

Perfect unrevised

Edition Note

This is the only edition that has ever existed.
There have been none before it.
There will be none after.

It will remain this way forever, frozen — Perfect.

About This Book

This is a story game.

It is meant to be played by 2-4 friends, sitting around a table.

It involves imagining, creating characters, making up stories together, and rolling dice.

This game has some dark and disturbing themes. It takes place in a nightmarish social fiction and asks you to collaborate on describing scenes of torture and great suffering. It is about the struggle between criminals and oppressive enforcers of the law.

It is also a meaningful game, and speaks to human struggle and the ability for passions to endure.

Legalities & Credits

I made this. Please don't steal it.

Titles in P22 Kilkenny. Text in Miller Roman, with examples in Miller Italic.

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There Are Stories

- ∅ A quiet man leading double lives, one of which might cost him both
- ∅ An insomniac who must murder before she can find the peace to sleep
- ∅ A schoolteacher, sharing with her students their nation's true history
- ∅ A vigilante detective willing to do anything to get to the truth
- ∅ A rebel leader prepared to sacrifice his followers to achieve their goals
- ∅ A child unwilling to be silenced

These people are criminals. They are the last remaining blemishes upon our perfect nation.

They will be hunted down, and they will be fixed.

Don't think we don't know that you're one of them.

Contents

2		<i>About This Book</i>
3	...	There are Stories
8	...	Introduction
11		Cadence
12	...	A Fictional Place
12		<i>Mood</i>
13		<i>A Recent History of Cadence</i>
14	...	The Laws of Cadence
17	...	Cadent Society
18		<i>Outside the Walls</i>
18		<i>Freedoms</i>
22		<i>Guilds and Groups</i>
32		<i>Inspectors</i>
34	...	Conditionings
36	...	Crime & Complacency

39 Creating Criminals

40		<i>Thinking Criminally</i>
42	...	Criminal Components
44		<i>Name</i>
46		<i>Archetypes</i>
48		<i>Concept</i>
49		<i>Class</i>
50		<i>Freedoms</i>
52		<i>Certifications</i>
55		<i>Resources & Contacts</i>
58		<i>Aspects</i>
60		<i>Secret Societies</i>
63	...	That's It!

65 Tests

66	...	Assigning Roles
67	...	How Tests Work
68	...	Test Actions
72		<i>Pacing the Test</i>
72		<i>Rolling the Dice</i>
73		<i>Spending Aspects</i>

75 The Cycle of Scenes

76	...	Crime Scenes
77		<i>Questions</i>
78		<i>Tension Points</i>
82	...	Discovery Scenes
82		<i>Capture</i>
86		<i>Establish a Hold</i>
90	...	Retribution Scenes
90		<i>The Law's Goal</i>
91		<i>Framing the Retribution Scene</i>
92		<i>Create Guilt</i>
95		<i>Threaten a Contact</i>
100		<i>Conditioning</i>
104	...	Reflection Scenes
105	...	Payout

109 Ending the Cycle

110	...	Getting Broken
111	...	Becoming a Hero

115 Making Stories Together

- 116 ... Setting Up a Game
- 119 *What to Bring*
- 119 *Setting Expectations*
- 120 ... Teaching the Game
- 124 ... Ending the Game
- 125 ... The Skills Used in Play
- 125 *Creating Characters Together*
- 126 *Framing Scenes*
- 126 *Participating in Scenes*
- 130 *Managing Tension*
- 131 *Character Development*
- 133 ... Collaborative Crimes
- 135 ... Watching Vibes

139 Design Notes

- 140 ... What Perfect Is
- 140 *My Understanding of Steampunk*
- 141 *My Understanding of Dystopia*
- 142 *Ludography*
- 144 *Mediography*
- 148 ... Reference Sheet
- 150 ... Character Sheets (Criminal & Law)
- 152 ... Index

Introduction

Perfect is a story game about criminals fighting for what they believe in, even when it will come back to haunt them. Their stories take place in a Dystopian Steampunk setting named Cadence.

Everyone creates a criminal, a character that they roleplay as – speaking as the character, narrating their decisions, and advocating for them. The game is played across a number of scenes; each scene involves imagining together, narrating, and tough decision-making. When you play the game, you create stories. The game is played through a repeating cycle of scene types: first a Crime Scene, then a Discovery Scene, then a Retribution Scene, and finally a Reflection Scene. Each of those four scene types has different mechanics - the rules and steps that structure the game.

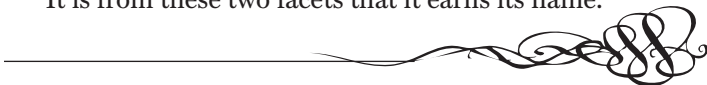
Perfect is exciting and challenging. It is exciting and challenging creatively, because it asks us to step outside of ourselves and become make-believe people, and to explore



Dystopian Steampunk?

A dystopia is a state where ideals have been twisted and corrupted. A dystopia is repressive, totalitarian, and a reflection of all that can go wrong in human affairs. Dystopian fiction often focuses on attempting to seize back one's personal liberty.

Steampunk is a genre of science fiction which reinvents the Victorian era. Steampunk often focuses on the burgeoning of experimental steam technologies as well as the birth of the individualistic inventor-artist. It is from these two facets that it earns its name.



their problems and passions. It is exciting and challenging ethically, because it asks us to sincerely explore the legitimacy of law and of criminal social action. It's exciting and challenging socially, because it asks us to push and challenge our friends while supporting their stories, and to do so in a theatrical way.

This book is a manual for learning to play Perfect, whether it's your first or fiftieth story game. In the first chapter, Cadence, the book introduces the game's setting. You'll gain a feel for the world that these stories are told in: filled with desperation and hypocrisy, but still retaining lots of room for you to make the setting your own. In the second chapter, Creating Criminals, the book walks through creating a criminal, and the third chapter, Tests, describes the game rules that criminals use to win tests and protect themselves in the story. In the fourth chapter, The Cycle of Scenes, the book describes player roles, teaches the game's rules, and explains how characters grow and change through play. It is in this chapter that the meat of the rules resides. The fifth chapter, Ending the Cycle, shows you how to bring your game to a close. In the sixth chapter, Making Stories Together, the book outlines how to organize a group, teach the game, and work together to tell meaningful stories. This chapter will be very important to people who have never played a story game, as it outlines how to frame scenes and roleplay.

Perfect is best suited for play with 2-4 people. It is intended to be played across one to five sessions, each lasting around three hours.

This is an intense game, about fighting the system and facing the consequences of your fight. Those can both be rattling experiences. Perfect asks you to create characters that matter, tell stories that matter, and play sincerely. There's no guarantee that you will create pleasant stories or stories you would want to live through. But nobody likes pleasant stories anyways.

So let's visit some dark places, you and I.



“Make everybody like me, and never allow this to change.”
- Queen Abigail

Chapter One: Cadence



A Fictional Place

Cadence is a fictional country, but one that bears similarity (geographically, socially) to a Victorian England. Perfect is set in a fictional country to avoid the issue of historical accuracy or placement. There is no expectation that you know who the important people of the era were, or that you understand the major issues of the time, or that you can recall turning points in a history. Cadence has no history, save what exists on these few pages... and what you will come up with when you play the game.

In reading this chapter, it is important to understand the overall tone of the setting. In play, you'll be expected to invent new details and to bring Cadence to life. There's no need to memorize all of the Freedoms or Certifications listed, but rather to understand how they might impact play.

Mood

Cadence is lit by gaslight. The dignified are driven by carriage and the poor walk about in tattered slippers. The air is brisk and biting, constantly.

It always seems to be late Autumn.

The world is stripped of colour; it is bleak and desolate. Inspectors stand upon most street corners and pay visits to the factories and storefronts and homes of the city. They are ever-present and vigilant, waiting to weed out the criminally different. They have no intention of a fair trial. They use clever psychological attacks, strange tactics, and horrific technologies to brainwash and condition these criminal miscreants into better citizenship, before re-releasing them into the world.

The people fail to recognize just how downtrodden they are. Rowena is a schoolteacher, a romantic, and a citizen of Cadence. She can't live a social life without a mountain of Certifications and paperwork. She's never kissed a man, as kissing is illegal out of wedlock. The god that Rowena worshipped as a child has been outlawed; she is forbidden to worship any deity other than the late Queen Abigail. She wears dresses cut from drab grey cloth; the only touch of colour she is permitted is her government-issued red bodice, coded to denote her social standing. Her life is unendingly regulated. But it wasn't always this way.

A Recent History of Cadence

Cadence is, always has been, and always will be the greatest nation on earth. For a period, however, a long line of slovenly and wretched monarchs threatened this greatness. They would show up to parliament, berate their representatives, prevent important work from taking place, and expend royal coffers on trivial whims. One especially bad ruler died, and the only person left to take the throne was his seventeen year-old daughter, Abigail.

Young Queen Abigail showed up to parliament trembling the next day, and didn't say a word. Three bills were passed before lunch. She remained silent throughout the week. The nation was once again seeing progress. She stopped talking altogether. She became ornamental. People loved her for this. Her passivity allowed everyone to carry out their work in peace. People talked about the power of silence.

One day Abigail got sick. She was to die. Doctors came but she was unresponsive. Two parliament men came to her one Sunday, and they swear she spoke to them. She gave them her only proclamation: "Make everyone like me, and never allow this to change". Others tried to clarify (or even verify) her proclamation, but she had once again fallen silent.

The two men arranged for her proclamation to be realized. They led parliament in the construction of something entirely new. People would lead very private, confined lives. They would stop being so colourful, so friendly, so expressive. Everything would be automatic, preserving the world just as it was for Queen Abigail, Cadence's final monarch (who died weeks later).

It worked perfectly. Now everything is structured exactly as they assumed Abigail wanted. It will likely stay that way forever. Inspectors have phenomenal success in monitoring and controlling the population. Except that there are still a few problems that need to be addressed.

You are one of them. But once they've finished with you, they'll have their perfect society.

The Laws of Cadence

Cadence has more laws than it does citizens. These laws invade every aspect of life, both public and private. They are complicated and expansive to the point of opacity – even the most studious of Inspectors could not hope to memorize all the laws that he is expected to enforce.

The list that follows is but a representative slice of the laws that Cadence is built upon, or perhaps crushed by. It is understood by most citizens that if something isn't mandatory, it is probably because it is illegal.

Relations & Marriage

Citizens will not clasp hands, kiss, or engage in sexual conduct outside of wedlock.

Marriage partners will not kiss or touch in public.

A marriage proposal must be approved by the Department of Personal Relations before it can be presented to a potential partner.

Appropriate Dress

Cadent Citizens will at all times display their government-issued waistcoats and Freedom indicators.

Aside from government-issued waistcoats, all articles of clothing will adhere to approved shades of grey.

White clothing is reserved for Queen Abigail; black for the Inspectors.

A citizen above the rank of Crude may not wear torn or patched clothing; a citizen above the rank of Lower may not wear that which is dirty, creased, or unkempt.

All articles of clothing will be approved by the Department of Design before being released to the public.

Religious Observance

Citizens will attend mass daily at a Church of Abigail designated for their rank and class.

Each Sunday shall be honoured as Abigail's Day of Death, and citizens will abstain from eating and working upon this day.

Only the priest may stand or speak during his sermon.

A portion of all wages, as determined by the Department of Religious Affairs, will be directed to the Church of Abigail.

Materials

Citizens cannot privately possess alcohol or opiates. These will be made available only to Crude Citizens, and only at approved drinking halls.

Citizens may only grow and possess white flowers. Offering someone a flower as a gift is strictly prohibited.

All art, music and theatrical performance will adhere to the list of approved works put forth by the Archival Department. Possession or re-enactment of blacklisted art is strictly prohibited.

Proper Conduct

Citizens of Cadence will abstain from tardiness, gambling, profane speech, singing, blaspheming, unnecessary physical touch, unnecessary loudness, displays of public drunkenness or immodesty, violence, and dancing.

Citizens will not engage in violence or unnecessary physical touch as a means of self-defense. These offenses warrant arrest regardless of motivation or condition.

Male citizens will not chew or consume food in the presence of a woman of equal or higher social rank.

Citizens will speak of Queen Abigail with proper tone and veneration.

Cadent Society

In the new Cadence, social class is critical. As such, it is government regulated and sanctioned. Not only is your class declared on your official papers, but you are issued a colour-coded waistcoat or bodice, displaying your class for all to see. Crude Citizens are the lowest members of society and they wear brown waistcoats. They are factory workers, carriage repairmen, and cleaning staff. They have more flexibility than most citizens due to their assumed unimportance.

Lower Citizens aren't much higher up the ladder, but they are more likely to have safe jobs, working in healthy conditions. They are the office assistants, factory supervisors, and skilled tradespeople of Cadence. They wear blue waistcoats.

Lesser Citizens are the middle class. They are likely to be shop owners, bankers, accountants, skilled artisans, and lesser officials. Their waistcoats are red, and they will often wear them with a mark of pride.

Notable Citizens are the well-to-do of Cadence, and wear orange waistcoats. They are often managers, estate owners, important business people, and wealthy dilettantes. Most Notable Citizens will have a house staff.

First Class Citizens are the absolute peak of Cadent society, and their gold waistcoats are a sign of extreme wealth. First Class Citizens rarely have jobs and always have a large house staff. Some First Class Citizens are governors, a completely token role in Cadent society.

Standing outside the power structure of Cadent citizens are the Inspectors in their black suits. We'll get to them later.

Outside the Walls

Although Cadence is an island nation, it is surrounded by a perimeter of stone wall. On the opposite side of those walls, in the often-narrow lane between stone and shore, live the Marginals. The Marginals are people outside of Cadent law and society. They are vagabonds and marine traders.

Cadence relies on these Marginals for the import of many goods, but most of its citizens abhor them for their wanton ways, their devilish dress, their frenetic music and their careless lifestyle. Luckily, the giant stone walls prevent most citizens from ever interacting with a Marginal. The only exception is citizens who hold a Merchant Marine's Ticket, whose job it is to negotiate trade with the vagabonds.

Even though they only step a few meters out of Cadence's boundaries, the stories these Merchant Marines bring back are often extravagant: carnivals, drunken soirées, men and women constructing homes out of driftwood together, crazed musicians playing foreign and bizarre instruments, poets yelling their confessions to the sea. It's unlikely that any upstanding Cadent citizen would ever find friendship, let alone love, in the arms of a Marginal.

Freedoms

The society of Cadence is structured so that in order to gain more power and rank, you need to submit to a growing set of constrictions, called Freedoms, designed to make a citizen more like the late Queen Abigail. Freedoms are contract laws that citizens sign to climb the ranks of Cadent society.

The name is an intentional misnomer. Freedoms are binding and restrictive, but they are promoted as a positive thing. The upstanding citizens think about Freedoms as opportunities to pay tribute to Abigail while reaching new social heights.

In actual fact, the losses far outweigh the gains for most.

Each Freedom has a title, a right which it bestows, and a much bigger imposition which it brings. Violating a Freedom is a crime.

What follows is the comprehensive list of Freedoms.

Freedom of Thought

The Inspectors want to protect your thoughts and your privacy to them. However, they need an assurance that your thoughts will not poison the rest of the populace. With the promise of silence, the Inspectors agree to allow you your own thoughts.

Representation: A black scarf tied tight across the neck.

Right: The Inspectors cannot ask you questions.

Imposition: You cannot speak.

Freedom of Practice

The government wants to allow citizens as much inclusion in the Church as possible. They are willing to allow you to attend Mass even if your Status would bar you, provided you give some commitment to the Church of Abigail.

Representation: Abigail profile brooch.

Right: You may attend masses held outside your Status level.

Imposition: You must attend mass twice daily.

Freedom of Privacy

The Inspectors want to respect your privacy but recognize that leaving people unattended can lead to the sharing of hateful ideas and dangerous substances. By isolating a citizen from others, it becomes safe to allow that person privacy.

Representation: A black umbrella, regardless of weather.

Right: You may ask an Inspector to leave your home.

Imposition: You may not have guests inside your home.

Freedom of Travel

The Inspectors like to keep a tight rein on travel within Cadence. In effect, that means that citizens traveling between districts or provinces will often wait months to obtain the necessary permits. With this Freedom, a citizen can travel between districts freely. This must be done in isolation, of course, to protect against collaboration and gang formation.

Representation: A traveler's purse.

Right: Free movement between districts in Cadence.

Imposition: Must travel alone.

Freedom of Observation

The government wants you to be able to inspect and witness the inner workings of the system for yourself. However, if the wrong citizens got their greasy fingers on certain inner workings, they could wreak havoc upon Cadence. With an assurance that you will not touch anything, made physical through the wearing of a single bound glove, you can travel anywhere within your district.

Representation: A bound glove, tying both hands together.

Right: You can freely enter any public building or room.

Imposition: You cannot touch anything outside of your home.

Freedom of Self-Defense

While your safety is naturally of the utmost importance, the issue of self-defense is a tricky one – to defend yourself against violent attack constitutes an act of vigilante justice, carried out by an untrained amateur. Further, it complicates the duties of Inspectors; cause and blame become muddled in a two-way exchange. If one agrees to some conditions which clarify causality in advance, though, then self-defense becomes permissible.

Representation: An empty grey sheath, tied to your belt.

Right: You may defend yourself against physical violence.

Imposition: You cannot initiate any physical contact.

Freedom of Creativity

The government wants artwork and culture to flourish through its reign, but some art inspires unwanted and unnecessary emotions. The process of blacklisting art is an intensive one, and a steady flow of freely released art would complicate the process greatly. Thus, if a citizen promises to adhere to official standards for art creation, and submits all works directly to a review panel, then that person can obtain the freedom to create art.

Representation: Steel bracelet.

Right: Allowed to produce art adhering to the official standards and catalogues.

Imposition: All art must be reviewed by an archivist panel, to be either approved or blacklisted.

Guilds and Groups

Beyond the government of Cadence, there is a large web of guilds, trade associations, and other organizations. Membership in most of these organizations is monitored and officially documented by the Certificators Guild, itself a vast organization. Official group members are issued Certifications, which act like hall passes in Cadent society - allowing access to new places and activities.

The proper citizen joins an organization because it is their duty. The criminal joins an organization because it opens doors for them.

Abigail's Envoys

Abigail's Envoys are members of society who act as guides to foreign dignitaries. The Envoys may be prestigious members of society or mere drivers. Membership introduces a wealth of information and power.

You'll see Abigail's Envoys doing their work in shipping yards, in cross-country coach trips, in prestigious social halls, and in places of travel and transport.

It is rumoured that some Envoy members will abandon their dignified posts and smuggle themselves out of Cadence with the help of their foreign friends and ship crews.

The Alliance of Purity

The Alliance of Purity is dedicated to protesting the sins of love, romance, and especially sex. This is done through pamphleteering, public education, and Inspector-aid programs. Cadent society regards the Alliance with a strange mixture of contempt and nodding approval.

You'll see the Alliance of Purity doing its work during protests, in classrooms, pamphleteering on street corners, and throughout the process of designing school curricula.

It is rumoured that some used their membership as a means to sabotaging the Alliance from within. It is rumoured that some members of the Alliance engage in vulgar sexual acts and parties.

Art Traders' Guild

Although inaccessible by the unappreciative Crude Citizens, the Art Traders' Guild is a great gift to the upper classes. It is a community of art appreciators who host and attend exclusive exhibitions, where they gather to critique and appreciate high art.

