LiBRE

Solo Role Playing

This work uses fictitious names, characters, places and incidents. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons is entirely coincidental.

FOREWORD

A tabletop *solo* role playing game? There is precedent. Some examples include branching path adventure books, random dungeon generators and improvised storytelling rules. As a game, Libre draws elements from each: It's storytelling, but with structure. It relies on random tables, but the player directs the story. Use the Libre Solo Role Playing rules to guide a protagonist through challenges and setbacks. Brace for tension that builds and breaks, changing the story in unexpected ways.

Libre Solo Role Playing was designed to meet a list of requirements. The book's storytelling game master engine is separable from its role playing game mechanics. Players can bring their own settings and rule sets, using the game master engine to tell stories with their own rulesets. It also had to work as a self-contained game, using the game's own RPG rules that interlock storytelling and game play. Once learned, it had to be easy to use and the rules consistent. All the key tables and charts had to fit on one page, player story notes had to fit on one page, it needed a one-page character sheet, and easily managed NPCs and foes. The underlying system had to handle story telling for both single heroes and adventuring parties, for just about any setting.

I hope this game will inspire you to tell interesting stories, and that will delight (and sometimes frustrate) with its surprising twists and turns. Along the way, may all your successes be meaningful.

-brian washburn, 2017

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1) GM ENGINE OVERVIEW

ABOUT THESE SIDEBARS

The layout of Libre Solo Role Playing uses a main text plus a collection of sidebars.

Most of the sidebars give examples for how the rules are applied in actual play. In some cases, they define terms or elaborate on concepts. Personally I've found this layout, which mixes rules with examples and notes on the same page, a good way to digest a game book. I hope you'll find it just as helpful.

DICE ROLLING CONVENTIONS

Libre Solo Role Playing uses some common conventions to let the player know what dice to roll, and how to roll them for various situations. Here they are in one place:

(d20): roll one 20-sided die.

(2d10): roll two 10-sided dice and add the results together.

(d100): roll two 10-sided dice, one representing 10s and one representing 1s, for a range of 1 to 100.

(four d10): make four 10-sided dice rolls individually, keeping them in the order rolled.

(d10xd10): Roll two 10-sided dice and multiply the results together.

The first eight chapters of this book introduce the rules needed to run Libre Solo Role Playing's game master (GM) engine. These rules work together with the role playing game (RPG) rules covered in chapters 9 through 14. Some sample game settings are also included. Libre Solo Role Playing's GM engine can be used separately from the RPG rules, and should be compatible with most third-party RPGs.

Libre Solo Role Playing's GM engine generates plots, protagonist conflicts and storytelling action. When it is used with a third-party RPG, lighter rulesets work better, making for faster and more streamlined play. It *can* support crunchy third-party RPG rules. Just keep in mind that it's tough for one person to handle both sides of big conflicts with a complicated third-party RGP ruleset.

This book uses jargon like "player's character", "scene quality" and "window dressing". Experienced gamers will recognize some of these terms. This chapter will define common jargon it uses in later sidebars.

Besides this guide, to play the game you'll need pencil, eraser and scrap paper to take notes; two 10-sided dice for rolling sums, multipliers and percentiles; a 20-sided die; copies of the mission sheet and action sheet for the GM engine; character sheet and ally/foe sheets for the included RPG rules, or your choice of third-party RPG; and a solid block of uninterrupted time in a quiet place to concentrate.

how gameplay works

The Libre GM engine handles solo gameplay. A solo game lets the player tell an interesting story with challenges, twists, setbacks and surprises for the protagonist, called the player's character. Besides telling a good story, the player tries to 'win' by achieving enough meaningful successes in scenes to wrap up the story with a positive outcome. At the start of a session, the player sets the number of meaningful successes needed to resolve the story's mission, usually two or three meaningful successes for a shorter game.

To get from here to there, the player first selects the preferred RPG ruleset and setting, then builds a player's character for that setting. This book's included role-playing game ruleset, and the included sample settings later in this book, are one way to get started fast, using the included GM engine and RPG rules together. Chapter 9 deals with the basics of character creation.

Plot action happens in scenes. The simplest of these is the cutscene. The focus of a cutscene is on dialog, using people in the scene to reveal information and insights. Any new adventure story in Libre Solo Role Playing usually starts with a cutscene to brief the player's character and define a mission. The mission is the player character's goal that drives the story forward.

The player can also use a cutscene at any point in the story, provided the player's character can get a break in the action to meet with someone and have a conversation. Cutscenes can may offer up new information; may recruit allies for a mission; or may supply other resources. In every case, the cutscene is a way to reveal information that helps guide the story's direction.

Besides cutscenes, the player sets up scenes that have conflicts and challenges to address the mission. To move the plot forward, the player needs to have the player's character meet some steep challenges. If all the goals of a scene are met, that scene qualifies as a meaningful success and the plot moves forward. If they aren't met, the player's character may face additional challenges, for example setbacks that force a follow-up scene. If the player can rack up enough scenes with meaningful successes, the player's character resolves the mission and the player can wrap up the story with a positive outcome.

Not all stories end well. Sometimes the player's character ends up so far off track from the starting mission that the player decides to accept defeat, and resolves the mission in a way that the player's character has to deal with failure and its ultimate consequences.

Each scene has some descriptive keywords: places, environment scene qualities, persons, items or potential foes. The player can select some of these elements in the

STORY ELEMENTS

Libre Solo Role Playing relies on common keywords and jargon. Some of it should be familiar to people that have played other role playing games, some of it will be new. Here are short definitions of some common terms.

The *player* is you, gentle reader. Your goal is not just to win by racking up meaningful successes, but to tell an exciting story about your protagonist who faces, and hopefully prevails against daunting challenges.

The *player's character* is the protagonist who is the main focus of the story. In a fantasy tale it could be a mighty warrior; in a far future story it could be a clever mercenary trader; in a present-day alternate reality story, it may be an ordinary person thrown into unusual circumstances (like a zombie apocalypse). Many of the examples in this book use intrepid private investigator Arthur Falcone as the player's character. The player's character is described through a record sheet of vital statistics. Arthur's character sheet, for example, includes information such as appearance, attributes, skills, personal flaws, important possessions, and a brief background sketch that outlines some key people in Arthur's life.

The *setting* is the background about the player character's environment. That includes the society, people, natural/civilized world and possible threats. Arthur Falcone's setting is modern-day noir: Our world as we know it but grittier, with widespread crime and corruption lurking beneath society's surface.

We will look in on Arthur in the middle of a *mission*. Arthur was retained to conduct an investigation into a suspicious death of millionaire heiress Greta Havik, and he is at her ostentatious mansion. More about that mission later.

The player set up a *scene* in the story: Arthur arriving at the palatial Havik manse, to question the help and look for potential clues. The player set it up as an *obstacle scene*, which means the private investigator will face a series of skill challenges. Arthur Falcone's goal for the scene is to try and find out more information about the case. The player noted three different skill challenges in advance that he expects Arthur to face in the scene if all goes well: *Intimidate* to interrogate the staff, *(cont'd)*

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empathy to detect possible duplicity among the help, and *deceive* as Arthur tries to fool suspects into believing he knows more than he is letting on. If (when) the scene goes off the rails, some of those advance plans will probably change or become irrelevant.

The *place* is the Havik family mansion. More specifically, the player set the scene for gathering and interrogating the help in the grand foyer of the house.

There are several *persons* in the scene, generated in two ways. The player added the house cooking and cleaning staff (the player hasn't named any of them) and Wesley (the butler) as *window dressing*. That means those people are part of the player's free-form exposition that described the scene before putting it in motion. The player also rolled randomly to generate a *person of interest* for the scene. That person, the player interpreted, is a handsome itinerant houseguest that the player named Slobodan Dragovic. Despite the ominous name, Slobodan isn't necessarily guilty or the other help innocent. That will be determined by the investigation.

Three randomly rolled *scene qualities* include pelting rain outside, a high balcony overlooking the mansion foyer, and an atmosphere of anxiety and fear from the gathered group. The player will draw on these in the scene where it makes sense, to modify *yes-no questions* and *skill checks*. More about these tools later.

Besides people and qualities, the scene also has more *window dressing* from the player's open-ended exposition before the scene started. These include floor-to-ceiling windows draped by velvet curtains; a marble floor covered in luxurious rugs; plush couches and costly furniture; a winged grand staircase connecting the first and second stories; and the grand scale of the room itself.

Finally, the player included *items* for the scene, again mostly window dressing. In this case, the player also randomly rolled an *item of interest*: ceremonial Pacific Island shell armor displayed in the foyer as art.

The player aims to achieve a *meaningful success* in the scene. For an obstacle scene, that means passing at least three different, moderately difficult skill checks; and asking for trouble through yes-no questions at least three times. The player will need several scenes with meaningful successes before resolving the story as a win for Arthur. More about meaningful successes later.

scene, such as the place where the action happens, and/or a key person the player's character meets. Or the player can choose to roll randomly for a place and key person. Other factors, such as scene qualities or types of foes, are outside the player's control and are rolled randomly. The player's character can interact with key elements in a scene, using them tactically to make skill checks and improve the chances of success. That way, the player tries to meet goals in each scene that qualify it as a meaningful success.

There are two types of scenes that the player can use to try and achieve meaningful success, each with its own goals. Obstacle scenes are about meeting challenges through skill checks. The player character's group faces these skill checks and either succeeds or fails at tasks, moving the action of the scene forward. Encounter scenes succeed or fail through direct conflict: That often means physical combat, which has a prominent role in many RPGs. Whether the player chooses skill checks or conflict, Libre Solo Role Playing's GM engine provides structure for the player to find out more about the details about the world around the player's character; and the consequences of, or reactions, to the player character group's actions.

In the background, a plot stress counter slowly ratchets up tension. Plot stress adds 1 tick each time the player asks a yes-no question, or anytime the player's character is involved in an action that calls for a skill check. The player also *tests* plot stress whenever rolling to answer a yes-no question, and when starting or ending any scene. Whenever the player tests plot stress and the roll result is lower than the current plot stress level, it triggers an unexpected event. An unexpected event can be good or bad for the player's character and allies. The unpredictable timing and potential for stirring up trouble makes unexpected events dangerous.

That's all there is to the basics of running a game with Libre Solo Role Playing. The upcoming chapters provide details on these pieces of the game's GM engine. ☺

2) SCENES

Libre Solo Role Playing's GM engine uses three types of scenes: cutscenes, obstacle scenes and encounter scenes. The setup of each type of scene is similar, but they play out very differently. Each type of scene has a different structure and player goals.

cutscenes

A cutscene is a short scene where the player's goal is to have a dialog and get insights. Use cutscenes when starting or ending a mission, to have the player's character learn information (usually) without introducing dangerous conflicts and complications, to ask for additional resources, or to try and recruit allies.

All new stories start with a cutscene. The goal of this kickoff cutscene is to assign a mission to the player's character, to pad that mission with supporting information, and optionally for the player to try and acquire resources that may help the player's character succeed. The GM engine uses *structured questions for persons*, a template for getting information and making requests. Structured questions for persons are in chapter 4 and summarized in appendix 7 (p.128). For quick reference they are also printed on the mission sheet.

For any starting cutscene, always ask and answer the first structured question ("does this person have a need?") without rolling a yes-no question or making a skill check: To kick off the story, the answer is *always* yes! The player's character always starts with a mission, which is a goal that drives the story forward. The player can optionally make other requests through structured questions for persons, to try and gain more information, equipment, allies, or ask about rewards. It's up to the player to decide when, but for some questions the player's character will need to make a skill check to succeed. That could be to get more information, convince the contact to supply an ally and/or extra equipment, or arrange (or increase) payment. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss how to mix yes-no questions with skill checks for the player's character to ask for, and get, resources.

To set a story goal, roll for a mission (d20) on the action sheet. Based on the character's background and the

GENERATING A MISSION

The player came up with Arthur Falcone's mission to look into the suspicious death of Greta Havik after rolling randomly for a mission (d20), and coming up with the result *investigate*. Appendix 4 has suggestions on how to focus a mission with follow-up rolls of person(s), place(s) and/or item(s).

In this case, the player decided that *investigate* implied a person (d100): The player rolled randomly for a person in the action table to focus the mission. The result of the (d100) roll was "aunt/uncle". The player could have decided that the "aunt/uncle" result was one of Arthur Falcone's relatives, or the relatives of the person (patron) assigning the mission, or possibly even related to someone else who might be relevant to the story.

The player chose to narrate that the person was an aunt of the patron. Arthur already decided his patron, Peter Havik-Stand, would be assigning the mission to Arthur in the starting cutscene. Peter, a wealthy but short-tempered (impulsive) local businessman, comes directly from Arthur Falcone's player character backstory. More about Peter later, but it seemed fitting for the patron to bring his family issues to Arthur.

How did Greta Havik become a millionairess, and how did the storyline point toward a murder mystery? The player used some free association that these window dressing elements (wealth and a murder) made sense for the setting, then verified them through yes-no questions. They were the player's judgment calls, *(cont'd)*

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based on storytelling in a modern-day noir setting with themes of civilized society, corruption and crime.

If the adventure was taking place in a swashbuckling setting, those themes would be different. The yes-no questions to set the mission might have assumed the aunt was abducted; or the player might have paired the investigation around an item (d100) rather than a person (d100). The player's random roll could have the player's character tasked to hunt down missing "religious texts" instead, for example. That would be a different story, but also an intriguing possibility for high adventure.

STRUCTURED QUESTIONS DIALOG

Structured questions are a template, they aren't meant to be conventional dialog. The aim for structured questions is to isolate key points in a conversation when the player's character asks for something that's important in game terms, a request that might be granted or get shot down. The player's character might ask a friend to borrow the keys to the car; requests an employer to give a cash advance for the job; or try to get a colleague to spill the beans on secret internal project documents. When the player's character pushes for something important in game terms, structured questions define useful requests and possible rewards. At that point, pick up the dice and see what happens.

It's up to the player to decide how the natural conversation in a scene flows with small talk, pleasantries and nuance. The player doesn't need to make up dialog details, but it's helpful for the player to think through this extra flavor of how the player's character behaves and interacts with others for the sake of the story. In game terms, details like wording in a conversations aren't directly involved in moving the story forward.

setting, a mission keyword might be enough information for the player to come up with an adventure idea. In that case, fill in the blanks with your inspiration and hit the ground running! If the mission needs more focus, the player can choose to roll from one or more of the tables on the action sheet to generate a wilderness or civilized place (d20), a person (d100), an encounter (d20) and/or an item (d100). There are no right or wrong tables to choose if clarifying a mission objective. There are some obvious pairings, such as rolling a wilderness place for missions that explore or patrol; rolling an item or person for missions that find and recover; rolling a person for missions that negotiate; or rolling a foe when the mission is to attack or defend. Appendix 4 (p.123) has guidelines about the nature of different types of missions.

What's the purpose behind a particular mission? Maybe the reason is obvious, or the player decides it's not important. But if the player wants to know, it's possible to get an answer (possibly after a successful social skill check to get the information out of the contact) by rolling a rationale (d20) on the action sheet or in appendix N (p.138). The player will need to interpret the focus of the rationale, again using place, person, encounter and/or item(s). If there are several possible answers and the player prefers a random result instead of choosing, one or more yes-no questions can sort out these details.

Structured questions for persons are a guide through common waypoints in a dialog, but are only a guideline. There's always the option to veer out of the structure. The player can take a dialog practically anywhere through a combination of yes-no questions and social skill checks.

Cutscenes are supposed to be about gathering information through dialog. They don't always turn out that way. The contact in the cutscene might be a foe; or through rolling an unlucky unexpected event, a foe might turn up while the cutscene is playing out. Chapter 8 has a section on yes-no question best practices that advises how to handle this, under *opening cutscene starts with a foe* (p.56). Whether a cutscene starts or ends with a bang, its only purpose is to gather information and resources. The player doesn't have to risk throwing in the towel, but also cannot ever get meaningful success from a cutscene.

encounter scenes

An encounter scene plays out a conflict with hostile foes. To achieve a meaningful success in an encounter scene, the player character's group must engage and win the conflict. Often in RPGs that means combat, though it could be some other type of extended high-stakes contest. Whether violence or some other form, an encounter scene uses up the player character group's resources, and failure means a major setback. In many settings it can mean player character injury, capture or even death.

Appendix H, I and J (p.136) and the action sheet have charts related to *encounter scene foe groups*, with instructions for setting up a group of foes and guidelines for how to start the scene, up to the point that the conflict starts. Here's how it works:

When you decide to play an encounter scene, start by generating an enemy point budget. Roll a d10 and a second d10, and multiply the results together (d10xd10). This is the point budget. Next, start rolling on the foes (d20) table, listed in appendix H (p.136) and on the action sheet. With each foe roll, subtract the point value of generated foe(s) from the point budget, until the budget reaches zero or less. For each roll of teams or minions, roll d10 to find out how many there are: Subtract the number of members times their individual point value from the point budget. For example, a player who rolls 6 weak minions (at 2 points apiece), subtracts 6x2, or 12 points from the budget. Animals/mounts, vehicles/mounts and captives results may have d10, or just 1, or a set number at the player's discretion, depending what makes sense for the size and composition of the foe group. Some of the rolled results are followed by a "%" symbol. These civilized foes have a culture and occupation. Roll on the table listed in appendix I (p.136) or on the action sheet and flesh out these foes' loyalties, skills and/or powers.

After the enemy point budget is spent, the player rolls one rationale (d20) for the entire foe group. The result is the group's demeanor, at least up until the point they become aware of the player character group's presence. Any sentient foe group gets a rationale; only mindless foes (e.g., zombies or an automaton) don't have a rationale.

TEAMS VS. GROUPS

What is the difference between a team and a group?

A *group* refers to the entire assembly of player's character and allies, or the entire collection of foes.

Each *team* represents d10 lower-power beings (allies or foes) that share the same background and skills, and in game terms, operate as one unit. Examples include cultists, street thugs or conscripts. A team is a collective stat block of members that always acts in unison.

ENCOUNTER BUDGETING EXAMPLE

A player in a classic fantasy setting is generating an encounter scene. The player rolls (d10xd10), gets '0' (10) and '3', and multiplies the results together for a 30-point encounter budget.

The player rolls for the first foe (d20), and the result is '15' - a powerful entity that costs 10 points (details to be determined). There are 20 points left in the encounter budget.

For the next foe roll, the result is a '1' - an average quality team with a "%" (culture and occupation) designation. The player rolls two d10s for culture (result: 'exotic') and occupation (result: 'generalist'). There is a race of evil dwarves in this stock fantasy world, and the player decides they are suitably exotic and make sense for the encounter. The player rolls d10 for the size of the team and gets a '7'. At 2 points apiece, the team of dwarves cost 14 points total. There are 6 points left in the encounter budget.

The third foe result is a '5' - add leader, also with a "%" (culture and occupation) designation. That costs 10 points and takes the encounter budget below '0', so it is the last foe. Given the evil dwarf theme, the player decides the leader should also be a dwarf, so doesn't roll culture but does roll a d10 for occupation (result: 'officer', which is fitting).

Looking at the totality of the encounter, the player decides, in line with the evil dwarf theme, the powerful entity is a rock elemental serving the corrupt dwarven faction's leader. The opposing force is all set up, and it's dangerously powerful if the player was considering a direct conflict!

SAMPLE OBSTACLE SCENE MIX

The scene is Havik mansion: The player has rolled three scene qualities, and considered rolling or choosing place, person of interest and item, and set up window dressing. The player also wrote down three skill checks for Arthur Falcone to use in the scene. In this case, all three are social skills: intimidate (to wrest information about the suspicious death out of a person in the scene); empathy (to detect that a person in the scene is lying or holding back); and deceive (to convince the staff as a whole that he knows more than he is letting on). The scene will require mixing skill checks with yes-no questions. More guidance about mixing skill checks with yes-no questions is in chapters 3 and 4.

It's possible Arthur Falcone could breeze through each of these skill checks, tested at moderate difficulty. That fills one of the player's criteria for meaningful success in the scene. The other criteria is asking for trouble three times. More about asking for trouble later.

What happens if Arthur bungles the intimidate skill check? That calls for a consequence. The player might decide a failure to intimidate Wesley the butler means that Wesley will threaten publicly to go to the police and complain about Arthur. If it comes to that, the player might let Arthur try to save the situation with a negotiate or deceive skill check. If that skill check succeeds, Arthur may recover and move to the next challenge. If Arthur fails the second check, the consequences should get worse. The player might decide with a second failure that Wesley publicly denounces Arthur, ruining any chance of using other social skill checks on the help staff for the rest of the scene. At that point, the player will need to re-trench plans for Arthur. Maybe the player will try to have Arthur intimidate all the help instead, but every additional failure should be bigger and worse for the investigator.

It's possible, even after multiple skill check failures, for the player to find a route to success for three different, moderately difficult skill checks. But successive skill check failures tend to spin a scene out of control. At some point it becomes easier for the player to throw in the towel on the scene, to try and close it without achieving meaningful success, which often means having to deal with outstanding consequences through a follow-up scene.

obstacle scenes

For an obstacle scene, the player thinks up a series of challenges for the player character's group in the scene. The player puts together a preliminary plan for three different, moderately difficult skill checks that the player character's group needs to succeed. The player then starts the scene and tries to move the character to the scene's goal. For suggestions of skill checks in a scene based on the player character's mission, see appendix 5 (p.126).

When a skill check goes right, the plot moves forward with the outcome the player expected. As the player moves the player character's group through the scene, it's pretty likely that skill checks will go wrong. Whenever the player character's group fails a skill check, there is *always* a consequence. A consequence might mean a follow-up skill check to avoid an immediate threat; it might be a complication that makes a repeat attempt impossible, or at least difficult and dangerous; or the intended outcome may still happen, but at a steep price (e.g., equipment gets broken or lost, or the effort consumes large amounts of resources); or the intended outcome may happen but create a new, bigger problem.

The consequences of failed skill checks may sidetrack or even derail a scene. That's intentional. The goal is for the player to try and improvise, finding ways for the player character's group to recover (whether successful or not) from setbacks and new threats.

One of the two criteria to achieve a meaningful success in an obstacle scene, is for the player's character to succeed at three different, moderately difficult skill checks. Those three successes don't have to be the same skill checks that the player planned at the start of the scene - the player only set up those skill challenges in advance to give the scene a starting structure, direction and goal. Things rarely go as planned. More often, when the player character's group fails skill checks, things start to go very wrong. When that happens, the challenges set up in advance are a guide for how far off track from the goal the player is, and can give ideas how the player might recover from setbacks and get the story back on track.

If enough skill checks go badly, the whole scene might derail enough to take the story in a downward spiral. The player can decide to throw in the towel on the current scene, aim to close the scene cleanly without a meaningful success, and then either set up a a fresh new scene, or else create an immediate follow-up scene to deal with unresolved trouble, consequences or other issues. Those unexpected twists and setbacks are great story fodder. It keeps the direction of the plot unpredictable, interesting and challenging.

Succeeding at three different, moderately difficult skill challenges is one of two criteria to achieve meaningful success in an obstacle scene. The other criteria is that the player "asks for trouble" against the player character's group at least three times in the scene. The player asks for trouble by using yes-no questions. These pointed yes-no questions create problems for the player's character if the answer comes up yes. For more information on yes-no questions and asking for trouble, see chapters 3 and 5.

Once a player makes three different successful, moderately difficult skill checks; and asks for trouble three times (whether or not trouble happens); the scene achieves a meaningful success. It doesn't matter whether the scene played out like the player expected. It still puts the player one step closer to resolving the mission with some sort of overall positive outcome.

setting up a scene

Whether it's a cutscene, obstacle scene or encounter scene, the setup is the same. The player first decides if the scene happens in a civilized (populated) place or in a wilderness (unpopulated) area. Choose or roll a place (d20), and roll three scene qualities (d100). Optionally add a key person (d100) or a foe (d20), and/or a key item (d100). All of these tables are on the action sheet, and are also listed in appendix A-F (p.131-135).

Scene qualities help inform about key story elements that are present in a scene. They are important to the player because they provide special bonuses (or penalties) to skill checks, and can shift the probability of yes-no questions. For this reason, scene qualities are "magical". More about the scene qualities is in chapters 3 and 4.

EXAMPLE CONSEQUENCE TYPES

Here are some examples how a player might match different styles of consequences with failed skill checks.

Require a follow-up skill check to avoid an immediate threat (including injury): Arthur Falcone's botched attempt to interrogate Wesley the butler leads to the angered servant dialing the police to file a complaint. The player's character attempts a follow-up skill check (e.g., negotiate, deceive, or another intimidate) to de-escalate the situation. If that fails, too, the butler shouts for help. Falcone will get roughed up (taking a level of damage) as he is escorted to the front door and physically thrown out.

A complication makes a repeat attempt impossible, or difficult and dangerous: Alternatively, Arthur's botched follow-up negotiate attempt to try and calm Wesley means the butler in a rage gives Arthur a public dressing-down, denouncing the investigator in front of all the help on the scene. All of Havik mansion's staff is now turned against the investigator for at least the current set of scenes, which ruins any further chances by Arthur to try social influence skills.

The intended outcome may still happen, but at a steep price: Arthur's being denounced by Wesley the butler cut off the investigator from using social skills to influence the help staff. But Arthur manages to get the cook to speak with him in private by slipping her $200 to talk later. By paying a steep cost in money or resources, the player moved the plot forward in the direction as if the skill check succeeded, though in terms of meaningful success, it still is a (costly) failure.

The intended outcome might create a new problem: Later, Arthur tries to sneak back to Wesley the butler's quarters, planning to use a set of lockpicks on the door. The player fails the skill check to have Arthur pick the lock. The player can narrate that the investigator takes enough time and makes enough noise in the process that Wesley, who it turns out was inside his quarters all along, suddenly opens the door from the other side. Wesley catches Arthur, lockpicks in hand, in a very compromised position.

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SIDE GOAL MISSIONS

Structured questions for persons let the player's character ask any person of interest if they have a need, and what that need is. In other words, every patron, ally or other person of interest in a cutscene, obstacle scene or encounter scene could be a potential source for an additional mission. All it can take (if it's reasonable for the person of interest to have a possible mission) is making some successful social skill checks, and asking some structured yes-no questions.

What happens if the player already has a starting mission, and then through structured questions for persons, picks up an additional mission? It's up to the player how to treat that new goal in relation to the existing main mission. A new mission can modify or replace the current main mission. It might be an additional task that may relate directly or indirectly to the main mission; or it could be a totally separate opportunity that has nothing to do with the main mission. Unless the player decides the new mission somehow replaces the existing main mission, any new task the player's character takes on is a *side goal*.

A side goal mission is easy to resolve: At some point in the story, the player sets up a dedicated scene specifically to address the side mission. Resolving it takes just one meaningful success. If the side goal mission is at all related to the main mission, any meaningful success that resolves the side goal also counts toward the number of meaningful successes needed to resolve the main mission.

The side goal can have a reward of its own (such as valuables, an item, or information). If rewards are important to the story, generating valuables is covered in Chapter 14 and appendix W and X (p.143). There is no penalty for the player's character not achieving a side goal, unless the player decides otherwise.

Side goal missions are an optional rule. If the player feels that side goals distract from the game's focus, just don't use them.

In a civilized place, the player can either choose, or else roll randomly, for a person of interest (d100) or foe (d20) and/or item of interest (d100). The player usually shouldn't choose or roll for persons or items in a wilderness scene, unless there is a special reason in the story why a key person or item is out in the middle of the wilds. It's possible, for example, for the player to narrate a scene setup where the player's character arranged to meet a patron, ally or other contact out in the wilderness. Wilderness or civilized, it is always an option to roll up a single random foe (d20) for an obstacle scene, or to make an encounter scene with an entire encounter budget of rolled foes.

It's fine for the player to mix rolled and chosen results. For example, a player rolling for scene qualities may end up with two or more places, several foe results or rationales. Or the player might have chosen one place for the scene, but rolled a second place as a random scene quality. Just mesh them together in a way that makes sense. For example, a mix of two places like "temple" and "port" could mean the scene happens in an airport chapel, or at a subway stop by a cathedral. If the rolls just can't be mixed, have the newest roll pre-empt the player's choice or any prior roll, or use what makes sense.

The player might roll 81-100 under civilized scene qualities (marked as "R:", meaning rationale). This section under scene qualities table doubles up to roll foe rationales (d20). If the player rolls a rationale as a scene quality, the result reflects the social atmosphere of people who are window dressing in the scene (it also guides the player to include window dressing people in the scene who exhibit the behavior). If the player doesn't roll a rationale for a scene quality, any window dressing people on the scene behave in whatever way the player wants; their behavior is part of window dressing.

Instead of rationales, individual persons (d100) including patrons, allies and rivals get a trait (d20). Traits are summarized on the action sheet; appendix 8 (p.130) has guidelines for the dominant outlook or behavior of different traits. Any person of interest, whether they are recurring characters or only around for a scene, should have a random generated trait that guides their behavior.

Any randomly rolled person on the scene, and/or randomly rolled item on the scene, is a special story element in that scene. They are useful levers the player can use to interact with and help influence the storyline. A person of interest (d100) is someone with whom the player's character can have a dialog (using structured questions for persons discussed earlier in this chapter). An item of interest (d100) may play some key role in the scene if the player's character chooses to interact with it. It may have to do with the mission, or have special significance to persons in that scene. Maybe the item is on display, or it can be bought or borrowed. Items of interest shouldn't be lying around for a player's character to take, at least not without a possible consequence. On the other hand, if the player does want the player's character to steal the item, that could be part of the planned skill challenges for an obstacle scene: One with potentially a major consequence for getting caught.

Foes can unexpectedly be in a scene. The player might roll up a random person of interest (d100), but get a result of 81-100 under persons - a random foe. That individual or standalone team/minions then gets a rationale (d20). It's also possible for the player to *want* to roll up a foe (d20) for a scene, but through a 'non-combat' result end up with an ordinary person of interest (d100) instead. Some foe results (such as vehicles/mounts or animals/mounts) are probably not hostile by themselves.

What if the player rolls a random person for a cutscene and ends up with a foe result? This isn't a problem: An enemy turning up instead of the protagonist's expected contact is a common story trope. Information about handling this situation is in chapter 8 on yes-no best practices: *opening cutscene starts with a foe* (p.56).

Rolling a random foe might seem like extra trouble in an obstacle scene, but a foe can be handy to have around. The player can plan skill challenges for the scene such as having the player's character try to sneak around them, pickpocket them, eavesdrop on them, negotiate with them, deceive or otherwise try to manipulate them. If a fight or conflict does break out, provided it is at least a moderately difficult challenge, the player's character side besting a foe counts as one successful skill check for an

EXAMPLES OF PERSONS AND FOES

Continuing with the example of Arthur Falcone, private investigator: Arthur is the *player's character*, and has a full character sheet write-up.

Arthur's recurring *patron* is Peter Havik-Stand. Peter is Greta Havik's impulsive (his trait) nephew, a successful businessman who retained Arthur to investigate Greta's suspicious death. The player doesn't have a character record sheet on Peter because the patron only assigns missions, and is not an active ally.

Arthur does have an *ally*, Toni Graham, the unflappable (her trait) personal assistant mentioned in his character background. The player has a short-form character record sheet on Toni.

Arthur also has a *rival*, heroic (her trait) local police detective Emily Chan, also from Arthur's character background. Emily has not yet appeared in the story. The player does have a separate, brief character record sheet for Emily; as a rival she may appear in any scene.

In the obstacle scene at the mansion, there is lazy (his trait) Slobodan Dragovic. Slobodan is a *person of interest*, who was randomly rolled at the start of the scene, and could be a conversation focus for Arthur for the scene. If the scene comes to skill contests or blows, Slobodan might merit a stat block.

Wesley the butler and the rest of the staff were generated as *window dressing* and don't have traits. As a group, the rest of the staff may share a rationale -- rolled as a random scene quality or written as window dressing. The player could assign someone who was window dressing in a past scene into a future scene as a person of interest. At that point, the person will need a trait and maybe a stat block if there is a skill contest or conflict. But in the scene where they are window dressing, those persons shouldn't be doing anything too significant.

Let's say during the scene, *foes* unexpectedly burst in. At first glance, they seem opportunistic robbers who assumed the estate might be ripe for ransacking. The team of thugs is armed. The player has a basic stat block shared by the team.

The thugs should have a rationale, though it's pretty much irrelevant once they engage in a conflict with the player's character.

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SCENE INTERPRETATION EXAMPLE

The player is setting up a new scene, and decides that investigator Arthur Falcone's scene goal is to arrange a meeting with a local crime family, to get a client out of trouble. The player sets it up as an obstacle scene: Arthur wants to make peace, not start a fight.

The player could have set the place or key person at the scene, but decides to roll instead. The place (d20) is "cellar/basement". The random scene qualities (d100) are "crowded", "breezy", and "P: hate/anger". For a person (d100), he rolls "army/marine soldier".

A crowded basement full of angry people? After considering it, the player asks a yes-no question: Is the place a drug den? The player thinks "basement" and "crowded" scene qualities suggest it, and shifts likelihood one category above 50/50 moderate, to likely. The player rolls, and the answer is no.

The player now resorts to the second thing that comes to mind, again increasing the likelihood from 50/50 moderate to likely, as it aligns with scene qualities: Is it a dive bar? The player rolls, and the answer again is no. So the player invokes "the rule of three" (see *rule of three: third guess is the charm*, chapter 8). The player rules without rolling again that the place is an illegal gambling establishment and moves on with the story.

WINDOW DRESSING EXAMPLE

Once the player set the scene as a gambling den, the player can tie together the elements, and add whatever else makes sense as window dressing through free-form exposition. The player makes a mental picture of the place and jots some notes. There are cramped poker tables, the foul mood of a crowd that's losing money. Stale cigarette smoke is blown around the room by noisy ventilation ducts in the low-ceilinged basement. The "soldier" is a clean-cut but dangerous-looking bouncer at the basement door. A few cocktail waitresses make their rounds without much enthusiasm, from a cramped bar serving watery drinks out of cheap plasticware.

The player closes the exposition. Once the scene starts, anything that wasn't included in the description (e.g., presence of a roulette wheel, or security cameras, or a rear emergency exit) needs to be added through yes-no questions, if it's important to the story.

obstacle scene. A foe also can be handy to help the player ask for trouble. To sum up, foes don't just exist to fight. They can be ripe fodder to help drive skill checks in a scene and help move it forward.

Depending on the setting and play style, foes won't immediately and always fight to the death. Foes are by definition hostile, but they might not want to fight at all. Instead of capturing, hurting or killing, their goal in a conflict might be to intimidate, or humiliate, interrogate or just observe the player character's group. Foes who are confronted by a superior force might choose to negotiate or flee. Clever foes may try to be discreet and bide their time, waiting for an opportunity to make their move. A foe might not have the opportunity to attack in the current scene, but might be brought back by a randomly rolled unexpected event in a follow-up scene.

scene interpretation and window dressing

After generating all the elements that go into a scene - a place, three scene qualities, and possibly a person, item, and/or foe - the player needs to use logic and creative interpretation to pull together what the scene should look like. Don't take keywords for persons, scene qualities and items too literally. Consider the underlying concept, abstract it, and interpret it in a way that makes sense for the scene. For example, "blowing winds" on a space station could be an overactive ventilation duct. "Rainfall patter" could be the sound of sands shifting in a desert breeze, or television white noise in a living room, or the gentle rustle of a wheat field ready for harvest, or a bubbling garden fountain. "Aunt/uncle" can represent any well-disposed, older person who is familiar to the player's character, or to an ally or another person of interest in the scene. A "former love" or "childhood friend" might be someone who reminds the player's character of the same.

To set the scene, pull the story elements together in a way that makes sense. If there are many possible interpretations, the player can use a yes-no question or two to decide which to use. Take the most likely and assign a possibility (usually "likely" if the scene qualities

line up behind the player's idea for the scene, or "50/50 moderate" if not). If the yes-no question comes back yes, go with the primary concept; if no, go with the alternative concept. If the second most likely idea also comes back no, the third most-likely explanation is always right. This is known as the rule of three: Keep moving forward rather than get bogged down with yes-no questions.

When establishing the scene, consider time of day or season of year if that's relevant. The player can choose to roll optional setup window dressing (up to four d10s) on the action sheet, to round out basic details about whether the scene is broadly warmer/colder, drier/wetter, flatter/hillier, or (in a civilized area) has more/fewer people than the player expected for the scene.

After pulling together a scene that makes sense, the player uses free-form exposition to tie the story elements together. Anything narrated into the description that isn't a keyword (a place, scene quality, person, item or foe) is called *window dressing*. Window dressing doesn't have the magic power of scene qualities: It doesn't influence skill checks or shift the likelihood of yes-no rolls. Window dressing does let the player's character use skills in the scene that might otherwise be off limits. For example, scene qualities might not mention a body of water, but the player could describe a lake in the scene as window dressing. Because the player narrated the lake into the scene before the action started, the player can draw on the lake during the scene, letting the character make skill checks for swimming, boating or watersports. Or a conflict could happen on or in the water. Window dressing can include items, crowds or background people that aren't individually interesting to the story, and any kind of environmental factors that make sense.

After the scene starts, the player can only add more window dressing after confirming its existence with a yes-no question. For example, a player narrated a scene at a farmhouse, but later wants the farmhouse to have a trellis for the player's character to climb to a second-story window. The trellis wasn't part of the window dressing before the scene started, so the player needs to ask a yes-no question to add that detail, which now would be important to the story, retroactively.

PLOT STRESS IN ACTION

Let's go back to the start of Arthur Falcone's mission. The player set an initial cutscene where impulsive businessman Peter Havik-Stand assigned him a mission to investigate the suspicious death of wealthy millionairess Greta Havik. Plot stress started at 0 before the scene was set up. After setting up scene qualities and the patron, and adding window dressing by exposition, the player adds the standard 5 points to plot stress for opening a scene. The player also asked two yes-no questions to clear up details about the scene before starting it. Each yes-no question added 1 plot stress, so the scene opens with 7 plot stress.

