XX](#)), the roll is made at +2. A character with this stunt may choose to have a medical degree, or at least certification to act as a paramedic, nurse, or other medical professional.

#### **Medic [Science]**

Requires Doctor.

The character is talented at delivering medical care in the field. Normally, someone providing first aid can remove a checkmark for every two shifts gained on the roll (see [page XX](#)). With this stunt, every shift past the first one improves the level of stress that may be removed (so three shifts will remove a checkmark up to the three-stress mark, rather than the two-stress mark). If the character rolls well enough to remove a stress mark that is higher than the subject's physical stress capacity (e.g., 6 or more shifts for a character who has Mediocre Endurance), he may even remove a minor, physical consequence.

#### **Surgeon [Science]**

Requires Doctor.

You're not only a doctor, you're at the forefront of medical Science in action. Your character is a respected authority in a specific field of surgical or therapeutic medicine; define it at the time you take this stunt. Possibilities include heart or brain surgery, transplant operations, disease

pathologies, and so on; your character has the opportunity to break new ground ahead of the actual technological curve.

In the elite circles of the chosen field, the character is recognized for his expertise. Even if his skill level is low, it merely means he is towards the bottom of that particular elite group.

When the character makes a Science roll to perform surgery or other intensive medical work, he acts at +1. In addition, when the roll involves his specific area of specialization, he gets an additional +1 and may remove the difficulty increase of any one factor affecting the operation (such as poor facilities, or a lack of a particular supply, etc).

This stunt combines with the Doctor stunt for a large bonus – which is only right, because practicing medicine is particularly hard, and patients are not as understanding – or replaceable – as bunsen burners and test tubes. Those who use Science to heal the human body are facing higher difficulties than they might in other fields and, in game terms, they can use all the extra shifts on those rolls that they can get.

Thus, surgeons start with the +2 bonus from Doctor, and add at least one, for a total of +3. And better yet, they operate with a +4 in their area of utmost expertise.

## Theory

### Scientific Genius [Science]

Your character is a respected authority in a specific scientific field. Possibilities include physics, chemistry, biology, and so on. In the elite circles of that particular field, the character is recognized for his expertise. Even if his skill level is low, it merely means he is towards the bottom of his particular group of the elite.

Whenever the character makes a Science roll pertaining to his area of expertise, he automatically receives a +1 knowledge bonus. In addition, the character should pick a specific area of specialization (like gravity, electricity or reptiles). When a science roll involves that specialization, his knowledge bonus increases to +2, and any research efforts involving the specialty are resolved at one time increment faster.

### Theory in Practice [Science]

Requires Scientific Genius.

Your character can start babbling about some theoretical scientific principle that has bearing on the situation at hand (the player must play this out). Even if it's a crackpot theory, Science is a kind of new religion for this guy, and his committed belief in his theory can translate into real effect.

Instead of using Science to make a declaration, the character may, for a fate point, and only once per scene, use his Science skill to substitute for nearly any other skill, subject to the GM's approval. If the roll generates no shifts, the scientist takes a minor consequence (such as "Crestfallen" or "Crackpot") to reflect the weight of his failure for the rest of the scene. Otherwise, great! It works!

### Scientific Invention [Science]

Requires Scientific Genius.

You are able to create new devices and upgrade existing technology as per the gadgets rules (see [page XX](#)), using Science instead of Engineering. You don't, however, have any skill at creating or repairing completely "normal" technology – stuff that wouldn't involve the gadget rules at all to work on.

### Weird Science [Science]

Requires Scientific Invention.

You may create and upgrade gadgets to use any improvements that are marked as requiring Weird Science. This lets you design and create items that have capabilities that exist in the late 20th century, among other things (see [page XX](#)).

Furthermore, you may collaborate with another character skilled in Engineering to enable that character to create and change items based on Weird Science; if you do so, your Science skill restricts that character's Engineering.

Working with an engineer, a scientist with this stunt enables his engineer partner to include Weird Science improvements for a single improvement allocation on one of his personal or universal gadgets.

## **Mad Science [Science]**

Requires Weird Science.

You are able to create devices that even a 21st century person would deem impossible, unlikely, or simply too advanced for mankind's present capabilities. Unconventional construction methods, cars that run on brainpower, and other bizarre effects are all possible.

Your Mad Science must have a theme (such as Doktor Herborn's "metabolic chemistry"), which you must define when you take this stunt. Any Mad Science improvements you incorporate into devices must fit this theme (but with a little creativity, most concepts can fit a sufficiently flexible theme).

As with the Weird Science stunt (above), a mad scientist may collaborate with an engineer in order to help that engineer build mad sciences into his gadgets for only a single improvement allocation.

Sadly, for most engineers (but perhaps happily for the rest of us!), mad scientists often don't play well with others, so finding someone with this stunt who is willing to collaborate is a great undertaking all by itself (and may even be a good seed for an adventure – GMs, take note).

## **Sleight of Hand**

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### **Distractions**

#### **Bump and Grab [Sleight of Hand]**

Your character is exceptionally skilled at taking advantage of distractions in order to make a quick grab. You may spend a fate point to make a simple Sleight of Hand attempt to do something – pick a pocket, palm an object – as a free action.

#### **Cool Hand [Sleight of Hand]**

A steady hand can be critical when things get hairy. This character's hands never shake and never waver.

Your character may ignore any difficulty increases from the environment when performing any fine manual work (even if that fine manual work doesn't involve the Sleight of Hand skill, such as Burglary for lock picking, or Science for surgical work).

Further, his steadiness minimizes other distractions and cuts down on mistakes. Once per scene he may eliminate one single non-environmental penalty that affects his Sleight of Hand.

#### **Sucker Punch [Sleight of Hand]**

If you are initiating an attack with someone who is not expecting it, you may use your Sleight of Hand skill instead of your Fists skill on the first exchange, provided you can directly interact with your target and narrate a reasonable distraction as your prelude.

## Showmanship

### Juggler [Sleight of Hand]

You have a great talent for juggling; this includes the ability to throw around and catch seemingly dangerous objects (knives, torches) without any fear of harm to yourself.

If called on to make a skill roll for juggling, you gain a +2 on your roll. You may set this +2 bonus aside and instead use your Sleight of Hand skill instead of Art to make a performance that dazzles your audience.

This ability does not include the ability to catch weapons are thrown at you with the intent of harm – if you want that ability as well, you’ll have to look to the Catch stunt under Weapons (see [page XX](#)).

You may, however, use your Sleight of Hand skill to complement your Weapons skill whenever making a thrown weapon attack.

### Legerdemain [Sleight of Hand]

You have a knack for pulling off magic tricks and can draw the eye effortlessly. When performing a magic trick, you may use Sleight of Hand instead of Art to perform and entertain, getting a +1 bonus to your roll.

If you are covering up some other sort of activity at the same time, your effort to conceal receives a +1 as well.

### Stage Magic [Sleight of Hand]

Requires Legerdemain.

You can perform misdirection on a large scale, under appropriately controlled circumstances. Provided you are acting within an arena you control (such as a stage, or an area you have had adequate time to prepare), there are simply no size limitations (within reason) for your Sleight of Hand targets.

### Master of Illusion [Sleight of Hand]

Requires Stage Magic.

You can prepare for a large illusion in a very short period of time, using improvised props and rigging. This lets you bring the effects of Stage Magic into play very quickly; the time it takes to prepare is reduced by three steps, allowing the character to put together something in about a minute that would normally take half an hour of preparation.

## Stealth

(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

### Hide

#### In Plain Sight [Stealth]

Your character suffers no environment-based difficulty increases when using Stealth. This means that even when he's out in the open and wouldn't normally be able to justify using Stealth, he may. This also means that, once hidden, even people actively searching for him (page XX) do not get a +2 to their Alertness or Investigation rolls.

This ability only functions so long as your character does not move, and does not do anything other than hide. The moment he does something else, he breaks cover and is immediately visible.

### **Master of Shadows [Stealth]**

Requires In Plain Sight.

Your character is one with the shadows, and lives in every darkened corner, unheard and unseen. You gain the full benefit of In Plain Sight, but may also move one zone per exchange without automatically breaking stealth, allowing you to remain hidden while moving, even when you shouldn't be able to hide in the first place.

If your character is in an environment that could give a bonus to stealth (like one with a Dark or Smokey aspect) or even one that would normally justify the use of Stealth to hide, you may pay a fate point to make a full sprint action without automatically breaking stealth.

The upshot of this stunt is as follows: Whenever the character moves while hidden, discovery penalties (see page XX) may still apply, but are cut in half. Outside of conflict, this leaves observers at +1 for a cautious creep, +2 for walking pace, +3 for a jog (short sprint) and +4 for an out-and-out run (long sprint); inside conflict, observers only get a +1 to detect the character for every zone moved in an exchange. If used in combination with Like the Wind (see page XX), these discovery bonuses are eliminated entirely.

### **Shadowed Strike [Stealth]**

Requires Master of Shadows (above) and Vanish (below).

The character strikes from out of the darkness, leaving his foes bewildered and in pain. When hidden, the character can launch an attack while remaining hidden, using his Stealth for any defense rolls for the duration of that exchange.

### **Deadly Shadows [Stealth]**

Requires Shadowed Strike.

When using the Shadowed Strike method the character may use his Stealth to make attacks as well, rather than using his Weapons skill or the like.

## **Retreat**

### **Quick Exit [Stealth]**

A momentary distraction is all you need to vanish from the scene. Provided you are not in the midst of a conflict, you may roll a quick contest between your Stealth and the highest Alertness in the room. If you succeed, the next time someone turns to look at or talk to you, you're not there.

### **Vanish [Stealth]**

Requires Quick Exit.

This stunt functions the same as Quick Exit (above), but the character may vanish even if he is in a conflict, as a full action. This requires some dramatic flourish (smoke bombs or bright flashes are classics) or the invocation of an appropriate environmental aspect (like The Darkness of the New Moon).

## Skulk

### Hush [Stealth]

Your talent with stealth may be extended to others who are with you close by, provided that you travel as a group. As long as the whole group stays with you and follows your hushed orders, you may make a single Stealth roll for the whole group, using your skill alone. If someone breaks from the group, they immediately lose this benefit, and may risk revealing the rest of you if they don't manage to pull off a little Stealth of their own.

You cannot apply the benefits of other stunts (besides Hush) to this roll, though you may bring in your own aspects (and possibly tag the aspects of those you are concealing) in order to improve the result.

The maximum number of additional people in the group is equal to the numeric value of the character's Stealth score (so someone with Fair Stealth and this stunt would be able to use his skill for himself and two others).

### Lightfoot [Stealth]

It's difficult to track you when you take care to walk lightly. Traps and such that depend on pressure or some other weight-based trigger are two steps easier for you to circumvent, and any attempts (such as with Investigation or Survival) to trace the physical evidence of your steps face a difficulty two higher than you rolled.

### Like the Wind [Stealth]

Requires Lightfoot.

Whenever your character moves under cover of Stealth – the skulking trapping for the skill (see [page XX](#)) – the bonus to discovery efforts is cut in half. This means that out of conflict, observers are only at +1 for a slow creep, +2 for walking pace, +3 for jogging, and +4 for a full-out run; in a conflict, observers are only at +1 per zone moved. If you combine this stunt with the Master of Shadows stunt (see [page XX](#)), then your movement, however swift, never offers a bonus to discovery efforts, ever.

## Survival

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(Skill, [page XX](#); Adjudication, [page XX](#))

## Beasts

### Animal Companion [Survival]

Your character has cultivated a close companion from the animal kingdom. This companion is designed using the companion rules (see [page XX](#)), with a few changes and limitations.

Animal companions are designed using four advances. This companion operates only with a “physical” scope, and must spend at least two of its advances on “Skilled” or “Quality”. Any “Skilled” advances must be taken from a short list: Athletics, Fists, Might, Stealth, and Survival. You may take only one skill outside of that list, within reason, as based on the animal type. A raccoon might have Sleight of Hand, representing its ability to perform fine manipulation; a lion might have Intimidation (this is unsubtle, and not considered a violation of the physical scope). If the animal is of an appropriate size, this creature may be ridden as a mount, at +1 to Survival.

If the companion is a mount, such as a horse, or a more exotic beast that has been persuaded to allow you to ride it, you may use that mount's Athletics skill instead of Survival in order to ride it.

Athletics would also be used to pour on the speed when the rider is too busy to “steer” the animal himself.

### **Animal Friend [Survival]**

Pick a particular type of animal (cats, rodents, horses or the like). Your character is capable of communicating with animals of that type, and moreover, they are likely to be favorably inclined towards him, granting a +2 when interacting with the specified animal type.

This doesn't connote a special level of intelligence on the part of the animal, so the communication may be relatively simple. When relevant, the character uses Animal Handling in lieu of any social skill when dealing with these animals.

### **Call of the Wild [Survival]**

Requires Animal Friend.

Calling out in a “native” voice, your character is able to summon nearby friendly creatures. A number of creatures up to the amount of shifts generated by Survival roll (against Mediocre) will heed the call (x10 if the creatures are small, like rats or cats, x100 for vermin like roaches). Only creatures affected by the Animal Friend (or King of the Beasts) stunt may respond.

### **King of the Beasts [Survival]**

Requires Animal Friend.

This stunt functions as Animal Friend does, but the character may speak to an entire broad category of animals, rather than just one type.

For purposes of this ability there are three main categories – creatures from or from near the sea (fish, whales, seabirds), creatures from the land (dogs, primates, cats, birds) and vermin (bugs, rats and other small scuttling things).

There is loose overlap between these categories – pigeons are in all three – and the GM is encouraged to be generous in her interpretation.

## **Orientation**

### **Due North [Survival]**

Your character's natural talent for navigation is such that he rarely gets lost. He always knows which direction north is, flawlessly, even underground, without a compass or stars to guide him. He gets a +2 knowledge bonus whenever trying to find his way out of a place (using Survival), and faces no familiarity penalties to his efforts to navigate.

### **Tracker [Survival]**

Your character is skilled at tracking, and can infer a great deal of information from a trail. When studying tracks, the character may roll Survival.

Each shift from this roll spent thereafter gives the character one piece of information about the person or creature being tracked (such as weight, how they were moving, and so on). Normally, Survival can't be used to track something, leaving such attempts at a Mediocre default.

## **Riding**

### **Hands Free [Survival]**

You can do all sorts of things from the back of your horse (or other mount). Riding your animal never causes a supplemental action penalty when you're doing something else from the saddle, whether you're rolling Survival as the primary skill or another.

### **Hell Bent for Leather [Survival]**

You know how to get the best speed out of your mount. Any sprint action you take using Survival while mounted is done at +2.

If you're using your mount's Athletics skill instead (as with an Animal Companion mount, above), the +2 is applied to the mount's Athletics roll.

You must be an active participant in driving your mount forward in order to receive this bonus, in such a case. The benefit doesn't apply if you're, say, in the saddle, but unconscious.

### **Ride Anything [Survival]**

If it can be ridden like a riding beast, you can ride it. You suffer no penalties or increased difficulty for a lack of familiarity, no matter how strange the mount, be it dinosaur, mechanical spider-robot, or Martian bird of prey.

### **Breaking it In [Survival]**

You're skilled at breaking in new mounts. Normally, breaking in a mount is a conflict between rider and steed. The rider is making social attacks (using Survival vs. Resolve) on the animal while the animal is making Athletics or Might vs. Survival physical attacks on the rider. When one party is finally taken out, takes a consequence, or concedes, either the animal is broken or the rider is thrown. Whatever the net result, the animal's composure track clears immediately.

Your character receives a +2 on all efforts to break in a new mount. If successful, he gets a +1 to all Survival rolls on a creature he has broken for the duration of that session.

## **Weapons**

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(Skill, page 64; Adjudication, page 157)

### **Proficiency**

#### **Flawless Parry [Weapons]**

When the character takes a full defense action using Weapons, he gains a +3 bonus rather than the usual +2.

#### **Riposte [Weapons]**

Requires Flawless Parry.

Whenever you are physically attacked by an opponent at melee distance (the same zone as you), and you successfully defend yourself (using Weapons) well enough to gain spin, you may use that spin to inflict a single point of physical stress on your attacker, immediately, as a free action.

#### **Turnabout [Weapons]**

Requires Riposte.

You have a singular ability to turn an opponent's action into an advantage for yourself.

Under the same conditions as Riposte, you may use your spin and spend a fate point to treat your defense roll as a free-action attack, dealing physical stress equal to the shifts you got on your

defense roll (since you got spin, you'll be inflicting at least three stress). You may only do this once per opponent in a scene.

## Thrown

### Catch [Weapons]

When defending against a thrown object, if you are successful enough to generate spin on your defense, you may declare that you are catching the item that was thrown at you, provided you have a free hand and it's something you could, practically speaking, catch (so no catching, say, refrigerators, unless you have something truly crazy going on in the Might department).

### Ricochet [Weapons]

You can throw a weapon such that it bounces off one or more surfaces, allowing it to come at an opponent from an unexpected direction. By bouncing your weapon off a surface before hitting, you make the shot more difficult, but also more likely to hit from an unexpected angle. Describe the shot and take a -1 penalty to the attack; if the attack is successful, the stress of the hit is increased by 2.

In addition, you may use this stunt to get a thrown weapon to hit a target that is around a corner, provided you can work out some way to see him (such as with a mirror).

### Good Arm [Weapons]

The character has an amazing throwing arm, and can throw weapons with great force, allowing them still to be effective at a much longer range than usual. The character may make an attack using a thrown weapon up to two zones away instead of the usual one; if he does so, the attack is made at a -1.

## Weaponry

### Anything Goes [Weapons]

Your character suffers no complications for an awkward or improvised weapon – virtually anything can be a lethal weapon in his hands, as long as he can comfortably and casually lift it.

The key here is that the weapon must be improvised – a chair, a priceless urn, a beer bottle. There's also a catch: most improvised weaponry doesn't often survive more than a few uses.

However, your character should never need to spend a fate point in order to declare that an improvised weapon is close at hand, unless his surroundings have been deliberately prepared against this (such as a prison cell). When using the Weapons skill to throw objects at a target, this stunt means he often has an easy supply of ammunition at hand.

### Close at Hand [Weapons]

Close at Hand allows your character to bring his weapon to hand faster than the eye can track. He never takes a supplemental action penalty when drawing his weapon if he has it nearby or on his person. If someone is actively blocking such an action (see [page XX](#)), you may treat that block as if it had a value two steps lower.

Combined with Anything Goes (above), this character is effectively always effortlessly armed if he's in an even moderately cluttered environment.

### Weapon of Destiny [Weapons]

You may only take this stunt if you have an aspect that refers to the weapon by name.

You have a signature weapon, which has a name that is well-known among certain circles, and a long and storied history surrounding its past owners. The weapon has a tendency to be always near at hand, even when circumstances have conspired against it. If you'd normally have to spend a fate point to have this weapon nearby, you can have it nearby without having to spend a fate point. If you wouldn't normally be able to get it near to you for a fate point, then this stunt lets you spend a fate point even in the face of that impossibility. Once the fate point is spent, the GM is not required to furnish your weapon immediately, but must work to bend circumstances to make it available in reasonably short order. Thus, you cannot be deprived of the weapon for long unless you voluntarily give it up or pass it on to another.

Beyond the above capabilities, this weapon is an artifact (see [page XX](#)) that includes the craftsmanship improvement, giving you a +1 whenever you are using it. In addition, you may select one other improvement, including those only available to artifacts, such as Blessed, Arcane, Conscious, and others.

### **Weapons of the World [Weapons]**

Every kind of proper (not improvised) hand-held melee weapon in the world has been in your hands at one point or another. Your experience is extensive and profound; you never face a familiarity penalty regardless of how strange the weapon you're using is. Further, if you tell a quick (two or three sentence) story about how you came to use such a weapon in times past, you may get a +1 bonus for a scene, once per "new" weapon, per session, at no cost. This story may either be out loud or as an internal monologue shared with the other players at the table.

## 7. Gadgets and Gizmos

The tools a character has to do their job can make the difference between success and failure. Equipment is a colorful part of the pulp era, and is often a critical component of a character's concept – after all, who's going to read about Gerald Carter and his Mechanical Aide if he doesn't have a robot companion?

### State of the Art

While the pulp era lacks certain modern conveniences we take for granted – cellular phones, computers, ATM machines and so on – there are many items that we might consider modern, which are in common use in the pulp era.

### Day to day

These items have been around long enough that no one even bats an eye at them anymore. If expensive or fancy, a particular item might draw notice, but the simple existence of these items is common and well known.

|                  |                        |                   |
|------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Air conditioning | Electric burglar alarm | Refrigerators     |
| Aspirin          | Escalators             | Sawed-off shotgun |
| Blue jeans       | Flamethrower           | Sonar             |
| Contact lenses   | Neon Lamp              | Submarines        |
| Crayons          | Pizza                  |                   |
| Dieting          | Potato chips           |                   |

### Modern marvels

These are the newest, most cutting edge technologies. They're excellent topic of conversation and may well draw attention.

|                  |              |               |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Aircraft carrier | Brassiere    | Silencer      |
| Automatic pilot  | Gas mask     | Hamburger     |
| Band aids        | Lie detector | Soda in a can |

### Soon to Come

These technologies are just around the corner, at least for most of the world. These are exactly the sorts of things that heroes of science are likely to have prototypes of.

|                 |      |
|-----------------|------|
| Aerosol spray   | 1926 |
| Analog computer | 1930 |
| Car radio       | 1927 |
| Color TV        | 1925 |
| Dry ice         | 1925 |
| FM radio        | 1933 |
| Freon           | 1928 |

|                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| Instant camera    | 1932 |
| Jet engine        | 1930 |
| Kleenex           | 1924 |
| Penicillin        | 1928 |
| Rotary dial phone | 1923 |
| SCUBA             | 1935 |
| Synthetic rubber  | 1926 |
| Tetanus shot      | 1927 |
| Telephoto lens    | 1924 |
| Walkie talkie     | 1933 |

## Dollars and Cents

In the 1920s, the average income for an American was a little bit over \$1200. A dollar can go a decent distance. Pulp heroes are usually a bit better off than the norm, as that is part of what frees them up to pursue their heroic interests.

Now, despite the fact that the actual resource system is pretty abstract, sometimes people are more comfortable when things have actual dollar values attached. As such, the yardstick for prices is shown on [page XX](#).

| Price     | Amount         | Can Buy                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Terrible  | Under a Buck   | roll of film, a candy bar, cigarettes, a movie ticket, a book, cheap meal, bed for a night in a flophouse, a quick cab ride                                                    |
| Poor      | Under 5 Bucks  | A night in a hotel, hand tool, common medicine, decent clothes, backpack, knife, alarm clock, flashlight, cab ride across town                                                 |
| Mediocre  | Under 20 Bucks | Nice clothes, one night in an excellent hotel or a month in a fleabag apartment, first aid kit, lantern, revolver, small tent, hunting rifle, lockpicks, one stick of dynamite |
| Average   | Under 50 Bucks | Fancy clothes, rental of an office or apartment for a month, bicycle, safecracking tools, semi-automatic pistol                                                                |
| Fair      | Under 100      | Military rifle, nice apartment for a month, portable typewriter                                                                                                                |
| Good      | Under 500      | Machine gun, motorcycle, truck                                                                                                                                                 |
| Great     | Under 1000     | Small house, Model T Ford car                                                                                                                                                  |
| Superb    | Under 10,000   | Sports car, wooden plane, large house                                                                                                                                          |
| Fantastic | Under 100,000  | Airplane, personal railroad car, mansion                                                                                                                                       |

|           |                    |                                |
|-----------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Epic      | Under 1,000,000    | Small company, office building |
| Legendary | Money is no object | Personal island, zeppelin      |

## Vehicles

Vehicles have two main attributes, their top speed and their stress capacity. This is noted simply as: Model T (car), Average, ☐ ☐ ☐ . This is a Model T, and its vehicle type is a car (shocking). It has Average speed, and three boxes of stress capacity (the amount of damage it can sustain before being taken out).

The type of a vehicle is mostly relevant to understand the value of its speed – the speed value is not absolute, but rather indicative of how fast the vehicle is for the type of vehicle it is. The Model T’s average speed is much faster than, say, a person’s average speed, but slower than the speed of an Gadgets average plane. Speed comes into play for simple contests of which vehicle is faster (roll speed vs. speed, modified by respective ride or drive skills as appropriate) but for anything more complex, the chase rules (see [page XX](#)) may be more appropriate.

Vehicle technology has not advanced far enough yet that the car vastly outstrips other means of transportation. This means that it’s entirely possible that you may have a mixed group of vehicles, animals and people on foot and need to keep a sense of how fast they are, relatively speaking. In a quick sprint (which is more about acceleration than speed) no modifiers are appropriate. In a short run, a person on foot is at -2 against a bike or horse and -4 against a car, while the person on the bike or horse is at -2 against a car. Over longer distance, skills hardly even matter – the faster base vehicle wins.

One thing to remember about the vehicles of the era is that they came in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. The 1922 Cadillac Suburban was designed to seat 7 people, so having a vehicle that can hold a whole group is entirely reasonable.

| Vehicle (Example)                                       | Speed   | Stress Cap.                                                                                                                                           | Cost   |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| <b>Cars</b>                                             |         |                                                                                                                                                       |        |
| Car ( <i>Model T Ford</i> )                             | Average | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                            | Great  |
| Luxury car ( <i>Cadillac Model 61</i> )                 | Good    | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                            | Superb |
| Hot Rod ( <i>Ford T-Bucket</i> )                        | Great   | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                     | Great  |
| Limousine ( <i>Heine Velox V-12 limousine</i> )         | Fair    | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>                          | Superb |
| Truck ( <i>Mack Truck</i> )                             | Average | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Good   |
| <b>Motorcycles</b>                                      |         |                                                                                                                                                       |        |
| Simple Cycle ( <i>Neracar Motor-cycle</i> )             | Good    | <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                              | Good   |
| Serious Motorcycle ( <i>Harley Davidson Big Chief</i> ) | Great   | <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                              | Great  |

## Guns

The prices for guns are pretty simple to figure out, but sometimes you want to be able to drop the name of the shooting iron you’re carrying around. By and large, different types of guns don’t have any game rules effect, but when you’re picking a weapon to suit a character’s style, these distinctions might come in handy.

There are just two game effects of “category”, here:

- Pistols, most machine guns, and other handguns generally only have an effective range of up to two zones, while rifles should be able to reach up to three or four zones away easily.
- The kind of gun someone carries will at the least limit the kind of descriptions they can make about what they're doing, based on the GM's sense of what's feasible. This very simply means that, say, someone might be able to talk more easily about laying down a spray of cover fire with a machine gun in hand, than if they had a singleshot revolver. In terms of game rules, this may have the strongest effect on what sorts of maneuvers the GM allows.

The categories (with cost), follow, with a list of particular weapons in each category.

#### Practical, "line of duty" Revolvers (Mediocre)

- Colt Detective
- Colt Police Positive
- Smith & Wesson Model 10
- Webley Mk III

#### Hunting Rifles (Average)

- Mauser Special
- Remington Model 30

#### Military Rifles (Fair)

- Arisaka Type 44
- Enfield M1917
- Springfield M1903

#### Big Honkin' Revolvers (Mediocre)

- Colt Peacemaker
- S&W Model 1917
- Webley-Fosbery

#### Submachine Guns (Good)

- Beretta Model 1918
- Thompson M1-A1 (The good old Tommy Gun – do you really need anything else?)

#### Semi-Automatic Pistols (Average)

- Beretta 1915
- Browning 1922
- Colt M1911
- Luger P-08
- Mauser Model 1910
- Walther Model 8

#### Machine Guns (Good)

- Browning M1917 (Heavy)
- Hotchkiss 1922
- Lewis MkI
- Vickers Mk I (Heavy)

## Explosives

---

Explosives should be introduced carefully and meditatively into your game. They can radically alter how a session will go. Make sure to read up on how they operate (page XX) before considering any purchase or provisioning of them in your game.

It's important to note that most any explosive which you can readily throw or use in combat is going to have an area of 1 zone. Larger explosives can be acquired, but they are usually reserved for villainous schemes. Dynamites's cheap cost here is due to its wide availability, and is a bit of an anomaly.

| Explosive               | Force     | Area | Cost     | Improvement  |
|-------------------------|-----------|------|----------|--------------|
| Dynamite                | Legendary | 1    | Mediocre |              |
| Hand Grenade            | Fantastic | 1    | Good     |              |
| Nitroglycerine (Bottle) | Fantastic | 1    | Great    | Hair Trigger |
| C [1]                   | Epic      | 1    | Superb   |              |

[1] (Just "C". No number. C was one of the very earliest plastic explosives)

## Bigger Bombs

Assume that the baseline bomb has an area of 1 zone, a force of Fantastic, a complexity of Good and cost of Good. Increasing area by one zone, or force or complexity by one step, increases the cost by one. These prices only reflect large, stationary bombs; mobility and portability will each cost extra.