The Art Traders' Guild are present in galleries and museums predominantly. You'll also see them doing their work during city meetings, church renovation planning, and other public forums.

It is rumoured that some Guild members use their contacts to smuggle and distribute illegal, blacklisted works amongst themselves.

The Certificators Guild

The crux of Cadent bureaucracy, the Certificators Guild is responsible for issuing Certifications, zone travel papers, and standard citizenship papers for all of Cadence. They are also responsible for maintaining the records of class membership.

The Certificators can be seen doing their work in office buildings, archives, libraries, and travel checkpoints.

It is rumoured that some members use the Guild's printing press to forge travel documents and fake papers for their friends or even themselves.

Church of Abigail

All citizens attend daily mass, organized into a time slot with members of their class. There is no singing during mass, and there is certainly no celebration. All worship the late Queen Abigail, and do so in silent reverence, with a chaste mind and a stiff posture. The only people allowed to speak in a church are its rectors and deans.

The rectors and deans of the Church of Abigail do much of their work within the actual church buildings. The churches of Crude and Lower Citizens are wood-floored halls; by contrast, First Class Citizens sit upon splendid chairs in opulent cathedrals.

There are always rumours of rectors giving the sacraments of the pagan faiths found outside Cadence, or of secretly denouncing the divinity of Abigail entirely.

Corpus Factum

In Cadence, fashion is of the utmost importance. Although new designs are strictly policed and the fashionistas have little to clamour over, it is still a source of obsession amongst the wealthy. Members of the Corpus Factum – the designer’s guild – are responsible for the yearly releases: the new tints of grey, the re-touched suit cuts, the slightly adjusted dress patterns.

You’ll see the Corpus Factum doing their work in design studios, warehouses, alterations shops, and fashion shows.

It is rumoured that some members of the Corpus Factum will slip in illegal design alterations or even use their contacts to distribute their own underground designs and patterns.

Drinking Hall Membership

Although alcohol is banned for most citizens, Crude Citizens can still apply for membership into the gritty and low-lit drinking halls. The Certification is only given to those needy few who prove the difficulty and physical strain of their work. Ironically, the middle-class proprietors of drinking halls are never allowed to sample their own wares.

Those with a Drinking Hall Membership can enter the Drinking Halls – places that are often run down and seedy.

It is well-known that Drinking Halls are full of dangerous and volatile people, and the rebellious minded often seek to harness the dissent present in these Halls.



*An Inspector checks to see that this woman's
Mercantile Exchange Certification is in order.*

Governor's Ticket

The Governor's Ticket, a prestigious award given only to First Class Citizens, denotes an appointment to Governorship. As everything in Cadence is automated and self-regulated, there are no actual duties for a Governor. Thus, a Governor's Ticket is a vanity appointment, a symbolic power status.

You'll see Governors doing their work as dignitaries at weddings, baptisms, public ceremonies, and parades.

It is rumoured that some Governors use their prestige and connections to plot overthrow, major social revision, and policy alteration.

Hermetic Society

The Hermetic Society is the governing body for practicing doctors and nurses. It runs training programs, helps organize apprenticeships, and acts as a quality assurance body.

Members of the Hermetic Society can be seen doing their work in home visits, private practices, and emergency situations. They can also be seen training in private and public programs.

It is rumoured that some members of the Hermetic Society will use their practice as a site for ongoing experimentation and alternative medicine practices.

Mercantile Exchange Certification

This Certification allows the bearer to sell goods. Storeowners and service providers must possess a Mercantile Exchange Certification in order to do business.

You'll see the Mercantile Exchange Certification put to use in every shop you enter.

It is rumoured that some Merchants will use their stores as a meeting ground and safe house for secret organizations and illegal practices, as well as hiding blacklisted goods within their shops.

The Merchant Marine

Legitimate members of Cadent society, the Merchant Marine is tasked to deal with Marginals, the transient populations living outside Cadence's boundaries. The Marginals are seen as malicious, dirty, murdering vagabonds, and the Merchant Marines are the unlucky souls forced to reckon with them.

You'll see Merchant Marines doing their work along the Regulated Boundaries of Cadence, in shipping yards, and in the Coastal Administration Offices built to deal with imports and local taxation.

It is rumoured that some Merchant Marines develop trust and affections for members of Marginal society, making significant efforts to protect their well-being and help them rise out of their squalor and degradation.

Queen's Crucibles

These citizens have organized to help the Inspectors by monitoring their fellow citizens and by helping to distribute literature issued by Inspection Yards. They are the citizen informants of Cadent society.

You'll see the Queen's Crucibles doing their work almost anywhere – they are constantly vigilant and present. They are most obvious when attending information sessions and distributing propaganda.

It is rumoured that some of the Crucibles use their power to disrupt the police state from within.

Queen's Honour Guard

The Queen's Honour Guard is a society dedicated to the historical appreciation of Queen Abigail, the Final Monarch. They review and discuss the literature of the late Queen, blacklisting as necessary.

The Queen's Honour Guard can be found doing their work in museums, libraries, and blacklisting facilities.

It is rumoured that some of the Honour Guard are secretly looking to unearth hidden truths about Abigail, information kept secret by the government itself.

Royal Order of Archivists

Archivists are the members of society tasked with organizing and monitoring the historical archives and blacklist containment units. They oversee the large, sprawling warehouses of confiscated documents and goods. They work with Inspectors to identify and prepare items for destruction.

You'll see Archivists doing their work in massive blacklist warehouses, the archives, museums, and historical appreciation centres.

It is rumoured that some Archivists use their access to repossess and re-release blacklisted items.

Teacher's Hegemony

Members of the Teacher's Hegemony are responsible for administering Cadent curriculum, educating young children and disciplining juvenile disobedients.

Hegemony members can be seen doing work in classrooms, home visits, and public demonstrations.

It is rumoured that some join the Hegemony in an attempt to influence the new generations with anti-Cadent messages of rebellion.

The Sentinels

The Sentinels are journalists whose work is printed in the daily papers and monthly chronicles. The role of the Sentinels is to provide Cadence with trifling distractions and simple appeasements. They often write on fashion, social events, marriages, discourses on etiquette, recent sermons, shipping manifests, and obituaries.

The Sentinels can be found doing their work in journalistic offices and press houses in major cities.

It is rumoured that some Sentinels will slip secret codes and messages into their work. It is also rumoured that some Sentinels use their printing presses to manufacture illegal, anti-Cadent propaganda.

Union of Crude Labourers

The Union of Crude Labourers is a collective of factory workers, physical labourers and warehouse stockers. The Union ensures a certain level of ignorance and illiteracy amongst factory workers, keeping the Crude Citizens it represents incapable of any major uprising.

The Union of Crude Labourers work primarily in dank, squalid factories and hazardous sites.

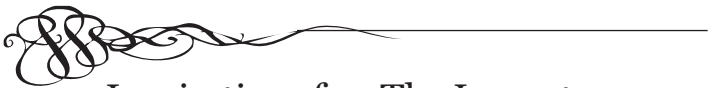
It is well-known that the Inspectors fear the potential these strong, grunt-like workers present.

Inspectors

The Inspectors are everywhere - in your office lobby, on the street corner, and in the shadows. They wear stiff black suits with long tails, adorned with black bow-ties, bowlers, and canes. They are almost always immaculately clean. Most of them are tall and wiry, though occasionally they are thick-set and broad-shouldered. They are always male.

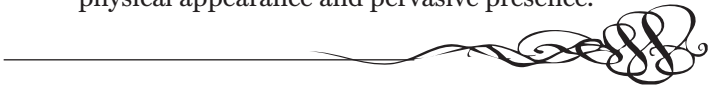
The Inspectors are efficient, brutal, and seemingly heartless. Many of them are almost supernaturally good at their job, there at just the right moment, able to run faster than any criminal they might be chasing, and somehow aware of just the right thing to say to crush someone's will.

Inspectors represent the entirety of the law. While other countries have complex legal systems with thousands of roles, Cadence has only Inspectors. Inspectors are responsible for patrolling the streets, investigating crimes, apprehending criminals, interrogating them, and finally conditioning them. They take apprehended criminals to Inspection Yards, which are large stone buildings with many rooms, where they can prepare conditionings and hold suspects for interrogation.



Inspirations for: The Inspectors

- ∅ The Thought Police in Nineteen Eighty-Four. The Ministry of Love is an Inspection Yard, and Room 101 is a Conditioning room.
- ∅ The black-clad androids with metal faces in THX 1138, who carry the eight-foot-long poles.
- ∅ The agents in The Matrix, due to their immaculate physical appearance and pervasive presence.





Inspector Thorley, immaculate and deadly.

Conditionings

In Cadence, an Inspector can declare you guilty without trial or consultation. When a criminal is apprehended, they are typically taken to an Inspection Yard, where they are interrogated or conditioned. Conditionings are experimental treatments meant to re-calibrate the citizen, fix their criminal tendencies, and prepare them for a more docile life.

Some conditionings are straightforward psychological warfare, involving emotional degradation and a barrage of leading questions and moral judgments. Some conditionings use electroshock therapy, starvation tactics, demonstrations of violence, flood rooms and even more bizarre techniques. While some Inspectors follow standard procedure to the letter, others are prone to wild experimentation and pushing the envelope. Some Inspectors revel in the pain and fear that conditionings ignite, whereas others approach this part of their job with a sense of grim duty.

It is during conditionings that the mad science aesthetic of steampunk rears its head. Bizarre clockwork contraptions, obtusely-designed electroshock machines and small whirring things all have their place within the conditioning room.

Below are three example conditionings, all in reaction to the same crime. When you're playing, you'll be expected to create interesting conditioning scenes too. Don't feel like there's a right answer - conditionings are arbitrary, at least to a degree. As long as they reflect the crime that was committed, and make for an interesting story, you've done it right.

Examples of Conditionings

Harrison Drosset was caught smuggling red roses, outlawed in Cadence due to their contemptible connotations. He was led into an Inspection Yard waiting room, and left there for several hours. Finally, two Inspectors lead him into a room they call The Greenhouse. It's a small, claustrophobic room littered with dead roses. There, amidst these dead things, they berate him and yell at him and question his sanity for risking so much on "a hideous weed." Harrison breaks down in tears.

Harrison Drosset was caught smuggling red roses. The Inspectors have decided that the best approach is to use electroshock to change how he reacts to roses on a biological level. They tie him to a chair, and attach a host of wires to him. They then show him a series of images on a shaky projector, and every time a red rose comes up they accompany it with an electric shock, of progressive strength. They stop when blood begins to run from his nose. Harrison passes out.

Harrison Drosset was caught smuggling red roses. The Inspectors render him unconscious, and when he wakes up he realizes that he's on an operating table that's been tilted so that he's almost vertical. He sees a tube running from his inner arm, slowly draining blood. The tube is quite long, and holding the other end is an Inspector, who's taken the liberty of donning painter's overalls. He's spraying Harrison's blood across a planter full of white roses. "You want red roses, Harrison? We'll gladly fix you up some red roses."

Crime & Complacency

In many ways, Cadence is a nightmarish place to live. There are several reasons, however, why the populace doesn't simply revolt. The first is that complacency is easy, made easier by the fact that the current structure is violence-free and all-encompassing. The second is that there is a pervasive fear that dissent will result in brainwashing. The third reason is that statewide propaganda extols the virtues of the modern age and explains the great injustices of the past. The past, after all, had war and widespread crime and a series of inconsistent and detrimental rulers. The final reason is that the public media conflates Queen Abigail with the current state, so that to condemn one is to condemn the other. And it is rare to find a citizen that doesn't love the late Queen Abigail dearly and devotedly.

But what of those rare criminals, the ones that do run contrary to the law? What of the criminals of a game of Perfect? There are a spectrum of justifications that might arise.

Perhaps the criminal...

- ∅ sees complacency as evil, and wants to spark revolt.
- ∅ craves the excitement of disruption.
- ∅ loves Abigail, but wants to see her represented differently.
- ∅ hates Abigail, and wants to destroy her good name.
- ∅ feels wronged by a neighbour and seeks revenge.
- ∅ disagrees with how the Inspectors do their job and wants to hamper them.
- ∅ disagrees with how the Inspectors do their job and wants to take matters into her own hands.
- ∅ seeks the truth.
- ∅ seeks experience.
- ∅ seeks love.
- ∅ seeks something that's been denied.
- ∅ seeks chaos.
- ∅ seeks justice.



Wester de Card

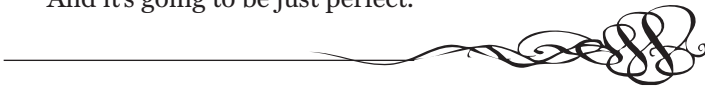
...a short story by Brendan Adkins

Wester de Card dug a tunnel and discovered a city beneath the city, evidence that the present was not the past. The Inspectors disapproved. They corrected his behavior by inducing severe claustrophobia. It took a week.

Wester left the facility, found an accomplice, and began to disseminate historical literature. The Inspectors corrected his accomplice to death while Wester watched. It took a month.

Wester began to set fire to officially sanctioned archives. They corrected all the bones of his hands. It took an hour.

Wester de Card is going to correct them, this time. And it's going to be just perfect.





Orville Milsom was a modest man. And also a murderer.

Chapter Two: Creating Criminals



In order to play Perfect, everyone needs to create a criminal. These are the characters on whom our stories will focus. The game focuses on each of them in turn, with separate scenes for each. While there will be other characters in the story - Inspectors, docile citizens, accomplices, lovers - they are not the story's focus. The game is about the criminals.

As stated earlier, the game is intended for 2-4 players. If there are more, the individual criminals won't get very much spotlight time and play will begin to slow down.

In each scene, only one person will play their criminal. Another player will play the role of the law, and the rest will play minor characters or remain audience. Playing a role involves narrating for a character, making decisions about their actions, and often rolling dice to engage the game's mechanics and determine what happens to that character.

Thinking Criminally

Now, in a dystopic setting like Cadence, the word criminal might mean something very different than it does in the real world. Kissing a lover outside of wedlock is against the law. Wearing a black suit is against the law. Creating original and visionary art is against the law. Progress is against the law.

To be a criminal means to be passionate about something, even when the consequences are dire.

This chapter is essentially a workbook. It goes through the process of creating a criminal, step-by-step.



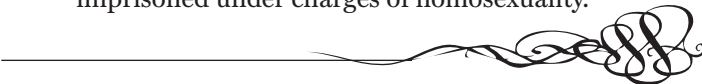
Inspirations for: Criminals

- ∅ Batman, in *Gotham By Gaslight*: A dedicated, mistrusted hero forced to operate in the dark of night.
- ∅ V, in *V for Vendetta*: A vigilante genius, building up an anonymous army.
- ∅ Winston, in *1984*: A man driven into danger by an illegal love affair.
- ∅ Alex, in *A Clockwork Orange*: A disillusioned teen, searching for beauty and meaning via hyperviolence.
- ∅ Sam Lowry in *Brazil*: A frustrated office worker, “misusing” his power to correct bureaucratic injustices.
- ∅ Vera Drake, in *Vera Drake*: A quiet lady, acting as an underground abortionist for those in need.
- ∅ The Marquis de Sade, in *Quills*: A debauchorous man, refusing to let even imprisonment end his hedonism.

I’m hard-pressed to find fictional examples of inspiring, empowered criminals who aren’t straight white males. Dystopian fiction and Victorian fiction have a problematic scarcity in this regard.

Looking to real life, the list is easy to round out:

- ∅ Harriet Tubman: An escaped slave who went on to free over 70 people, via the underground railroad.
- ∅ Malcolm X: A man who drew upon his religious beliefs for the willpower to lead his people by any means necessary.
- ∅ Emma Goldman: An anarchist who incited riots, plotted assassinations and spread radical literature.
- ∅ Oscar Wilde, a famous playwright and author, imprisoned under charges of homosexuality.



Criminal Components

In order to examine criminals and how they are created in Perfect, it's best to start with a look at the character sheet. Flipping to the back of the book, you'll see a page titled The Criminal, with some boxes to fill in. That's the character sheet. You'll also see a page titled The Law, which is the law sheet – we'll come back to that one later. For now, we're going to be focused on the components of the character sheet.

Everyone will require a character sheet to record their character on. You'll create your characters at the same time, sharing creative energy and even making suggestions to one another as you go.

Name: Everyone has a name.

Archetypes: Archetypes are chosen from a list and describe your character's motivations.

Concept: Your concept is a one or two sentence description of your character and their goals.

Class & Waistcoat: Here you record your character's certified social class, and the colour of their government-issued, class-signifying waistcoat or bodice.

Freedoms: Freedoms are chosen from a list. They're the contract laws that your character has signed.

Certifications: Here you list two organizations that you are a certified member of.

Resources: This is a score, noting how many points you have to win tests. You start the game with 5 or 6.



Pending Payout: This is a spot for you to record how many points of Payout you will be receiving at the end of the cycle.

Secret Society: This is a score that you'll gain if you start or join a secret society. It notes how your secret society backs you and your allies. You start the game without a society.

Contacts: This is a list of allies and accomplices, with the bonuses they provide you during tests noted next to their names. You start the game with 0-2.

Aspects: These are descriptions of skills, memories and tools that help you out of sticky situations. You start with three.

Conditionings: These are the brainwashed commands that the Inspectors have successfully stuck inside your head. You start without any.

 <h2 style="text-align: center;">The Criminal</h2> <hr/>	
<u>Name</u> _____	Resources <input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Archetypes</u> _____	Pending Payout <input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Concept</u> _____	Secret Society <input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Class & Waistcoat</u> _____	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;">Contacts</div>
<u>Freedoms</u> _____	
<u>Certifications</u> _____	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;">Aspects</div>
<u>Conditionings</u> _____	
<hr/> 	

Name

Each character needs a name. Cadence's List of Approved Given Names is similar to the most common names of Victorian England, and can be found below. Pick a name from the list; this is the name associated with your character on all official records. Your character might go by some other name — any two-syllable or longer name that sounds vaguely British and a touch regal will be a perfect fit — but it's frowned upon, especially by Inspectors, who always use your "correct" name.

You can also refer to that list during play when choosing names for the supporting cast and extras, as well as the Inspectors.

Male

ø Arthur
ø Bertram
ø Cecil
ø Edmund
ø Francis
ø Garnett
ø Horace
ø Isaac
ø Luther
ø Mordecai
ø Nathaniel
ø Orville
ø Ransom
ø Shelton
ø Thaddeus
ø Ulysses
ø Victor
ø Wendell

Female

ø Arabela
ø Chastity
ø Delphine
ø Emily
ø Fedelia
ø Grace
ø Hannah
ø Instance
ø Jessamine
ø Lillian
ø Lucinda
ø Millicent
ø Roselise
ø Rowena
ø Selina
ø Ursula
ø Victoria
ø Winona

Surnames

ø Ashdown
ø Beaton
ø Claxton
ø Desmond
ø Gallagher
ø Hadley
ø Holloway
ø Joplin
ø Lonsdale
ø Milsom
ø Neelands
ø Orr
ø Patton
ø Quincy
ø Renton
ø Stanbury
ø Thorley
ø Werthington



*Selena only knows him as Vance.
His official name is a mystery.*

Archetypes

After choosing a name, choose 1-3 Archetypes that reflect your character's motivations. Archetypes are broad brush strokes that suggest personality and motivation. They are a guide for playing your character, but don't directly affect how scenes play out or who wins a test. They are helpful in firming up a character concept, and also act as a flag to the other players, signaling your interests and expectations. This is especially useful for your law player, who will introduce conflicts for you.