To open the scene, the player tests plot stress (d100). The player rolled 43, higher than current plot stress of 7, so the player starts the cutscene as is.

The player is using structured questions for persons to guide the conversation in the cutscene. There is no need to roll a yes-no question about whether Peter has a mission for Arthur in a starting cutscene: The answer is automatically yes. The player rolls up the mission (d20) and gets the result "investigate". The player decides to roll a random person (d100) to be investigated, and the result is "aunt/uncle". These rolls are not yes-no questions or skill checks, so plot stress is still 7. The player arbitrarily decides to run with "aunt": There's no roll, and that decision by the player does not affect plot stress.

To narrow the focus of the investigation, the player asks the following yes-no questions: "Is the investigation regarding a crime?" The player sets the chance at likely since this is a modern noir setting, and the rolled result is yes. For a follow-up question the player asks: "Is the aunt the perpetrator?" The player sets the likelihood at 50/50 moderate, and the rolled result is no. The player concludes if the aunt was not the perpetrator, she was the victim. The player has another follow-up yes-no question: "was it a crime of passion?" The player sets the likelihood at 50/50 moderate and the rolled result is answer is no. The player concludes that the crime was about wealth, not passion. At this point, the player likes the feel of a murder mystery, but decides to call the death suspicious for now. None of the *(cont'd)*

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three yes-no questions roll results were below 8, 9 or 10, respectively, so there have been no triggers for unexpected events. Plot stress is now 10.

The player decides to ask two more structured questions. The first is about payment. The player decides Peter will pay Arthur his usual retainer, so asks the yes-no question "does the person offer extra valuables for completing the mission?" The player decides the question requires a 50/50 moderate negotiating skill check for success, considers the consequences of failure (Peter would shut down and end dialog). If the player rolls and succeeds with the skill check, it lets the player follow up with a yes-no question to see if Peter has the funds to afford giving Arthur a financial bonus. The player assesses the roll for this yes-no question is very likely to succeed, rolls, and the result is yes. Plot stress is now 12 - one from the skill check and one from the yes-no question - and the roll results triggered no unexpected events. Skill checks do not test plot stress, and the player rolled higher than 12 for the yes-no question.

The player decides to press Falcone's luck and asks whether Peter would provide an ally, an assistant to the investigation. The player decides that requires another 50/50 moderate skill check using negotiate; the result is no, which fails. With failure comes a consequence: Peter is offended (as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Peter's trait is that he's impulsive). The player narrates that the patron shuts down and won't provide any additional help or information. Since the roll failed, the yes-no question about whether Peter will supply an ally, never gets asked. The skill check increased plot stress to 13.

The player now tries to close the scene. To shut it down without an unexpected event requires a plot stress roll (d100). As long as the roll is 14 or higher, the scene shuts down as expected. If the roll is 13 or below, it will trigger an unexpected event that is applied in the scene. That would cut the level of plot stress in half, rounded down to 6. The player would need to deal with the unexpected event before the scene can be closed.

Whatever the result, the total plot stress at the end of the scene carries over to the next scene.

plot stress

Plot stress is key to the GM engine. Each time the player starts a new scene, plot stress increases by 5 points. Every time the player asks a yes-no question, or the player's character performs or is involved in a skill check (in combat, each round the player's character acts counts as a skill check), plot stress increases by 1 point.

The player makes a test against plot stress (d100) before opening any scene, before closing any scene, and every time the player rolls a yes-no question (d100). Whenever the player's character participates in a skill check it also increases plot stress, but doesn't test it. If the stress test result is equal to or lower than the current level of plot stress, it triggers an unexpected event (d20).

For example, if current plot stress is 21, the player asks a yes-no question and rolls a "13" result, that roll both answers the yes-no question and triggers an unexpected event. Triggering an unexpected event cuts plot stress in half, rounding down. In this example, plot stress would drop from 21 to 10. If the roll hadn't triggered an unexpected event, rolling the yes-no question would have increased plot stress from 21 to 22. Triggered unexpected events should happen immediately or in the same scene. If it does not happen in the same scene, it forces a follow-up scene (p.53-54). A list of unexpected events is on the action sheet and in appendix O and P (p.138). More about each type of unexpected event is in appendix 1 (p.118).

Sometimes an unexpected event (d20) roll result doesn't make logical sense. In that case, just cut plot stress in half and disregard the event: nothing happens. Other times, an unexpected event will trigger when the player tests plot stress to close the scene: When that happens, the player needs to keep the scene open and resolve the fallout of the event first. It's possible for an attempt to close out a scene to start a whole new round of yes-no questions and skill checks, ramping up plot stress again, triggering more unexpected events. Once outstanding unexpected event(s) are resolved, the player can close out the scene. Plot stress carries over from one scene to the next. Closing a scene with high plot stress makes it likelier an unexpected event will happen early in the next scene.

wrapping up a story

At the start of a session, the player sets the length of the story by deciding how many meaningful successes are needed to resolve the story with a positive outcome. Two meaningful successes is a good starting point: That is challenging enough to tell an interesting short story with a few twists. Requiring three or four meaningful successes makes for longer, more involved stories. A story that needs more successes probably best involves a journey or quest, described in chapter 14's optional rules.

Not every story ends with a positive outcome for the player's character. The player can decide at any time not just to throw in the towel for a scene but to quit the whole mission and accept defeat for the player's character. That can happen when the player's character suffers too many setbacks, and the player runs out of ideas for viable new scenes. Or the player's character may become badly hurt in a scene and the story can't go on without downtime to recuperate. It's possible the player's character dies. Short of that, the player can hold out hope that no matter how bad the scene setbacks get, the character might succeed in a follow-up scene with a daring turnaround of fortunes.

It's not mandatory, but it is good practice for the player to wrap up any mission with a brief final cutscene. The final cutscene lets the player focus on the rewards to the player's character for success, or on the ultimate consequences of failure for the mission. It's also an opportunity for closing dialog that wraps up loose ends through yes-no questions, maybe helped along with a skill check or two. Sometimes plot stress can turn up one or more unexpected events in that final cutscene, which might become a final surprise plot twist.

Whatever way the player decides to end a story, it's a good idea to save the details of the storyline and any persons involved. Past adventures can be rich fodder to bring back recurring friends and allies, face down old rivals, or call in favors with known patrons and contacts that have evolved their relationships with the player's character. In this way, stories can build on each other and become richer and more meaningful over time. ☺

FINAL CUTSCENE EXAMPLE

Back to Arthur Flacone's mansion obstacle scene. In the end, the player managed to secure a second meaningful success for Arthur Falcone by passing three different, moderately difficult skill checks and asking for trouble three times in the scene. With that second meaningful success, the player now can wrap up this short story with a positive outcome. The mansion obstacle scene included Arthur accusing one of the persons on the scene of millionaire heiress Greta Havik's murder. The player had Arthur start a punch-up in the scene. In that skill challenge Arthur got his clock cleaned.

For the aftermath, the player decides to set up a closing cutscene between Peter Havik-Stand, who initially assigned the mission, and our investigator. After setting up the scene and rolling against plot stress for unexpected events, the scene opens. The player has the opportunity to use structured questions for persons with Arthur's patron to wrap up loose ends in the story, mixing skill checks and yes-no questions. The player might ask yes-no questions of Peter about whether the police found enough evidence to charge and convict the suspect. A no result suggests the suspect somehow got off, and walked free. The player could ask a yes-no question about this, or also about anyone else complicit being apprehended, if the player feels it's important to help wrap up the story. The player might have Arthur try to make a negotiate skill check with Peter, if successful followed up by a yes-no question, to see whether his patron is willing to put in a little something extra in that paycheck to help pay Arthur's hospital bills.

The player can use the closing cutscene to add up final rewards and expenses for the player character's side. As part of that, the player should also figure distribution of rewards, valuables and experience to any allies that took part in the story. Chapter 6 covers how to distribute treasure and experience, and how to handle advancement for individual and team/minion allies.

Besides wrapping up loose ends, the closing cutscene is a final opportunity for unexpected events -- helpful or harmful -- triggered by plot stress to come into play, a possible final surprise plot twist.

WHAT IS A POSITIVE OUTCOME?

The player can wrap up a mission with a positive outcome after racking up the number of meaningful successes set up before the story began.

After playing out a series of scenes, the plot could be in a very different place from anything the player expected at the beginning. Narrating a positive outcome doesn't have anything to do with reaching the outcome the player might've thought at the start of the story. A positive outcome just means two things: First, the player can narrate generally good things that happen to the player's character in the aftermath. Second, the character gets full experience and gets paid, if there were rewards or valuables for completing the mission.

If the player quit the mission, that means no experience or other rewards for completing the mission. The player's character might get some experience and rewards from individual scenes with meaningful success, from completing side goals, and from incidental valuables and rewards found along the way. But the player must also narrate the ultimate consequences of the mission failure, which might get wrapped up with consequences from individual scenes where the player threw in the towel.

For example, if Arthur Falcone finished his investigation mission successfully, the murderer may have gotten away, but Arthur made enough progress for Peter Havik-Stand to be satisfied. The investigator gets paid, and the relationship between the investigator and his patron remain strong.

If the player quit the mission, the narration might be that Peter is livid. Arthur stepped in it, and Peter's reputation in turn is damaged by Arthur's brash actions. The criminal got away, and Arthur's punch-up is ending in a lawsuit.

Even when the player quits a mission, there are usually still some small side benefits. Arthur may have new contacts for future stories for example, and damage to Arthur's relationship with Peter Havik-Stand can recover. Still, failure to accomplish the mission should mean a painful story ending for the player's character.
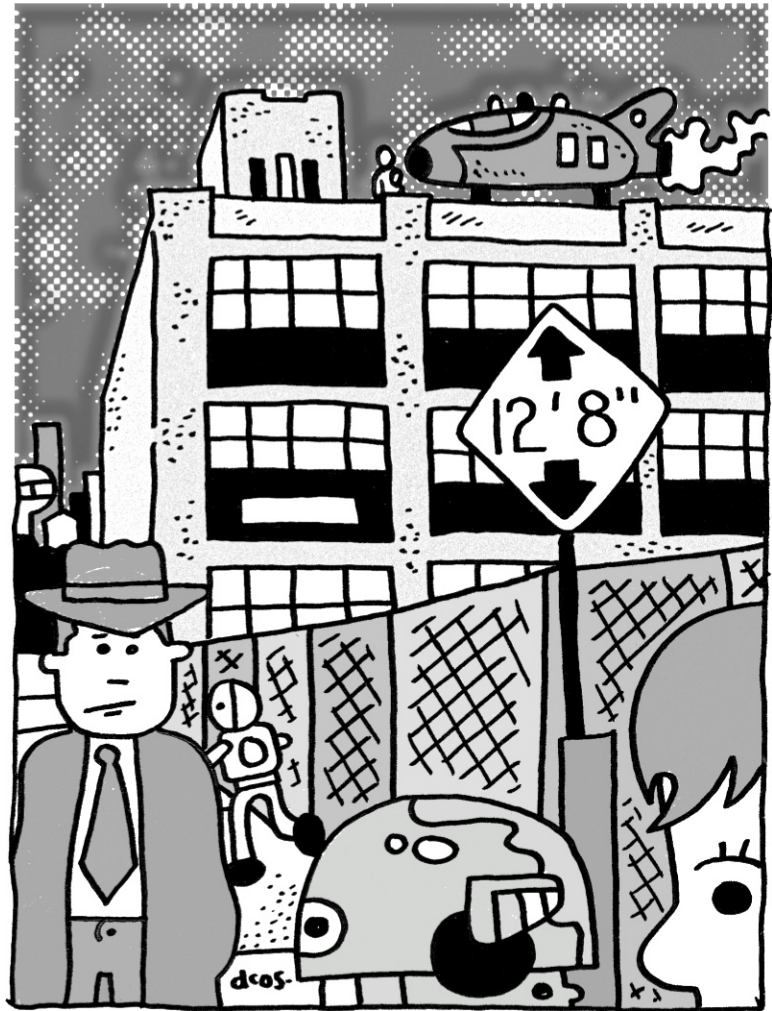
«Achieving a positive outcome doesn't mean the story is resolved in a way that the player might've originally expected...»

3) YES-NO QUESTIONS

When the player's character moves through the scene, the player will have questions about the environment around the player character's group. The scene's keyword elements (place, scene qualities, person, foes, and/or item), and the window dressing set up before the start of the scene, are sure things. Other question can come up about things happening and further details about a scene. The player can resolve these by asking yes-no questions.

The player uses yes-no questions to answer anything unknown that becomes important for the player to know about the scene. Is there a bridge across the chasm? Is there an airplane in the hangar? Is the door guarded? Does the witness speak French? The player takes a best guess at the probability based on what's known about the scene and setting, and picks up the dice. If the roll result is yes, the player can fill in details based on what makes the most sense for the story. Add some free-form interpretation, and yes might mean the chasm is spanned by a rickety planked rope bridge; there are some small propeller planes and helicopters in the hangar; the door is guarded by video surveillance; or the witness took some French language classes in college.

Use yes-no questions when there are two or more possible answers, each of which takes the story in a different direction. Based on the logic of what has come before and makes sense in the story, the player judges which choice is most likely to be true, and guesses at the probability: nearly certain (95% yes), very likely (80% yes), likely (65% yes), 50/50 moderate, unlikely (35% yes), very unlikely (20% yes) or nigh impossible (5% yes). The player then rolls d100 to see whether the answer is yes (true), or no (false). The yes-no question table is on the action sheet and in appendix Q (p.139).

Every time the player asks a yes-no question, it increases plot stress by 1. Every yes-no question roll result at the same time tests current plot stress. If the d100 roll result for a yes-no question is equal or less than the current level of plot stress, it triggers an unexpected event (d20), and plot stress is cut in half, rounding down. Unexpected events are listed on the action sheet and in appendix O and P (p.138). There is more information about each type of unexpected event in appendix 1 (p.118).

JUMP-STARTING THE GAME

If you'd rather start directly with how yes-no questions work in actual gameplay, look up the summary rules at the end of the book (p.159-164) for flowcharts with instructions how to ask yes-no questions. The summary rules include page references so you can look up rules details as you walk through gameplay.

SAMPLE YES-NO QUESTIONS

Here are some sample yes-no questions and the player's assessment of likelihood for the answer to be yes.

"Does Slobodan Dragovic appear to be polite and cooperative?" Unknown. 50/50 moderate.

"Does Slobodan have an alibi for the evening of Greta's death?" Seems likely. 65% yes.

"Does Wesley the butler seem visibly unsettled by the line of questioning?" This started at unknown, 50/50 moderate. It shifted up to likely, 65% yes, because of the scene quality influence of "anxiety/fear". The player should have to make a successful empathy skill check for the player's character first, before asking this question.

"Does Wesley the butler agree to let Arthur rifle through his personal quarters?" This is an example that isn't a yes-no question. Instead, this is a contest that requires a successful social skill check by the player's character to get Wesley to comply. see chapter 4 for more about skill checks.

"Have the rugs been cleaned by the help since Greta Havik's death?" With such a large working staff in the mansion, seems likely. But is the question significant or even relevant? If the answer is not important to moving the plot forward, just decide rather than roll.

"Are the rugs currently wet?" Given the scene quality of "rain" outside, seems likely. Since "rain" is a scene quality, it then shifts that 1 more category to very likely. See *qualities and yes-no questions* sidebar on the next page. Note that this example as well as the previous one are yes-no questions that create window dressing. The former might refine "rugs" window dressing into "clean rugs"; the latter would alter the "rugs" window dressing into "wet rugs."

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QUALITIES AND YES-NO QUESTIONS

Here are examples of how scene qualities can influence yes-no questions. Each scene quality may shift the likelihood of a yes-no question by 1 category in either direction, based on whether it aligns or contradicts with the question.

"Is the help cooperative when Arthur says he is investigating Greta Havik's death?" 50/50 moderate, raised to likely for the scene quality of "anxiety/fear".

"Did Wesley the butler track wet footprints into the room?" Normally there would be no reason to ask. But it is raining. The player still assesses it as unlikely, then shifts likelihood up to 50/50 moderate because "rain" is a scene quality, shifting likelihood 1 category.

"Does Arthur hear anyone in other rooms of the mansion?" That would require a skill check with a penalty because of the scene quality of "rain": The sound interferes with the listening attempt. If the skill check is successful, the player probably should shift the yes-no question of exposing unknown visitors down 1 category, reasoning that the rainstorm is keeping travelers away.

RECONCILING WINDOW DRESSING

You might think this section about yes-no questions to create window dressing contradicts itself.

On one hand, it says if the answer isn't important to the story, don't ask a yes-no question. Just make a call and move on.

On the other hand, after a scene starts, the rules say window dressing can't ever be brought into a scene without asking a yes-no question to create it.

Which is it? The player "makes the call" (doesn't ask a yes-no question) if scene qualities or window dressing already point to an answer, and the answer isn't too important. Think of it as embellishment, not new story elements.

If the player wants something additional on the scene for reasons that are important to the story, and it's not already inferred by what's on the scene, that's adding window dressing. That requires the player to ask a yes-no question, assess the likelihood and make a roll.

yes-no questions to confirm assertions

The trick in asking yes-no questions is to start by thinking about the nature of the scene, and the story. Based on the setting, what has gone on before and what is happening now, what is the most likely answer? Whether or when to ask a yes-no question is subjective. It depends on what's important about the story to the player, and on things that might potentially affect the player character's group.

Here are some guidelines for asking yes-no questions:

First, does the outcome of the yes-no question roll affect the story? If not, don't roll. Make an arbitrary decision and move on. Just like how role-playing games don't fret over how characters lace their boots, there's no sense (usually) in asking if a gallery room's paintings are by Paul Gauguin, or if a grocer has persimmons for sale. If it's not important, make a call and move on.

Second, does the question open up at least two possible, branching answers? There's no need to ask a yes-no question if there isn't an obvious alternative. For example, the player might start a scene with the player's character looking for a crime gang's hangout, but then ask: "Did my character find the crime gang's hideout at this location?" A no result only makes sense if the player has something else in mind that could happen in that scene instead: No could mean a trap and ambush; or the scene introduces a new crime faction into the investigation; or maybe the bust is a crime gang branch but not its headquarters. Whatever the answer, the player should think about what yes means and what no means before picking up the dice. If there is only one right answer to move the plot forward, that's the answer.

Third, does the question make sense in the context of the story? If something isn't reasonably likely to happen based on what's come before, then there is no point in rolling: The answer is no. Players can't use yes-no questions to have their characters find cash or equipment just lying around, or to have total strangers volunteer to do favors for the player character's group. Obtaining cash and gear or gaining trust should take skill, work and perseverance.

Even with setting information and guiding tropes, there are often situations where the player has no way to decide what the probability of a yes-no question should be. In those cases, set the odds at 50/50 moderate, and let the dice fall where they may.

yes-no questions to add window dressing

Yes-no questions often add window dressing -- persons, items and descriptions -- to a scene after it has already started. Before any scene starts, the player adds window dressing freely by narrating and jotting down notes about the setup. Window dressing can tie into those scene quality keywords. It might add nuances, and should never directly contradict any keywords (location, scene qualities, person, foes or item). Once a scene starts, whatever wasn't written down as window dressing is not in the scene, unless it's obviously inferred from what's already there. For an example of something obviously inferred, a sailboat can have a tiller, ropes and anchor; a modern-day store will have items on shelves, shopping baskets/carts and checkout counters. If an element isn't obvious to the scene, and it becomes important to know if it's there after the scene has started, the player must ask a yes-no question to add the extra window dressing.

Setting the probability for new window dressing is like asking any other yes-no question. The player looks at what's already known about the scene, modifies the likelihood by any helpful scene qualities, avoids contradicting scene qualities, asks the yes-no question and rolls the dice. The player character's group can fully interact both with scene qualities and window dressing, for example to make skill checks. But scene qualities are magic, and can shift the likelihood of yes-no answers; window dressing does not. More about that next.

probability shift: the magic of scene qualities

Scene qualities have a special role in scenes. These keywords are fundamental plot hook elements, and they can help or hinder the player's rolls. In terms of yes-no questions, each scene quality that aligns, shifts the likelihood of yes/no questions up (meaning more likely) by 1 category. Each scene quality that opposes a yes-no

SAMPLE WINDOW DRESSING ADDS

Here are some examples of how yes-no questions might introduce window dressing into a scene after it has started.

"Is Slobodan Dragovic wearing a hat?" 50/50 moderate. If there isn't a point to this question, don't even ask, make a call - he wears a beret - and move on.

"Is there a kerosene lamp next to the curtains?" Seems foolish, so very unlikely, and definitely not lit.

"The help that's gathered here: is there an electrician among them? A plumber?" Unknown, therefore 50/50 moderate.

"Is there a bell-pull in the mansion's grand foyer for summoning the help?" Seems likely.

"Is the floor wet and slippery?" This is a compound question (p.51). The scene quality of "rain" outside suggests 50/50 moderate, which the scene quality shifts to likely. The second element "and slippery" reduces likelihood by 1 shift, back to 50/50 moderate.

"Is a gun hidden underneath the cushions of one of the sofas?" Unless there is reason to ask -- such as a missing gun -- nigh impossible: The question shouldn't even be asked.

MIXING YES-NO, SKILL CHECKS

The following are examples of skill checks, followed by yes-no questions in case they are successful.

"Does Slobodan appear to be telling the truth?" Requires an empathy social skill check: if successful, maybe 50/50 moderate.

"Is Wesley carrying a concealed weapon?" A notice skill check, very unlikely to succeed; raised to a likely notice skill check if Wesley can be talked into being searched. If successful, it seems unlikely at best.

"Does Arthur get Wesley to give his honest opinion of Slobodan in private?" Requires a skill check using savvy; if successful, it's possible to shift up to likely, if the player decides Wesley is influenced to cooperate by the scene quality of "anxiety/fear".

"Can Arthur snatch Slobodan's wallet without him noticing?" This is a trick question. It's okay for the player to infer Slobodan has a wallet. Usually the player would assess the probability and make the skill check. But in this case it's a smart attribute skill check to determine whether Arthur *can* pull it off, followed up by a yes-no question to assess the likelihood of success.

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question shifts the likelihood down (meaning less likely) by 1 category. Scene qualities have a similar effect on skill checks. They provide a bonus to a skill check for each quality that aligns, and a penalty for each quality that conflicts. In the game's RPG rule terms, each scene quality shifts the difficulty up or down by one category. Scene qualities that don't directly complement or contradict a yes-no question have no effect on probability. Appendix 6 (p.127) shows how different types of scene qualities might affect yes-no questions or skill checks. More about how skill checks work, including how they interact with scene qualities, is in chapter 4.

Window dressing does not have the magic that scene qualities do for shifting probabilities. Window dressing can make a yes-no question or a skill check possible, and help set a base probability for success. But window dressing never provides an extra magic bonus/penalty to yes-no questions or skill checks.

For example, if window dressing described a lake in a scene, the player could ask during the scene if the lake is stocked with fish. The player might assess the probability at 50/50 moderate. But if "lake" is a scene quality keyword, any question directly related to the lake (presence of fish, boats, swimmers) shifts by 1 category more likely. Another scene quality like "cold" might drop the probability of warm-weather activity like swimmers by 1 category. The player would already assess a low starting likelihood for swimmers because of the natural aspect of cold weather, and then have another shift penalty for the magic of the scene quality. A "stormy" scene quality could drop the likelihood of swimmers and boats. Again, the player first assesses the likelihood of those things present during stormy weather; then the "magic" of the scene quality shifts the probability 1 additional category. If the story had the window dressing of "winter" in a cold climate, that doesn't provide a magic shift, but the player might rule out swimmers or boating completely. On the other hand, window dressing of "winter" would let the player later ask a yes-no question about the lake being frozen, if it becomes important to the story, and if it wasn't already specified as window dressing before the start of the scene.

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yes-no questions and skill checks

Chapter 4 covers skill checks, and shows how to mix skill checks with yes-no questions. When it comes to mixing skill checks with yes-no questions.

To sum up here, there are cases where the player can't easily ask a yes-no question, because the answer is hidden or unknown. The player first has to create the circumstances that make rolling for a yes-no question possible. Examples include a structured questions dialog and gathering information; or searching for a secret door, compartment or traps. The player can't know in advance if the person has valuable information, or if there is anything to be found by searching.

The way to solve this chicken-and-egg situation is always to make any relevant detection or information gathering skill checks *first*. The player asks yes-no question(s) only *after* the relevant skill check succeeds.

The reason to make the skill check first is because there is always a consequence if the skill check fails. The answer is never just: "the player's character doesn't find a secret door". It might be as simple as: "the player's character wastes time working on this task. It took long enough that (some bad thing) happens during that time". If the skill check succeeds, *then* the player can assess the likelihood that there is important information to be revealed, or that there is something worth finding. Pick up the dice, ask whether something interesting was uncovered, assess the likelihood and roll the yes-no question.

After detecting something that was previously unknown, the player often needs to roll one or more follow-up yes-no questions, starting with a broad outcome that is most likely, maybe honing in on the answer with a follow-on question. For example, what sort of important information might the interrogated prisoner most likely know? Or what item (either rolled randomly or selected) might be in the secret compartment? Or what place was the secret door intended to conceal? A successful yes-no question roll might generate a randomly rolled or chosen place, person, ally, foe, item or rationale, as appropriate to the original, successful detection skill check. ☺

YES-NO QUESTION/SKILL CHECK MIX IN ACTION

Investigator Arthur Falcone is questioning Wesley the Butler in private, to try and get incriminating information out of him about Slobodan Dragovic. The player makes an intimidate skill check first. If the roll succeeds, Wesley breaks down in interrogation. The player can then ask one or more yes-no questions about whether/what the butler actually knows, if anything, about Slobodan Dragovic's secrets. The player sets the probability for that yes-no question at 50/50 moderate, since it's unknown whether Wesley has anything useful on Slobodan. If the yes-no question result is yes, the player could roll and interpret a rationale (d20), as an insight about Slobodan's behavior. The player might then use one or more yes-no questions to nail down what the rationale roll means.

If the interrogation succeeded and the follow-up yes-no question result is no, Arthur Falcone finds out that Wesley didn't know anything useful about Slobodan. But if the original interrogation skill check failed, there's no chance to ask the yes-no question, and the skill check failure carries a consequence. Options might be for Wesley to clam up, or possibly threaten to contact the police and complain about Falcone. Getting the police involved in the scene might be a good option to help the player ask for trouble (covered chapter 5).

When asking a question about something hidden or unknown, it's always skill check first, yes-no question(s) to follow up only if the skill check is successful. It's easy to mix up the order by accident. It seems more natural to ask the yes-no question first, and then make the skill check second to try and bring that information into play.

If you play out of order, don't worry about it. To use the example above, if Arthur's intimidate skill check succeeds, roll up a rationale (d20) that Wesley reveals to explain Slobodan's behavior, and use yes-no questions as needed to refine. A failed skill check, as before, carries a consequence. Just try to avoid asking the yes-no question: "does Wesley know anything?" first, have the answer come back "no", and then use that knowledge to ignore the butler.

4) SKILL CHECKS

JUMP-STARTING THE GAME

If you'd rather start directly with how skill checks work in actual gameplay, look up the summary rules at the end of the book (p.159-164) for flowcharts with instructions how to use skill checks. The summary rules include page references so you can look up rules details as you walk through gameplay.

SKILL CHECK RULES IN THE GM ENGINE

Why are skill check rules included in the Libre Solo Role Playing GM engine part of the game, when skill checks and conflict resolution can come from third-party RPG rulesets?

   This chapter is about how to think through and apply skill challenges with the GM engine using any ruleset. It addresses how to think up challenges, gauge and set difficulties; when to roll, and when and how to apply modifiers; what happens when skill checks succeed or fail; and how skill check mechanics should work together with the GM engine's tools like yes-no questions and plot stress.

   When it comes to making the actual skill checks, use your RPG ruleset of preference, whether that's the included RPG ruleset or a third-party system.

In every scene, the player's character takes actions that move the plot forward. If that action is challenging and has a significant risk of failure the characters involved need to make a skill check to succeed. To set up a skill check, the player sets a difficulty for the challenge, based on what is known about the scene. If there are no clear guidelines to gauge how hard a skill challenge is, default to moderate difficulty. Moderate difficulty is: "An average character for the setting with some training and talent has a moderate chance of success." In Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG rules, that is a 50/50 moderate (0 shifts) chance of success. One of the two criteria to achieve meaningful success in an obstacle scene is to succeed at three different skill challenges, each of at least moderate difficulty for the player character's group.

A successful skill check moves the plot forward in the trajectory the player intended. If the skill check fails, there are always consequences, and those involved in the failed skill check suffer a risk or setback. Each time a player makes a skill check that includes the player's character, successful or not, increase plot stress by 1. A skill check does not test plot stress. That is, a skill check roll never triggers an unexpected event.

assessing difficulty

How hard is it to jump a 10-foot gap, or to convince a group of bandits to stand down, or to dig up a clue buried in research documents? It's subjective, but the player does have two guidelines for assessing the difficulty of a skill check. First, look at the default power level of the setting. A superhero or pulp adventure story should allow daring feats that wouldn't be possible in a realistic, or grim and gritty story. Second, look at the abilities of the player's character: A trained athlete and a child math prodigy will have some very different talents. If there is no obvious answer how hard a skill challenge should be based on the scene and setting, the default should be moderate difficulty.

For a skill check to contribute to a meaningful success, it must be at least moderate difficulty measured against the skill of the player character's group. There's nothing wrong with skill checks that are easy, but they don't

count toward meaningful success in a scene. The player may need to crank up the difficulty of a skill challenge so that it counts towards meaningful success. A player can always decide to narrate harder skill checks that are up to the task of challenging the player character's group.

Here's how it works in practice, with the child math prodigy as an example. Let's say this player's character is a crack expert at computers and security systems. If there's no other information about the challenge, defeating a security system defaults to "moderately difficult for an average hero with some training." For the child prodigy, a skill check to defeat a normal security system is a breeze. But if it's not a challenge, it also doesn't count toward meaningful success. To qualify a skill challenge around disabling security for meaningful success, the player will need to bump up the difficulty to match the child prodigy's abilities. The player can narrate factors that help to turn the skill check into a moderate challenge for the prodigy, to make the skill check count.

Now let's say later in the scene, the same child math prodigy needs to climb over a chain link fence. Without any other information, that challenge also defaults to "moderately difficult for an average hero with some training". Unfortunately the child prodigy plays to stereotypes and is untrained in athletic skills. With all the player character's penalties, it turns out that a skill check to climb that wall is very unlikely to succeed. The player can't ease up on the default moderate difficulty just because it's a weakness to the player's character. The odds are heavily stacked to failure. But in the off chance the skill check succeeds, it would count towards meaningful success. The player considers the consequences of failure, probably a bad fall. Instead of making such a risky skill check, the player starts brainstorming for alternatives.

skill checks: the magic of scene qualities

Relevant scene qualities can help or hinder skill checks. If a scene quality aligns with a skill check, it provides a bonus and makes the skill check easier to succeed. Appendix 6 (p.127) gives examples of different types of scene qualities, and how they might help or hinder skill

THIRD PARTY RULES & DIFFICULTY

In Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG ruleset, it is easy to tell what a "moderate difficulty" skill check means. It is a 50/50 moderate or less likely chance of success. But what does a "moderate difficulty" skill check look like in third-party RPG systems? The rule of thumb is that the character making the check should have about a 50% chance of success - slightly higher if the player is being generous.

In a 20-sided dice RPG, that might mean a skill roll difficulty of about 12-15 for starting player characters, counting their ability and/or proficiency bonuses. That same 12-15 difficulty is not going to be a challenge to an experienced player's character: The player will need to raise the difficulty so that skill check rolls will contribute to meaningful success for the scene.

RPGs that use percentile-based dice, for example, can work like this: For skill checks below 50% chance of success, the player just rolls regularly. If the skill check succeeds, it contributes to a meaningful success. If the player character's skill level is higher and the player wants the skill check to contribute to a *(cont'd)* meaningful success, then the challenge needs to be more difficult. A character skill of 60%-80% might need to accomplish a harder task, meaning a roll penalty of -20% or 2/3 skill. A character skill of 80%-100% might need to accomplish a very hard task, meaning a roll penalty of -40% or 1/2 skill.

For a 2d6 system where players roll high to succeed, the target number for a roll to contribute to meaningful success might be 8.

For a 3d6 system where players roll under their skill level to succeed, a skill below 11 or 12 would contribute to a meaningful success with an unmodified roll. Characters with a skill of 12 or higher need enough penalties for the roll to lower their effective skill to 10 to 11 or so, if they want the skill check to qualify toward meaningful success for the scene.

When it comes to handling special game rules for bonuses and re-rolls - brownie points, bennies, hero points, advantage, etc. - that's all fine, as long as it is kept contained to skill checks and conflicts of the RPG ruleset and isn't used to re-roll yes-no questions.

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THIRD PARTY RULES AND SCENE QUALITIES

Scene qualities that align with an attempted skill check provide a magical bonus. A scene quality that runs counter to an attempted skill check makes for a penalty. There is going to be wide variation from one RPG system to the next, in terms of interpreting the right levels for bonuses and penalties for skill checks. A bonus or penalty in your RPG ruleset of choice should be about the equivalent of one category shift on the yes-no question chart: from roughly 50/50 to two-thirds chance of success, three quarters chance of success, and almost certain success; or to one-third chance of success, one-quarter chance of success, and almost certain failure.

In a d100 system, each bonus or penalty might be +/-15%; in a d20 system, each bonus/penalty might be +/-3. For a 3d6 system, a +2 or -2 to effective skill seems about right. In dice pool games, it may be a difference of a success or two, depending on the typical dice pool size for the game.

Many rules-lite games have a standard bonus/penalty size to cover a range of factors (e.g., generic +/-2). In these types of games, each scene quality can apply that game's standard bonus or penalty.

SCENE QUALITIES AND THE LIBRE RPG RULESET

The example in the main text notes a base chance of success at 50/50 moderate. It shows how scene quality bonuses make the skill check likely or very likely to succeed, and how penalties make the skill check unlikely or even nigh impossible to succeed.

For Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG rules paired with the GM engine, each complementary scene quality shifts the difficulty 1 category easier, and each conflicting scene quality shifts the difficulty 1 category harder, using the yes-no question table in appendix Q (p.139) and on the action sheet. The player uses the same probability table for both yes-no questions and skill checks: *(cont'd)*

checks. If a scene quality runs counter to a skill check, it imposes a penalty, making it harder to succeed. The bonus or penalty from scene qualities is magical: it doesn't count against the difficulty to qualify for a meaningful success.

This ability for scene qualities to give bonuses or penalties, without counting against difficulty needed for meaningful success, makes them very valuable. For example, let's say a player's character is trying to hide from foes. It's a moderate challenge for the player's character, meaning a base chance of 50/50 moderate: That skill check happens to be hard enough for the player's character to qualify towards meaningful success. If there is a scene quality of "shadowy", the player can use that quality for a bonus shift, making the roll more likely to succeed. If there was a second complementary scene quality like "foggy", that could provide a second bonus. The modifiers to the final skill roll could make a moderate challenge likely or even very likely to succeed. Thanks to the magic of scene qualities, that successful skill check still qualifies as a meaningful challenge, even if scene quality bonuses made success easy.

Scene qualities cut both ways. If instead there are scene qualities such as "well-lit" or "wide open spaces", those turn into penalties that make the skill check harder, maybe even nigh impossible. Even if the category shift makes the final roll unlikely to succeed, it doesn't count toward meaningful success unless the original skill check (before applying the magic penalties from scene qualities) was at least a moderate skill challenge to the player's character.

Window dressing does not provide bonuses or penalties in the way scene qualities do. Window dressing can let the player character's group make skill checks that it otherwise couldn't. In some cases, the player can assess that window dressing makes a skill check easier or even unnecessary for a player's character. But window dressing is never magical. That is, it doesn't change the rule that skill checks must be at least moderately difficult to contribute to meaningful success in a scene.

For example, a player's character can't use swimming skill if there isn't something to swim in. A lake, river or pool as window dressing to a scene makes these skill checks possible. Or the player of the child math prodigy brought up earlier, faced by a chain link fence, might ask a yes-no question to add a hole in the fence as window dressing. That hole in the fence might swap a climbing skill check, with an agility-related skill check to squeeze through, giving the player's character a better chance to succeed. If the skill check drops below a moderate challenge for the average heroic character for that setting, it no longer contributes toward meaningful success. So, if the player decides that squeezing through the fence hole is easy for an average heroic character, the skill check won't count toward meaningful success even if it's challenging for the player character's child prodigy.

Players are best off focusing their player character's stories around skill challenges in categories where those characters are competent. In a category where the player's character is weak, default skill challenges that are supposed to be moderately hard can end up being much harder, and unlikely to succeed. Which is as it should be: A player's character with a background of car racing, for example, is supposed to play out scenes that lean on those strengths.

shifting skill checks

There's often more than one way for the player character's group to overcome an obstacle. The player should be creative in dealing with skill challenges, trying to play to the player character group's strengths. A player's character might not want to try and leap across a chasm if the consequence for failure risks a long fall to death, for example. Maybe there is mountaineering equipment on hand, with ropes and pitons to lower down one side of the rift and ascend the other. If there are no time constraints, the player has shifted the skill check to one where the character has a better chance of success, or at least less deadly consequence options for failure.

When a skill check shifts from one type of challenge to another, the default should still be moderate difficulty for an average hero with some training. But shifting to a

nearly certain (95% chance of success), very likely (80% chance of success), likely (65% chance of success), 50/50 moderate, unlikely (35% chance of success), very unlikely (20% chance of success) and nigh impossible (5% chance of success).

Regardless of bonuses and penalties, the probabilities for success don't go above nearly certain or below nigh impossible. If the skill roll likelihood goes off the charts at either end of the scale, it caps at nearly certain and nigh impossible. At that point the player might want to review if it still makes sense to roll. The player could just declare the effort a success or failure without making a skill check and move on. That way the roll doesn't add to plot stress, and if the attempt is nigh impossible, it doesn't saddle the player character's group with the consequences of almost certain failure.