## Other Weapons

Outside of the modern conveniences of death such as guns and bombs, it's entirely feasible that characters – particularly those playing around with artifacts – are going to come across, design, and make use of archaic weapons – in other words, knives and swords, or their equivalent. Rather than go to the level of detail as provided with guns (above), simply use these guidelines for cost:

**Pocket knife:** Terrible

**Hunting knife:** Poor

**Spear:** Poor

**Sword:** Mediocre

## Making Things

Engineers are capable of improving or customizing all manner of devices. Of course, they're also capable of causing otherwise innocuous devices to explode messily, so one needs to be careful. Rather than using the Resources skill to buy items, they retreat into their workshops and use the tools and materials they have there to invent and build those items using the Engineering skill.

Building something from scratch is based off a difficulty equal to the cost of the item in question (see Spending Money, page XX). For example, building a revolver from scratch is a Mediocre difficulty, due to the gun's Mediocre cost. It also requires appropriate tools, supplies and time. Tools and supplies are measured by the quality of the engineer's workshop, which must be at least as high as the item quality (which is equal to the cost). To build a gun (Mediocre cost and, thus, Mediocre item quality), the character must have a Mediocre or better workshop.

Building something is time consuming, taking at least a day per level of item quality over Mediocre (minimum of one day), so it's assumed that characters will only be building things that they can't

buy or acquire otherwise. More often, it's assumed they will skip the time to build the base item, and instead start with something that already exists and then improve it.

## Improving Things

---

Engineers can tinker to improve or change the workings of any device. There is an array of possible improvements, which include:

### *Additional Capability*

The device can now do something else of roughly the same scope. A car might also be able to be a boat, for example, or a gun might be able to shoot a grappling hook. Alternately, it may be able to do something normal but do it exceptionally well (so that a technology works like it does in the movies rather than real life).

### *Alternate Usage [2]*

The device allows skills to be used differently. For example, a ghost detector might allow a Scientist to use Science rather than Mysteries for the Sixth Sense effect.

### *Armed*

Adds guns or blades to a device that would not normally have them, allowing its use with the Guns or Weapons skill.

### *Armored*

A device may be given a point of armor, meaning that any time it is hit for one point of stress, the damage does not roll up even if that box is already checked off (it does not prevent the stress, just the roll-up).

### *Futurization*

The device can include a technological advance we already know about but which hasn't happened yet. However, this is limited to technologies that existed before the beginning of World War II.

### *Speculative Science [2]*

This is like futurization, but extends to any technological effect which could be achieved with technology from within the 20th century.

### *Unbelievable [3]*

Like futurization, but this allows for scientific advances which are considered science fiction even today.

### *Independent*

The device has some manner of autopilot and is able to act independently in a very limited fashion.

### *Conscious [2]*

Like independent, but the device is capable of basic reasoning, and can interpret simple commands.

### *Hair Trigger*

This is mostly only applicable to explosives. A bomb with a hair trigger has no delay – it blows up as soon as it's thrown. The bad news is that Hair Triggers can be a bit tricky, and there's a chance of it blowing up in your hand. Failing the throw means that it explodes at the thrower's feet! Also, if a character carrying a hair trigger device takes any physical stress or consequences, he must roll a die, and on a -, it explodes.

### *Miniaturization*

Something that's not normally portable can now fit in a large set of luggage, while something merely large can now fit in a wristwatch.

### *Maximization*

The inverse of miniaturization: Sometimes you just need something to be BIG! This improvement is used to alter an item for circumstances when size will truly matter, such as a weapon that can't possibly damage its intended mega-monster target without being very large, or a car that's actually house-sized and able to transport a huge number of passengers.

### *Craftsmanship*

The device gives a +1 bonus to any effort using it (usually only to one skill, if the device supports the use of multiple skills). This improvement may not be taken more than once per affected skill.

### *Rugged*

The device has 2 extra boxes of stress capacity over the default, which is usually 3. May be taken multiple times.

### *Special Effect [2]*

A device may now operate on different principles, like a car that runs on water or a gun which can shoot ghosts. The game benefit of this will depend highly on the specifics.

### *Upgrade*

A specific improvement, granting a +2 bonus to some fairly specific use for the thing. A car, for example, might get a +2 in a swamp or a +2 on the straightaway.

[2] (1, 2, 3, 4) Requires that the engineer also have a “Weird Science” stunt or co-inventor (see [page XX](#)) to justify the effect.

[3] Requires a “Mad Science” stunt or co-inventor.

To improve an item (rather than create it from scratch), start with the base difficulty to create the device based on the item quality, as before.

Next, determine how many improvements you want to make. Each improvement increases the difficulty (and required workshop quality) by one. Each improvement takes approximately 8 hours to implement.

If the player is willing to increase total time to improve the item by one increment on the time table ([page XX](#)), he gains a +1 bonus to the roll; increasing it again results in a +2 bonus, and so forth. This bonus doesn't reduce the requirements for the workshop, however; that's still based on the quality of the item (and thus the difficulty target). The player may also reduce the time spent; if less total time is spent improving the item, each step faster on the time table imposes a -1 penalty to the roll.

Equipment that characters make can be expected to last for the duration of a single adventure, but is assumed to be lost, deconstructed or otherwise removed from play between adventures. Failure on the roll is subject to the rules for “taking your time” (page XX) in order to retroactively succeed.

## Personal Things

---

Characters are able to buy **personal gadgets** as stunts (see page XX). Gadgets bought this way generally start from a baseline item of any sort, with three improvements applied. Cost factors are set aside since the gadget is getting “paid for” in terms of stunts. Alternately, the player can take multiple devices and spread those three improvements among them. The GM and player may work together to create new improvements that fit the concept of the gadget.

Personal gadgets can be taken away, destroyed or lost over the course of an adventure unless the character also has an aspect for the gadget. However, the GM should assume that the character recovers or replaces the device between adventures. If the character has an aspect for the gadget, the GM may, at his discretion, allow the player to invoke the gadget’s aspect to make a declaration that he’s recovered the device fortuitously during the course of play. Gadgets that are tied to aspects in this way become central to the character’s story and, as such, should never be taken away from the character for too long.

Personal gadgets can use improvements which require weird science. If the player does not have the Weird Science stunt, he must apply “Uses Weird Science” (at the cost of one improvement) before applying the weird improvements themselves (so a device may have two weird improvements for a total cost of three improvements).

Personal gadgets can also use improvements which require mad science, subject to much stronger GM scrutiny. If the player does not have the Mad Science stunt, he must apply “Uses Mad Science” (at the cost of two improvements) before applying mad science improvements.

## Universal Gadgets

Characters can also take unspecified gadgets as stunts. This is useful for characters who are likely to carry around a variety of gadgets and need to pull out just the right thing for the occasion. These sorts of gadgets are called universal gadgets (page XX).

When a character begins an adventure, his gadget doesn’t need to be defined. Instead, at the point where he decides he needs it, he reveals the device, which can have two improvements. If a character has multiple stunts, they can combine them to make one gadget with many improvements. Once the character has declared the gadget, he has it for the rest of the adventure.

If the character wishes to introduce something a little more dramatic, he may instead introduce a wonderful toy.

### Those Wonderful Toys: Gadgets as Effects

Sometimes a gadget is a “fast forward” button that, when used, effectively allows the characters to skip to the end of a scene, perhaps by being exactly the right thing to get past a lock, or releasing gas at just the right time to incapacitate the guards.

Instead of pulling out a device with improvements, an unspecified gadget can be used for a specific effect, which is usually enough to simply bypass any challenge, or at least radically redefine it. This is a one-shot effect, trading off a more potent effect for being able to use it only once. These effects are always subject to GM veto.

## Buying Gadgets Outright

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While the prices for normal items can be found elsewhere (see [page XX](#)), sometimes a particularly rich individual is interested in purchasing something a little bit more custom for himself. Buying an item with upgrades requires two things: finding someone willing to sell, and shelling out the cash.

The difficulty for finding a seller is a Contacting contest with a difficulty equal to the difficulty of improving the item. This will take one day, +1 day per upgrade. Shifts generated on the Contacting roll may be spent to reduce the timeframe as usual (four shifts make it just half an hour).

Once a seller has been found, the base price of the item is equal to the cost of the base item, +2 per upgrade.

Upgraded devices which are purchased have the same limitations as those built in the workshop, which is to say that they do not last between adventures.

## Some Sample Gadgets

### *Garrote Watch*

This classic for assassins is a wristwatch which includes a long cord that is drawn out at the nub. A stylish and deadly addition to one's wardrobe.

- Base cost: Average (Gentleman's Watch)
- Improvements:
  - Armed
- Item Quality/Cost: Fair

### *Wrist Communicator*

This sophisticated device is normally used to communicate over radio waves, but can be used to connect to almost any communication system, as well as jam communications.

- Base Cost: Average (Radio)
- Improvements:
  - Miniaturization: Radio kit now fits on the wrist
  - Special Effect: Jamming
  - Futurization: Having this "hack" is a bit far future, but quirky enough to be interesting
- Item Quality/Cost: Great

### *Belt-Buckle Grappling Hook*

A small hook and a length of thin but super-strong cord is exactly the sort of thing a gentleman might want to have on hand while falling out of a lady's 17th story balcony.

- Base Cost: Mediocre (Rope & Hook)
- Improvements:

Miniaturization

Upgrade: Concealable - +2 to difficulty to spot.

- Item Quality/Cost: Fair

### *Flash Bomb*

These ninja staples are great for throwing on the ground and making a fast exit. There's a flash of light and a cloud of black smoke (which improves Stealth, see [page XX](#))

- Base Cost: Mediocre (Regular Smoke Bomb)
- Improvements:

Additional Capability (works like in the movies)

Upgrade: Run away (+2 to stealth rolls as the character runs)

- Item Quality/Cost: Fair

## Artifacts

**Artifacts** are devices that work on different principals than traditional science. Artifacts use many of the same rules as gadgets, but with a few exceptions. Visually, artifacts are rarely subtle – they are covered in arcane runes and mystical carvings, and their use is definitely likely to raise eyebrows.

### Making and Improving Artifacts

The base quality of an artifact is at least Good, reflecting the strange and curious materials such things must be made from. An artifact may be upgraded with many of the same upgrades as gadgets, excepting *futurization* or *hair trigger*.

That said, there are a small number of upgrades that are only available for artifacts:

#### *Arcane*

This does not actually do anything, except it makes whatever else the artifact does into a magical effect. There are situations where this will be quite useful, such as when the GM throws in some zombies who can't be permanently killed without magic.

#### *Blessed*

The GM should consider what restrictions he puts on this – an artificer should also be a holy man of some sort, like a priest. This is very much like the Arcane modifier, except the things that respond to it may be a little different.

An artifact can use effects that would normally require Weird Science without an appropriate stunt, but it means that there is a potential complication. It may mean that Elder Things are tied into it, or it may have bizarre side effects. For example, the artifact version of “conscious” might mean the artifact has a quirky personality, or it might have the potential to become truly self aware and a danger to all those around it.

### Personal Artifacts and Rare Artifacts

Personal artifacts (page XX) function pretty much the same way as personal gadgets, and effectively use the same rules. However, artifacts can use weird science or mad science improvements without an appropriate stunt (and without the additional cost that's applied to gadgets), but such effects are subject to complications (see above).

Multiple personal artifact stunts can't be combined into the same artifact – for that, you need a rare artifact. Rare artifacts work like universal gadgets, in that they can be defined on the fly, but they have three improvements instead of two and a guarantee that they fall under the “potential complication” effect from above. This is reinforced by the idea that, when the character reveals a rare artifact, he may take a temporary aspect to represent the complication (see the Rare Artifact stunt on page XX for more).

## 8. Running the Game

In this chapter, we'll take a look under the hood, and see how to make use of skills from the GM's end of things. We'll also talk about general principles for setting difficulties and other common situations as a GM. Overall, the focus here is to provide the GM with extensive (perhaps, at times, too extensive!) guidance on how to make the dice-rolling stuff really work. Where needed, with each skill we cover, we look at each trapping (see [page XX](#)) in depth. We'll also look at other special uses for skills (which is why we put a section on poisons under the Endurance section, for example).

In the next chapter, we'll pull the camera back a bit from this tight focus, and look at overall strategies for GMing from an adventure design perspective. But for now, onward, to the nuts and bolts...

### Setting Difficulties

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Before you – the GM – call for a die roll, it is critically important that you stop and do two things:

1. Imagine Success
2. Imagine Failure

It sounds simple, but it can make a critical difference. Success is usually the easy part, but failure can be bit trickier. You want to make sure that both outcomes are interesting, though interesting certainly doesn't need to mean good.

If you cannot come up with a way to handle either outcome, you need to rethink the situation.

It's as simple as that, because there are few things more frustrating to a player than making a skill roll and getting told that it nets them no new knowledge, no suggested course of action, no new development for the story, and so on.

So, whenever you call for a roll, be absolutely certain you understand entails. If one or the other branch does not suggest a course of action, then calling for a roll is probably a bad idea.

Now, that said, every roll does not need to have high stakes. There should always be a consequence to failure, but there are degrees of consequence, and minor setbacks may be overcome for a larger success. If there is a large issue on the table, try not to have it hinge entirely on one roll – spread it out across the scene. Just as a roll has consequences, so does a scene, and the scene should have meaningful consequences.

The whole point of the consequences is to keep players engaged. It makes rolls into something a little more meaningful than hoping to get lucky on a die roll. That fact is the ultimate informer on how you want to set difficulties. The goal is to make any roll satisfying.

With that in mind, as a general guideline, difficulties should be set low (with a few exceptions we'll cover in this chapter). If you leave difficulties at the default of Mediocre (+0) then characters will almost always succeed, but there is still a chance for failure. What this means is that characters will rarely fail, but failure is still a possibility in most circumstances. You can increase difficulties from that, but always stop and think about why you want to do that. The answer should always be "because you want failure to be more likely" – hopefully because failure's cool too.

If you are tempted to make a roll so difficult that failure is likely, make sure you've got a solid reason why that's so, and why you're calling for a roll.

With difficulties set low, shifts ([page XX](#)) become critically important. When the question is not "will they succeed?" then it becomes "how (or how much) will they succeed?", and that means the number of shifts a character generates on a roll becomes the yardstick you can use to frame how something turns out.

| Effect   | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0 shifts | Minimal success – The character pulled it off. It's neither pretty nor graceful, but it works, at least for now.                                                                                                   |
| 1 shift  | Notable success – This is a clear-cut success. The character's result is solid, reliable, and while it may not be inspired, it is absolutely workmanlike.                                                          |
| 3 shifts | Significant success – The success is sufficient enough to be noticeably well done, and will be of fine quality, very reliable and so on. A significant or better success can be said to generate spin (see below). |
| 5 shifts | Potent success – Not only is the quality of the success remarkable, it may have some unexpected, secondary benefits, such as a deeper insight into a problem at hand.                                              |

The bottom line here is that every roll should be fun, whether it succeeds or fails.

## Spin

In the interests of repeating ourselves: In its broadest sense, spin is a special effect that occurs whenever a character scores a significant or better success (3 shifts or more). That special effect may simply be color – it may mean the character looked particularly cool, or is due some recognition for excellence. In some cases, as outlined in skills and elsewhere, gaining spin can result in an actual game effect. In combat, if a character gets spin on a defensive, he can add a +1 to the very next action that occurs (even if it's not his own). Other applications of spin, found throughout the text, will exist as well, but in general, it serves as an easy way of making note that a character has done particularly well on a roll. Whenever characters roll well enough to generate spin, it's time to sit up, pay attention, and spice up the details. See [page XX](#) for deeper details on the concept of spin.

## Setting Declaration Difficulties

Some skills (such as knowledge skills like Academics) may allow a player to make declarations. A declaration is typically a player-driven assertion that there is a particular aspect (determined by the player) on a particular target (an individual character, group, location, scene, or story). Broadly, declarations allow players to introduce facts into the setting and storyline. The difficulties for declarations should, honestly, be based on how interesting the proposed fact or aspect is. Ideas which would disrupt the game or are just unreasonable should simply be vetoed. These are the questions to ask yourself when determining difficulty:

1. Is the declaration interesting (or funny)?
2. Will the declaration have interesting consequences if it's acted upon but is wrong?
3. Does the declaration propose a specific and interesting or heroic course of action?

Each “no” adds 2 to the base difficulty of Mediocre. If the proposed fact is very amusing, proposes an interesting course of action and has interesting consequences if wrong (three “yes”-es), a Mediocre difficulty is appropriate. By contrast, a boring fact with a dull course of action and no possible consequences has a difficulty of Fantastic.

If your players haven't quite got a grasp of how much they can do with declarations, you will probably need to lower the difficulties to suit – but you should let them know what makes a declaration more likely to succeed.

## Setting Assessment Difficulties

Several skills (perception skills especially) may be used to make assessments. An assessment is an effort made by a character to discover one or more hidden aspects about a particular target (an individual, group, location, or scene). If the target of an assessment is a person or a group, the difficulty of the assessment is usually an opposed skill roll. Static entities like locations or objects typically have difficulties based on their quality. If there's no obvious way to determine the assessment difficulty, consider the baseline difficulty to be Mediocre.

| Target   | Difficulty                                                                                          |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Person   | Usually Rapport or Deceit (see skills).                                                             |
| Location | Quality of concealment (default Mediocre).                                                          |
| Group    | Usually Leadership of group's "Named" leader, otherwise, quality level of the minions in the group. |

At the GM's discretion, if a character gains spin ([page XX](#)) on an assessment roll, he may gain insight into a more potent fact, or one additional fact – potentially allowing good rolls to result in the revelation of two aspects.

## Time

When a character takes an action, it is expected to take a certain amount of time, ranging from a few moments to a few days. Sometimes characters need to take longer to do something or want to do something a little faster. When that happens, take a look at the chart on [page XX](#) and find how long the tasks should take.

Each shift the character generates that is put towards doing something fast makes the task one step faster.

|               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| Instant       | A few days   |
| A few moments | A week       |
| Half a minute | A few weeks  |
| A minute      | A month      |
| A few minutes | A few months |
| 15 minutes    | A season     |
| Half an hour  | Half a year  |
| An hour       | A year       |
| A few hours   | A few years  |
| An afternoon  | A decade     |
| A day         | A lifetime   |

## Taking Your Time

When a character fails a roll to perform a task that he reasonably should be able to do, the GM can simply rule that the task succeeds but takes longer than it normally would. For each step of additional time the character spends on the action, he gains a retroactive +1 on the roll, to a maximum of +4.

## Adjudicating Skills

All right. Here's where we roll up the sleeves, look at each skill on a case by case basis, and get our hands a bit greasy. As a fair warning, we will be repeating ourselves a bit here and there in the interests of making sure that when you flip to a particular skill, you've got most all you need to make a quick judgement call right there. Hang on tight...

## Academics

(Skill, [page XX](#), Stunts, [page XX](#))

When setting the difficulty for a research roll, the best yardstick is the obscurity of the knowledge sought.

Something with a Fantastic difficulty is probably only known by one or two people in the world. Superb difficulty is limited to the handful of leading experts. Great would equate to all the top men in the field, while Good and lower start getting into the common body of knowledge. Difficulties beyond Fantastic are appropriate for lost knowledge. Shifts on the roll should correspond to the depth of detail discovered.

### Declaring Minor Details [Academics]

For guidelines on setting difficulties for minor details, see "Setting Difficulties for Declarations", above on [page XX](#).

## Alertness

(Skill, [page XX](#), Stunts, [page XX](#))

For surprises and the like, Alertness rolls are usually contests, so difficulties are easy to determine.

Beyond that, Alertness rolls should generally have a very low difficulty, for several reasons. Most notably, if you have included something like a clue for someone to stumble across, you probably want it to be found.

Additionally, nothing makes players more paranoid than a call for an Alertness check from out of blue. For even the best groups, it can increase tension as they wonder what it is they missed. Therefore, such general calls for Alertness rolls should be used sparingly, and should only be used when you actually have something to tell people... even if they don't end up rolling well enough to discover it.

Consequently, if difficulties are set low, then characters will always see **something** – the trick is to make sure the outcomes are tiered, so that you have more information to give to the person who does well, but you still have something for the person who does poorly.

When you have multiple characters performing Alertness checks, provide the information to the person who did best first, then for each person down the line, tell them what they don't see. Doing it in this order lets the players get a clear picture, while making the limits of their characters' knowledge very clear.

If you want to simulate a confusing situation, one where it's difficult to see clearly what to do because of smoke, mirrors or simply too much activity, it's reasonable to say all actions will be restricted by Alertness (see [page XX](#)), imposing a -1 on all of a character's skills rated higher than his Alertness.

## Art

(Skill, [page XX](#), Stunts, [page XX](#))

### Art as Knowledge [Art]

When using Art for knowledge, the guidelines for Academics are sufficient (see the skill write-up on [page XX](#), and above for adjudication advice).

### Art as Craft [Art]

Art can normally be used to create something with no real problem, especially if the character is a virtuoso. The dice only need to come out when the character is trying to get a specific effect. The conflict rules can cover most of those situations, but in a pinch, the character may use Art in contest to an opponent's perception skill, as in forgery (see [page XX](#)).

### Art as Performance [Art]

When Art is used to put aspects on a scene, those aspects describe the mood of the scene, and as the GM, you should keep them in mind for more than just invocations and compels. For instance, if the mood of a scene is "somber" then you should take that as a cue for NPC behaviors, just like you'd describe a scene with a "dark" aspect as having things that are hard to see..

It's also worth remembering that the mood of a group offers a secondary opportunity for compels and other complications – if the mood of the room is somber, and a player fails to act in accordance with the mood, others will probably respond badly to them, rather the way people might respond to someone using their cell phone in a funeral.

Not every performance is going to put an aspect on a scene. To start out, the artist describes what aspect he's trying to put on the scene and how he's going to go about it. The difficulty for an adequate performance is Mediocre, but the difficulty for a performance that's good enough to shape the mood is starts two higher, at Fair. This difficulty may be further modified by other factors:

| Difficulty         | Notes                                                                                                                                                      | Mod. |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Adding to a mood   | If the room has an existing mood, adding an additional mood is a little harder.                                                                            | +1   |
| Changing a mood    | If the new mood is going to replace an existing mood (either by design, or because it's actively contradictory to the existing mood), it's more difficult. | +3   |
| Distractions       | A noisy room or other activities will make it hard to focus on the performance.                                                                            | +1   |
| Major Distractions | It takes active effort to pay attention to the performance, such as when the performer is in a large, active area with many distractions.                  | +3   |
| Total Distractions | There's no reason for anyone to be paying attention to the performance, such as on a battlefield.                                                          | +5   |

So, the baseline difficulty is Mediocre, and as long as the character beats that, the performance is technically adequate. The modifiers are applied to the performance that has an emotionally transportive quality. Essentially, the second difficulty indicates the number of shifts over Mediocre the artist needs to get in order to place an aspect on the room – starting with two shifts for a distraction-free, no-existing-mood-to-address performance.

### Satire and Eulogy [Art]

If the performance targets an individual, the base difficulty of the effort is the Contacting skill of the target being satirized. The target's Contacting skill is used to approximate the character's reputation and ability to mitigate the satire's impact. Treat this as an attack or maneuver as appropriate to the situation.

## Static Art [Art]

When we say “performance,” it mostly means an active artistic endeavor, such as a play or musical performance. In those situations, the skill roll is made at the time of the performance. Occasionally a more static art form, such as painting, can be used to impact a mood, but it requires an active display of the artist’s work, such as at an art show or a dramatic reveal at an estate’s ball. Here, the revelation and discovery of the art piece is where its maximum impact occurs, and in game terms, that’s where the effort is focused.

## Using Performances [Art]

Performances are a powerful way to set up a scene with an advantage for the artist (or his sponsor). Using an artist’s performance to lay down some scene aspects can be very powerful if a character is planning to play on those aspects in the subsequent scenes. Players who have invested in a high Art skill will expect to be able to do this on a semi-regular basis, and as a GM you should be ready for them to do so, and to succeed.

## Forgery [Art]

Difficulties for forgery should be set at Mediocre for something simple like a letter or a ditty, Good for something more involved like a painting or a novel, and Superb for something that will be challenging in its own right, like a symphony. Subtract 1 from the difficulty if there is an original on hand to work from. An appropriate Investigation or Art use would be used to oppose or otherwise detect the forgery.

## Athletics

(Skills [page XX](#); Stunts [page XX](#))

Because Athletics can be used for so many different physical activities, the GM needs to be especially aware of when she should and should not call for a roll. It’s very easy to think “That’s a wall; I should call for an Athletics roll to see if they can climb it,” forgetting that this is a bad idea unless you’ve got a good idea of how failure is going to be interesting. No skill should ever be rolled purely for its own sake, and Athletics is often in danger of being used without meaningful story impact.

Athletics can be used offensively in combat, but in strongly limited ways. Athletics should never be used to inflict stress, but it is often a reasonable skill for certain maneuvers. If the maneuver involves pushing around heavy things, Might (or Might modified by Athletics) will be more appropriate, but if it’s more about grace than power, Athletics is certainly a better match.

## Jumping [Athletics]

Jumping is, oddly, one of the most difficult things to adjudicate. Consider the classic situation of characters looking to jump over a bottomless pit – as GM, you want the scene to have some tension, but you don’t want anyone falling to their death because of dumb luck. Aspects and fate points can mitigate this to some extent, but this means you do not want to set the difficulty too high. Consider the difficulty you set to be the point where they barely make the jump and improve it by shifts. If you set the difficulty higher, but treat a failure as “barely making it” then your players will catch on, and the thrill will be gone. If, instead, you make the threat of failure smaller but more real, players will respond more strongly, and feel strong incentive to use aspects and fate points.

When not looking to introduce the chance of failure, simply avoid calling for a roll to clear the pit, and instead give it a high “border” value to increase the cost of crossing from one zone (the near side of the pit) to another (the far). Another softer approach is letting a failure be a realization that

the character just isn't up to the task – “You missed the roll by two? Well, it's clear to you that it's too far. You'll have to find another way around, or get someone to throw you a rope.”

That said, if it's only an apparently bottomless pit, and something interesting (rather than something lethal) happens to people who fail... let the dice roll!

### Climbing [Athletics]

Climbing is not quite as bad as jumping, but it can be quite boring. Unless you've got a really good reason why climbing needs a roll, just assume people get over the obstacle. If, however, the wall is virtually impossible to climb, that gives a character with appropriate stunts an opportunity to shine – absolutely a good time to call for a roll. Climbing difficulties are determined on two axes – first the base difficulty is determined by height. Climbs, like falls, are either Short, Medium, Long or Extreme, and they follow the same rules for height that falls do (see below, [page XX](#)).

| Mod. | Slipperiness      | Visibility      | Distractions                 |
|------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| +1   | Wet or slick      | Dark or Raining | Non-threatening interactions |
| +2   | Completely smooth | Pitch Black     | External dangers             |

These difficulties assume a fairly easy climb, a situation with many hand and footholds, like a fence. They are subsequently modified by circumstance. The three main factors affecting a claim are slipperiness, visibility and distractions. Each of these can increase the difficulty by 1 or 2.

| Height  | Base difficulty    |
|---------|--------------------|
| Short   | Mediocre (+0)      |
| Medium  | Fair (+2)          |
| Long    | Great (+4) [4]     |
| Extreme | Fantastic (+6) [4] |

[4] (1, 2) Climbs of this length are Athletics restricted by Endurance unless the character has the ability to rest occasionally

Given all these difficulties, certain climbs (like a glass skyscraper at night, while someone's shooting at you) are going to be too difficult even to try, so it's important for a climber to know his limits (or have stunts to exceed them).

Most of the time, you won't need to get into the nitty-gritty of a climb, since most climbs are either fairly simple (in which case, definitely consider why you're asking for a roll) or are of the “Impossible! No man could do such a thing!” variety. If you've got a character who has taken stunts to allow such climbing, remember to hook him in with opportunities to show his stuff.

Climbing should usually be binary – if the character can't do it, they usually figure that out near the bottom, so they succeed or they don't, rather than getting partway up, slipping, and falling. However, if you want to insert such a moment of tension, halfway up a wall is an excellent time to compel an aspect (environmental ones are good for this) and, if the player accepts, demand a new roll.

### Falling [Athletics]

A short fall is usually anything under 20 feet. It can hurt, but in heroic fiction, such falls are little more than inconveniences. A medium fall is more substantial, anything up to three or four stories. If the fall is more than that, but you can still see details on the ground (say, 10 stories), it's a long fall. Anything more than that is an extreme fall. By default, a short fall imposes minor consequence, a medium fall imposes moderate consequences, a long fall imposes severe consequences, and an

extreme fall hops right to taken out regardless of die rolls (unless stunts get involved). See the table below for a summary of these effects.