Choose 1-3 and record them on your character sheet.

Anarchist

You commit crimes in an attempt to break down the system and strip the law of its authority.

Archivist

You commit theft and other crimes in an attempt to collect up the remnants of the past, either hoarding or redistributing what you find.

Hedonist

You commit crimes because you need to feel something more. You use crime as a vehicle for finding pain, pleasure, adrenaline and fulfillment.

Idealist

You commit crimes because you are a visionary and a believer, and you're willing to fight to preserve or bring about your ideals.

Inquisitor

You commit crimes in an attempt to uncover the truth. The world is full of masks and convoluted lies, and you feel it is important to expose the truth.

Judge

Others have committed sins, and you carry out crimes as a way of distributing vigilante justice upon these people.

Leader

You commit crimes as a way of taking control of a situation and gaining the confidence of others around you.

Romantic

You believe that love is something worth fighting for, and if necessary, dying for.

Sadist

You watch others, learning their weaknesses, and you commit crimes against these people just to see them in pain and suffering.

Vandal

You commit crimes of simple destruction, carving proof of your existence into the property of others.

Concept

Now, think about who your character will be. Maybe a mild-mannered school-teacher? A violent factory worker? A man delighted by foreign art and human touch? You'll want to create a 1-2 sentence concept statement, which addresses some of these components:

- ∅ occupation
- ∅ personality
- ∅ crimes they might commit
- ∅ reasons they commit crime

The concept is much more flexible than Archetypes or Certifications, so use that flexibility to record the information that doesn't seem to fit anywhere else on the sheet.

An Example from Character Creation:

Charlton is about to play Perfect with Zach and Brendan. He starts by selecting a name for his character, settling upon Roselise Beaton. Looking at the list of Archetypes, he chooses Anarchist Idealist. At this point, Charlton is imagining that Roselise might be some kind of artist-instigator. Under concept, he writes "a young painter, who wants her subversive images to span entire walls."

Class

The next step is to determine the character's rank in society. As outlined earlier, there are five government-recorded, colour-coded classes that citizens of Cadence are slotted into. Each character will be a Crude, Lower, Lesser, Notable or First Class Citizen. See the Cadent Society section on page 17 for a general description of each class.

Each is assigned a different colour of government-issued waistcoat or bodice, making class a glaringly obvious factor of daily life.

Choose a Class, and note it and its colour on your character sheet. Make a mental note of the number of Freedoms granted, as that'll come up momentarily.

Class	Colour	Freedoms
Crude	Brown	0
Lower	Blue	1
Lesser	Red	2
Notable	Orange	3
First	Gold	4

Freeds

You'll notice that each class has a certain number of Freeds assigned to it. Freeds are contract laws that citizens sign to climb the ranks of Cadent society, and are a tool of social repression.

Choose as many Freeds as your class requires you to have and record their names on your character sheet. For more details about Freeds, see the extended list on pages 19-21.

Short List of Freeds

- ∅ Freedom of Thought - Inspectors can't ask you questions, but you can't speak.
- ∅ Freedom of Practice - You may attend any Church service, but you must attend twice daily.
- ∅ Freedom of Privacy - You may ask Inspectors to leave your home, but you may not invite guests in.
- ∅ Freedom of Travel - You may move freely between districts, but must travel alone.
- ∅ Freedom of Observation - You may enter buildings freely, but you may not touch anything.
- ∅ Freedom of Self-Defense - You may defend yourself against assailants, but you cannot initiate physical contact.
- ∅ Freedom of Creativity - You may create art, but you must submit all completed works to blacklist review panels.

Using Freeds in Play

Freeds shine a little light on what passes for logic in Cadence. When you sign a Freedom, you are signing your name to a losing bargain - trading away rights that should be inalienable in exchange for things you should be able to do anyways.

But once you enter play and you've got those Freedoms as part of your character's back story, what do you actually do with them? Well, regardless of whether you stand in the shoes of law or criminal, Freedoms are there to be exploited, to hold against your foes.

If you are the criminal player, search for opportunities to halt the Inspectors in their tracks. If you have the Freedom of Privacy, deny them access to your home. If you have Freedom of Thought, feign illiteracy and appear to be unable to answer their questions. Use the Freedoms you have to put up blockades.

They won't necessarily help, in the long run. The Inspectors can still stake out your house, skip the questioning and move directly into accusing, and otherwise sidestep your blockades. So, what's the point? Why pull out those narrative stops? The point is that it shifts the power dynamic, and it shifts where the dramatic tension sits. It is no longer a simple narrative of implacable oppression, but a two-sided conflict where both sides wield the same weapon – that of a mangled and nightmarish system of law.

And if you are the law player, Freedoms present you with another thing to attack. They point out things that the character in question cannot do, by law. They aren't trifling things, either. There are Freedoms that remove your right to speak, to touch, to create, and to gather. The criminal player has just painted a giant red target on their character, and it's there whenever you want to take a shot at it.

Freedoms are new points of conflict, with the ability to redefine the relationship between the criminal and the system. Don't miss the opportunity to turn them to your advantage, whether you're the law or the criminal.

Certifications

Cadence has a large web of guilds, trade associations and other organizations, and membership in most of these organizations is monitored and officially documented. Membership cards are called Certifications. Most citizens are involved in several of these organizations, out of a mixture of interest and assumed duty. The citizen who has no Certifications is considered suspicious in the eyes of some Inspectors, and thus any criminal with an interest in avoiding prying eyes maintains several Certifications at all times.

Choose two Certifications that your criminal has and record them on your character sheet. For more details about Certifications, see the extended list on pages 22-31.

Short List of Certifications

- ∅ Abigail's Envoys – Attendants and guides to foreign dignitaries.
- ∅ Alliance of Purity – An activist group that protests love, romance, and sex.
- ∅ Archivist's Certification – The archivists maintain the historical archives and blacklisting centres.
- ∅ Art Traders' Guild – A society dedicated to the appreciation of high art.
- ∅ The Certificators Guild – The organization responsible for issuing Certifications.
- ∅ Church of Abigail – The rectors and deans who lead services worshipping Abigail's memory.
- ∅ Corpus Factum – A guild of fashion designers.
- ∅ Drinking Hall Membership – Allows Crude Citizens access to pubs and drinking halls.
- ∅ Governor's Ticket – Appoints a First Class Citizen to the symbolic, superficial role of Governor.
- ∅ Hermetic Society – An organizing body for doctors in Cadence.

- ∅ Mercantile Exchange Certification – Allows a citizen to operate warehouses and storefronts.
- ∅ Merchant Marine’s Ticket – They deal with Marginals, who live outside the boundaries of Cadence.
- ∅ Queen’s Crucibles – Citizen assistants and informants of the Inspectors.
- ∅ Queen’s Honour Guard – A society dedicated to the historical appreciation of Queen Abigail.
- ∅ Teachers’ Hegemony – An organizing body for teachers in Cadence.
- ∅ The Sentinels – The journalistic association of Cadence.
- ∅ Union of Crude Labourers – Membership allows a citizen to work as a manual labourer in factories.

Using Certifications in Play

Certifications serve two basic purposes: to help flesh out your character and to make scene framing an easier task.

Most of character creation asks you to focus in on your character’s criminal ambitions; Certifications contrast that by asking you to consider your day job, your routine responsibilities - and your alibis. In short, Certifications add another dimension to your character. One option is to pick a Certification that reinforces the existing concept (for someone who yearns to uncover secret truths, perhaps involvement in The Sentinels), and a Certification that adds a new idea into the mix (perhaps a Merchant Marines’ Ticket for that same character).

Certifications are tools that can be used in framing compelling scenes. They add depth and detail to the world of Cadence, meaning that you can easily pluck details from them to make your scenes feel as though they fit into a real world. Each Certification entry lists a few places that the organization operates, giving you simple backdrops for your crimes and reflections. If your character belongs to the Queen’s Honour Guard, you can use that information in play by framing a crime that takes place in a blacklisting facility, or a reflection

scene that takes place amidst other honour guards in a royal museum. To best take advantage of this opportunity, consider taking coworkers and fellow guild members as Contacts in the next step.

Finally, every Certification comes packaged with some dark rumours. These are perfect starting points for crimes that your character might be lured towards, if you are out of ideas or unsure how to carry your character's story forward. If your character is a member of the Certificator's Guild and you are unsure what their next crime is, remember that it is rumoured that some members of the guild exploit their power by forging unapproved documents. Maybe your character's mother wants to visit a dying lover from her past, and that'd require a temporary district passport, which could take months. Or you could just produce one for her when no one's looking. These rumours are crimes waiting to happen.

An Example from Character Creation:

Charlton has to choose a class for his character Roselise, and settles upon Lower. Roselise comes from a modest neighbourhood. Since she's Lower, that leaves her with one Freedom – Charlton settles upon Freedom of Thought, smiling at the idea that Roselise can only express herself through her paintings. For Certifications, Charlton selects Art Trader's Guild (an obvious choice) and the Queen's Honour Guard (to add a new dimension to the character).

Resources & Contacts

During the game, your criminal will engage in some pretty desperate struggles, mostly with the Inspectors. You'll need to win tests in order to get what you want. Your primary tool in winning these tests will be Resources, a score which you'll add to your dice rolls. Resources represents your overall ability to use your skills, experiences, and environment to help you escape and endure rough situations. On your character sheet, you simply write a number, but in a given scene, you declare what that number means in narrative terms.

You'll have another tool, Contacts, which represents your allies, accomplices, sidekicks, and those you've blackmailed into supporting you. Each Contact has a number next to their name (+1, +2, or +3), and if you're able to enlist their help or guidance in some way, you'll add that score to your die roll. Contacts can be manipulated against you and even eliminated if the Inspectors manage to seize the upper hand. For this reason, they are cheaper to buy mid-game than an increased Resources score, but are also more volatile. It's easier to trust others, and safer to trust yourself.

At the start of the game, you can choose any of the following options:

- ∅ Loner: A Resources score of 6 and no Contacts.
- ∅ Malefactor: A Resources score of 5 and a single Contact rated at +2.
- ∅ Conspirator: A Resources score of 5 and two Contacts rated at +1 each.

Your Resources score is simply a number, with no written descriptions attached. Before play, it's good to brainstorm some of the ways Resources can be used in a scene – that way, you are more likely to feel confident about their use when the game is actually in motion.

For Contacts, you need to name and briefly describe each Contact. These names and descriptions should be short:

- ∅ Mordecai Orr, my butler
- ∅ Hannah, my secret lover
- ∅ Nathaniel, partner in crime
- ∅ The man in the black cape
- ∅ Orville, the Inspector I'm blackmailing

You can refer to the Names section on page 44, if you need some appropriate names for your Contacts.



Inspirations for: Contacts

- ∅ Alfred, Batman's butler.
- ∅ Julia, Winston's lover and partner in crime, in 1984.
- ∅ Dr. Watson, Sherlock Holmes' dependable assistant and friend.



Using Resources & Contacts in Play

Resources are the tool by which you show how your character thinks, adapts and survives. In a Discovery Scene or Retribution Scene, the law player is going to work hard to chase you down, dismantle your defenses, and take something from you. Everything they narrate in these scenes will be underscored by an implied question: "I've got you now, haven't I?"

Resources are the tool by which you say no. No, they haven't got you yet, because you can still duck into the pitch-black alley and hide. No, they haven't got you yet, because you can still recite those poetic verses and steel yourself against their torture. No, they haven't got you yet, because you can still find something that'll help you stave them off.

When you invoke Resources, the amount that you invoke at once is a statement about how important your narrated details are to the situation. If you invoke 3 Resources when you narrate that you give the Inspectors false information, that 3 states that your lie turns the tables significantly – maybe it’s believable; maybe they see through it but are exasperated that their tactics are failing.

When you invoke Resources, the amount that you invoke at once is also a pacing mechanism. If you invoke 1 or 2 at a time, you’ll have a longer scene with a slow struggle for power. If you invoke 3 or 4 at a time, you’ll have a shorter scene with some monumental shifts in power. Either is good, as is a varied mix.

When you invoke Contacts, you prove that your character is not alone in the world. Contacts are proof that you are part of a living, breathing world – not just some cold case study to be dissected and fixed. When you invoke Contacts, you are given an opportunity to pull in outside help and outside knowledge. Contacts let you step beyond the boundaries of what your character is capable of doing alone.

If you are hoping to interact with a criminal that someone else is playing, it’s a great idea to take them as a Contact. That way, whenever your character is in need, you can call upon that other player to jump in and support you. If you have someone else’s criminal as your Contact, they will always be the one playing their own character – even when that character is called into your scenes. Another way to involve other players’ characters is through Collaborative Crimes, described on page 133.

It’s advised not to take your law player’s criminal as a Contact, as you’ll be asking one person to juggle the roles of ally and enemy at the same time, and to juggle several characters at once.

Aspects

In addition to Resources and Contacts, your criminal will have a third tool: Aspects. Aspects are things which help the criminal out of sticky situations... and that prove to be a crutch in times of desperate need. They can be memories, skills, personality traits, tools, or life ambitions.

You'll create three Aspects and record them on your character sheet. Each should be a short phrase, anywhere from 1 to 7 words long. They should describe things that your character depends on or looks to, in times of need.

Some examples of Aspects follow, grouped into common categories:

- ∅ Memories: The scent of my mother's perfume; Watching my lover die; My father's code.
- ∅ Skills: Can hold breathe for several minutes; Fox-like reflexes; Quick-witted negotiator.
- ∅ Personality Traits: Stubborn as a mule; Aware of tiny nuances; Manipulative.
- ∅ Tools: Set of syringes; A billowing grey cloak; A concealed coil of wire.

If you lose a test during a Discovery Scene or Retribution Scene, you may spend an Aspect to re-roll your die. To spend your Aspect, you need to have already demonstrated it throughout the scene. That means that if you want to spend the "Meticulous" Aspect after losing a test, you need to have already demonstrated how your character is meticulous, earlier in the scene.

When you spend an Aspect, cross it off. It cannot be used again – though there are Payout options that let you buy new Aspects or refresh old ones (see page 105).

If after re-rolling you still lose, then you really do lose. You may spend one Aspect per test. Thus, it's fine to spend an

Aspect during your Discovery Scene and a second Aspect during your Retribution Scene.

Using Aspects in Play

While Resources show how your character acts in a given situation, Aspects show people the consistent elements of your character – their greatest strengths, their most obvious quirks, their favourite tools and objects. They serve as anchors to a persona.

Aspects need to be seeded into a scene in advance of their use. You must prove that your character is disciplined before you can lean upon their discipline as a crutch. Look for opportunities to incorporate your Aspects early on in a scene and throughout. Think about how your narration, the details you hone in on, and your criminal’s dialogue can all tease out your Aspects.

While a maximum of one Aspect will affect the mechanics in a given scene, you should feel encouraged to incorporate any Aspect that fits. This will help create a consistent portrait of your character, and will make it easier to reincorporate details later in the scene and in future scenes. Reincorporation is one of the easiest ways to make yourself look like an artful storyteller.

An Example from Character Creation:

Deciding that Roselise keeps her art to herself, Charlton gives her a Resources of 6 and no Contacts. To complete the character, Charlton comes up with three Aspects: Fierce as Fire; Not Who You’d Expect; Father’s Rusty Knife. That’s it! Roselise Beaton is complete.

Secret Societies

Over the course of the game, you may join or even found a Secret Society. You never start with a Secret Society, but there's nothing that says you can't join one on your very first cycle.

Each Secret Society has a name, a goal, and a list of members. Some of those members may be your Contacts. When one of your Contacts is a fellow member, you add the Secret Society's score to their Contact score. However, if anything happens to compromise that Contact, the Secret Society will also come under threat.

When you acquire a Secret Society on your criminal's sheet, its score will describe your relationship with the society, and how much it is able and willing to help you out. More than one criminal can become a member of the same secret society, but their scores can and will be completely different. The society may value or trust one member more than another, and this is reflected in their different Secret Society scores.

Secret Societies are usually created entirely by you and your fellow players, but here are some examples:

- ∅ The Abbey Runners — a group of young men dedicated to bootlegging liquor, arranging illegal parties and carrying out hedonistic debauchery.
- ∅ The Jury — a group of vigilantes who monitor Inspector activities from the shadows, and punish the Inspectors who they believe are abusing their power and wrongfully conditioning the innocent.
- ∅ Mordecai's Militia — a group of older men, who are smuggling and stockpiling weapons in preparation for the inevitable uprising.
- ∅ The Collective — a group of poets and artists who congregate in secret places and create beautiful works of highly-illegal original art.

∅ Ring of Rats — an assassin’s guild that prides itself on the use of poisons and pestilence to bring down its targets.

Using Secret Societies in Play

While Contacts show that the criminal is not alone, they are rarely more than satellites of support. Secret Societies take this to a different level: the criminal becomes part of an active community, something bigger than themselves.

Note that a Secret Society’s score doesn’t necessarily represent its power; rather, it represents your access to its power. There might be a secret society with posts in every major city and whole Inspection Yards under its wing, poised for revolution – with a score of 1 on your sheet. What that means is that you have a meager foothold in the organization, and aren’t able to pull many strings or garner many favours. You’re currently a pawn, but each time you add a point to the Society, you’re climbing rank and gaining power.

That isn’t the only way to do it, though! You can create a Society which you lead, with followers clearly devoted to your cause.

You never invoke the Secret Society directly; instead, you invoke other members of the Society, and couple the two bonuses together. This is because secret societies are built on trust and relationships. It is impossible to call on a mob of unnamed goons. It is possible, however, to call upon Tristan and his mob of unnamed goons, because Tristan trusts you, and his friends trust him. Presumably Tristan knows their names.

When you invoke a Contact who is a member of a Secret Society, that Secret Society bonus could mean a lot of things: it could represent dangerous knowledge and training that your Contact has received, equipment and weaponry that the Society has provided, strings that the Society has pulled, or back-up that the Contact has called in.

If another player creates an interesting Secret Society, it's fine to join it yourself. However, each player is mechanically isolated, and points invested don't cross over. If another player has a neat Secret Society with a score of 3, and you want to join it, you need to buy a new Secret Society with a score of 1. You can give it the same name and description as the already existing society, but mechanically it's the same as if you just started a new one.

An Example of Secret Societies:

Like all characters, Roselise started the game without any Secret Society to belong to. In fact, Charlton decided that Roselise didn't even have any Contacts at the start of the game.

But over the course of play, Charlton had opportunities to establish Contacts for Roselise. Imagine that after a few cycles of play, Charlton established the following Contacts: Jessamine, my sister in arms +1; Marek, my paint smuggler +2.

If Charlton creates a new Secret Society, perhaps called the Destroyers and dedicated to graffiti and clandestine art, he'll get to choose who's involved in it: Jessamine, Marek, or both. Once he's created the Secret Society, there is no cost to bringing his Contacts into it.

Let's say that Charlton brings both of them into the Destroyers. Now, when Jessamine is invoked, it's worth +3 (+2 normally, +1 for the Secret Society). When Marek is invoked, it's worth +2 (+1 normally, +1 for the Secret Society).

That's It!

You've created a complete criminal. One with a name, some motivations, a concept statement, a role in society, connections to organizations, inherent capabilities, and things that they can depend upon.

Once each player has completed their criminal, the group is ready to play. If this is your first session of play, expect to spend 20-45 minutes creating criminals. If you've already played one or more sessions, you can pick up your criminal right where you left off with them last time, and thus don't need to go through the process of making a new character.