MORE ON CONSEQUENCES

When a skill check is successful, the plot moves forward in the trajectory the player intended. If a skill check fails, there is always a consequence. Before picking up the dice to make a skill check, decide (or at least have an idea) what success looks like, and also what the consequences of failure might mean. There is nothing wrong with having several possible consequences in mind. There's always the option to follow up with one or more yes-no questions to choose among consequences if the skill check fails, though that does also drive up plot stress.

For example, failing a mountaineering skill check can mean a fall. But it could also mean spending a long amount of time on the rock face and suffering exposure to the elements, or attracting unwanted attention while vulnerable on the mountainside. Or the player character's group might use up or break the climbing gear, making it impossible to use again that scene, and being expensive to replace. Whatever the odds, the player should always have at least one clear idea for a consequence of failure before picking up the dice to make any skill check.

EXAMPLES WHEN NOT TO ROLL

Here are some sample skill checks where there's no point in rolling: Just make the call and move the story forward.

Arthur Falcone is hurrying to catch a train while carrying a heavy suitcase. Do not make a skill check if missing the train means he takes the next one on the schedule: That is no consequence. But if the suitcase contained top-secret plans, and Falcone's failure to catch the train means he is cornered by goons who are after him, then make the check; there is a meaningful consequence for failure.

Another example would be Falcone's pushing through a crowded area: Failure to traverse? That makes no sense. But if the investigator shadows a suspect and failure means losing the trail, there is a purpose: Make the skill check.

A final example of not rolling is if Falcone were to try and break into a secure bank vault. The investigator has no safe-cracking skills and no tools. He has no realistic chance of success, and the player shouldn't roll. The player should have Arthur try another way, like recruiting an ally with special skills to assist.

SOCIAL SKILL CONSEQUENCES

Arthur Falcone is meeting a local contact at a diner in the hopes of digging up information. He fails the social skill check to get what he wants from his contact. Whatever happens, it's not "Arthur learns nothing."

An example of failing forward with a complication: Maybe Falcone's contact is suddenly uncommunicative. The player decides this calls for a follow-up notice or empathy skill check. A success can prompt a yes-no question, for example, to ask if a buddy of the local crime boss - or maybe Arthur's rival Emily Chan - just sat down in the opposite booth (this sort of question could also qualify as asking for trouble, covered in chapter 5). Whatever the reason, it can't be good. If Falcone fails to make that second skill check, the matter should get more serious, fast. *(cont'd)*

different approach might let window dressing affect the skill check's difficulty, or it might let the player draw on magic modifiers from scene qualities. The player might draw on the player character group's equipment, or could add new window dressing to change the skill check's difficulty. But again, only scene qualities are magical and can shift difficulty without disqualifying a challenge from contributing to meaningful success. If the player lets equipment or window dressing drop the skill check's challenge below moderate difficulty, it no longer counts toward meaningful success.

when not to roll

Like with yes-no questions, think about what the skill check is going to accomplish before picking up the dice. Does the skill check merit a roll? What does success mean in terms of moving the plot forward? What are the consequences of failure? If there is no significant consequence for failure, don't bother to make a skill check, just narrate success or failure and move on. No dice are rolled, plot stress doesn't increase, and there is no chance to contribute to meaningful success in the scene.

Some examples include a character chopping down a tree or catching a train at the station. Normally, there is no consequence for 'failing' to chop down a tree (the player's character gets tired, takes longer than expected, accidentally slips with the axe, or is hit by the falling tree? No. Just no.) There needs to be progress with success, and consequence for failure. If the player's character is felling a tree to cross a chasm and escape a pursuing wolf-pack, that works: Taking longer than expected has an immediate and serious consequence. Or maybe the player's character at the train station is chasing a fleeing suspect already on board. Pick up the dice and roll only after figuring out the consequences of failure.

consequences of failed social skill checks

It's straightforward why most physical skill checks are important. The in-game consequences for failing social skill checks aren't so obvious. Failure to sneak risks being seen; failure to climb may mean a fall. But what about a failure to gather information or negotiate a deal?

As with any other type of skill check, the result for a failed social skill check is never just "no". There is a consequence. Ideally the failure moves the action forward, but not in the direction or the way the player wanted. The failure might create a complication that forces a different skill check with higher stakes at risk. For example, failing to intimidate a bystander might have him phone the police, who might dispatch a car. That's good, but it's more immediate if the bystander calls out the player's character, ruining any chances of social skill checks with others for the rest of the scene. Or the bystander might have some friends nearby who step in against the player's character. A second option for failure in social situations is to create a complication that makes another attempt possible, but steps up the stakes, making success more difficult and failure more dangerous. A third option for social skill checks is to make failure squeeze by as success that comes at a steep price (it does not contribute toward meaningful success).

There is no one correct or best way to assess what a consequence should be. The player should choose the consequence that makes the most sense for the skill check, creating a setback for the player's character and/or dialing up the threat level. The player should always have an idea of possible consequences for failure before picking up the dice to make a skill check. If the skill check fails, the player can resort to yes-no questions for which consequence to use, or how to apply the details.

exposing the unknown

Chapter 3 on yes-no questions first brought up the idea of mixing skill checks with yes-no questions. Certain types of skill checks can reveal something formerly unknown. Detection and perception skills help find hidden things. Interrogation, intimidation, diplomacy and negotiation can reveal information. In a solo game, it's a chicken-and-egg situation. How can a skill check find a hidden trap, a secret compartment or withheld information, things that the player can't know about?

Here's how it's done. The player divides any question that reveals the unknown into two parts. The first part is the skill check to see if finding the thing (e.g., getting

An example of failing forward that steps up the threat level: Maybe Falcone's contact gets offended about the line of questioning, as it might hit too close to home. Falcone could then have a second chance with a social skill to smooth things over, but as a harder challenge. A success could turn things around, and his contact could still open up with the information Arthur wants. A second failure could mean Falcone's contact storms off and informs the local crime boss all about the investigator. Or better (worse) since it's more immediate, the frazzled contact may draw a weapon; or may point to backup muscle or to a newspaper reporter backing up the contact from the other side of the room; or even worse, the contact is at that moment grotesquely executed by a drive-by shooter, leaving Arthur with a dead body in his booth, and potentially a big police issue and legal mess.

An example of failing forward as a costly success (not to be confused with actual skill check success): Falcone's contact is at first offended, but the investigator manages to defuse things by opening his wallet, handing over a stack of bills to the contact, and promising him a favor in the future. Despite the failure, Falcone gets the information he needed so that the plot moves forward, but he is also $200 poorer.

If an idea for a consequence seems a stretch, or you have two or more more good ideas for consequences, yes-no questions can help choose which one to use. Estimate the likelihood that the most probable conjecture is true, pick up the dice and see whether it is confirmed. Use the rule of three (p.50) to keep the story flow moving.

As the examples above show, there is no one correct or best way to fail forward, and any situation can have many different possible approaches to deal with failure. The key is when things go wrong, there are consequences, and the player should have in mind what those consequences might be before picking up the dice to make the skill check.

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STRUCTURED QUESTIONS EXAMPLE

Arthur Falcone started the investigation into millionaire heiress Greta Havik's untimely death by talking to his patron, Peter Havik-Stand. We've covered earlier how the cutscene worked in relation to plot stress. Now we'll look at it in terms of how the player used structured questions for persons to run the scene.

Note again that structured questions for persons are a guideline and don't represent actual dialog. The player can use the results of structured questions to narrate the content and tone of the conversation between the player's character and other persons. An improvised dialog can help bring in new, creative ideas.

For example, the conversation between Arthur and his patron Peter Havik-Stand starts with pleasantries: Arthur asks how Peter's family is doing, Peter inquires about how business has been for the investigator.

Arthur eventually gets around to the subject of the meeting: "So you called because you'd like my help? You said it was something important." That's the structured question prompt of Peter's mission for Arthur. Since it's the first cutscene, this is not a yes/no question roll: The answer is automatically yes. If this hadn't been the first cutscene, the player might choose instead to start the conversation by having Arthur ask about getting more assistance: That could be a request for equipment, an ally, a contact, or information about possible places and foes.

The player rolls on the mission (d20) table, with the result "investigate"; the player decides it's a person (d100) to investigate; the result is "aunt/uncle" and the player arbitrarily chooses "aunt". The player clarifies with a few follow-up questions. "Is the investigation regarding a crime?" - result: yes. "Is the aunt the perpetrator?" - result: no. "Was it a crime of passion?" - result: no. At that point the player decided, rather than rolled, that it was a crime related to wealth. It would take another yes-no question to see whether Peter knows this detail, but since the player didn't have Arthur ask, the player didn't make another roll. *(cont'd)*

information, searching a place, researching an item) is successful. Remember that success moves the plot forward in the way the player expected, and failure comes with a consequence that deals a setback to those involved in the skill check.

If the skill check succeeds, the second part is asking a yes-no question to see whether there was something hidden that is now revealed. Because it is a yes-no question, the answer can simply be no, without needing any further details or having any consequences. No can mean the player's character (or ally) investigated the place, item or person to satisfaction, and found no hidden secrets or concealed information.

If the skill check and the follow-up question returns yes, it does reveal something hidden. That might be a piece of information like a rationale, or an additional item or valuables, or maybe a hidden person or place. The player might have to ask more yes-no questions to refine what is found, which drives up plot stress. Depending on what the searcher is looking for, the final thing revealed might be a person or foe, a rationale, an item, a place, a mission, a trait or perhaps something else. It could be the actual thing the player's character is searching for, or else information about that thing such as a person's or item's identity or location.

Add it all up -- the skill check, the initial yes-no question that something is revealed, and any follow-up yes-no question(s) that narrow down just what was revealed -- and the player will quickly find that trying to expose the unknown too often will ratchet up plot stress. That's as it should be. The player should investigate tactically for hidden things, at points where the results have a good chance of success and help move the story forward.

structured questions for persons

The structured questions that a player's character can ask persons of interest is on the mission sheet, and also in appendix 7 (p.128). It's probably clear by now that structured questions are a form of exposing the unknown, mixing skill checks and yes-no questions. Structured questions are the game mechanics behind the dialog, not

the dialog itself. It represents the points in a conversation where the player's character makes key requests from another person on the scene, which may require a skill check to succeed before the player can ask a yes-no question to see whether the request can be granted.

Regular persons generally should not volunteer information or hand over resources to the player's character or group freely. Unless there's a good reason the person would help the player's character (or the request is trivial), the player should require a social skill check to get any other person to divulge private information, or to help out. Depending on the player's character and the nature of the dialog with the person of interest in the scene, some structured questions won't be relevant or appropriate and shouldn't be asked at all.

As with other forms of exposing the unknown, trying to grill every person of interest in every scene for information will spike plot stress fast. The player selects a structured question, makes a social skill check, if successful asks a yes-no question whether the target person knows anything. If the answer is yes, the player might roll for a place, person, item, foe, rationale, etc., then make additional yes-no rolls to narrow down the information. That's why the player is best off using select structured questions, and asking them conservatively: Focus on questions that have a good chance of success, that might reveal the most meaningful information to help move the story forward.

structured questions for foes

Structured questions that the player's character can ask foes are on the mission sheet, and also in appendix 7 (p.128). Generally, foes are only going to engage in dialog after they have been defeated in a conflict, and/or have a good reason to cooperate. Even if they can be made to talk, foes never share useful information easily. The player's character should need to make a separate, successful social skill check for each structured question asked. The consequence of failure means the foe stops cooperating completely at best, or might try to flee or becomes hostile. More information about structured questions for foes is in chapter 7 on encounter scenes. ☺

The player interprets these yes-no question rolls as the conversation between Arthur and Peter turning darker. "My elderly aunt went missing a few weeks ago. They just found her body in a nearby lake," the wealthy businessman glowers. "I don't think the police are going to do anything about it, but I trust you will get to the bottom of this, and help me bring anyone responsible for this crime to justice?" Note how the player was free to embellish: A mention of a lake isn't a scene quality or window dressing, since it isn't in this scene. The player should take a note about this off-the-cuff thought. It might be handy to bring in as window dressing for a future scene.

The player decides to skip any structured questions about a rationale, item or place. The player already planned for there to be an extravagant Havik mansion and estate, and decides to introduce these details in future scenes as they happen.

For dialog, the player imagines that Arthur listens carefully, then asks: "This sounds like it could be involved and dangerous. I think I could use something extra for this case, and maybe an advance?" In structured question terms, the request is: "does the person offer extra valuables for completing the mission?"

The player decides that calls for a negotiate skill check that succeeds, then asks the yes-no question about an extra reward, with the roll result yes.

Peter hesitates for a moment, then says: "I understand, Mister Falcone. I'll increase your usual pay. But I expect regular status updates. You can imagine how important this is to me." Note again how the player improvised and embellished the dialog. Regular status updates seems like a reasonable request that the patron would ask, so the player runs with it and makes a note. Again in game terms, the statement doesn't affect anything in this scene. But it could always come into play in a future scene.

And so the dialog goes. Structured questions help guide the conversation to those key pivotal points of questions and requests, where game mechanics - skill checks and yes-no questions - matter in the scene.

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5) ASKING FOR TROUBLE

A player naturally wants the player's character to succeed. Usually that would mean staying away from any yes-no questions that might bring up a problem or create a setback for the player character's group if the roll result is yes. That's where asking for trouble comes in.

For example, imagine a player's character is trying to duck out a back exit (window dressing established earlier in the scene) to escape a foe group. The player wants the character to get away, so the last thing the player would want to ask is a question like: "is the door locked?" or "is there a guard posted on the other side of the door?"

To qualify any obstacle scene for meaningful success, the player needs to ask for trouble at least three times in the scene, in the form of yes-no questions that risk creating new problems or setbacks. The player wins meaningful success for an obstacle scene only after the player's character is involved in three different, at least moderately difficult skill check successes; and after asking for trouble through yes-no questions with at least 50/50 moderate likelihood of causing a problem or setback, three times (regardless of whether the roll result is yes or no).

Just as with ordinary yes-no questions and skill checks, scene qualities have a magic influence on asking for trouble. Each quality that aligns with the yes-no question shifts the probability by 1 category more likely. Each quality that conflicts with the yes-no question shifts the probability by 1 category less likely. If the original yes-no question was at least 50/50 moderate before any magic shifts from scene qualities, the roll contributes toward meaningful success in the scene. In terms of plot stress, asking for trouble is like any other yes-no question. It tests current plot stress that can generate an unexpected event, and increases plot stress by 1.

If there is a bright side to asking for trouble and having the roll result come back yes, it's that when things go badly, it is an opportunity for the player character's group to rally with skill checks to try and overcome the challenge. Asking for trouble and getting it can help the player guide an obstacle scene toward meaningful success.

ASKING FOR TROUBLE EXAMPLES

Here are some common questions related to asking for trouble. The player's assessment of likelihood for the answer to be yes is typically 50/50 moderate (i.e., unknown), before applying any shifts from relevant window dressing and scene qualities. Asking for trouble creates a problem or deals a setback if the result is yes.

If the player's character is trespassing or in hostile territory: *Did someone see (or hear)? Does someone recognize the player's character (or an ally)?*

If the player's character is trying to move between locations in the scene: *Is the way blocked? Is a portal locked, barred, alarmed? Is the way guarded?*

If the player's character successfully gathers information: *Is the information incorrect? Has it been planted? Is it a red herring?* (this question separates player knowledge from character knowledge, and the player's character should act upon the false information or bad lead. It could lead into a trap, for example).

In conflicts: *Is the weapon stuck? Does it jam? Does the foe have high ground? Cover? Reinforcements nearby?* (these yes-no questions add window dressing that specifically aid the foe or rival).

In hot pursuit: *Does the bad guy have a ready getaway car? Did someone complicit with the bad guys steal, sabotage, slow down or disable the player character's vehicle or gear?* (More yes-no questions that add window dressing aiding the rival or foe).

With valuables and items: *Is it just costume jewelry? Is it counterfeit? Is it damaged? Is it bugged, traceable or trapped?*

TROUBLE FROM STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

Here are some examples of how structured questions for persons can ask for trouble. These examples are not the strongest, because they're not in any context. If the yes-no question roll asking for trouble comes back yes, ideally, the problem or setback should happen immediately or later in the same scene. If that isn't possible, any trouble that doesn't get addressed in the current scene forces a follow-up scene to resolve the outstanding issues (see p.53-54). Yes-no questions that don't risk a knock-on effect, don't qualify as asking for trouble.

Before starting a structured questions dialog. *Does the person speak/understand the same language? Does the person mistrust the player's character or a group ally? Is someone else eavesdropping on the conversation?*

"What does the person need?" and "what is the reason behind that need?" *Does the person try to deceive or misdirect? Is there an actual mission agenda that's different from the one assigned? Is there a different, secret rationale behind the assignment?"*

"Does the person supply premium equipment for the mission?" and "will the person provide/be an ally for the mission?" *Is the supplied equipment incomplete, unreliable or flawed? Does the patron or ally expect something major in exchange for loaning the equipment?*

"Is there another person(s) to contact with more information" This is a case where it does not make sense to ask for trouble: If the information is false, or the other person is compromised or has a hidden agenda, that is a factor that can play out as asking for trouble by exposing the unknown. That way, the information can have an immediate effect at whatever time it gets revealed.

Many of these examples point to subterfuge or possible double-crossing. The player might consider having the player's character make a skill check after asking for trouble to detect hidden subterfuge, via an empathy type of skill check. Keep in mind that whether asking for trouble or not, the proper order for exposing the unknown should be to make the skill check first, and only ask the yes-no question about uncovered information if the skill check succeeds.

exposing the unknown: detecting trouble

The concept of exposing the unknown was covered in chapter 4. To recap, the player first rolls a skill check (often some kind of detection or social skill) to see if something hidden might be revealed. A successful skill check lets the player next ask a yes-no question to see if something was there to be found, and if so, to ask additional yes-no questions to hone in on the details of that hidden or secret thing.

Checks to expose the unknown can tie into asking for trouble. Secret things aren't always valuables or helpful information. What about the terrible truth, the hidden trap, or the unexpected assault? The shock reveal is a classic horror trope. Consider the lone investigator out in the woods at night or in a dark alley, looking around with a dim flashlight, listening for phantom noises in the darkness. Whether or not the player wants to try for a successful detection skill check, this is a great time to go for it and follow up by asking for trouble. If the investigator made the listen skill check, asking for trouble may reveal the investigator is not alone. A follow-up yes-no question or two can gel what danger lurks in the dark.

unintended consequences

Chapter 4 stressed that whenever the player's character fails a skill check, there are consequences. A successful skill check means the action succeeded, and the plot moves forward the way the player intended. The player can ask for trouble whenever the player's character succeeds with a skill check, to see whether there is a detrimental side effect from the success. If asking for trouble's roll result is yes, it creates a success with a setback: an unintended consequence. As always, the player should have the unintended consequence in mind before picking up the dice. That means looking at the bigger picture after a skill check succeeds to consider possible unexpected fallout.

One common unintended consequence of a successful skill check can be drawing unwanted attention. Whatever that unwanted attention triggers, the consequence should happen immediately or later in the same seen, or else the outstanding trouble will force a follow-up scene.

persons, trouble, and persons in trouble

Persons in a scene, and especially the player character's allies, are great fodder when it comes to asking for trouble. As mentioned earlier, every person (ally, rival, and others) get a trait (d20) when first introduced, which is the player's guideline to that person's behavior. A player can ask for trouble with allies based on drawbacks around their traits. An ally who is loud, boisterous or gregarious might blab when he or she should be quiet. A cautious or cowardly ally might hesitate or flee in the face of danger. Unflappable or heroic allies might seem like a good thing, but might take up causes and stand their ground when the player wants the player character's group to flee, surrender or negotiate. Appendix 8 (p.129) outlines positive and negative qualities for each type of trait, which the player can use as a guideline with a scene's window dressing modifiers, and of course also to ask for trouble.

The player can ask for trouble through the actions of a player character's ally or another person on the scene. For it to qualify toward meaningful success for the scene, the effect must have consequences that also affect the player's character. For example, if an ally jumps in front of grave danger as a sacrifice to help the player's character flee to safety, that's not asking for trouble. It *is* asking for trouble if the player's character is compelled to save that person, whether that means trying to drag the ally out of danger; or standing with the ally in solidarity against dangerous foes they might otherwise have escaped.

trouble from unexpected events

Unexpected events (d20) are triggered by a roll that's below the current level of plot stress whenever it is tested: When opening or closing a scene, or whenever the player asks a yes-no question. There is a wide range of unpredictable effects that fall under unexpected events. People can enter or leave the scene; it can trigger positive or negative actions based on the traits of people on the scene; a foe may enter the scene; or scene qualities can intrude in a helpful or harmful way. The player may need to ask one or more clarifying yes-no questions around an

ALLIES IN PLAY AND FOR TROUBLE

Arthur Falcone and his ally, the unflappable (her trait) aide Toni Graham, broke into Havik mansion at night and are looking for clues in the basement. At the start of the obstacle scene, the player expected that the duo's three skill checks would be sneaking downstairs, lockpicking a door, and then noticing an important clue.

That's not what happened. The player got Arthur and Toni downstairs successfully, but rolled abysmally for skill checks after that. Among the consequences, the player narrated success with a setback: Falcone's lockpicks jammed in the doorlock - snap!

The player is still trying to resolve the scene with meaningful success, but Arthur still needs to succeed at some skill checks to move the obstacle scene forward. The player decides to ask for trouble: "Will someone take this opportunity to try and take out Arthur Falcone?" The player's yes-no question roll result is yes, and follow-up yes-no questions fill in the details: Someone has rigged the furnace and boiler to explode. But first the player narrates the obvious without rolling: The lights go out, because that's what happens to investigators sneaking around at night in basements. ("I think someone knows we're here," Toni whispers to Arthur in the darkness).

Playing on Toni's unflappable trait, the player again asks for trouble with a yes-no question: "Does Toni go off on her own to look for the circuit breaker?" If that happens, the player could have Arthur try a social skill check to talk her out of it (but remember, to make this skill check the player also needs to come up with a real and immediate consequence for failure).

There are plenty of other options: Arthur and Toni could make a smart attribute skill check to find their way back to the stairs in darkness; one or both could make a notice skill check to hear the furnace kicking into overdrive, warning of the danger; if they find their way to the basement exit, the player could again ask for trouble: did whoever rigged the boiler also lock the door? Arthur and Toni may need to break down the door to escape.

Whenever Arthur is involved in a skill check (alone or assisted by Toni), it increases plot stress; success can count toward meaningful success for the scene. Toni can make skill checks alone, but those neither increase plot stress nor contribute toward meaningful success.

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WHY "WILL SOMEONE TAKE OUT ARTHUR"?

In the prior example of asking for trouble with an ally present, the player phrased the yes-no question as: "Will someone take this opportunity to try and take out Arthur Falcone?" The player ran with that premise.

There are plenty of ways to ask for trouble. But there were specific reasons why the player chose to phrase the question this way.

The player could have asked: "Do the lights go out?" while Arthur and Toni are in the basement. That looks like a setback, but it's not. By itself, it doesn't accomplish anything besides leaving our investigators in the dark. It's not really a threat and if Arthur or Toni have a flashlight, it's not even an inconvenience.

The context here is that Arthur and Toni are investigating a murder. The pair has been snooping around the mansion, interrogating staff, and the murderer is still at large. That seems like a ripe situation for a would-be killer to strike again.

The player could have asked: "Does the boiler explode?" instead of deciding that the rigged boiler is on the way to overheating. There are two problems with this version. The first is that is that boilers don't just blow up. Asking: "Is someone trying to kill Falcone by making the boiler explode?" is a compound question (p.51), which is possible but inelegant.

The second reason why that question's phrasing is problematic, is that if the boiler blows up without warning, it's a terrible consequence and an abrupt end to the scene. About the only response the player character's group might have is to duck and cover for a better chance to survive the blast. The intent of asking for trouble is to create a serious new problem or setback, not instant death.

In a different genre (let's say a superhero game, for example), explosions without warning happen, and that might be fine when asking for trouble. The player might follow up an explosion with a surprise assault on the heroes, where the player character's group must choose to defend themselves or escape. The intent of trouble is a setback or consequence that amps up the pressure and creates new challenges for the player character's group.

unexpected event to refine what happened, and the effect on the scene. Any follow-up yes-no questions to clarify an unexpected event are like other yes-no questions: They test current plot stress, and add 1 plot stress. It's possible to trigger a second unexpected event while asking yes-no questions for a first unexpected event.

The player can also use those clarifying yes-no questions after rolling an unexpected event to ask for trouble. Just imagine the worst possible outcome for the rolled result, one that creates a setback or new threat for the player's character, and ask it as a yes-no question.

trouble weak sauce

Look out for yes-no questions that look like they ask for trouble, but coddle the player's character or even give a back-handed advantage. Asking for trouble doesn't count if the yes-no question does not create a new problem or risk a near-immediate and serious setback that affects the player's character.

A player asking the yes-no question "are the guards awake?" before the player's character tries to sneak past isn't asking for trouble: Guards aren't supposed to be sleeping! At best, the player's question adds new window dressing. It might be legitimate to ask this yes-no question if the guards have a rationale like "tired/rest/sleep." But even with that rationale, the yes-no question doesn't ask for trouble, it's trying to bypass trouble.

For another example, if a player's character is running away from a foe group, asking "do the foes pursue?" isn't asking for trouble. If the foes are superior and can chase a fleeing player's character, then that's what they do. If there is a reason the foes might not pursue -- they are wounded, or have a rationale of "anxiety/fear," or are slow or mindless -- then it can make sense to ask a yes-no question to see what happens next. But again, that question does not ask for trouble, because it does not introduce a setback or new threat. It would be another case of the player trying to bypass trouble instead of asking for it. ☺

6) ALLIES AND RIVALS

It's a dangerous world out there, filled with skill checks that have serious consequences for failure, and with foes that stand (or shamble or crawl) in the way of a player character's mission and goals. The player roots for the protagonist -- the player's character -- who is the center of the story and the main force driving the action forward. But the player's character doesn't need to face the mission alone. Anyone who teams up with the player's character, making up the player character's group, are *allies*. Barring unexpected events, dismissal by the player's character, or the fates of a dangerous world, once allies are on board they stay until the end of the mission.

A player can find and recruit allies for the player's character from several sources. One option is to ask the person who assigns the mission in a starting cutscene to assign, or possibly her-/himself be, an ally for that mission. The player can also set up cutscenes at any time during the mission and use structured questions with a person of interest to request them to supply, or be, an ally. If the player has one or more patrons -- a person or organization that the character belongs to, which is part of the player character's background -- that's an obvious source to ask for allies and other assistance. The player can build a cutscene to have the player's character meet with a patron, who might be a person or representative of the player character's organization, and use structured questions for persons to ask for aid.

Another place to find and recruit allies is past friends and associates from the player character's background. As with patrons, use a cutscene and structured questions for persons backed by social skill checks to have a dialog in the scene. The player can ask if the past friend or associate is available and willing to help with a particular mission. A third, remote possibility is that an ally just might appear in the middle of the mission through a randomly rolled unexpected event during a scene. It's rare to run across a new or known ally in a scene, but it can happen.

recruitment

No matter how the player goes about it, recruiting a new ally should should always mean first making some sort of

THE PLAYER CHARACTER'S GROUP

The terms "player's character" and "player character's group" are used interchangeably in this book. The player's character is the center of attention in Libre Solo Role Playing. But the player can have one, two, or a whole coterie of allies that, plot-wise, play supporting roles in scenes. What do allies do, and why would the player want to use them? Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG ruleset has its own ways to use allies, but in any RPG game system, allies can help the player in these ways:

They aid skill checks. A group helping each other can do more than the player's character alone.

They can complement the player character's skills. For example, a scholar or naturalist ally can lead skill checks where the barbarian-style player's character would be hopelessly lost.

They increase the chances to win conflicts. Encounter scenes aren't balanced against the size and skill of the player character's group. This is intentional. If the player wants to use encounter scenes regularly, recruit a larger group to make it more survivable.

They absorb damage. In a worst-case scenario for a conflict, the player can decide to sacrifice allies to protect the player's character from harm. That might give the player character's group extra chances to overcome foes, or gives the player's character a chance to flee.

They can cause trouble. Finally, allies can and do act on their own. The GM Engine assigns each individual ally and team/minions a trait, which guides behavior. Traits can help with skill checks but the player can also use traits as a source to ask for trouble. Asking for trouble is covered in chapter 5.

What are the any downsides to recruiting allies?

It takes time and effort to recruit. The cutscenes and dialogs used to recruit allies increase plot stress, which risks triggering more unexpected events.

They earn an equal share of rewards. At the end of the mission, experience and valuables are divided among the group. A large group can cut deeply into the take for the player's character.

RECRUIT A NEW ALLY: EXAMPLES

Let's say Arthur Falcone works with his regular patron, Peter Havik-Stand, on a new mission. Arthur asks Peter to supply people to help in the mission, makes a successful social skill check, asks the yes-no question whether Peter can provide these resources and the roll result is yes.

The player rolls on foes (d20) and gets the result of "vehicles/mounts". Arthur is in a modern-day setting and doesn't ride a horse, so the player might loosely interpret this as some travel resources that Arthur can call on during the mission: a rental car, boat, charter flight or plane tickets if he needs them.

The player might have rolled "automaton": While in other settings it might be a combat robot or golem, the player might interpret the roll for this investigative setting as access to an extensive research database, and help from a data analyst to run searches. "Powerful entity" might be a representative of the precinct head of the police or a retired beat cop who can pull strings.

If the roll result is some kind of minion, the player would swap that roll with an equivalent weak or average quality team. A brute or powerful entity could translate into an average or talented NPC.

Any individual or team NPC result gets a culture and occupation roll: a majority/native culture might mean people from the same city, while others might be allies from out-of-town or foreigners. A fighter/warrior result might lean toward either streetfighters or ex-military; officers/special forces might be law enforcement of some kind; and so forth.

In the modern-day setting, depending on the mission context, the player could for example interpret culture and occupation rolls of an ally that is "far-away" and "religious/inspirational" to be a missionary from South America; or new-age paranormal specialist from New Zealand; or a religious leader, or a civic special interest representative; or a fanatic whose cause aligns with that of the mission; or just a superstitious hired hand.

Whatever the final result, be sure to generate a trait for each individual ally or ally team/minions, to get a direction for guiding behavior.

(usually social) skill check. If the social skill check to recruit the ally succeeds, the player then follows up with a yes-no question asking whether the ally is available to join the player's character for the mission.

Under structured questions for persons, the question "will the person provide (or be) an ally for the mission?" is like other types of skill checks exposing the unknown. As with any other yes-no question, assess how likely it is that the ally is available to join the mission; set the default odds at 50/50 moderate. The player might raise the yes-no question to likely if, for example, the ally is a close friend from the player character's background. If the patron or ally might provide much more aid, you may use a chaining question to try and recruit many allies from one request (p.53). Depending on the type of mission and the relationship with the player's character, the player might also decide that any negotiate skill check to recruit the ally is more or less likely to succeed, and that the follow-up yes-no question to check the ally's availability and willingness to help could be more likely or unlikely.

If the player described the ally as a person in the player character's background, the player probably already has vital statistics for that ally. If the player's character is making a general appeal to a contact for help, the player should roll randomly for the type of ally that shows up. Generate a random ally using the same table as random foes (d20), but the rolled result becomes part of the player character's group. As with rolling up foes, a team or minions result is a force with d10 members. The player should roll or choose a culture and occupation for any ally result that is marked as "%".

If the player successfully brings back a team or minions from a past story, the player has the option to bring back just the surviving members from the last story, or else to roll a fresh d10 for the current number of members in the team or minions available to the player's character. If the player rolled a fresh d10 of members, they should be a mix of old comrades and new recruits that join the player character's group for the mission.

The player might have to interpret the foe (d20) roll to turn it into an ally result that makes sense. A result of

captives might mean a team of noncombatants, for example. Minion foes in a fantasy setting might mean goblins, redcaps or zombies. If those types of options wouldn't be acceptable allies to the player's character, substitute the roll with an equivalent team result, then either roll for culture and occupation or assign what makes sense. For example, if the player's character makes an appeal to local mercenary band for help and they supply a weak quality team, the ally team's occupation probably should be generalists or warriors (low-end sell-swords), and their culture should probably be local. The local mercenary band won't supply a randomly rolled group of scholars from exotic far-off lands.

allies and traits

Each individual or team/minions ally gets a trait (d20), which guides behavior. Some traits might look more appealing than others. For example, a "heroic" ally seems better to have than a "treacherous" one. There are benefits and drawbacks to each trait, noted in chapter 5's *persons, trouble, and persons in trouble* (p.37). Traits are listed on the action sheet, and more details about the benefits and drawbacks of each trait are in appendix 8 (p.129).

A player can use ally traits as window dressing to help change the odds of skill checks, and also to ask yes-no questions about their behavior. Allies are a good source to ask for trouble. An ally's personality traits can also come into play at other trigger points, for example when an unexpected event happens.

allies and skill checks

The player can always choose to let one or more allies take point and make a skill check without the player character's involvement. That might be, for example, to compensate for the player character's weaknesses in some skills. More cynically, the allies making the skill check can shield the player's character from a dangerous outcome, for example the consequence of failure when defusing a bomb.

Another possibility is for the player's character and one or more allies to combine efforts for one skill check. One

ALLIES AND PLOT STRESS

To illustrate when to, and when not to increase plot stress for skill checks, and whether a skill check can contribute toward meaningful success in a scene:

Arthur and Toni are trying sneak into deceased Greta Havik's boudoir to look for clues. The player decides to roll two sneak skill checks separately. Arthur's (the player character's) check increases plot stress, and may count toward meaningful success. Toni's (the ally's) check neither increases plot stress nor counts toward meaningful success. If Toni's skill check fails, it's up to the player to figure out what happens next, but there is a consequence for Toni. Probably she makes a noise heard by house help that comes to investigate. While the failed skill check only affects Toni directly, Arthur may also need to deal with the fallout of Toni's failed skill check.

Arthur and Toni try to break down a door together: In this case Arthur is the primary and Toni is assisting. The check increases plot stress and can count toward meaningful success. The consequence of a failed skill check (e.g., attracting the wrong kind of attention, or suffering a minor injury that prevents the pair from re-trying this kind of physical attempt) would affect both Arthur and Toni.

Later, Toni is conducting research on some pills they found in Greta Havik's boudoir, assisted by Arthur. Toni is the primary for this skill check and Arthur is assisting. Since the player's character is still involved, the check increases plot stress and may count toward meaningful success. The consequence of a failed skill check (e.g., getting entirely wrong information about the pills and/or someone possibly finding out about the search) will affect both Arthur and Toni.

It's possible for some types of skill checks to be separate rolls or one group roll. For example, Arthur and Toni might search an area for clues individually; or they might work together for a single roll. It depends on the player's taste and the RPG ruleset. Whatever the player's decision, any failed roll carries a consequence for the player's character and/or allies that fail. The roll may only contribute toward meaningful success for the scene (and increases plot stress) when the player's character is involved in the roll.

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MORE ON SHARED CONSEQUENCES

Here are a few more examples of consequences and how they would be shared among the player character's group.

Arthur Falcone and his assistant Toni Graham separately try to sneak past the Havik mansion's servants into deceased Greta Havik's boudoir to look for clues. If either fails the skill check, only that character makes noise and is heard by the help, who comes to investigate. Arthur and Toni are together, so even if only one was heard by the help, both have to deal with the fallout.

Later, Toni and Arthur team up to try and move a bookcase to see what's behind it. The player asks for trouble with a yes-no question that notes the bookcase is top-heavy. A failed skill check brings it crashing down as a consequence, the noise alerting everyone in the mansion. Based on the trouble, the player might also decide as part of the consequence that anyone who tried to move the bookcase might get pinned; only the characters who participated in the failed skill check take the risk of getting trapped and/or hurt.

POSTHUMOUS REWARDS

Do NPCs who died or left during the mission still get an equal share of treasure? Do NPCs who died, left or were dismissed during the mission get experience? Yes, they do.

The details of how to handle these matters is up to the player, who should take the setting and the relationship between the player's character and any departed allies into account.

The one sure thing is that the player cannot recruit allies, then dispose of them just before the end of the mission so that the player's character gets all the mission's experience, valuables and glory. Each individual NPC and each team/minion contingent gets a fair share. For the unfortunate deceased, assume the share is passed on to any next of kin.

character makes the skill check, the other(s) render assistance. Use common sense, or if the situation is tough to pin down, ask a yes-no question for when a skill check can only be made by one person; when two or more people can coordinate their efforts; when everyone in a group needs to make a skill check separately; and when to make one averaged skill check for the group, or to default to the character with the lowest skill. Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG rules in chapter 10 have instructions on when and how to handle these different types of group collaborative actions.

The player can choose who in the player character's group will participate in a skill check, and who will sit out. If the player's character participates, the skill check both increases plot stress and can qualify toward meaningful success in an obstacle scene. Note that the player's character doesn't have to lead the skill check, and doesn't even have to be competent enough at helping to lend a bonus. Just participating is enough to increase plot stress and qualify for meaningful success. If the skill check is only made by allies and the player's character isn't involved, then the result doesn't increase plot stress, but it also never counts toward meaningful success. Consequences from a failed skill check directly affect everyone who participated. Anyone who didn't participate, doesn't bear the consequences directly. Often that point is moot, and the entire player character's group needs to deal with consequences of failure regardless of who caused it.

experience and rewards

One of the downsides of recruiting allies to participate in a mission is having to split experience and wealth. Each ally gets an equal share of rewards that come the player character's way during the mission. Treat teams and minions as one ally for dividing treasure and experience. If some valuables are hard to split into equal divisions, the player might make a social skill check as part of a final cutscene, where the player's character proposes some other split. Like any other skill check, the player needs to have a consequence in mind before picking up the dice. A failed roll should mean that valuables are

divided in a way that isn't as favorable to the player's character. If the player is using Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG ruleset, chapter 13 has rules for awarding, dividing up and using experience points; chapter 14 has optional rules for generating treasure and rewards.