When a character falls, he should roll Athletics. If he fails to make a Mediocre (+0) difficulty, the fall is treated as one category worse than it is. If he beats a difficulty based on the length of the fall (as shown in the table below), he may treat the fall as one step shorter (so a long fall would become a medium fall and so on).

Extreme Falls (and falls in general) are more useful as a threat than a reality. The danger of a fight on top of a skyscraper is emphasized by the danger of falling, but the falling should never be central to the scene, unless you can think of a way to make it very cool.

| Fall    | Height                     | Base Difficulty                                                       | Consequence |
|---------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Short   | Up to 20ft                 | Fair (+2)                                                             | Minor       |
| Medium  | Up to 40ft                 | Great (+4)                                                            | Moderate    |
| Long    | Can see the ground clearly | Fantastic (+6)                                                        | Severe      |
| Extreme | Is that a house?           | Can't be attempted without "Safe Fall" stunt, <a href="#">page XX</a> | Taken Out   |

## Burglary

(Skill, [page XX](#); Stunts, [page XX](#))

### Casing [Burglary]

Casing can be treated as either an assessment or a declaration. Players may respond well to feeling that they have some ownership of the scene, so in general, if a player's willing to step up and declare something about the joint he's casing, you should not only let him, you should encourage it. If the player declares, see the "Setting Difficulties for Declarations" section, [page XX](#), for guidelines about setting difficulties for casing.

There's no guarantee that a player will do that, however. Sometimes you'll instead approach this as assessment – the player wants you to reveal an aspect to him if he rolls well enough. This is also fine, but the guidelines for difficulty are less responsive to the "interesting"-ness of the aspect to be revealed – you're the one coming up with it, after all, rather than the player. Since this will almost always give rise to a scene aspect that will be broadly available and have a significant impact on the shape of the coming scene, you should be looking for the character to score several shifts above a standard difficulty of Mediocre – so, all other things being equal, rolls of Good or better will reveal findable flaws, unless a strong effort has been made to conceal those flaws.

Both of these circumstances really only address a static target, where there is no strong, driving force behind the security effort. If a significant NPC is taking an active role in, say, patrolling or monitoring security at a location, the location has suddenly become much more difficult to burgle.

When this is the case, the casing effort may instead turn into Burglary (on the PC's part) vs. Burglary or Investigation (on the NPC's part) rolls – and the NPC may already be aware of the aspect knowledge he wants to keep out of the PC's hands. If this is the case, such contests may function an awful lot like someone trying to "read" another person, as with Empathy, only it's a building or other location here rather than a person. For an idea of how to handle such cat-and-mouse aspect revelations, see the sections on Empathy, Rapport, and Deceit both in Skills chapter and this one ([page XX](#), [page XX](#), [page XX](#), [page XX](#), [page XX](#), and [page XX](#)).

### Locks [Burglary]

Burglary will frequently see use in overcoming locks and other security measures. Most locks that a person runs into on a day to day basis are of only Mediocre difficulty, but more specialized locks are more difficult. As a rough guideline:

|                                        |           |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Front Door, Simple Padlock:</b>     | Mediocre  |
| <b>Quality Padlock, Office Door:</b>   | Average   |
| <b>Security Door:</b>                  | Fair      |
| <b>Prison Cell:</b>                    | Good      |
| <b>Safety Deposit Box, Cheap Safe:</b> | Great     |
| <b>Expensive Safe:</b>                 | Superb    |
| <b>Bank Vault:</b>                     | Fantastic |

Most locks require some sort of tools to open. For regular locks, this is some sort of pick, whereas safes and vaults require more specialized tools. These difficulties all assume investing a few minutes, if not longer, depending on the lock. If the character wishes to take less time, he must get additional shifts and adjust the timeframe according to the time table (page XX). If he lacks the proper tools, the difficulty is boosted by 2 at minimum. He must have some kind of tools to use, however; the job can't be done otherwise unless it's a very unusual lock indeed.

## Security [Burglary]

Security systems as a whole are just collections of smaller elements, like window locks, tripwires, alarm bells and so on. The quality of a security system (which determines its difficulty to assess or overcome) depends upon who was responsible for setting it up, and is based on either their Engineering or Burglary skill. The cost of a security system is equal to its quality. If a character is building a security system for himself, this cost is reduced by one (quality, of course, stays the same).

Most often a security system should be defeated (or not) in a single roll. Failing that roll should make the matter more complicated – increasing difficulty or revealing that there are multiple steps that must be taken in order to make the job even possible – if not outright setting off any security measures that the character was trying to circumvent.

If the scene is a big and important one, with a complex security set-up in order to allow a Burglary focused character to strut his stuff, the GM is encouraged to start things right at the “multiple steps” point. Such security systems may often be indicated by aspects on the scene, and a player trying to get around them may be trying to alter or otherwise remove those aspects from the scene. Alternately, the systems may have a stress track of their own, with the character's Burglary actions acting as “infiltration attacks” against the securities and failsafes.

## Contacting

The main difference between Contacting with and without stunts is the quality of the people you're going to deal with. Every organization that a character tries to get an inroad into with Contacting is going to have a certain amount of bureaucratic smokescreens in place. A character's reputation, without a stunt, can only get him so far. Thus, without an appropriate stunt, characters will end up contacting the lowest level functionary of the highest level of the organization – that is to say, its middle managers, sergeants and other mid-level folks, falling well short of the big cheese at the top ... unless the storyline's set up for such access. This isn't to say that a stuntless character can't eventually get there – just that it'll take more work, or at least money. In a vacuum, easy access to heads of state, generals, and capos are in the domain of stunts (though it might be bought with a little creative use of Resources).

Whenever it comes into play, Contacting is the GM's excuse to have a little bit of fun. Remember that information from Contacting always comes from a person. While the GM is not obliged to play out every Contacting roll, it's always an excuse to get a chance to play a brief scene with a colorful NPC – and players being what they are, if you make the NPC interesting enough, they'll want more of him. If you don't enjoy that, no problem, just hand over the information. But if you do enjoy it, here's your chance!

### **Gather Information [Contacting]**

When characters use Contacting to gather information, the information received should always suggest a clear course of action. A vague answer that is just going to call for more Contacting rolls is no fun for anyone.

### **Getting the Tip-Off [Contacting]**

Getting the Tip-Off is actually a bit of a dirty trick. It's a bonus to the player, but it also creates a hook to draw them in – no one is going to be indifferent to a warning of a threat against themselves. However, make sure that the information in the tip off is either very vague or very specific. If it's vague enough to serve as foreshadowing, it's unlikely to distract the character, but if there's any amount of detail, there's a good chance the player will concentrate on this tip-off as something they must do next. As such, the advice for gathering information also applies to tip-offs – if it's information that could be acted upon, the course of action should be obvious.

For example, if a hit man has been called in from Chicago to kill the character, an appropriately vague warning is "I heard you really got a hair up Mister Big's nose. You should watch out ." A decently specific tip-off is "Iceman Jenkins is in town, over at the southside motel! They say he's got a gang of guys and is here to whack you! You need to get outta town!" Something in the middle, like "There's a hitter in town, and he's after your head," is potentially problematic, because the player may well become obsessed with tracking down this hitter, rather than dealing with whatever else is afoot.

The Iceman Jenkins tip-off at least says "to deal with this, you can go to the southside motel right now!" whereas "there's a hitter in town" suggests that it's simply the first step in a longer investigation to discover the identity of the hitter and, if necessary, neutralize him. If it's your intention to kick off a potentially long investigation sub-plot, great – your tip-off is right what you want it to be. But if that's not your intention, you've created a wrinkle for yourself that you're going to burn some game time on smoothing out.

Regardless, you need to be sensitive, as with any kind of investigation, to making sure that the process you kick off with a tip is not simply a parade of frustrating dead ends. Tips should head somewhere!

As a rule of thumb, like Alertness, don't have the character roll for a tipoff unless you have something to tell the character. To do otherwise is just mean!

### **Rumors [Contacting]**

When a player plants a rumor, consider it a mental bookmark. Assuming anything but a terrible roll, that rumor should resurface later in the game. What form it takes depends on the player's roll.

**Mediocre** The rumor earns passing mention  
**or Average:**

**Fair or Good:** Other characters are passing around the rumor, even back to the original character

**Great or better:** The rumor has spread far enough that someone (presumably the target) will do something in response to it. Additional shifts above Great may

indicate that the rumor has spawned a number of alternate or embellished versions as well, all with the same thread running through them, or may be used to speed up the rate at which the rumor spreads.

## Deceit

People say you can't con an honest man, and there's a good reason for it. Even the most persuasive lie can only suggest a course of action, not compel one. At best, a lie can suggest that a given course of action is in the target's best interest, but even if that's convincing, some people still won't take the bait because it violates their convictions.

What this means is that you need to be very careful about adjudicating Taken Out results in social conflicts where Deceit is in play. Deceit should never create behavior that is at odds with the basic nature of the target – an honest man won't be tricked into stealing, for example, though he may be tricked into, say, holding stolen goods if he has no reason to think they're stolen.

When Deceit is most successful, the target is put in a position where his own nature forces the decision that the liar wanted him to make, much the same way the compulsion of an aspect does. An honest man won't steal, unless he feels he has to do so to protect something more important than his honesty. Part of the reason a character with a high Deceit is going to want a decent Empathy is to know what direction to spin things towards.

In any case, this is not a huge problem when Deceit is used on NPCs – though you should keep an eye out just to make sure the character doesn't use Deceit as poor man's mind control. But when players are taken out by a Deceit attack, it's important to remember that they may believe something false to be true now, but it should not change their essential nature.

## Disguise [Deceit]

Disguises generally hold up until the worst possible moment. The trick with dealing with disguises is less about when the opposition wins a roll, and more about when the opposition is going to get close enough to use Investigate. That's the trump card, and the way to play out tension in a scene with disguises is by making it clear such a roll could happen – and thus the question is whether or not it will.

## Cat and Mouse [Deceit]

In such a contest, the "reader" is effectively maneuvering (as he attempts to win an Empathy roll and pick up a piece of information) rather than attacking, but he is acting, so he does not get a full defense bonus. The deceiver is responding in kind with attacks and maneuvers as well, with the goal of planting false ideas on the reader. Usually, the opponent disengages after they've won the maneuver and gotten the information they want.

## Drive

First thing to remember: Cars of the pulp era are just not that fast compared to the cars of today (45 miles per hour is the blistering top speed of a Model T). You want to bear that in mind when players want to jump the crick or try a bootlegger reverse. Now, this is pulp, so feel free to play a little fast and loose with the physics of it, but just remember that the baseline is lower than in the modern era.

If racing a car against something other than a car, refer to the guidelines on [page XX](#).

## Chases [Drive]

Despite the caveat about speed, Drive mostly comes up in one important context: chases! Sure, sometimes there will be rolls against specific difficulties to get out of a burning building in time or

the like, but really, if a character has a substantial Drive skill, it's so he can come away as the winner of a car chase.

So here's the first rule of chases: they aren't about speed. Sure, in a straightaway, the faster vehicle wins, no question, but that should almost never happen. Car (or any other kind of vehicle) chases end when one party is no longer in the chase, usually because they've crashed violently (and possibly explosively).

Car chases play out like any other conflict, with one or two small differences. Vehicles have their own stress track (see Gadgets & Gizmos, [page XX](#)), but they do not "attack" each other as is normally the case in a conflict. Instead, they engage in a steadily escalating series of dangerous actions, until the lesser driver is weeded out.

At each exchange in a chase, the driver of the lead ("chased") vehicle calls out an action. Even if other things are happening at the same time as the chase, this action declaration is made first, regardless of initiative. The driver declares a difficulty of his choice, and describes what complicated and dangerous maneuver he's performing that this difficulty matches. He then makes a Drive roll against that difficulty.

If he succeeds, he pulls it off, but if he fails, it goes less well than planned – the car gets banged up some or slips out of control, and the car takes stress equal to the number of shifts the character missed the difficulty by (as if an opponent had rolled the difficulty as an attack).

Next, the driver of the pursuing vehicle (see below if there's more than one vehicle) rolls against the same difficulty. If successful, the car takes no stress and inflicts stress to the lead car according to the shifts on its roll as it manages to get close, slam bumpers, fire some shots, or otherwise make trouble.

Alternately, if the pursuer is not looking to damage the lead vehicle, he may roll for a maneuver. If he fails, his car takes stress as if the difficulty were an attack – poor driving or overzealousness has had him sideswipe a vegetable stand, or rip up his tires on a tight turn.

Eventually one party or the other will be taken out, and that should pretty well handle that – if the chased vehicle's still in motion, an escape; if a pursuing vehicle's in play, capture!

### **Multiple Vehicles [Drive]**

Now, this is all well and good for when one car is chasing another, but chases are usually a lot more crazy than that – it's a lucky hero who is only pursued by only one vehicle! Usually, if one car goes down, another one is in its place, and villains are famous for having guys with grenades on just the right rooftop as the hero tries to get away.

Multiple vehicle chases usually use the minion rules (see [page XX](#)), with each car equating to a minion, and all of the pursuers acting as a single unit making a single roll. If there's a named pursuer with a handful of unnamed companions, the minion vehicles attach to the named leader normally.

However, if there are a lot of cars – say you have a named pursuer who has 10 minions – it's a little hard (and anticlimactic) to have all of the vehicles on the field at once. When you look at movies and the like, the usual pattern is that a few cars show up in pursuit, they crash, and new cars come in to take their place, and this process repeats until there are no more reinforcements.

With that in mind, when you want to play out a more extended chase that has this kind of pacing, the Chase Scene rules become appropriate.

### **Chase Scenes [Drive]**

Chase scenes occur when the players are being pursued by a large enemy force. In a chase scene, the named pursuer stays out of the chase, at least initially. Over the course of the chase, the

pursuing minions come at the player sequentially, with a new minion coming in as a prior one is taken out. This continues for the duration of the chase until the pursuer is out of minions, at which point, he enters the fray and the chase is then resolved normally.

Because the pursuer is not on the field, the minions never attach, so they use their own skill, which is often to the fleeing character's benefit. In return for this, the pursuing villain is given a few tricks to balance the scales. (Players, being heroes, don't use these rules, since they are potent individuals of action, rather than masterminds working through lackeys.)

At the beginning of a scene, the GM-controlled pursuer is given a certain number of points, which represent the total value of the pursuit. Five points makes for a very short chase, 10 for a one meant to be a major feature of this section of the story, and 20 can make for a chase scene that will take up a goodly portion of the session, as a climax to the action.

The baseline use of this value is to determine how many minions the pursuing character has. Each minion costs a number of points based on its value (1 for Average, 2 for Fair, 3 for Good). At the start of the chase, the pursuer can spend as many points as he wants (up to the total value of the pursuit) in order to buy minions. He can choose to have all of these minions go after the characters now, or he can hold some of them in reserve (in which case the reserve vehicles will enter the chase one by one, as individual minions are taken out). Also, at any time there are no pursuing vehicles (i.e., all the minions that he's bought have been taken out), he can spend points to add a single additional pursuing vehicle, which immediately enters the chase. More importantly, the pursuer may also spend 1 point per exchange for any of the following effects:

### *Reinforcements*

Allows the pursuing character to add multiple cars at once. By spending one point, he may spend additional points up to half his remaining total on purchasing additional cars, which are immediately added to the field. These vehicles must all be of the same quality as the car already in play and each other. Adding extra vehicles allows them to get the bonus for being in a group, but has the drawback that overflow damage will roll onto the next vehicle as it does for minions (this does not happen when there is only one pursuing vehicle).

### *Road Hazard*

The pursuers have managed to get someone ahead of the lead car and may launch an attack against the lead car, using the villain's Drive (or Pilot, when appropriate) skill as the attack value. Other pursuing vehicles do not need to defend against this attack, since in theory, at least, they're aware that the hazard is forthcoming. This is one of main tools the villain may use to offset the loss of not involving himself directly.

### *Shotgun!*

One of the pursuing vehicles has someone with a gun in the passenger seat, and the addition of bullets into the mix makes things all the more dangerous. Any time the lead car takes stress, it's increased by one as long as this guy is shooting. The guy with the gun can be removed when that car is taken out (reinforcements do not have a gun unless points are spent for it).

### *The Last Pursuer*

If the pursuing villain is not going to join the fight himself, he can try to end the chase with one last, tougher-than-usual vehicle. This is the last ability the pursuer can use, and costs all his remaining points (minimum of 1). If the Last Pursuer is used, the villain himself cannot subsequently join the chase.

The last pursuer is always more impressive than the previous vehicles. Perhaps it's big and armored, sleek and black, or maybe it's something completely unexpected, like a biplane. It is always treated as a Good Minion, with one extra box of capacity for each point spent beyond the minimum.

It also has one other benefit from this list:

- +3 Stress Boxes
- +1 to Drive Rolls
- Armed – Always treated as having the Shotgun! Effect.
- 1 point of armor (see Gadgets and Gizmos, page XX)
- Alternate Movement – the pursuer can move in ways the lead vehicle can't (such as flying, or water). Mechanically, this means that the pursuing car can opt to avoid almost any hazard, treating it as if the pursuer automatically succeeded at the roll, but inflicting no stress on the pursuer for doing so. The pursuer is only obliged to roll if the lead car can come up with a maneuver that forces the pursuer to respond.

### *Dramatic Entrance*

This is the moment when the named pursuer reveals himself, and begins the end of the chase. If the GM has used "The Last Pursuer" already, this option is off the table. This costs all the the pursuer's remaining points (minimum 1) and triggers a Road Hazard for the fleeing vehicle, as the pursuer appears in a colorful and hopefully hazardous way. The stats of the pursuer's vehicle depend on the pursuer, and if he does not have a signature vehicle, he may use the same rules as The Last Pursuer, above, replacing the minion quality with his own skill.

Once the pursuer is out of points *and* there are no pursuing vehicles left, the fleeing vehicle finally escapes.

### **Passengers [Drive]**

Each exchange, one PC or named NPC passenger may assist the driver, provided he has the means to do so. This allows him to contribute to the chase, as long as he finds a way to describe it, be it shooting at the pursuers (Guns), pushing a crate out the back (Might), or just shouting "look out!" when dramatically appropriate (Alertness). The passenger rolls his skill while the driver rolls his Drive as usual, and the driver may use the higher of the two results. (The only limit on this is that the same passenger may not help two exchanges in a row .) Note that this is a single result, not two – for instance, a passenger who is shooting does not get normal attack results, just the ability to let the driver choose between two rolls. This said, by dint of being passengers in the same vehicle, all characters – even those not able to roll in that exchange – may offer to spend fate points out of their own pool on behalf of the driver, so long as they supply a bit of color dialogue, e.g., "Alleyway ahead!"

Furthermore, there's nothing saying that characters along for the ride can't be doing other things that don't contribute directly to the chase. While they can only act against the pursuers by partnering with the driver as described above, there's nothing to say that your car chase can't feature the Academics guy in the back seat furiously trying to read through the book the heroes just stole from the villain's lair... just in case the guy's minions catch up with them and the book returns to its owner.

The reason for these rules are twofold. First, if all the passengers were engaging in full participation at the same time, the chase would finish very quickly and would almost certainly be less interesting. But second and perhaps more important, by focusing the chase experience around the person in the driver's seat, the driver's shtick of being good at driving gets backed up. Chases are uncommon

enough that, when the opportunity to shine comes up, the driver should most certainly get the spotlight.

## Empathy

### Reading People [Empathy]

Knowing someone's aspects is a powerful tool, both because it allows that person to tag them, and because it gives potent insight into the target's nature. It's critical to remember that a character's aspects are not necessarily public knowledge. While a scenario may call for compelling a character's aspects, NPCs should not be planning for that aspect unless they have some reason to have found it out, either because the player showcases it, or because they've successfully used Empathy on the character.

When you decide which NPC aspects Empathy reveals to a player, there are two possible yardsticks. The first is showcasing those aspects you feel are closest to who the NPC really is. The second is showcasing the ones you think would be most entertaining if the player found out about. If neither of those yardsticks work, pick the one closest to the top of the list; it's probably reflective of what you thought was most essential at the time.

## Endurance

To handle a scene where you feel fatigue should be an issue, use Endurance to limit the primary skill (similar to the use of Alertness and Resolve).

### Poisons [Endurance]

Poisons are an interesting case, and one that bears some discussion, since they fall into a few categories which in turn follow a few rules.

Poisons have a potency and a subtlety, both rated on the adjective ladder. The potency determines how hard it is to resist using Endurance (see below) and the subtlety is the difficulty for any Alertness, Investigation or Science rolls to detect or analyze it – either to prevent exposure, or to determine the cause of someone's sudden ailment. Poisons also need to have a means of application, such either as food, gas or injection.

First, we have damaging poisons. Damage is used loosely here, as it may be lethal or it may mean knockout drugs or any number of other things.

Damaging poisons are often fast-acting, found on the blades of enemies and tips of blowgun darts. When such a poison is introduced into the system, it makes an attack (at its level of potency – Mediocre for a mild poison, Superb for something very potent) against the target's Endurance.

This attack occurs before the first initiative of an exchange. This attack repeats every exchange until the end of the scene (at which point the poison has run its course) or until the character somehow stops the poison, such as with a stunt or medical treatment (or even something as mundane as inducing vomiting when appropriate). Many such poisons may stop if the player acquires spin on his defending Endurance roll (beating the attack by 3 or more).

Some damaging poisons are slow acting and kill over a much longer period of time, but those are often more appropriate for background than showing up directly in play. If you are looking to introduce a slower-acting poison, rather than treating it as a standard attack, make a roll once per scene against the victim's Endurance roll. If the poison's roll beats the Endurance roll by 3 or more, then the victim acquires a consequence. Regardless of severity, these consequences do not disappear until after the poison is cured. After three such rolls, escalating from minor to moderate to severe, the fourth will leave the victim succumbing, with a taken out result. Alas, with poisons, there are no concessions!

Next, we have exotic drugs. Rather than damaging their target, they put one or more additional aspects directly on them (as with a maneuver rather than an attack). Their potency is the value which the subject rolls their Endurance against in a simple test. If the subject wins, the symptoms are passing, but if he loses, he immediately gains the aspects as described in the poison. The duration of these effects depends upon the poison. This approach is specifically different from a slow-acting damaging poison, as these aspects are not consequences, and thus do not push the character closer to taken out.

Lastly, we have special poisons. These are the poisons that violate the rules in some way and tend to either leave a beloved NPC in a coma, needing a very exotic cure, or will kill the person who has been exposed in a fixed period of time so they must race to find the antidote. Alternately, they may have killed someone in a very peculiar way and may prove the only clue to the killer's location.

In short, these are poisons that serve no purpose but to motivate the plot. That's OK! Pulp can tolerate a little bit of cliché, but try to keep their use to a minimum unless absolutely necessary.

## Engineering

Most of the guidelines for Engineering can be found in the Gadgets and Gizmos chapter, [page XX](#). For explosives, jump to the end of this chapter, [page XX](#).

Engineering requires a workshop, the same way Academics requires a Library and Science requires a Lab. While Engineering can have very potent effects, it's fairly time-consuming to work something up in game time. Frequently, a gadgeteer character will have multiple ranks of the Universal Gadget stunt to help speed this process along. If the character does not have enough improvements from stunts to buy a gadget outright, he can use the stunt's improvements to reduce the time required.

For example, a device with 3 improvements usually requires 24 hours to make. If the engineer uses his Universal Gadget stunt's two improvements to cover part of those improvements, the gadget will only take 8 hours to build (see [page XX](#) for more on the gadget improvement process and timeframes). Engineering improvements do not last from session to session, so if a player wants to start play with a gadget, he should buy a stunt to reflect it. With that in mind, you should not be giving players the opportunity to engineer for its own sake. If the pacing of the game is giving everyone time to stop by the workshop for a few days to upgrade their guns, that is a sign that you badly need to increase the urgency of the threat facing the players. Pulp gadgetry is done under the gun, with the clock ticking down to a dire midnight (see "Keeping it Pulpy", [page XX](#)).

For devices that have stress tracks, the difficulty of repair is the quality of the device. Removing stress or a mild consequence takes a few hours, a day for a moderate consequence, and a week for a severe consequence. For devices that don't have stress tracks, the difficulty is based off the highest value of the device, or its resources cost, whichever is higher.

Failure on a repair roll can be made up in a few ways, retroactively. First, each additional step longer on the time chart ([page XX](#)) gives a retroactive +1 to the player's roll, up to a maximum of +4 for four steps on the table. Second, the device can be repaired on the usual timeframe, but, the quality drops by one for every point shy of the target. Both methods may be combined; a character can get a retroactive +3 to take two steps longer and drop the quality of the item by one. Degradation in item quality may mean that some of its special abilities are lost, if it has any. Subsequent efforts may be made to restore the item to its original quality, but those face a difficulty equal to the target quality, plus one for every two steps the current quality is below the target. Missing a restoration roll can only be made up by investing time, and the starting length of time on such efforts is usually a week.

If the GM agrees to it, a player may make a partial repair when falling just short of the target. In these cases, the consequence on the device being repaired is downgraded in severity, rather than

being entirely removed. If the character misses the roll by one, he may opt to downgrade the consequence, regardless of its severity, to a mild one. If the character misses the roll by two, he may opt to downgrade the consequence one step, taking severe to moderate and moderate to mild. If the consequence is mild in any of these cases, it is removed, but the device's stress boxes are all filled to the point of one shy of "taken out".

## Fists

Most of the issues with Fists come up in combat and are addressed there (page XX). One thing to bear in mind with Fists (and Weapons and Guns, for that matter) is that they are balanced on the level of the skills rather than the situation. That means that the system is designed based on the assumption that a fight between a character with Fists and a character with Weapons is a fair fight because the Fists guy always has a "weapon" but can do little to extend its capabilities, while the Weapons guy may be at an advantage or disadvantage due to his choice of, and dependency upon, a weapon.

This can be jarring for some people, because it means that we are not giving a bonus to the weapons guy for having "superior weaponry" or the like. The reasoning is simple enough – the fight is about the people involved, not the trappings – but this can be a problem when the weapons should give some obvious advantage, like reach.

In those situations, there are two ways to go. First, in the small set of situations where the guy with Fists shouldn't be able to attack, then don't let him. As an example, if there's a chain link fence between the combatants, and the guy with a weapon is jabbing his spear through, the Fists guy just isn't going to be able to counterattack, simple as that (though he may defend). These should be obvious, common sense solutions, and if they're not, then consider the second option.

The second option is more appropriate when there seems like there could be some disparity, such as when the character's weapon provides an advantage of reach which should help out. In those situations, it falls on the head of the disadvantaged fighter to describe the actions in such a way that it acknowledges the disparity. As long as he does so, there is no penalty. If he fails to do so, it may be appropriate to impose a -1 penalty on his actions until a plan for counteracting the disadvantage is done. This plan need not involve anything more complicated than a free action and a bit of color description, but sometimes, it may require something more than a free action.

Effectively, this is just mandating color, but it saves a lot of headaches. Players may respond well to bare-fisted characters starting a fight out with a brief penalty, even if it's one that's easily discarded, so don't be afraid of feeling like an ogre for penalizing them out the door – just be ready and willing to penalize your own fist-swinging NPCs similarly!

And if you really want to make a point of weapon advantage, bring a little back and forth into it – maybe the Fists user is describing ways to deal with the presence of a weapon, but the Weapons user gets to reassert the penalty on a subsequent exchange by using his weapon in a new and unexpected way. Mix it up a little!

## Gambling

(Skill, page XX; Stunts, page XX)

If a player has bothered to put Gambling anywhere on his character sheet, he's casting a vote for gambling to be a factor in your games where he's playing. Make sure to keep that in mind, and always have in the back of your head an idea for a cool gambling vignette that ties into your storyline!

In practice, Gambling requires striking a balance between cool scenes and boring play. The moment that matters in a gambling scene is the last one, when everything is on the line and the last card gets turned over. Compared to that, playing out each hand of cards can be numbingly boring.

It's possible to play out a gambling contest as an extended social conflict, but there are only limited circumstances where that's appropriate. Instead, Gambling scenes should usually be picked up in medias res. Give a quick rundown of who's at the table, making sure to include their body language, before picking up with the gambler character and the fall of the dice. If the character beats the quality of the game (equivalent to the Resources value of what's staked), he walks out with the pot. If issue that brought the character to the game is a vital one, this may be too quick a shorthand – or, at the least, you should be ready for a lot of aspect use to hit the table.

Once won, the pot allows the character to make a single Resources check using the pot's value rather than his Resources skill – assuming the pot is something as mundane as cash or easily-liquidated items of little importance otherwise. Under more exotic circumstances, such as a high stakes game, the pot may contain all manner of unusual things – maybe giving the character a temporary gadget for the session, or kicking off an entire storyline on its own. (More on that shortly.)