An Example from Character Creation:

Charlton has finished his character, Roselise Beaton. On his character sheet, he has written the following information:

Name: *Roselise Beaton*

Archetypes: *Anarchist Idealist*

Concept: *A young painter, who wants her subversive images to span entire walls.*

Class: *Lower*

Freedom: *Freedom of Thought*

Certifications: *Art Trader's Guild, Queen's Honour Guard*

Resources: *6*

Contacts: *(none)*

Aspects: *Fierce as Fire; Not Who You'd Expect; Father's Rusty Knife.*

While Charlton was making his character, Zach and Brendan would both have created a character as well. Now, with a character each, they are ready to play!

Chapter Three:

Tests



Assigning Roles

Before playing, everyone needs to create a criminal character, as described in Chapter 2: Creating Criminals.

Next, everyone needs to be assigned a law player. When you are playing as your criminal, someone else at the table will be playing as your law player, which includes roleplaying as the Inspectors and the regular citizenry of Cadence. The easiest way to choose is to have the person to your left play the role of law during your scenes.

When you are playing as your criminal and that one other person is acting as law player, everyone else forms the audience. If there are additional characters in the scene, like a criminal's Contacts or a cohort of additional Inspectors or regular citizens, the players who are currently audience should step up and play those minor characters for the duration of the scene.

Example

Charlton's law player is Zach. When it's Charlton's turn, he will be playing Roselise Beaton, and Zach will be playing all of the Inspectors and common citizens who get in his way. Brendan will simply be an audience member for the scene. If Zach narrates that two Inspectors corner Roselise, then Brendan might jump in and assume the role of one of those Inspectors for this scene.

How Tests Work

Over the course of the game, there will be many tests, always triggered by the law player. Each kind of scene has a different set of goals that the law player can pick from. The test determines if the Inspectors achieve their goal or if the criminal wriggles out of their schemes and traps.

Tests all follow a similar format: the criminal player and law player go back and forth, narrating what their characters are doing and what resources they have at their disposal. Each time one of them does this, they are bringing in another bonus to help them win the test. Bonuses are most easily tracked with glass beads or other small tokens, placed in front of the player when the bonuses are brought in.

When both the criminal and the law player have their bonuses in order, they each roll a six-sided die and add their bonuses to it. Whoever has the higher total score wins the test.

The law player is the first to take a turn in this back-and-forth narration. He has at his disposal 2-20 Tension Points, which are his primary fuel for the test. In addition, he might have Holds or Guilt established in the criminal's previous cycles. Some of the concepts referenced in this chapter (like Holds and Guilds) aren't defined until Chapter Four - readers may find it helpful to move back and forth between these chapters.

Each turn, the law player chooses one of the following:

- ∅ Spending between 1 and 5 Tension points
- ∅ Invoking between 1 and 3 points of the criminal's Guilt
- ∅ Spending a Hold to invoke one of the criminal's Contacts against them
- ∅ Spending a Hold to break the criminal's advantage

Each turn, the criminal player chooses either of the following:

- ∅ Invoking some (or all) of their Resource score
- ∅ Invoking a Contact

Test Actions

Note that on the list of options above, I use the term spend in some cases, and invoke in others. When you spend Tension Points, Holds, and Aspects, those go away forever. When you invoke Resources, Contacts, and Guilt, those points only go away for the rest of the test. They are yours to use on every single test, and they don't go away or become unavailable to you.

Spending Tension

As the law player, when you spend Tension Points, you narrate a danger that the criminal faces, an action that an antagonistic force takes, or an unpleasant result of the criminal's actions. If this is the first action of the test, it should establish what the criminal needs to fear and react to. Whenever you spend Tension Points, you should give the criminal something new to react to, even if it's just a heightened level of danger from the same source as before.

After you describe what the Tension represents, put forward a number of glass beads equal to the points you spent.

Invoking Guilt

As the law player, when you invoke Guilt, you get the rare opportunity to foist fears and neuroses directly upon the criminal's psyche. When you invoke Guilt, you are introducing the possibility that the criminal might break down under the pressure.

You don't get to control the criminal's reactions, but you do get to introduce new psychological obstacles to overcome.

Invoking Resources

As the criminal player, when you invoke Resources, you aren't only narrating actions - you're responding to the dangers that the law player has introduced. Your invokes shouldn't comprise a hero's narrative but rather the story of someone under fire.

After you describe your criminal's actions, put forward a number of glass beads equal to the points you invoked.

Invoking Contacts

As the criminal player, when you invoke a Contact, it's important to demonstrate how that character is supporting your actions. If they arrive on the scene and do something, that's going to be easy. If they aren't physically present in the scene, though, it might take more thought. Perhaps they handed you a tool in an earlier scene, which you can re-incorporate now. Perhaps they taught you how to do exactly what needs to be done right now. It's not enough to narrate that "I think about them, and that brings me strength." You must narrate how they support your actions.

If you invoke a Contact who's part of a Secret Society, you should include reference to how they bring the weight of the society to their aid, or how your bond is strengthened through your mutual involvement in the society. Bring the society into the present, through their actions or your relationship.

After you describe how your Contact, and possibly their Secret Society, helps you, put forward a number of glass beads equal to the Contact's score. If the Contact is a member of a Society, put forward a number of glass beads equal to the Society's score, as well.

Spending Holds to Steal Contacts

As the law player, you may spend a Hold to take a Contact away from the criminal for the duration of a test. This might include the Inspectors threatening the Contact's life, the Contact being manipulated by the Inspectors, or an act of betrayal.

After you describe how you are stealing the Contact, the criminal has a choice. The criminal player may choose to remove the Contact from their sheet permanently to prevent the law player from manipulating them. This the criminal represents severing ties at the moment of betrayal or manipulation.

If the criminal player chooses to keep their Contact, the law player puts forward a number of glass beads equal to the Contact's score. The criminal can not invoke the stolen Contact for the rest of the test.

If the criminal player chose to remove the Contact, the Hold is still spent, but the law player gains no bonus towards winning the test. The Contact, however, is removed permanently from the criminal's sheet. That Contact will never again be a friend or accomplice.

Spending Holds to Break Advantage

As the law player, you may spend a Hold to track down the criminal, exploit their weaknesses, or put something new at stake. It can be evidence, a blackmail tool, a dark truth, or a secret weapon. Use it to reverse the power in a situation where the criminal has the upper hand or to kick the criminal when they're down.

After you describe how the Hold is used, roll a single six-sided die. Remove that many glass beads from the criminal's pile. If you rolled higher than all his glass beads, leave him with nothing.

When You Spend Major Holds, Add Goals

As the law player, when you spend a Major Hold to Break Advantage or Steal a Contact, you should also narrate a bit about what you are putting at stake, how the Inspectors are getting inside the criminal's head, and how dark they're willing to get. During a Retribution Scene, a Major Hold adds another Goal to the test, in addition to any other effects. This is described at length in the "Mixing Stakes" section on page 90.

Pacing the Test

The two players go back and forth, narrating and choosing bonuses, until both are satisfied. Why do it back-and-forth, instead of just all at once? The answer is that it's all about pacing. Going back and forth allows you to have a conversation and build a story, and to riff off of one another's contributions.

The difference between invoking five points of Resources all at once or invoking them one at a time over five turns is entirely a difference in pacing. Do you imagine a scene where the criminal makes a bold game-changing action, or slowly inches towards success?

There's one type of test that works differently: when the law player decides to Establish a Hold. In that case, there may be multiple rolls, each heightening the tension. We'll describe this kind of scene later, in its own section on page 86.

Rolling the Dice

If one of the players passes their turn, declining to build up more bonuses, the other player is still allowed to bring in additional bonuses. Once both sides are ready, the two players each roll a six-sided die and add the result to their bonuses.

If the criminal player's total is higher, the law player's goal is not fulfilled. The criminal player should describe the last gambits or actions that get the criminal into the clear.

If the law player's total is higher, his goal is fulfilled. This usually means something unfortunate for the criminal, which the law player should describe in detail.

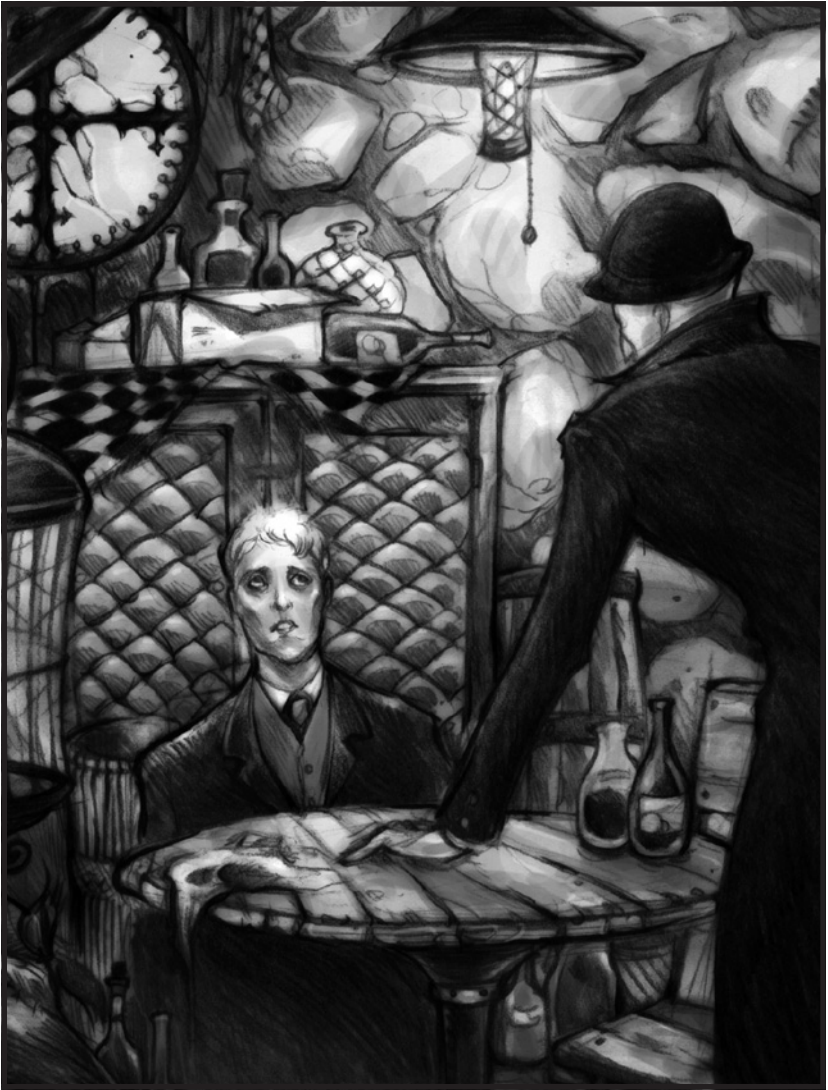
In the case of a tie, the law player always wins. It is a cold, harsh, totalitarian world!

Spending Aspects

If, as the criminal player, you lose a test, you may spend one of your Aspects to re-roll the die. To spend your Aspect, you need to have already demonstrated it throughout the scene. That means that if you want to spend the “Meticulous” Aspect after losing a test, you need to have already demonstrated how your character is meticulous, earlier in the scene. Maybe your criminal donned gloves and wiped their feet before breaking into someone’s home; maybe your criminal wiped their bloody nose with a crisp handkerchief before proceeding to retaliate against the assaulting Inspector. Both are examples of how to seed “Meticulous” into a scene so that you can call upon it later.

If you reroll and it changes your result (to a win), describe how your Aspect helped you turn things around at the last moment.

If after re-rolling you still lose, then you really do lose. Whether your reroll wins or loses, strike the Aspect off of your criminal sheet. That part of your character is burnt out, excised, strained to the breaking point. It is of no further use to you.



Nathaniel had always known it would come to this.
He just didn't think it would come to this so soon.

Chapter Four: The Cycle of Scenes



Play takes place across a recurring cycle of scenes. These scenes are of a fixed type, repeating in a fixed order. At first, this might seem restrictive, but there is a wealth of variety within these scene types. The cycle serves to support what the game is about – committing crimes, facing the consequences, and emerging changed. The order of scenes is as follows: a Crime Scene, then a Discovery Scene, then potentially a Retribution Scene, and then finally a Reflection Scene. The game goes through this cycle for each criminal, one at a time.

Crime Scenes

If you're the current criminal player, you start the Crime Scene. Your job in this scene is quite simple: narrate your criminal committing a crime as you answer the other players' questions. A Crime Scene should take anywhere from one to five minutes, and most of that will consist of your description of the scene, your narration of your actions, and your answers to questions.

While simple, your job is also difficult. It requires creativity and forethought. Below are some considerations when playing your Crime Scene:

Give just enough context.

You want everyone else at the table to understand where you are coming from when you describe your crime. If you need to spend 30 seconds describing your criminal's motivations, or how they kissed their children goodnight before stealing out the back door, do so. Be succinct: give as little context as you can while still providing a rich scene.

Think about your motivations.

Your Archetypes are a good starting point in this regard. Think about who your criminal is, why they commit crimes, what they hope to accomplish and what they're willing to risk. Demonstrate these things through your crimes.

Give evocative details.

Don't describe everything in a scene. But do choose a few evocative details and share them. Invoke the senses. Play to people's interests. Re-incorporate. Give them touchstones to fix their interest to.

Demonstrate.

Don't just say that your character is vengeful and hasty. Demonstrate it. That might mean narrating that they smash the door open instead of picking the lock. It might mean narrating the evidence they chose not to clean up. In every instance, in every moment, demonstrate.

Questions

The key role of other players during the Crime Scene is to ask good questions – questions that reveal the nature of the character, what drives them, what is going through their head during the crime. What makes a good question depends on the context, but generally:

- ∅ A good question digs deeper, asking why and how.
- ∅ A good question is simple and powerful.
- ∅ A good question is relevant to the character.
- ∅ A good question creates fodder for future scenes and re-incorporation.

If it's your job to ask these good questions and you're confused by what they might be, start with "what's going through your character's head right now?" and "is this the first time you've done something like this?"

If you're the law player, it's your job to ask questions that reveal the potential consequences and fallout of the criminal's crime. In a minute or two, you'll ask the audience to rate how much society cares about the crime; right now you want to convince them that the crime is so heinous they must care a lot!

If you're the criminal player, it's your job to respond to these questions with simple, revealing answers. Answer with a few sentences, which let us know more about your character and the situation. Don't take a full minute answering a question – keep in mind that a crime scene should take no more than five minutes.

Tension Points

At the end of the Crime Scene, the law player asks two final questions.

The first question is asked of the criminal player. The law player asks them, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how much does this crime matter to you?"

The second question is asked of the audience: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how much does society care about this?" If there is no audience, the law player answers this question.

It's sometimes hard to know how to rank such an abstract and arbitrary question! As the criminal player, there are a few considerations that might help:

- ∅* Does this express something about who you are?
- ∅* Does this prove something to the world or validate your ideas?
- ∅* Is this something new for your character?
- ∅* Is this the next step in a progression towards some new territory?
- ∅* Does this involve reaching out to others, either with kindness or with cruelty?
- ∅* Does this involve learning?

While there are no strict guides for choosing your number, if you find yourself saying yes to half of those questions, it makes sense that you'd choose a fairly high number (maybe 5 to 7). If you find yourself saying yes to most of those questions, it makes sense that you'd choose a decidedly high number (maybe 8 to 10).

As the audience, there are a few considerations that might help you as well:

- ∅* Does this crime fit into an ongoing pattern?
- ∅* Will this crime create new criminals?
- ∅* Does this crime subvert class roles?
- ∅* Does this crime subvert gender roles?
- ∅* Does this crime subvert the balance of power?
- ∅* Does this crime break Freedoms?
- ∅* Does this crime uncover secrets?
- ∅* Does this crime target the enforcers of law?

Again, there are no strict guides for choosing your number. But if you find yourself saying yes to more than a couple of those questions, it makes sense that you'd choose a fairly high number (5 to 7). If you're answering yes to most of the questions, or a resounding yes to a few in particular, it makes sense that you'd choose a decidedly high number (8 to 10).

The law player takes the answers to both of these questions (one from the criminal player, one from the audience), and combines the two scores, for a total between 2 and 20. They gain that many Tension Points. They write the total number of Tension Points on their Law Sheet, which can be found on page 151. They will not use these Tension Points until the criminal player's next scene, which is a Discovery Scene.

Additionally, Tension Points from your previous crime cycles roll over, so if there are any remaining from your prior crimes, they are added to this new total.

While the law player needs to note the combined total of those two questions, the criminal player needs to note the higher of those two question scores. This is the amount they get to spend on Payout at the end of the crime cycle. There's a spot on the character sheet to record Pending Payout. Write the higher of those two 1-to-10 question scores in the Pending Payout box now.

Example

It's time for Charlton to kick off a crime scene for his criminal, Roselise. He frames the scene, "Roselise is walking along the dock, just past curfew. No one else seems to be around. She pauses for a moment next to a gigantic foreign ship. Certain that she is alone, she pulls from her backpack a tin of black paint and a large brush." Brendan pipes in, asking, "Does she know who this ship belongs to?" Charlton responds, "She doesn't have a clue – she just knows it's foreign. She dips the brush, and paints a sketch-like picture onto the side of the ship. It's a caricatured Inspector, caning a wimpy-looking man. Both characters have a word bubble, in which they are exclaiming, 'Send help!' She finishes, and then tosses the paint canister and the brush into the water."

Zach, the law player, asks, "is she hoping that the Inspectors will see it?" Charlton thinks for a moment, then says, "Ideally, Roselise wants the ship to sail away with this image on it, and have it spark some kind of inquiry and concern abroad. If the Inspectors see it before the ship departs, though, that'll still be a minor victory in her mind." Brendan asks a final question of Charlton: "How does it feel, having finished this little mural?" Charlton replies, "It feels good. Roselise feels like she just took charge of her own life, come what may."

After a few more questions, Zach asks the two closing questions, starting with, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how much does this matter to you?" Charlton thinks about it (it expresses who Roselise is, she's attempting to prove something to the world, she's reaching out to others) and replies with a 6. Zach now asks of the audience, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how much does society care?" Brendan thinks about it, and realizes the crime is pretty severe: it subverts the power balance, uncovers national secrets, and targets law enforcers. Bringing the scrutiny of the international community to Cadence would be a big deal! Brendan replies with an 8.

Zach combines the two numbers together to determine how many Tension Points he gains (14). Charlton records the higher of those two numbers under Pending Payout (8).

Discovery Scenes

The Discovery Scene revolves around a test which determines whether or not the criminal is discovered in some way. The test should take several minutes to complete, and should comprise most of the scene, with some lead-in scene framing by the law player, and some lead-out narration by whoever wins the test. A Discovery Scene should take from 4 to 7 minutes to complete.

Before the test begins, the law player chooses what's at stake: Capture, or Establishing a Hold.

Capture

If the law player chooses Capture, they begin by narrating how the criminal might be caught - are there footsteps in the distance, or perhaps an orphan child emerging from the shadows after witnessing the crime? Is there an Inspector chasing after the criminal?

During a Capture Scene, the law player spends points trying to apprehend the criminal. This might involve a bumbling Inspector asking to see the criminal's papers as part of a routine district checkpoint, or a shadowy figure chasing the criminal down a dark alley, or someone threatening to sell the criminal out.

During a Capture Scene, the criminal is invoking Resources and Contacts trying to escape or cover their tracks. This might involve ditching evidence, running from Inspectors, attacking pursuers, or hiding in a dark alleyway.