If the player plans to tell more stories using the same setting and characters in the future, check at the end of a mission for advancement of any allies. With minions and teams, the RPG ruleset lets the player ask a yes-no question at the end of a mission: "Did a member of this team/minions advance?" Set the odds based on how much action (in terms of skills and conflicts) the team or minions saw during the story, and make a roll. If the answer is yes, the player can promote one member of the team or minions to become an individual NPC, as a more powerful named ally; other surviving members remain part of the team or minions. Chapter 13 has more details on this approach: You may even want to use this rule with your third-party RPG of choice, to promote lowly minions into adventurers capable of standing alone!

Once a member of a team or minions becomes an individual ally, the player will need to recruit that person separately from the team/minions. The player will need to make a separate social skill check and follow-up yes-no question to ask that standalone NPC to join the group.

dismissal

It's possible to release an ally or a team/minions at the end of any scene. The player can optionally play the dismissal as its own cutscene, for example to gather additional information while letting the ally go.

There are two restrictions for the player to release allies from the player character's group. First, the individual or team/minions still gets an equal share of valuables the player's character might have uncovered up to that scene, an equal share of the rewards for completing the mission if it succeeds, and a share of the experience. Second, the dismissal needs to happen away from immediate danger. Cutting loose an urban socialite in the middle of a deadly jungle wilderness isn't an option. Once an ally has been dismissed from a particular mission, that contingent will

RIVAL ON THE SCENE

One great player benefit of a recurring rival is that rivals are good both to ask for trouble and for coming up with inventive skill checks for the player character's group in an obstacle scene. Another big benefit is that the rival, no matter how awful a villain, shouldn't want the player character dead outright (but may aid foes that do).

One scene example we've drawn upon a few times across these chapters is Arthur Falcone's going into a gambling den to try and confront some crime bosses, which goes badly wrong. The player can't easily bring Falcone's rival police detective Emily Chan into the middle of the active scene. Emily's chance appearance mid-scene is too unlikely to ask as a yes-no question. An unexpected event might bring the police detective into the scene, but the chances of that happening are slim.

The player closes out the scene with Arthur Falcone seized by crime family thugs, about to get a beating and maybe worse. But the player might open a follow-up scene choosing the rival police detective as the key person of interest. Maybe the crime bosses will reach an understanding and hand back the nosy private investigator over to Emily with a stern warning? Or maybe the scene plays out with the captured Falcone caught in the center of a police crime bust? By judging the likelihood of how Emily might appear on the scene, and asking a yes-no question or two, the player can firm up the follow-up scene. Either scenario gives the player lots to play with for the follow-up scene. If Arthur does get freed, he may be in more hot water with the police detective!

A sample collection of skill challenges for such a follow-up obstacle scene might be: notice or empathy to catch details about the relationship between Emily and the crime bosses; negotiate or deceive Emily and/or the crime bosses, so everyone believes Arthur won't keep sticking his nose where it doesn't belong; and savvy to interact with one of Emily's officers, who may have more knowledge at this point about the case than Arthur does, to get him to open up about what's really going on. This final check, if successful, might disclose a new rationale (d20), or the player might use it to change the main mission or generate a side goal mission (d20).

not rejoin unless the player's character goes back through recruitment all over again. Since experience and advancement is only done at the end of a mission, a dismissed ally doesn't advance, despite taking a share of experience and treasure.

rivals

Recurring rivals are an optional rule. Like allies, rivals can come from the player character's background. They represent a recurring opposing character, one who might appear at any time or place across scenes and missions to thwart the player character's goals.

One way to generate a new rival or have a recurring one appear on a scene, is through rolling an unexpected event (d20) that has a new person arrive on the scene, with the focus of "self or rival", or "foe or rival" as a result. Another way for a rival to appear might be by the player asking for trouble in an obstacle scene, or selecting the rival as a person of interest at the start of a scene.

Rivals have competing goals to the player's character. That causes conflicts of interest, but shouldn't escalate to deadly combat. Some possible types of rivals might be a professional who faces off against the player's character in the same area of expertise; or a talented member of an organization that opposes the player character's patron.

Rivals are valuable to the player because, like foes, they can be a foil against which the player's character can set up skill checks in obstacle scenes, and ask for trouble. Rivals as a rule aren't out to kill the player's character directly, but they might help less considerate foes. The player's character similarly shouldn't be trying to kill a recurring rival. Instead the player's character might try to outwit or avoid the rival, or bring the rival to justice.

There is a common story trope of rivals who set aside their differences with protagonists, to work together and achieve a common goal. In that spirit, it's always possible for the person in the initial cutscene to be a rival; or for the player's character sometimes to recruit a rival as an ally for a mission. Those scenarios will have no shortage of opportunities for the player to ask for trouble. ☺

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7) ENCOUNTER SCENES

Encounter scenes were first covered in chapter 2. These types of scenes involve the player's character in direct conflict with a group of foes. The player character's group must win this conflict, defeating the opposing foe group, for the player to achieve a meaningful success for the scene. In many role-playing games and settings, conflict means combat.

Instructions for building a foe group is in appendix H, I and J (p.136) and on the action sheet, under "encounter scene foe groups." The player generates a foe group by rolling a d10 twice, multiplying the results (d10xd10) for a total point budget. The player then rolls randomly or selects results that make sense from the foes table (and/or beasts and monsters), spending down the point budget until it reaches zero or less. The results may need creative interpretation. The player can switch foe roll results for others at the same point cost that work for the setting (e.g., mindless minions or automaton might not apply in a setting without magic or high-tech). Once the foe group is assembled, the player rolls a rationale (d20) for the overall demeanor of the group at the start of the scene.

advantage of place and scenery

Based on the foe group's rationale, the place, scene qualities and the player's overall idea for the scene, the player should use common sense in setting up a foe group in an encounter scene. Consider for example whether the foes are traveling or at rest. If they are at rest, they could be in a temporary shelter or permanent lair, or if in a civilized area, in a public or private place.

The scene's place should guide window dressing related to the foe group's defensive stance. The foe group should take advantage of scene qualities and other window dressing. An obvious example would be a place such as "fortress" or "keep". A defending foe group should be entrenched and well-defended there.

first detection

The upper hand in an encounter scene can hinge on which side detects the other first. When setting up a scene with foes, it's up to the player to decide if each side knows the

GENERATE A FOE GROUP

A player using the GM engine with a science fiction setting is assembling an encounter scene: The player character's group is approaching the private chambers of a heinous intergalactic villain.

The player starts by rolling d10xd10 to create a foe budget. The result is a 7 and 6, multiplied together for 42 points.

The player rolls for a first foe and gets "d100, Talented" costing 10 points. He rolls a person and gets "specialty academician". Knowledge is power. This should be a dangerous individual.

Next the player rolls "d100, average" for 5 points. He rolls a random d100 person and gets "royal family". This will be someone of authority in the setting, who the player decides is part of the villain's inner circle.

The next roll is for captive(s) at 0 points. He rolls a d100 person and gets "rogue guild/smugglers". Nothing obvious fits the bill, so the player sets that aside for now as a person of interest to be determined.

The next roll, "add leader" is worth 10 points. The occupation is "setting skill specialist" (and culture is "majority/native"). The player decides this is a psionicist.

The final roll is "average quality minions" worth 3 points apiece. The player changes that to an equivalent average quality team, with a culture and occupation. For culture/occupation, the player rolls "generalist" and "affiliated/neighbor". The player decides these are members of the royal guard, rolls d10 for number and gets 6 members, costing 18 points.

The total spend on foes is now 43 points, 1 point over budget. The player stops here, and begins to stat up the collection of foes.

Given the player's scene setup, the foe group should be prepared, entrenched in defensive positions. The player decides that, thanks to the specialty academician's knowledge, the foe group knew well in advance that the player character's group was coming.

The player character's group is badly outmatched by the nine foes in the foe group, and the player starts looking into converting the planned encounter scene into an obstacle scene instead, to try and avoid a fight the player character's small group of allies probably cannot win.

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ENCOUNTER SCENE DETECTION IN PRACTICE

Our intrepid investigator Arthur Falcone has gotten the address of some small-time local criminals who were seen lifting goods from the Havik estate the night that millionaire heiress Greta Havik disappeared. Arthur has found and paid some toughs to be his backup, and is ready to move on the house where the burglary suspects are holed up. While it might make a good obstacle scene, the player decides to set up an encounter scene. To achieve meaningful success, the player character's group needs to defeat the opposing foe group in a conflict.

Since Arthur and his allies know the criminals are in the house, his side doesn't need to make any detection rolls: They know there are foes nearby. The player rolled up the foe group and their rationale: "celebrate/fest". Arthur and his ally team arrive in two cars that they park out of sight; they approach on foot. The player decides not to roll for the foes to detect Arthur's side at extreme range. It's a dense housing area with plenty of other vehicle and foot traffic.

The second detection roll would be at medium range, but the player again rules Arthur's group doesn't stand out until they are adjacent to the property, at about 20 yards. Arthur sneaks in on his own first and cases the place. He's not good at stealth, but between the scene qualities and the foe group's rationale (the player rules the burglars are chatting and drinking beer), the investigator is at low risk of being seen and makes the skill check.

After seeing the coast is clear, Arthur signals his reinforcements, who pull around to the back door. Arthur tests the door, at which point the player asks the yes-no question: "is the door locked?" (This is asking for a break, not asking for trouble. In this setting and neighborhood, house doors should be locked).

The player decides that once Arthur and his ally team tries to open the door and sneak in, the foe group gets its close range notice skill check. If the foe group makes its roll, the conflict starts without surprise at close (melee) range. If the foe group of burglars fails its close range notice skill check(s), they are surprised.

other is there (the default); if one side is unaware of the other; or if each side is unaware of the other. As a rule, a group that is unaware (but reasonably vigilant) has up to three opportunities to detect the other. The player can set the detection probability based on how large, distracted and/or noisy each group is, the type of place, and any applicable scene qualities and window dressing. As in other cases, scene qualities have a magic effect for detection bonuses or penalties. If one side is not trying to be (or just plain not) stealthy, crank up the likelihood of detection, or else skip rolling and declare that one group is aware of the other.

When conditions are ideal, the first possible detection roll will be at extreme range, the outer edge for missile weapons in the player's setting. The second possible detection roll is at medium range, standard missile weapons range in a setting. An unaware group always makes a detection roll at close range, which is just before melee combat starts. In a bronze age setting, those three detection rolls might be bow range of around 100 yards (extreme), bow fire at 30 yards (medium) and thrown weapons/melee at 10 yards (close). In a modern setting, gun range might be about 300 yards, 60 yards and 10 yards.

These sample ranges are based on ideal conditions. If one side is being sneaky, the player can look at the place and scene qualities and decide to skip the extreme range roll, and sometimes even skip the medium range detection roll. Examples where detection at extreme range shouldn't be rolled: Indoor or underground places, crowded public places, and areas with thick vegetation or poor lighting. If one side misses its opportunities to detect the other, the unaware group can be ambushed, unprepared for the (missile fire or melee) attack. Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG rules cover how to handle surprise ambushes in chapter 11.

Use common sense in figuring out foe group tactics. Mindless foes attack with no strategy or self-preservation. Smarter foes might not rush headlong into direct conflict. They might organize, entrench or retreat against a dangerous foe, try to parlay or even flee from superior forces. Some foe groups may enter conflict with a

specific objective, such as capturing the player's character for ransom or interrogation. Disciplined and trained foes may have group tactics for skirmishing, or form effective military formations. Animals and less disciplined foes flee from deadly threats if they can.

encounter scene to obstacle scene

Generating encounter scene foe groups is very dangerous. The player might end up with a foe group that threatens to overwhelm the player character's group in a conflict. The player can avoid a potential slaughter and still try for meaningful success by converting the encounter scene into an obstacle scene.

It's easy to make the swap from one to the other: The player abandons direct conflict, and instead re-tools the scene with obstacle scene objectives. That means thinking up three at least moderately difficult skill checks for the player character's group, and asking for trouble three times. But the scene itself doesn't change and the foes don't go away. The player will need to think through what skill checks work with, and better yet play off, the foe group's presence on the scene. Examples might be trying to scout on the foes' encampment while remaining undetected; trying to capture and interrogate a guard for information; trying to steal plans or supplies from the camp; or trying to sneak past the camp's outlying scouts, guards and traps.

Having a big foe group on the scene can make for major consequences when a skill check goes wrong. The player can get backed into a corner and be forced into direct conflict. The player's character and/or allies might be captured, injured, possibly killed. If the player flips to an obstacle scene, and later in the scene defeats the foe group, that can only count as one successful skill check toward a meaningful success.

If the player can't resolve the scene in a way that gets the character disentangled from the foe group, the follow-up scene might be dire. The player's character might have been taken prisoner, leaving the player to try and figure out the next scene as a daring means of escape!

ENCOUNTER TO OBSTACLE EXAMPLE

Earlier, we gave an example of a science fiction encounter budget that included a knowledge specialist, a person of authority, a psionicist and a team of 6 competent guards. The player doesn't see much chance for the player character's group to defeat a force this size. Before even opening the scene, the player decides to swap this deadly encounter scene for an obstacle scene.

As is usual for a foe group, the player rolled a dominant group rationale: "respect/grateful". It also made sense, given the knowledge specialist, to ask: "does the foe group know the player character's group is there?" That's not asking for trouble. The player already considered that the knowledge specialist should be in the know, so the player is asking for a break. The player sets the yes-no question at very likely to be yes.

The player now jots down three skill checks the player character's group might try to make. The player decides that the player character's group first needs to notice it is being monitored and realize it has been found out. If that notice skill check roll fails, the player character's group will be in a bad place, as the foe group moves in for an ambush. The other skill checks the player jots down for the converted obstacle scene are to deceive the foe group by creating a distraction; perhaps running or hardy to escape the danger; and spaceship pilot to commandeer a small vehicle and attempt a getaway (the player narrated before the start of the scene through window dressing that the villain's hideout has hangars full of various types of spaceships).

If any of these skill checks goes wrong, the player character's group could end up facing a superior force. If the player character's group gets hemmed in by foes, they might try a desparate and daring escape attempt, or else drop fighting or surrender. If the player throws in the towel while cornered and outnumbered, it will make for a difficult follow-up scene. The player might have the surviving members of the player character's group stripped of equipment and weapons, and start the next scene with the group separated and restrained.

OBSTACLE TO ENCOUNTER EXAMPLE

One of the starting chapters on scenes had examples of scene interpretation and window dressing. The player interpreted a scene with investigator Arthur Falcone in a crowded basement gambling den with poker tables, a foul mood among the gamblers, some cocktail waitresses, and a clean-cut, dangerous-looking bouncer at the entrance.

The player had an initial plan in store for the scene, that Arthur would try to get into a back room where some crime bosses were holding a meeting. The player's planned skill checks were: Bluffing (deceive) to get into the gambling den; chat up a blackjack dealer (empathy) for information about the bosses; and sneaking through a door to the bosses' back room.

That's not how it happened. After several failed skill checks, asking for trouble and an unexpected event or two, a bouncer is making a beeline through the crowd towards Arthur to throw the investigator out of the club.

The player might use the bouncer as a foil for skill checks. If Arthur defeats the bouncer in a brawl (if it is at least a moderately difficult conflict) that secures one skill check towards meaningful success. But the player is nowhere near the three skill checks and three times asking for trouble to resolve the scene. So the player decides to switch over to an encounter scene. To get meaningful success, the player now just needs to generate a foe group and have Arthur defeat it.

The player picks up the dice, rolls d10xd10 and gets 9 and 4, for a 36-point foe budget for the encounter. The player decides the soldier already on the scene is "d100, talented," a foe worth 10 points. That's a good start, but there are still 26 points left to fill.

The player next rolls "average mindless minions," which he translates into an average team of generic thugs. For the d10 number of members, the player rolls 9: at 3 points apiece, that takes up 27 points, going 1 point over to fill the 36-point total budget.

Only after Arthur starts swinging does he notice bruisers pouring out of the back door and from dark corners, sending the crowd into a panic. Tough luck. It looks like Arthur may end up meeting the crime bosses for the next scene, but not the way he planned.

obstacle scene to encounter scene... and back

The player can also decide to swap an obstacle scene into an encounter scene. The player might switch the scene's goal after missing too many skill checks, deciding it makes more sense to try for meaningful success in the scene by starting a conflict instead.

To swap from an obstacle scene to an encounter scene, the player tosses out all successful skill checks and asking for trouble that happened so far in the scene. The player rolls d10xd10 to generate a foe budget and build a foe group, as described in appendix H, I and J (p.136) and on the action sheet. The player can subtract the point value of any foes already in the scene, but needs to find a logical way to introduce extra rolled foes into the scene for the conflict. The player can narrate how these reinforcements arrive in the scene, maybe helped along by one or more yes-no questions to clarify what happens.

The player might also want to change over from an obstacle scene to an encounter scene -- then decide after rolling up the foe group that the conflict stakes are now too high, and want to change back to an obstacle scene. That's possible. But once foe group is rolled up, it will arrive in the scene and there's no turning back. To revert back to an obstacle scene, the player starts all skill checks and asking for trouble from scratch. The player needs three new, different successful skill checks and three new times asking for trouble to achieve meaningful success for the reverted obstacle scene. Once the player swaps back to an obstacle scene, even if the player character's side somehow does defeat the foe group after all, that effort can only count as one successful skill check.

Swapping scene types back and forth is punishing for the player. It's probably easier for the player to throw in the towel, either to try and close the scene cleanly or else start a follow-up scene. The most straightforward option to close a scene that is out of control is for the player character's group to flee the arriving foe group. If the player can't resolve the scene as a clean escape, a follow-up scene might have to start with the player's character cornered, captured or otherwise in a very bad place - once again, a chance to plot a daring means of escape!

conflicts, plot stress and success

Whether it's physical combat or some other conflict, each round where the player's character takes an action that involves a skill check increases plot stress by 1. In a conflict, individual rolls don't count towards meaningful success. But if the player judges that a foe or foe group was at least moderately difficult for the player character's group to defeat, victory contributes one successful skill check toward meaningful success for an obstacle scene.

structured questions for foes

Just like there are structured questions for persons, there are also structured questions for foes, which are listed on the mission sheet and in appendix 7 (p.128). These are key questions that the player's character can ask a foe.

Even if they have been captured, subdued or otherwise neutralized, foes are never cooperative. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, asking any structured question for a foe requires some kind of social skill check to succeed. Like with other skill checks, any failed social skill check has a consequence. Foes typically shut down and stop cooperating, ending any questioning. Depending on the information the player wants out of the dialog with the foe, some structured questions won't be relevant or appropriate and shouldn't be asked.

If the social skill check succeeds, the player character's group can get an answer to one question from the foe (as with other dialogs, use the rules for exposing the unknown). This is one way the player character's group might get additional valuables or items that might be relevant to the player character's mission. The yes-no question might uncover the rationale that led the foe into conflict, or provide information about a person or another foe who is affiliated, or even a patron of the foe. A separate successful social skill check and yes-no question might pinpoint the place of that person or patron. The player can round out the rationale (d20), person (d100), foe (d20) and/or place (d20) through successful social skill checks and yes-no questions. Just as with structured questions for persons, the player can also break away from the structured questions guidelines to ask other yes-no questions that move the story forward. ☺

INTERROGATE A FOE

Arthur Falcone managed to escape the gambling den from a previous scene. After giving the pursuing thugs the slip, he even managed to single out a guard and ambush him in a dark alley outside the club, knocking him out.

The player decides to close the existing scene and set up a follow-up cutscene to interrogate the captured thug. The interrogation didn't have to be its own cutscene, but the player liked the idea of taking a break from the action without having to worry about achieving meaningful success or throwing in the towel.

The player sets up the cutscene in a nearby alley, with Arthur holding the guard (the person of interest he selected for this scene) by the shirtfront in the inky shadows. The player reviews the structured questions for foes, and decides to skip questions about valuables or items. The investigator isn't looking for either.

The player *does* want Arthur to find out why the crime bosses are after his client (i.e., "what is the reason behind the hostilities?"). The investigator growls: "Ever heard of Peter Havik-Stand? Your people put out a hit on him. Why?" The player makes an intimidate skill check; if it's successful, the player can then ask a yes-no question about whether the thug has an answer. If the roll result is yes, the player generates a rationale (d20).

If the intimidate skill check fails, the thug would just clam up, maybe even shout for help. If the skill check succeeds but the yes-no question comes up no, the thug might respond: "I have no idea what you're talking about. You're the one who started swinging in the club, remember?"

But let's say the yes-no question comes up yes. The player rolls a rationale and comes up with "anxiety/fear". The player could ask yes-no questions to clarify, but runs with the first explanation that comes to mind: "it's not us," the thug sobs, "somebody higher up wants him taken out!" With another successful social skill check and successful yes-no question, Arthur might get the answer to: "the source person/encounter behind the hostilities".

FEWER YES-NO QUESTIONS

Let's say a player's character in a modern day setting fails a skill check to pick a lock on a door. The failed skill check means a consequence.

It's possible the player might not roll any yes-no questions, and decide (and narrate) that the character managed to unlock the door, moving the action forward - but as the character pushes the door open, it trips a motion sensor, an alarm goes off and the area is alerted of the intruder's presence.

The player might have other possibilities for consequences in mind. In that case, the player asks the yes-no question: "does an alarm go off?" If the answer is no, the player's alternative idea for a consequence might be that as before, the character gets the door unlocked, but the lockpick jams in the lock, destroying the equipment and leaving clear evidence of a break-in. Again, the player can stop here and decide that's what happens.

But let's say the player is really up in the air and feels it's important to keep asking. Therefore the player rolls a second yes-no question: "does the lockpick get jammed inside the lock?" If that answer is also no, then the player *must* stop asking yes-no questions and run with whatever the third-likeliest option is. The player narrates that while the player's character was picking the lock, someone unexpectedly opens the door from the other side, leaving the player's character surprised and in a compromising position.

All three options are fitting set-ups that move the action forward, prompting more skill checks and opportunities to ask for trouble. The player had in mind what the branches of yes and no meant before picking up the dice. It's okay if a rolled no result triggers a follow-up yes-no question.

It's easy to fall down the rabbit hole of asking too many yes-no questions: don't lean on yes-no questions for detailed explanations. Put together one or two likely answers to the question, ask the most likely, and interpret the rolled answer as much as possible based on what's known about the game setting and the scene. If necessary, ask a follow-up yes-no question, but again try to generate and infer details instead of asking too many questions.

There is no one right or wrong way to use yes-no questions. But since each question increases plot stress by 1, it's better to limit yes-no questions to situations that matter to the story, where each likely outcome makes a difference. Use fewer questions and make them count.

rule of three: third guess is the charm

It's been said several times before: When asking a yes-no question or making a skill check, the player should already have in mind what the roll results for yes and no both mean. Avoid yes-no questions when there is only one good answer; don't get caught grasping at straws if the roll result is no.

If a yes-no question has just one logical and rational answer and no possible alternatives, that's the answer. Don't ask a yes-no question to confirm the assumption, just make it so. If the player can come up with two solid possibilities and the first yes-no question roll result comes back no, the alternative assumption is correct. If the first and second assumption both come back no, stop rolling and run with the third assumption.

avoid double jeopardy

Chapter 4 on skill checks stresses how important it is that success and failure both move the story forward. Failing forward means never just saying "no" when a skill check fails. If the player's character fails a skill check, resolve the situation in a way that creates a setback or otherwise changes the circumstances and move on. Do not repeat variations of a skill check until it succeeds.

The same holds true for yes-no questions. Once a yes-no question falls a particular way for a scene, let it ride for

that scene. Don't ask the same question in different ways, trying to get a different answer.

parsing compound questions

"Is there a bridge across the chasm that is guarded by goblins with treasure?" Assuming "chasm" was a pre-existing scene quality or window dressing, there are at least four separate yes-no questions here: Is there a bridge; if there is a bridge, are there goblins; if there are goblins, are they guarding the bridge; and if the goblins are there guarding the bridge, do they have treasure.

The first advice is not to pack so much into a yes-no question: Ask what's important, infer and narrate the rest. In the above example, the bridge is window dressing and the goblins are a foe. Both of those can be generated with yes-no questions, or each can be decided by the player. If there are goblins and a bridge, the player can infer that of course they are guards. Treasure may only be revealed after a search, which can fall under "rules for rewards" or "exposing the unknown." In any case, try to pull apart compound questions and ask only what's important in each yes-no question.

While it's usually not good form, it *is* possible to ask compound yes-no questions. The player still needs to parse the compound question into its components, and then assesses the likelihood for each individual part of the compound question being yes. The player starts with the probability of the *least* likely part of the question, and shifts the likelihood down 1 category (less likely) for each additional factor in the question. A rolled no result invalidates all parts of the question, and under the guidelines of avoiding double jeopardy, the player shouldn't ask about *any* of those elements again for the rest of the scene.

For the example of the bridge question above, maybe the player knows goblins are common in the setting, and they live in inhospitable places like chasms where they build all kinds of makeshift construction. The player sets each of these three parts at likely. But goblins are weak and don't have much hope of holding onto treasure, so the player assesses that chance is just 50/50 moderate. The

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WHAT HAPPENS FIRST? WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

All this discussion about gameplay might make sense in theory. But when it's time to start a story, the player might draw a blank, staring at a blank mission sheet and stumped about where to begin.

For ideas, look back to the player character's concept and the setting. Is the setting about action and adventure, drama, mystery, horror, comedy or some combination? Come up with a rough idea for a starting cutscene, usually a place where the player's character would talk business with a patron or person of interest. Consider what the player's character does well, and pull the story toward those skills. Use the information around the cutscene - place, scene qualities, the patron or other person of interest, the assigned mission and the conversation (using structured questions for persons) with the patron/person in the scene - all are clues to help shape ideas for what should, or might, happen next.

The mission and other information from a starting cutscene should build ideas and momentum for the player to decide what the next scene should be. Scene qualities will modify that idea but also provide new cues. The action and information in each scene should help guide what might happen next. The player should go big and bold with the plot: There's no achieving meaningful success without taking risks, accepting setbacks and consequences, and entering into conflicts.

During a scene, focus on what's logical for what may happen: If in doubt, a yes-no question always helps. What's logical will depend on the genre: Only a horror story might have a terror from beyond time and space in the basement of an abandoned building.

Consequences and asking for trouble should focus on similar logic: If the skill check fails, what could reasonably go wrong? If there's trouble, what's a reasonable danger, threat or setback that affects the player character's group?

If in doubt, jump into story, assemble the scene elements, make a best guess on how they fit together, and narrate your way forward. Your story will get its legs and build momentum.

compound question's likelihood starts at 50/50 moderate (for goblins to have treasure), then drops 1 shift less likely each for the bridge, the goblin presence, and whether the goblins are guards. Three shifts down from 50/50 moderate means the yes-no question's chance of being yes is nigh impossible. No would mean there are no goblins, no bridge, and obviously no guarding or treasure. The player should reconsider whether such a convoluted compound question makes sense to ask.

structured and unstructured questions

Structured questions are listed on the mission sheet and in appendix 7 (p.128). These are sample guidelines that players can use when their player's character interacts with another person (including patrons and allies), or has leverage to question a foe. Structured questions are only guidelines to help focus the interaction's outcome and move the story forward and it's fine for the player to go off-script from structured questions. A player can improvise dialog as part of, or in addition to, structured questions. Consider if a social skill check is needed when the player's character asks for information or favors, and have immediate consequences in mind if a social skill check fails.

One point of structured questions is that the player should only ask some questions of some people, some of the time, based on what is appropriate for the scene. Many of the requests, particularly asking for favors or information, should only be asked of the right person under the right circumstances. Use common sense. Someone can't hand out new mission objectives, or supply a jet fighter, just because they're a person of interest in a scene. People don't willingly hand over their wallet or car keys.

GAMEPLAY IN PRACTICE

avoid the impossible

"Your mission is to capture a nuclear submarine from the Soviet army. Here's a spoon and a bus ticket. Good luck." It's good to be ambitious. But when putting together a

mission, consider what is possible or realistic for the player's character to accomplish in a setting, even with the help of allies.

closing scenes and throwing in the towel

When in the scene is it best for the player to try and close it? Closing a scene should happen after the action winds down naturally. The player character's group shouldn't be in any active conflict, should be able to leave the area at will, and any outstanding trouble or consequences should be resolved.

It's easier for the player to figure out when a scene should end if it achieved a meaningful success. For an encounter scene, there will be a natural break after all the foes are defeated and the scene's conflict ends. For an obstacle scene, it's when the player character's group succeeds with three different moderate skill challenges, the player asked for trouble three times, and any outstanding trouble and consequences are resolved.

It's harder to find a breakpoint to close a scene when the player character's group is failing skill checks and facing trouble, or is losing in a conflict, and the player decides to throw in the towel for the scene. Before trying to close the scene, the player needs to end any active conflict. Losing, successfully surrendering, fleeing, or negotiating for both sides to stand down are some possibilities for resolving a conflict. Next, the player should try and address any outstanding trouble or consequences. Finally, the player might need to make skill checks and/or ask yes-no questions that ensure the player character's group can leave the area at will.

The player can throw in the towel anytime, as long as there is no active conflict in the scene. But if there are any unresolved trouble or consequences, or if the player character's group cannot leave the area at will, it forces the next scene to be a follow-up scene to deal with unresolved issues. No time passes between a scene and its follow-up, and there is no chance for recovery or other skill checks. The player has to deal with unresolved issues as penalties and setbacks in the follow-up scene.

CUTSCENE CODA

Cutscenes are a break in the action. That doesn't seem valuable when the player's goal is to use scenes for achieving meaningful successes. On the other hand, not being forced either to achieve meaningful success or else throw in the towel in a scene, definitely helps.

If the player fails to achieve meaningful success and throws in the towel on an encounter scene or obstacle scene, the player risks having to deal with the consequences of failure in a follow-up scene scene. By contrast, a cutscene lets the player gather new information and amass resources. Consequences for skill check failures in a cutscene are typically contained and are relatively painless. The player rarely should be forced into a follow-up scene based on something that goes wrong in a cutscene.

CHAINING QUESTIONS

With structured questions regarding allies and items, the player can decide that one successful skill check opens the door to multiple follow-up yes-no question rolls to supply resources - not force one social skill check per resource. Handle this by asking the follow-up yes-no question after each roll: "is there another (ally/item)?" Set the likelihood of each additional resource one shift lower than the last.

For example, if the patron is nearly certain to provide one ally, a second ally is a very likely yes-no question roll, a third ally a likely roll, a fourth ally a 50/50 moderate roll and so forth. Keep rolling until the yes-no question roll result comes up no, meaning that's all the resource there is available.

The player can also chain questions for armor, to provide ongoing (but reduced) protection as it is damaged; or to itemize loot from foes, setting odds for a first item roll, and dropping by one shift for every additional item roll. That can turn a generic treasure loot of 1,000 silver pieces into a collection of gear, supplies, information and coin worth 1,000 silvers total.

RETRENCH A SCENE OPENING, PART 1

Drawing from the example in the main text, the player just finished a scene where the player's character snuck through a house of cultists, who supposedly hold a fugitive in the cellar that the player's character is trying to rescue. The player intends to start in the cellar with an obstacle scene to free and escape with the fugitive. But the randomly rolled scene qualities don't line up with those plans. The roll results are "crowded", "streets/alleys" and "music". The setting context is modern and gritty.

The player thinks through the factors, and decides that at the start of the next scene, the player's character spilled back outside the house to avoid detection. The player narrates that the house is at the edge of a crowded downtown shopping district, and that there are sidewalk sales that are causing the commotion. The scene starts outside the house, but the player's character could sneak back in, maybe finding some advantage from the scene qualities of nearby crowds and noise.

If the player's character is incapacitated, shut down the scene immediately. This is the only case where the player doesn't need to roll a stress test to close a scene. The next scene does not have to be a follow-up, but the player's character wakes up wounded, and the scene setup is likely to be grim.

follow-up scenes

There will be cases where the player decides it makes sense (or is forced) to start the next scene in the same place or nearby, immediately following the last scene. If it is in the same place, the new scene carries forward the qualities of the old scene, and can also inherit the place, window dressing, holdover foes, and possibly also persons of interest, items, and other elements.

If it is shortly afterwards and/or not in the same place (e.g., the previous scene was in a building, and the current scene takes place on the street outside the building), then roll new scene qualities and convert the last scene's qualities into window dressing. The window dressing might also include persons, items and window dressing from the last scene that is still relevant. As for carrying over foes, in a pinch a yes-no question can resolve whether foes from the last scene are present in the new scene; if in doubt, assume they are in pursuit.

If a new scene happens shortly after a previous scene, no time has gone by to allow for healing or other skill checks. A player's character and allies who are hurt don't have time to recover from the condition.

retrench a scene opening

It's possible that a player envisions one type of scene to happen. For example, the player might assume the next scene starts in a dank cellar, where the player's character is trying to rescue a captured fugitive. Then the player rolls scene qualities, and comes up with "crowded," "streets/alleys" and "music" (see sidebars). What now? The scene is different from what the player expected.

First, the player can always ask yes-no questions and use the answers to adjust the scene and fit the new

circumstances. Use common sense and draw logical conclusions. The player has less room to retrench after throwing in the towel on the prior scene, and/or if the player left some trouble or consequences unresolved. In that case, the player needs to carry forward the consequences of failure from the prior scene, and account for other trouble or consequences from that scene.

In some cases, scene qualities just might not apply, for example forests on a cruise ship in the open ocean or out in space. In these cases, interpret as loosely as possible, and drop scene qualities that just don't fit at all. With a scene on a lonely scout ship out in deep space, for example, some scene qualities won't work no matter how loosely they are interpreted.

foes enter a closing scene

There will be times when the player tries to close a scene, tests plot stress for closing and ends up rolling an unexpected event that generates a random foe. In some cases (for instance if the player is finishing up a long, hard-won encounter scene), dealing with another foe could snowball. The new foe means the player's character might engage in yet another conflict, meaning more skill checks and yes-no questions that generate plot stress, which might trigger more unexpected events, which may roll another foe, and so forth. Meanwhile, the player might have already secured a meaningful success from the encounter scene, and has nothing to gain from the character engaging these new foes.

The easy answer is that the player's character doesn't have to fight every foe that shows up in a scene. A simple skill check and yes-no question later, the player's character might successfully be out the door and down the hall (or through the portal and down the dungeon corridor, or over the next sand dune) before the newly rolled foe has a chance to get bearings. A successful escape means that the player can go ahead and set up the next scene freely, not as a follow-up scene. The player might also decide to go ahead and close the scene unresolved. In that case the player must set up a follow-up scene with a consequence or setback from the choice to leave loose threads from the prior scene.

RETRENCH A SCENE OPENING, PART 2

Let's go back to the cellar fugitive-rescue effort and say it happened differently. For the prior scene, the player's character fled to the basement to avoid detection by cult leaders upstairs, the consequence of a failed sneak skill check. What's more, the player decided to throw in the towel on the last scene.

That means the player starts the next scene as a follow-up dealing with the consequences of failure. The player also needs to account for the unresolved consequence of getting stuck (the player's character was not able to leave the area at will). The failed sneak skill check already had the consequence of making the cultists in the house suspicious about intruders, forcing the character to flee into the basement. That's a weak consequence: if the player doesn't think that's enough, the next scene should open potentially with the cultists hot on the player character's tail!

The player needs to build a scene that accounts for the prior scene's consequences and scene qualities. Because the player's character fled into the cellar and couldn't leave the area, the player decides "crowded" could mean there are many cultists (let's say new recruits) down there. A looser alternative might be that it's not a crowd of people, but that the cellar is extremely cluttered.

For "streets/alleys", the player decides that the cellar has a bulkhead leading out to a maze of alleys. For "music", the player decides the new recruits are playing meditative tunes; or if not, neighbors nearby are playing hip-hop music, loudly. The player has a few ideas of what the scene qualities could mean, and a yes-no question or two can help clarify the direction of the player's window dressing before opening the scene.

Whatever the final decision, the player's character starts the scene in a difficult position. Is the sought-after fugitive even in the cellar? Is that person one of the new recruits? Meanwhile there are alert cultists above and brainwashed initiates in the cellar below. The player is left to weigh whether to try for an encounter scene free-for-all, or else to try to navigate the player's character through a difficult, delicate obstacle scene.

swapping main missions

If a player runs out of steam on a main mission, it's easy enough to modify or change the mission. The player can run a cutscene where the player's character circles back with the patron or person who assigned the mission. It's then possible through structured questions to ask: "Does the person have a need?" and "what does the person need?" That lets the player roll randomly for a mission (d20), which can be a change to the prior main mission instead of a new side goal. The old objective didn't go away, it changed in scope. The player interprets how the old mission and the new one fit together, keeps the current level of plot stress, and also holds on to any meaningful successes secured in the story so far.

opening cutscene starts with a foe

What happens when the player sets up a cutscene, particularly the opening cutscene where the player's character is supposed to get a mission, and a random person of interest (d100) roll returns a foe? There are many ways to deal with this situation. Here are a few options.

First, as mentioned before, foes don't always fight the player character's group on sight and to the death. With some yes-no questions, the player might turn the foe into an 'enemy of my enemy': A foe who reluctantly sought out the player's character because of a mutual interest or threat. Another way to interpret the cutscene is that the foe wants to negotiate an exchange (e.g., a hostage or blackmail situation to get the player character's group to perform the mission). Yet another possibility is that the opening scene is about the player's character successfully eavesdropping on the foe, which reveals the mission. A fourth possibility is that the player's character confronts and defeats the foe in the cutscene, and gets a mission using structured questions for foes, through the interrogation that follows. This is one case where the player's character can ask the foe: "does the person have a need?" and the answer will always be yes without requiring a skill check, so that the player's character gets a mission out of the cutscene. ☺

9) RPG CHARACTERS

Player characters in Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG rules are meant to be simple, to handle the basics of conflicts and skill checks and get out of the way of the story. New character creation is summarized on p.147; a full list of skills is in appendix S (p.140).