If the character loses a game and doesn't have the Resources to cover the pot, he'll have to go into debt. Make a note of the debt on the character sheet. This is not that big a problem for most games, not even significant enough to merit a temporary aspect – the character simply can't get into another game until it's paid off. Or rather, he can still get in, but it requires beating the quality of the game with his Deceit skill to try to sneak in passing as someone else.

If the game is high stakes (where the pot is two ranks higher than the game's quality) then things get more interesting. If the character wins a high stakes game, the pot should include at least one odd thing, like a mysterious artifact, someone's wedding ring, a writ for someone's soul, the services of a bondsman, an ancient sword, a life debt, and so on. For games of a Good or lower quality, this item is usually just a curiosity, but for Great or better games, this item is important enough that the player takes it as a temporary aspect, and it remains on his sheet until he resolves it, usually because you will use the item as a hook for one of his upcoming adventures. A character may only have one such aspect at a time, so until it's resolved, high stakes wins are only worth the pot.

If a character *loses* a high stakes game, that may be very bad indeed. He marks down the debt as a temporary aspect, but his problems are not limited to money. His debt will usually be picked up by someone important who will demand a favor or some other payment to resolve the debt. Until that happens, everyone knows the character owes someone big, and he will not be welcome at high stakes games.

## Guns

(Skill, [page XX](#); Stunts, [page XX](#))

It's worth noting that the main advantage of guns in this game is that they offer a range advantage; despite their lethality, they're no more dangerous in a fight than fists, knives, chains or anything else. This is a genre decision – making guns more lethal quickly moves things away from pulp and into noir, which is not bad, but not the goal of this game. The advice under Fists ([page XX](#)) for handling mismatches in weaponry applies to Guns as well.

### Ammunition [Guns]

One thing that inevitably comes up when dealing with guns is how many shots one has left. Thing is, aside from tracking how much clip capacity every type of gun has, counting bullets is just not a valid approach, because a character may actually fire off their weapon many times in a given exchange, with the outcome summarized in one roll. To a great extent, reloading is considered to be just part of the flow of a fight and the use of the Guns skill.

With that in mind, running out of ammunition is something that only happens when it's dramatic and interesting, which is to say, when it's something appropriate for the application of aspects. Running out of ammunition is a legitimate compel for a character with gun-related aspects, but even more, it's an excellent first consequence or concession, or the possible result of a maneuver (such as using Athletics to run all over the place, drawing fire and getting the bad guys to expend their ammunition).

Shy of this, if you want the flavor of a reload without the drama, simply be reasonable and request that the character take a supplemental action (basically, a -1 to his next roll) to reload after every three or four exchanges of sustained gunfire.

## Intimidation

Intimidation requires a reason for fear, however tenuous. This makes it hard to intimidate someone over the telephone unless you have something very specific to threaten them with. This is the most important thing to bear in mind when deciding how vulnerable an NPC is to Intimidation or how intimidating an NPC is. Without a reason for fear, Intimidation will produce, at best, annoyance, and at worst, explosive anger. Then again, that can be a goal for its use too... Regardless of whether or not there is a reason for fear, a potent success on an Intimidation roll should produce a strong emotional response – just not, necessarily, one that was intended, nor that is controlled.

## Investigation

As with Alertness (page XX), when in doubt, set the difficulties low. You never want to derail your own game because players failed to find a clue at the crime scene. It may seem like it makes life less interesting if there is no challenge in the Investigation roll, but this is one of those odd situations where that is not the case. A lack of information is clearly frustrating to players, and if you have a player who really savors the challenge of figuring out clues, the challenge is usually less in finding the clues than in figuring out what they mean once they're found. And there's the rub: clues don't come with explanations baked right in. Position your mystery in the clues they find, not in the clues they don't.

Remember, unless there's something actually there for them to find, don't make them roll. You'll have a much healthier game if you just say, "Nah, don't roll – after a bit of searching it's clear there's nothing here," and get moving on to the next eventful thing. Don't give your players the opportunity to "waste" a really good Investigation roll on finding out that there's nothing to find out!

In general, characters will use Investigation in two possible ways. Either they will be searching an area for whatever they can find (such as when searching for a clue) or they will be looking for something specific. When searching for something specific, the difficulty of the Investigation roll should be kept at Mediocre, with the shifts on the result being used as a yardstick for how long it takes to find the thing.

The only exception to this is if you (the GM) have a reason the thing in question shouldn't be found. In those situations, it's often better to just make the thing unfindable due to a critical missing piece that would "unlock" access to the otherwise unfindable objective (if so, don't make them roll; instead, put them on the path to discovering what that missing piece is). This missing piece could be equipment, like X-Ray specs, or the utterance of a certain codeword, like "Open Sesame", or something else entirely. Once that piece is in place, the difficulty should drop back to the usual level. And remember, if there's no chance of success, here, don't make the players roll for it – that's just rude.

If characters are just searching an area for clues, the guidelines for Alertness very strongly apply. Set the base difficulty at Mediocre, and make sure that players can find *something*. Once characters

find things, the burden is on you to make sure that whatever they find suggests a course of action. Even a red herring should suggest something, sending the characters into a situation that deepens or complicates the plot. The good news is that if players know what they're looking for, they usually already have a pretty good idea of what they're going to do with whatever they find. For clues that you provide, you're going to have to put some thought into what comes next.

One of the tricky things about clues is how much to explain when you give one. If you give a piece of information that seems like it suggests a clear direction, but your players don't seem to see it, there's a temptation to explain the significance of the clue to the players to push them in the right direction. This may do in an absolute pinch, but it's an easy way to frustrate players – it can feel like you're leading them around by the nose, and that breaks the feeling of heroism you're striving to create, because it undermines their role as protagonists.

If the players are talking about what the clue might mean, or have some other direction to pursue, don't sweat it for the time being. If they're working on it, and they're interested in it, then all is well in the world. Similarly, if they're pursuing something else, they're busy, and it gives you time to drop in new hints. It's only if things look like they're in danger of slowing down should you resort to interpreting things for the players. The exception is when a player explicitly asks you something like "What does this mean?" or "What would I know about this?" When that happens, it's an opportunity to be as forthcoming as you feel you need to.

Investigation can be used, in a somewhat more radical application, as the skill to put some control of the story into the players' hands. Consider the "Declaring Minor Details" trapping of Academics – a declaration action – as it might apply to Investigation. If your group's up for it, why not allow the same sort of trapping for Investigation? This would allow your investigators to make Sherlock Holmes-like declarations, asserting minor details about a crime scene, say, and backing up the truth of their assertions with a successful Investigation roll. Sure, this may mean that you've lost some control over the storyline yourself, but if you're up to facing this sort of challenge, the effect on your players could be electrifying.

There are occasions when a clue *should* be frustrating – for the characters. This shouldn't happen often, and usually only very early in a session. Such clues should always make sense later on in the adventure; otherwise, they're just frustrating. The best such clue should be designed so players go "Ah!" and may be even better when paired with other, more explicit clues that suggest action. For more on clues and information management in a game, see [page XX](#).

## Leadership

Players may have a little bit of this skill for the bureaucracy parts, and maybe the occasional act of battlefield leadership, but this skill is more of a villain thing. Why? Villains have minions, simple as that.

Taking a lot of leadership tends to indicate that the player is most interested in being in charge of something, and while that should be encouraged to a certain point, this can be a red flag if the player is too disinclined to get his own hands dirty. A character who is a mastermind who directs things from the shadows makes for an interesting story, but is fairly dull to play. Make sure the player doesn't have an expectation of not getting involved. If he seems overly attached to the idea, see if he's willing to consider making a character who works for this guy in the shadows, and then take *him* as an aspect.

### Command [Leadership]

This is a villain trick. It lets you make villains who don't have much combat skill themselves, but who can still help out their minions in a fight.

Assuming a villain has Good minions attached to himself, if his combat skill is better than Good, then he'll usually be attached to those minions and rolling his own skill. Characters with a high Leadership, on the other hand, can get by without any combat skills because they can make a small quantity of Good minions into Superb (+1 for numbers, +1 for command) combatants, which is very potent.

A hero can do all of these things too, but in such situations the word "hero" is pronounced "chicken".

## Might

Might is a pretty simple skill to use, and it should be remembered that it is a fairly flashy skill – explosions of physical force can be as dramatic and interesting as any other kind of action. If someone has put Might on their sheet, make certain he faces the occasional heavy obstacle to bull through with naught but his strength!

### Breaking Things [Might]

Given time and tools, pretty much anything can be broken. In general there are two ways to break something: methodical and abrupt.

To break something methodically generally requires no rolling. Given time and tools, you can eventually break anything. How long it will take is mostly just a matter of common sense, ranging from a few moments to saw a board, to decades to scratch through a door with a spoon. This is usually done off-screen, and a Might (or Engineering roll) might do to get a sense for how well or quickly the job is done, but if no one is interrupting or otherwise involved, it will work sooner or later.

If it's necessary to break up a methodical roll into something measurable, you may call for a number of rolls and tally shifts to get a sense of progress, but that is ultimately more a narrative convenience than a real measure of difficulty. In short, if you want to interrupt a methodical effort with things like enemy attacks, you can certainly call for a roll between each interruption, but make sure you know what those rolls mean. If they aren't actually going to affect the speed of the progress, then you're just rolling to maintain pacing. There's nothing wrong with that (see "Testing the Breeze", [page XX](#)), but it's important to remember why you're doing it.

Breaking something abruptly is more dramatic – knocking down a door, splitting a board with one's hands, bending iron bars and so on. That's just a quick roll against a difficulty based upon the target's nature. Having an appropriate tool (like a hammer, crowbar, or axe) may reduce the difficulty by up to two.

**Mediocre:** Paper or glass. Why are you rolling this?

**Average:** Flimsy wood. Again, why are you rolling?

**Fair:** Cheap wood broken with the grain; bamboo.

**Good:** Non-reinforced wooden board, like a pine two-by-four, or an interior door.

**Great:** Strong wood, hardwood boards, exterior door.

**Superb:** Reinforced wood, heavy door.

**Fantastic:** Security door.

**Epic:** Bending prison bars (an inch or two).

**Legendary:** Bank vault door, the door of a safe.

In case you're curious, outright ripping the door off a jail cell is Legendary +2, and ripping the hatch off a tank is Legendary +4.

Characters can try (and fail) to break something twice without penalty; after two tries, the difficulty goes up by 1 for each additional time they try.

### Lifting Things [Might]

Characters have a default amount of weight they can lift and still do something with that weight (like moving slowly, or trying to place it carefully), shown on this page in pounds. If purely lifting without moving – like, say, a heavy portcullis so others can scurry through – they can roughly double that capacity. For things like knockback (page XX), the weight factor (WF) is figured as shown in the table.

Might Lifting Table

| Might     | Capacity            | WF   |
|-----------|---------------------|------|
| Abysmal   | 10                  | 0    |
| Terrible  | 50                  | 1    |
| Poor      | 100                 | 1    |
| Mediocre  | Small man (~150lbs) | 2    |
| Average   | 200                 | 2    |
| Fair      | 250                 | 3    |
| Good      | 300                 | 3    |
| Great     | 350                 | 4    |
| Superb    | 400                 | 4    |
| Fantastic | 450                 | 5    |
| Epic      | 500                 | 5    |
| Legendary | 600                 | 6    |
| Each +1   | +100                | +0.5 |

A character can try to push themselves into the next category, which requires a Might roll against his own Might skill as the target difficulty, and if successful (the dice don't come up negative), he may perform a single Might action at the next category up. Appropriate use of tools can increase this capacity, using anything from a lever (which may grant a bonus) to a pulley system (which may outright multiply capacity).

This may seem like a number-heavy approach in what has otherwise been a fairly abstract system, but the reason for this is pretty simple. People are used to thinking in terms of weight when talking about how heavy something is, and they have certain expectations that the 90 pound weakling is not going to have “a good roll” and carry more than the trained power-lifter.

The exception to this is the famous idea of a mother's pulling a car off her child – people are known to perform heroic acts of strength when there is a need, and as this is a heroic game, it is only appropriate that we support that.

The trick in those situations lies in the fact that the line between Lift and Break is sometimes fuzzy. If someone is trapped under rubble and you want to get it off them, if you do it carefully, that's an appropriate use of lift. If it's a moment of panic, ripping aside something heavy to free a loved one, well, then the guidelines for breaking things are more appropriate, and the amount the character can remove (lift) is based off their roll. While this may seem like a tricky distinction, it's actually very

easy to distinguish in play. When in doubt, look and see if the character has any personal aspects that might apply. If so, then this may be a moment of passion.

### **Pitching In [Might]**

Many hands make light work, and for lifting things, it's a simple matter of adding each person's capacity to figure out the total pounds the group can lift. For abruptly breaking things, gain an additional +1 to the roll for each person helping who can practically pitch in. This is usually one or two people.

### **Encumbrance [Might]**

This is not a game where we're going to make characters empty out their pockets to figure out exactly how much they are carrying. For the most part, day to day equipment and clothing is just not an issue. From time to time, however, a character may need to perform an action while carrying a large amount of weight, like a bomb that's ticking down or a wounded buddy slung over their shoulder.

A character can easily carry something that is 4 steps lower than their lifting capacity without a problem. Now, remember common sense applies – just because Dan Dynamite can run at full tilt while carrying 100 pounds of TNT doesn't mean he can do so all day. Trying to do so for more than a scene calls for an Endurance roll against the weight of the load, and additional rolls each subsequent scene, with the difficulty going up by 1 each time!

For each step heavier than this carrying capacity, the character takes a -1 on all other physical action, up to a maximum of -4 (-5 if they're really pushing themselves). This may also lead the GM to demand that the character start performing all skill rolls limited by his Endurance skill.

## **Mysteries**

This is an odd skill, and if a player chooses it for his character, it is a vote for a little bit of weirdness in the game. While pulp (and this game) is strongly rooted in early 20th Century science fiction, Mysteries occupies that fuzzy fringe where things that look supernatural live, even if they have explanations that sound scientific. Psychic phenomena of various stripes have been the subject of serious scientific study over the years, and in a pulp game, Mysteries is the skill focused on such study. The importance of Mysteries is going to depend a lot on the tone of your game – Mysteries has a strong presence in games influenced by *The Shadow* or the writings of H.P. Lovecraft, but much less so in a game of science heroes.

When a player decides to invest heavily in Mysteries, make sure to sit down and talk to him a little bit about what his expectation for the ability is – while one player may want to play the man of mysteries, cloaked in shadows, another may want to play the academic or scientific crackpot, using Mysteries to explain their bogus theories. Most importantly, make sure that Mysteries is going to be a good match for your group and your game. If you don't feel that Mysteries adds anything useful to the game, there is no harm in simply disallowing the skill and its stunts (or making it a solely "bad guy" skill).

When using Mysteries to do research, think of it as Academics for crazy people. Mechanically it's no different from Academics, but the material found will usually be tracts by madmen, obscure prophecies, and dark books bound in human skin. With that in mind, remember that libraries suitable for Mysteries research are rare and should always be colorful, and are occasionally in locations that may be an adventure in and of themselves to reach.

### **Sixth Sense [Mysteries]**

Mysteries as a sixth sense follows the same guidelines as Alertness – set difficulties low and make sure the information is something usable. Of course, the fun thing about Mysteries is that you are less obliged to make the information useful so long as it's colorful. Things like “there's an oppressive sense of darkness” don't necessarily mean anything, but they can add color to a scene and give the player a sense of secret knowledge, which is pretty satisfying, even if it's based in a vague phrase of foreshadowing.

### **Mesmerism [Mysteries]**

Mesmerism is one place you may need to rein in player expectations. There are stunts that allow for more cinematic effects if a player is interested in that. Unless noted in a stunt, all mesmerism effects require a *willing* target and a roll of Mysteries versus Resolve, though the mesmerist gets a +2 on the roll if the target is actively participating (lying back, relaxing, otherwise really getting into it). Again, if the target flat-out unwilling, it will simply not work.

When using mesmerism to help someone remember something, the mesmerist rolls a quick contest of Mysteries against the target's Resolve. If successful, the target may act as if he has the Scene of the Crime Investigation stunt for the scene in question, but his skill is restricted by the mesmerist's Mysteries skill. Thus, if a character with a Great Investigation skill is put under by a Good Hypnotist, the memories are a little fuzzy, and he treats his Investigation as if it were Good (Great - 1) for purposes of what he can remember.

Putting a character in a calming trance reduces all of his perception skills to Poor, but allows him to use the mesmerist's Mysteries skill in lieu of his Resolve skill (which may temporarily improve his composure capacity). The mesmerized person also leaves the decision regarding whether or not to resist an aspect compel in the hands of the mesmerist (the mesmerist may contribute fate points of his own to turn down a compulsion). Unfortunately, the character is also unable to take any action other than what the mesmerist directs. While a mesmerist may misuse this trust, any shock, surprise, or suggestion that the character would find repellent will knock them out of the trance instantly.

### **Fortune Telling [Mysteries]**

Fortune Telling difficulties follow the same principles as a declaration action, though with slightly different criteria for the difficulty. The base difficulty is Mediocre, and the three criteria to judge a whether a prediction can be made are specifics, presentation, and obscurity.

First off, predictions should never be too specific. To predict that good fortune will come to your family is nicely broad, but to predict that your sister will get some money is a bit too specific.

Obscurity is a complementary component to specifics. A good fortune usually is cloaked in metaphor and can be taken in a number of different ways. Saying that fortune will come to your family may be specific, but saying that a flower shall blossom in the garden of your blood is specific and obscure.

Lastly, presentation is all about how the fortune is told. Just rattling off a fortune or reading a horoscope from the paper has no sense of deep mystery. A proper fortune requires an appropriate set of props, like tarot cards, chicken bones, tea leaves, the *I Ching* or something similar, or at least a great show of ritual and incantation. While the first two criteria are about the “text” of the prediction the player is trying, this criterion focuses on how well the player roleplays the revelation of that text.

For each of these criteria which is not met to the GM's satisfaction, the difficulty increases by two. If any of these criteria are outright ignored (such as predicting that “Sam will win at Bingo tonight and walk out with a 100 clams”) that penalty may be increased to 4 or more – in short, if your player is abusing this, you're under no obligation to help him.

Only one fortune can be considered to be “in effect” at any given moment (so no telling a fortune for each character), and it is up to players to make it come true or not. Basically, when there is a chance that some course of action will make the prediction be true, that’s when someone can try to invoke the aspect (assuming the predicting was true in the first place – you’ve got no reason to tell them until they try), just as with any normal declaration.

The big difference with fortune telling is that a fortune aspect is persistent throughout the story – it’s not tied to a scene, and as such, it casts its strange light over the entirety of the adventure. Once a player has made a successful fortune-telling, the GM should be ready to play along as well. At the least, she should think about how the fortune might come to bear in the climax towards the end of the session. The occasional compel of the fortune’s aspect is a great way to toss a few extra fate points to the players and to remind them that a fortune is very much a genie out of its bottle.

Nevertheless, the burden is on the players to make it work. Remember that while one character is making the prediction, it’s out there for everyone to take advantage of, and this may mean that the final interpretation is very different than the initial player intended. That’s a good thing. After all, telling the future is a tricky business.

You can, however, definitely make it easier for a prediction to come to pass if you find the prediction particularly interesting (or if you’ve got a particular twist on the interpretation you want to pursue). As such, one good use for compels on the fortune is the introduction of obviously foreshadowing components. As an example, if a character’s fortune is that he will face death by cats, you can put a bunch of cats in an alley and ask the player (offering a fate point) if they’re *entirely* sure this fortune telling is mumbojumbo.

## Pilot

Most of the guidelines for Drive also apply to Pilot, though most chases will be single-opponent affairs. There’s just a little bit less craziness possible in the air – if only due to there being fewer planes in operation than cars.

One thing to note is that this is still very early in the age of aviation, and planes are still in transition from the wooden framed biplanes of the Great War to the sleeker metal vehicles of World War Two. Long range aircraft are still a very new idea, and the Zeppelin is still a viable means of long range travel.

All that said, it’s also worth remembering that characters exist a little bit ahead of the curve, so they may have access to technologies that are not available to the public (particularly through gadgets). At the very least, this is certainly true of their adversaries!

## Rapport

Rapport is the fallback social skill. While Empathy, Deceit, and Intimidation are fairly specific in their applications, Rapport is the catchall that covers everything else.

### First Impressions [Rapport]

When characters meet an NPC for the first time, their opinion is going to fall into a fairly narrow band – they’ll have no opinion, or they’ll have a mildly favorable or mildly unfavorable opinion. Stronger opinions – friendliness, love, hate and so on tend to be based on some existing knowledge of the person, and are unlikely to change simply from meeting them.

That said, small differences matter. A clerk who has a bad first impression of a character might grudgingly help him out, but the character has got no real reason to trust his work, while a clerk with a good first impression is likely to remember that third piece of paperwork he needs to fill out which becomes so much more important when he gets to the border.

When a player first meets an NPC, that NPC's inclination towards the player will be negative, neutral, or positive. If you need to determine this on the fly, rolling a single die should do the job ([+] for positive, [-] for negative).

The player can simply accept this reaction roll, or he can attempt to turn on the charm, and make a better first impression. To do so, the player rolls Rapport against the NPC's Resolve (Mediocre by default). If the player generates any shifts, he improves the inclination by one step (so negative becomes neutral and neutral becomes positive and positive remains the same.). If the player fails badly enough that the target generates some **spin**, then the impression instead shifts one step for the worse. If the player does so well that he gains spin himself, then it *might* be grounds for a reversal from negative to positive (or *extremely* negative to, say, merely suspicious), unless the NPC has a strong reason not to change his mind.

While this will absolutely color the way the scene plays, it should also have some effect on the game. Before the roll is made, think of something this NPC can affect. Ideally, you'll think of this while planning the adventure, but sometimes you'll be surprised and need to think quickly. Look at what the players want from the NPC, and base your decision off that.

What you *don't* want to do is make players regret rolling Rapport. For example, say your characters encounter a clerk and you have them roll Rapport to establish first impressions. If the NPC is a clerk looking at their paperwork, you could decide there is a problem with the paperwork which may make trouble later on. A friendly clerk will spot the problem and warn them, and an unfriendly one will ignore it, creating a problem. That may seem satisfying on the surface – the friendly result has averted a problem. However, it's averting a problem that would not have existed in the first place if there had not been a Rapport roll to affect the clerk's impressions.

A first impression is the possibility to introduce an NPC that will either enhance or complicate the characters' lives. If you aren't ready for that sort of thing to occur, keep the interaction as smooth as possible.

This isn't to say you should only roll for first impressions in moments of import. We're merely saying that outside of that, it's best in small doses, such as when you're in a hurry and you just want to get past something but let the player feel their skill mattered, but if you do it too much, then the player will get (justifiably) annoyed as their skill is effectively thrown back in their face, particularly if they haven't made a strong investment in Rapport.

It's more useful to think of potential consequences down the line. Given the same situation, the GM can just decide that when the players get to the border and need to give their paperwork and convince the guards to let them pass, they may be due for a +1 bonus if their papers were well prepared or a -1 penalty if they weren't. Just having the NPC comment on the state of the papers when they make the roll at the border is enough of a tip of the hat to the character who befriended or alienated the clerk to let them feel their skill wasn't wasted.

By focusing on potential consequences you can create a wonderful alchemy by combining first impressions with NPCs, provided that the NPCs in question have proven interesting to the players. Anytime an NPC proves interesting to your players, it's a good idea for you to think about bringing them back later on – and what the first impressions the players made on that NPC will inform you what sort of role that might be. A "bit-part" NPC left with a bad first impression could easily turn into a minor rival or colorful (if petty) villain down the road – and those with good impressions may inevitably end up in your players' growing stable of allies.

## Resolve

It's important to remember that a failure of Resolve should never take control of a character out of a player's hands. A bad Resolve roll affects how the character carries himself, and how well or poorly he convinces everyone else that he's unfazed by events. If a character is exposed to something

disconcerting (like a fright), Resolve is useful to see how well they “keep it together” and may impact whatever penalties the character is exposed to, but how the character reacts, such as whether they run from the room, is a decision the player makes. Such decisions can be influenced by aspects normally, but the failure of the skill only removes control of the character when he is taken out.

One good way to handle very stressful situations or other crises where keeping your cool or otherwise keeping it together is paramount, is to use Resolve as a modifier or restriction on whatever other skill the character is using, the same way one would use Endurance to restrict skills when tired.

## Resources

How much specific things cost is covered below, but there are a few things to bear in mind when players start throwing money around.

Most importantly, be willing to be generous. Characters with a high Resources skill *should* be throwing money around. That was the whole point of them taking the skill. The important thing to remember is that money should be able to remove obstacles, but it should not solve problems. A fat contribution to the Mayor’s re-election campaign should get you an audience with him to plead your case, but it should not get him to solve your problem for you (unless he’s fantastically corrupt).

When a character is in a place where they can’t draw upon their usual resources, you may increase the difficulty of making a purchase – anywhere from +1 for a modest amount of red tape, to a +4 if they’re limited solely to the already-converted local currency they happen to have in their pockets. This boost to difficulty needn’t indicate an increase in the actual cost of the purchase; it is more likely to represent the increased effort necessary to make the purchase happen.

### Spending Money [Resources]

For guidelines to determine the difficulty target for Resources rolls when spending money, see the various cost tables in the Gadgets & Gizmos chapter (page XX).

## Science

Science is the backbone of pulp, so this is a fairly common skill, and it shares a lot with Academics in terms of how it is used in play.

### Lab Work [Science]

This is the Science equivalent of Academics research (page XX), using a lab rather than a library. Labs come in varying qualities, much like libraries do, and the availability of a lab is one of the main limitations on lab work. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, Lab Work is like any other effort to get information – base difficulty should be low, with details provided by a greater number of shifts, and the information found should be something that can be acted upon unless it is specifically supposed to be frustrating.

### Medical Attention [Science]

When using Science as first aid in the middle of a fight, the character must take a full action with a target who’s not trying to do anything else active (i.e., forfeiting his next action). Make a roll against a target of Mediocre; if it succeeds with at least one shift, the subject may remove a checkmark in his one-stress box on his physical stress track. Every two shifts beyond the first improves this effect by one; for example, with five shifts, a character can remove a checkmark in his target’s three-stress box. Success can also be used to “stabilize” someone who has taken a severe or lesser consequence that would appear to be life-threatening (e.g., a Bleeding to Death

aspect) – in game terms, this has the effect of limiting the extent to which the aspect can be compelled. A given person can't be the target of more than one first aid action in an exchange.

When using Science to address someone's long-term injuries, the character must spend a scene providing proper medical attention. This is a use of Science to directly address someone's physical, long-term consequences. If the roll is successful, then the time it takes the subject to recover from the consequence is reduced by one step on the time table. Multiple such attempts may not be made.

The difficulty of the roll depends on the severity of the consequence; starting at moderate, the difficulty increases by two steps for each level of severity:

| Consequence | Difficulty to Reduce Time |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| Mild        | Mediocre                  |
| Moderate    | Fair                      |
| Severe      | Great                     |

At the GM's discretion, when the doctor in question gains spin on his roll, the time to recover may be reduced by two steps instead of one.

## Science! [Science]

This follows the rules for Academics' "Minor Details" (and declaration actions in general), [page XX](#) and [page XX](#), almost to the letter, except that the fact or facts involved must be of a scientific (or scientific sounding!) nature.

## Sleight of Hand

### Pickpocket [Sleight of Hand]

One common pickpocket technique that players may try is the "bump and grab", where an accomplice distracts the target, usually by bumping into them, so they are less likely to notice the pickpocketing attempt.

If the player has an accomplice, the accomplice rolls a quick contest of Deceit or Sleight of Hand against the target's Alertness. If successful, they've distracted the target, and the target doesn't get the +2 bonus to their Alertness as mentioned on [page XX](#). Without an accomplice, a player is already presumed to be doing as good a job at distracting the target as he can.

## Stealth

Stealth really depends on conditions. First and foremost, if someone is actively watching the character, there's no way to start sneaking. Beyond that, Stealth is greatly affected by the environment.

| Bonus | Environment                                                                   |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| +4    | Pitch black, no visibility                                                    |
| +2    | Dark, smoke, thick fog, no clear line of sight, greatly diminished visibility |
| 0     | Dim lighting, cluttered line of sight.                                        |
| -2    | Good Lighting, clear line of sight                                            |
| -4    | Bright lighting, clear area                                                   |

If you're not certain how to handle something, treat it as a half step. For example, if a ninja is hiding in the dark (+2), but the guards have flashlights, reduce the bonus to only +1. Also note,

these are all matters of visibility. Extreme noise can grant an extra +1, while total silence might impose an additional -1 penalty.

Stealth is usually a quick contest between Stealth and Alertness, though anyone who is “on alert” gains a +2 to their Alertness (as if they were making a full defense). Usually, Investigation isn’t in use because there’s no active searching effort. Simply being on guard does not equate to being on alert – there must be some reason for a heightened sense of alert, and it can only be sustained for so long before boredom sets in again.