If the law player wins, proceed to a Retribution Scene. Otherwise, proceed to a Reflection Scene.



*She's experienced their brand of "justice" before.
This time, she's not coming in quietly.*

An Example of Capture:

Charlton has just finished his first Crime Scene. Roselise painted an inflammatory mural on the side of a foreign ship, depicting the Inspectors as cruel torturers. It's now time for Zach (Charlton's law player) to frame a Discovery Scene.

Zach assesses the situation: he has 14 Tension Points, and Roselise has a Resources score of 6. Zach decides that he has a fairly good chance of Capturing Roselise and still having enough points left over to succeed during the Retribution Scene. He announces that he will attempt to Capture.

Zach opens by saying, "As you turn to head back, you notice two large figures standing at the edge of the dock, blocking your original exit. That's worth two points." The decision to have that narration be worth two points was arbitrary. Zach could have said it was worth one point, or three, or any number that felt right to him. Since he said two, he knocks two points off his pool (leaving him with 12 remaining) and slides two glass beads forward.

Charlton replies, "Roselise is alarmed, but she doesn't make a sound. She crouches down, and begins to slink in the opposite direction. The docks have multiple platforms and bridges, and are rather maze-like. Roselise is making her way towards another exit. That's 2 of my Resources invoked." Although no one had stated that the docks were maze-like previously, it's perfectly fine for Charlton to introduce that detail now. Resources are invoked, not spent – meaning that Charlton doesn't cross those two points off his sheet or anything like that. He slides two glass beads forward, as well.

Zach spends another three Tension Points and says, "You hear a gruff voice yell, 'I think I saw someone over there!' Footsteps, coming towards you, from the opposite direction of where the original figures stood." Charlton nods, concerned for Roselise at this point. "Roselise sees some crates nearby. Pulling her father's rusty old knife out of her backpack, just in case, she crouches behind the crates. That's another 1 of her Resources." Charlton worked one of Roselise's Aspects into that narration (her father's rusty knife), which means he'll be able to call upon it for a reroll if needed.

Zach spends two more Tension Points, and in a gruff voice says, "Well, well, well! What do we have here?" Charlton responds by invoking Roselise's remaining 3 Resources, saying, "Roselise does the only thing she can think of: she lashes out with the knife, slicing open the Inspector's ankle. And before anyone else can do anything, she rolls off the side of the dock, into the icy-cold water. She's going to try to swim to safety."

Zach's happy with the amount of Tension Points he's spent (7), and Charlton's invoked everything at his disposal (6 Resources). They both roll: Zach rolls a 3, and Charlton rolls a 2. Zach's currently winning, which means Roselise is getting captured. Charlton pipes up, "Ah, but I've got one of my Aspect's in play! The knife. That Inspector I slashed up is too busy yelping in pain to point out the way I swam, and none of the others saw me." Charlton crosses off the Aspect and rerolls, getting a 4. Including all bonuses, he's now tied with Zach. Unfortunately, ties always go to the law player. He crosses off the rusty knife Aspect - it's spent and cannot be used in future scenes.

Zach grins, and ends the scene, "Roselise drags herself out of the water on the other side of the docks, in an area that's pitch black. Of course, being pitch black, she doesn't see the Inspector standing a few feet away, until she bumps right into him."

Establish a Hold

If the law player chooses Establish a Hold, they narrate how the Inspectors go about searching for evidence and tracks. It's assumed that the criminal has already fled the scene, or perhaps that the Inspectors have some motive for letting the criminal go and biding their time.

No matter what, the Inspectors find something. What's at stake is whether this something is a mere piece of evidence or a window into the mind of the criminal. Mere evidence is called a Minor Hold, and it is useful in tracking the criminal down and punishing them. The latter possibility is a Major Hold, and it is useful in yanking on the criminal's heart-strings, wreaking havoc upon their life, and crushing them.

A Minor Hold might be:

- ∅ a red button left at the scene of the crime
- ∅ an eye witness who can describe the criminal
- ∅ fingerprints lifted from a teacup

A Major Hold might be:

- ∅ a forbidden love letter from a Ms. Fedelia Desmond
- ∅ the Inspectors know that the criminal is afraid of rats
- ∅ realizing that all his crimes are attempts to recreate the scene of his mother's murder

Everyone at the table collaborates in determining what the Hold might be. It's important that the criminal player is on board with the nature of the Hold being established, as that Hold implies a lot of things about their character. It's important that the law player is on board with the nature of the Hold being established, as they need to use that Hold to their advantage at some point. Ultimately, the final say rests with the law player, acknowledging that it's best to find a Hold that everyone is keen to see in action.

The law player narrates where the Inspectors are looking, and how they are going about their search. The criminal player can respond with some information about the scene – what condition they left the room in and what the Inspectors are likely to find. Both sides roll a single six-sided die with no bonuses. If the law player has the lower score, they only establish a Minor Hold. If the law player has the higher score, they establish a Major Hold.

When Establishing a Hold, the normal test rules do not apply. There is no spending, invoking, or accumulating bonuses. It is a simple contest of the dice, with the stake of whether a Minor Hold or Major Hold is established. The criminal may still spend an Aspect to earn a re-roll. The law player still wins ties, which results in a Major Hold.

There is a cost that the law player must pay when they Establish a Hold. They expend Tension Points equal to the sum of the dice rolled. If the criminal player rolled a 3 and the law player rolled a 2, then the law player removes 5 Tension Points from their pool and gains a Minor Hold. If the criminal player rolled a 3 and the law player rolled a 5, then the law player removes 8 Tension Points and gains a Major Hold. If the total is greater than the law player's Tension Pool, then they lose all of their Tension Points, but the results of the roll still stand.

The loss of Tension Points matches a shift in the narrative – the criminal has gotten away for now, and the risk has temporarily receded. But the Hold now lies in wait.

Keep Searching

If the law player only managed to establish a Minor Hold, they can choose to push further and Keep Searching. This option is only available if the law player still has Tension Points remaining. The law player narrates how the Inspectors change their tactic and refine their search. Instead of rooting around at the crime scene, maybe they double back to

the criminal's apartment and look there. Instead of just cataloguing the items present, maybe the lead Inspector clears everyone else out and tries to think like a criminal would.

The law player picks up their die and rerolls it. The criminal player's die stands, and is not rerolled. If the law player's die is now higher than the criminal player's die, the law player establishes a Major Hold instead of a Minor Hold.

The law player loses Tension Points equal to this new result, in addition to what they've already paid. They do not lose points for the criminal player's die after the first roll.

Write the Hold on the Law Sheet, in the section for Holds. Note whether it is Minor or Major. Remember to remove the Tension Points you lost. Regardless of whether the law player establishes a Minor Hold or a Major Hold, the next scene is a Reflection Scene.

An Example of Establishing a Hold:

For the sake of example, let's see what would have happened if Zach had chosen to Establish a Hold instead of attempting Capture. Zach would make this choice if he wanted to build up resources for future cycles, or if he felt like he would probably be unsuccessful in attempting Capture.

Zach chooses to Establish a Hold, narrating that, "Not long after Roselise's crime, a patrol of Inspectors make their rounds through the docks and come across her mural. They're aghast, and immediately call forward reinforcements." Brendan decides that this is an excellent moment to jump in and play a supporting role, stepping into the shoes of one of the other Inspectors, "Oi! What seems to be the problem, Horace? Is there - why! Who in Abigail's holy name would draw such a lewd and graceless portrait? And on such a prominent vessel, no less! Disgusting!"

Before anyone rolls, Charlton mentions, “Roselise stole those paint supplies from a neighbor, so she’s pretty confident that they can’t be traced back to her. I think that probably counts for her ‘Not Who You’d Expect’ Aspect. Still, she did carelessly leave the brush and can floating around at the crime scene.”

Zach and Charlton both roll. Zach rolls a 2, and Charlton rolls a 3. Since the sum of those two numbers is 5, Zach removes 5 of his Tension Points. Zach could now establish a Minor Hold (which would probably be “Roselise’s fingerprints are on the paintbrush”). However, he wants more, so he decides to Keep Searching and hopefully establish a Major Hold. “While a few of the boys are happy to have discovered the brush, Inspector Quincy refuses to quit. He studies the mural under the light of his lamp, searching for something more.” Zach rolls his die again, this time getting a 5. He removes another 5 points from his pool, and compares scores with Charlton. He’s now winning, and can establish a Major Hold.

Charlton could potentially spend his Not Who You’d Expect Aspect, in order to reroll his 3. He decides that this would be a poor choice, as he’d need to roll a 6 in order to beat Zach, and so he’d be burning his Aspect for little chance at any gain. Instead, Charlton accepts Zach’s victory.

Zach has the authority to invent a Major Hold himself, but since he still doesn’t have a very firm understanding of Roselise’s motivations, he asks Charlton for some feedback. Together, they settle upon the idea that Roselise dreams of foreign rescue, for both herself and all of Cadence. And so Zach records the Major Hold “Dreams of foreign rescue” on his law sheet. That hope is something that can Zach can target in future cycles.

Retribution Scenes

In the Retribution Scene, the law player attempts to punish, debase, fix, or break the criminal. A Retribution Scene only occurs if the law player successfully Captured the criminal during the Discovery Scene. If that didn't occur, skip ahead to the Reflection Scene.

The Law's Goal

The Retribution Scene revolves around a test, just like a Capture attempt. Before the test begins, the law player chooses one of the following three options, determining what's at stake. If the law player wins the test, this is the effect that their victory has.

- ∅ Create Guilt: the criminal will feel remorse and guilt about their crimes. The law player gains 2 Guilt.
- ∅ Threaten a Contact: deny the criminal one of his Contacts or shatter his confidence.
- ∅ Condition: impose a Conditioning on the criminal's future behavior.

Mixing Stakes

When a Major Hold is spent during a Retribution Scene, it adds another goal to the test. This means that the law player gets to pick another option from the list (Create Guilt, Threaten a Contact, Condition).

The law player can choose the same goal they originally chose. So if the law player chose Create Guilt originally, and chose Create Guilt again when they spent their Major Hold, then the criminal would stand to accumulate 4 Guilt if they lost the test. If the law player originally chose Threaten a Contact and chose it again, then two different Contacts would be on the chopping block this test.

The law player may also choose a different goal. In that case, you might have a scene where the criminal could stand to accumulate 2 Guilt and a Conditioning, for example.

In these cases, the fight is being fought on multiple fronts or being fought with multiple weapons. The criminal player should recognize that their character is under a barrage. Put yourself in your character's shoes, and channel that messy frustration!

Framing the Retribution Scene

As the law player, declare what's at stake and frame how the Inspectors set up their retribution. Most of the time, this will look like the Inspectors isolating the criminal, somewhere dark and scary, somewhere where their psychological games and experimental methodologies won't offend anyone. Occasionally, a Retribution Scene will instead take place in front of a crowd, or even at the hands of a crowd.

The criminal player's narration in a Retribution Scene should reflect how the criminal is attempting to cope and endure this troubling scenario. This might include internal monologues, spiteful retorts, playing along with the laws' minions, attempts to break free, or calling upon past experiences to weather current ones.

The criminal player should keep in mind that their character is being confronted by people attempting to control how they think. That's scary stuff. Immerse, and imagine the lengths you'd go to, in order to preserve your free will. Channel that, in your test actions and narration.

Create Guilt

If you choose to Create Guilt, you are choosing to challenge the criminal's commitment to crime, threaten their resolve, and attack their sanity. Guilt represents the sum total of a criminal's doubts, second guesses, confusions and regrets. It functions like a negative Resource score - the Inspectors can invoke it against the criminal during tests, to narrate how the criminal falters, breaks down, hesitates, gives in or fails to keep themselves well guarded.

A Retribution Scene that revolves around Creating Guilt might involve an angry mob chastising and tormenting the criminal. It might involve a mother crying over the death of her son, an accomplice in a criminal enterprise. It might involve Inspectors berating and belittling the criminal, attempting to get into their head and change how they remember the crime they committed.

When you attempt to Create Guilt, you enter into a psychological battle. The criminal might be fired, shamed in front of co-workers, exposed to the negative repercussions of their crimes, beaten down emotionally, threatened or dismissed. The Inspectors might be directly responsible for the scene, or might be entirely removed from it. The specifics of how this scene plays out depend a lot on what happened during the Discovery Scene. If the criminal was arrested in broad daylight, in the middle of a crowd, it makes sense that the Create Guilt attempt might leverage crowd reactions. If the criminal was caught by a fellow citizen, the Create Guilt attempt might involve blackmail by that citizen. If the Inspectors arrested the citizen in a fairly private fashion, perhaps they later march the criminal in front of a large crowd, as a parade of shame.

If the law player wins, they add 2 Guilt to the Law Sheet. If the criminal wins, they persevere and emerge unscarred. Either way, play proceeds to a Reflection Scene.

An Example of Creating Guilt:

Roselise was Captured, and so Zach has three options for the Retribution Scene. He chooses to Create Guilt.

Zach frames the scene, “The next day, as Roselise is out walking with her mother, there is a great commotion, and people are rushing toward the docks. Roselise’s mother can’t help but lead both of them to a vantage point, where they can clearly see Roselise’s mural.” Charlton responds, “I think Roselise is apprehensive at this point, but also a bit joyful. This is perfect.”

Zach nods, and continues, “Right, well, Roselise’s mother is reacting a bit differently. She gets all worked up, and starts muttering under her breath. Nearby, someone begins to boo and hiss at the image, and Roselise’s mother joins in. And Roselise just has to stand there, and deal with it. I’m trying to Create Guilt here. That’s 3 Tension Points, out of my remaining 7.”

Charlton responds, “Roselise plays dumb, and joins in the booing and hissing. Except she’s booing and hissing the Inspector in the picture, not the picture itself. She pretends that everyone around her is doing the same – booing the Inspector. That’s 3 of her Resources, there.”

Zach responds, “Nice. That probably helps a lot. Except, at dinner that night, your mother spends the whole meal spelling out exactly how vile and inappropriate the image was, ranting about how disturbed the perpetrator must have been – and she says perpetrator, not artist. 2 more Tension Points.” In Roselise’s voice, Charlton retorts, “Mother, do you think that maybe the artist was trying to send a message, or to call attention to some form of misconduct?”

Might the picture not have been warranted after all?" Charlton matches that question with another 2 Resources.

Zach continues on in the voice of Roselise's mother, "Well, that's not all! Shelton, tell her what happened as a result, dear!" Zach is looking at Brendan when he says this, hoping that Brendan will jump in as Roselise's father. He does, saying, "Right, well, the watchmen at the dock are being re-evaluated for duty. Which basically means that they're fired, done, out of a job. Bloody hell, Bertram worked the watch on those docks. And now he's out cold, and same with his wife and kids." Zach grins, and caps the narration off by saying, "And that's my remaining 2 Tension Points right there."

Charlton has one Resource remaining, and invokes it by narrating, "Roselise goes quiet, but in her head she's just picturing the impact her painting might have had - raising alarms overseas, sparking widespread investigation, bringing Cadence to its knees. And maybe that justifies whatever consequences might come about."

They both roll, and Zach wins. Charlton didn't work an Aspect into this scene, so he can't reroll. So, Zach adds 2 Guilt to the law sheet he has for Roselise. Zach wraps the scene up by saying, "Even though that image of salvation and revolution is nice, Roselise can't quite get past the realization that she's hurt people and alienated herself from her parents as a result of this whole scheme."

Threaten a Contact

If you choose to Threaten a Contact, you are choosing to test the criminal's loyalties, and to ask of them that they sell out the people they depend on. Likely, you're asking who the criminal has been working with or working for. Maybe you already know the answer, and this interrogation is your way of proving to the criminal that when the chips are down, they'll do anything to save themselves.

When the law player spends Tension Points during an Interrogation, they might present articles of evidence, make threats, administer measures of torture, offer things that the criminal wants or convince them that their suspect is in the other room confessing everything. It's fine to establish a "good Inspector, bad Inspector" dynamic, or to introduce a single Inspector who plays to the criminal's sympathies.

When the criminal player invokes Resources, they might give false names, refuse to speak, claim ignorance of the Inspectors' claims, make counter-threats, or implicate innocent citizens. When invoking Contacts, the criminal player needs to demonstrate how the Contact in question is supporting their action, which in this case is denying the Inspectors the information they need. This could take the form of using alibis that their Contacts helped them to establish, or giving the name of a Contact who can "confirm" their alibi, or recalling a piece of information that the Contact had given earlier, which could prove immediately useful now.

If the law player wins the test, the criminal player has a choice: offer up the Contact, or lose Resources equal to that Contact's bonus.

If the criminal offers up the Contact, it is removed from their sheet. The fate of the character is in the hands of the law player. They might be killed off, or they might vanish into the night, or they might start working with the Inspectors - it's

all fair game at this point. The law player can jot down the Contact's name on the law sheet for future insidious uses. If the Contact was part of a Secret Society, that society also loses 1 point; if that reduces the Society to 0, it is disbanded or exiles the criminal from its ranks.

If the criminal player refuses to offer a name or refuses to commit whatever actions the Inspectors are demanding of them, then the Inspectors are left with no other option than to punish the criminal severely. This is represented by a loss in Resources - the specifics are left up to the players. The criminal player loses a number of Resource points equal to the Contact's score. However, the criminal's bond with the Contact is strengthened, and the Contact's score is increased by one.

Regardless of who wins the test, play proceeds to a Reflection Scene next.

An Example of Threatening a Contact:

Several crime cycles later, Roselise is caught again - this time, she's caught defacing a giant statue of Queen Abigail in town square. At this point, Roselise has developed a Contact - an accomplice by the name of Jessamine. The law player, Zach, has established a Major Hold: "Roselise fears her father's judgment."

Zach decides that Jessamine needs to disappear, and chooses to Threaten a Contact. He frames the scene, "Alright, they take you in for interrogation. You're alone with a single Inspector, in a dark little room. He places a small silver locket on the table, and you instantly recognize it as Jessamine's. He raises one eyebrow, menacingly. Drawing the words out slowly, savouring every syllable, he offers you freedom in exchange for a name. 5 Tension Points."

Charlton replies, "Roselise squirms a bit at first, but then steels herself. While glaring at the Inspector, she says snidely, 'I've never seen that before in my life,' and then shoves it away. It slides off the other end of the table, clattering on the floor. Her determination is worth 3 of my Resources."

Zach decides that this is a perfect time to spend that Major Hold. "The Inspector gets angry, and slams a fist down on the table. 'Listen, you little twit! If you don't tell me who this locket belongs to, I'll have to find out some other way. I'll have to go to your parents, and explain the kind of insolent miscreant that they've raised, and they'll have to come down here to release you. Do you know how they're going to like that? They're not going to like that one bit. Me? I'm being nice. I'm being gentle. Do you think your father's going to be so gentle, when he learns what you've been up to? Do you think he's going to be so nice? I don't!"

Since Zach spent a Hold, he rolls a die and gets a 4. That's how many points Charlton loses off his running total. Since Charlton had only invoked 3 points at this point, he's reduced back to a total of 0. Since it was a Major Hold and this is a Retribution Scene, Zach gets to pick another stake to add to the test. While Zach could introduce a Conditioning like "I cannot tell lies," he settles upon Create Guilt. If Roselise loses this test, she is going to accumulate 2 Guilt in addition to choosing the fate of Jessamine. Charlton responds, "Roselise does her best to feign exasperation and fear. She offers up a name, but it's entirely made up. Ursula Milsom. She starts to explain Ursula's role in the crime, and devolves into fake tears. She's legitimately scared in this situation, so the tears aren't very hard to conjure, nor are they entirely fake. There's another 3 of my Resources right there."