The player's character has six attributes: *strong, nimble, hardy, smart, willful* and *savvy.* There are just three attribute levels: good (+1), average (0) and poor (-1). For a starting player's character, the sum of attributes adds up to 0. The player's character may have 0 for all attributes; or have one +1, one -1 and four attributes at 0; or have two +1, two -1 and two attributes at 0; or have three attributes at +1 and three attributes at -1.

Strong characters (+1) are good at lifting, pushing, carrying and breaking things. Weak characters (-1) are poor at these tasks.

Nimble characters (+1) are good at balance, dodging and fine manipulation. Clumsy characters (-1) are poor at these tasks.

Hardy characters (+1) better resist getting fatigued, tired or sick, and recover more easily from being hurt. Sickly characters (-1) become tired when they push themselves, and find it harder to recover from being injured.

Smart characters (+1) know more, and they can study and learn topics more quickly. Dull characters (-1) don't have as much education, less knowledge and less experience learning complex concepts.

Willful characters (+1) are in control of their emotions and resist temptation. Weak-minded characters (-1) are driven by their desires and are easily manipulated.

Savvy characters (+1) have good intuition for interacting with people and animals, which also extends to operating vehicles by "feel". Unsociable characters (-1) have difficulty communicating effectively, or understanding and influencing others.

The types of skill checks listed above are tied directly to the underlying attributes. For example, the player uses the

CHARACTER DISADVANTAGES

Players' characters might have physical, mental or social disadvantages as part of their background. Examples include a permanent disabling or debilitating injury; or low social class and poverty; or family relationships, cultural or religious obligations that can come into play; or phobias, or even delusions.

These sorts of character flaws make a player's character more interesting. However, assigning disadvantages to a player's character does not provide any special bonuses. In gameplay, disadvantages might be hard on the player's character. But these extra challenges can also help the player. They provide yet more ways to ask for trouble, and opportunities for the player's character to make skill checks. The player needs these to achieve meaningful success in obstacle scenes and move the story forward. For that reason, there is no penalty for assigning flaws to the player's character.

WHAT PLUSES AND MINUSES MEAN

The RPG rules use the yes-no questions (d100) table on the action sheet and in appendix Q (p.139) to make skill checks. Use the "shifts" column on the left-hand side for likelihood of success. Rolling a yes result means the skill check succeeds. A no result means the skill check fails.

For example, a skill check at 0 has a 50/50 moderate chance of success; a skill check at +2 is very likely to succeed (80% chance of yes); a skill check at -1 is unlikely to succeed (35% chance of yes).

Whenever a player rolls a skill check that involves the player's character, the rolled result adds to plot stress, but it does not test plot stress. For example if plot stress is 17 and the player rolls 13 for a skill check, plot stress increases to 18 and the roll does not trigger an unexpected event. If the roll had been a yes-no question, that roll result would have generated an unexpected event and cut plot stress in half.

A 50/50 moderate chance, at 0 shifts, is the bar for a player character's skill check to contribute toward meaningful success in an obstacle scene. That minimum bar doesn't include shifts from magic scene qualities that might help or hinder the attempt.

ARE PLAYER CHARACTERS TERRIBLE?

On its face, characters' untrained skills on average are unlikely to succeed. The best possible base untrained rating for a player's character is a measly +1. Even the most gifted player's character is only somewhat likely (65%) to succeed at an untrained task that has a base 50/50 moderate difficulty.

Compare that to allies, rivals and foes. As will be covered in chapter 10, these NPCs default to a *conflict* rating that is at base 0, possibly even +1 or +2. Conflict is used as a universal base skill, covering everything that person, team or minions might reasonably attempt. Unlike the player's character, NPCs have *no* untrained skill penalties.

Is that totally unfair? Not really. Consider that the player gets to narrate the story, and should use that advantage to draw on the player character's skills, the scene's qualities, window dressing, special equipment and other advantages to succeed. The player should also recruit allies and draw on their strengths as part of the player character's group. These factors help the player character's group best rivals and foes, and power through obstacle scenes to achieve meaningful success.

So it's correct that technically, the player's character starts at a disadvantage to NPCs for untrained skills. In practice, the player guides the story to work toward the player character's strengths, and can compensate for the player character's weaknesses through allies.

As a player's character gains experience, the character also gains more skills, and can even become proficient in entire skill categories, making the player's character quite powerful. Untrained skills are areas where the player's character remains vulnerable to challenges from competent rivals and foes.

strength attribute to make a skill check related to lifting, pushing, carrying or dragging heavy things. *Nimble* is used to balance or dodge. *Hardy* is used to resist fatigue or disease. *Smart* is used for general education and knowledge. *Willful* resists temptation or influence. *Savvy* is for getting favorable reactions from others. Attributes also affect base levels for trained and untrained skills.

skills

A starting player's character gets six points to spend on trained skills. Skills are grouped below by type and by category. For one skill point, the character can choose a specific skill and boost it by +1 over its base. For three skill points, the character can choose an entire skill category, which boosts all the skills in that category by +1 over its base. There are six types of skills, each of which defaults to the sum of two attributes:

Device and ranged skills default to the sum of nimble plus hardy attributes.

Animal and vehicle skills default to the sum of strong plus savvy attributes.

Social skills default to the sum of savvy plus willful attributes.

Physical and melee skills default to the sum of strong plus hardy attributes.

Subterfuge and survival skills default to the sum of smart plus nimble attributes.

Knowledge skills default to the sum of smart plus willful attributes.

Device and ranged skill categories include bows (longbow, shortbow, crossbow; also slings); thrown weapons (rock, knife, axe, hammer, dart, grenade); guns (pistol, rifle, submachine gun); gunner (individual large ranged weapons, which might be stationary or vehicular); disable (lockpicking, break electronics/security, disarm trap, sabotage mechanical). Dodge (avoid damage) is a standalone skill.

Animal and vehicle skill categories include ride (horse, elephant, camel, giant flying lizard); handle animal (mounts, birds of prey, cattle, large predators, pets); wayfind (navigation, astrogation, orienteering); crew (for very large vehicles: sailing ship, cruise liner, submarine, space battleship); drive (for smaller ground transport: motorcycle, car, truck, bus, ground speeder); pilot (for small to mid-size air/space transport: prop plane, jet fighter, helicopter, personal jetpack).

Social skill categories include influence (negotiate to resolve situations diplomatically; deceive to use false suggestions or outright lies; appeal to carouse or seduce; intimidate to coerce cooperation through real or implied threats); and interact (empathy to read people for their thoughts or feelings; leadership to inspire allies; etiquette to behave properly in particular cultural/social situations).

Physical and melee skill categories include performance (singing, dancing, physical sports); martial arts (unarmed karate, judo, boxing, wrestling, street fighting, capoeira); athletics (running, jumping climbing, swimming); and melee weapons (axes, swords, staves, plasma swords, flails, spears, as well as active protection from shields).

Subterfuge and survival skill categories include hunt (tracking, fishing, trapping, camouflage); survival (tundra, desert, deciduous/coniferous forest, mountain, scrub/badlands, underground, swamp, urban); streetwise (gather information to get the word on the street; scrounge to acquire, sell or dispose of gear; gamble; sleight of hand to palm and hide small objects on one's person); sneak (hide, sneak, and shadow to follow someone without being detected). Notice (find hidden things) is a standalone skill.

Knowledge skill categories include craft (working with cloth, leather, wood, metals, writing/poetry, painting, photography); medic (first aid, pharmacology/herbalism, surgery); mechanic (design/build machines, repair machines). Language represents fluency in an additional language. Profession represents any one trained science or political field, e.g.: engineering, law, chemistry, theology, history. When a player invests points into the

BUILDING ARTHUR FALCONE

When Arthur Falcone was created a player's character, the player imagined a good talker who is not all that quick on his feet. The player chose an array of attributes with four 0s, a single +1 (assigned to savvy) and a single -1 (assigned to nimble).

From there, the derived levels for skill types are: Physical/melee, adding strong 0 and hardy 0, for base 0. Device/ranged, adding nimble -1 and hardy 0, for base -1. Animal/vehicle, adding strong 0 and savvy +1, for base +1. Subterfuge/survival, smart 0 and nimble -1, for base -1. Knowledge, adding smart 0 and willful 0, for base 0. Social, adding savvy +1 and willful 0, for base +1.

The player has 6 skill points to spend. It takes three points to buy a full skill category, but only one point apiece to buy skills individually. The player decides three points for a skill category puts too many eggs in one basket at too steep a cost, and decides to buy individual skills. There are no powers in the setting, so the player skips that. If any power categories had been available, it would have cost three skill points to buy in.

The player wants a combat skill and decides to put a point into brawling. It's based off physical/melee 0, so the player adds a point and writes in brawling +1.

The player next puts one point apiece into three skills in Falcone's best derived skill types: drive car at +2 (in the animal/vehicle skill category); deceive +2 and intimidate +2 (both in the social skill category).

The player also decides to compensate for the poor subterfuge/survival skill type, which defaults to -1. The last two points are spent to add gather information 0 and notice 0.

All other skills are untrained, which puts Falcone at one point lower than the derived base skill levels in each category. That means untrained physical/melee skills default to -1, untrained device/ranged defaults to -2, untrained animal/vehicle defaults to 0, untrained subterfuge/survival defaults to -2, untrained knowledge skills default to -1, and untrained social skills default to 0.

WHERE ARE SKILL DEFINITIONS?

The RPG rules don't define skills and what they can and cannot do. There are two reasons: First, most skills are straightforward. There isn't much more to say to an experienced gamer like you. Second, when it comes to asking "can my skill do this?" in the context of a setting, the answer is strictly the player's decision. If you're unsure whether a skill check can do something, ask a yes-no question, or consider "closely related skills" below.

CLOSELY RELATED SKILLS

During gameplay, if the player's character has a skill that's close enough to an unknown skill, the player can decide to apply the existing skill with a -1 shift instead of treating it as untrained.

For example, Arthur Falcone's base animal/vehicle skill category is +1, based on the attributes of strong 0, and savvy +1. The player spent a point on drive car, for a drive car +2 skill. The player could apply drive car +2 to any type of car, from subcompacts to pickup trucks, to Formula 1 racers to vans, maybe even a golf cart. But driving other types of vehicles (a motorcycle, tractor-trailer, bus, all-terrain vehicle and so forth) would be an untrained skill that would default to the animal/vehicle skill category -1, for 0 shifts.

But what about the gray areas? A small bus or all-terrain vehicle is not a car, but the player might decide it's close enough. In those cases, the player might decide Arthur's drive car +2 allows the investigator to operate the vehicle with a -1 shift to the skill. That means drive ATV or drive short bus gets a base +1 skill check instead of Arthur's untrained animal/vehicle skill check at 0 shifts.

This rule of closely related skills can apply to all types of skills. But it probably will come up most often for skills related to vehicles/animals and weapons use in conflicts.

profession skill category, it is called "jack-of-all-trades." Research (representing computer searches and/or library use) is a standalone skill.

Outside of this conventional list of skills, there are three open-ended categories of supernatural skills, called *powers*. Chapter 12 has more details on what powers are, what kinds of powers are available, and how they work. Libre Solo Role Playing RPG rules cover three types of powers: *special abilities*, *magic* and *psionics*. Depending on the player's setting none, one, or more than one of these types of supernatural skill types might be available to the player's character, and/or to foes and other persons. Buying a power category costs three skill points. For that cost, characters with *magic* start with three magic skills; characters with *psionics* start with two psionic skills; characters with *special abilities* start with one special ability skill.

untrained skills

After selecting the player character's skills, any remaining skills or skill categories where the character hasn't spent points are untrained: They default to the character's base skill level -1. Depending on the setting, some types of skills can't be used untrained. The player can use common sense whether the player's character has a chance to make an untrained skill check or not. For example, characters cannot use guns untrained in a setting where firearms don't exist. A modern-day player's character might have a chance to pilot a plane untrained. But a barbarian from a primitive society would need a very good explanation to have any chance to use a computer or operate a vehicle!

For an example of trained vs. untrained skills, let's look at Arthur Falcone's animal/vehicle category skill. Arthur's base skill of +1 for the category is the sum of his strong attribute of 0 (average), and savvy attribute of +1 (good). The player decides to take drive car as a trained skill for Arthur. The skill starts at +1 to his base, for +2. If Arthur gets on a motorcycle, a skill in which he has no training, his untrained default is base animal/vehicle skill -1, for a net 0.

regular equipment

Outfitting a player's character before gameplay is fast and loose: Choose whatever personal effects the player's character should have, write them down, and you're done. Selecting equipment has the following restrictions:

First, is the gear openly available and reasonably priced in the game world? Starting items should be something the player's character could buy, trade for, find or make in the game world, based on the character's background.

Second, is the gear legal to own in the game world, without special status or restrictive licensing? Any starting item should be something that wouldn't be confiscated, or result in the player character's arrest if caught possessing the item.

Third, Is the gear something the player's character could easily carry or have in each scene? If not, the player's character might own the item, but the player will need to figure out where the item is when it is not in use. For example, it's fine for a player's character in a modern setting to own a car. If the character flies to another city between scenes, the car won't figure into those scenes.

Regular equipment doesn't give bonuses to skill checks. Instead, like window dressing, it just lets certain types of skills be used. Many types of tasks are impossible to do without the right gear, no matter how much training someone has. Examples include using weapon skill without a weapon; trying to craft something without materials and tools; or trying to repair a device without tools and spare parts. The player can make a skill test with inadequate or poor-quality equipment, but the skill check is at least at a -1 modifier. Examples might be trying to repair a motorcycle engine with a pocket multi-tool; applying first aid with a sewing kit and rags; or picking up a stick as a makeshift club for combat.

Regular equipment doesn't give bonuses to skills, but the player can use it like window dressing to bypass a skill check, or to shift to a different skill check (ideally one that makes it easier for the player's character to succeed, or that reduces the consequence for failure). One example

STARTING GEAR EXAMPLES

Outfitting Arthur Falcone before the start of the game is easy: It's a modern-day setting, so available equipment should resemble what an ordinary, modern-day person carries around.

The player starts with a suit and a wallet. Related to his job, the investigator would need a vehicle, office space and a bank account for purchases.

Arthur certainly owns much more than these basics. The player can write in details from scene to scene if they make sense to the player character's background. For example, the player might write before any scene that Arthur has a smartphone and notebook (or else add them as window dressing by asking yes-no questions during a scene). While Arthur doesn't seem to be the gun-toting type, it seems logical that the investigator can get hold of a pistol or rifle if there's time between scenes to make that possible.

A wandering barbarian starting in a fantasy setting probably carries everything that's owned, maybe helped by a horse or other beast of burden.

The barbarian might have a primary and backup weapon (let's say spear and hand axe), light armor, and a pack for carrying things with a bedroll, food and drink, some rope or cord, fire starting kit, plus a modest coinpurse and possibly an heirloom and/or some personal adornment.

In each case, those respective equipment lists feature gear that's common, readily available, reasonably priced and legal in the setting. The exception is the mentioned gun mentioned above, which isn't usually legal without some sort of permit. But in the setting guns are not uncommon, and it would be the sort of thing a private investigator could dig up when necessary. When in doubt, a yes-no question can help decide.

Falcone's ally Toni Graham would have access to computers and a library that Arthur Falcone wouldn't, but her graduate student background means that she shouldn't reasonably have access to guns or martial weapons.

EXAMPLES OF PREMIUM GEAR REQUESTS

Below are some examples of premium gear and other favors that Arthur Falcone might be able to convince his patron, Peter Havik-Stand, to supply for a mission. The examples include estimates for the likelihood that Falcone might be able to talk Peter into supplying them, assuming the request makes sense for the mission and Falcone passes an appropriate social skill check:

Transportation: a limousine and driver (very likely); small airplane, boat or helicopter with pilot (50/50 moderate); personal charter jet and pilot (unlikely).

Valuables: $1,000 cash advance (likely); $10,000 loan or pricey jewelry borrowed for a night (unlikely); loaned $100,000 of unmarked bills in a nondescript briefcase (nigh impossible).

Explosives, weapons, drugs, lockpicks, surveillance gear: nigh impossible. Peter is a wealthy patron, not an anarchist. Don't bother rolling except under truly exceptional circumstances.

Restricted library access: likely, but it would depend on the specialty subject of the library, and assumes there is a point to the request, to move the plot forward.

A pair of high-demand sports, theater or concert tickets: 50/50 moderate. This request enters unknown territory. It's not established that Peter Havik-Stand is a sports fan or a patron of the arts, able to get tickets easily.

is a knotted rope as a safer alternative to climbing sheer surfaces. The rope could shift the skill check from a climbing skill check, to a strong attribute skill check. A ladder could eliminate making any skill check.

premium gear

In some games, the player's character will have access to costly or restricted equipment. A wealthy patron, government agent, or member of a powerful criminal organization might have this privilege. Premium gear *might* give +1 to specific skill checks. One way the player's character might get premium gear is by acquiring the item in gameplay, for example as a treasure or reward.

Another possible approach is to play out the request for premium equipment using structured questions for persons, for example in a starting cutscene. Whether the request is for a jet fighter or space cruiser, a box of explosives, code cracking software or a magical sword, the player can try to have the player's character make a social skill check to convince a patron or other person assigning the mission that the gear is necessary. If the social skill check is successful, a follow-up yes-no question determines whether the patron can supply the requested equipment. Don't bother rolling the yes-no question unless the setting and the person being asked have a reasonable chance of procuring the specialty asked-for equipment to help accomplish the mission, and if there's a reasonable chance for the request to be granted. As with any skill check, failure carries a consequence. Failing this type of skill check should cut off any further requests for assistance.

If the player's character does receive requested special equipment to help with the mission, the supplier always expects the gear to be returned at the end of the mission, if not earlier. The player might want the player's character to try and hold onto the gear, for example through a successful deceive skill check to lie convincingly that the items went missing, or were lost or stolen. As always, a failed skill check triggers a consequence. If the player's character tries to lie to a powerful patron and fails, that consequence could be severe. ☺

10) RPG SKILL CHECKS

Anytime a player's character makes a skill check in Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG rules, the player starts by assessing the level of difficulty for the challenge, which can range from nearly certain success to nigh impossible. The player then subtracts the skill check's difficulty from the relevant attribute, trained skill, or untrained skill category needed to succeed, and applies the modifier as shifts on the yes-no question table on the action sheet and in appendix Q (p.139). The sum of shifts is the probability: A yes result is a skill check success; a no result means failure and a consequence. Quick references for handling skill checks are on p.146, and also in the summary rules (p.159-164).

For some examples: Arthur Falcone is trying to force open a locked door. Arthur's *strong* is 0 (average). The player assesses the strength of the door's lock makes it a 50/50 moderate challenge (also 0). There are no further modifiers. The net level of 0 gives a 50/50 moderate chance of success. Later, Arthur uses his *savvy* +1 attribute to talk up some bystanders, aiming to get favorable reactions. The people are neutral about Arthur, making it a 50/50 moderate challenge of 0. That means Arthur has a net +1 for the skill check: likely to succeed.

Yet another example: Arthur is driving his car recklessly through city streets. The player rules this is a 50/50 moderate challenge of 0. Arthur's *drive car* +2 makes success very likely for this skill check. But the player is having Arthur drive at reckless speeds (-1 modifier), behind the wheel of an old jalopy (substandard gear for another -1 modifier), totaling a -2 penalty to the skill check. Arthur's *drive car* +2 cancels out -2 in penalties. The skill check's chance of success is 50/50 moderate (0).

Keep in mind that for obstacle scenes, the player's character needs to overcome a 50/50 moderate or harder skill check to qualify for meaningful success. Using *drive car* +2 by itself wouldn't qualify. But driving recklessly (-1) in a decrepit car (-1) brings that net chance of success down to 0, for a 50/50 moderate chance of success that does qualify toward meaningful success. Some possible consequences of a failure might mean the car breaks down, Arthur gets into a crash or fender bender, is pulled over by the police, or is stuck in a lengthy traffic jam.

ALLIES, FOES AND SKILL CHECKS

Chapter 13 discusses foes, allies, and gaining/distributing experience in more detail. For skill checks, team(s) and minions always act as one, and use a combined generic *conflict* skill that covers their overall competency. The ratings for teams/minions by quality and size of the team are included for reference on the game's included NPC sheets, and are also in appendix R (p.139).

Any team or minions always makes a collective skill check: It doesn't matter whether it's a direct contest, limited assistance, unlimited assistance or interference skill check (skill check types are covered later in this chapter). The team or minions roll as one, based on the number and quality of its members.

For example in a fantasy setting, a member of 7 competent dwarven warriors (an average quality team) might enter an arm wrestling contest against the player's barbarian character. Even though arm wrestling is a one-on-one direct contest, use the dwarven warriors' team's conflict rating, at +1. That team of 7 dwarves would sneak (as an interference skill contest) at +1 before applying any window dressing modifiers. If there were just 6 dwarven warriors in the average quality group, its generic conflict rating for sneaking or arm wrestling would be 0.

If the player's character had challenged an individual NPC instead of a team member, then it would be an ordinary direct contest: The player's character using strong attribute for the roll, the NPC defaulting either to a trained skill or generic conflict skill.

CULTURE/OCCUPATION MODIFIERS

For the RPG rules, culture and occupation are window dressing for individual ally/foe skill checks. That means you may assess a bonus or penalty for NPCs leading (or being able to contribute to) skill checks, depending on whether the culture and occupation align with or contradict the skill check.

You may assess, for example, that the dwarven warriors above get an extra +1 to hardy checks for being dwarves, and +1 to axe and shield skills; but also a -1 shift penalty for any knowledge skills, and to athletics like running, climbing and swimming.

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SKILL CHECK: A COMPLEX EXAMPLE

Arthur Falcone and Toni Graham are trying to sneak into the basement of the Havik mansion. The player wants this to be a moderately difficult skill check, to contribute to meaningful success for this obstacle scene.

Toni Graham's generic conflict rating is 0, so her sneak skill is also 0. Sneak falls under subterfuge/survival: Arthur Falcone is unskilled in sneak, which for him defaults to -2. Sneaking is an interference skill check, so the player must use the lowest attribute in the ally group.

If there's a scene quality such as gloomy, sight-blocking or music, each of these could add a +1 magic shift related to remaining unseen and unheard. Wide open spaces or bright / well-lit each could subtract a -1 magic shift from the skill check. In this case there are no relevant scene quality modifiers, but there is relevant window dressing: the basement entrance is "dark", for which the player decides to assess a +1 skill level shift for the player character's group, which is not magic. The player also decided before the scene started that Arthur brought black bodysuits to wear for the scene: It's a stretch, but the player makes this equipment window dressing worth another +1 shift, which is also not magic.

The player rules that the opposition being snuck past in this case is the kitchen help, which is window dressing in the scene. The player decides that the window dressing help has a base notice 0. The player narrated several people in the kitchen, but since they are window dressing, the player treats the kitchen help as one entity to notice Arthur and Toni.

The final opposed skill check roll is:
[-2 (sneak skill) +1 (darkness) +1 (bodysuits)] -
    [0 (notice skill)] = 0 shifts, for a final 50/50 moderate chance of success.

50/50 moderate is the minimum bar for the skill check to qualify toward a meaningful success.

The player also has the consequences laid out: The kitchen help catching the investigative pair in black bodysuits would force a social skill check. That, and maybe a couple $100 bills, *might* let the pair leave without involving the police. If the player tries to continue this scene, Arthur and Toni will have to switch tactics dramatically.

if Arthur were to try his hand at motorcycle racing or horse riding - transportation with which he has no real experience - his default base for *animal and vehicle* of 0 would give him a base 50/50 moderate (0) chance to succeed against a 50/50 moderate (0) skill check. Seeing as failure carries a consequence, and crashing or being thrown seems the most likely outcome, the player might consider the alternatives carefully before having Arthur get into this type of dangerous situation, whether it's jousting on horseback or motocross racing.

opposed skill checks

The formula for the likelihood of a skill check success for an opposed (also called a contested) roll is:

[relevant stat of lead person making the check +
    all participating player character/ally bonuses]
    -
    [relevant stat of lead foe opposing the check +
    all participating foe bonuses]
    +/-
    [window dressing/scene qualities that
    assist or detract just one side's efforts]

For some examples: if the player's character 'Boris Beefcake', who has *strong* +1 arm wrestles NPC academic 'Skinny Stan', who the player assesses has *strong* -1 because of his occupation, it's a direct contest of *strong*. The chance for Boris to succeed is +1 (-) -1, for a total of +2 shifts. Boris is very likely to succeed with the skill check on the yes-no questions/skill checks table.

For the reverse, if the player's character is Stan with *strong* -1 and the player assesses NPC barbarian Boris has *strong* +1 for his occupation, the chance for Stan to succeed is -1 (-) +1, for a total of -2 shifts. Stan is very unlikely to succeed at that skill check on the yes-no questions/skill checks table.

In either event, the player makes just one roll to get the result from an opposed skill check, based on the likelihood of the player character's group to succeed. Failure means a consequence; usually the fallout of the foe group's winning the skill check *is* the consequence.

assisted skill checks

In many cases the player's character and allies help each other to succeed with a skill check; sometimes just one, or just two or three persons will be able to work together for a skill check. Here are the different categories of skill checks for the player character's group or foe group, and how to think about when a group can and cannot coordinate effectively to make a skill check:

Some skill checks are *direct contests* with just one participant, or just one participant on each side squaring off against each other. These are situations where additional people cannot help. Examples of direct contests include arm wrestling, a duel, picking a lock, defusing a bomb, or driving a vehicle. Most social skills checks are direct contests: it's up to one person to try and influence or interact with one or more subjects. For direct contests, compare the relevant statistics of the individuals or team/minions on each side in the contest.

Some skill checks allow *limited assistance* where one, or at most two others can help the person leading the skill check. Opening a stuck door, chopping down a tree or applying first aid are cases where two or three people might work together. In these cases, take the relevant skill level from the person leading the check, then add +1 for an individual or contingent team/minions assisting in the effort, *as long as the relevant skill for each assistant is at least 0 or higher.* An assistant with a relevant skill of -1 or lower can participate, but are not competent enough to give a bonus to the skill check.

Skill checks with *unlimited assistance* allow many persons to help. This can include conducting research, searching or noticing something out of place, or surviving in the wilderness. In these cases, take the highest relevant statistic, and add +1 for each assisting individual or team/minions *with a relevant skill of 0 or higher.* As above, any participant with a relevant skill of -1 or lower can participate, but not well enough to give a bonus.

Skill checks for *larger groups* come into play in cases where only a large group coordination can do the task. Examples include fielding a sports team, crewing a ship,

SCENE QUALITY BONUS/PENALTY

Here are some more examples how scene qualities that align with a task can raise the likelihood of success by 1 shift, and scene qualities that run counter can lower the likelihood of skill check success by 1 shift. Scene qualities are valuable to players because of their magic. A favorable scene quality can raise likelihood of success by one shift, while still letting the skill check count to the 50/50 moderate bar that's needed for the skill check to contribute to meaningful success in an obstacle scene.

For example: A player's character with bow 0 is trying to hit a target. One of the scene qualities is "still". The player decides this scene quality is in the character's favor for the skill check, for +1 shift. If the player assessed hitting the target at 50/50 moderate, the odds of hitting that target become:

[0 (skill base) + 1 scene quality] - [0 (difficulty to hit the target)].

The total is 1 shift, likely to succeed. Thanks to scene quality magic, it still counts as a 50/50 moderate skill check toward meaningful success in the obstacle scene.

For another example: A foe with a handgun is shooting at Arthur Falcone at medium range. The opponent has conflict +1, and the scene has the quality "wide open spaces". That scene quality is unfavorable to Arthur, meaning a -1 shift to any skill check to dodge. Arthur is unarmed. His best option is his *nimble* attribute which is poor, at -1. The chance for Arthur to avoid being hit is:

[-1 (player character attribute) - 1 (scene quality)] - [+1 (foe ability)].

The total is -3 shifts, meaning it will be nigh impossible for Arthur to dodge under those conditions. Arthur can choose to fight defensively, meaning that rather than moving or attacking, The investigator spends his action trying not to be hit, giving him a +1 shift (more about fighting defensively is in chapter 11). Going full defense brings Arthur's chances of successfully evading the shooter up to -2, still very unlikely to succeed. Without cover or other options, in this combat situation Arthur is clearly in trouble. What's more, this skill check is part of a conflict: if it's an obstacle scene, even dodging the bullet does nothing for meaningful success. If Arthur somehow defeats this foe, and the player judges the entire conflict was a moderate challenge, it counts as just one successful skill check toward meaningful success.

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or a mass conflict. In these cases, start with the skill level of the leader, using the higher of *leadership* skill or the relevant skill best suited for the task. Next, figure out the average skill level for the group (counting each team/minions contingent as one ally/foe). Use the average skill level of the group as a bonus or penalty to the leader. Assess and apply other bonuses or penalties. For example, if two large groups are facing off, the side with the larger group, or the side with clearly better gear for the task, could get a bonus shift.

Lastly, there are *interference* skill checks. These involve cases where more people participating in a skill check *hurts* the overall chance of success. Sneaking, hiding and shadowing are examples of interference skill checks. In these cases, use the *single lowest* relevant attribute or skill of any one ally/foe across the group that is performing the action. Apply other bonuses or penalties as makes sense. ☺
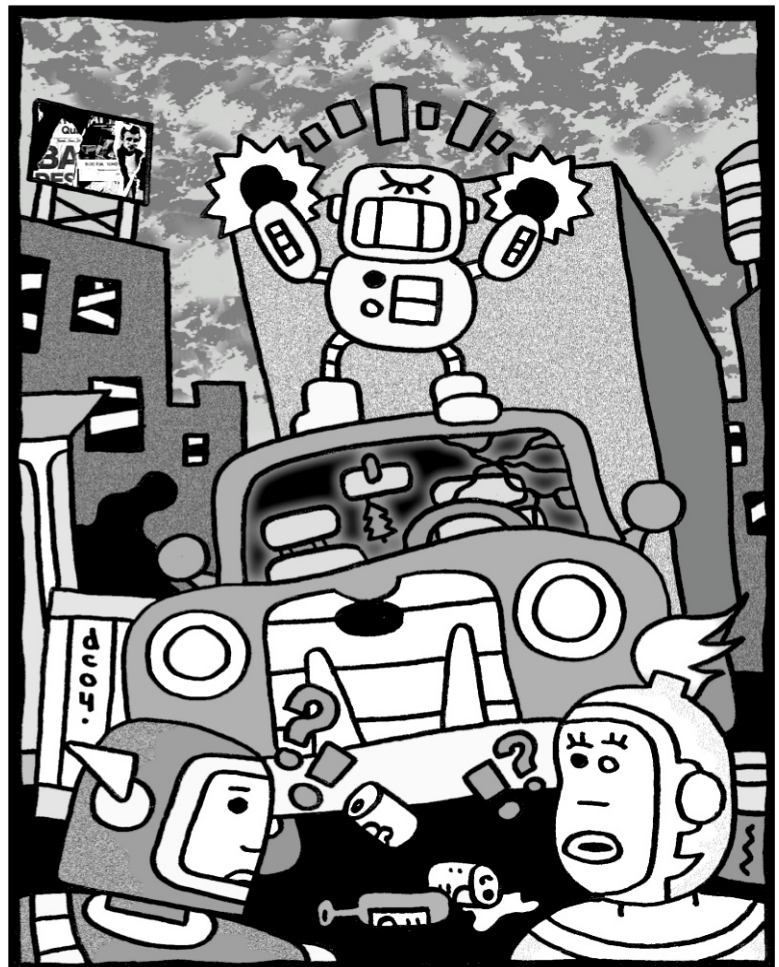
11) RPG CONFLICTS

Combat in Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG ruleset is a series of opposed skill checks pitting the player character's group against a foe or foe group. The player adds the forces on both sides and makes one roll for each round of combat, representing the outcome of all individuals and teams/minions participating in the conflict. If the skill check succeeds for the player character's group, it inflicts damage on the foe group; if the skill check fails, the player character's group takes damage. Quick references for handling conflicts are on p.146, and also in the summary rules (p.159-164).

The chapters covering the GM engine discuss the significance of conflict to move the plot forward, both for obstacle scenes and for encounter scenes. To sum up, defeating a foe group in an obstacle scene counts as one successful skill check, but only if the player's character was involved in the conflict, and the conflict was at least moderately difficult for the player character's group. Defeating a foe group in an encounter scene qualifies as a meaningful success for the player character's group for that scene, but again only if the player's character participated in the conflict.

Detection and combat can take several rounds of skill checks to resolve, which can spike plot stress. Each sneak or notice roll, and each round of combat in which the player's character participates, adds 1 plot stress.

For example in an obstacle scene, the player's character might sneak to ambush, fire several volleys of missiles, move into melee and spend several rounds in combat before securing victory. Each skill check added 1 plot stress. But detecting and defeating a foe group in an obstacle scene can only contribute one successful skill check toward meaningful success for the obstacle scene, assuming it was at least a moderate challenge.

COMBAT ACTIONS

There are four types of actions each side can take when a player character's group and foe group engage in a conflict: Two are movement maneuvers (advance and retreat); two are attacks (ranged combat, melee combat).

SETTING LEVEL: GRITTY, PULPY, HEROIC

Some types of stories are about mighty-thewed protagonists who cut through hordes of foes like so much fodder. In other stories, a single competent opponent is a deadly force.

Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG ruleset has three setting levels for handling gameplay conflicts.

The default is the *gritty* gameplay setting. Each round of combat where the player character's group succeeds its skill check, the foe group takes 1 level of damage; each round the player character's group fails its skill check, it takes 1 level of damage.

Crank up the action to *pulp* gameplay, and the player character's group deals 2 levels of damage to the foe group each round the combat skill check succeeds. The player character's group takes 1 level of damage when its combat skill check fails.

The top level is *heroic* gameplay. The player character's group deals 3 levels of damage to the foe group for each round its combat skill check succeeds. The player character's side takes 1 level on damage when its combat skill check fails.

The *gritty* gameplay setting makes battles tough, encouraging stories that value skill and ingenuity over brute force, but still with room for occasional violent mayhem.

NON-COMBATANTS IN MELEE

How can even the most hapless non-combatant provide a +1 to conflict skill, aiding its side in a conflict? Even persons who don't know how to fire a gun, swing a sword or throw a punch can assist in some way.

If they are no good at fighting directly, a non-combatant may help distract foes, put them off guard with flanking, or maybe even just shout encouragement. Any person or team/minions caught up in combat are risking life and limb by being in the fray. That courage should be rewarded, so it is enough to merit a +1 shift to whichever side that person aids.

OFF THE CHARTS

Combat odds can become unbalanced quickly, especially as one side weakens from taking casualties. Skill checks cut off below -3 and above +3.

If a skill check is higher than +3 or lower than -3, that roll defaults to +3 (nearly certain) and -3 (nigh impossible). That 5% success or failure is a slim chance for the tide of conflict to turn. Most forces should be intelligent enough to realize they are overwhelmed, and that they need to find a way out of the predicament: fleeing or otherwise disengaging, surrendering or parlay, or some other tactic to change the odds.

SIMPLE MELEE EXAMPLE

Here is an example of a fast and simple melee, with a player's character facing off against a small foe group.

Brutus the barbarian with a skill of battleaxe +2 faces 3 orcs (average minions), their orc chieftain (a group leader), plus an orc warrior (an average NPC). The 3 orc minions collectively have conflict -1 skill; the average warrior has conflict 0 skill; and the chieftain also has conflict 0 skill. The total for Brutus is +2. The orcs' highest skill is 0, but each additional individual or team/minion adds +1. There is no relevant window dressing or scene quality that rebalances the conflict. The final skill check is +2 (-) 0 +1 +1, which is 2 -2, or 0: a 50/50 moderate chance of success.

The player rolls a skill check and gets a success for Brutus: Since this story is in a *pulpy* setting, Brutus deals 2 levels of damage, which takes out up to 2 individual foes, or up to 4 team/minion members. The player can't take out a leader until after the minions are gone, so decides that Brutus cuts through the orc warrior and 2 of the minions.

The next round, Brutus faces just the orc leader with melee 0, and a remaining minion with conflict -2. The likelihood for Brutus to win the skill check is now +2 (-) 0 +1, which is 2 -1 or 1, a likely chance of success. If Brutus succeeds again, he gruesomely slays remaining minion, and finally the orc leader.

melee and ranged combat

Melee combat represents all types of close contact conflict, from pikes and laser swords to martial arts mayhem; it also includes everyone participating in ranged weapons combat who is firing into melee. Here's the formula for figuring out the skill check for a round of combat:

PC Group: [highest melee skill, +1 for each extra ally (individual or team/minions) + misc. modifiers]
-
Foe Group: [highest melee skill, +1 for each extra foe (individual or team/minions) + misc. modifiers]
+/-
[window dressing/scene qualities that assist or detract from one side's efforts]

To figure out the total combat skill for each side in a melee, start with the player character's group, choose whatever member will lead the conflict. That is usually the character with the highest physical/melee combat skill: it does not have to be the player's character. Then add +1 shift for each additional individual ally or team/minions participating in the conflict from the player character's side. Next, do the same for the foe group. Choose the foe participating in the combat who has the highest useful conflict/combat skill. Then add +1 shift for each additional individual foe or team/minions. Each individual or team/minions who is firing ranged weapons into the melee, or at ranged opponents adds +1 shift to its side for the final count.

To be clear, a supporting team/minions with just 1 or 2 members contributes +1 to its group's total; a supporting team/minions with 8 or 10 members also contributes only a +1 to its group's total). Unlike other types of skill checks, in combat even the most hapless individual or team on either side, even those with -1 or lower conflict/combat skills, contributes +1 shift to its side as long as it participates in the conflict.