### **Hiding [Stealth]**

If someone is actively searching for a hidden character, they use Investigation rather than Alertness and gain a +2 on the roll so long as they have some reason to actually be looking and are taking the time to do a thorough search in the right place. When someone is searching you can usually assume they’ll do logical things like turn on the lights or otherwise do things to put penalties on any attempt to hide. The +2 is not available without reason or time, and lacking both will often set things back in the realm of Alertness.

This means that if a stealthy character is ever in a position where people are actively searching for him, he’s in a lot of trouble. That usually requires that the character was spotted or somehow set off an alarm – which, if he’s doing his job, he wasn’t, and didn’t.

For example, consider a character hiding in a storeroom. If a guard opens the door, shines a flashlight in, and looks around, it’s just a quick Investigation roll (reason, perhaps, but not time), and the character can probably stay hidden. If the guard flips on the lights and starts methodically going through the room, hiding is much, much more difficult – he’s imposed some penalties, and he has both reason and time.

The good news is that this sort of searching is usually obvious, so when the guard flips on the lights and starts looking, it’s the player’s cue to act now or give up his chance at surprise.

### **Skulking [Stealth]**

When a character tries to move while remaining unseen, anyone looking for him gains a +2 bonus for each zone he moves. Within a conflict, normally, moving at more than a cautious creep or a walk will automatically break stealth, so this is usually limited to a one-zone move. As a rule of thumb outside of conflict, observers are at +2 for a cautious creep, +4 for walking pace, +6 for a jog and +8 to run.

## **Survival**

(Skill, [page XX](#); Stunts, [page XX](#))

Survival is a very broad skill covering virtually every sort of outdoorsy activity from wilderness survival to animal handling. As a general rule, if it seems like something man was doing before that pesky technology came along, there’s a better than even chance that Survival’s the skill to roll.

### **Animal Handling and Riding [Survival]**

Animals are dumb. This is an important thing to remember when dealing with them.

Most animals will act in a specific way in any given situation. How an animal responds to a person is very much like a first impression (see Rapport). If the animal has been trained, like an attack dog, then not much is going to change it’s mind, but if it really could go either way, Survival can be rolled against the creature’s Resolve to see if the impression is favorable or unfavorable. If the animal is potentially hostile, a friendly result means it’s not likely to attack. If the animal is potentially useful (such as with riding), a friendly roll is necessary to get it to work.

## Scavenging [Survival]

The difficulty for finding something is based off how likely it is to be found and how interesting it will be to use. The base likelihood depends on the environment and what's being looked for. If it makes sense that it could be there (like wood and vine in a forest) then the difficulty is Mediocre. If it's a bit of a stretch, but still possible (decent wood in a swamp) then the default is Good, and if it's less likely or simply outright rare, it's Superb or higher.

Each qualifying criteria increases the difficulty by 1. Thus, if a character needs sticks in a forest, the difficulty is Mediocre, but if he needs sticks of a certain size and strength (2 criteria) the difficulty is Mediocre +2 (Fair). If the character is trying to build something, like a trap, it's an Engineering roll, modified by Survival.

## Weapons

First and foremost, remember that the ability to throw things is the main mechanical balance for the Weapons skill versus the Fists skill. The Weapons skill bridges the gap between Fists and Guns as a combat skill. Provided an actual weapon is in hand, the Weapons skill may be used to attack – and some weapons will either be thrown (like a knife) or have an unusually long reach (like a whip), allowing the attack to reach into an adjacent zone – as well as to defend. The downside, simply, is that the skill requires the use of a weapon – someone who successfully disarms a character using Weapons has effectively deprived him of using this skill.

The primary disadvantage a Fists user faces against a Weapons user is the ability of the weapons user to make use of this additional reach, and the GM is encouraged to be generous when allowing a Weapons user to make maneuvers that take advantage of this. At the same time, the advice under Fists (see [page XX](#)) about mismatched weapons remains valid – a weapon does not in and of itself grant a bonus, but it does shape the way a fight is described.

## Other Common Situations

Beyond the situations covered by specific skills, above, there are other common situations which bear some examination.

### Fire

Fire and other environmental hazards are rated by their intensity. At the beginning of the exchange, they inflict that much physical stress on every person in the scene. Intensity basically means:

Intensity Means. ..

- 0: The building is on fire, but the fire can be avoided.
- 1: Almost everything is on fire, and the heat is pressing in on you in waves.
- 2: Everything is on fire, and the flames lick up near you.
- 3: Inferno. There may well be nowhere to run, you have only moments to live.

Some environments are fatiguing rather than damaging, such as trying to operate out in the hot desert sun. In those situations, it is more appropriate to have Endurance restrict other skills, rather than any physical stress.

### Explosions

Explosions and other area attacks have the potential to do damage against everyone within their radius. They are deadly and can end a fight or alter a scenario significantly once used. Choose very carefully before allowing free and easy use of explosives in your game.

As discussed briefly on [page XX](#), explosives have three ratings: complexity, area, and force. Here, we'll dig deeper into what these mean.

**Complexity** is the difficulty to disarm the bomb once the fuse has been lit or the pin has been pulled.

The **area** of an explosion determines how many zones the explosion will cover. An area of 1 means the explosion affects only one zone. An area of 2 means it affects one zone and **every zone adjacent to it**. And area of 3 expands it out to all zones adjacent to that. An area of 10 can pretty effectively cover a small town, and a 20 can cover a large city. This of course assumes that your zones are roughly the same size, that the explosion originates in the center of its zone, and so forth – feel free to tweak how things behave. There's nothing saying some area 2 explosions don't hit all of their adjacent zones, merely that they *could*.

The force of an explosion is a measure of how dangerous it is once it finally detonates. When an explosive detonates in a zone that a character is in, the force value is the difficulty of the free action Athletics test to take cover behind something solid. People unaware that a detonation is impending automatically fail this roll. If successful, the character takes a consequence (unless he generates some spin, in which case he makes a miraculous escape). If he fails, he is taken out immediately and is either badly injured or dead (though only minions should outright die in explosions).

The good news is that the force of an explosion drops by one for each zone it crosses, so characters in an adjacent zone have to deal with a force level that's 1 lower. If there is a border between the zones that would provide some cover (like a wall) it also reduces force by the value of the border. The force of an explosion drops to zero once it reaches its maximum radius indicated by the area.

In case that doesn't make it perfectly clear, the use of explosives in a fight is extremely, perhaps even insanely dangerous, but extremely potent. Setting and using explosives can usually be done using the Engineering skill, but throwing a stick of dynamite into a fight is something else entirely. Fuses are not your friend. Before a character throws, the GM should ask if the fuse is short, medium or long (for some explosives this is fixed, and not a choice of the player's). This does not literally need to mean a physical fuse – it could just as easily be a timer or some other control. If the explosive supposed to go off on impact, it will need a hair trigger (see [page XX](#) in *Gadgets and Gizmos*).

Throwing an explosive as an attack works in two stages. When a character throws an explosive, it's an attack using Weapons against a difficulty of Mediocre. If successful, the explosive lands in an appropriate zone (remember that thrown weapons have a range of one zone), and if not, it lands in the thrower's zone.

When the explosive lands, everyone within a zone covered by its area rolls Athletics against the attacker's Weapons result (from above) to get clear, should they so wish; if they gain spin on this defense roll, they may move one zone away from the zone the explosive is in by "diving clear" as a free action. Anything short of spin has no effect – they'll have to hope that they get a turn before it goes off or, otherwise deal with a detonation scenario as described above. The thrower has the option to reduce everyone's difficulty to dive clear (he may not want to make it too difficult for his allies to dive away), so long as that difficulty is not reduced below Mediocre. If the thrower makes a bad throw – missing the Mediocre target entirely – then as noted, the explosive lands in the thrower's zone, with the difficulty for the thrower to dive free increased by one for each step he missed the target. The thrower does not have the option to reduce it, though in such a circumstance everyone else merely faces a Mediocre difficulty to dive clear.

After this initial "dive clear" check, the GM makes a quick check before every individual action to see if the bomb explodes, by rolling 2 dice:

| Dice result | Short Fuse | Medium Fuse | Long Fuse |
|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|
|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|

|    |              |              |              |
|----|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| +2 | Explode      | Explode      | Explode      |
| +1 | Explode      | Explode      | No explosion |
| +0 | Explode      | No Explosion | No Explosion |
| -1 | No Explosion | No Explosion | No Explosion |
| -2 | Fizzle       | Fizzle       | Fizzle       |

On a fizzle result, make a mark on a piece of paper. The next time a fizzle result comes up, if a mark's already been made, the bomb is a dud or otherwise unable to explode. If the GM chooses to make it an option, characters with appropriate aspects may invoke them to demand that GM re-roll the dice after revealing the result.

Each time the turn comes around to the person who lit the fuse again, a full exchange has passed, and the fuse's length drops by one step – so if a long-fuse explosive is out there for a full exchange, it becomes a medium fuse explosive, and so on. If it's a short fuse explosive (pretty improbable that it lasted a full exchange), then it goes off right then and there.

## Playing With Fire

When a character has an unexploded bomb in his zone and the opportunity to act, he may try a few things.

### *Pick It Up and Throw It.*

This uses the same rules for throwing the explosive that the original thrower used, but at a -1 penalty for taking the supplemental action of picking it up. This can become a deadly game of hot potato, and not one you want to get into with a character who has the Catch stunt (see [page XX](#)).

### *Pick It Up and Disarm It.*

A character may use his own Engineering to disarm a bomb. This action is at -1 for the supplemental action of picking it up and is at a difficulty equal to the complexity of the explosive. It's easy to pull the fuse out of a stick of dynamite, but somewhat harder to stop a grenade without the pin.

### *Leap on Top of It.*

Well, first off, this will pretty much kill the character dead. That said, it will improve the chances of everyone around him by reducing the force of the explosion by 3. If the character is armored in some way, then the value of the armor is also subtracted from the force. Under particularly unusual circumstances, sets of stunts, or strange arcane invulnerability rituals, the character might be able to walk away from this, but really, players should be discouraged from such actions unless they're looking to start a new character. Fate points could be brought to bear, of course, to force a fizzle once this is done, but the GM should feel quite free to charge the player every single fate point he has to pull it off (sort of like the Death Defiance stunt, [page XX](#), only temporary, and with more bite).

### *Run Away.*

Often the wisest course, using Athletics to sprint away from the bomb is not such a bad idea. The trick is that you need a chance to take a turn to be able to exercise this option. Players are often going to want to bring their friends along on their flight away from the scene of a bomb, so GMs should make sure to review the rules on throwing, pushing, and carrying ([page XX](#)). While an individual will most always get away faster, the nature of a fuse – getting checked

on every action – may make a player prefer to get less distance, if he’s helping a slower person get some distance too.

### **Bombs Outside of Combat**

When a character encounters a bomb in a situation other than having it thrown by a maniac, there are a few commonalities to expect. It is usually larger, heavier and more powerful, and it usually has an explicit trigger, such as a timer on a countdown or an event it will trigger in response to, like a tripwire.

Such bombs are inevitably powerful enough that characters in close proximity to them when they detonate have very little chance of survival. Thankfully, the role of such bombs is not to blow up but rather, to threaten to blow up. Usually such bombs are in important places so that if they go off, there will be serious consequences, even if the characters are unharmed.

Attempts to disarm one of these bombs will require one or more Engineering rolls against its complexity. A failure on any roll shouldn’t result in the bomb exploding immediately; instead turn the bomb into one with a fuse that starts counting down! Roll a single die: minus means it’s become a short fuse, blank means a medium, and plus a long. Hopefully, this buys time enough for everyone to run like the dickens. More information on handling situations like this can be found under “Death Traps and Other Dooms” on [page XX](#).

## 9. Tips and Tricks

In the previous chapter, we presented ideas for how to make use of the nuts and bolts of the system itself in order to get the best effect. But that's only part of the GMing job. Here, we talk about the art of GMing – and more importantly, how to make your game squeeze out the best bits of pulp for everyone's enjoyment. We'll also cover things like adventure design, advancement, important “configuration” decisions about your setting, and camera work. Read on!

### The Power of the Pickup Game

Sometimes you have everything you need for a game. The session is planned. The players are all on time. Snacks are on hand. You're good to go. It's a nice thought, isn't it? Unfortunately, reality doesn't always comply. Life comes up and one player or another can't make it. A babysitter doesn't show. Family visits from out of town. There's a work emergency. Reasonable problems, and understandable, but frustrating all the same. You can always just cancel the game, but that's rarely satisfying for anyone.

One solution to this problem is the pickup game, a game played with whoever is on hand, purely for the fun of it. Pickup games can be tough, because it's not easy to create an entire adventure on the kind of short notice we're talking about. It can be even more time consuming to come up with characters and get everything started up.

*SotC* is written with the pickup game in mind. Certainly, you can run a satisfying campaign in the traditional vein, but even if you do, the elements that make up a pickup game can be useful when players bail, or when you find yourself pressed for time to prepare a session on short notice.

There is one central principle of the pickup game: ease of use. It needs to be easy to prepare, easy to get started, and easy to play. Ease means two things: that it's quick, and it's simple. Pickup games don't have a lot of ramp up time, so speed is of the essence, and since they're intermittent, you don't want players needing to relearn an entire system every time they play, so complexity is problematic. It also means that you want to be able to just start playing: long introductions, extended shopping trips, foreshadowing and other tricks that take time now for a payoff later have no place in the pickup game. Make it cool, and make it cool *right now*. To that end, we offer three different means of planning a game: Structured, Aspected, and Dynamic.

### The Structured Pickup Game: Easy as 1-2-3

The characters are the period's equivalent of jet setters. If there's something interesting going on in the world, there's a good chance there's at least one PC there. With that in mind, there is no pussyfooting around required to explain why the characters are on the scene – they should be there, so they are!

Once you've got the ball rolling, the next big advantage for a pickup game is the spirit of pulp. It's a spirit of action. If players aren't willing to be proactive, then someone has not communicated or understood how this game is supposed to work. What's more, pulp plots are simply not that sophisticated, so it's easy for players to jump headfirst into them. Perhaps even more importantly, it makes them easy for GMs to come up with. With that general idea of what you're going to want for a pickup game, let's take a moment to break down the specific steps.

#### Establishing Characters

While you can use the on-the-fly character creation rules (page XX), that's not necessarily the best solution. If your game schedule is erratic enough that you expect to be running pickup games with any frequency, it may be useful to do character creation in advance. Having an established character

to step into can help players get going quickly when the pickup game begins. A fast creation character will eventually have the same utility, but can make the first few sessions a little rough.

There's also some incentive for the GM to encourage players to establish their characters in advance of a session – it makes plotting up the session easier. Established characters have aspects and histories that the GM can (and should!) mine for inspiration.

## The Pulp Plot Framework

Here's a secret – once you hit your stride with pulp, all you're going to need to come up with is an adventure title. But that will come with practice. There's advice for running adventures elsewhere in this book which will be helpful to you, but some of it may take some getting used to. Until you're at a comfort level that allows a little more improvisation, you're going to want to start with a pretty structured model, and that's what we're offering you here. Once you have the bones of the structure in place, you can start elaborating on it to suit your needs, but if you ever get stumped, just come back to this simple model.

- Endanger the Characters
- Reveal the True Danger
- The Pursuit Encounters Complications
- Certain Doom
- The Twist
- Final Showdown
- Breakneck Escape (Optional)

Obviously, this is not the model for *every* pulp plot. Rather, it is a structure to follow in creating plots until you want to discard it. You also are not obliged to determine the components of the outline in any particular order. Find something that interests you, put it in the appropriate slot, and then fill in the other slots to better justify it. If you have a really cool deathtrap you want to throw the characters into, go ahead and put it in as Certain Doom, then figure out the rest so the deathtrap makes sense. If you're at a loss for where to begin, start with the Final Showdown. It's going to be the most dramatic element of the game, and what villains and elements it includes may suggest how to handle some of the earlier elements.

## Endanger the Characters

It may seem odd that the first thing is figuring out how to threaten the characters. Intuitively, it might seem more reasonable to figure out where the game opens. As it happens, these are one and the same thing. Figuring out how you're going to endanger the characters contains a large component that depends on where they're going to be. Environmental hazards require certain settings, as do burglaries or wars. The nature of the danger will suggest the setting.

With that in mind, the nature of the danger can vary greatly. The most basic sort of danger is an unexpected attack. This is usually performed by a mob of low-quality, highly distinctive minions of the villain, sometimes led by a lieutenant of some sort. The goal of the attack can vary greatly. They might be after the characters, they might be after someone else at the location, they could be there to steal or destroy something; they might even be there by accident. In determining why they're there, you put the first piece into place regarding the plot.

Alternately, the danger might be environmental: a ship sinking, a zeppelin going down, a building on fire or collapsing in an earthquake. Any of these is a suitable threat to get things going. Sometimes there is a motive behind the danger, like someone setting the building on fire, and sometimes it's just bad timing. The cause is important to determine, if only for what it implies. A ship sinking because it's been sabotaged means that the danger is the saboteur. A ship sinking due to an accident is usually a precursor to washing up on a dangerous uncharted island. It's also

possible to mix and match dangers. A building with a bomb in it requires evacuation as well as discovering and disarming the bomb or bombs. Whatever the danger, it is important that it is a legitimate threat, and that the characters can address it in some way. Even if they can't stop it entirely, they shouldn't be helpless bystanders – they can save civilians, keep thieves from taking all the treasures of the Louvre, or keep the ship from crashing on the rocks, killing everyone on board. Go into the game assuming that players will drastically impact the flow of events, and plan anything you feel needs to happen around that assumption.

### **Reveal the True Danger**

Whatever the cause of the previous danger, it was only a taste of things to come. This is the opportunity for characters with strong investigative talents to shine, as they discover the pieces of the puzzle, revealing at least part of why things are in trouble, and where to go next. This step requires two important things – an explanation, and a clue. The explanation does not need to be complete. It may be known that the villains are up to something involving the Eye of Askaton, but that doesn't mean that anyone knows precisely what.

The clue should point to a place. It may be that it points to a person in that place, or a thing in the place, but it should draw a clear line towards where the characters should go next. It should also suggest that time is of the essence, so there is strong impetus to get moving.

### **The Pursuit Encounters Complications**

The players should have a clear sense of what they need to do at this point. They should have a clear direction which they are able to move decisively towards. And this is the point where things go terribly wrong. Maybe another group reveals itself with an attack. Maybe the apparently simple explanation of events is revealed to be deception.

Generally, either something about the pursuit creates a complication, such as an obstacle to bypass, or something external threatens the journey, such as an attack or a disaster. If this sounds a lot like *Endangering the Characters*, there's a reason for it. In fact, if the *Endangering* step was an attack, then the complication should be something environmental or other wise difficult to overcome. If the *Endangering* was environmental, then an attack might be appropriate. Basically, your goal here is to provide a different type of challenge, to allow different characters to shine.

This is also an opportunity to complicate the plot. If there's some other element you want to include, now's your chance. Some traditional complications include new characters on the scene, such as new villains, old enemies, or even rivals pursuing the same goal. Others include a double cross by friendly guides, a loss of supplies or equipment, or another problem demanding attention that conflicts with the issue at hand, leading the characters to a tough decision.

If the complication turns the current course of action into a dead end, it's important that another action option suggests itself (after a suitable period of dramatic tension). Of course, that course of action may well pass through *Certain Doom* (see below).

### **Certain Doom**

Sometimes the complication gets worse, or it leads to another situation, or sometimes another situation entirely comes up. One way or another, the characters end up in a terrible situation, where it seems absolutely certain that the characters will perish. The classic example of this is the fiendish deathtrap, but it can really be anything that looks like certain doom. The whole point is to ratchet up the tension, get things to the point where it looks like there's no hope, and put the players on the edge of their seats.

Then you go get a drink.

Ok, maybe not, but it's kind of fun. You really do want to make the players sweat, so this is certainly time for a dramatic pause at the very least before they start desperately throwing around crazy plans and ideas for getting out.

## **The Twist**

The twist is a revelation that changes the understanding of the situation. The delivery of the twist can come in many forms. It can be simple information from a captured foe, released prisoner or even a gloating villain. Often, it flows from actions, like the arrival of an unexpected ally providing aid and information, or a villain's henchman turning against him at an opportune moment.

One bit of secret utility for the twist is that it can get you, the GM, out of trouble. If your Certain Doom is looking a little too certain, or if there's an element of the story that got missed, now is your time to throw it in. And, frankly, if you discover things have gone too far off the tracks, this is your opportunity to say "Ha-ha, it was all a trick. This is what's actually going on!" Obviously this is a power to use sparingly, lest your players become skeptical of every plot, but it can really save you when the need arises.

The "twist" doesn't need to be too much of a twist. Its real role is a revelation, the final piece of the puzzle which makes the path to the final showdown crystal clear.

This should also be the point where the clock starts ticking. If the twist lets the players know what the villain's master plan is, but also leaves them feeling that they've got all the time in the world to deal with it, it will kill all the tension and turn into an extended shopping trip and planning session (which, we'll remind you, are boring and have no place in a pickup game). As such, it is an important part of the revelation that time is running out.

## **Final Showdown**

There are a lot of ways to run the climactic fight scene, but there always needs to be something that sets it apart from just a normal fight scene. This may be some environmental element, something distinctive about the opposition, or almost anything else, all with the underlying tension of what happens if the players fail.

And there's the real kicker – in any other fight, there is a simple tension tied to the character's health, but the stakes are higher in the climax. If they lose, something specific and bad is going to happen, and it's going to be all their fault. No pressure though.

As a rule of thumb, you don't want the terrible thing to be the end of the world unless you're very confident in your players. Failure is not something we want to see happen, but most failures have the option of creating future adventures. If the Giant Robot is activated despite the heroes' efforts, then it means that at some point there will be an adventure to stop the rampaging giant robot. When you destroy the world, it's kind of hard to go anywhere from there (unless you want to take the cheap Hollywood out of temporarily being able to rewind time!).

With the consequences in mind, it's time to get the ball rolling. Now, it's possible that the final showdown is some other sort of contest, like a race. If so, the tension is usually coming from the stakes. The only drawback with doing something other than a fight scene is that since this is the climax, everyone should have something to do, and more specialized scenes rarely allow this.

To spice up the fight it's time to look at your characters. At least a few of the opponents should be suited to the player's area of expertise. If you have a big, strong character, consider a big, strong opponent; if you have a flying character, consider a flying opponent; and so on.

The tricky part of this is that you don't want to do that for every character all the time – otherwise it feels like Battle of the Doppelgangers. The best thing to do is look at the big challenge of the scene and figure which characters are most capable of handling it, and then come up for dance partners for the people you feel will be a bit left out.

Here's a little bit of a trick: come up with a few more detailed opponents than you'll need. When you see how the fight is going, you can note which characters are at loose ends and zero in on them.

There are a few other tricks and traps to be aware of.

- If you have a big main villain, make sure he's not left in a situation where all the players can gang up on him, since he'll go down too fast. Give him minions, mobility or some other advantage that can be picked away at, so that he feels like a more substantial challenge.
- Use the environment to kill off NPCs you don't want to track any more. If the characters nail a guy hard enough that one more hit will drop him, rather than just keep him around for bookkeeping purposes, have him be the guy who falls into the lava or is eaten by the pursuing monster. It emphasizes the dangers of the environment and saves you headaches. It also establishes precedent for when the main villain takes a similar plunge later.
- Try not to kill any important character, be they PC or NPC, onscreen. Characters coming back from certain doom is a staple of pulp, so such questionable deaths are to be expected.
- Whatever reason required the players to get to the showdown in a hurry can still be in effect. Adding a countdown happening during an existing fight can ratchet up the tension drastically. However, it can also trap you. The last thing you want is a literal countdown, since the numbers are a fixed effect. Instead you want to have physical cues that indicate that things are getting worse. Waters rise, ancient statues begin to move and so on. These sorts of cues allow the GM to dramatically indicate things are getting worse, but without nailing yourself to a specific timeframe.

### **Breakneck Escape**

Not every game will include a breakneck escape. Traditionally, it's that flight for life as the enemy's headquarters blow up behind you or the volcano erupts. How necessary it is for the story has a lot to do with how exciting the climax was. If everyone clearly had a good time with the climax, then the escape can pretty much get hand-waved. If there's a little more excitement to be squeezed out of the evening, then some attention should be spent on the escape.

A good, convincing escape can be hard to run, simply because this is a stupid place to kill a character. Instead, you need to put something else at risk, so there is a possibility of loss without killing off a character. Escape should be dangerous, but the real danger should be to the thing or person they are taking with them.

### **Wrapping Up**

Once you've finished the session, wrap up should be brief, but should make it clear that the characters' heroism is appreciated and that they made a real difference. The rewards of pulp are not in treasure or money, but it's not purely in the moral satisfaction either. Not every adventure ends in accolades, but if it's appropriate, make sure that the characters get recognized for their deeds.

### **Pulling it all Together**

Long as that explanation was, it's an easy model to apply. Just a line or two of notes for each element are enough to form the basic framework. And remember, just as you can have the player characters created on the fly, you can have your villains created on the fly, too – just write down a few salient points and don't sweat the details until you need them.

### **So What's Wrong With It?**

Having this sort of structure easily on hand is a useful tool. But it can also be a boat anchor around your neck. A planned plot is only useful so far as you can get the players to buy into it. Continuing

to stick to a plot after it's gone off the rails can lead to a host of problems, not the least of which are frustration and boredom.

Structured plots are a good place to start... But to really shine, you've got to learn the skills of guided improvisation. And that is where our next method comes in.

## The Aspected Pickup Game: Improvising Like a Pro

So you only have about twenty minutes to prepare for the session, the pizza is on the way, and you're staring at the PC's character sheets wondering what on earth you're going to do with tonight's gaming. Suddenly, just before you've resigned yourself to a place in GM Hell, an idea strikes – brilliant, masterful, worthy of the greats. You structure it out and chart it quickly, jot down major elements, bask in the glow of certainty, and wear that evil grin all the way to the table when your players arrive.

Play happens. Suddenly, after an hour of the players just being there, the structure of your plot is shot into so many pieces that you don't recognize what's going on anymore. It apparently doesn't matter that session you planned is just that damn good – sometimes things just don't fall your way.

When structure fails you, it can be useful to step back and think of the game as the story of the characters. That seems simple enough, but consider the implication: just like the protagonists of a book or movie, the most interesting story is wherever *they* are, and is the story best suited to *these* characters in particular.

Fortunately, your players have already given you tools to make it easy for you to determine what needs to be important in an adventure, what they want to see in the game, what to hang and hook conflicts around, and what elements you can include to make them feel like the story belongs to them.

These tools are called aspects. Your players put them on the character sheet for a reason. Now it's time for you to use them.

### Basic Assumptions

This approach requires a few basic assumptions on your part as the GM, so let's get them out of the way now:

- It is not necessary for you to know how anything is going to turn out for you to run a good session, and in fact, better stories can (and often do) result when you have no preconceived ideas in that regard. This includes the outcome of any conflict or decision the players make, what scene is going to conclude the adventure, and everything in between. Cooperative effort will be necessary to make the thing work. That's good.
- The use of aspects, whether to invoke or compel, is one of the key methods in this game to add "weight" to any decisions made, and is therefore one of the key methods to create drama and tension during play.
- The more that a given session of play involves moments where aspects are invoked or compelled in response to or because of a decision, the more inherently interesting it is. Play is boring when nothing is really at stake.
- Whatever the players are interested in is more important and better than anything you came up with. If your ideas are so good that player input ruins them, you should be writing novels instead of playing roleplaying games.
- None of these principles should be applied in extremes. If you do have some kind of great idea to throw into the adventure, you can probably work it in so long as it doesn't violate any of the basic tenets above.

## Making the Plot

When you're making an adventure up the aspected way, you're not going to be making up an entire plot. You may have a firm idea about how you want to kick things off, but after that, you need to be prepared for the adventure to branch off in any number of directions.

What you do need to do, however, is pick the aspects on each of the player's sheets that you want to meaningfully incorporate into the adventure.

Usually, one or two per PC will more than suffice, though you may want to pick more if you have a few solid days scheduled to play the pickup game. These aspects, once you select them, are going to form the basis for your adventure's focus – they'll determine what the central adventure seed is, what types of decisions the players will have to make, and what context you can draw from when you have to pull things out of your rear end.

Let's take an example. Suppose you have a two-person player group (we'll call their characters John and Jane), and one aspect from each of them really catches your eye: John has an aspect of Loyal Like a Dog, and Jane has an aspect of Keeps Her Past a Secret (keep in mind that as the GM, you'll know what that past is from character creation). An adventure that revolves around these two aspects might do the following:

- Create a situation where John's loyalty is not necessarily the best way to solve a problem, or one where in order to accomplish something important, he may have to betray one of his friends.
- Create a situation in which revealing something of Jane's past is the key to resolving a problem without severe consequences, and she has to choose whether or not her secrets are more important than suffering those consequences.