Zach only has two more Tension Points, and so spends them to narrate, “The Inspector puts an official statement form in front of Roselise, along with a quill. Before leaving the room, he cautions, ‘I’m going to go away, and when I come back, you’re going to have written the name of your little friend, along with a detailed explanation of what happened. If you lie, so help you, I’ll know. And then I’ll stop being so nice with you.’ And then he leaves for several hours, and it’s just you and the quill in that tiny room.”

Roselise has invoked all of her Resources, but still has her Contact. Charlton says, “Roselise thinks back to the promise she made with Jessamine. They both swore that they’d stay loyal to one another, forever. Jessamine’s father was a con man, and he taught her a thousand different tricks for making your lie believable. Ways to make sure your alibi was always foolproof. Jessamine and Roselise had spent days practicing their alibis. They had every detail nailed down. And so all Roselise had to do was write out that elaborate fiction they’d created. I’m invoking Jessamine for +2.”

Zach and Charlton roll, and Zach wins. Charlton points out that Roselise was Fierce as Fire earlier – one of her Aspects – and rerolls his die. Zach still wins. He narrates, “The Inspector can find no loophole in her story, but sees in her eyes that she is clearly still lying. And so he makes it clear to you: change your story now, or he’s just going to leave you in here until he damn well feels like releasing you.” Charlton has to make a tough decision: give up Jessamine and remove her from Roselise’s Contacts; or, take the hit, losing Resources equal to Jessamine’s score (2), but increasing Jessamine’s score by 1 as a result of the tribulation.

In the end, Charlton decides that Roselise is loyal through and through. She keeps Jessamine, and bumps her score up by 1. She also loses 2 Resources, and it's up to the group to determine what that means. They decide that the Inspector follows through with his threat to lock her up for a good while. He returns after about a week, with Roselise starved and dehydrated, her body damaged and her nerves shot. As if that wasn't bad enough, Zach writes down another 2 Guilt on his law sheet.

Conditioning

When the law player declares that their goal is a Conditioning, they must also declare what brainwashed command they are attempting to condition into the criminal. If the law player needs some help, the other players at the table can offer suggestions.

Some examples of potential Conditionings follow:

- ∅* I will not touch red roses.
- ∅* Red things make me vomit.
- ∅* I cannot look men in the eye.
- ∅* I obey all of my boss' commands, without question.
- ∅* When others touch me, I must leave the room.
- ∅* When I pass an Inspector, I must confess recent dirty thoughts to him.
- ∅* I can't touch steel.
- ∅* I cannot enter the town square.
- ∅* The sound of clocks chiming reduces me to tears.
- ∅* I no longer see in colour.
- ∅* I cannot speak unless spoken to.
- ∅* I cannot fall asleep.
- ∅* I compulsively destroy unlawful works of art.
- ∅* I cannot accept gifts.
- ∅* When I see blood, I faint.
- ∅* When I attempt violence, I freeze up and begin dry heaving.
- ∅* I don't love Julia anymore.
- ∅* I am unable to help women in need.

In all cases, if the law player wins the test, the Conditioning is something that is brainwashed and automatic within the criminal. It isn't a law that can be broken, but rather a subconscious routine that will persist until it is somehow overcome, which might never happen.

Although the law player is ultimately responsible for determining the potential Conditioning, everyone at the table should be able to make suggestions. Conditionings can



They didn't want to hurt her. You see, they understood that she was already hurt. They wanted to fix her.

and should be cruel, but they shouldn't make a criminal no fun to continue playing. Let everyone voice concerns about a potential Conditioning, if they have any.

Once the Conditioning at stake has been determined, the law player must think up a clever method for attempting to brainwash that Conditioning into the criminal's head. As mentioned above, this can include psychological attacks, bizarre machinery, hallucinogenic drugs, secret weapons, and all manners of science fiction devices. Be creative!

When the law player spends Tension Points, they might foreshadow a conditioning method, begin to administer that method, take a new approach, escalate the violence, bring in a "specialist," or narrate the biological effects of a certain method (causing the criminal to pass out, bleed from the ears, convulse, or tremble, for example).

When the criminal player invokes Resources, it might be to steel their mind against a new assault, to reassure themselves of their own safety, retreat to a mental happy place, talk back to the Inspectors, or fake effective treatment.

If the law player wins, the criminal player writes the new Conditioning down on the character sheet. If the criminal player wins, they manage to emerge un-brainwashed. Either way, play proceeds to a Reflection Scene.

An Example of Conditioning:

Roselise has been taken in for Conditioning after defacing a prominent statue of Queen Abigail. Brendan suggests that an appropriate Conditioning would be “I cannot gaze upon nor walk near works of art.”

Zach agrees that this is perfect, and sets up a treatment situation that will help the Inspectors achieve this conditioning. The Inspectors force Roselise to drink a series of strange elixers, which put her into a state of confusion and partial hypnosis. They bring her into a dark room, and confuse her into believing that she herself is a statue, and that a pair of young girls is defacing and destroying her.

Zach and Charlton go back and forth, spending and invoking, as the scene unfolds. At the end, they both roll.

Charlton wins this one, meaning that Roselise emerges without being brainwashed. He narrates, “Luckily, Roselise has a pretty high tolerance for these weird drugs. They wear off before the Inspectors manage to drive their point home. Still, she’s a smart girl, and she pretends that everything’s still working. The Inspectors are convinced they’ve won, but she strolls out the door in fine condition. Well, aside from the lingering feeling of stone-like skin.”

If Zach had won, Charlton would have recorded “I cannot gaze upon nor walk near works of art” on Roselise’s character sheet.

Reflection Scenes

The Reflection Scene is a quick scene that describes how the criminal returns to their life, and acts as an end-cap for the cycle. As the criminal player, frame a denouement that reflects how the crime has affected your criminal's daily life. The scene should take 1-3 minutes. Reflection Scenes have no tests or die-rolling.

The Reflection Scene is a quick one. The criminal player demonstrates, through 1 to 3 minutes of narration, how the entire ordeal has been reflected in the criminal's life. They might focus the narration on:

- ∅ their criminal returning to a mundane day job the next morning
- ∅ their criminal passing secret notes to a Contact in a dark alley, with instructions for the next crime
- ∅ their criminal returning home to a spouse, hastily coming up with an alibi for their tardiness
- ∅ another criminal seeking their criminal out, looking to forge an alliance
- ∅ a Conditioning intervening on their criminal's regular life, messing things up

The Reflection Scene is a vignette scene. By this, I mean that it is a short scene where one player does most of the narrating, telling a short story to the rest of the table. It's a chance to demonstrate how the rest of the cycle has impacted the criminal.

Other players can take on the roles of extras, Contacts and other characters in the scene, but it's also fine for the criminal player to simply narrate the entire scene.

Payout

After the Reflection Scene, the criminal player chooses one Payout for their character.

Payouts are how your character improves, reflecting how their ordeal has changed them and how they've emerged stronger. No matter what, whether you lose your tests or win them, you get a Payout. It's equal to that Pending Payout number you created at the end of the Discovery Scene (the higher score of the two 1-to-10 questions).

Choose one option within your budget. You can only choose one, and you don't get to carry over left-over payout for the future.

At least 1 point...

- ∅* Remove 1 Guilt
- ∅* Add an Aspect or Refresh a stricken Aspect
- ∅* Add 1 to an existing Contact

At least 4 points...

- ∅* Create a new Contact with a score of 1

At least 6 points...

- ∅* Add 1 to Resources

At least 7...

- ∅* Add 2 to an existing Contact
- ∅* Remove a Conditioning (cannot choose a Conditioning that you acquired this cycle)
- ∅* Remove all of your law player's remaining Tension Points

At least 8 points...

- ∅* Add 2 to Resources
- ∅* Create a Secret Society with a score of 1
- ∅* Add 1 to an existing Secret Society

An Example of Reflection and Payout:

Roselise was captured after defacing a statue of Abigail. She was subjected to a conditioning, but emerged victorious. The event shook her, but didn't change her. Charlton looks down at the Pending Payout section of Roselise's character sheet, which says 9 for this cycle.

Roselise has been working to establish criminal accomplices, and Charlton decides that it's time she take the next step and create a real network. He begins the Reflection Scene by saying, "Alright, Roselise is at mass, with her family. She's dressed in her best clothes, but hidden within one of her dress pockets is a small stack of little cards. And as everyone is leaving the hall after the sermon, she manages to palm these cards into the hands of her most trusted allies. Later that night, these other young girls will uncrumple these cards and inspect them. They'll mouth the name of their new secret society: The Destroyers."

For his Payout, Charlton creates a new Secret Society for Roselise, with a score of 1. It's called The Destroyers, and it's a group of young girls dedicated to vandalism and public art installations. They have a pretty revolutionary agenda. At the moment, Roselise's only Contact is Jessamine, and Charlton declares that Jessamine is part of The Destroyers. As Roselise gains more Contacts, Charlton can declare that they are also members of The Destroyers – there is no cost to initiate them, and Charlton can make that choice freely. However, once someone is made a member of a Secret Society, that decision can't ever be reversed.

This concludes the cycle of scenes. This is a good time to take a brief break, which allows you to socialize, have some snacks, have a smoke, use the washroom, stretch your legs and just relax. After five or ten minutes, regroup and begin another cycle. It's now someone else's turn to be the criminal player.



Hadley

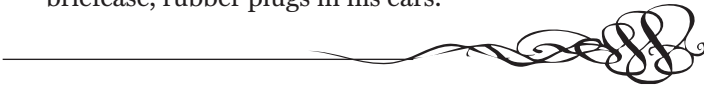
...a short story by Brendan Adkins

They broke him to the sound of the great clock tower.

It was their little joke, a bespoke punishment, and now any bell tone deeper than low E causes him to vomit uncontrollably. He's ruined good shoes and friendships by unhappy proximity to a church at noon. He hasn't approached Westminster in months.

He is considered a reformed terrorist, and lives under a terrible constraint. For most people this would be an effective muzzle. But there is this about constraints: they fire the imagination.

Hadley is walking down Bridge Street, a bomb in his briefcase, rubber plugs in his ears.





Meet Horace and Mordecai. They plan to break you.

Chapter Five: Ending the Cycle



Perfect might seem like an unending series of crimes and retributions, and for some characters it might be exactly that. However, there are two situations through which this struggle can come to an abrupt halt: the criminal can get Broken, or can attempt to become a Hero.

Getting Broken

If a criminal accumulates four Conditionings, then the criminal snaps and is Broken. He loses his criminal spark, and is likely driven to insanity by the weight of repeated and conflicting psychological experimentation. In short, the Inspectors have won.

The criminal player always has the choice to declare that their character dies during Conditioning instead of becoming Broken. This could include suicide, or suicide-by-hostile-resistance, or simply a careless Inspector who turned the electroshock dial too high. It's a pretty serious choice to have your criminal die rather than accepting a Broken fate, but it's a choice that you are allowed to make. It's the last choice you get to make.

The Reflection Scene that follows a Breaking should demonstrate the criminal's final defeat. This could include a retreat into domestic life, an unhinged derangement that winds them up in an asylum, or some similarly bleak condition.

They are no longer playable.



Inspirations for: Broken

- ∅ At the end of 1984, Winston finally collapses under the Party's torture, and in Room 101 he renounces his love for Julia. This final Conditioning (which would probably be "I love Big Brother" or "I have betrayed Julia") leaves Winston Broken, and his final Reflection Scene takes place at the Chestnut Cafe, where he admits his betrayal to Julia.
- ∅ At the end of Brazil, Sam Lowry imagines himself being freed by his friends and driving through the countryside with Jill. Pulling back from his thoughts, we find out that he's still fastened to the cold, metallic observation chair. With this final Conditioning ("I'm completely disconnected from reality"), Sam has become Broken.



Becoming a Hero

The criminal player can declare, at the start of a cycle of scenes, that they are going to attempt to become a Hero. It's a big choice, and it means that this will be their criminal's last cycle, regardless of the outcome. If the criminal succeeds, they become an infamous folk hero, leaving a lasting impact. If the criminal fails, they are dragged away, broken, killed on the spot, abandoned by their allies, or in some other way are utterly defeated. When a criminal player decides to attempt Heroism, they are putting everything on the line. The cycle of scenes works a little bit differently when someone is attempting to become a Hero.

In the Crime Scene, the criminal attempts a Heroic Crime, one which will bring them into the public eye and establish them as a Hero. It is likely to take place in public, in front of a crowd, but this isn't always the case. A Heroic Crime Scene

could take place inside the clockwork of a giant clock tower, as the criminal rigs explosives throughout it, in an attempt to bring it toppling down. Regardless, the law player chooses a point at which to interrupt the crime - intervening in an attempt to stop it before the criminal becomes a Hero to the people. This interruption brings the Crime Scene to a close on a cliffhanger.

The law player does not ask the two final questions of the Crime Scene. A Heroic Crime is profoundly important to the criminal seeking to become a Hero, and Cadence has absolutely no room for heroics. The answer to both questions is always 10 for a Heroic Crime.

In the Discovery Scene, the law player does not choose between their regular options. Instead, if the criminal wins, they become a Hero. If the criminal loses, they are utterly defeated and the law player narrates their epilogue. The law player automatically gains 20 Tension Points (since the two questions are automatically answered “10”). The odds are against the criminal, unless they are very well prepared: the law player just got 20 Tension Points, and has no reason to keep any for later. There is no later.

During this test, the law player should be narrating attempts to discover the criminal, disrupt their completion of the crime, control any crowds that might be present, and remove the criminal from the situation. The criminal player should be narrating the criminal’s efforts to finish their crime, reach out to the citizenry of Cadence, and emerge a Hero.

If the criminal wins the test, they become a Hero. This can mean a number of things - they leave a lasting impact on Cadence, they create or destroy some vital thing, or they incite an uprising. The criminal player doesn’t have the power to bring Cadence’s system of control to an end and to rebuild a new nation. They do have the power to disrupt or alter the way things are, and even to foreshadow a demise to come.

Ultimately, revolution is beyond the scope of this game. You can hurt Cadence, and you can poise Cadence for an uprising, but you cannot defeat Cadence in the truest sense. Perfect is a game about personal struggle, and the Hero condition is one of absolute personal victory. But it still remains personal in scope and not national.

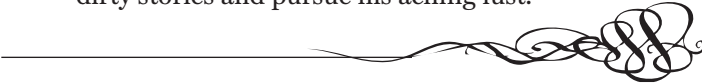
If the criminal loses the test, they have lost everything. The Inspectors, the conformists, all of the antagonistic forces - they descend upon the criminal like carrion birds. The law player narrates the criminal's Reflection Scene for them in whatever way they see fit. They are encouraged to be cruel, bringing the full weight of an angry totalitarian state down upon the failed criminal.

The outcome of this test is the focus of the Reflection Scene. It serves as an epilogue for the criminal, reflecting either their triumph or their defeat.



Inspirations for: Hero

- ∅ In the movie *V for Vendetta*, V dies but his final vision is realized. Thousands of people, dressed in Guy Fawkes masks, converge on the parliament buildings as his explosives go off, demolishing the government's seat of power.
- ∅ In *Quills*, the Marquis de Sade traps his prudish doctor in a cage, and runs rampant, free to tell his dirty stories and pursue his aching lust.





They knew it wasn't safe. That didn't stop them.

Chapter Six: Making Stories Together



Setting Up a Game

Perfect is usually played in sessions of 3 hours, with 2-4 people. Getting everyone in the same place, on the same page, with that much dedicated time is going to take some planning and arranging. If you're reading this book, chances are that you'll be the one doing the arranging.

Perfect is best played somewhere with a table so that you can write things on character sheets and roll dice. It doesn't need to be a large table, though - a card table or small coffee table will definitely work. It's also preferable to play somewhere where you won't feel rushed or intruded upon, where you can relax, with comfortable chairs. A living room (free of children) is an excellent venue.

You can play in public, but remember that Perfect involves scenes of interrogation, psychological torture, crime and vengeance. The heroes are criminals, and the villains are even more dastardly. Play somewhere where you'll feel comfortable narrating these things and roleplaying as these characters.

If you're the one arranging the game session, make it clear that the game will take 3-4 hours, and that this time should be dedicated to the game. Unless this is explicitly stated, people might make assumptions about the level of involvement and the amount of time that are required. State it upfront, as part of the invitation. If someone has never played a roleplaying game before, tell them a little bit about what goes on during a session of play - narrating, acting, rolling dice, listening to one another tell stories.

In talking about the game, it's good to have a quick summary or "elevator pitch" ready, so that you can quickly tell people what the game is about and perk their interest. Here are a few different elevator pitches for the game, each targeting a different audience:

For the person who has never played a role-playing game:

Perfect is a game where we tell stories about criminals. Passionate criminals, trapped in a nightmarish society that's half Victorian England and half Nineteen Eighty-Four. What makes you a criminal? Will you get caught? If you do, will you withstand their brainwashing? The game has rules that help us answer these questions and tell cool stories. It takes around 3-4 hours to play, and is really creative and fun.

For the person who has played roleplaying games, but never one like this:

Perfect is a game about passionate criminals, in a Victorian-Dystopia, like Nineteen Eighty-Four meets A Clockwork Orange. The game is played out in spotlight scenes, which revolve around some big questions: What makes you a criminal? Will you get caught? If you do, will you withstand their brainwashing? There is no party or team - it's your criminal against the Inspectors. It's designed to work well as a one-shot game.

For the person who plays lots of indie, focused-design roleplaying games:

Perfect is a game about passionate criminals, in a Victorian-Dystopia, like Nineteen Eighty-Four meets A Clockwork Orange. The game is played out in spotlight scenes, which ask: What makes you a criminal? Will you get caught? If you do, will you withstand their brainwashing? You have a law player (like in Polaris or Shock), and it's their job to push hard and provide your character's opposition, fuelling their story.

For the movie lover:

Perfect is like a mashup between *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *V for Vendetta* and *A Clockwork Orange*. Passionate criminals, in a Victorian-inspired society that's ruled by totalitarian law. Inspectors, similar to the Thought Police in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or the agents in *The Matrix*, try to track down these criminals and brainwash them into being better citizens. If you liked the crazy medical experiments in *A Clockwork Orange*, or the antagonism between the Marquis de Sade and his doctor in *Quills*, you'll like *Perfect*.

Quick, sound-bite sized pitches:

"It's like Kafka and Charlotte Bronte had children, and those children wrote *Blade Runner*."

-Malcolm Craig, author of *Cold City* and *Hot War*

"This society is perfect. Except for you."

-Tony Lower-Bausch, author of *Capes* and *Misery Bubblegum*

The Recent History of Cadence section, in the first chapter, also works as a great pitch (though it's a bit longer).

What to Bring

Perfect requires a few things to play. First of all, at least one copy of the book should be present, to reference. Everyone will need a set of character sheets (Criminal Sheet & Law Sheet), which can be found in the Appendices or at www.buriedwithoutceremony.com/perfect/resources

There should be several pencils, several six-sided dice (4 or 5 will suffice), and a small stack of index cards (to take notes, make fold-out name cards, and the like). Glass beads, poker chips, or paperclips are useful for keeping track of how many points you've invested in a test.