To get the final difficulty level for the skill check, use the formula above to get a total player character's group conflict rating, and subtract a similar total foe group

conflict rating. Then apply any modifiers. Each scene quality potentially adds or subtracts 1 shift if it aids or hampers just the player character's group, or just the foe group. There might be other extenuating circumstances that give one side a bonus or penalty, like premium or poor quality gear. Add or subtract all these modifiers, then roll the skill check using the yes-no question chart on the action sheet and also in appendix Q (p.139).

If the player's combat skill check is successful (a yes roll result means the player character's group succeeds that round), assign foe group damage based on the style of game: 1 level of damage (taking out one character or 2 team/minion members) for a *gritty* setting; 2 levels of damage (two characters or 4 team/minion members) for a *pulpy* setting; 3 levels of damage (three characters or 6 team/minion members) for a *heroic* setting. If the player's roll fails the skill check, the player character's group takes 1 level of damage, which takes out an individual ally or 2 allied team/minion members, or does 1 level of damage to the player's character. No matter what side takes damage, it's the player's choice how to assign it.

ranged combat only

If neither side has advanced to melee range, the battle might only have ranged combatants. A ranged combat skill check uses the same formula as melee combat skill checks. Only members on each side with ranged weapons can participate in the skill check.

To resolve a round of ranged combat, pick whatever member with a ranged weapon will lead the conflict (usually the character with the highest ranged weapon combat skill). Add +1 shift for each additional participating person or team/minions in the player character's group with ranged weapons. Then do the same for the foe group, starting with the participating individual or team/minions that has a ranged weapon and the highest ranged combat skill. Add +1 shift for each additional individual or team/minions foe with ranged weapons who is participating in the conflict.

Characters without ranged weapons, or who are moving or otherwise occupied, do not participate in ranged

NO MELEE SKILLS

What to do if a conflict breaks out and one side has no members with trained skill? For the player's character, default to untrained skill. NPC non-combatants have it worse: They can assist but they can't lead a conflict. Left to their own devices, they can only try to avoid being hit. Without someone to lead the fight they can only try to surrender or flee.

CONSEQUENCES IN COMBAT

Any failed skill check carries consequences, and combat is no exception. In violent conflict, the consequence for failure is built into the conflict: The failed skill check means foes succeeded in causing damage. The player might need to choose between having the player's character take a level of damage, or else taking out allies, either an individual or two team/minion members. That is consequence enough, so there isn't any additional fallout for failing the skill check for a round of combat.

Besides consequences, conflicts are ripe opportunities to ask for trouble, in case the conflict happens in an obstacle scene. Weapons can break or malfunction, or run out of ammunition, for example.

FIGHTING DEFENSIVELY

Either side in a combat may choose to fight defensively, whether at range (e.g., through laying down suppressive fire) or in melee. Fighting defensively is still a fighting action: The entire group fights defensively except those taking an advance or retreat maneuver or other non-combat actions.

Defensive fighting gives a +1 to the skill check that round for the defending group. If the defending group succeeds with the skill check, it neither takes nor deals any damage.

A player might decide one side is using defensive fighting to provide cover by some members of a group, while others advance, retreat, or make a skill check (such as first aid to help a fallen member).

MELEE EXAMPLE WITH ALLIES

For a more complex look at melee, we re-visit Brutus' fight against the orcs, but this time with allies fighting alongside. As before, Brutus the barbarian with a skill of battleaxe +2 is squaring off against a group of 3 orcs (average minions) and their orc chieftain (leader), plus the average NPC: an orc warrior. Brutus also has Sterinia, a rogue (throwing knives +1, conflict 0) and Noel the Cowardly (with no conflict skills). As before, the 3 orc minions are conflict -1; the average orc warrior has conflict 0; and the orc chieftain also has conflict 0.

Since the scene is playing out in underground dungeon passages, the player decides to make the first detection check at moderate instead of extreme range. Brutus' side failed the opposed notice roll, meaning the orcs detected Brutus' side first. The player tries a follow-up sneak roll for the orcs to advance for a surprise ambush. The orcs' sneak roll is an interference skill check, meaning it uses the lowest skill among the orcs, which is the minions' conflict -1 default. Brutus' side notice skill check allows for unlimited assistance: Brutus' notice is +1; his two allies meet the minimum bar (skill level 0+) to contribute +1 shift apiece, to total +3. The 4 shifts top out the skill check at +3, and Brutus' side is nearly certain to win the opposed roll for notice vs. the orcs' sneak. The player rolls, Brutus' side succeeds easily and the encounter starts with everyone at medium range.

For weapons, Brutus has battleaxe +2 skill, Sterinia throwing knives +1 skill, and Noel is a scholar with a tome. The orc minions and leader have bows and spears; the individual orc warrior has a club.

Sterinia's throwing knives are thrown weapons for close range, so Brutus' side can't counter orc archers. The player decides to have the entire player character's group take the advance maneuver. The chieftain has conflict 0 for bow and adds +1 for the minions with bows, for a total of +1; the player character's group has no dodge or shield skill, and Brutus nimble rating is 0. The odds to evade the attack are [0 for Brutus] - [0 +1 for the orcs]. [0 -1] is 1 shift negative, unlikely to succeed. The player rolls a 42: no. The dodge attempt fails, and the player character's side takes a level *(cont'd)*

combat. But the player can choose anyone on either side to take damage, regardless of whether or not the person or team/minions have ranged weapons.

If one side or the other has no ranged weapons to return fire - or its members are busy with movement or skill checks and cannot return fire - the group can use its single best *nimble* attribute, *shield* (requiring a shield), *dodge* or general *conflict* skill of their group to try and avoid damage. If the evading side succeeds, it takes no damage but also deals no damage to the opposing side. If the evading side fails, it takes damage that the player assignes, just like in melee combat.

Usually the noise of melee or ranged combat alerts all foes in a scene. Even if there are no other foes in the scene, it can prompt a question to ask for trouble, such as "are there any additional foes nearby who hear and respond to the noise of battle?"

advance, retreat, disengage

The Libre Solo Role Playing's GM engine first covered abstract ranges in chapter 7. The RPG ruleset uses three range categories: At *extreme* range, people can see each other but ranged combat is ineffective: missile weapons can only target opponents taking the advance maneuver. At *medium* range, missile weapons (e.g., guns, bows) can be used for combat. Thrown weapons can target opponents taking the advance maneuver from medium range. Once at *close* range, melee weapons dominate.

Advance and *retreat* maneuvers let persons move between extreme, medium and close range in combat. Any character that moves cannot participate in combat that turn. It's possible a player might have some members of either group make an *advance* maneuver, while others provide covering fire with ranged attacks. For example, the characters that *advance* might go to medium range, or to close range for thrown weapon/melee combat.

For characters in melee, the *retreat* maneuver moves them out from close to moderate range. As with advancing, characters who take the *retreat* maneuver cannot participate in combat that turn. If a whole group is

retreating, it can use its single best *nimble* attribute, *shield* skill (for any characters with a shield) or *dodge* skill to try and avoid damage. If the evading side succeeds, it takes no damage in its retreat; if the evading side fails, it takes damage.

Any individuals or group/minion contingent that is already at medium range may use the *retreat* maneuver to move even further away, to move to extreme range and then *disengage*. If melee combat is still happening, any person at range can *disengage* from the combat. If there is only ranged weapon combat, a final round of ranged attacks can happen between the two groups before the retreating side can move from medium to extreme range.

ambush and surprise round

Depending on the circumstances before combat begins, one group might be already aware of the other when the scene starts; or one group might detect the other first. Being the first to detect a foe can be an advantage going into a conflict. That side can choose whether or how to enter into a conflict.

If a player narrates a scene where each side is unaware of the other, the player sets the range at which each side might first detect the other and makes an opposed *notice* roll (player character group *notice* vs. foe group *notice*) to determine which side detects the other first.

The group that wins the *notice* roll might try to stay undetected. If one side tries to stay hidden, the player makes an opposed roll, pitting *sneak* of one group against the other group's *notice*. As noted in chapter 10, *sneak* is an interference skill check: It defaults to the lowest skill of participating individuals and teams/minions. *Notice* allows unlimited assistance: It starts with the group's highest participating individual or team/minions skill and adds +1 to the skill check for each individual or team/minions with a skill level at 0 or higher.

If one side sneaks successfully, it opens up several possibilities. One option might be for a group to *disengage* and avoid the threat. Another option is to try for an ambush: As covered in chapter 7, the first opposed

of damage. Rather than take Sterinia or Noel out of the action, the player decides Brutus takes a level of damage, for the "grazed" condition. Brutus takes an arrow in the charge, but it doesn't slow the barbarian.

The next round picks up with melee and thrown weapon combat at close range. Brutus now leads with battleaxe +2 skill and Noel contributes +1, even without a formal melee skill. Sterinia throws her knives at close range, adding +1. The orc warrior leads the foe group; at this point it doesn't matter if the minions and leader support with bows or spears, they each contribute +1. The melee skill check is now [+2 +1 +1 for Brutus] - [0 +1 +1 for the orcs]. Brutus' side needs [4 -2] or 2, a very likely skill check to succeed. The player makes the roll, and with a 53 succeeds. Since it is a *pulpy* setting, the player deals two levels of damage, and takes out up to two individual or four minion foes. The player decides that Brutus and his allies fell the orc warrior and 2 of the minions. One minion and the orc leader remain.

The next round, Brutus' side total attack strength stays at 4 [+2 +1 +1]. The orcs, now wielding spears, are down to the leader 0 and a single minion, who still yields a +1 to assist, for [0 +1]. The odds are [4 -1] or 3 shifts, nearly certain success for Brutus' side.

If the remaining orcs had only bows and no melee weapons, at least one would have to engage in unarmed melee against the barbarian, for a further -1 penalty. But it's not as if things could get worse for the orcs: the [4 -0] would have topped out at 3 shifts anyway, leaving Brutus' side nearly certain to succeed.

If the remaining orc warrior and orc minion break and run, defense against parting shots would default to the highest nimble score for the orcs, which is 0. Again that's [4 -0], rounded to 3 shifts and nearly certain success for Brutus' side. It's a good ending for Brutus and his allies, less so for the orcs.

FOES WITH MULTIPLE HITS

Powerful monsters (see chapter 14) can take multiple hits before being vanquished. These creatures don't suffer penalties as their hits are whittled away. They fight at full strength until they take enough damage from opponents to be defeated in a conflict, or they retreat first.

ROLE OF ARMOR

What use is chain mail, a flak jacket, or futuristic powered armor? If armor exists as equipment generally available in the setting, an optional rule is to use it as a story element: When an armored person (player's character, ally or foe) takes a hit, ask the yes-no question: "does the armor (or shield) stop the blow?" Set the probability at unlikely for light armor or small shield, 50/50 moderate for medium armor or shield, likely for heavy armor or large shield, and pick up the dice. Armor and shield each stop one damage level, then need to be repaired. Alternatively, you can treat armor wear and tear as a variant of chained question (see p.53), and reduce its effectiveness by one shift each time it stops a blow.

Wearing medium or heavy armor is part of window dressing modifiers, and can ask for trouble. Armor is noisy when the group wants to be quiet, hampers athletic activities (jumping, running, swimming, climbing) and can cause fatigue, especially in hot weather. It can even affect social skill checks.

ROLE OF WEAPONS

What is the difference between a dagger, a guisarme and a greatsword? Or a light pistol and semi-automatic rifle? System-wise they have the same effect on melee and ranged combat: These RPG rules assume ample ammunition, and that everyone contributes to a conflict, regardless of the type of blade or barrel bore width.

There are two optional rules when there is a conflict between two groups with widely disparate weapons. If one side is at a clear disadvantage weapon-wise (fighting unarmed or with a knife against polearm-wielding foes, or pistols against assault weapons), the player assigns the inferior side an extra -1 shift for this disadvantage.

Another option is to treat the weapon like any other equipment, as a story element. When asking for trouble, or looking for skill check consequences, guns can jam, ranged weapons run out of ammunition, and melee weapons can break or get stuck. A disabled weapon is useless for at least the remainder of the scene, and could require a craft or mechanic skill check to fix.

notice, or a *sneak* vs. *notice* opposed skill check, usually happens at extreme or medium range. How far away one side can detect the other depends on environmental factors such as place and scene qualities. The sneaking side must roll a *sneak* vs. *notice* opposed skill check for each action to succeed: to avoid being detected during movement (advancing or retreating), and then for surprise when the ambush is sprung.

If the ambush *sneak* vs. *notice* opposed skill roll succeeds at medium range, the sneaking side can opt for a surprise ranged attack round. For one round, the defending group can only use its single highest individual or team/minions *nimble* attribute, *dodge*, *shield* or general *conflict* skill to try and avoid damage. After the surprise round, the conflict proceeds normally.

If the ambush *sneak* vs. *notice* opposed skill roll succeeds at close range, the surprised group is caught flat-footed in melee. Again, it can only use its single highest individual or team/minions *nimble* attribute, *dodge*, *shield* or general *conflict* skill to try and avoid damage for that round. After the surprise round the conflict proceeds normally.

If the *sneak* vs. *notice* opposed skill check roll fails for the sneaky side, the consequence in every case is the same: The noticing side is alerted to the opposing force at that range and can engage without surprise. The conflict can go directly into ranged weapon (medium range) or melee/thrown weapon (close range) combat.

An ambush, just like any conflict, is noisy. Usually the noise alerts all other foes in the scene. Even if there are no other foes in the scene, it can prompt a classic follow-on question to ask for trouble, such as "are there other foes who are nearby that hear the noise of battle?"

damage and recovery

Unless there's a chance for armor to stop the blow (see the role of armor sidebar) allies and foes go down with one damage level, and ally and team/minion members go down in pairs per damage level. The RPG rules divide non-player characters into just two conditions. They are either well enough to soldier on, or they have suffered enough trauma to be taken out.

To get allies back on their feet, or get an incapacitated foe into shape to interrogate, use a *first aid* skill check helped (or penalized) by the player character's *hardy* attribute, or for NPCs use a base 50/50 moderate chance of success. For example, an ally with *first aid* 0 tries to restore a *hardy* +1 player's character with strips of cloth (a -1 shift for using improvised equipment). That adds up to a net skill check of 0 +1 -1, for 0: a 50/50 moderate chance of success. For a team/minions, the player can make one healing roll for each member taken out during battle. *Recovery from injury is one of the only times that team or minion members are rolled for individually.*

An ally successfully treated with a healing skill check recovers immediately without further in-game penalties. The injury was not debilitating or deadly, and with medical treatment the ally is well enough to go on. If the ally is not healed or if the attempt to heal fails, assuming it was a deadly combat, the player can then ask the yes-no question: "Is that person still alive?" The base difficulty is the player character's *hardy*, or for NPCs a base 50/50 moderate chance of success. The player might shift the odds up or down based on the nature of the combat and any related circumstances. Pick up the dice and hope for the best.

If the ally fails a heal skill check and is still among the living (or was never healed but is still alive), that person is no longer able to participate in the mission, which includes participating in any skill checks. If the player can close down the current scene cleanly without forcing a follow-up scene, it's possible to set a cutscene or an obstacle scene related to bringing wounded allies to a safe refuge, or related to visiting recovering allies in a safe place later in the story. The player might opt to handwave that wounded allies are dropped off at a safe place off-scene to rest and recuperate, whether by ambulance, traveling friendly samaritans or some other story conveyance. The player needs to be able to break out of follow-up scenes cleanly to get the chance for enough time to pass between scenes that any wounded allies can be successfully parked in a safe place.

Unlike allies and foes, the player's character can sustain three levels of damage. The first level of damage for a

AN AMBUSH EXAMPLE

The player's character, Brutus the barbarian, is in a dungeon where he is approaching a single foe, an orc warrior with a conflict 0 rating. The place is underground tunnels. The player decides the first detection opportunity is at medium range. Neither side is trying to sneak, so the player makes an opposed notice roll. The orc uses conflict 0 for notice; Brutus' notice defaults to untrained at -1. The player rolls the skill check at -1 (unlikely) and Brutus fails, which means the orc hears Brutus first.

The player decides the orc will now try to sneak up on Brutus. That will require a second opposed roll: sneak (again defaulting to the orc's conflict 0) against Brutus' notice -1. If successful, the orc reaches close range unnoticed. For the ambush to succeed (and the orc to gain a surprise round), Brutus must fail a final notice -1 against the orc's sneak of 0. If Brutus succeeds that skill check, the two engage at close range without surprise. If Brutus fails, the orc gets an ambush round where the barbarian may only defend, using nimble or dodge (Brutus has no shield so cannot block). After the surprise round, the player proceeds with regular combat.

BRINGING A BOW TO A KNIFE FIGHT

Can characters fight with ranged weapons in melee combat? Basically, no. It is possible to fire into melee at close range with ranged weapons. But when one side loses its hand-to-hand warriors that held the line, everyone in close range with ranged and throwing weapons default to hand-to-hand melee skills.

It is possible for the player to have one (or a team) of NPC missileers at a time throw themselves in front of an advancing opposition. If they have no melee weapons, skill defaults to a generic conflict rating, with a -1 penalty if the character doesn't have melee weaponry.

Meanwhile, remaining characters with ranged weapon skills can hang back and continue to fire thrown/ranged weapons. But if no one is holding the line with melee combat, opponents collectively overrun all missileers within close range, or do so after they advance from medium range.

THREE-SIDED COMBAT

What happens if an unexpected event calls for a beast/monster or a third-party force of foes to appear on the scene? It's rare, but could trigger a three-way brawl. Here is a way to handle this kind of event.

First, the player should assess the overall situation for the scene. If the player character's group and a foe group are in active conflict, that makes lots of noise and the new force entering the scene will be aware of the conflict in progress. If that's not the case, it's possible to use the rules for each side detecting the others, for a possible ambush and surprise round.

The player should assess from what place the new force enters the scene, whether the player's character detects it before they engage, and what actions make the most sense for the new forces to take on the scene. An intelligent newcomer, for example might opt to sit out an existing battle, either to ambush weakened survivors or even to slink away if either side in the scene appears too powerful to challenge. The new force might only engage with ranged weapons, for example. It's also possible that existing foes on the scene flee at the sight of the newcomer, if the new foe is powerful and fearsome enough.

The player can opt to ask for trouble with a yes-no questions, such as: "is the new force allied with the foes already on the scene?" If the answer is yes, the newcomer joins foes already on the scene to face off against the player's character. Consolidate the two foe forces into one group and continue the conflict.

But if the new contingent does choose to engage, and it is not allied with either side, the player can ask the following yes-no question each round: "is the new foe attacking the player character's side this round?" The default odds for this unknown question should be 50/50 moderate.

If the yes-no question roll returns yes, add the foes together for an attack against the player character's group that round. If the roll returns no, add the new foe to the player character group's attack, against the existing foe group that round. Each round, the player can decide which foe(s) the player character's group attacks.

player character is "grazed", which has no penalties. A player's character automatically recovers from being grazed as soon as substantial time passes between scenes (i.e., when the next scene is not a follow-up scene).

The second level of damage is "wounded". A wounded player character suffers a -1 shift penalty to all abilities and skill checks. To recover from being wounded takes a successful healing roll such as a *first aid* skill check. If a wounded player's character is self-administering a heal skill check, remember that the -1 shift penalty for being wounded applies to this check. As always, failure carries consequences. If a skill check to treat a wound fails, for example the wounds the player's character suffered are usually not treatable except in long-term recovery, after the end of the current mission.

The third and final level of damage for a player's character is "incapacitated". At this point the player's character is badly hurt, either unconscious or otherwise helpless. It's up to the player to decide how to proceed, depending on how the character was incapacitated and the type of story being told.

In a story with mortality as a threat, one option is for the player to ask the yes-no question: "Is my player's character still alive?" with a difficulty based on the character's *hardy* and the circumstances surrounding the player character's incapacitation. The player should be generous on setting the likelihood of the player character's death low; in pulpy or heroic settings, the player might decide not even to risk the player character's death with a roll.

Any scene where the player's character is incapacitated does not shut down cleanly. If the character is still alive, the next scene is a follow-up that starts with the consequences of the last scene. It must account for the past scene's overall failure, and any unresolved individual consequences and trouble. The player character's condition improves to wounded. The player might set up an obstacle scene to give the player's character a chance at a daring escape from dire circumstances. That's the sort of thing adventure stories are all about! ☺

12) RPG POWERS

There are three types of supernatural skill sets in Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG ruleset, called powers. Depending on the setting, none or only some types might be available to characters. Powers can never be used untrained: Characters must have the relevant skill. Powers are also covered in summary rules (p.159-164).

Special abilities are individual skills based on *hardy.* A *special ability* is a skill that is intrinsically part of the character, which the character can use at any time.

Magic are power skill groups based on *smart*. Characters with *magic* start with three skills (spells). They can use each spell once in a scene or set of follow-up scenes.

Psionics are power skill groups based on *willful*. Characters with psionics start with two skills (talents) and a power pool of three points. They can use talents the number of times in a scene or set of follow-up scenes as they have total points in the pool.

Characters using magic or psionics need time to recharge their spells or talents. This happens automatically whenever the next scene is not a follow-up scene, so that time has passed between scenes.

There are five categories of power uses, and characters can mix them freely: *attribute powers*, *melee powers*, *ranged powers*, *skill powers*, and *equipment/utility powers*. Powers can either replace or provide bonuses to skill checks. Powers that give bonuses never stack under any circumstances. The maximum bonus that powers can ever give to a particular skill check is a +1 shift.

An *attribute* power enhances an attribute for a +1 shift to a skill check related to that attribute. The power only gives the itself attribute a boost; it does not affect skills. Use of an attribute power lasts for one skill check.

A *melee power* can substitute or enhance the character's physical/melee skill. The player has the choice of designing a power used in place of a physical/melee skill; or a power that adds +1 shift to a character's existing physical/melee skill. Use of a melee power lasts for one skill check (treat a whole conflict as one skill check).

BUILDING A MAGE

A player is building a player's character for a fantasy setting where magic exists and is readily available. The player puts together attributes, then holds three skill points in reserve to buy spells, which translates into three points to spend. The player gave the mage a smart +1 attribute. The player character's default magic power is set at -1 shift to smart: The character's base for spells is 0.

For the first spell, the player wants to shoot lightning bolts as missile weapons. The player spends one point to create a ranged spell and calls it lightning +1.

For the second spell, the player spends a point to create a melee spell and calls it fists of iron +1. The player separately spends a conventional skill point on boxing +1 (the player character's base physical/melee is 0, based on strong 0 and hardy 0). The player notes the fist of iron +1 spell, when successfully cast, adds +1 bonus to the player character's boxing skill, for an impressive +2 total base with hand-to-hand fisticuffs in conflicts. Based on the spell's trapping (i.e., a window dressing description of the power), the player might be able to stretch the fists of iron spell as an equipment power, for example maybe to use the power to add +1 for a strong attribute skill check for breaking down a door.

The player decides the player character's third spell should be something defensive, and spends a point to create an equipment spell, calling it eldritch armor +1. The player decides that since the spell is cast at +1 shift, which is likely to succeed, the result of the yes-no question whether the eldritch armor stopped a blow should also be set at likely. That makes the eldritch armor spell roughly the equivalent of heavy conventional armor. Like conventional armor, it either can stop 1 level of damage in a combat and then is used up, or the player can choose armor to degrade with chaining yes-no questions (see p.53).

After adding two more conventional skills (profession: alchemy +2 and research +2), equipment, background details, and notes on starting character relationships, our mage is ready for storytelling action.

SETTING UP TRAPPINGS

For the sample assembled in the previous page sidebar, the player was off to a good start with trappings. The player didn't just say "ranged weapon spell"; it's clear what a lightning bolt looks like. Fists of iron is similarly evocative of its effect.

But the eldritch armor spell is vague, and needs some fleshing out. The player describes the effect as a soft-glowing greenish field of energy that surrounds the player's character, causing weapons to bounce off harmlessly. Note in this case that all three spells have completely different trappings. That's fine. The player also could have opted for a central theme, with spells like hurled boulder for ranged, stone fists for melee, and a protective skin of rock for the defensive armor spell.

Trappings can help by suggesting creative alternative power uses. A lightning bolt could be used to disable an electrical or electronic device; iron fists might make it possible to break things (a door, a thin brick wall); eldritch armor's glowing green protective field might supply dim light, useful in a pinch if the player's character is caught in pitch darkness.

Trappings are also helpful when it comes to asking for trouble. Lightning bolt is probably noisy, the flash possibly blinding, and the effects might be capricious around conductive surfaces like water or metal. Once cast, fists of iron likely can't manipulate anything fine, and risks breaking things unintentionally; fists of iron beating down a door or wall is of course going to be noisy. The glowing eldritch armor will be noticeable, and could well attract unwanted attention, either from foes active in the conflict, or from observers that the mage might have to deal with in later scenes.

ACTIVATION TRAPPINGS

How does a power get activated? It is up to the player to define actions, materials or limitations for activating a power. A need for focus items, rituals and components, or limitations to the power's use, could be handy to help the player ask for trouble. Just like with other player's character drawbacks and disadvantages, there is no bonus for choosing complex evocations or power complications.

A *ranged power* substitutes or enhances the character's ranged skill. As with a melee power, the player can either build a ranged power to use in place of a ranged skill, or else build a power that adds +1 shift to a character's existing ranged skill. Use of a ranged power lasts for one skill check (treat a whole conflict as one skill check).

A *skill power* substitutes or enhances a particular skill. Any skill can be substituted or enhanced. Common skill powers include *medic*; *disable* (or *repair*); *athletics*; *influence*; *empathy*; *handle animals*; *survival*; *sneak*; *notice*; and *research*. The player can build a skill power that displaces the skill check, or else build a power that adds +1 shift to a character's existing individual skill or skill group. A skill power lasts for one skill check.

An *equipment power* lets a character perform actions that would otherwise need specialized equipment. It might let that character bypass a skill check, or substitute one type of skill check for another. Example equipment powers are related to movement (flying, climbing, jumping, teleport, tunneling, insubstantiality); enhancing or shrouding senses (light/darkness, detect foes); and defense (armor/shield deflection). An equipment power lasts for one skill check (treat a whole conflict as one skill check).

power trappings

This chapter describes powers in generic terms. It's up to the player to customize each power to its user. Each magic spell, psionic talent or special ability should have a power trapping (basically window dressing) that describes how it is activated, and how it manifests. A melee power, for example, could be a dancing (real or ghostly) weapon; or the character may fight with flame or electricity bursting forth from hands; or the character might summon a spirit animal that engages in combat. A ranged power might be barbs or arrows plucked out of thin air, balls of fire or bolts of lightning shot out of a wand. An equipment power related to climbing might cause the character to sprout claws or suckers. Flying may mean the character walks on air, uses a jetpack, or sprouts (or has) bird- or bat-like wings.

Power trappings don't provide any modifiers of their own. But there might be cases where the way a power works might influence a skill check; might prompt a yes-no question or influence an answer; or might even be used by the player to ask for trouble.

powers and consequences

Just like other types of skill checks, when a power skill check fails, there is a consequence for failure. In combat, a power failure might be like any other conflict skill check fail. That is, when the player's side fails the roll, the player character's group takes a level of damage. That consequence is punishment enough.

But when power skill checks fail, the player should follow up with a yes-no question on whether the power itself backfired. A no result means the power worked as expected, and it was the skill check itself that went wrong: The player can base the consequence off the conventional failed skill check. A yes result means something went wrong with the power itself. The player bases the consequence off the blowback of the failed special ability, psionic talent or magic spell.

The most common consequence of a special ability or psionic talent failure is that the character temporarily exhausts the ability to use powers. The character cannot use any power again for at least that scene and any follow-up scenes, until it is possible to narrate time passing for recovery. A harsh player might narrate that the character loses all powers for the rest of the mission.

Magic spells are especially capricious: When a spell's skill check fails, the consequence should be something that achieves roughly the opposite of the intended effect. For example, a *detect foes* spell failure or *sneak* spell failure should instead alert the foes to the presence of the mage; a *disable* spell failure may trigger a trap with the mage (or an ally) in it; a *research* spell failure might either provide the wrong information, or else alert others of the mage's line of questioning, giving the desired information to a rival. When it comes to spells going wrong, players should be cruel and creative. ☹

POWER MANIPULATION

Can the player's character use skill powers, equipment powers or attribute powers to affect others, for example with the previously mentioned eldritch armor spell? Is it possible to use a ranged power to perform some sort of skill trick? To manipulate a melee power into a close area effect? To fight in melee with a ranged power?

Chapter 14 on situational rules and appendix V (p.142) covers complex options for flexible use of powers. The simple way to flex powers is for the player to ask a 50/50 moderate (or less likely) yes-no question whether a power can be used in an unconventional way. If the answer is yes, you may attempt this one-time power manipulation with *at least* -1 shift penalty. Be prepared to amp up the consequences if the skill check fails.

FOES, ALLIES AND POWERS

Individual allies, rivals and/or foes can have one or more powers. Teams/minions can also be power users, and even mindless minions can have special abilities. For teams and minions, use the generic conflict skill to represent power skill level. Other power users should have their special abilities, talents or spells separate and in addition to any generic conflict rating.

For example, death cultists might use life-draining rays of darkness at range, and tear at their victims with wraith-like ghost hands in melee combat. If they are an average quality group with 3 members, for example, their generic conflict skill -1 would also represent their spell-using ability. In game terms, those cultists might be using spells, but roll for them under generic conflict skill, just like three average quality mercenaries armed with swords and crossbows.

The differences will be in spell trappings, options for consequences, and potentially in asking for trouble. There's also the question about how the player's character might interact with different types of powered teams outside of conflict. The effects of cultist magic might manifest itself differently, but in game terms the basic team/minions conflict skill level remains the same.

NON-COMBAT POWERS IN COMBAT

When a character wants to use a non-combat power such as a skill power or equipment power during a conflict, treat it like any other non-combat skill check in a conflict. The power user doesn't participate in the conflict the round during which the non-combat power is activated. This might be, for example, if someone uses a healing power; or if our example mage wants to cast the eldritch armor spell after a conflict has already started; or if someone wants to retreat by teleporting.

POWERS FOR SKILLS AND COMBAT: A REALITY CHECK

Powers can take the place of skills, including melee or ranged combat skills. Alternatively, a power can provide a +1 bonus to a chosen skill, skill group or attribute. Given the flexibility of powers, it would seem like powers are much more valuable, even unbalanced, compared to conventional combat and non-combat skills.

Powers are not very unbalancing in group conflicts. As explained in chapter 11, combat uses one character's melee or ranged skill as the base; others participating in combat can provide just a flat +1 bonus to their side in a conflict.

It's a similar situation for group skill checks outside of conflicts. For group checks with unlimited assistance or limited assistance (for more information about assisted skill checks see chapter 10), individuals or teams/minions need a skill level of at least 0 to participate.

A power-using individual or team/minions can try and extend a power to affect whoever is leading the conflict or skill check; or the power user can try to increase an individual or team/minions' skill up to 0 or higher, to let a member participate in a group skill check who otherwise wouldn't be skilled enough. Use the rules on power manipulation earlier in this chapter, or else the optional rules for flexible use of powers in chapter 14, if the power user tries to give someone else a skill bonus using a power.

Also keep in mind: Powers that give bonuses never stack, so the maximum available skill check benefit to a group is +1.

«Each magic spell, psionic talent or special ability should have a power trapping that describes how it is activated, and how it manifests...»

13) RPG EXPERIENCE

For Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG rules, most allies and foes have a single generic *conflict* statistic, which covers competency in all things. That one statistic covers any actions by that individual or team/minions contingent.

The player can adjust ally and foe skill levels as outlined in culture/occupation modifiers (p. 63). For allies, foes and beasts without a culture and occupation, the player needs to adjust skill checks using common sense based on its nature. For example, a player might decide zombie foes have a -1 shift penalty when it comes to *notice* skill checks and automatically fail *smart* attribute skill checks. The player decided that zombies aren't bright, fast or perceptive, so the player character's group has a better chance to sneak past. On the other hand, even if dogs or giant rats have a low generic conflict rating, they should have at least a +1 shift bonus to *notice* skill checks.

Always treat each team, collection of minions or animals as one unit for the sake of assessing its skill level. Power levels of different size weak and average teams are listed here, and are also on the NPC sheet and in appendix R (p.139). Any team/minions designated as *weak* quality have the generic *conflict* skill levels below:

# Members	Skill
1	Nigh impossible -3
2-3	Very unlikely -2
4-5	Unlikely -1
6-8	50/50 Moderate 0
9-10	Likely +1

Any *average* quality team/minions or animals have the generic *conflict* skill levels below:

# Members	Skill
1-3	Unlikely -1
4-6	50/50 Moderate 0
7-10	Likely +1

Leaders typically have a *conflict* 0 rating, but they have a unique special ability. Leaders cannot be taken out in melee until after all members of any team, minions or animals in the group are eliminated first.

TEAMS IN CONFLICT

What happens when a team or minions loses members? Its skill goes down as its number of members drops. For example, a group of 10 goblins (weak minions) has a conflict +1 rating, or likely chance of success. As soon as it drops to 8 members, it has conflict 0 rating, or 50/50 moderate chance of success. Since every skill check is tied to the team or minions' conflict skill, there is a downward spiral as their numbers are whittled down.

A team or minions usually support rather than lead conflicts. In that role, a team or minions can give a +1 bonus to a group's conflict skill checks even as their members drop.

BREAKING UP TEAMS AND MINIONS

Can the player break up a team or minions into two or more smaller contingents? No: A team or minions do everything together as a unit. They don't act individually.

Team or minion members are only treated as individuals for dealing damage to them, healing and recovery, and for the potential to promote a member to individual NPC status at the end of a mission. For each level of damage, a team or minions loses 2 members. For recovery, the player makes individual skill checks and asks yes-no questions about each member.

As chapter 11 on combat describes, after a deadly conflict the consequence for an unsuccessful first aid/healing skill check is the yes-no question: "Is that person still alive?" A yes result means that the member still lives, but is disabled and unable to participate for the rest of the mission. A no result means the member is either dead, or is permanently disabled and will not come back for this or future missions.

REWARDS AND WOUNDED OR DEAD ALLIES

Allies, whether individuals or teams/minions, will drop during conflicts. The player's character might, for example, start the mission with three individual NPC allies and two teams, and end the mission with just one individual NPC ally and a few members of one of the two teams still left standing.

Even if allies are taken out, the player awards each individual or team/minion contingent of allies 1 experience point, and each gets a roughly equal share of financial rewards.

For the above example, if the player has collected 100 silver coins at the end of a fantasy mission, that gets divided into six lots of 16 coins apiece: one share for the player's character; one share for each of the individual NPC allies whether they are still standing, incapacitated but still alive, or were killed during the mission; and one share for each ally team, regardless of how many members (if any) are left standing. If there are unusual items that don't have straightforward monetary value, such as magic/special items, a small vehicle, mount or owed favors, the player's character might get those directly: It might call for a social skill check in a final cutscene, with the clear consequence that failure means the special item(s) go to another owner or purpose.

If there is ever a question about dividing experience points, for example if experience points can't be distributed evenly, give your player's character a break by rounding up any fractions in their favor.

An average NPC has a generic *conflict* 0 rating, and optionally has one skill or power at +1.

A talented NPC has a generic *conflict* 0 rating, and optionally has two skills or powers at +1.

A brute, powerful entity or automaton has either a generic *conflict* +1 rating plus a special ability at +1 related to its nature; or else has a flat-out *conflict* +2 rating. Special abilities are a type of power, covered in chapter 12.

Hybrids/animals may have a *conflict* -1, 0 or +1 rating decided by the player, plus a special ability related to the nature of the hybrid creature or animal. Again, special abilities are covered in chapter 12.

An infiltrator/spy has a *conflict* 0 base skill level, but should be assigned multiple skills and/or powers at +1. This type of NPC should be a powerful, versatile and dangerous ally or foe.

experience and progression

As mentioned in the Libre Solo Role Playing's GM engine rules, when it comes to dividing up experience and rewards, each individual ally or ally team/minions contingent gets a share of experience from a mission. Here's how to calculate the division of experience between the player's character and allies with the RPG rules. The rules both for awarding and spending experience points are also summarized in appendix T (p.141).

After the end of any story, award the player's character 1 experience point for each scene that qualified as a meaningful success. Add 2 experience points if the player finished by getting the mission's needed meaningful successes instead of quitting. Now subtract 1 experience point for each individual ally or team/minions contingent that took part in the mission. This is regardless of whether the ally or team/minions participated in all or just part of the mission, or whether the ally is still alive at the end of the mission. If the final result is less than 1, give the player's character 1 experience point for surviving, no matter how poorly the mission went.

When it comes to spending experience points to improve the player character's skills, the following rules apply:

A new skill can be added at 1 point over its base value by spending 2 experience points.

An existing skill can be raised to 2 points over its base value by spending 2 experience points, or to 3 points over base value by spending 3 experience points. Skills cannot be raised above +3 over base or above +3 total.

A new skill group can be added at 1 point over base value by spending 6 experience points. Single skills in the skill group can be raised by spending 2 points (2 points above) or 3 points (3 points above) the skill group's value, up to a maximum of 3 points over base or +3 total.

An entire skill group that is already at 1 point over base can be raised to 2 points above base value by spending 9 experience points. Single skills can be raised by spending 3 points (to 3 points above). Skill groups cannot be raised above 2 points over base value or above +2 total.

Any one attribute can be raised by 1 by spending a massive 12 experience points. Attributes cannot be raised above +1.

In a setting with powers, experience points can be spent on powers in these ways. Note that skills cannot be raised above 3 points over base level, or above +3 total:

For magic, adding a new spell at 1 point over base ability costs 1 experience point. Any one magic spell can be raised to 2 points over base ability by spending 2 experience points, or to 3 points over base ability by spending 3 experience points.

For psionics, adding a new psionic talent at 1 point over base ability costs 2 experience points; adding 1 point to the psionic point pool also costs 2 experience points. Any one psionic talent can be raised to 2 points over base ability by spending 3 experience points, or to 3 points over base ability by spending 5 experience points.