Thinking about that for a moment, you get an idea for an adventure seed: A former partner of Jane's in a shady business dealing from her past is using the finances gained from it to fund the robotics research of a mad scientist, so that he can use the robotic creations to hold Washington D.C. for ransom. If he isn't stopped from buying the last few components the scientist needs and isn't exposed to the law, he will create a reign of terror that will paralyze the whole country.

Obviously this presents an issue for Jane – she could come forward and testify to what she knows about her former partner directly, but the proof would reveal her participation as well, damage her reputation, possibly cost her friends, get her in potential legal trouble, and give her enemies leverage over her.

How do we work this into an issue for John? Simple enough – if someone John trusts is investigating the situation, he may ask John to look into Jane's potential involvement in the matter. If Jane knows about this investigation, obviously she could cover it up however she wants, so discretion becomes paramount. Suddenly, issues for John come up to the fore. Does his loyalty for his friend Jane outweigh his devotion to justice? If he does find evidence implicating her, will his loyalty allow him to use her to stop what's going on?

Between resolving these issues and whatever other confrontations occur between the villains and the PC's, you've definitely got enough material here for a four-hour session.

## Decision Points

So, now you know the core of the adventure. What's next? You still don't have any idea what's actually going to happen in the course of play, and you've only got ten minutes to go before your house will be filled with wily, structure-killing gamers (gotta love 'em). The next step is to take the elements you thought up and structure them into decision points. These points will focus around an open-ended choice that can't be ignored and will push the action in a certain direction (for those familiar with Ron Edwards' Sorcerer, these are, indeed, "bangs"). The decision points should make

use of the seed material. Be sure to keep most of them flexible enough that they could be introduced into the adventure at any time, and don't predetermine any outcomes.

Going back to our example, we can immediately see some decision points that need to happen:

- At some point, the true identity of the bad guy ( Jane's partner) will have to be revealed, probably as the crux of the adventure, leaving Jane stuck with the choice of how to deal with it. This might best be accomplished through a clandestine meeting where he taunts her, warning her to stay out of his way unless she wants to bring herself down too.
- At some point, another investigative party (like an informant, cop, or contact) will inform John of their suspicions regarding Jane, pressing the urgency of the situation upon him, and ask him to snoop on her secretly. John will have to decide whether he's going to do that or not, if he's going to tell Jane, etc.

These two decision points alone will spin off into a potential group of scenes. If John goes straight to Jane, they may decide to work together to root out what the precise connection is to Jane's past and reveal the villain that way. If they choose to keep secrets from each other, there will be a little cat and mouse as John tries to get Jane away from her house and office long enough to snoop. That other investigative party might provide some harassment for Jane as he pursues his own motives. Jane might try and find a way to alter the evidence that links her to the villain. Lots of stuff.

But it may not be enough. Here are some more, off the top of your genius head:

- Robots descend into the street when the characters are present, unstable prototypes of the mad scientist. They get involved in a brawl with local cops and start wreaking havoc. Do the characters intervene? The cops will probably be able to handle it themselves, and it'd keep them in a low profile, but some people could die and the cops would likely take away all the evidence of the attack. If the characters fight the robots directly, they could potentially get in trouble for any collateral damage, and it would inform the villain that the characters are in town. This is the kind of scene that's great to open an adventure.
- The characters discover that the research company that the mad scientist is getting technical equipment from is also involved in humanitarian efforts, providing certain important pharmaceuticals to hospitals in need. If an NPC is involved in helping them get this info, he or she will beg the characters not to make the company's involvement public, claiming that there was no way the company could know better. Can the characters afford to implicate the company if it means that they could get shut down? Can they risk being caught if they selectively alter the evidence? Is that justice?
- The villain offers to demand something of great value to a PC (perhaps relevant to another aspect) as part of his ransom, and he genuinely doesn't want to see what the full potential of the robots are – he's just a businessman, and he wants his money. He is genuine about his offer, and will accede to demands from the characters if they leave him and his ransom demand alone. The mad scientist may have other plans, so it'll still come to a showdown, but it gives the player a chance to decide whether or not his character really does have a price...

## What Happens in Play

So there it is – all the material you need for a successful night's adventuring. Start with a bang-up opening scene, get into a decision point, and run whatever scenes are necessary to explore the consequences of the choices made. Mix more decision points in whenever you need to and continue riffing off of them, and you're guaranteed at least a whole evening of play. Even better, because those scenes all rebound off decisions the PC's have made, the episode will definitively be "about" them in a way that no preplotted adventure structure can be, even at its most flexible. Because you have nothing predetermined, the outcomes will surprise and entertain you, and the stories will be full of unexpected character development and thematic weight.

## Getting Decision Points into Scenes

So this is all well and good, but how do introduce new decision points into play? If you're chaining a whole group of scenes off of one decision, do you need to introduce more if there's a good momentum going?

Emphatically, *no you don't*. Don't get married to the idea of including everything you've come up with in the session – a lot of decision points you come up with may be rendered irrelevant by the action of play or simply be extraneous in the middle of all the action you have going on. Often, with a proactive group, you may only need one or two major decisions per character to fill the night with scenes.

In the end, pulp is about action. If you have action going on, roll with it! But, if the pace starts to flag or the events of the first decision point resolve more quickly than you expected, introduce a new one. The easiest way to do this is through NPCs – no matter what, people will always respond to people better than they'll respond to other stimuli. People the character is connected to, with a strong need and the will to pursue that need, are often all you require to push decision points. What if a PC has a rivalry with a cop on the scene when the robots attack? What if the person who wants to spare the research company is a doctor friend of a PC? What if the villain was in love with Jane back then?

It also might help you to restructure more traditional adventure scene goals (break in here, defeat these guards, make this investigation roll, etc .) to be the beginning for a decision point scene instead of the end. Instead of spending all your time trying to figure out if the characters are going to get their hands on the smoking gun, drop it in their laps with one bullet left in it and a villain who just torched their friends/lovers/parents/children. Justice or vengeance?

That's the kind of pressure that will get you stories.

## Avoid Dithering with Pacing and Structure

Often, going with this method will require you to be very flexible with overall plot structure, as reacting to decisions may not net you an adventure in the traditional "beginning-middle-end" format. But you know what? That's okay, as long as everyone's having a good time. On the other hand, you don't want to create a situation where scenes get muddled from one to the next and the pace drags on because of a lack of proactivity. This is pulp, for God's sake. Things have to keep happening. Do not let your session dither. If you've only got four hours on a Tuesday night to play and you're still unraveling initial plot complications during the third hour, you're probably going too slowly. Take the dulled wits and bleary nods from your players as a sign.

Remember, as the GM, you are in complete control of when scenes transition from one to the next, what the actual decisions are that have to be made, and how much pressure gets applied by NPCs or in-game situation to move things along. You're still in control of a lot, and like a smart movie editor, you need to know how to frame scenes, which is talked about in more detail later in this chapter (see [page XX](#)).

Luckily, a lot of the basics of scene framing happen by instinct – people have a tendency to subconsciously structure things, and the general anatomy of a story is something practically hardwired into our brains by now. When things start to bog down, though, it's your job to kick your game into gear. Your power to frame scenes is paramount to establishing pace (see [page XX](#) for more).

For this reason, the adventure structure provided earlier can still be useful to you in this method. Taken as a general example of how stories go, it can give you a good hint on what kind of scene you're going to be running at what point in the evening. If the game ends at midnight, and the villain gets unmasked at 11:30, it's time to enter the push toward the final showdown – take whatever decisions get made at that point, and raise the consequences appropriately. Haven't

unmasked the villain at 11:45? Do so in the next scene. Make him a little careless. Bring in the final showdown, lights and guns blazing. It's 10:30? That last decision point might be a great springboard for you to introduce your Big Plot Twist. Keying into these kinds of things can lend a little structure to your sessions and cast the whole thing into a sense of the familiar, despite the fact that you don't know what the scenes are going to be.

### **Long-Term Play**

All this advice can be applied in a larger scale also, if you're looking to run a whole series of adventures. With ten aspects per character and an average of three to four players in a group, you have plenty of material to thread a long-running series together that makes those characters matter. If you want to spread the love further, you can deliberately center individual adventures on the aspects of a couple of PC's who become your "stars" for that storyline. Players usually won't mind this kind of focusing if they're confident that they'll also get their time in the spotlight.

## **The Dynamic Pickup Game: Set 'Em Up and Knock 'Em Down**

The Dynamic game is a little looser than the Structured game from above, but it has a tighter framework and more narrative thrust (i.e., deliberate plot structure) than the Aspected game. Designing it is still pretty procedural, but it depends a lot on the GM being able to set the balls in motion, and keep track of where they go.

### **Set Up the Board**

#### *Step One: What is the Hook?*

A dynamic game begins with a central hook. It might be a thing, like a valuable treasure or a trade secret. It could be a person, like a traveling billionaire, a famous diva or a brilliant scientist. It might even be a place, like an opera house on opening night, or a just-disturbed gravesite. What it is doesn't matter, what does matter is what people want with it.

#### *Step Two: Who Wants It?*

The next thing you need is an NPC. The best choice for the first NPC is the character you expect to be the villain of the piece. That character has an interest in the hook. Maybe they want to steal it, maybe they want to destroy it. The why, will be answered in the next question.

"Who" does not always need to be one person. It may be a group, such as an organization, or perhaps an interested individual and his lieutenant. These secondary characters usually are just extensions of the motives of the main character.

#### *Step Three: What is He Going to Do With It?*

Ask yourself, if no-one got in the way, and nothing went wrong, what is the NPC going to do with the hook? What's their plan?

Bear in mind, when you answer this question, you're really looking in the medium term. In the short term, they'll be doing whatever they can to get (or protect or destroy or eat or whatever) the hook, and in the long term, they'll have applied whatever it is they did with the thing and started using it towards their ultimate goal. The medium term plan is what they're going to have to do to bridge that gap.

Note, sometimes what the character plans and what the actual consequences are not the same thing in all cases. Thieves stealing something dangerous to sell, but instead being inflicted with a terrible curse, is a great example of how this can go wrong.

Notice that because plans are medium term, the result is very rarely something so extreme as “and then I rule the world”. Instead, it focuses on a step in the process towards ruling the world.

#### *Step Four: Is That Enough?*

If you think you’ve got enough to start things going, then rock on. If not, go back to step two and come up with a new NPC, and answer questions two and three. Keep doing this until you feel you have a sufficiently dynamic situation and a clear picture of what’s going on.

In these subsequent steps, take a moment to consider the characters’ aspects. If they have any aspects for appropriate NPCs, this is a great time to bring them in. Barring that, take a look over the aspects and see if you can bring in NPCs whose plans or motives are going to resonate with those aspects.

### **Look at the Big Picture**

Once you’ve complicated the mix enough, you should have several potentially competing threads. Each participant has their own goal, and it’s very unlikely that they can all get what they want. At the same time, the competing goals should suggest a matrix for how the story would work itself out if no one else got involved. Stop and take a moment to think about how you would see this playing out if the players never got involved.

### **Get the Ball Rolling**

Once you’ve looked at the big picture, it should suggest the direction the narrative is going at the point when the players get involved. Figure out where the players enter into the situation, and then simply start having events play out. When players do take action, consider the consequences of their actions, and whether or not it increases the likelihood of one or another of the desired outcomes.

Players may end up supporting one of the NPC’s goals, but the GM needs to be prepared for them bringing the situation to an entirely different conclusion.

### **Plan It Out**

Give a little bit of thought to the likeliest outcomes. You’re not obliged to make any of these happen, but these are the things the NPCs will be actively working to make happen, so there should at least be a decent chance of it occurring.

### **Sketch It Out**

If it makes it easier, imagine the hook as a small sphere. Each interested NPC has an arrow running through the sphere from their name to their goal. With multiple hooks in play, each character may have multiple arrows. Use this map to keep you aware of what’s going on with the characters you bring into a scene at any point.

### **Play It Out**

You’ve thought it through enough. Now *get cracking!*

### **Was it Enough?**

Ok, so, the pacing didn’t go quite right, and you finished the first chain of events too quickly. You need to do more and you need to do it quickly. No problem at all! Start with the goal that was successfully achieved, whatever it was – that is the new hook. Some of the same characters are probably still interested, but some will probably have dropped off the map. Replace them with new

interested parties until you've rebuilt the model. With a few minutes' break, you should be ready to go all over again.

It doesn't hurt to think about these potential outcomes, but don't get too attached. The one thing they don't account for is the goal achieved by the characters if they do something entirely unexpected. Thankfully, the same model can be used: look at what the characters accomplished, and use it as the hook for the next setup.

### **Expanding and Contracting the Model**

It's worth noting that this tends to assume complex, multi-motivational situations. That's great for establishing things, but as you move out to secondary hooks, feel free to loosen up a bit, and make the sole obstacle to the goal something simple, like a temple full of death traps.

Alternately, you can complicate the path to the hook. If the hook is not immediately accessible, interested parties may need to go through one or more intervening steps before they can interact with the hook. For example, there may be a temple deep in the jungle as the hook for multiple groups, but there are still the dangers of the jungle to get through before that is ever an issue. This allows you to combine the dynamic factors coming from active, agenda driven NPCs with more traditional problems.

Like dinosaurs.

### **The Bottom Line**

Each of these approaches to running a pickup game have been presented to you in a pure form – and you could certainly pick any one choice and run a great, solid pickup game using it. But your real ninja power as a GM is going to come from putting all of them in a big blender and turning it on to puree.

The structured pickup game provides a good, default set of bones for any adventure. This makes it the ideal fall-back position if the other two strategies are running dry on you. And any dynamic pickup game is going to be stronger if you take the aspected perspective on it, and work your aspectbased decision points into it.

Think of this as a hammer, screwdriver, and wrench. Each tool has a particular function that it's especially good at, but without all three, your toolbox just isn't complete.

## **Keeping it Pulp**

Pulp is exactly the right kind of genre for a pickup game because it's so damn simple. Pulp isn't complicated. Good is generally good, bad is generally bad, science and good intentions fix the world's ills, and evil can be defeated with determination and two swinging fists.

This isn't to say your pulp scenarios can't have some complexity here and there – everyone loves a good mystery now and again – but pulp really starts to sing when it builds a kind of crazy, tumbling-ever-forward momentum. A good pulp game session should leave the players feeling like they were desperately scrambling all over the surface of some monolithic vehicle hurtling with great determination at a very tall, very unsympathetic wall – and managed, somehow, to pull it all together at the last minute.

To say it another way, great pulp games are nearly always some kind of a race – against a clock, against distance, against an opponent. Everything is in motion, and conclusions – coming right at you – are inevitable. When your players cross the finish line, it should be with the same panting elation of a runner who came in first by the skin of his teeth thanks to a desperate last-minute sprint.

Some GMs can manage this just by exercising the techniques they've already honed, but many of us are not so blessed. This chapter's already given a number of ideas for how to run your game such

that you'll have room to create the kind of experience we're talking about. Here we'll focus on techniques that directly address the idea of the "race".

## Staying Action-Oriented

Action is the proud beating heart of adventure fiction. It's the GM's job to see that that heart never skips a beat. Read on, fair GM, and learn the true tempos of your pulp game's heart.

### Put Them on the Clock

There's nothing like a clock for keeping your game's metronome regular. Whether you're running a pickup game or a longer series, you've already got one clock going – the length of real time for the session. You should already have a concern for making sure that you pack in enough events and interest in the bounds of that clock's timeframe, but here, we're talking about something else.

We're talking, instead, about the in-game clock – something which the characters should always hear ticking away over their shoulder, hounding them. In-game time pressure is vital to encouraging an ongoing action atmosphere. No situation that needs the players to act should come up without having some sort of time limit on it before dire consequences shall befall the dawdler.

As a GM, you should tune your ear to the sound of this clock, and move quickly to renew it whenever the sound falls silent. The tension in a dramatic scene should never fall slack; if it does – put them on the clock! Your players could use the occasional nudge to get going; they may be inclined to sit around and talk rather than take action – put them on the clock!

### Provide Plenty of Cues and Clues

You may think you've given the players all the clever hints and subtle cues necessary to solve the riddle and get to the heart of the matter ... but they're sitting there looking unsure of what to do, or asking all the questions that *aren't* on target. The game is, in essence, paralyzed. Why did it happen?

Unfortunately, it's likely you only have yourself to blame. If all those questions the players are asking are off-target, it's very likely because you didn't make the target big enough. If they're sitting around and unsure of what actions they can or should take, you probably didn't give them enough cues as to what their options are.

We're not saying that you shouldn't leave the field open for players to pursue whatever agendas they want to – because after all the characters are the big focus of the game. But when players stop having somewhere to go (and whether or not that's true from *your* perspective is irrelevant if it's effectively true from *theirs*), it's because you didn't show them what the destinations were. *Show them.*

Pulp plots have a certain *inevitability* baked right in. This is *not* the same as saying they're built to "railroad" the players. Rather, each step that is taken should naturally reveal the shape of the next ones available. In a vacuum, players will follow that shape, so long as it's clear enough to be recognizable.

If you're putting together a mystery in a pulp game, for example, then you *must* make sure that there's more than one way to solve it. You should also exercise a broad tolerance for wacky solutions that the players come up with (but we'll get more into that below), or letting them pursue some side-threads before getting back to the main one (if it seems to be dragging the game off course, however, make sure you've put the main thread *on the clock*, as above).

This goes back to what we said just a little bit earlier. The targets you put into the story need to be big enough – big enough to be noticed and to suggest a course of action, and big enough to be hit if someone's trying to come at it from any number of directions. Paralysis arises from a simple lack of

the obvious. Don't be *afraid* of the obvious – it's part of pulp. *Provide plenty of cues and clues*, and your players will move ever forward.

### Embrace Crazy Plans and Schemes

"A good plan, violently executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week." — General George Patton

The General may as well have been talking about pulp when he said that. Players are going to be more likely to take an action-oriented approach if they feel like they aren't going to be penalized for less-than-perfect plans. Be understanding of flaws and be willing to gloss over them in the interests of fun and entertainment.

Even if you can see several holes in a plan, don't go taking advantage of those holes right off. Villains can have blind spots; they're not perfect either. Jeopardize the holes, certainly, to increase the drama, but don't go after them to the point of unraveling the plan. If it's even halfway decent (and especially if it's violent or involves characters taking some kind of crazy risk), then it's going to make for a solid, entertaining element of the story. Support their plan – like it – and be glad to be a part of it!

### Encourage Action over Contemplation

Sitting around and thinking about things can be the death of pulp. The characters are men and women of action.

When given the choice among "thinky/ talky", and "smashy", smashy wins!

This is not to say that the *thinky/talky* side of things shouldn't get its screen time. The world of pulp is also the land of strange technologies that need examining, ancient inscriptions that need deciphering, and powerful delegates that need schmoozing. But each of those is only half of a pulp situation, never its whole. Strange technologies that need examining *can come to life, attacking all in the lab!* Indecipherable inscriptions that need deciphering *unlock tombs chock full of death traps!* And powerful delegates that need schmoozing are *the targets of sinister assassins!*

Dropping action into the middle of an otherwise contemplative scene can liven up the game, keeping things jumpy and in motion. Don't be shy about doing it. But *do* be shy about doing it when characters are interacting with each other excitedly. The idea here is to *encourage* action over contemplation – not to mandate it. A good social scene where everyone's chewing the scenery is fantastic – you don't want to nip that in the bud by any means. What you *do* want to prevent is the spiral from that point towards things which are less interesting. Stay sensitive to the nature and pace of the conversation, and when it starts slowing down, make sure that action awaits.

When the thinky or talky side of things comes up, you should still make sure it's *valuable*. If the players have created characters who are eminent scholars and scientists, or people well-connected in the halls of power, they should get every chance to make use of those skills. But these sorts of examinations, discoveries, and conversations should be abbreviated where possible, and should *always* give quick rise to potentials for action. They can be the glue that holds together two pieces of action, but without those two pieces, they are glue best kept in the bottle.

It boils down to this: when in doubt, fill out the second half of something thinky or talky with something dynamic, exciting, and pregnant with the potential for violence – something smashy! *Encourage action over contemplation.*

### Allow Two Fists to Solve What Ails Us

Part and parcel of accepting the action principle of pulp is embracing the idea that two swinging fists (and a mug full of raw determination and good intent) are enough to get through just about any situation. In pulp, violence *works* as a solution.

Some of this idea overlaps with the *action over contemplation* principle. If someone is struggling with something thinky or talky, it's appropriate to give them something they can smash to get their answers (provided that the group is otherwise stymied with the less violent approaches). This also means that the characters shouldn't face problems that are impossible to fight. Pulp is simple, and occasionally players will want to dive into the simplest solutions, and hitting something until it stops doing the bad thing is really, elementally simple.

There are, of course, complications to this. Should you allow swinging fists to solve the problem of the snooty bureaucrat? Well, no (even if it does make the character feel better). What we're talking about here is the use of fists (and guns, and weapons) against the *big* problems of the adventure. If a giant monster is trying to eat your apartment, you *can* fight it to solve the problem. If a vastly powerful mathemagician has run off with your girlfriend and plans to incant dark equations that will siphon off her life force – your guns *will* be proof against his evil.

In pulp, when the cards are down, and the big doom is upon us, violence doesn't beget violence – violence begets victory. *Allow two fists to solve what ails!*

### **When All Else Fails... Send in the Ninjas**

Games will inevitably stagnate at some point or another, no matter how much effort is put into heading off that undesirable eventuality. Leads will get exhausted, players will get frustrated with puzzles, and nobody will come up with a good, crazy plan to save the day. There's only one thing you could possibly do in such a situation.

Send in the ninjas.

Seriously. Send in the ninjas.

For one, a good sudden explosion of violence gives you time, as a GM, to think, and gives everyone else something to do too, what with all the pointed sticks and knives and poison darts and kung-fu fists and feet flying at their heads.

For two, the ninjas will inevitably fall before the derring-do of the heroes, and then they'll have someone to interrogate. By this time you'll have used the combat time to figure out where to send folks next.

Naturally, the captured ninja in question will only offer enough information after a good Intimidate roll (okay, if you're at this point, really, any Intimidate roll) to point the characters as to where and what to do next, before the cyanide capsule he has under his tongue dissolves and kills him, or a more talented villain nearby puts an arrow through his heart, but by that time, he's said enough, and the game is back on a roll.

Naturally you don't always have to dress the ninjas up like ninjas. Sometimes they'll be the shambling undead. Sometimes they'll dress up in pin-stripe suits and carry tommy guns and say things like "youse guys" and "fuggedaboudit" instead of "kii-yah!" and "you want to fight – fight me!" But make no mistake, though their costumes and customs may be different, you are dropping ninjas onto the party, and it's time to go to town.

But beware! Use the power of the ninjas carefully. There *is* such a thing – though we know you may doubt it! – as *too many ninjas*. Overuse of this technique leads to players getting wise to it real fast, and one too many fights of this nature can start to feel like hollow or meaningless victories. Try the other things we've talked about first, but when all else fails... send in the ninjas.

### **Slightly More Subtle Ninjas**

There's one trick to remember with the ninjas, or whatever else you send in. Players can get pretty accustomed to threats to themselves. Nothing is more frustrating than having some gun toting

mooks come in through the door, get creamed, and have the players go back to studying their navels.

When this is a concern, the trick is to have the ninjas bust in *on someone else*! The players may be blasé about attacks on themselves, but if the ninjas attack the shoeshine guy at the corner that's suddenly a challenge and a mystery! Can they save the guy in time? And even if they can, why are ninjas after him?

## Good Cliche, Bad Cliche

There's a hearty embrace of cliché which, while not necessary, can go a long way to making an adventure feel like it's a "pulp" adventure. One thing you can do to help this out is to add a twist.

Once you've thought up a reasonable explanation for events, add one more layer. Don't make things more complicated. Instead, make them more colorful. If your story involves gangsters, consider making them zombie gangsters, kung fu gangsters, gangsters with freeze rays, gangsters led by a talking gorilla, or anything else that comes to mind. In most games, you would not want to overuse this sort of thing, but for pulp, it's encouraged.

## NPCs on the Fly

When you need to introduce a new character, simply start with a blank character sheet and fill in a few critical pieces of data – their best skill, a stunt or two, the aspects that jump out at you as most important – and leave the rest blank. When a situation arises where the NPC needs to roll a skill or use an aspect you haven't written down, go ahead and write it down in one of the blank slots, then roll appropriately. This results in NPCs getting fleshed out over time without needing to invest a lot of time or effort up front.

## R-E-S-P-E-C-T

A lot of games center on a ragtag band who exist in the grey area outside of society where they live a life of danger and adventure. This is only half true for characters. They get the danger and adventure, certainly, but they are also firmly within the bounds of society. They are storied individuals, and the people they meet are going to develop opinions of them over time, both good and bad.

Two things are true of the player's characters – they are heroes (we hope) and they are very good at what they do. That should merit a certain amount of respect from the NPCs they deal with.

Now, a certain amount of fawning and sycophancy is to be expected. The characters get invited to all the best parties and will always have people wanting to bend their ear because they're presumed to be well connected, but that's admiration, not respect. Some players really enjoy that, so feel free to heap it on, but respect is a rarer, more valuable gift for characters. Respect only really matters when it's coming from people who understand what you do. The world may recognize that Maggie Honor is a brilliant engineer, but that doesn't mean as much as when Dr. Avenarius Herborn pauses for just a moment, impressed by her latest creation. When Diego McKinnon cows a group of thugs, that's no great thing, and it's nothing compared to when a hot up and coming gunslinger shows a tiny bit of quiver of fear in his voice when he speaks because this is Sky Freakin' Hobo!

Opponents, rivals and peers should be aware of what players do, and should be respectful of it. One way this manifests is that opponents will plan based on you being awesome, and try to take it into account. Traditionally, this is done by the villain doing something cheesy that completely devalues the characters' strengths. This is lame and almost insulting. The villain should provide a check against the character, not simply overwhelm him.

One thing to note: all of the cheesy options are valid adventure hooks if, and only if, they are the central hook of the adventure. Depriving Diego of his Hobo Harpoon is fine for the adventure about Diego needing to cross a war zone on foot to get back to his jet pack, but depriving it for the adventure about Dr. Avenarius Herborn's attempt to split pi is just lame.

This may seem like a lot of space for a very small thing, but please remember it. When characters get a little bit of the respect that they feel their characters deserve, it's a big payout for the players.

## Deathtraps and Other Dooms

Sometimes the characters will be faced with situations where the potential for a lethal outcome is clear - fights on the edge of a bottomless chasm, crossing a field full of artillery fire, trapped in a building with a big bomb – that sort of thing. Certainly, if the character were to fall into the chasm, get hit by an artillery shell, or be caught in the explosion, it would be the end for them.

As a rule of thumb, try to never put a character in a situation where it is “make this roll or die”. Instead, have the threat affect the contest in other ways – an artillery shell landing nearby should scatter the combatants, not decimate them. A nearby hazard like a bottomless crevasse provides color to descriptions, and is best used as an aspect for the scene.

All that said, while you should go out of your way to try to keep these things from bringing about an arbitrary death, sometimes characters do die, and when that time comes, let it happen with dignity, and help the player get his next character started as quickly as possible. A little heartless? Yes, but it's necessary – if death is entirely impossible, the game shifts from pulp to being a full on cartoon.

## Information Management

Information management: what does that mean? Consider for a second that as a GM, you know a *lot*. You've read the whole book, you've got some notes, you have solid ideas of what makes the various NPCs tick. You've got information that you probably haven't even thought about yet, that you just think of as logical extensions of what you know. As a GM, one of your most important jobs is making sure that that information flows steadily towards the players – too little and they may grow frustrated, too much and they'll get overwhelmed.

The trick of this is that you need to control the quality of the information the players receive. This is partly about interest level – if you read a passage straight from a textbook, don't expect a lot of interest – but it is more about how you expect the information to be used. Practically speaking, there are two types of information, color and drama.

### Color

A lot of information is going to provide color. Most descriptions and explanations are color. Color is most important to maintaining the feel of the world – if you don't provide things like descriptions, play begins to resemble little more than a board game. On the other hand, if there's any kind of information you're liable to provide too much of, it's probably going to be color. There's no one way to do color right, but there are a few guidelines.

### Scenes

The first is to realize that people don't need all the details to fill in the appropriate ones. If you describe a narrow alley between two brownstones, a lot of players will fill in things like windows and fire escapes, maybe even trash cans and litter without you needing to describe “four by three windows every twelve feet or so, and a rusty fire escape going up to the next floor”.