Your group might want to have dinner first, or prepare a few snacks and drinks to munch on during play. I definitely encourage this! A session of Perfect should be a social event, and a chance to share good food and good company.

Setting Expectations

It's a good thing to have everyone on the same page before play starts. Specifically, it's good to talk about playing hard and about the game's tone.

Perfect is best when it's played hard. This means that people make choices strategically, work hard to advocate for their characters, and get invested in the narration and roleplaying that happens at the table. But playing hard requires that people all agree that what they are doing is fun, and that they will not take it personally. It's a good idea to mention the expectation that everyone play hard, but not take anything to heart.

If your character takes a Conditioning, look at it as a gift. It's a new angle for your character, a new idea to play off, and a new

direction to take the game in. Advocate for your character, but also graciously accept the Conditionings you take. Losing a test has real and interesting effects, because it's boring to have a game in which the good guys always win, or in which their failures aren't important. In *Perfect*, the consequences you suffer are interesting, and they also provide a meaningful counterbalance for the successes you can achieve.

It's important to talk a bit about the game's tone, as well. Will the criminals be bold heroes or sinister villains? How dark and gritty will the game get when someone is strapped into a Conditioning chair? How merciless will the Inspectors be? Is it okay if our stories involve murder and suicide? While people can have different answers, and different stories can have different tones, it's a good idea to know where everyone else is at. This can all be addressed in a pretty simple fashion, just by asking, "So, how dark do we want this session to get?"

The default assumption in *Perfect* is that the criminals work alone. There are exceptions to this assumption, including Collaborative Crimes (pages 133-134). If someone really wants their criminal to work together with the other criminals at the table, they should say so early on, and let the game build those connections up over time.

Teaching the Game

Teaching a roleplaying game can be hard work! There's a lot to learn, and it's hard to know what order you should present things in. But if you're reading this book, it's likely going to be your job to teach the game to your group, as you sit down to play. Do you teach people how to make characters, first? Talk about the setting? Explain the rules? Reference some of the movies and shows that inspired the game? How much detail do you go into?

The way I recommend teaching Perfect is the same way I recommend teaching anything - consider your audience, start simple, spiral outwards, always build upon what you already know, invite participation, and invite questions.

Consider your audience in teaching the game. If your audience is composed of Steampunk enthusiasts, people who already play roleplaying games, or people who love V for Vendetta, then you can tailor your teaching to build upon what they already know and cater to both their strengths and interests. Start by presenting a short summary of what Perfect is, in under a hundred words. I've provided four elevator pitches in the Setting Up A Game section, and any of those can be used as a short summary of the game.

Once you've provided a short summary, spend a few minutes talking about the setting, creating characters, and playing the game, in whatever order is most intuitive to you and easiest to communicate to your target audience. From there, continue to add more information, building upon the knowledge they already know and have mastered. Get them creating and playing as soon as possible, even if it's just "example scenes."

Consider how much you need to teach before play. Collaborative Crimes, for example, can be introduced midway through the game. For now, you can summarize by simply saying "There's the possibility to create rivals and important allies, even among the criminals. We'll get into that more when it comes up."

Let people know that they can and should ask questions while you explain. Feel free to say "We'll get to that in a second", if you don't think that you've spiraled out that far yet. Be interactive in your teaching, getting them doing stuff, rather than just explaining away.

There is no single best order to teach the game in. Depending on the group, their level of previous experience with roleplaying games, and what's most interesting about the game to them, the teaching order will fluctuate. Teach to the

group's strengths and preferences. If you don't know them, teach to your own strengths and preferences, and be open to questions and interaction.

An Example of Teaching the Game:

This is an outline of how I teach the game at a convention, to an audience I don't know much about. It's a good general outline.

I usually spend a few minutes talking about setting (I read the Short History of Cadence section, from the Cadence chapter, verbatim). I then talk about the premise of the game, how cycles work, and how tests work. At this point, my explanation of tests is incredibly simple, roughly "When the criminal - your criminal - wants to get away from the Inspectors (or if they get caught, to resist brainwashing), there's a test. Both sides add some bonuses to a die roll, and whoever scores higher wins. I'd rather demonstrate, before trying to explain." I then play through a mock Discovery Scene with someone else acting as the criminal player, in order to demonstrate how tests work.

I start by saying "Alright, so let's say that you just stole a priceless heirloom necklace from the museum and Inspectors are hot on your trail. You want to escape them. You have some Resources." at which point I slide them an index card, on which I write "Resources: 7" in a big, bold font. "As your law player, I'm going to play the Inspectors. I have 6 points, with which to try and catch you. I spend 3, for +3 to the test. When I do that, I narrate how one Inspector blows his whistle, summoning up other Inspectors to join in the chase! Now, you narrate something that you're doing, and how it's helping. This is just an example, so don't worry about coming up with anything clever or extraordinary." They might fumble for a minute, but eventually give some workable answer.

I'd then say, "Great. Now, you get to invoke some of your Resources, for a bonus, based on that narration. Let's say you choose to invoke 2 points." I scratch out the 7 and write 5, since that's how many points they have remaining. We go back and forth like this until both of our points are gone. Then, we each roll a six-sided die and add our bonuses to it. I explain quickly what the results mean, either, "You win! So now, you'd tell me how you escape..." or, "I win! So the Inspectors close in on you, and wrestle you to the ground. They cart you away." Finally, I explain that the points that the Inspectors spend disappear, but Resources are permanent; they don't disappear when invoked.

So far, the demonstration should have taken roughly 10 minutes. That's all the information they need before we launch into making characters. It's an easy step-by-step process, and so I teach them each step and then give them time to complete it.

I explain things like Certifications, Freedoms and the classes as they come up during character creation. When we arrive at Resources and Contacts, I remind them that they already know how tests and Resources work, and quickly explain how Contacts are different, and that they are slightly more risky.

Once everyone has completed their characters, I'll review the cycle and begin with a Crime Scene. At the end of the first Crime Scene, I'll explain how Tension works and how it gives the law player points, before asking the two "scale of 1 to 10" questions. I'll introduce Payout at the end of the first cycle of scenes.

Ending the Game

Perfect is played in sessions of about 3-4 hours. During a session, the group will sit down and play through two or three cycles for each criminal, depending on the pace of play. I prefer to end the game once everyone has completed an equal number of cycles (either two or three), but if the energy in the room seems to fall, it's best to end promptly. In a single session, we'll see characters grow and change significantly – they'll put their ambitions and beliefs on the line, fight for them, and emerge changed.

The game can be played across multiple sessions. If this is the case, the character sheets should be saved, and everyone be given them back at the start of the next session. Their criminals' stories pick up where they left off at the end of the previous session - they retain their refined beliefs, tempered resolve, and new tools.

The game is designed to be played across 1 to 5 sessions. The mechanics are balanced to support a handful of sessions, not a weekly game that lasts for several years.

Some characters will end the game Broken or Heroes. It's not a necessity that every character arrive at one of these two ends. It's expected that at the end of the game, some characters will still be exactly what they began the game as: regular people. Maybe they'll retire from a life of crime. Maybe they'll be drawing up the plans for a hundred other escapades. There's no need to push for an extreme ending for your criminal if it doesn't fit.

The Skills Used in Play

Playing Perfect requires a number of special skills and techniques: creating characters together, framing scenes, playing through scenes, managing expendable resources, and developing characters through play. While the previous chapter outlines the mechanical procedures of the game, what follows is a detailed exploration of how to play, on a social and narrative level. These sections are largely written for someone who has never played a story game before, but can also serve as a nice clarifier for experienced players.

Creating Characters Together

I always prefer to create criminals together, with everyone gathered around the table, pencils in hand. It's more social, and it creates a sense of unity for everyone at the table.

In addition, it allows people to brainstorm and make suggestions for one another. This can create characters that a single player wouldn't have thought up alone, without that dynamic feedback.

It's totally fine to create characters with deep, dark secrets. However, you should share them out loud with everyone else at the table! In order for your audience to appreciate a nuanced, secret-riddled story, they need to know about it. Share your character's secrets. When everyone is on the same page, they are able to support each other much better. Sharing your character's secrets with other players doesn't mean that their characters know, though! Quite the opposite - you're implicitly saying "your character doesn't know this. It's something that'll need to be uncovered during play, if it's to become uncovered at all."

Perfect is one of the few roleplaying games that really supports pre-planning. It's totally fine to create a criminal with an

idea of what your first three crimes will be. You always get to declare what your crime is, and you always get to succeed at it. The things that you don't have control over are the reactions that you face. So, hold lightly to any vision you have of your character's future - because it might become more dangerous, or more foolish, to keep pressing forward with an intended line of action. Then again, criminals are often both endangered and foolish, and there's nothing stopping you from pushing a planned agenda straight through to the end of the game, come what may.

Framing Scenes

Someone is always responsible for starting the scene. The criminal player is responsible for framing the Crime Scene and Reflection Scene. The law player is responsible for framing the Discovery Scene and the Retribution Scene. They need to do what is commonly referred to as scene framing. Scene framing simply means introducing the scene - where it takes place, who is present, and what action is occurring at the moment. Scene framing is most effective when it is concise but evocative.

When you frame a scene, aim to give people all the facts they need, along with a couple rich descriptions, so that they can picture what you're picturing and contribute in a way that makes sense. Scene framing gets everyone on the same page. When you frame a scene, all you're doing is introducing the scene, and it should take twenty to forty seconds to do so. From there, others can participate as well.

Participating in Scenes

In each scene, you'll be asked to do a great number of things: narrate, roleplay, make decisions, ask questions, use mechanics, and interpret results. How do you manage those responsibilities? How do you do those things?

In actuality, those things all work together quite naturally and organically.

Narrating

Each type of scene calls for different things to be narrated. In all cases, when you narrate you are adding to a collaborative story. It's fine to narrate in first or third person, and in whatever tense flows most naturally. These stylistic details matter far less than communicating in a way that feels natural and comfortable, and that allows you to concisely and clearly communicate with the other players.

Focus on narrating the details that matter to you, and the ones that bring to life a shared imagined space. Sometimes, these will be succinct descriptions of action, allowing the scene to move quickly. Sometimes, they will be rich sensory descriptions, like the smell of a particular alleyway that the criminal is frantically running through.

Don't use your narration to tell others the whole story. Instead narrate your part, so that others feel invited to narrate their part in response. If you are the criminal player, don't make an attempt to narrate your character all the way to safety, nor to portray them as invincible. Instead, take joy in narrating your criminal's actions in such a way that they are left vulnerable and human. Take joy in witnessing your law player's genius as they decide how to take advantage of that vulnerability. It's the back-and-forth that makes a story game interactive, engaging and fun. Narrate with uncertainty about where it will go next.

You can help other players narrate well by asking good questions. Regardless of the role you're in at the moment, ask questions that clarify, reveal and propel. If someone narrates a confusing action sequence, ask questions that'll help people to get onto the same page, imagining roughly the same thing. If someone isn't talking about their character's true intentions and feelings, ask questions that reveal what's going on underneath the surface. If someone is narrating

the resolution to a situation, ask questions that hint at future complications and scenes - don't let someone put the narrative to sleep.

Roleplaying

Perfect involves more than just narrating and describing. It also involves roleplaying. Attempt to see the world through your character's eyes and imagine their choices. Speak their words as if they were your own, and narrate their actions as if you were undertaking them. Immerse into their world.

The game requires you to roleplay at times and to step back from your character and think as yourself at other times. Shifting between these two roles should feel normal. There's no need to signal when you're thinking as yourself and thinking as your character. Others will figure it out.

There are certain points where you'll be required to make decisions. When you're playing your criminal, you'll be expected to act as an advocate for them. When you're playing as the law player, you'll be expected to make decisions that will be both dramatic and cruel. As the law player, don't make weak decisions to be merciful to the criminal player. Play hard, and make harsh decisions, because the game falls apart if you don't. Don't hold back - make the best decision you can, considering the role you're playing and the story you're telling. Part of the fun of this game is pushing against the other players, and being pushed back against in return.

Mechanics and Reincorporation

Each scene asks you to use certain mechanics, though the Crime Scene's mechanics are very quiet and minimal - a few rounds of questions and then the law player asking two "Scale of 1 to 10" questions. Regardless of the complexity of the mechanics, it's important to let them guide play and add structure. This means that when an unexpected result comes

up, it's everyone's job to shift their expectations and bring the results to life. In other words, everyone at the table needs to interpret the results of the mechanics, and demonstrate their interpretation through narration and choices made.

This interpretation of mechanical results isn't a specific step during play. On the contrary, it's a process that you should be engaging in throughout play - taking results and decisions and reflecting them through your narration and future decisions. This is essentially a type of re-incorporation.

Re-incorporate details. When you're the law player, if you name an Inspector Garnett Milsom, write that down. Be sure to have Inspector Milsom show up again. Even better, if you're an audience member and someone introduces an Inspector named Garnett Milsom, write that down. Incorporate this Inspector Milsom character when it's your turn to be the law player, because that'll make for a nice tie-in and everyone will think you're a very clever player.

Re-incorporate Inspectors, and store clerks, and descriptions that came up when you described a certain pavilion. If the last criminal blew up a post office, narrate that your criminal hides amidst some charred rubble when escaping from the Inspectors, and notices a half-singed letter under their boot.

Scenes generally take from 2 to 10 minutes. The above seems like a lot of things for everyone to be doing in such a short window. The solution to this one is simple: don't worry about doing everything all the time. Some scenes might not have a lot of re-incorporation. Some scenes won't solicit questions. Some will be short and sweet. The above advice is not a wagon that you're expected to hitch yourself to - pick techniques from it, use what comes naturally, and find your own play style.

Managing Tension

Of all the mechanical components of Perfect, Tension Points require the most bookkeeping. On the Law Sheet, there's a section to record how many Tension Points you currently have. You can keep a tally and cross off points as you spend them or use that space to place glass beads representing your remaining points.

As the law player, Tension Points are your primary weapon. You want to use them to drive home the fact that crime has consequences and that rebellion is no walk in the park. Crime hurts people. Your job is to spend Tension Points in a way that reveals that hurt and makes it real. In doing so, you are implicitly asking a question of the criminal player: "Is this worth it?" That question is only meaningful if it has teeth, and Tension Points are those teeth.

Play to win. Spend your Tension Points strategically. If you feel like you don't have enough points to succeed in both the Discovery Scene and the Retribution Scene, lay low and Establish a Hold. If you have the points to force a Conditioning or Guilt, go for it. If the criminal has established powerful Contacts or a Secret Society, use the Threaten a Contact option to shut that down and isolate the character. In every scene, think about what will make a powerful story, but also think about what will make you into a powerful enemy.

Do not go easy on the criminal player when they are outmatched. This is a game about crime and its consequences, and playing gently undermines our ability to take those things to heart. The social contract of the game demands that you play to win. If playing to win is making you feel uncomfortable, using a weak application of the mechanics will not solve your problem. What will solve your problem is open communication, checking in, and trusting your fellow players to handle your fictional antagonism with grace.

Part of playing hard is keeping an eye on the long game, and choosing your battles. The criminal will get more powerful over time. If you're to stay a serious threat, you need to get more powerful over time too – that means establishing Guilt, establishing Holds, and saving up Tension Points where you can. Ultimately, you should be working towards a Broken criminal – one who crumples under the weight of four Conditionings. Attempting to Capture and Condition every single cycle won't work – you won't grow any more powerful while the criminal will. Instead, you need to utilize all your tools with an eye to both being powerful now and staying powerful. Sometimes you'll need to bide your time, and other times you'll need to strike mercilessly.

Character Development

During play, characters will change and grow in reaction to the situations that they find themselves in. This happens on a mechanical level during each cycle of scenes. Through Payout, the criminal player chooses how their criminal improves and grows. Through winning tests, the law player develops new weapons to use upon the criminal.

In the case of Payout, the criminal player can choose to improve their Resources score, add new Aspects, improve or add new Contacts, create a Secret Society to benefit their circle of Contacts, remove mounting opposition, or deal with ongoing Conditionings.

It's possible that throughout play there will be grounds to alter a character's Certifications or Class. This might be due to a criminal joining up with new official organizations, in order to blend into regular society better. This might be something that an Inspector offers them – dangling a promise of social promotion, or threatening to strip them of their rank and responsibilities. When it comes to modifying Certifications and Class, these changes lead from the fiction, and require no Payout or mechanical interaction to come true. If the character earns that increased or decreased role

in society through the story, it is recorded on their sheet. Remember, though, that a change in Class will almost always be reflected in a change in the number of Freedoms a character has.

In the case of the tools of the law player, for mechanically hindering a character, there are three. The first are Holds, which are evidence and secrets that can be used to hurt the criminal later on down the road. The law player can choose to establish a Hold when they win a Discovery Scene test. The second is Guilt, which is essentially an anti-Resource, which can be used to undermine the criminal. The law player can choose to establish Guilt when they win a Retribution Scene test. The third are Conditionings, which are the brainwashed commands that have been programmed into a criminal to “fix” them. The law player can choose to establish a Conditioning when they win a Retribution Scene test.

These components of the game work together to turn the criminal into a battleground. The criminal player and the law player engage in a desperate struggle, with a fictional life at stake. One fights for passionate freedom, the other for the absoluteness of law.

Collaborative Crimes

The default expectation in Perfect is that criminals act independently of one another. However, it is possible for two players to have their criminals work together on a Collaborative Crime. This allows group members to interact differently, shakes things up, and promotes cross-over between otherwise distinct storylines.

In the case of a Collaborative Crime, the two players will need to conspire beforehand to establish what their joint crime will be. Also, the group will need to determine who will be playing the law player for the Collaborative Crime.

The two criminal players share a Crime Scene, each narrating what their own character does and how they support one another. When their joint crime is complete, the law player will ask each of them the first “Scale of 1 to 10” questions, and ask the audience the second question. Combining each answer, the law player will generate between 3 and 30 Tension Points. The law player does not add outstanding Tension Points from previous cycles, at this point (because there might be different amounts of remaining Tension Points held against both criminals). The two criminals recording a Pending Payout equal to the higher of their answer or the law player’s answer (but not the other criminal’s answer).

The two criminal players share a Discovery Scene. The law player chooses one option (Establish a Hold or Capture) that applies to both characters. The criminal players both invoke Contacts and Resources, pooling their scores. The law player spends Tension Points and Holds, as well as invoking Guilt, just like normal. When it is time to roll dice, the two criminal players only roll 1 die between them both, but add their collective Resource & Contact scores to it.

Regardless of the outcome of that Discovery Scene test, the active law player divides the remaining Tension Points

between the two criminals. Those points get added to any outstanding points held against the respective criminals, from previous cycles. From that point forward, the two characters are once again mechanically isolated. Their regular law players take over the role of the law, once again.

If the criminals face Retribution, their regular law players choose what's at stake and lead that test. Each criminal has a separate Reflection Scene, and picks their own Payout.

An Example of Collaborative Crime:

Charlton and Brendan decide that their characters should team up and commit a collaborative crime. Brendan's character is named Molly, and she's a bitter, old smuggler. Charlton and Brendan decide that Molly will smuggle Roselise out of Cadence, and delivering her to a group of Marginals who've promised to take her overseas. They collaborate on a Crime Scene. Zach asks the scale of 1-to-10 questions. Charlton responds with an 8, Brendan with a 6, and Zach with a 7. Zach records 21 Tension Points. Charlton marks a Pending Payout of 8. Brendan marks a Pending Payout of 6.