For special abilities, adding a new special ability at 1 point over base ability costs 3 experience points.

EXPERIENCE AWARD EXAMPLE

After the end of a tough slog, the player brings Arthur Falcone across the finish line for a long mission that needed four meaningful successes. The player only managed three meaningful successes before Falcone was so battered that the player decided the investigator was in no shape to go on, and quit the mission.

That means the player secured 3 experience points for scenes with meaningful successes, but missed out on 2 more experience points for completing the mission successfully.

But the player also brought in both Falcone's ally Toni Graham, and rival Emily Chan, plus Emily's retinue of police officers for the story.

The player needs to give Toni 1 experience point, meaning Falcone gets the remaining 2 experience points. As a recurring rival, Emily Chan automatically gets 1 experience point, but that award is automatic and does not come out of the player's pool. Emily's group of police officers gets nothing: While the player gave the officers names they're neither recurring rivals, nor are they part of Falcone's ally group.

The player decides to spend the 2 experience points to buy sneak at +1 over the base value (this falls under subterfuge and survival, which is at base -1 for Arthur). Spending a point brings that skill level from an untrained -2 up to sneak 0.

The player asks "did Toni advance?", sets the odds at 50/50 moderate and rolls yes. The player buys Toni first aid at +1 over the base conflict stat of 0. Arthur had been getting into a lot of fist fights, and an assistant with that skill might help.

For Emily Chan, the player adds pistol +1 skill. Arthur Falcone shouldn't ever have to face down the police detective in a gunfight, but it reflects Emily's competence across all aspects of her job.

PROMOTING A TEAM/MINION MEMBER

Whether it's a minor noble's retinue of guards (a team), a barbarian's shifty goblin chattel (minions), or a necromancer's group of zombies (mindless minions), any of these ally teams/minions also check for promotion at the end of a mission in which they participated.

At the end of a mission, the player asks: "did a member of this group advance from the experience?" If the ally team or minions did nothing and were just along for the ride, the odds ought to be nigh impossible or very unlikely. But if they led some skill checks, participated in others, faced a conflict or two, and maybe lost some members, set the odds of advancement at 50/50 moderate or even likely. If the roll result of this yes-no question is yes, the player can promote one of the allies to an individual NPC.

First, re-assess the conflict rating for the individual: A weak team/minions can have as low as a conflict -3 rating, but a promoted weak NPC has a generic conflict -1 rating, and a promoted average NPC such as a guard might have a generic conflict 0 rating.

In each case the individual NPC becomes a new ally. That new individual will need to be recruited separately from the team or minions (with a separate yes-no question to check for availability, and possibly a social skill check to try and recruit the NPC). In any future missions, that individual NPC gets an experience point and an equal share of valuables.

As a weak or average NPC, the individual may also get one skill that is at +1 skill level above that character's generic conflict rating. Ideally, the assigned skill should reflect some memorable skill check where the ally team/minions contributed to the mission. An average guard NPC might get an extra skill such as sword +1 or interrogate +1. A weak goblin NPC might get sneak 0, or hide 0, or notice 0. A weak zombie NPC doesn't have many options, but might get claws 0.

The remaining un-promoted team or minion contingent remains available separately. Each time they appear in a future mission, that is another chance to promote another of the team/minions' members to become an individual NPC.

Increasing a special ability to 2 points over base ability costs 4 experience points; raising it to 3 points over base ability costs 8 experience points.

ally, ally team/minions and rival experience

Libre Solo Role Playing's GM engine already noted earlier that allies also should progress in the game. The rules to do this are below, and are also summarized in appendix T (p. 141). At the end of a mission, whether it succeeded or failed, ask the following yes-no question for each individual ally that is still alive and available for future missions: "Did this ally learn enough from this experience to advance?" Set the odds based on the amount of participation the ally had in the mission, including skill checks and danger of conflicts.

If the answer is yes, the individual ally that participated in the mission can get a new skill (or spell, talent or special ability if these are available in the setting); or raise an existing skill or power by one level. A new skill or power should be 1 level above that character's general *conflict* skill. An ally's general *conflict* skill level never changes, and allies have a maximum possible skill or power of +3.

For an ally team or minions, ask the following yes-no question: "Did a member of the team/minions advance from the experience?" Set the odds based on the amount of overall participation and danger of conflicts that the team or minions faced in the mission. If the answer is yes, the player can promote one member of the team or minions to become a standalone individual NPC ally, usually converting into an average NPC who can be recruited separately in future stories. The rest of the members of the team or minions remain a single unit, recruited as normal.

Finally, any recurring rival who appears in a mission automatically gets a new skill (or spell, talent or special ability), or improves an existing skill or power up to the maximum of +3. The recurring rival advances automatically, without asking a yes-no question about advancement. Rivals should remain competent, challenging and dangerous whenever they appear in a mission to square off against the player's character. ☺

14) SITUATIONAL RULES

This chapter covers extra rules for the RPG ruleset. Some of these rules are optional; others cover special situations that may or may not apply, depending on the setting. Use rules in this chapter that add fun and challenges to Libre Solo Role Playing. Ignore rules that don't apply to your setting of choice, or that you find bog down the game.

rules for building monster encounters

Monsters represent a vast range of threats. They can be extremely deadly. Later in this book are two sample settings; the Artanes fantasy setting has a sample encounter table that includes some sample monsters.

The formula below can generate a wide range of monsters. These instructions are also summarized in appendix U (p.142).

Generate the monster's *conflict* skill modifier by rolling d10 and dividing by 2 (round down). A d10 roll result of 0 (ie. 10) explodes, meaning roll again and add 10 before dividing the final by 2. If the *conflict* skill roll result is odd, also give the monster a special ability relevant to the situation at a base +1 skill level, or optionally higher (special abilities are a described in chapter 12). Next, determine the number of damage levels for the monster by rolling d10 and subtracting 5. Any result less than 1 means the creature has 1 damage level. A d10 roll result of 0 (ie., 10) explodes: roll again and add 10.

To give an idea of scale, any creature with higher than a +3 sum of skill modifier and damage levels is a dangerous threat; a creature with more than a +6 sum of skill modifier and damage levels is a frightening beast; a creature with more than a +9 sum of skill modifier and damage levels is in the realm of terrifying behemoths; and a creature with more than +15 sum of skill modifier and damage levels is in the realm of cosmic horrors.

If the player needs to assign a point value to make a monster part of a foe encounter budget, its point value is triple the conflict skill modifier, times the number of damage levels the beast can take.

MONSTER THREAT EXAMPLE

In a science fiction game, the player's character has landed on a wilderness planet to investigate rumors of an ancient monolith that may hold a vital clue.

After leaving the shuttle and making his way through the thick jungle, the player rolls an unexpected event that generates "monster/beast".

Picking up the dice, the player rolls d10 for the monster's skill modifier and gets 8, divided by 2 for a terrifying +4 conflict skill. The roll was even, so this beast has no special abilities. A second roll produces a second 8, meaning the creature will take 8 -5, or 3 damage levels to take down.

The player asks a clarifying yes-no question whether the creature is mammal-like (the alternative the player considers is reptilian). The answer is yes, so the player decides the beast is a cross between a tiger and a kodiak bear. The player's character might be able to take down the creature with successive shots at range. But in a lush jungle, getting a ranged attack will be difficult. The player decides the creature will try to ambush the player's character. Fortunately the creature has no special abilities, and the player assesses the sneak of this big beast at 0. If the player's character fails to notice the beast before it advances to close range, it will be a deadly threat.

Since the monster came from an unexpected event, it isn't part of a foe budget. But if the player needs to calculate a point value for this beast, it is triple its 4 skill x 3 damage levels, for a massive 36 points total.

MONSTER SPECIAL ABILITIES

Some sample monster special abilities include:
Melee attack bonus (claws, pounce, poison);
Ranged attacks (spikes, fire/lightning breath, mental blast);
Skills (enhanced sneak, intimidate, notice);
Equipment (armor, flight, jumping, climbing, tunneling, swimming).

EXAMPLE POWER MANIPULATION

The player character mage with a lightning bolt ranged attack spell wants to cast a forking bolt into a melee with a mix of allies and enemies. It's a *pulpy* setting, so the player character's group deals a base 2 damage levels if it succeeds in a round of conflict. If the foe group succeeds, it deals 1 damage level to the player character's group.

The player's character intends to cast a ranged lightning bolt spell at medium range (0 shifts) that will cause triple damage (-2 shifts). The player's allies are in melee and the player doesn't want to affect them (-2 shifts for ranged finesse). The mage has lightning +1 spell skill. With the total -4 shifts, the player character's group starts at -3. Fortunately, the player's character has a big ally group: There are five individual and team allies, for +5 shifts. The player character's side totals [-3 +5], for +2 for the conflict. The foe group's highest skill is 0, with three individual and one team foe. That's [0 +1 +1 +1], for +3 total. The two sides are [+2 (player's side)] - [+3 (foe group's side)], for a total -1, making the player character's group unlikely to succeed with the skill check.

If the player does succeed at the skill check, triple damage from an overcharged forked lightning spell in a pulpy setting will deal a massive 6 damage levels to the foe group. If the player fails the combat skill check, the player character's group takes 1 damage level and the player character's mage also takes an immediate consequence: Overpowered combat spell failures should have especially nasty side effects. To start, the mage should take the generic penalty of losing access to all spells for the rest of this scene and any follow-up scenes.

If the player had excluded the "doesn't affect allies in melee" clause, that would've improved the odds for the player character's group by two shifts. The combat skill check would then be +1, likely to succeed. But with success, both sides would have taken damage. For a *pulpy* setting that's 2 damage levels to the foe group for every 1 damage level for the player character's side, so 6 damage levels to the foe group, 3 damage levels to the player character's side. Failure, as before, would inflict 1 damage level for the player character's side and cause an immedate consequence for the player character's mage.

rules for flexible use of powers

Chapter 12 has a brief sidebar about manipulating powers to accomplish more flexible results. The default of a beneficial power is that it affects only the power user. Melee and ranged powers channel through the power's user, to affect the target of the attack.

A power user might want a variant that affects allies within touch range, or all allies in the scene. Healing powers are a good example. But power users might also look toward equipment powers, for example to transport multiple people via a group teleport, or mass fly or underwater breathing. Another classic effect are defensive powers that surround and protect all members of a group.

For conflicts, a power user may want to boost the power for a bigger, more dangerous impact on multiple opponents through area effects such as as bolts, beams, cones, spheres, or harmful auras. The simple way to handle power manipulation from chapter 12 is to set a probability and ask the yes-no question: "can the power user invoke this power in this way at this time?" The player assesses the likelihood and makes the roll. If the answer comes back yes, the player can try to succeed by rolling a skill check with at least a -1 shift penalty for each complication in invoking the power.

Here is a more structured way to figure out skill level difficulty for manipulating powers. It involves assessing what the power user wants to do, and applying shift penalties. As discussed in chapter 12, the power user *must* be the lead person for the skill check (this is one way a ranged power will lead a conflict skill check even though melee conflict is already happening). If the power user is *not* leading the skill check, it only contributes a +1 shift to the conflict. Outside a conflict, a power can raise the skill of a member in a group skill check to 0 or higher, so that the extra member might qualify to assist the check.

For beneficial powers the modifiers are as follows, which is also listed in appendix V (p.142):

A flat -1 shift for the power user to transfer an effect from her- or himself to another person who is in melee range (can be touched), as the target. Otherwise:

-1 shift for each person in melee range (touching distance) of the power user to be affected.

-2 shifts for each person to be affected who is in close range but the power user cannot touch (for example to affect persons using thrown weapons in melee).

-3 shifts for each person to be affected who is at medium range (missile weapon range) to the power user.

Assess an additional -1 shift for each person the power user wants to include who is resisting the effect. This might be a subject who resists being teleported away, or who wants to lock out a telepathic link.

For melee powers or ranged powers used in conflicts, the following shift penalties apply:

-1 shift for each damage level multiplier. That is, -1 shift to double the setting's usual damage level, -2 shifts to triple the setting's usual damage level, and -3 shifts to quadruple the setting's usual damage level.

For the default *gritty* setting (where the standard is 1 damage level), a power user can boost the power to try and cause 2, 3 or 4 damage levels. In a *pulpy* setting (where the standard is 2 damage levels), boosting a power multiplies the effect to 4, 6 or 8 damage levels. For a *heroic* setting (where the standard is 3 damage levels), boosting a power multiplies the effect to rain down a massive 6, 9 or 12 damage levels on foes. The power user *must* be the lead person to make the skill check in the conflict. Otherwise the power user can only contribute a flat +1 shift to the melee or ranged conflict roll.

Additionally, there is a finesse penalty if the power user wants to target a mix of allies and foes selectively while they are engaged in melee combat. The finesse penalty is an extra -1 shift if the power user is at close range, and -2 shifts if the power user is at medium range to the melee. The power user can opt to skip the finesse penalty, in which case both the foe group and the ally group take damage if the player character's group skill check succeeds (the player character's group doesn't suffer extra *pulpy* or *heroic* setting damage multipliers). If the

UNCONVENTIONAL POWERS USE

An inventive player will think up creative new ways to use powers. For example, take the player character mage from chapter 12 with the fists of iron +1 spell. The power as designed is supposed to give the mage a +1 bonus in melee combat.

But what if the mage successfully casts the effect on someone else, such as a would-be pickpocket, so the subject loses all fine manipulation? Or what if the mage wants an on-the-spot variant that creates feet of iron, to slow down an escaping foe? These are creative possibilities, and examples of a power being invoked in a way other than it was intended. Those creative uses inflict *at least* a -1 shift on top of any other penalties.

For the pickpocket example, the effect is at a -1 shift for affecting one other person in melee range; and a -1 shift for the subject being unwilling. In this case, the player ignores the extra -1 shift for doing something unusual with the power, because loss of fine manipulation is written into the spell's trapping. The total penalty for this effect is -2 shifts, and the mage's chance of success is [+1 -2] totaling -1: unlikely to succeed.

Trying to cast a feet of iron variant of the spell is definitely an unusual application. Again the player is being generous and sticks to a minimum -1 shift for the manipulation. In this case the attempt took place at close range as the foe was escaping, for another -2 shifts; and the foe is unwilling, for another -1 shift. The total penalty is -4 shifts. The mage's chance of success is [+1 -4] to total -3, nigh impossible. Unless the mage has some other bonuses to factor into the skill check, it's probably not going to happen.

MANIPULATION CONSEQUENCES

Manipulating powers, particularly overpowering to cause extra damage, should be very dangerous. Whenever a power skill check fails (this includes a person leading with a power in a conflict), use the rules on powers and consequences (p.77) to determine if just the skill check failed, or if the underlying power went awry. If the power itself failed, the blowback of the overpowered failure should be very serious indeed for the power user.

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EXPLOSIVES AND HEAVY WEAPONS

If it's important for the story to include machine guns, plasma throwers, explosives or other heavy weapons, the optional rules for flexible use of powers is a template for including this type of equipment and its deadly effects.

Treat a machine gun as a missile weapon with a double damage multiplier.

A thrown hand grenade is at throwing distance, and has a triple damage multiplier; a grenade launcher extends the explosive effect's range as a missile weapon.

Treat cannons and other big guns as missile weapons. They could have up to a massive quadruple damage multiplier.

One downside of all heavy weapons is that they have no finesse. Any weapon pointed into melee does damage to both sides. It also makes sense to penalize any healing and recovery rolls, or even rule it out completely, for anyone taken out by heavy weapons or explosives.

Heavy weapons and explosives are not power manipulations, so their effects can't be altered. There are no skill check penalties in exchange for the damage multipliers of these weapons: They are being used exactly as designed.

Like powers, any heavy weapons use must lead the skill check for its side to count the extra damage multiplier (as with powers, this is a special case where a ranged attack can lead a melee conflict). The consequence for skill check failure with heavy weapons may be extremely dangerous. See the sidebar on manipulation consequences (p.85) to determine whether something went wrong with use of the heavy weapon itself. Create a very serious consequence indeed if it turns out that the weapon malfunctioned.

When might a foe group have heavy weapons or explosives? As a general rule, if the player character's group gets access to these types of weapons, then the foes they face should also have these types of weapons (or their equivalents). When in doubt, a quick yes-no question can clear up whether foes are similarly armed.

power user didn't use finesse, assign damage to both sides participating in the melee conflict.

Additionally, the player should assess -1 or more shifts if the power user is trying to use a power in an unconventional way.

If the player decides to use these more comprehensive rules for powers, they are available to all power users in the game: the player's character, allies, rivals and foes. Keep it simple by limiting power manipulations to the player's character, key rivals, and the occasional truly exceptional foe.

rules for traveling on journeys

Any journey or quest has two elements. One is travel to remote places. In many settings, that can mean the mission will have at least some wilderness scenes. The second element is the length of the journey, as the player character's group takes time to travel distance. A quest-length adventure should require at least three, even four or five scenes with meaningful success to complete. Journeys usually go hand in hand with advance known information about the waypoints and the mission's goal, which is covered in the rules for scene portents that follow. Rules for journeys and portents are also summarized in appendix Y (p.144).

Before embarking on a journey or quest, the player should make some decisions about the length of travel and general challenges along the way. Adequate food and water, rest, shelter from adverse weather, and avoiding the most dangerous areas are factors in the journey. The speed of the group will be limited to the ability of mounts or vehicles; or else to sore feet, encumbrance and stamina of the travelers.

One easy way to plan out the basic logistics for travel, and the challenges and scenes that might take place along the way, is to use an existing map from a third-party source. An existing map can give some ideas about distance to a destination, waypoints along the journey, and travel challenges on the way.

But the player can also improvise, for example if the journey goes through unknown, uncharted territory. Based on the number of meaningful successes needed for the story to end with a positive outcome, the player can set an arbitrary number of event waypoints, and then roll d10 for each set waypoint to determine the number of time units (days, hours or weeks) to travel from one place or event to the next. A waypoint may be civilization and a chance to rest, re-stock and re-fuel (and also potentially to get into trouble); the waypoint could also be the place of an anticipated obstacle scene or encounter scene.

One way to determine the nature of a waypoint is to ask the yes-no question: "Is this next waypoint a place of civilization?" A few follow-up yes-no questions, and some randomly rolled places and scene qualities can provide insight about the nature of a waypoint: Whether it is a safe place to rest, the location of a potential obstacle or encounter scene, or possibly both.

If the trip is long and arduous, the player character's group risks being exhausted or otherwise unprepared when a waypoint turns out to be a tough obstacle or encounter. An easy and immediate way to kick off a scene asking for trouble is with the yes-no question: "is the player character's group entering the scene fatigued, hungry/thirsty or tired?" This might mean a -1 shift penalty to some types of skill checks for the scene.

The player also might need to decide whether to make the destination the end of the journey (and mission), or also to run scenes for the return trip. That could hinge on whether the player already racked up enough meaningful successes on the journey to resolve the mission once the player character's group reaches its destination. If the player doesn't have enough meaningful successes, add scenes that address challenges on the return home.

One alternative the player might consider for journeys, especially if the mission failed, is that the player's character might end the current story in a faraway land instead of back at home. The next mission may pick up with the player's character still a long way from home. The long and arduous return journey could play a role in the character's next mission.

A SAMPLE JOURNEY AND PORTENTS

Arthur Falcone is tracking down a missing person last seen in the city of Greenfield (in game terms, the rolled-up mission is "hunt" and "craft master/boss"). Arthur is in Mill City, and Greenfield is several hundred miles southeast. The missing person's car was spotted in the town of Plainville along the way. Between those locations is mostly a mix of rural towns and forested hills.

The player didn't use a map, and narrated these details off the cuff. Whether the journey is traveling on foot or horseback in a fantasy setting, or moving at hyperdrive speeds in a science fiction setting, the default time between waypoints is normally d10 days. But for a modern setting, the player decides that places of interest are close enough that each location is just d10 hours' drive apart. After rolling randomly, the player determines Mill City and Plainville are 8 hours' drive apart; Greenfield is another 6 hours' drive.

The player generates a random scene quality and foe for the Plainville waypoint. The roll result is "average NPC", with a culture/occupation of "opposed" and "fighter/warrior". The random scene quality is "hate/anger" (the player doesn't write it down but takes the sentiment under advisement). The player decides the NPC is a man named Paul Ghentry, a known violent criminal that Arthur Falcone's patron informs him had dealings with the missing person. The patron advises Arthur that whatever happened to the missing person, Paul is likely involved or in the know.

For a random scene quality and foe at the Greenfield waypoint, the player rolls up "average minions". The player changes that to an average team with a randomly rolled culture/occupation of "native minority" and "common/generalist". The random scene quality is "background noise". The player decides this is a noisy big city with a vibrant east African community, and that the missing person was known to have contacts in that community.

The player now has Arthur Falcone's travel plan scenes roughly figured out, and the investigator *(cont'd)* gets behind the wheel. In setting the first scene, the

player first asks a 50/50 moderate yes-no question: "is the scene taking place as expected?"

If the answer is yes, the player proceeds with an obstacle or encounter scene incorporating the pre-rolled factors around Paul Ghentry. Arthur enters the scene trying to wrest information about the missing person, probably tracking down and confronting Paul.

If the yes-no question's roll result comes back no, the player can ask follow-up yes-no questions to clarify, such as: "Does something different happen before Falcone gets to Plainville?" If the roll result is yes, the player needs to set up a completely different scene from scratch that happens on the road before reaching the city. Depending on randomly rolled scene qualities, the location might be at a rest stop, or on an empty stretch of road.

If the yes-no question's roll result is no, the scene happens in Plainville as planned. The player might next ask "Does the scene happen before, or instead of, Falcone finding Paul Ghentry?" If that roll result is yes, the player still uses Plainville as the backdrop but changes the scene from a meeting with Paul Ghentry, to rolling a random person of interest or foe.

The player's character is still on the case to try and track down Paul, so once the Plainville scene is underway, the player might use information-gathering skill checks to ask yes-no questions and hone in on Paul Ghentry's location: his home, a hideout, or even the local jail. The player can build an obstacle scene to try for meaningful success, though the player may need to add a follow-up scene to confront and get the story out of Paul.

If the roll result for the above two yes-no questions is no, the player uses the "rule of three" in chapter 8. In this case, the player decides the scene of Falcone finding Paul Ghentry will go on as planned, but instead of taking the "hate/anger" scene quality under advisement for Paul Ghentry's attitude, the player decides to make Ghentry a person of interest and rolls a random trait for the man as a reformed criminal. The player might decide to run this encounter as a cutscene to get more information, and look to future scenes to achieve meaningful successes.

rules for scene portents

Some types of missions embark into the unknown: travel to distant uncharted lands; delving into a vast, dangerous underground complex; or getting inside the grounds of a secured private estate. In any of these cases, there should be some advance information that is known about the place, especially if the destination is related to a mission that a patron assigned the player's character. That information might come from actual surveillance, or might be rumors picked up from travelers who claim to have been there.

For example, if a dungeon is filled with deadly traps, or if a secured private estate is bristling with armed guards or cultists, whoever assigns the mission should know something of these things, and should brief the player character's group on what to expect. As the story progresses, some of that information will turn out to be true, and some information might prove to be outdated or even dangerously wrong.

Libre Solo Role Playing's GM engine already has structured questions that are designed to reveal this kind of advance knowledge, such as: "Can the person warn me about possible upcoming encounter(s)?" If a journey or quest is particularly long and ambitious, the player could handwave any social skill check to answer this question, just like always assigning a mission in an opening cutscene. The player might also handwave the yes-no question asking whether advance information is available, or set it between likely and nearly certain.

Below are optional rules for generating advance information regarding known challenges when embarking on a journey or quest. The information here is also summarized in appendix Y (p.144).

First, the player should set up as many scene portents as there are waypoints; ideally, the player should have as many waypoints as there are meaningful successes required for the story to have a positive outcome. If the player's character is on a quest that needs four meaningful successes, for example, that might mean four waypoints and advance portents on each of them.

For each scene portent, the player first needs to select whether the scene happens in a wilderness or civilized area. If there is a journey involved and the player is using an existing map, the player can pick and choose wilderness and civilized waypoints from the map. Otherwise, it's fine to roll randomly for civilized and wilderness scenes.

If the player is using maps of a game world, for example, the player might decide a quest should start in one kingdom and end in a neighboring land. Looking at the map, the player might decide the first waypoint will be a wilderness scene in a forest after three days' journey; a second waypoint will be a civilized scene in a border town two days after that; a third waypoint will be another civilized scene, happening in the foreign capital four days later; and the destination will be a wilderness scene in the mountains, four days' travel after the player character's group departs the foreign capital. With a map, the player should find it easy to pick out wilderness scenes and get some idea of places in advance. Without a map, the player rolls randomly.

Next, for each civilized or wilderness waypoint, the player rolls one random scene quality in advance. If the result is a permanent scene quality, that is something that is known about that waypoint. For the above example, the player rolled "windy" for the forest waypoint: The player decides that the patron described that area as 'the groaning trees'). The player rolled "running water" for the border town, which the patron described as a bubbling brook that flows through the center of the town. The player rolled "stairs/ramps" for the foreign capital, which the patron described as many high buildings set into hillsides. Finally, the player rolled "rotten/carrion smell" for the mountains, which the player decides to discard, since it is too impermanent (though the player could have the patron allude to 'the valley of the dead').

The player also can roll up one random foe for each location in advance, interpreting the result as something appropriate for the location. For example, for the forest the player might roll "average minions," which player decides was described by the patron as roaming goblin tribes. The player could roll "average mindless minions"

JOURNEY AND PORTENTS IN SPACE

Here's how journeys and scene portents can work, for example, in a science fiction setting where star travel is common.

The player's character gets a mission to spy on a diplomat. The player creates the mission as a journey, and decides on four waypoints: The first, two days away, is a (civilized) space station; the second is six days' travel, a (civilized) planetary starport; the third, another two days away, a (wilderness) planet; and the mission's target, the diplomat, is on a (wilderness) planet another five days away. The player rolled d10 days randomly for distance between waypoints, and whether each stop was civilized or wilderness, and narrated the framework basics of each waypoint.

The patron supplies a dossier of intelligence regarding resources along the way. The space station scene quality is "soft/plush", which the player chooses to ignore, and the foe there is average mindless minions: The player decides the site is an automated, robotic facility. The starport scene quality is "disease-ridden". A random foe roll generates "talented NPC", with a culture and occupation of "affiliated neighbor" and "wilderness specialist". The wilderness planet place is "steppes/grasslands" and the scene quality is "ruins/buildings"; the foe encounter roll is "add group leader". The player arbitrarily rolls again and gets "weak mindless minions". The destination planet place is "swamp/marsh," with a scene quality of "wildlife signs," which the player chooses to ignore. For a foe encounter, the player rolls "d100, talented", and a random follow-up roll is for "rival of friend/ally."

After giving it some thought, the player narrates that the player's character needs to go to the space station to hack into its systems and get security codes to get ship authorization to travel to the destination planet. The starport has an epidemic. There, the player's character might need to convince a known alien expert (the "wilderness specialist" above) who is knowledgeable about the destination planet to assist in the mission. The player decides the third scene is a staging area *(cont'd)*

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before the spy destination, a ruined planet where post-apocalyptic soldiers guide squads of robot drones in battle. Finally, the player decides to bring in a rival: The diplomat on the swamp planet has a known affiliation to a powerful rival of the patron who assigned the mission to the player's character.

As the player goes through the adventure, for each of the waypoints, the player asks the 50/50 moderate yes-no question before the scene opens: "does this scene happen as predicted?" If the roll result is yes, the player then selects the type of scene, and develops the scene as normal. If the roll result is no, the player optionally might ask the follow-up question: "did something happen before the player character's group reached the waypoint?" That could help the player decide whether to roll up a new scene at the planned place, or whether to roll up a random place for a scene that intercepts the player character's group and happens before the group reaches the planned waypoint.

MULTIPLE PROTAGONISTS

Libre Solo Role Playing was designed to have one main player's character who drives the story. By default, the rules treat other members of the player character's group as allies. If the player wants complete control over several protagonists or even of a whole adventuring party of player's characters, that's certainly possible.

With multiple protagonists, whenever one or more player's characters participate in a skill check, it increases plot stress by 1. Moderately difficult skill checks can count toward meaningful success as normal, and the player still needs to succeed at three different types of skill checks for obstacle scenes. Asking for trouble and encounter scenes work normally.

At the end of any story, divide experience and wealth among player's characters and any other allies. Players' characters divide evenly whatever experience points are left after other allies take their share. Divide wealth evenly, with each player's character and each individual or team/minions ally getting an equal share.

for the border town, which the player might swap for a more suitable average team with a culture and occupation (randomly rolled as "far-away" and "fighter/warrior"). The player interprets the result as the patron describing the town's guard is brought in from a remote part of the kingdom, to hold down corruption. And so forth.

Based on the expected places, foes and known scene qualities, the player might decide to have the player character's group make different advance preparations. The group might know, for example, if it should concentrate on stocking up food and drink; bring along mountaineering gear, or space suits and jetpacks; or to request vials of holy water from the church (better yet, recruit a priest ally to join the group).

Once the player is satisfied with the scene portents, the mission starts. If scenes don't get derailed, the player character's group travels from one waypoint to the next, getting to the places with scene portents. Before each scene with portents, the player asks the 50/50 moderate yes-no question: "does this scene happen as predicted?" If the answer is yes, select whether to run the scene as an obstacle or encounter scene, opening it in the anticipated place. Use the scene quality that was rolled in advance, and add two more randomly rolled scene qualities. Any pre-rolled foe should also be in the scene. If the player chooses to run an obstacle scene, it's possible to play off the foe in the scene, to have the player character's group make skill checks and ask for trouble. If the player wants to run an encounter scene, it's possible to generate a point budget and round out a foe group for the encounter.

If the yes-no question roll result comes back as no, the portent was wrong. Keep any pre-generated wilderness place, but the pre-rolled foe and/or scene quality are missing or different than expected. For a civilized place, generate a new encounter scene or obstacle scene from scratch.

If an unexpected event happens during a scene with pre-rolled portents, and the event calls for a new foe or scene quality, a follow-up yes-no question can find out if the event is related to the pre-rolled portents. If the yes-no question's roll result is yes, introduce the foe and/or scene

quality portent if it is missing, or increase it if it is already in the scene.

rules for rewards

Libre Solo Role Playing doesn't get hung up on financial rewards. About the only guideline is the open-ended structured question for persons: "Does the person offer valuables for completing the mission?" and the structured question for foes: "Do the foe(s) have money or valuables on them/nearby?" If resource management is interesting to the story, here are two ways to set up financial rewards and other types of treasure for the player character's group. Summaries of these two options are also in appendix W and X (p.143).

Start with a rough estimate of average monthly income for the player's character, based on occupation and social standing. Completing a mission should carry a reward for the player character's group based on 1/4 of the player character's monthly income for each meaningful success. Failure to complete the mission nets nothing. The reward needs to be distributed evenly among all participating individual allies; count each team/minions contingent as one ally.

If a patron hired the player's character for pay, and the roll result to the structured question for persons: "Does the person offer (extra) valuables for completing the mission?" is yes, increase pay by another 50%.

For loot captured from foes and foe groups, use the foe point budget to generate a total reward as a percent of the player character's monthly income. For example, 20 points of foes will have valuables (e.g., cash, coins, jewelry, gear) worth 20% of the player character's monthly income. Again, remember that the spoils of any conflict need to be shared evenly between the player's character, and all individual allies and teams/minions.

If this approach is too predictable, another option is to roll (d100) for each reward. The table on the following page, which is also in appendix W (p.143), generates random rewards:

REAPING REWARDS SIMPLY

Let's say Arthur Falcone successfully solves the case of the missing person, or at least gathers enough meaningful successes that the story is resolved in a positive way. The player had set up the scene with just two meaningful successes needed to conclude the mission.

Using the simple rewards system, 2 meaningful successes mean that Falcone is due 1/2 month's salary. The player had previously decided that Falcone's average monthly income is about $2,500, so barely $30,000 a year. That means the private investigator clears a base of $1,250 for the case. Falcone also successfully pushed the patron for more money through a social skill check (a calculated risk, because there is always a consequence when a skill check fails). Because of this successful social skill check, the investigator cleared an additional $625 payment from the case.

During the mission, Falcone also took Paul Ghentry's wallet full of cash (a dumb move that could come back to haunt the investigator, but we won't judge). Falcone lifted the wallet as part of an obstacle scene, and Ghentry on a standalone basis was just a 5-point foe. So that move netted 5% of the investigator's monthly salary in the scene, or $125.

If Falcone had been accompanied by Toni Graham for part of the mission, that cash would be split evenly. In that case Arthur's share of the valuables would have been $625 for resolving the case, plus an extra $312 because Falcone hit up the patron for more money with a successful social skill check, and $62 for taking Paul Ghentry's wallet.

REAPING REWARDS BY ROLLING

Let's now revisit Arthur Falcone's successfully solving the case of the missing person, using the random treasure table found in the main text here, and in appendix W (p.143). The player set up the mission with two meaningful successes for a positive outcome. A positive outcome at the end of the story means the player can make one roll on the rewards table with +40 total modifier. The player did not complete any side goals, so there are no extra rolls.

In the scene where Falcone took Paul Ghentry's wallet, the player rolled once on the treasure table with a +5 modifier, since Ghentry was a 5-point foe. When Falcone defeated Paul Ghentry and took his wallet, the player rolled a 55, modified up to a 60, which merited nothing.

For the end of the mission, the player rolled a 34, modified up to 74. That turned out to be 1/2 month's income. The total take for the mission was $1,250, which Arthur Falcone needs to split evenly with each individual ally individual and team/minions contingent that participated in the mission.

If the player had rolled a modified 81-90 for winning the encounter, the player's character would have gained 1/2 month income, and also been owed a personal favor by the patron who assigned the mission.

But if the player had rolled a modified 81-90 for lifting the wallet, it only would have counted for money, no favors: Stealing the wallet was not part of any mission.

If Arthur Falcone had successfully asked the patron for an additional reward, and had found and taken on a side goal in addition to the mission, the player would have three rolls on the treasure table total at the end of a successful mission: one roll with a +40 modifier for completing the mission; a follow-up roll with a +20 modifier (half the +40 modifier of the main mission) because he convinced the patron to pay extra; and one unmodified roll on the rewards table for the completed side goal mission. If the player had quit the main mission, that might still merit one unmodified roll if the side goal was achieved.

For a completed mission: Make one (d100) roll, adding +20 for each scene with a meaningful success. If the player was hired by a patron, made a successful social skill check and rolled a yes result for the yes-no question, "does the person offer (extra) valuables for completing the mission?" make a second (d100) roll on the rewards table with half the modifier (i.e., +10 for each scene with a meaningful success). Make an additional (d100) unmodified roll for each successful side goal accomplished in the story.

For collecting loot after a successful conflict against foes, roll (d100) once after defeating the foes, adding the value of the total foe point budget.

01-60: Nothing.
61-70: cash/treasure worth 1/4 month income.
71-80: cash/treasure worth 1/2 month income.
81-90: cash/treasure worth 1/2 month income. If this is the end of the mission, the patron also owes the player's character a favor (call it in for automatic success on any one future social skill check with this patron).
91-100: cash/treasure worth 1 month's income.
100-125: cash/treasure worth 1 month's income. If this is the end of the mission, the player character also either gets a promotion in an organization related to the mission, or builds up a public reputation and recognition for the mission. Alternatively, the player character gets extra training (1 extra experience point at the end of the mission).
125-150: Either cash/treasure worth 1 month's income, or a mount or small/personal vehicle (or a partial payment or improvement of a special mount or larger vehicle). Alternatively, premium gear or modest one-use magic/technology item.
151-175: cash/treasure worth 2 months' income. If this is the end of the mission, the patron also owes the player character a major favor (automatic successes with up to three future social skill checks with the patron).
176+: choose either cash/treasure worth 3 months' income; special premium gear; promotion and/or prestige; powerful one-use magic/technology item; modest permanent magic item; or another type of unique item of value. ☺

LiRE

Settings

ARTANES:
BRONZE AGE CITY-STATE

The following is a fantasy setting for use with Libre Solo Role Playing. It paints with a broad brush, providing a basic outline and ideas to start adventuring in Aelos. Through storytelling the player can discover more about the land, its people, surrounding geography and culture. The default setting for Artanes is *pulp*.

The city-state of Artanes is ancient, nestled into the mountainous, temperate southern coast at the outer edge of the vast Aelandric Empire, usually just called "Aeland". Artanes and its surrounding communities are part of the mighty Aelandric Empire in name, and share its language and customs. Politically, the city and its surroundings are isolated from Aeland by the massive Ramikan mountain range, a hundred miles of narrow passes, dangerous monsters and unpredictable weather. Culturally, the city-state looks toward the other peoples that live on the shores of a great Inner Sea, who call the Empire's autonomous southern coast "Aelos."

Artanes is an autonomous city-state under the rulership of Regent Naira Kameiros, known by locals as "The Iron Lady" for her stern disposition. Regent Kameiros resides in Artanes' palace under the protection of the royal guard. She is advised by councellors from the city and surrounding communities: the men Savash Sekroba; Reyhen Oricos and Cumhar Kagan; and women Hannafey Aysel and Lara Elatir. The councellors in turn have their own manors and holdings both inside and outside the city-state, each with its own aides, advisors and guards.

Artanes prospers thanks to trade with other communities around the Inner Sea. The connected political and mercantile families benefit most from regional sea trade. The poorest live along the city's cramped and shoddy buildings near the docks. Wealthy citizens live in villas at the city's mountainous edges, surrounded by walled and guarded vineyards.

Magic (powers) exist but are uncommon in Aelos. So-called sorcery is considered an evil force. The city endorses and enforces one state religion, Artanis, the city's protector and healer. Worship of other deities is outlawed as illegal cult activity, and public proselytizers can be fined or imprisoned. Priests outside of Artanis' temple that practice religious magic are dealt with

harshly: Banishment or even public execution (in extreme cases having to do with deities considered evil). Any religions besides Artanis hold their ceremonies in secret: For those in the know, there are shrines hidden in the city dedicated to the goddess of storms, the wealth bringer, the bull slayer, and the watcher over the night.