### Improvising Detail

Sometimes players will have a slightly different view of things than you. If this difference is drastic, it may result in them taking an action that doesn't entirely make sense. When this happens, just ask the player what they expect. If they're making an assumption that seems entirely unreasonable, you may need to discuss that with them, but if it's not unreasonable, then it's an excellent opportunity to suggest to the player that this would be a good use of the editing power of a fate point (page XX). Usually, the player's expectations are more minor, and usually come in the form of "Is there a ladder here?" The answer to a question like that depends on your response. If you feel the answer is "yes", or even "no, but there should have been, why didn't I think of that?" then say yes. If you feel the answer is "no, but while that's not very likely, it's not unreasonable" then the answer to give is "I don't know, is there?" while looking meaningfully at the player's fate points. It is only if you feel that the request is entirely out of line that your answer should be "No."

## **People**

As with scenes, don't try to provide too much detail. Players usually pick one or two things to remember a character by, so try to pick perhaps three elements and describe those. If there's some other element you need to reveal, work it into the scene, describing it as part of an action the character takes.

## **A Trick**

Find an author whose work you enjoy, and take a moment to look at how they describe things and people. When a new character shows up, how much time does the author spend on the description? How many elements does the author reveal? Every author has a slightly different cadence, but if you can isolate one that you enjoy, you may find that using it to provide your own color makes your life much easier.

## **Drama**

Drama is that information which leads directly to action. The clearest form of drama is the immediate threat – "there's an axe swinging towards your head, what do you do?" – but there are also discoveries like "This clearly proves the Colonel is the killer. What do you do?" Implicit in any dramatic information is that question: What do you do?

The hardest part about providing such information is remembering that the more immediate the requirement for action is, the better. Consider the second example above – you have proof that the Colonel is the killer. If all the suspects are just milling about waiting for the detectives to come along, then there is no immediacy. The players could sit on the information as long as they like, pursue secondary goals and otherwise generally twiddle their thumbs until they feel like it.

If, on the other hand, the Colonel is already across town, and he's about to have a private audience with the likely next victim, then the characters must act! Naturally, the Colonel has cut the phone lines, so the players are going to have to race across town to try to catch him at the last moment!

Assuming that the second description is closer to the kind of game you want to run, there are three necessary elements to any dramatic reveal: tension, consequence and clarity.

**Tension** is required to make sure that a choice must be made now. This usually means that the matter is time sensitive in some way. Tension is also the implicit difficulty of the task at hand. If it can be done casually, there's no tension to speak of because no choice needs to be made. Tension is what forces the player's hand, and makes them make a choice.

The most important **consequence** of any piece of dramatic information is what will happen if the players do nothing. Whatever those consequences are, they should be bad – inaction should always be one of the worst choices that the players can make.

Even if you get the other two elements, they'll be nothing but frustrating unless you also provide **clarity** – players must have at least one clear course of action available to them. Without that, the players are reduced to being spectators, which is not where they want to be. Don't be afraid to be obvious. The clearest course of action may be as simple as "Get over there and keep hitting him 'til candy comes out!" Even if there are multiple potential courses of action, go out of your way to make sure that the players are aware of at least one with a better outcome than the consequence of doing nothing.

### *Consequence, Consequence, Consequence*

Tension and clarity are usually the easy part of the equation. Tension is usually just an extension of the consequence, and clarity depends mostly on the GM's ability to communicate. Consequence is really the heart and soul of drama, and as a GM, you are going to need to get a firm grasp on what that means.

The simple yardstick for consequence is how much the players are invested in it. Sounds easy, sure, but what are your players going to invest in? For some players, it's going to be the same things that their characters are invested in. For others it's going to be whatever makes for the most interesting story. For others, it will need to be a threat directly to themselves or their stuff.

No one knows your group better than you do, so there's a limit to how far our advice can take you. Make the decisions that work best for you. Still, in case it's useful, here are a few tips.

- Consequences that are absolute (death and destruction) are usually less potent than more transitory ones (injury and damage). While may seem counterintuitive, it makes sense if you remember that if an NPC dies, it's very sad, but it is only if they're badly injured that they can blame the character for what happened to them.
- Especially avoid any consequence that will end the game. When you plan a consequence, you must be sure you have a plan for how things will move forward if it comes to pass.
- A consequence that makes characters look foolish is surprisingly motivational, especially if you make sure NPCs have long memories.
- Remember, consequences don't always need to be bad. The only thing that needs to be bad is that inaction is the worst option, but that can be highly relative. If a player discovers that he has a winning lottery ticket, but has only 10 minutes to get to the office to turn it in, then you have all the elements you need: tension (only 10 minutes to get across town), consequence (if no action is taken, the player won't win, but if he succeeds, he'll get a prize) and clarity (get to the ticket office, and fast!).

### *Clarity and Choice*

Sometimes (almost always, even) a piece of dramatic information will have more than one potential course of action available as a reasonable response. Sometimes the difference is merely one of tactics or appearance, but sometimes the choice needs to be made between multiple options which each have consequences (albeit consequences which are not as bad as doing nothing).

Now, these choices are good opportunities for play all by themselves, but as a GM, these are the moments you want to look for. These are the times when a character's aspects are at their most meaningful – if they have two choices, and their aspects would lean them towards one over the other, that's exactly when you roll out a fate point and brandish it casually. If the choice their aspect leans towards is a little tougher, that's even better.

### *Getting Blindsided*

Players will sometimes outsmart you, or just get crazy lucky. Sometimes you will provide a piece of dramatic information and have all the pieces in place and they will respond in a way that comes

completely out of left field, and which undercuts your entire expectation for the scene, perhaps even leapfrogging past any amount of preparation you've done. This is insanely frustrating, and the instinct is to immediately invent a reason why they can't do that so as to force them back on track.

**For the love of all that is holy, don't do it.**

If you do this, your players will know. They will. Honest. And they'll think it sucks because it will feel like you're punishing them for getting into the game. And they'll be right.

If this happens, roll with it. You should have a strong enough sense of the motives of the various NPCs in play, their plans and consequences that you should be able to adapt to it. And if you can't? Don't sweat it. Take a second, look sheepish, then praise your players. Let them know they did something pretty clever, and have them take a few minutes to grab a drink or a smoke or whatever while you rough up some notes to deal with this. It'll work out, and by the time they get back, you'll probably find you've been inspired by this turn of events. So there's your pressure valve: confess to getting caught off guard, step back, look at what's happened, and you'll find yourself fueled by this turn of events rather than burned. Your players will get a chance to grin and feel clever out on the back deck while you prepare their next challenge.

***Building a Mystery***

Now that you have a clear idea of the difference between color and drama, you need to keep it in mind as you play. One of the most frustrating things that can happen in play is that the GM muddles the two, and includes some dramatic information in the midst of a barrage of color and expects his players to "catch on". This is dirty pool, and it leads to nothing but frustration. Don't mix these things up. There are always cases which seem like they're a little bit of both, and handling them can be tricky. The cases you most want to look for are **clues** and **tells**.

***Tells***

Tells are pieces of color information that may seem like dramatic information, but aren't. They are pieces of information which wave a flag and say "there's something to investigate here!" without revealing what that *something* is. Think of them as a bit like a poker "tell" – something's showing on that guy's face, *but what does it mean?* Tells draw in player curiosity without innately satisfying it – until that player then takes action to dig deeper. Therefore, in practice a tell is usually a piece of information about a person or thing which is not immediately apparent to all observers, but which one character discovers. While this information may provide perspective, or be useful in any number of ways, it *suggests no course of action* (other than saying "there's a rock to turn over here!"), which is why it stays firmly in the color camp.

The line between a tell (color), and drama that the player doesn't care about, is almost indistinguishable.

Tells should be interesting. As color, interest is their only currency, and they may eventually turn some *other* piece of information into drama rather than color, or it may influence a choice later on. Tells are also a great way for you, as a GM, to test the waters of player interest. In a given situation, if a player picks up four tells, but only pursues two, the ones he pursues are where you want to situate your plot.

***Clues***

Clues are pieces of information that are dramatic, but which handle tension and clarity differently than usual. Usually, tension exists for the larger situation, rather than for an individual clue. When a character is faced with a complex piece of drama, it is often broken into smaller sections, represented as clues.

What's the next (immediate) action of the characters?

The answer to that question is usually “look for clues”, but that’s a fairly meaningless piece of advice. Clues, as discrete pieces of information, must also suggest action, but that action may simply lead to the next clue. This is a very tricky balancing act, but done right, it means that each clue is its own piece of dramatic information. But to look at these clues another way, they all have the same tension and consequence, and they only vary in terms of clarity. Thus, for a mystery, the mystery itself provides the tension and consequence, but not the clarity, while each clue may provide no new consequences or tension, but does provide clarity. This sequence of clues is the *chain of evidence*.

### *Tells and Clues*

Tells should not be clues in their own right, but they can affect the clarity of a clue, by making it clear that there are more options than the obvious. To the player, this distinction may seem almost unnoticeable, but it’s useful for the GM to keep in mind because it’s critical for keeping mysteries framed in such a way that they are neither too easy nor too hard to solve.

Notice that the tell expanded the options for the clue, but it was the clue itself that suggests the course of action.

### *Secrets Kill!*

Now, bearing in mind that we’ve been talking about mysteries here, at no point have we talked about how to *keep* information from players. There’s a simple reason for that – *it’s a bad idea*.

This returns to that core responsibility of the GM as the provider of information, but here is a basic rule of thumb: *if there is a piece of information to be found, a player should find it, the only question is when and how*. A piece of information in your notes should be treated like a gun introduced in the first act of a play – it’s going to go off sometime before the end. By the same token, if there’s a secret door in the complex, then it is not the player’s responsibility to find it, it is *your* responsibility to show it to them.

This may seem overly generous, like you’re giving everything to players on a silver platter, but remember that it is the *player’s* responsibility to act, and to face the consequences of his actions. Rather than hand the results to the players outright, you are giving the players *opportunities* to act.

How do you make that happen? *Stick to the rules of providing drama*. As long as there is tension and consequence to make players act, and clarity to provide them a means to act, then you’re good to go.

### *Gathering Information*

When players set out to gather information, be it research, contact or any other means, you need to decide if they’re going to get drama, a clue, or a tell. This is partly influenced by the situation, and partly influenced by your read of player intent.

If the characters already have a dramatic situation, but they’re gathering information because they don’t see the clear path of action, then they should find a tell which helps provide the clarity.

If the characters already have a dramatic situation and they see at least one clear path, but they’re researching to try to find another (or to find another solution entirely) then you make a judgment call. If there is another potential path that you think would be useful for them to see, give them a tell that points to that. If you think the players are grasping at straws, take a moment to assess the situation. It’s possible you’ve been too harsh, and your players are flailing around, looking for an alternative. If you agree, this might be your cue to throw them a rope, and introduce a new option with a tell. Of course, if you think they’re just trying to weasel out of a tough choice, then give them a tell that underlines the forthcoming consequence (your most basic form of clarity is a simple reminder).

The best way to tell which one players are doing is this simple test: Are they trying to simplify a complex situation so that no one has to suffer any consequences ? If so, they're acting like bureaucrats, not heroes, and you need to emphasize to them that their job is to do the best they can with what they have – not to spin their wheels endlessly worrying about what-ifs.

If the characters are already in a mystery, then they're probably researching to get more clarity on their clue, so feel free to provide a tell to that end. If, however, characters are gathering information because the players can't think of anything else to do, then it's time to throw some *drama* at them. That's what they're here for.

## Testing the Breeze

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When you tell a player to pick up the dice, you're communicating that something is about to happen. In fact, sometimes, the entire point of the roll is to communicate that something is going on far more than to find out how well the character rolled. These are situations where you could just tell the player that they see something, but by first calling for an Alertness or Drive or other roll, you capture their attention. Generally, you can use their roll to indicate how to twist the description. If they roll badly, perhaps something goes wrong, or you couch the data in very obscure terms. If they roll very well, you're welcome to throw in some extra detail, which may be a clue, or may just be a bit of extra flourish.

One important qualifier on testing the breeze – sometimes players will look at a bad roll and feel they need to use aspects or fate points to bump it up. You can discourage them, a simple “Don't worry about it, I was just checking something” will often suffice. If you don't want to discourage them, however, take it as a reminder that you need to create an opportunity for that character to earn that FP back as soon as possible.

## Controlling Perspective

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Not every GM realizes the importance of controlling the audience's (i.e., the players') perspective in a game, but it's just as important in a roleplaying game as it is in a movie or television show. What you show the players, how you show it to them, when you show it to them, and what you don't show are all key components in building excitement and story.

The questions of how to manage perspective are nothing short of vital. Here, we'll give you some answers.

## Scene Framing

If you've ever played a roleplaying game before, you've framed a scene without thinking about it. Even if you've never played a roleplaying game before, you'll frame a scene without thinking about it. The fact that we give it a formal title may disguise how common it is – **scene framing** is merely what you do when you decide when a scene starts and stops, where it happens, and who's involved in it. Every time a GM says, “So you're all sitting in a bar when...” or “So now you get to the villain's secret hideout...” she's framing a scene. It's as simple as establishing the transition for the next piece of game action. The easiest comparison to make is to a film editor, who routinely cuts scenes off and begins others. That's scene framing, and everyone does it whether or not they realize it.

So, why point it out? Because *mindful* scene framing is a GM's primary tool to establish pace in a session of play, *especially* in a pickup game. When the pace is flagging, it's the GM's responsibility to focus everyone on the game and frame the next scene, to keep things moving along as they should in a pulp game, where the action is fast and the “camera” isn't willing to focus too long on a particular subject if it no longer serves a purpose in play. This can be a rocky road to walk

sometimes – one or all of the players may truly enjoy going through all the minute details of their characters’ shopping trips for better equipment. You’re going to have to cater to those preferences, if the whole group exhibits them. If they don’t, however, you’re going to have to take those rolling eyes as a sign that you need to be proactive about framing scenes. How will you know when to move things? Look no further than the next few paragraphs.

## Starting Things Off

When you frame the beginning of a scene, you’re typically going to want to start it just before an important piece of action (not necessarily violence) is going to take place. If the characters are going to the villain’s hideout, you don’t want to start describing events in the scene from the moment they leave their apartment unless something important is going to occur then. If Maggie is waiting for a contact to arrive at a rendezvous, you don’t want to start the scene two hours before the contact shows up. This may seem like common sense advice, but it’s something that can trip people up on the fly – it’s easy to fall into a pattern of narrating every block of time the characters spend in play without realizing and chomping up game time with “okay, so you leave the store and start heading back home, and you’re walking down...” kind of material. Keep an eye out for it and cut when necessary to save yourself idle time.

## When a Scene is No Longer a Scene

How do you know when it’s time to move on? Well, just about every scene you could envision has a purpose, a moment where you can definitively say that the *point* of the scene has happened. Usually, this happens after the resolution of some kind of conflict, but that isn’t always the case. If the characters are shopping for equipment, the scene’s purpose is for the characters to find out whether or not they can acquire the gear they want. If they can (or can’t), and they know it, the scene is over – whatever bickering Gerald Carter’s player is doing with the antiques dealer can safely be glossed over. If the characters are trying to figure out the meaning behind an obscure puzzle left at a crime scene, the scene is resolved when they discover (or fail to discover) that clue. If the characters are in a fight, the scene is resolved when that fight’s over and they figure out where to go from there.

Even in purely character-driven scenes, like when Drake’s player wants a scene so he can fail to convince his pursuers how he really converted from being a criminal yet again, that time eventually comes. He’s failed to say what he needs to say, probably milked some fate points out of the GM for good roleplay, shown his true colors, and it’s time to move on. Going into a scene, you have to ask yourself: What’s the point? Why is this scene happening? And when that point occurs, whatever it is, close up loose ends and move on.

## Making the Transitions

So you’re sitting in play, the time has come to change scenes, and you’re trying not to ruffle feathers when doing it. How do you frame a scene without abusing your power? How do you avoid stealing a player’s thunder if he’s riffing off some good roleplay?

Well, first rule of thumb is that if it looks like your players are getting into the action at hand, let ’em run with it. Unless you’re totally strapped for time, letting the players revel in immersion or in a particular aspect of setting (no pun intended) isn’t going to do your game any harm. Roll with what they give you. You may find your game enhanced by it. It may not be what you planned, but if they enjoy it, your gaming session is a successful one. And if the NPC interactions are interesting enough, you can always take this as a cue to move decision points around to be initiated by different NPCs than you thought. Your plans are the ones that need to be flexible.

The second rule of thumb is that when you’re in doubt, just ask. Your players know you aren’t a mind reader, and no rule in this book can substitute for honest, direct communication with them.

You may be in a place where you're strapped for time and only have the length of one session to run your adventure. If that's the case, no one's going to begrudge you asking, "Hey, guys? Gerald's got the equipment he wanted... can I go ahead and cut to the next scene?" If you have a player who *would* begrudge you asking that, it might be time to review his inclusion in your game.

The third rule of thumb is that if you feel the purpose of a scene has been fulfilled but you don't know what to transition to next, then turn to the players and ask them what they want to do. If you've set up your decision points right, or some player has a clear goal in mind, they're more than likely brimming with ideas about what scene they want to run next. All you have to do is solicit ideas, and you have an instant wealth of scenes you can possibly run.

The fourth rule of thumb is that if there's any dead air, do something. Are the players not talking anymore, looking at you expectantly or at random details of the room? More than likely, a scene's gone off its course. Do whatever you have to – bring in a new NPC encounter, ask to frame a new scene, narrate two guys bursting in the door with guns – but under any circumstances, do not let dead air dominate your game time. Your time for making stories is valuable; make sure you make it count.

## Camera Work

When it comes right down to it, the GM is the director for her game – or at least the *cinematographer* – and can deliberately control the "camera" through descriptive techniques. When she takes control of the camera, she's saying to the audience, "Hey – look over here, right now!" This ability of the GM is powerful juju, and if you juggle and tweak it just right, you can really drive up the excitement level of your game.

To pull off solid camera work, you need to picture yourself as the camera crew, a set of ghostly, invisible people placed within the scene. Each interesting thing in the scene should get a camera on it, and any given set of interesting things should contain all of the characters. If a PC is missing from the list, figure out why – it may be a warning sign that you haven't given them anything interesting to do (and, thus, there's nothing interesting to point a camera at around them). Come up with something interesting for them, and include them with a camera.

Sometimes even certain NPCs – usually the big villains of the piece – may get a camera as well, but we'll get into that a bit more in "Cut Scenes", below.

In the above example, all of this is one larger scene, yes, but each camera's point of focus can be looked at as a smaller, contained scene of its own. The exchanges Drake spends climbing up the temple needn't be the same exchanges shared by Gerald and the Sky Hobo.

With this in mind, the GM gets to control which camera is turned on, when. When she wants to focus on what Maggie's doing, she can run a few exchanges' worth of Maggie struggling to make it up a rusty scaffold; when she wants to watch Drake and the Sky Hobo wallop cultists, she can do much the same.

In situations like these, it's important to make sure that each camera gets a healthy chunk of screen time. To put it another way, each camera should get roughly the same amount of time and attention. Here, we're talking more about *real time* than in-game time – there's no formula of exchanges-per-camera to be had. Further, with multiple cameras, the length of real time each camera is "on" should be kept short – a few minutes, perhaps, but not much more than five (or *maybe* eight or ten).

This sort of camera work should be active and deliberate. Think about the angle something would best be filmed at, and describe it from that perspective. Taking the role of the camera man, talk about zooming in on particular details, pulling back to reveal a vaster whole, or panning over to a new, sudden development. You can even use this method to describe transitions from one camera to the next, showing how the smaller scenes are connected inside of the larger whole.

Nearly always, if an exchange has ended on something that would make a good short-term cliffhanger, it's time to cut over to the next camera. Other times, it may even be worth it to pause a camera in the *middle* of an exchange – say, after someone's made a bad roll – in order to ratchet up the tension.

Bringing this sort of description into full form can give players the immersive sense of starring in a movie, and can go a long way to holding their attention even when it's not their camera that's turned on.

Solid camera work achieves two primary goals. First, it makes sure all your players get “spotlight” time. (This makes players happy, and happy players make a better game .) Second, it drives the pace of your game within the larger scene. In the end, the high action of pulp is only as exciting as how it is filmed. *Film it well.*

## Cut Scenes

If you're particularly invested in making your game feel like a movie, consider the idea of using a **cut scene**. In this context, a cut scene is a short bit of narration by the GM that follows what's going on with the NPCs *without* any of the characters present, while the PCs are off doing whatever it is they're doing.

Most cut scenes should *tease* about what the NPCs are doing. For example, you could show two NPCs having a conversation, but don't let it be too clear what the specific topic is. Other times, you may want to keep one of the NPCs in the scene “off camera”, but heard – and save the revelation of his identity for when the characters actually encounter him.

Cut scenes also work well as an anticipation-building commentary on what the characters are doing. For example, when the PCs have just walked into a trap, consider doing a cut scene to the bad guy (ensconced elsewhere in his lair) saying something sinister and pulling the lever that unleashes the killer robots. “He pulls the lever, cackling. Everyone roll Alertness!” They also work well as transitions from one player scene to the next, particularly if the characters are doing some lengthy travel in between actual on-screen scenes.

Finally, cut scenes can give the audience (your players) a nice view of a hated villain's demise when their characters aren't able to stay around to see it themselves (what with them not wanting a more personal demise experience). The sight of the master villain shouting “nooooooooo!” as his creations rise up and destroy him, his lab exploding all around, is the stuff of *satisfaction*. Provide it!

The main wrinkle with cut scenes is all about your comfort level, as a GM, and your players' comfort level, with the ability to separate the “in character” stuff from the “out of character” stuff.

Cut scenes are there solely for the players' enjoyment – they provide no information to the characters, and the players shouldn't act on the information that *is* supplied. If you stick tightly to the recommendations above – in particular going for the tease and saving the revelation – you shouldn't run afoul of these issues that much (unless your players just plum don't like such scenes). But if you do have the kind of trust and comfort levels that let you reveal more, by all means, do so – provided you're sure you're keeping your players entertained. Avoid the temptation to hog the spotlight. Cut scenes are spice; they're not the main dish.

## The Montage

Some skills take a lot of time and their use is best described as a montage. A *montage* is a term from film that describes a series of short shots that collectively indicate time passing and a character or characters doing something. If you've ever seen a training montage in a film where the hero spends several quick scenes lifting weights, running up stairs, practicing under the sharp eye of his mentor,

and at the end, he's mastered whatever he started working on, then you should have a good idea of how a montage should play out.

When you describe a character performing such a task, take a moment to describe a few key scenes, trying to visualize how this might be presented if the story were a movie. This gives an opportunity to give a little more color to long efforts, like researching and contacting.

## The Long Game: Advancement

*SotC* is intended to be a pickup game with a revolving cast of players and characters. As such, it's not truly intended that characters receive individual advancement (character improvement) based on, say, how many adventures they've gone on. Instead, the intention is entirely that the characters advance *en masse* if they do advance at all, with the entire group receiving credit for being a part of the game.

Player characters should always receive the same amount of on-sheet rewards, in order to make sure that everyone remains a peer of one another. Giving out advancement only to those who manage to attend one or more sessions means you're penalizing those players who may have busier schedules. It's impolite; don't do it. The game will benefit when the characters are mutual peers. No one should come back from a playing hiatus to discover he's become the sidekick.

The easiest form of reward, and the only one allowed to be a little "uneven" from character to character, is in terms of fate points. If your game allows someone to carry his fate points forward from the last session he was in (if the total's higher than his refresh rate), then it's entirely appropriate to give out fate points as rewards for clever, entertaining, or well-crafted play. Characters with a pile of fate points at the end of a session may also have had less to do, or were particularly "goosed" by compels on their aspects, so letting the karma wagon roll on into their next session is a good way to compensate for whatever the situation was.

In terms of even-handed advancement given to all characters, there are three ways characters can improve: their skills, their aspects, and their stunts.

### Skills: Raising the Roof

It should be rare, if ever, that a GM lets characters raise the peak level (top adjective) of their skill pyramids. The characters that the players embody are Superb-level characters, quite capable in a wide array of activities as it is. Increasing the peak of a skill pyramid increases all the skills underneath as well, and raises the default level for skills not shown. It should only be done to represent a fundamental shift from what the game was about before, and what it has now become.

Furthermore, such a change in character power level will only have meaning if the rest of the world does not come along for the ride. Old enemies who might have been supremely potent by comparison will now be more within reach. Normal people, who still cluster around the Mediocre and Average skill levels, get left just a little further behind. If you instead take all, or even more than a few, of the old things and give them the same boost, then everyone is still in the same relative position to one another, and you've changed very little about the game.

For this reason and more, we recommend you leave the skill peak where it is.

### Aspects: Deepening the Story

Any major advancement effort – and in *SotC*, any amount of advancement should be considered major – should first look to adding aspects to characters.

From the perspective of game rules, adding an aspect has two effects. First, the characters get more opportunities to improve their performance and gain fate points. Second, the refresh rate goes up by one – everyone starts each session with one more fate point.

Looking past the rules, adding an aspect allows a character to open up a new part of his story. The best aspects picked up from advancement are those which are a sort of commentary on in-game experience. These aspects tie characters into the ongoing storyline of the entire series, and as such should be encouraged at every turn.

Maybe a new catch-phrase has shown up for the character (“I Hate It When I’m Right”); maybe he’s made a new enemy or friend who deserves a nod (“Dr. Herborn Must Be Stopped”). If a consequence aspect turned out to make play more entertaining, the character could “promote” it to full permanence – maybe changing it a little, turning a “Lost Eye” into a “Fashionable Eye Patch”.

It’s the player’s choice, in the end – if he wants to go to a place that doesn’t tie back to prior events, that’s fine too. Characters in television and other media reveal new secrets about themselves all the time. Only one aspect should be added in any given “advancement period” and your game should cover a healthy number of sessions in between any increase in the number of aspects the characters get.

## Stunts: New Tricks for Old Dogs

Looking at the numbers, new characters get half as many stunts as they have aspects. Stunts are potent and game-changing, so this ratio should be maintained when possible.

In practice, this means that characters should get a new stunt on the third “round” of any advancement cycle – the first two would be a new aspect each, and the third would be a stunt. This pattern can “lather, rinse, repeat” from there.

Don’t be afraid to be stingy about stunts. Stunts are a potent path to carving out individuality and shtick, and if your larger play-group taking part in the pick-up game is big enough, you’ll want to make sure everyone’s niche doesn’t get too threatened. As always, any stunt pick a player makes should be reviewed and approved by the GM.

The first stunt after the starting five is a crucial one. Roughly speaking, every three or so stunts gives a character a potent, easily identified *shtick*, carving out a niche for them in the story. This means that a sixth stunt potentially increases the number of niches to *two*. And in some of the more potent stunt combinations, some stunts aren’t even available until someone can take a sixth stunt.

A GM should also be ready for her players to start pushing the boundaries at this point. If a character has maxed out the stunts under a particular skill, but wants to go further, she’ll need to be ready to work with them to create new stunts.

Don’t be afraid of the idea of creating new stunts. New stunts are a natural process for the game, and there are plenty of examples in the stunts chapter to draw on as ideas for what does and doesn’t work.

If a player wants a stunt that’s too powerful at this point, come up with a few intermediate steps (stunts) that he’ll have to complete first in order to get it. Stunts with prerequisites are meant to do more than the usual – embrace this principle, and make use of it.

## Shuffling: Staying Put is Still Travel

There’s a final kind of advancement that a GM can make use of in her game, with one catch: it’s not really advancement, per se, even though it can and does represent a kind of character development and growth. In fact, this is the safest option for a GM to offer her players, and even if the GM is running a “growthless” campaign, this approach should be strongly considered for use.

At the end of every session, the GM may offer her players the option to shuffle their sheets around a little. This means the players may do one or more of the following (but not one of the things listed twice or more), all subject to approval:

- Swap out one aspect for another

- Swap out an Average (lowest rung) skill for another not currently in the pyramid, *or*, change the places of two skills in the pyramid that are not more than one rung apart from each other.
- Drop a stunt *that hasn't seen much use*, and pick up a new one.<sup>i</sup>

The idea behind this is that characters, even if they don't grow in power or necessarily deepen in story, still change over time. Lessons are learned. Some abilities fall out of practice, while others come to the fore. This technique helps cover that, and can give players a real feeling of their characters not being the same-old-same-old they started out with on day one.

## Setting Decisions

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Every game is a little bit different, but there are a few questions that every GM is going to want to answer for themselves.

### How Weird Is Your World?

The rules, you'll notice, include space for impossible science and even more impossible magic. These things go hand in hand, and you're going to have to decide how you want to handle them. There are a few possibilities to choose from.

#### The World Outside Your Window

In a fairly realistic campaign, the weirdness is almost entirely removed. Weird Science, Mad Science and the gadgets which require them are no longer allowed, and Mysteries can no longer provide artifacts. Under this setting, the characters are exceptional only due to their training and natural talent, and a number of the setting's NPCs are no longer valid. You may even want to consider removing Mysteries from your skill list.