Charlton and Brendan pool their Resources and Contacts against Zach in a Discovery Scene. Only one of the two criminal players rolls a die against Zach's. Zach wins, with 11 points remaining. He divides the remaining points as such: 7 to Roselise (Charlton's character), and 4 to Molly (Brendan's character).

Zach is Charlton's regular law player, and adds 7 points to the Tension Point pool held against Roselise. Then, he chooses to put a Conditioning at stake.

Charlton is Brendan's regular law player, and adds 4 points to the Tension Point pool held against Molly. Then, he chooses to put Threaten a Contact at stake.

Watching Vibes

It's important to pay attention to the general vibe in the room as you play Perfect. The game deals with intense themes, is creatively demanding, and requires some pretty high-order thinking. People can get burnt out, frustrated, or upset.

One of the things that everyone should be making sure of is that all the players are actively involved in the game, and that during a lengthy scene no one is sitting around impatiently, waiting for their turn. As the criminal player, you can assign the job of roleplaying Contacts to the other players at the table. As the law player, it's fine to hand over the responsibility of playing some of the Inspectors to players who aren't otherwise invested in the scene. Keep everyone involved.

If people seem drained, burnt out or unfocused, call for a five minute break at the end of the scene. Let everyone know that it's fine to go grab coffee or some fresh air, and that the game will work best if everyone is feeling energetic and charged up. If someone appears frustrated or upset, ask them politely if everything is okay. Sometimes, just acknowledging an upset feeling is enough to help it go away. Don't derail the game in order to unpack personal problems at length, but do acknowledge that its okay to voice concerns with how the game is going. If the person isn't interested in talking about whatever seems to be bothering them, move on. Focus on making the game as fun for everyone as possible.

Games of Perfect can involve intense scenes of interrogation, psychological warfare, crime, and the like. If someone appears concerned or upset, check in. Ask a simple question like "Does this cross your boundaries?" Let people know that it's okay to voice boundaries that are being crossed, and that it'll help others to deliver a game that will better suit everyone at the table.

Some of these things might be triggers for people, bringing up really unpleasant feelings. When someone says that something crosses their boundaries, acknowledge these feelings as legitimate. Hear their concerns charitably, and try to look for solutions.

Two solutions can be borrowed from author Ron Edwards: Lines & Veils.

If you are uncomfortable with hearing the specific details of a crime, you can ask for a Veil. The narrator should cut away from the action, while still acknowledging that it happened. This is used all the time in movies and television shows, with a “fade to black”. When using a Veil, hint at the action, but don’t describe it.

An Example of a Veil:

Christian begins to narrate how his character Ransom is carrying out a ritualistic, cold-blooded murder. Christian is really involved in his narration, but Lukas feels like the details are crossing a boundary for him. “Hey Christian, can we have a Veil here? These details are too much for me!” Christian agrees, and he narrates that “Ransom’s smile widens as he continues his work. He emerges, twenty minutes later, looking happier than he’s ever been.”

If something really crosses your boundaries and you don't want it to happen at all, you can declare a Line. Lines are things that you are not comfortable with including in your game. Only impose a Line if it's an issue that you don't feel like you can sit through.

An Example of a Line:

I have a major issue with stories involving child murder, and I always have. It makes me sick. Christian begins to narrate how his character Ransom is planning to murder a child. I say, "Christian, I have a Line here. I don't want the game to include child murder." Christian nods, and then thinks about it for a minute. "Alright. Is it okay if my victim is a teenager, like a 16 year-old?" I let Christian know that this would work, and he replaces that little piece of narration and keeps on going.

Sometimes, it's not necessary to call for a Veil or a Line. Sometimes, simply saying "hey guys, this is pretty close to my boundaries" and taking note of that is all that needs to be done. A feeling of empathy and understanding, on behalf of others in the room, can go a long way to making you feel supported and comfortable.

Chapter Seven: Design Notes



What Perfect Is

Perfect is both a game and something else. That something else is complicated. It's a venue for exploring ethical struggles, and seeing the repercussions of your beliefs – all in an environment that's at just enough of a remove from our real lives that we are comfortable dissecting it.

I'm not sure what I believe in. When I encounter guerrilla action in the real world, when I encounter people committing crimes that they believe in, I don't know how to react or what to think. It's troubling for me.

I want to explore this stuff. Not in a pedantic or moralizing way, and not in a dangerous way. Rather, I want to play with these ideas, and to make art with them and see what that art looks like.

Perfect can act as a vehicle for challenging our assumptions about passion, law, freedom, and legitimacy. Because it is a game, and because the conversation takes place at a remove from our real-world views, it allows us to challenge and explore in an intense fashion, but remain safe.

If Perfect is just a game for you, that's cool too. I hope it's a good one. But, if you're looking for more than just a game, then I hope it rocks your world.

My Understanding of Steampunk

Since I am calling Perfect a steampunk dystopia game, it makes sense that I should unpack what I mean by both of those terms. While they might not be universally agreed upon definitions, they are the understandings upon which I have designed this game and written this text.

Steampunk is a reinvention of the Victorian age, a mythologized history of the industrial revolution. Instead of holding rigidly to the way things were, steampunk imagines the way things could have been. It often focuses on the idea of a personal industrial revolution – that industrial technology and human ingenuity had advanced to the perfect balancing point, where if you did not like the way that the world worked, you could change it. The aesthetic of the age hybridizes upper-crust sophistication with greasy-fingered mad science.

The ‘steam’ nods to the smoke-belching, gear-clanking, cantankerous nature of industrial invention. The ‘punk’ refers to the spirit of invention and individuality that permeates the steampunk mythos – plucky individuals who reconceptualize their world and stride recklessly forward.

Perfect pays rigorous homage to the punk component of the genre, while nodding to the steam.

My Understanding of Dystopia

At an etymological level, dystopia simply means “bad place.” And for some, the definition ends there, with no further nuances or stipulations. In my understanding, a dystopia is more than simply a repressive and totalitarian state; a bad place. It is a place where an idea or value has been taken to a dysfunctional extreme, and where important personal freedoms have been lost in the process.

Kurt Vonnegut wrote a short story titled 2 B R O 2 B (pronounced “to be or naught to be”), depicting a society that had ended both disease and aging. To protect itself from overpopulation, the society had introduced a supported suicide program, and mandated that for every newborn, someone else must voluntarily end their life, in order to balance the population. Now, the important thing to realize about 2 B R O 2 B is that the society presented isn’t evil. They’ve ended aging, disease, overpopulation, and famine. They’ve

offered people the means by which to meet the problems of the day (namely, overpopulation). However, along the way, they've also taken their values to dysfunctional extremes, and sacrificed important personal freedoms (namely, the right to freely bear children).

Cadence is not built upon inherently bad ideas. Rather than lauding crass and disruptive egotism, Cadence venerates non-action and automation. Rather than funding state prisons and complicated legal systems, Cadence attempts to reintegrate criminals back into society. There is only one visible rank of law enforcement, and every person who holds that rank is a front-line worker. These ideas have theoretical merit, at the very least.

The reason that Cadence is dystopic is that it takes these ideas to dysfunctional extremes, and sacrifices personal freedoms routinely along the way.

Bibliography

The following three games inspired Perfect.

My Life with Master, Paul Czege

My Life with Master was the first indie game that I ever bought and held in my own two hands. It is an amazing, rocking game about minions serving a cruel and lonely master. It is a game about the Igors of the world, and the difficult and frustrating relationship that they have with both their masters and normal people.

My Life With Master was influential in two ways, for me: it was my gateway into indie games, and it validated the idea that protagonists weren't always heroes or powerful people, that they could be raggedy and neurotic, that they could be both more and less than what we are.

Polaris, Ben Lehman

While *My Life with Master* let me know that story games could tell dark stories, it was *Polaris* that let me know that they could tell tragedies. *Polaris* is a game in which ideals crumble, and that crumbling is a very real and hard-hitting thing. In *Perfect*, your protagonist can be brainwashed out of their motivations. They can end up *Broken*. They can fade away, having not shaken the foundations of their society. *Perfect* is a game in which ideals may crumble. It owes some of that permission and inspiration to *Polaris*.

Also, *Polaris* is a game in which everyone takes turns playing their protagonist, and every protagonist is matched against an antagonist player. *Perfect* at one point had a central GM, but games like *Polaris* and *Shock*: showed me another way.

Shock: Social Science Fiction, Joshua A.C. Newman

Shock: Social Science Fiction is a game in which players create a science fiction setting and play characters caught at its focal points. Everyone creates a protagonist, as well as playing someone else's antagonist, and play rotates between separate storylines. *Perfect* borrows from that GMless/GMful set up.

Also, the way that you can use an Aspect to gain a re-roll borrows from *Shock*:, which lets you risk a Link to re-roll.

Mediography

The following movies, books and graphic novels were inspirations throughout the development of this game.

A Clockwork Orange

A disillusioned teen leads a life of unchecked crime with his droogs, until all his ultraviolence catches up to him. Eventually, we find him subjected to horrific video projections and behavioural modification, in an attempt to fix him and enable him to reintegrate into society. This is where Conditionings came from. I watched A Clockwork Orange, and saw Alex subjected to that horrible torture at the hands of earnest and kind-hearted professionals, and I thought, “that is what I want to be playing.”

Alex returns to the world cognitively crippled, unable to cope with the consequences of his previous actions. And this is where the effects of Conditioning stemmed from.

Nineteen Eighty-Four

Nineteen Eighty-Four was perhaps my first exposure to dystopian fiction. The notion of an omnipotent and ever-present police force was an early inspiration for the Inspectors. The idea of thought police influenced how I thought about conditionings.

The idea of the unchecked proletariat led to the creation of Freedoms, and more generally the idea of a continually more restrictive set of expectations and laws as you climbed the social ladder.

Years after I started on Perfect, I returned to this early inspiration, and realized what was wrong with my design

– it was chase, chase, chase. The Inspectors never bided their time, watching and collecting from a distance. Returning to the question of “How do I turn Nineteen Eighty-Four into something playable” led to the creation of Holds. Realizing that “Winston has a secret love shack above an old pawn shop” and “Winston is afraid of rats” were two importantly different things led to the distinction between Minor and Major Holds.

Gotham By Gaslight

Gotham By Gaslight captured exactly the tone of Cadence. Also, the way that Jack the Ripper serves as Batman’s foil led to furious design work, as I tried to create a system for non-Inspector foils that slowly gained power leading to a final confrontation or betrayal. Ultimately, it was both broken and a distraction from what made the game great, and I scrapped it. Still, Gotham By Gaslight remains a pitch-perfect inspiration.

V for Vendetta

A masked vigilante. A totalitarian government. A trial-by-fire relationship between two criminal collaborators. Waltzes in resplendent mansions, followed shortly by knife-fights in sewers and giant explosions. V for Vendetta has it all.

The ending prompted Perfect’s Hero endgame. Rather, several people who played Perfect wanted that end endgame to shoot for, and pushed me in that design direction, but V for Vendetta showed me what that Hero option would look like and that it would be cool.

Quills

Quills has this amazing and focal antagonism, between the Marquis de Sade and the Abbe du Coulmier. The former is a force of nature, an idealist and a hedonist who refuses to back down from his vision of what the world could be. The latter is a man obsessed with order and righteousness, a powerful man of both the cloth and the law. Standing between them is the Marquis' primary Contact, Madeleine. Watching this triangle of relationships grow and change and damage one another is gripping and amazing.

It's also what happens in a good game of Perfect – Contacts become dangerous liabilities, but also powerful tools. Adversities grow a life and character of their own. Minor and Major Holds are established and tugged upon.

The Matrix

The mannerisms of the Inspectors owe a lot to the agents. Always immaculate, never ruffled, the agents are terrifying because of their more-than-human precision and calm. Add to that the fact that the agents are everywhere, a threat ready to materialize at a moment's notice. If you are playing an Inspector, you'd do well to simply mimic the mannerisms of the agents in The Matrix.

I am, of course, pretending that the sequels don't exist.

THX 1138

There's something thunderously imposing about an all-black uniform. The shiny metal faces don't do anything to soften the appearance of the enforcers in George Lucas' first science-fiction title (and, in my opinion, his best – that's right, I said it).

Equilibrium

In a world where emotion is illegal, a man of the law decides to stop taking his medication and start feeling again. Equilibrium portrayed John Preston's fall as an officer and rise as a criminal. The rise and fall in the severity of Preston's crimes was fantastic – in one scene, Preston would be fighting to the death against armed men; in the next, he'd be listening to banned music or hiding a frightened puppy in his car. This pacing and fluctuating severity was an inspiration for Perfect – it is fine to have a shocking and egregious crime like murder, and then follow it up with something more nuanced, like listening to banned music or sending love poems to a woman above your station.

2 B R O 2 B

I'll confess: I read this short story too late to really count it as an inspiration. Still, I love it, and it helped me clarify what I considered the word "dystopia" to mean.

A Brief Overview

Crime Scene (p. 76)

Criminal player frames a scene of crime.

Ask good questions (p. 77).

At scene end, law player asks two questions (see below). Law player gains Tension Points equal to the total score; Criminal player records the higher of the two for Payout (p. 80).

The Two Questions (p. 78)

Asked of the criminal player:

“On a scale of 1 to 10, how much does this matter to you?”

Asked of the audience (or oneself, if there are only two players):

“On a scale of 1 to 10, how much does society care?”

Discovery Scene (p. 82)

Law player frames the scene.

Law player chooses what's at stake: Capture (see below), or Establish a Hold (see below).

Unless Captured, move on to a Reflection Scene.

Capture (p. 82)

There is a regular test, to see if the criminal is captured.

If the law player wins, move on to a Retribution Scene. Else, a Reflection Scene.

Establish a Hold (p. 86)

Both players roll a single die, with no bonuses or modifiers. The law player loses Tension Points equal to sum total.

If law player wins, establish a Major Hold. If law player loses, establish a Minor Hold.

If the law player still has points, they may Keep Searching (p. 87). They re-roll only their die, subtracting their roll in points.

How Tests Work (p. 67)

Each turn, law player chooses one:

- ∅ Spending 1 - 5 Tension points
- ∅ Invoking 1 - 3 Guilt
- ∅ Spending a Hold to invoke one of the criminal's Contacts against them
- ∅ Spending a Hold to break advantage

Each turn, criminal player chooses one:

- ∅ Invoking some (or all) of their Resource score
- ∅ Invoking a Contact

Roll one die each. Ties go to the law player (p. 72). The criminal player may spend an Aspect to re-roll (p. 73).

Retribution Scene (p. 90)

Law player frames the scene.

Law player chooses what's at stake: Create Guilt (see below), Threaten a Contact (see below), Conditioning (see below).

If a Major Hold is spent during a Retribution Scene, the law player gets to choose a second stake (p. 90).

Create Guilt (p. 92)

There is a regular test, to see if the criminal's resolve is weakened.

If the law player wins, they gain 2 Guilt on the criminal.

Threaten a Contact (p. 95)


There is a regular test, as the criminal is interrogated.

If the law player wins, the criminal player chooses: lose the Contact, or lose Resources equal to Contact's bonus (but then raise that bonus by +1).

Conditioning (p. 100)

Determine a Conditioning at stake. There is a regular test to see if the Conditioning takes effect.

If the law player wins, the Conditioning is added to the criminal's sheet.



Reflection Scene (p. 104)

Criminal player frames a short scene, reflecting the impact that the crime cycle has had.

Choose a Payout, within the limit generated during the Crime Scene (see below).

Payouts (p. 105)

At least 1 point...

- ∅ Remove 1 Guilt
- ∅ Add an Aspect or Refresh a stricken Aspect
- ∅ Add 1 to an existing Contact

At least 4 points...

- ∅ Create a new Contact with a score of 1

At least 6 points...

- ∅ Add 1 to Resources

At least 7...

- ∅ Add 2 to an existing Contact
- ∅ Remove a Conditioning (cannot choose a Conditioning that you acquired this cycle)
- ∅ Remove all of your law player's remaining Tension Points

At least 8 points...

- ∅ Add 2 to Resources
 - ∅ Create a Secret Society with a score of 1
 - ∅ Add 1 to an existing Secret Society
- 

The Criminal



Name

Resources

Archetypes

Pending Payout

Concept

Secret Society

Class & Waistcoat

Contacts

Freedom's

Aspects

Certifications

Conditionings



The Law



Who is this criminal?

Guilt

Tension Points

Holds

Major or Minor?

Prominant Inspectors & Other Notes

Their Freedoms & Conditionings



Index

A

- Archetypes 46-47
- Asking Questions 77
- Aspects 58-59

B

- Broken 110-111

C

- Capture 82-83
- Certifications 22-30, 52-54
- Character Sheet 42-43, 150-151
- Class 17, 49
- Collaborative Crimes 133-134
- Colour 49
- Concept 48
- Conditioning 34-35, 100-103
- Contacts 55-57, 69
 - Threaten a Contact 95-99
- Create Guilt 92-94
- Crime Cycle 76
- Crime Scenes 76-81

D

- Discovery Scenes 82-89
- Dystopia 8, 141

E

- Elevator Pitches 117-118
- Ending the Game 124

Examples (Roselise)

- Archetypes & Concept 48
- Capture 84-85
- Class, Freedoms & Certifications 54
- Complete Character 63
- Conditioning 103
- Create Guilt 93-94
- Crime Scene 80-81
- Establish a Hold 88-89
- Reflection & Payout 106-107
- Resources, Contacts & Aspects 59
- Secret Societies 62
- Threaten a Contact 96-99

F

- Freedoms 50
 - List of Freedoms 18-21

G

- Guilds and Groups 22-30
- Guilt 68, 92-94

H

- Hero 111-113
- Holds 67, 71-72, 86-89
 - Major Holds 71, 86, 90
 - Minor Holds 86

I

- Inspectors 32, 34-35
- Invoking Contacts 69
- Invoking Resources 68

K

- Keep Searching 87-88

M

Mixing Stakes 90

N

Names 44

O

Organizations 22–30

P

Pacing 72

Payout 105–107

Pitches. *See* Elevator Pitches

Player Roles 40, 66

R

Reference Guide 148–149

Reflection Scenes 104

Re-rolls 58, 73

 Keep Searching 87–88

Resources 55–57, 69

Retribution Scenes 90–101

Rolling 72

S

Secret Societies 60–62

Skills Used In Play

 Character Development 131

 Creating Characters Together 125

 Framing Scenes 126

 Managing Tension 130

 Participating in Scenes 126

Spending Aspects 58, 73

Steampunk 8, 140

T

- Tension Points 68, 78–80
- Tests 67–73
 - List of Test Actions 67
- The Law's Goal 90
- Threaten a Contact 95–99
- Ties 72

U

- Using It In Play
 - Aspects 59
 - Certifications 53–54
 - Freedoms 50–51
 - Resources & Contacts 56–57
 - Secret Societies 61

W

- Waistcoats 49

Art and Stories

- Queen Abigail, by Johann de Venecia 10
- Poor Shopkeep, Stock Image 26
- Inspector Thorley, by Bradly Bleeker 33
- Wester de Card, short story by Brendan Adkins 37*
- Man in Mirror, by Joe Slucher 38
- Couple Kissing, by Kaleigh Barton 45
- Interrogation, by Johann de Venecia 74
- Woman Killing Inspector, by Kaleigh Barton 83
- Electric Chair, by Kaleigh Barton 101
- Hadley, short story by Brendan Adkins 107*
- Guarded Portrait, by Johann de Venecia 108
- Shadowy Figures, by Andrew Gillis 114
- Take a Seat, Stock Image 158