#### World of Mystery

This slightly more cinematic campaign presumes that there are oddities, but they are few and far between. Weird Science and Artifacts are available, but are in the hands of very few individuals. There may be one or two incidences of Mad Science in the world, but no more than that, and certainly not for the characters.

#### World of Adventure

Weird Science is hardly common, but there are easily hundreds of people across the globe practicing some version of it, and a handful push the limits all the further into the realms of Mad Science. Long lost mysteries are still to be found in ancient ruins, and mysterious cults work in the shadows to gather and recover this lost lore. All options are available; and this is the default setting for *SotC*.

#### World of Magic

Much like the World of Mystery, there is some Weird Science, and perhaps a tiny bit of Mad Science, but much of that is magic that the scientists have merely not recognized yet. The true power is held by a select few, hidden in the shadows, fiercely guarding the secrets of magic from the crass masses. In this more magical world, the characters may find their roles carry potent symbolism, and Artifacts may access Mad Science improvements.

#### World of Tomorrow

Science will free us all! As in the World of Adventure, arcane mysteries have a small following, but Weird and even Mad Science run amok! Most every scientist of any stripe in the world has some

grasp of Weird Science (change the stunt so that it includes the Scientific Invention stunt's functions, reducing the number of stunts it takes to get there), and the Mad Scientists number in the hundreds, their rivalries threatening to reshape the world. This option more or less demands an ahistorical game (see below), and is well suited to "retro" science fiction.

## Building a History

As a historical game, there is always the danger that player may do something to change history in small or large ways. You should decide in advance how you intend to address that possibility. There are a couple potential models, which we detail in brief, here; make sure you determine it – and agree upon it with your players – in advance.

### Rigidly Historical

History will occur as written, no more, no less. The characters' adventures take place in the margins around real events, but any attempt to alter those events will meet with aggressive failure.

### Fluid History

History will go in about the same way it did in the real world, though some of the details may change. As long as the end results of the large events work out about the same, all is well. Things that would drastically change history, like new technologies, tend to just end up forgotten rather than realizing their potential. This is the default assumption for *Spirit of the Century*.

### Ahistorical

Once the game begins, history is your canvas to write upon. Left to its own devices, history will unfold roughly as you'd expect it to, but the adventures of the heroes and their opponents have the potential to change history into something else entirely.

## 10. Quick Pick Stunt Packages

If you're well and truly playing *SotC* as a pick-up game, probably one of the biggest problems you run the risk of smacking into is the difficulty of picking stunts on the fly.

In general, we've tried to present the stunts in a way that makes it easy to look for your concept first, at a high level, with the categories under each skill that we've divided the stunts into.

But even this isn't really a *recommendation* from us on what to take, just a selection aid, so we'd like to go one step further here and offer you sets of recommended stunt picks, in blocks of two, three, four, and five, to make it easier to quickly nail down a set of stunts that fit a particular concept.

Stunts work best when they're married to the skills you've decided to put at or close to your apex, so these packages are organized, as with several things in this book, in terms of skills.

### Academics

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#### Rosetta Stone

Able to decipher strange languages, to speak to the locals anywhere, and to recall minute facts at a moment's notice, the Rosetta Stone is a font of knowledge, offering invaluable insights into the mundane and, occasionally, mysterious world.

Core Stunts (3):

Linguist (page 65), Gift of Tongues (page 65), Walking Library (page 66).

Other Stunts:

Photographic Memory (page 66) and Studied Recall (page 66); or Scholar (page 66) and Dizzying Intellect (page 67).

#### Smug Scholar

While you may be a bit of a know-it-all, there's a damn fine chance you do know it all – or, at least enough to convince people of the fact.

Core Stunts (3):

Scholar (page 66), Dizzying Intellect (page 67), It's Academic (page 67).

Other Stunts:

Walking Library (page 66) and either Photographic Memory (page 66) or Linguist (page 65). Also consider use of Science or Mysteries stunts focused on knowledge.

### Alertness

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#### First in Action

Whenever a fight or physical contest comes up, you act earliest, taking on the opposition before they even know you're coming.

Core Stunts (2):

On Top Of It (page 67), Ready for Anything (page 67)

Other Stunts:

Cut Off (page 68), Run Interference (page 68). Combine with Athletics to boost physical speed and performance, or combat skill stunts for hit-first, hit-hard potency. Look into the Never Surprised package (below) for a double-shot of preemptive Alertness power.

## Never Surprised

The bad guys never take you by surprise, no matter the ambush. Someone's got a sniper trained on you? Even money says you take him out before his trigger finger twitches.

Core Stunts (2):

Danger Sense (page 68), Saw It Coming (page 68).

Other Stunts:

Constant Vigilance (page 68), first and foremost (it's nearly, but not necessarily, a core stunt). Combine with the core of First in Action (above) to ensure that not only you aren't surprised, but you can take action in response to it first, or some Guns stunts to make sure you're able to address an untimely ambush at range. Consider Take It All In (page 69) to let Alertness double for Investigation.

## Art

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### Artiste

You are less about creating a persona and reputation than you are about producing the maximum emotional impact with your creations. Bravo, bravissimo!

Core Stunts (3):

Virtuoso (page 69), Moving Performance (page 69), Stage Presence (page 70).

Other Stunts:

Add The Artist's Eye (page 69) to turn your unique perspective on the world into a decisive, perceptive advantage. Look into Commissions (page 70) unless you're wanting to suffer for your art.

### Avant Garde

You are plugged into the avant garde as a member of the artistic community. Your work breaks new ground, and your name's on everyone's lips.

Core Stunts (3):

Virtuoso (page 69), Do You Know Who I Am? (page 70), Weight of Reputation (page 71).

Other Stunts:

Add Razor Tongue (page 70) and Poison Words (page 70) to render yourself a capable satirist – excellent for dealing with your social rivals. Consider Commissions (page 70) to combine talent with financial success. If your art focuses on acting, most certainly consider All the World's a Stage (page 70).

## Athletics

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### Fastest Man/Woman Alive

The only chance people get to look at you is when you stand still. Once in motion, you're nothing but a blur.

Core Stunts (3):

Marathon Training (page XX), Fast as a Leopard (page 127), Faster than a Leopard (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Combine with Alertness's First in Action (above). Consider Slippery (page XX).

## Man or Beast?

You just don't move like normal people do – climbing walls, leaping great distances, and squeezing into strange spaces.

Core Stunts (2):

Human Spider (page XX), Mighty Leap (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Contortionist (page XX), Slippery (page XX), Equestrian (page XX), or simply combine with the core of another Athletics or Survival package.

## Up in the Air with the Greatest of Ease

Acrobatic feats are second nature to you, enabling you to work at heights that would leave most people tumbling from sheer vertigo.

Core Stunts (2):

Acrobat (page XX) and Safe Fall (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Contortionist (page XX), Human Spider (page XX), Mighty Leap (page XX).

## Burglary

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### Caper Commander

If it has a clever, elaborate plan, or an angle to work, you're probably the guy who came up with the plan of approach.

Core Stunts (3):

Mental Blueprint (page XX), Tripwire Sensibilities (page XX), The Big Heist (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Trespass Tempo (page XX) keeps things going according to plan. Also look into Contacting (to build your team and get an inside man) and Deceit (for the big con) stunts to flesh out your repertoire.

### Second Story Man/Woman

If it's locked up, it might as well not be. You already know the way in.

Core Stunts (3):

Hatpin Maestro (page XX), Tripwire Sensibilities (page 128), Trespass Tempo (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Athletics' Human Spider (page XX) gets you where you shouldn't be; Mental Blueprint (page XX) and The Big Heist (page XX) keep you prepared; Stealth stunts keep you hidden and silent while on the job.

## Contacting

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### A Little Help from My Friends

You've got a solid network of close friends who help you out in a pinch. You're always able to bring in someone who's right for the job.

Core Stunts (3):

I Know a Guy Who Knows a Guy (page XX), Network of Contacts (page XX) taken twice.

Other Stunts:

For a constant companion or two, take Contact (page XX) and Close Contacts (page XX).

### Been There

Whether it's around the world or in the halls of power, you've been there, and probably know a few folks in the area who can help.

Core Stunts (2)

:Walk the Walk (page XX), Insider (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Consider the Academics' Linguist (page XX) and Gift of Tongues (page XX) to make sure you speak the language everywhere you've been, too.

### Mister/Miss Big

You know people because people know you. You're big in certain circles, and spoken of outside of them. Whenever you show up somewhere, people shut up and listen.

Core Stunts (3):

Big Man (page XX), Big Name (page XX), Big Reputation (page XX).

Other Stunts:

You may want to Talk the Talk (page XX), or draw on A Little Help From My Friends (see above).

## Deceit

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### Man/Woman of a Thousand Faces

You're never what – or who! – you appear to be, drifting in and out of disguises and personalities as easily as changing your clothes.

Core Stunts (3):

Clever Disguise (page XX), Mimicry (page XX), Master of Disguise (page XX).

Other Stunts:

For the full package, add Infiltrator (page XX) and Disguise of the Mind (page XX).

## Slippery Character

No one can trust your words – not that they can spot the lie in them. But it's good that you're on their side, right?

Core Stunts (3):

Con Man (page XX), The Fix Is In (page XX), The Honest Lie (page XX)

Other Stunts:

Takes One to Know One (page XX), Clever Façade (page XX), Sucker (page XX), Big Sucker (page XX).

## Drive

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### Genius Mechanic

You drive them, but you also build (and modify, and tweak, and care for) them. You're a top notch mechanic in the garage, and you drive one of the best rides on the road.

Core Stunts (3):

Car Mechanic (page XX), Custom Ride (page XX), Prototype Car (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Any other driving stunts (see Wizard behind the Wheel, below) mesh well.

### Wizard behind the Wheel

When you drive a car, it doesn't just move; it dances. You make impossible turns, and race with the fastest.

Core Stunts (3):

Defensive Driving (page XX), One Hand on the Wheel (page XX), Turn on a Dime (page XX).

Other Stunts:

For a bit of environmental mayhem, Unsafe at Any Speed (page XX); giving yourself a Custom Ride (page XX) or upgrading to a Prototype Car (page XX) certainly fits the bill as well.

## Empathy

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### Interrogator

You get information out of people – the soft way. Rather than scare the crap out of them (though that's in your toolbox), you get inside their heads and figure out what makes them tick.

Core Stunts (3):

Cold Read (page XX), Heart's Secret (page XX), A Peek Inside (page XX).

Other Stunts:

The Skeptic's Ear (page XX), Track the Soul (page XX), Hit Them Where It Hurts (page XX). You'll need one Investigation stunt (like Quick Eye, page XX) if you want to take Uncanny Hunch (page XX). Intimidation stunts should suit you as well.

## Perceptive Conversationalist

Social situations play out on a tempo you can feel – and, by watching carefully, adjust to your liking.

Core Stunts (2):

Ebb and Flow (page XX), Preemptive Grace (page 141).

Other Stunts:

The Skeptic's Ear (page XX), Cold Read (page XX), Heart's Secret (page XX), Hit Them Where It Hurts (page XX). Rapport stunts may suit you as well.

## Endurance

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### Can't Be Killed

You can take all sorts of physical abuse and bounce back in short order. Wounds never trouble you for long, and minor scrapes and bruises are as nothing. Even death has a loose grip on you at best.

Core Stunts (3):

Bounce Back (page XX), Last Leg (page XX), Death Defiance (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Feel the Burn (page XX), Face the Pain (page XX), Developed Immunities (page XX). Also, see Iron-Clad (below).

### Iron-Clad

Things just seem to hurt you a lot less than other people – as if your skin was made of brass or iron.

Core Stunts (3):

One Hit to the Body (page XX), Thick Skinned (page XX), Man of Iron (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Stunts from Can't Be Killed (above) serve you well. You're bound to take abuse, so Now You've Made Me Mad (page XX) is a great way to turn your pain into other's pain. Also look into some Might and Resolve stunts.

### Never Rests

You embody the principle that sleep is for the weak.

Core Stunts (3):

Tireless (page XX), Bounce Back (page XX), Last Leg (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Resolve and Athletics stunts complement this nicely, as well as the other Endurance packages (above).

## Engineering

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### Gadgeteer

You make things. Lots and lots of things. Repair them too! Sometimes by hitting them.

Core Stunts (2):

Mister Fix-It (page XX), Thump of Restoration (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Multiple picks of Universal (page XX) or Personal (page XX) Gadget are a must; consider Grease Monkey (page XX) if you focus on vehicles.

## Munitions Guy/Gal

If it hurts or kills someone, you understand it, and you've probably built one before.

Core Stunts (3):

Demolitions (page XX), Architect of Death (page XX), Universal Gadget (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Add in another Universal Gadget (page XX) or two to give yourself a bagful of deadly things.

## Fists

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### Deadly Martial Artist

You have studied ancient techniques. Many of them involve killing people with your pinky.

Core Stunts (3):

Martial Arts (page XX), Lethal Weapon (page XX), Fist of Death (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Signature Strike (page XX), Brickbreaker (page XX), Flying Kick (page XX).

### Fights Dirty

Kicking evil's ass was never pretty. You put the ugly face on it.

Core Stunts (3):

Brawler (page XX), Dirty Fighter (page XX), Crippling Blow (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Signature Strike (page XX), Whatever's on Hand (page 152).

### Gentle Fighter

Your ways are embedded in history, respect, discipline... and a healthy dose of kung-fu. Attackers slide off you like water; your understanding of technique is supreme.

Core Stunts (3):

Martial Arts (page XX), Flow like Water (page XX), Bend like the Reed (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Demoralizing Stance (page XX), Brickbreaker (page XX), Flying Kick (page XX).

### Scrappy Brawler

Ain't nothin' you can't fix with your two mitts and a whole lotta swingin'! I'll take on the whole lot of ya!

Core Stunts (3):

Brawler (page XX), Mix it Up (page XX), Army of One (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Whatever's on Hand (page XX), Fists of Fury (page XX).

## Gambling

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### Lucky Devil

Games of chance just seem to go your way, and you can never resist playing the odds.

Core Stunts (3):

Gambling Man (page XX), Double or Nothing (page 155), The Devil's Own Luck (page XX).

Other Stunts:

See Professional Gambler, below.

### Professional Gambler

Your lifestyle comes from your gambling. It's a pleasure, sure – but it's also your job.

Core Stunts (3):

Know When to Fold 'Em (page XX), Players' Club (page XX), Winnings (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Never Bluff a Bluffer (page XX), Gambling Buddy (page XX). Consider the Resources skill and its stunts as well to represent a more stable income.

## Guns

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### Gun Nut

You're fascinated with guns; you've got a special one you made yourself, and you always have ammunition close at hand.

Core Stunts (3):

Gun-Crazy (page XX), Custom Firearm (page XX), Fast Reload (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Rain of Lead (page XX), One Shot Left (page XX), Shot on the Run may be essential (page XX).

### Pistolero

With a gun in each hand, you're ready to take on anyone in shootout.

Core Stunts (3):

Quick Draw (page XX), Lightning Hands (page XX), Two Gun Joe (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Snap Shot (page XX), Shot on the Run (page XX), Fast Reload (page XX), Rain of Lead (page XX).

### Sniper

Guns aren't something to use at a moment's notice. Sure, that'll do in a pinch, but where you really shine is when you slow down, take aim, and get your target dead to rights.

Core Stunts (3):

Long Shot (page XX), Stay on Target (page XX), Trick Shot (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Shot on the Run (page XX), Rain of Lead (page XX). Also consider Alertness and Stealth stunts as areas of focus.

## Intimidation

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### Dead-Eyed Stare

Your gaze is so cold, so unsympathetic, that it drives the ice of fear into the hearts of lesser men.

Core Stunts (3):

Scary (page XX), Steely Gaze (page XX), Fearsome Gaze (page XX)

Other Stunts:

Quick Pick Stunt Packages combine with Aura of Menace (page XX) and Aura of Fear (page XX) to get good crowd control and put yourself one stunt away from Master of Fear (page XX) – once the GM is ready to grant you a sixth stunt.

### Never Cross Me

Just looking at you makes it clear: crossing you would be a very bad idea.

Core Stunts (2):

Unapproachable (page XX), The Promise of Pain (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Scary (page XX), and then either Aura of Menace (page XX) or Steely Gaze (page XX) would serve you well in case they didn't get the message the first time. Subtle Menace (page XX) also helps remind people that you're no one to tangle with.

### Under Their Skin

You can scare people, sure, but you don't always come straight at them. You get under their skin, exert a little subtlety in your control, and then tighten the noose with carefully chosen words.

Core Stunts (3):

Subtle Menace (page XX), The Serpent's Tongue (page XX), Infuriate (page XX).

Other Stunts:

The Promise of Pain (page XX), Unapproachable (page XX).

## Investigation

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### I Miss Nothing

You just don't miss details, even the smallest ones, given the chance to look around.

Core Stunts (2):

Focused Sense (page XX), Impossible Detail (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Lip Reading (page XX), Quick Eye (page XX).

## Private Eye

You're a talented investigator, whether you work for the law or for other interests.

Core Stunts (2):

Scene of the Crime (page XX), Eye for Detail (page XX)

Other Stunts:

Quick Eye (page XX). If you take one Empathy stunt (such as Cold Read, page XX), you can also take Uncanny Hunch (page XX).

## Leadership

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### International Attorney

You've got a line on the law, helping out with legal entanglements and other matters of red tape all over the world.

Core Stunts (2):

Legal Eagle (page XX), World Court (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Center of the Web (page XX), Instant Functionary (page 170). Best when combined with stunts from other skills. Consider the Rosetta Stone package from Academics (above), and anything under Contacting, Deceit, and Rapport.

### Master/Mistress of Minions

This is a package generally reserved for bad guys, because bad guys have plenty of minions on hand.

Core Stunts (3):

Minions (page XX) taken twice, Reinforcements (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Lieutenant (page XX), which must also be taken twice; alternately, Personal Conspiracy (page XX).

### Octopus' Head

This is a package which can be used for bad guys, because bad guys run vast conspiratorial organizations. It could, conceivably, also be used to represent someone who's the head of a more benign organization or business, or someone who's very highly placed among the elite of the world.

Core Stunts (2):

Center of the Web (page XX), Ubiquity (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Funding (page XX), Personal Conspiracy (page XX). Also Lieutenant (page XX), which must be taken twice.

## Might

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## Juggernaut

Your strength is how you press on towards your goals; once in motion, you can't be stopped.

Core Stunts (3):

Herculean Strength (page XX), Piledriver (page XX), Unstoppable (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Unbound (page XX).

## Wrestler

You know how to use your considerable strength in a fight.

Core Stunts (2):

Unbound (page XX) or Herculean Strength (page XX), and Wrestler (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Body Toss (page XX), Hammerlock (page XX).

## Mysteries

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### Collector

You have a small and potentially dangerous cache of mysterious artifacts at your disposal, as a product of your research into things man was not meant to know. Handle with care!

Core Stunts (3):

Secrets of the Arcane (page XX), Personal Artifact (page 173), Rare Artifact (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Additional picks of Personal or Rare Artifact; maybe you even know how to alter their functions, as an Artificer (page XX).

### Hypnotist

You've delved deep into the border-science of hypnotism, adept at unlocking secrets – and perhaps planting new ones – in the minds of others. Be careful with this power – at its full extent, the shadow of evil falls over you.

Core Stunts (3):

Mesmerist (page XX), Hypnotic Speech (page XX), Mind's Shadow (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Enthrall (page XX) robs others of their freedom; tread lightly.

### Mystic

A part of you lives a few hazy steps into the future; you catch glimpses of what is to come.

Core Stunts (2):

Fortuneteller (page XX), Palm Reader (page XX).

Other Stunts:

See Psychic Summoner, below; also, Herbal Remedies (page XX).

## Psychic Summoner

You are tapped into the spirit world, and can hold séances to speak to the dead.

Core Stunts (3):

Psychic (page XX), Voices From Beyond (page XX), Words on the Wind (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Spirit Companion (page XX)

## Pilot

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### Ace

You've flown planes in combat and lived to tell the tale – it helps that you're among the best.

Core Stunts (3):

Flying Ace (page XX), Death From Above (page XX), Barnstormer (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Fly by Night (page XX), Walk Away From It (page XX).

### Experimental Pilot

You fly the cutting edge in airplane technology, and you know how to make a crash landing and survive.

Core Stunts (3):

Personal Aircraft (page XX), Prototype Aircraft (page XX), Walk Away From It (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Barnstormer (page XX), Flawless Navigation (page XX), Plane Mechanic (page XX).

## Rapport

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### Everybody's Friend

You can own a room when you walk into it with your smile, grace, and winning demeanor. This gives you no small talent with the ladies, or gents, as suits you.

Core Stunts (3):

Best Foot Forward (page XX), Ladies' Man/Popular Gal (page XX), Five Minute Friends (page XX).

Other Stunts:

International (page XX), Smooth Over (page XX), The Right Questions (page XX).

### Mister Mouth

You've got the gift of gab – a whole lot of gab. You can talk anyone's ear off about damn near anything, especially the stuff you know nothing about.

Core Stunts (2):

Blather (page XX), Smooth Over (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Best Foot Forward (page XX), The Right Questions (page 184), International (page XX).

## Resolve

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### Cool as a Cucumber

Social and psychological warfare do nothing to you. Nothing can crack your calm regard of the situation, and when you make it clear what you mean to do, people listen.

Core Stunts (3):

Smooth Recovery (page XX), Aplomb (page XX), Iron Determination (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Mix with other Resolve packages to taste; serve cool.

### Makes It Look Easy

Nothing perturbs you. If an air force of flying monkeys came knocking on your door, you'd crack a smile and invite them in for drinks; if your car just blew up in front of you, you'd flick a few specks of soot off your clothes and consider a taxi.

Core Stunts (3):

Smooth Recovery (page XX), Unflappable (page XX), Right Place Right Time (page XX).

Other Stunts:

One or both of Cool Customer (page XX) and Aplomb (page XX) for the total package; to truly subvert surprise, look to the Never Surprised package under Alertness.

### Unyielding

You cannot be broken. You will never yield, no matter the manner of assault.

Core Stunts (4):

Inner Strength (page XX), Still Standing (page XX), Driven (page XX), Unyielding (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Consider Iron Determination (page XX) to show others that you mean it; choose Feel the Burn (page XX) from Endurance to match your body to your mind.

## Resources

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### Fantastically Rich

Your wealth goes well beyond the rating of your Resource skill; you have investments all over the place and enough free cash floating around to buy some really outrageous things whenever you want.

Core Stunts (3):

Best That Money Can Buy (page XX), Long Term Investment (page XX), Money Is No Object (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Grease the Wheels (page XX), Money Talks (page XX).

## King/Queen of the Castle

You're rich, and you've sunk a lot your money over time into building an absolutely amazing home base – worthy of a King and then some.

Core Stunts (2):

Headquarters (page XX), Lair (page XX).

Other Stunts:

If you want it all, also take Stately Pleasure Dome (page 189). Consider a Home Away From Home (page XX), or bring a Trusted Employee (page XX) along on your adventures.

## Science

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### Mad Scientist

You've delved into areas of the science that not even the 21st century has grasped. You're a genius but, potentially, an unbalanced one; every week is another strange experiment.

Core Stunts (4):

Scientific Genius (page XX), Scientific Invention (page XX), Weird Science (page XX), Mad Science (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Either a Personal Gadget (page XX) or a Universal Gadget (page XX) is essential.

### Medical Doctor

Your study of the sciences has focused in particular on healing the sick and caring for the wounded. In the typical game, you get a lot of work.

Core Stunts (2):

Doctor (page XX), Medic (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Surgeon (page XX), Forensic Medicine (page XX).

### Science Hero/Heroine

While you don't always push into the mad end of sciences, you have a firm grasp of the field, and translate your knowledge into action (and the occasional cool toy).

Core Stunts (3):

Scientific Genius (page XX), Scientific Invention (page 193), Theory in Practice (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Weird Science (page XX), Personal Gadget (page XX), Universal Gadget (page XX).

## Sleight of Hand

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### Illusionist

You're a practiced stage magician, capable of magic tricks anywhere from making a coin disappear, to appearing to levitate an elephant.

Core Stunts (3):

Legerdemain (page XX), Stage Magic (page XX), Master of Illusion (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Cool Hand (page XX), Sucker Punch (page XX), Juggler (page XX). As a complement to Juggler, consider the Catch stunt (page 204) from Weapons.

## Pickpocket

Sure, picking pockets is pretty small-time, but you'd be amazed what people put in there.

Core Stunts (2):

Bump and Grab (page XX), Sucker Punch (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Cool Hand (page XX); combine with Burglary stunts for full-on larceny, or Deceit to round things out as a con man.

## Stealth

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### Man/Woman of Shadows

The shadows are your home; you slide into them as a glass knife into water, invisible once submerged, able to strike without notice.

Core Stunts (5):

In Plain Sight (page XX), Master of Shadows (page XX), Quick Exit (page XX), Vanish (page XX), Shadowed Strike (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Should the GM ever allow you a sixth stunt, Deadly Shadows (page XX) is what you want.

### Swift and Silent

With the smallest effort, you are never seen, and never heard.

Core Stunts (4):

In Plain Sight (page XX), Master of Shadows (page XX), Lightfoot (page XX), Like the Wind (page XX).

Other Stunts:

To bring others along – though it will slow you down – consider Hush (page XX). Quick Exit (page XX) is also good.

## Survival

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### Cowboy/Cowgirl

Don't matter much if you're in the big city or in the country, you ain't never far from your horse.

Core Stunts (2):

Hands Free (page XX), Hell Bent for Leather (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Breaking it In (page XX), Ride Anything (page XX). Animal Companion (page XX) for a worthy steed; consider some Guns stunts too.

## Hunter

You know how to track something down – be it man or beast.

Core Stunts (2):

Due North (page XX), Tracker (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Combine with a few Alertness and Weapons or Guns stunts for the full package.

## Jungle Prince

You were raised by animals, or have at least lived among them long enough to get along with them better than people.

Core Stunts (2):

Animal Friends (page XX), King of the Beasts (page XX).

Other Stunts:

Call of the Wild (page XX), Animal Companion (page XX). The latter may be taken multiple times. Consider Due North (page XX) or Tracker (page XX) as well.

## Weapons

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### Combat Juggler

You know how to throw around knives, torches, and other exceedingly dangerous things. At some point it occurred to you that you could throw them at other people too.

Core Stunts (2):

Catch (page XX), and Juggler (page XX) from Sleight of Hand.

Other Stunts:

Ricochet (page XX) and Good Arm (page XX) to make the most of what you throw. Anything Goes (page 116) to make the most of the scenery.

### Man/Woman from another Time

The further we move into the 20th century, the more you seem to be something of an anachronism: a man who solves the ills of the world with several feet of sharpened steel instead of a gun. But the old ways, and the mythic weapon you bear, still work in these modern times...

Core Stunts (2):

Close at Hand (page 116), Weapon of Destiny (page 116).

Other Stunts:

Good Arm (page XX), or the core stunts from the Skilled Fencer package (below). Endurance, Might, and Survival will also serve you well.

### Skilled Fencer

You know your way around a rapier, and can do wonderful things with a saber. Your opponents don't always agree afterwards, but what of it? You had fun.

Core Stunts (3):

Flawless Parry (page 115), Riposte (page 115), Turnabout (page 115).

**Other Stunts:**

Close at Hand (page 116), Weapon of Destiny (page 116) for your sword, Weapons of the World (page 117) for a wide assortment, or Anything Goes (page 116) to keep yourself well equipped in a bar brawl.

# 11. Character Worksheet

|                                        |                       |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Character Name:</i>                 |                       |
| <b>Phase One (Origin)</b>              |                       |
| <i>Events:</i> _____<br>_____<br>_____ |                       |
| <i>First Aspect:</i>                   | <i>Second Aspect:</i> |
| <b>Phase Two (The Great War)</b>       |                       |
| <i>Who inspired you to greatness?</i>  |                       |
| <i>Events:</i> _____<br>_____<br>_____ |                       |
| <i>First Aspect:</i>                   | <i>Second Aspect:</i> |
| <b>Phase Three (Your Novel!)</b>       |                       |
| <i>Title of your Novel:</i>            |                       |
| <i>Guest Stars in your novel:</i>      |                       |
| <i>Events:</i> _____<br>_____<br>_____ |                       |
| <i>First Aspect:</i>                   | <i>Second Aspect:</i> |
| <b>Phase Four (Other Adventures)</b>   |                       |
| <i>Guest starring in...:</i>           |                       |
| <i>Events:</i> _____<br>_____<br>_____ |                       |
| <i>First Aspect:</i>                   | <i>Second Aspect:</i> |
| <b>Phase Five (Other Adventures)</b>   |                       |
| <i>Guest starring in...:</i>           |                       |
| <i>Events:</i> _____<br>_____<br>_____ |                       |
| <i>First Aspect:</i>                   | <i>Second Aspect:</i> |

[illegible]

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