A huge stone statue of Artanis, the city's patron deity, stands proudly near the peak of mount Ramikus, the tallest mountain that looms over the city-state. In the shadow of the statue is the city-state's formally sanctioned Temple of Artanis, dedicated to healing the injured, sick and infirm brought to this high mountain place. The priest in charge of all duties at Artanis' temple, Bashak Oricos, is half-brother to councellor Reyhen Oricos. Reyhen is a powerful political influence in the city-state. At least in his public persona, the temple's high priest is carefully neutral.

The people of Aelos favor bronze tools, weapons and armor. The warm and humid climate corrodes iron quickly; refined steel is rare and its quality is undependable. The city has full-time guards that keep the peace, but if the city needs to draw up a bigger military force, it recruits from the city's citizen-soldiers. The middle class fights with sword, hoplite shield and shortspear; wealthier families outfit their warriors with a hoplite armor panoply. The wealthiest ride horseback or drive chariots, though the mountainous terrain around Aelos makes chariots and horses more about prestige than an effective battle strategy.

The people of Aelos eat a diet heavy on fish and everything pulled from the sea, plus fruits from surrounding orchards, grapes and vegetables. The countryside is steep and rocky, poor for grains but good for vineyards.

The steep Ramikan mountain range encircles the Aelos subcontinent. The mountain passes to the Aelandric Empire in the north are only predictably open about half the year, and they are never really safe. Starting late fall through early spring, sudden intense storms blow in, closing off mountain passes and trapping travellers. Landslides and flooding add to the danger. There are goblins in the mountains and terrible beasts that roam the wilds. Sometimes a monstrous beast will terrorizing

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hillside communities at the edge of Aelos. When that happens, Artanes responds with hunting parties to kill or at least drive away the threat.

Aeland

Aelos is a prosperous southern subcontinent. Relative to Aelos, the Aelandric Empire to the north is overcast, chilly, wet and poor. Historically, Aeland had been a rising star of civilization, which conquered other human cultures and drove out other races. Out of its seat in the far northern city of Magradene, the Empire annexed one culsture after another: The burly Brothands of the middle foothills; the troublesome Shiaki people of the northeastern scrublands; and some tribes of the Kastany peoples in the mighty forests of the southeast. The Empire has had to contend with Shiaki and Kastany rebellions that fester at the edge of its influence.

The Aelandric Empire's expansion over centuries went mostly unnoticed by the dwarves, who live deep under the Ramikan Mountains. As for elves and fey: Most Aelanders are skeptical that such creatures ever existed. There are curious holdovers, like parts of Aeland with placenames in a curious foreign language. There are rumors that Kastany rebels are in league with fey forces, but to sensible Aelanders these are far-fetched fables.

The Aelandric Empire's success for centuries drew on its effective bureaucracy, and its widespread institutionalized sorcery. Centuries ago, the Empire's arcane masters, a guild known as the Sardekai, built libraries and academies. They set up recruitment for youth with a talent for magic. The Sardekai charter was civilian and military, spreading Aeland's civilization by the sword, the plow and the book. The Sardekai supported the Empire, but remained separate from its governing leadership.

The Sardekai are long gone: They were eroded by the Jhourdekai, which turned the guild internal, to gain and hold power within bloodlines and families. The Jhourdekai kept their knowledge behind closed doors, and set up hereditary succession to keep their families in power. The mage academies' towers became dominated by a few families, supported by factions.

The Sardekai have mostly been erased from history. The Jhourdekai families rule from their towers, and recruit agents to carry out espionage and settle squabbles between rival families. The Jhourdekai that engage with the public are powerful and unaccountable: They act with impunity while the Empire's power center in Magradene looks the other way. There are rumors that

the Jhourdekai towers sit on vast treasures, including massive stockpiles of magic. There are plenty of darker rumors about Jhourdekai habits and behavior. The common folk of Aeland greatly fear the Jhourdekai mages, even though few common people have ever met a guild sorcerer personally.

To the people of Aelos, those internal and external tensions of Aeland are distant problems. The Aelandric Empire doesn't give its remote southern territory much time or attention, and Aelos leadership is happy to act independently.

Surrounding cultures: Karkhedon

A day's sail south along the coast of the Inner Sea is Karkhedon. Karkhedon was formerly a sister city of Artanes, under Aelandric rule. It is now a splinter city that has grown into its own. Decades ago, the people of Karkhedon rejected Artanis and turned to a pantheon of many gods over one protector. Aelos leadership was less religiously strict at the time and did not interfere; the Aelandric Empire was too distracted to become involved. Then Karkhedon formerly seceded and became the city of many gods. In the name of free worship, its rulers -- a religious council in an unstable, shifting coalition of factions -- tolerate public religious dedication to all deities, even those who openly worship darker forces.

Karkhedon is less than half the size of Artanes, and its resources are no match against its former sister city. The city's population is poorer and and it has far fewer educated and skilled workers. Karkhedon has also gone to war against Artanes several times since it broke away. Its divine magic and zealous fervor has let Karkhedon field a smaller, poorly equipped army and come away with symbolic victories on the battlefield. But Karkhedon never had the resources for its soldiers to move beyond the battlefield and set foot inside the city-state of Artanes. Instead, the power brokers both of Kharkedon and Artanes take advantage of their common language and send smugglers, spies, agitators and other agents into each other's territories.

The leadership of Karkhedon describes Artanes as a puppet to the Aelandric Empire, and its public stance is that it must and will fight to protect its hard-won religious freedoms. Artanes citizens regard the people of Karkhedon as agitators and extremists. Many Artanes citizens believe it is a matter of time until the city-state of Kharkedon collapses under the weight of its many factions.

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Surrounding cultures: Ras Jadal

A week's sail at the southern edge of the Inner Sea lies Ras Jadal, the wealthy and decadent border city of the sprawling Kaizari Empire. The Kaizari people have their own culture and speak the Kaizari language. Past the border city of Ras Jadal, this Empire sprawls across swaths of densely overgrown jungles, sun-bleached deserts, massive mountain ranges and seas of grasslands. Ras Jadal is a massive city, but the Kaizari empire is wilderness in every direction for leagues.

The people of Ras Jadal are known to be excellent sailors, shrewd traders, and masterful at many crafts. They are also known for their friendliness and hospitality. A traveler from Aelos will always find welcome in Kaizari's border city, and the educated speak many languages including Aelandric.

Ras Jadal and the northern part of the Kaizari Empire have rich mines of iron ore, and Ras Jadal is in a hot dry climate that is kinder to iron. The Kaizari have little bronze, and they put up with rust when their tools and equipment are abroad to other places on the Inner Sea.

Ras Jadal has tens of thousands of residents. Given time and purpose, the city and surrounding lands can assemble an overwhelming military force in the region. Kaizari guards and soldiers are lightly armed and armored, accustomed to traveling over long stretches of wilderness. The military also mixes small contingents of heavily armed and armored infantry, as shock troops to break enemy lines. Fortunately, Sultan Bey Ramlan Bassir, leading monarch of Ras Jadal, emphasizes education and trade and seems utterly disinterested in military gains.

Surrounding cultures: Siron

Siron is a small city, about three days' sail east of Ras Jadal along the Inner Sea. The city and its surrounding lands fall under the control of the Kaizari Empire, but it is dominated by the unique culture of its people. The territory is administered by Queen Shustriani Malavoputri. The first language of the people of Siron is Sirese, a radical dialect of Kaizari. Educated people in Siron also speak proper Kaizari, as subjects of the empire.

While Ras Jadal has a drier climate, Siron is oppressively hot most of the year. People do their business in the mornings and evenings: The heat keeps people indoors during the day, and fear of things that stalk the streets keep people's doors barred and windows shuttered at night.

Siron allows open worship of all deities. While the city is dotted with small shrines and temples, it is even better known for sorcery. Siron has a dark reputation as a place where evil magic, particularly human sacrifice, are practiced just below the city's surface. People who leave claim that there is evil in the soil, the water and the air of the place. They believe an ancient evil haunts the city, and that unwary people who listen in the Sirese darkness will hear whispering voices that wear down the vulnerable until they succumb to corruption.

Siron's political leadership is tough on crime. The city strictly enforces nightly curfews, and public executions are as regular as they are brutal. These hard-line responses have been mostly for show, with no real effect in changing the nature of Siron.

Surrounding cultures: Kos

Kos is a trading city on the borders of barbarian lands on the eastern shores of the Inner Sea, more than a week's sail east from Artanes. The entire wildlands of the eastern region is called the Gozd Velik; the people who hail from the region speak Goz: not one language but a group of tribal languages. That nuance is lost to outsiders; to them it all sounds the same.

The sitting tribal chieftain of the trading city is Wotan Kos. Wotan is a solid representative of his people. He is an unpleasant (and impossible to please) man with a dour personality, who is famously never satisfied with the quality of a task, the value of a gift, or the attractiveness of a trade.

Kos has special status in the Gozd Velik as a border trading town. It made his burgeoning village far richer and more powerful than its neighboring tribes. It has also made Wotan Kos a very rich man, wealthy enough that he thinks of himself as an equal to the region's ruling warlord who granted Kos trade status: A massive and utterly brutal tribal leader named Dragmil Graas.

Dragmil wears a helm crafted from the skull and jaw of a forest serpent. He wields a fire-blackened greatsword that is rumored to possess dark magic powers. One of the reasons that Wotan Kos is still alive at all, is that Dragmil and his retinue are nomadic and the Gozd Velik is a large territory. The warlord has had other priorities. But Wotan Kos' self-aggrandizement has gotten the attention of Dragmil Graas, and that means the chieftain's days are numbered. Whenever Dragmil next comes to the village of Kos, Wotan Kos' private guard will stand aside for Dragmil's demand for the chieftain undergo trial by combat, a graphic public execution to reinforce publicly Dragmil's rule over the Gozd Velik.

Surrounding cultures: Non-humans

In the countryside between Aelos and Karkhedon live several tribes of minotaurs, who keep herds of cattle. Minotaurs are usually peaceful, though protective of their herds and deadly dangerous warriors if provoked. The minotaurs have traditional grazing lands for their herds. Their territory is marked by ancient standing stones.

Then there are the Praque. Short, slim, hairless and olive-skinned, the Praque have a passing resemblance to goblins, but refined, even more civilized than humans. The Praque are an intelligent and industrious seafaring race that originate from a far-off continent. They conduct trade wherever they go. Sailing and trading is in their blood. The Praque's sleek ships rarely come to the Inner Sea, but when they do they carry exotic foods, spices, textiles and many curiosities. Some people believe that the Praque live out their lives in their ships out on the sea. In fact, the Praque have a deep love for their distant homeland. Many sailors come from the sprawling Praque capital of Chabool, where they hope someday to return. While the Praque language is hard on the ears, the expressiveness of that language is subtle and complex. The Praque are well traveled and their traders speak many languages including Aelandric fluently; few humans mingle with the Praque long enough to learn more than a few words.

Directly or indirectly, all Praque at sea work for their people's massive bureaucracy, called the Praque Syndicate. The Syndicate is a guild of guilds that is so big that the organization sometimes ends up at odds with itself. Every large city has at least a token Praque presence, starting with local Syndicate representatives tasked with understanding and influencing the locale's political and business levers. Most Praque are honorable most of the time. But they are vulnerable to greed, curiosity, and a lust for magic. Praque that go astray find elements in the Syndicate that are willing partners. Syndicate leadership is mostly honorable, but there are always rank-and-file members who will exploit opportunities for fast personal gain, and who don't mind leaving someone else -- even possibly a fellow Praque -- holding the bag on any damage that unethical activities might do to political and trade relationships.

Finally, there are the Banders. This rare race stems from a set of islands out of the far north known as the Banderchain. Banders mostly look like regular humans, but with disturbing differences such as violet or golden eyes with oval or hourglass pupils. Various rumors about the Banders say they have forked tongues; that all their teeth are razor-sharp canines; that they have six fingers on each hand.

Banders have a reputation as warriors and sorcerers whose are possessed by madness. The Banders wield weapons, wear armor and carry other gear made of bone that can be as sharp and pliable as high-quality steel, as tough as iron, or as resilient as the best hardwoods. The Banders speak their own unique language, and their customs are a mystery. Because they are rarely seen this far south, not much else is known about these warlike people.

Adventuring Careers in Aelos

In Aelos, Artanes is a place where patrons can include the city's councilors and their guards, the Regent of Artanes or members of her retinue, various guilds and other organizations, wealthy families, and even sorcerers and religious fanatics looking to further their own agendas. There is also the possibility to serve as an ambassador, agent or spy representing one of the surrounding cultures, in its effort to understand and influence local politics. There is no shortage of opportunities to try and steal valuables and important artifacts from estates, or to investigate and try to recover items stolen from those same wealthy estates.

The mountains to the north are fraught with dangers including unpredictable bad weather, hordes of goblins and deadly monsters. Sometimes one, both or all three of these dangers blow down into Aelos from the mountains. From the south is the threat of Karkhedon. Artanes has in the past needed to raise an army to defend herself against Karkhedon, and even fielding a superior force, Artanes has been routed before when fighting the fanatic soliders from the city of many gods.

The Inner Sea is dotted with islands inhabited by human and other cultures: Sorcerers, giants, sea raiders and fantastic monsters have homes among the many islands that dot the Inner Sea. There is opportunity to explore, trade and carry out missions in the communities of the distant lands that ring the Inner Sea.

The average take for a basic adventurer who is doing relatively well, is around 100 silver pennies (sp) per month. This is the money that a rogue, hired hand or entertainer might make from exercising their craft. A well-to-do heroic adventurer, such as a child of a more privileged family, may make around 200 sp per month. A peasant laborer or lantern bearer by contrast could make at most 50 sp per month, and maybe as little as 25 sp per month. ☺

ARTANES FANTASY EQUIPMENT

Note: all prices are in silver pennies. 10 copper farthings (relatively large & heavy) are worth one silver penny. 10 silver pennies are worth 1 gold cross, and 10 crosses are worth 1 gold sovereign.

Basic gear that everyone has when on the road: mug, spoon, flint & steel, small pouch, and some personal hygiene items.

Light armor (very unlikely (-2) to stop a blow,
    Light Leather or Padded): 50
Medium armor (unlikely (-1) to stop a blow, heavy leather, ring or studded): 250
Heavy armor (50/50 moderate (0) to stop a blow,
    hoplite plate, chain or splinted): 500
Very heavy armor (likely (+1) to stop a blow,
    Kaizari iron plate): 1,000
Individual armor accessories (e.g., helmet, bracers, gauntlets, greaves): 50-250 each

Small shield (very unlikely (-2) to stop a blow):20
Medium shield (unlikely (-1) to stop a blow): 50
Large/tower shield (50/50 moderate (0) to
    stop a blow): 100

Clubs, staves: 10
Hatchets, axes: 150
(Bronze) daggers, knives: 25
(Bronze) short swords: 200
(Bronze) long- or broad swords: 400
Short or long spears: 100
Maces, flails and picks: 150
Polearms: 300
Great weapons (sword, axe): 500

Bows, light to heavy: 300
Crossbows, light to heavy: 500
Slings: 10
Arrows, bolts, sling bullets: 0.5 each

Clothing, nothing fancy: 25
Fancy clothes: 200
Fancy accessories (heavy boots, floppy hat, satchel): 10-50 each
Backpack: 75

Small burlap sack: 5
Large burlap sack: 10
Blanket: 25
Tarp/tent: 25
Pots & pans: 10
Box of candles: 0.2 each
Wineskin: 5
Preserved meal: 5
Torches, pitch: 0.5 each
Lantern: 25
Lantern oil, pint: 5
Rope, 10 yards: 10
Herbalism/first aid kit: 25
Lockpicks/fine tools: 100
Portable workshop: 500 (needs horse, cart)

Horse: 300
Donkey/mule: 200
Oxen/cow: 200
Sheep/goat: 35
Trained dog: 150
Saddle, bit & bridle: 75
Carriage (with harness/es, horses not included): 500 (2-wheel cart) to 5,000 (full-size suspended carriage)
Row boat: 500
Sailing vessel: 2,500+

Message (written/verbal), delivered across town: 1
Message (written), delivered across kingdom: 10
Overnight stay, cheap/rural tavern: 3
Overnight stay, urban flophouse: 2
Overnight stay, fancy urban inn: 15
Cheap meal (bowl of stew): 5
Decent/fancy meal: 25+
Chariot/carriage transport, across town: 2

ARTANES FANTASY ENCOUNTERS
CULTURES & OCCUPATIONS

Culture

Majority/Native: Aelos humans
Native Minority: Aelander humans, Brothand humans
Affiliated/Neighbor: Ras Jadal humans, Siron humans, Kos humans, minotaurs
Far-away: Shiaki humans, Kastany humans, Ramik dwarves
Unusual/Exotic: Praque, Banders
Opposed: Karkhedon Humans

Occupation

Social/Leadership occupation: Politician's assistant; family housemaster; military leader; entertainer
    Key skills: influence (deceive), influence (intimidate); interact (leadership), interact (etiquette)

Fighter/Warrior occupation: Citizen-soldier, barbarian, guard, gladiator, archer
    Key skills: melee (spear); melee (sword and/or shielf); melee (polearm); ride (horse); athletics (run); melee (2-handed maul); bows (shortbow/longbow); bows (sling); medic (first aid); dodge

Traveler/Rogue occupation: Burglar, petty thief, messenger, sailor, merchant
    Key skills: notice; performance (singing); performance (dancing); athletics (climbing); bows (shortbow); sneak (sneak); sneak (shadowing); streetwise (gather infromation); streetwise (scrounge); streetwise (sleight of hand); disable (lockpick); disable (disarm trap); dodge

Wilderness specialist occupation: Hunter, trapper, woodsman, beast handler
    Key skills: bows (shortbow/longbow); survival (swamp); survival (forest); survival (mountain); handle animal (predators); hunt (tracking); hunt (camouflage); medic (herbalist); sneak (sneak); notice

Officer/special forces occupation: Cavalry/charioteer, heavy infantry, sharp shooter, healer, agent
    Key skills: medic (surgery); ride (horse); drive (chario); wayfind (orienteering); social (leadership); knowledge (battle tactics); streetwise (gather information); sneak (sneak)

Academic specialist occupation: Scholar, lore-master, alchemist, "Athelstane" (public advocate), healer
    Key skills: profession (law), profession (engineer), profession (history), profession (alchemy); research; powers (magic)

Religious/inspirational occupation: Priest, cultist/cult leader, acolyte, preacher, monk
    Key skills: profession (theology); medic (first aid); medic (surgery); powers (magic)

Settings skill specialist occupation: Sorcerer (Jhourdekai, Sirese or other), Kos shaman
    Key skills: knowledge (magic), powers (magic); language (Sirese); language (Octicant)

ARTANES FANTASY ENCOUNTERS
ALL OTHERS

Minion, Hybrids & Creatures

Weak: Gishkinti (goblins); robber bandits/thugs/cultists (human)
Average: Gishkinti (hobgoblins); robber bandits/thugs/cultists (human)
Mindless weak: Skeletons/skeleton animals; vermin swarm; zombie animals
Mindless average: Zombies; ghouls; grave wights; clay guardian statue
Hybrids: Minotaurs; centaurs; reptile folk; snake folk; toad folk
Animals, vehicles, mounts: Dogs/wolves, snakes, large vermin, horses; lion, tiger or bear

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Brutes & Powerful Entities

Brutes: Ogre (+2 conflict); troll (+1 conflict, armor-like stone hide); giant (+2 conflict)
Automaton: Living statue (+1 conflict, solid clay/stone armor); earth elemental creature (+1 conflict); coal elemental creature (+1 conflict, flammable)
Powerful entity: Demonic fiend (+1 conflict, extremely fast); massive fiend (+1 conflict, extremely big & strong); living wraith

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Beasts and Monsters (d10)

1   Dragon: young +2 conflict (2 hits), adult +5 conflict (4 hits), old +8 conflict (6 hits),
        ancient +12 conflict (16 hits). Special ability: flight; Special ability: breath weapon (x2/x3/x4 damage)
2   Bearshark: conflict +3 (2 hits)
3   Giant centipede: conflict +0 (1 hit). Special ability: poisonous stinger +1
4   Wyvern (flying drake): conflict +5 (4 hits) or giant serpent (ground drake): conflict +5 (4 hits)
5   Carnivorous blob: conflict +0 (mindless, not affected by physical attacks)
6   Griffon: conflict +2 (2 hits)
7   Hydra: conflict +3 (4 hits)
8   Swamp shambler: conflict +1 (2 hits)
9   Enormous raptor: conflict +3 (4 hits)
10 Gorgon: conflict +0 (2 hits). Special ability: petrifying gaze +1

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MILL CITY: MODERN DAY NOIR

The following is a sample modern-day setting for use with Libre Solo Role Playing. It supplies details for players to get started and run their own adventures, finding out more about Mill City through story telling. The default setting for Mill City is *gritty*. The player could choose *pulpy* or *heroic* to give Mill City a higher-power crime fighting twist. For example a *heroic* setting with powers would support street-level superhero mayhem.

Mill City was founded in the early 1800s at the junction of two rivers in the mid-Atlantic states, several hundred miles inland from the seashore. The climate is hot and humid in the summer, ranging up to the Fahrenheit triple digits during extreme heat waves. Winter is mostly cloudy and dreary, mixing freezing rain with snow, sleet, slush and the occasional ice storm.

Mill City prosperity came early in the city's founding, and it left the city long ago. The urban downtown has been in a slow, festering malaise for decades, with infrastructure that is past worn out and well into deterioration. What funds the city can spare go first to maintain public utilities and try to stay ahead of leaking water and gas pipes, crumbling bridges and potholed roads. In the city proper, housing units are small and cheap, and taxes are high. For as long as anyone cares to remember, the city has been struggling economically.

Back in the 1800s, Mill City was successful as a manufacturing and shipping hub. The city was is situated on two rivers - the Pochinuk and the Ashen - and it also was a stop along major north-south railway corridors, which fed the young city with a stream of raw materials and finished goods. Mill City's first factories in the 19th century worked on processing cotton shipped up from the southern US, and on weaving and dyeing fabrics. Leading up to the Civil War the city's role in the cotton industry collapsed. The city never recovered in textiles. After the Civil War rich industrialists further north in New England built bigger, cheaper factory towns.

For the second half of the 19th century, Mill City turned to pressed glass and ceramics for bottling, which took the company into the 20th century. Then those industries fled. The mills took on occasional work that would last a few years. Some became store houses for raw materials and finished goods. But most of the factory buildings sat empty. Mill City's last major resurgence was between the Great Depression and the Second World War. The municipality recruited the fast-growing chemical industry to take over some of the city's factory buildings. Some of the large chemical companies still have a token presence downtown and in the suburbs. Some of those chemical companies, most prominently Biglott Chemical and Faster-Webb Industries, are tied to Mill City because of hazardous waste sites. It is less expensive and better public relations for them quietly to hold on to the properties for storage than to spend millions to clean up the sites. Corporate offices and talent remain in Mill City, but the chemical manufacturing itself has moved abroad.

Today, the harbor at the Pochinuk-Ashen rivers and the north-south railways have fallen into disuse. Many of Mill City's classical old brick mill buildings along the city's rivers still stand. Some of these buildings are cheap artist's lofts, others have been converted to pricier luxury condominiums, and still others remain makeshift warehouses or sit empty, intermittently occupied by squatters.

The city's Mayor, Douglas Archfield, has been in charge of the town for the past five years. It has been a constant struggle for the mayor and the city board to budget for education, infrastructure, social needs and welfare programs. That meant chronically under-funding some areas such as the city's public transportation system, which depends on an aging fleet of busses that, when they are running at all, spend most of their time idling in the city's gridlocked downtown automobile traffic.

The surrounding suburbs have both wealthier and poorer sections. There is some high-end glitz from executives and technology employees that work for smaller, new technology companies, many of them ringing Mill City rather than located downtown. Most neighborhoods are gritty, representing the neglected working-class communities that face a shrinking range of economic opportunities. One bright spot downtown is Mill State University, a small but successful state-run four-year college.

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Communities and Culture

The population of downtown Mill City is slightly more than half Caucasian, about one quarter African-American, and the remainder a mix of Latino, Asian and other ethnicities. The city's Caucasian mix includes people of Irish, English and central/eastern European (Polish, Czech and German) heritage.

Mill City's African-American population includes a vibrant east African community that immigrated to the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s. One of the few economic bright spots in the city comes from this community, which has set up many successful small businesses. While the immigrants started with service industries such as corner stores and restaurants, the second generation is fully integrating into the city, and has many enterprising entrepreneurs. Regular festivals held in the city include St. Patrick's Day and Fasika/Tensae: public occasions for the older and newer immigrant communities in the city.

Crime and Punishment

Mill City has its share of crime. Drugs have taken a big toll on the city. The city has become a crossroads for synthetic opioids coming from the north and east, and methamphetamines driven in from the south and west. Organized crime keeps a low profile; amateurish gangland activity is the public face of crime, but more established crime families run deep in the city's history. Representatives of each of the immigrant communities have taken their knocks, being implicated at one time or another in citywide scandals.

Modern-day organized crime in Mill City has gone corporate, far removed from surface gangland activities. It recruits talent and specializes in white-collar crime such as cooking corporate books, money laundering, corporate espionage, and most recently identity theft and cyber crime.

Mayor Archfield's priority has been to use limited funds to address violent street crime, at the expense of too few resources to go after white-collar and cyber crime. There is a lack of skilled detectives to investigate these types of cases. Those who are on the force have more work than they can handle, and there is always the worry whether the police force itself is compromised. Any detective who is both talented and motivated enough to rock the boat on the bigger money-makers in Mill City can find work -- and will also catch unwanted attention.

Adventuring Careers in Mill City

Mill City's police force is generally effective at the street level, but it doesn't have resources to conduct detailed investigations. That emboldens criminal bosses. There are many possible patrons who are interested in help to get information and get things done.

Even the bad guys find it useful to recruit honest people, so long as those people remain pointed in the right direction. Established crime families do not like the idea of new competition making waves, for example. Some of the older crime families object to new organizations that do particularly distasteful things. Beyond ethics, there are pragmatic issues of attracting unwelcome attention. Crime families need someone who can credibly engage with the police, for example.

Businesses and non-profit organizations are also potential patrons. These organizations might retain consultants to gather information on the ground for their research purposes, or else to reach out to others for particular agenda items, such as acquiring property or negotiating trade secrets. By doing this discreetly through a contracted agent, there is always plausible deniability for the organization in case something goes wrong.

Finally, the city does have some wealthy benefactors that would be interested in retaining someone who can help them get and stay out of trouble with the wrong people. That might mean keeping lines of communication open with crime bosses, or evading issues with the police, or both. Sometimes a patron just needs help delivering a package, no questions asked.

The life of a freelance investigator looking to pay the bills means being careful selecting who to work for and what types of jobs to take on, but it also involves accepting work without looking too closely. If the player wants to step up the threat level, the life of a street-level superhero is not just about doling out justice, but also about knowing where to take the fight, and when to avoid getting in too deep.

The average pay for a full-time, struggling self-employed worker in Mill City is $1,500 per month. A self-employed worker who has landed steady clients and is living more comfortably might have an average income of $3,000 per month. A person of means, or with a well-paying job, might draw a monthly pay of $5,000 to $10,000 per month; a corporate executive may make much, much more. ☺

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MILL CITY MODERN-DAY GEAR

Note: all prices are expressed in U.S. dollars.

Clothing, nothing fancy: 150
Cheap dress or suit: 300
Fancy dress or suit: 1,000+
Accessories (bag/purse, watch, satchel, simple
      jewelry): 100+ each

Daggers and knives: 25
Baton or tonfa: 25
Hatchet: 30

Throwing knives or shuriken: 10 each
Hunting bow: 300 (regulated)
Crossbow: 500 (regulated)
Handgun (pistol/revolver): 250 (regulated, limited
      availability outside U.S.)
Shotgun, double barrel or pump-action: 300
      (regulated)
Hunting rifle with scope: 400 (regulated)

Bulletproof vest (unlikely (-1) to stop a blow): 500
Riot shield (50/50 moderate (0) to stop a
      blow): 500
Wet Suit/Dry Suit: 500

Backpack: 75
Small burlap sack: 5
Large burlap sack: 10
Sleeping bag/blanket: 100
Tarp/tent: 100
Pots/pans, set: 100
Flashlight: 5
Lighter: 1
Collapsible canteen: 10
Preserved meal: 5
Lighter: 2
Lantern: 25
Kerosene, pint: 5
Rope, 10 yards: 10
Basic first aid kit: 25
High-end medical kit: 300

Multi-tool: 25
Lockpicks/fine tools: 100
Toolbox (basically portable): 250
Computers/gadgets (cellphone/smartphone, GPS,
      cheap laptop, digital camera, shortwave
      radio): 100-500 each
Binoculars: 100

Used car: 5,000
Fancy car: 25,000+
Canoe/row boat: 500
Power boat or larger, used: 2,500+
Scuba gear: 1,500
Ultralight aircraft: 8,000+
Hang glider: 4,000
Small airplane or helicopter, used: 100,000+

Mail delivery, nation/worldwide: 1
Package delivery, nationwide: 15
Overnight stay, cheap motel: 75
Overnight stay, ok hotel: 150
Overnight stay, major city/fancy place: 300
Cheap meal (fast food): 10
Decent meal: 25+
Subway or metro bus ticket: 4
Taxi across town: 20
Bus ticket across state: 50
Plane ticket, nationwide: 300
Plane ticket, worldwide: 900

Beer, six-pack: 5-12+
Hard liquor, quart: 15-30+
Illicit drug, one dose: 10-20+
Illicit drug, 1 pound: 5,000-25,000+

Broadband Internet service, month: 50-200
Cell phone voice/data service, month: 50-150
Home expenses, cheap, month: 800
Home expenses, moderate, month: 1,600:
Car expenses, month: 100+

MILL CITY ENCOUNTERS
CULTURES & OCCUPATIONS

Culture

Majority/Native: Caucasian American, African American, Asian American
Native Minority: city's Irish community, Polish community, Latino community, east African community
Affiliated/Neighbor: New Englanders, Empire City residents, midwesterners (all ethnicities)
Far-away: Recent immigrants/visitors from Middle East, Asia, Europe, west/south Africa (all ethnicities)
Unusual/Exotic: Native American, Australia/New Zealand or Pacific Islands (all ethnicities)
Opposed: People from ficticious rogue states in eastern Europe, central Asia, Africa, etc.

Occupation

Social/Leadership occupation: marketing/sales, crime boss, company executive
　　　Key skills: influence (deceive), influence (intimidate); interact (leadership), interact (etiquette)

Fighter/Warrior occupation: boxer, martial artist, athlete, gunman
　　　Key skills: martial arts (karate, judo, boxing, wrestling, street fighting, capoeira); gun (pistol, submachine gun); athletics (run); bows (shortbow/longbow); bow (sling); medic (first aid); drive (car/motorcycle)

Traveler/rogue occupation: Burglar, pickpocket, courier, informant
　　　Key skills: notice; athletics (climb); guns (pistol); sneak (sneak); sneak (shadowing); streetwise (gather information); streetwise (scrounge); streetwise (sleight of hand); disable (lockpick); disable (electronics/security); drive (car, motorcycle, truck, bus)

Wilderness specialist occupation: Hunter, trapper, woodsman, animal trainer
　　　Key skills: guns (rifle, shotgun); bows (crossbow); survival (swamp); survival (forest); handle animal (dogs); hunt (tracking); hunt (camouflage); medic (first aid); sneak (sneak); notice

Officer/special forces occupation: Soldier, gunner, demolitions, SWAT team
　　　Key skills: guns (pistol, rifle, submachine gun, shotgun); gunner (any type of large guns); throwing (grenade); medic (surgery); knowledge (squad tactics); sneak (sneak); drive (car)

Academic specialist occupation: Teacher, professor, researcher, doctor, lawyer, professional
　　　Key skills: profession (law), profession (engineer), profession (history), profession (chemistry), profession (medicine), medic (surgery), medic (pharmacology); research

Religious/inspirational occupation: Priest, minister, street proselytizer, rabbi, imam, monk
　　　Key skills: profession (theology), interact (leadership); interact (detect lies); interact (empathy)

Settings skill specialist occupation: Treat as Traveler/Rogue occupation for this setting.

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MILL CITY ENCOUNTERS
ALL OTHERS

Treat all minion rolls as an equivalent team for encounters, with a culture/occupation.

Animals, Vehicles, Brutes & Powerful Entities

Animals/Mounts: Dogs (breeds of various size, ferocity, training & loyalty); horse (unlikely)

Vehicle: Bicycle, motorcycle, car, tractor-trailer, bus, construction vehicle;
    rowboat, sailboat, power boat, yacht, personal submarine;
    glider/hang glider, ultralight, helicopter, prop plane, jet plane

Brute, powerful entity, hybrid: Treat this result as a NPC with +1 conflict and 1 extra skill (at +2)

Monsters/Beasts

Milll City may have the occasional superheroic or supernatural element. If you wish to include these elements, use the rules on the NPC sheet and in appendix U (p.142) on monster conflict ratings to roll randomly the extent of the danger. Otherwise treat any monster/beast unexpected event result either as extreme weather or a natural disaster that affects the rest of the mission; or as a conventional "F:adds/reinforcements" result; or disregard.

THE STOLEN PRIEST:
A SAMPLE MISSION

This brief sample mission takes place in the Artanes setting, outlined on p. 94-100. The setting level is *pulpy*: In a conflict, each round the player character's group has a skill check success causes 2 levels of damage to a foe group.

The player's character in this story is named Gortais. Gortais is a citizen rogue who works the streets in the city-state of Artanes. He knows many people, is a smooth talker, and with his knife and small bow can defend himself in a scrap. The player decided to give the Gortais player's character an edge. Usually the sum of a starting character's attributes totals 0; Gortais has a net +1 to his attributes. Gortais is otherwise a normal starting character with 6 skill points. Gortais has Reyhen Oricos, one of the city's high counselors, as a patron. The player character's sheet for Gortais is included for reference at the end of this book.

SCENE 1

The player decides that a good starting cutscene would be Gortais meeting Reyhen Oricos discreetly at night in a local tavern. Reyhen will be in disguise. Maybe they will discuss the mission over goblets of wine, if Reyhen is buying.

«The player selects Reyhen Oricos as the person of interest and patron for the starting cutscene.»
«But then the player rolls three scene qualities, and the results are much different than the scene the player expected. The scene qualities rolled for this civilized scene are: 13 - palace/fortress/HQ; 51 - wide open spaces; 22 - crowded. The player could have rolled for an item or added window dressing as well. But since this is a cutscene, the player decided not to add any of these details.»
The player now needs to reconcile scene qualities. After giving it some thought, the player decides the starting

cutscene instead takes place in the official counselors' statehouse building, in the grand hall, which is thronged with people.»
«Based on the surprise change of venue, the player decides to ask some clarifying yes-no questions before starting the scene. At 50/50 moderate: "Is Reyhen Oricos in some kind of trouble?" 82 - no. Add 1 to plot stress. Again at 50/50 moderate: "Did Reyhen Oricos intentionally want to meet with Gortais here (no means it was an impromptu or urgent meeting)?" 19 - yes. Add 1 to plot stress.»
«That's 2 plot stress; now add the 5 plot stress to start a scene, to total 7. The player tests plot stress (d100) to open the scene: 29 - the scene begins as expected.»

Gortais received the morning summons from a boy runner in his neighborhood. Between gasps, the errand boy passed along the message: "Come to see me at my work chambers immediately." Gortais knew one contact who would summon him without giving a name or reason. Puzzled and cautious, the rogue left his poorer quarters in the lower city to ascend to the state house. There, the grand hall was filled with noise and confusion. Gortais fought his way through the milling crowd to find his patron Reyhen Oricos, with his assistants, surrounded by a press of people.

Counselor Reyhen Oricos spotted Gortais immediately. "Ah! There you are," the counselor said flatly, took Gortais by the arm and led the rogue away from the noise of the mob, retreating from the hall to his private council chambers. An assistant closed the doors behind them. Then Gortais noticed Rehyen's eyes were sunken and his face lined more than usual. Whatever caused the crowd to gather in the big public hall, it wasn't good.

«Technically Gortais and his patron have moved away from the wide open spaces and crowd. That is fine, but it might now be harder for the player to bring in these scene qualities if they prove useful for a skill check. Note the player also narrated noise and confusion of the crowd. This could

have been window dressing if the player had described it before the scene. Since they were observations after the scene started, if the player wanted to introduce noise and confusion formally into the scene it would require a yes-no question, which would also increase plot stress. **»**

Gortais gave the counselor a half-crooked grin: "It's a busy morning for the administration?" The grin turned into a grimace as Reyhen gazed back at the rogue, expressionless. After a long pause Gortais added more awkwardly, "Look, I don't have expertise in crowd control, but if I can be of service, let me know what I can do to help."

«Under structured questions for persons, the first thing to ask is "does the person have a need," and the answer for a starting cutscene, without requiring any social skill check, is always yes. The player rolls a mission: 19 - rescue. Rescues generally involve people, so the player rolls for a d100 person: 15 - religion staff.»

«The player muses that this could take the plot in an interesting direction. The Artanes setting specifies that Reyhen Oricos has a half-brother, Bashak, who is the high priest of the Temple of Artanis, the city-state's only official sanctioned religion. Reyhen's brother, the priest of the temple has been kidnapped? That fodder is too good to pass up! The player decides to confirm with a yes-no question and sets the odds at very likely; a no roll would implicate someone else. The result: 01 - confirms it. Plot stress increases to 8. **»**

«But wait! Yes-no questions test plot stress, and the 01 roll is less than current plot stress of 8, so it also triggers an unexpected event (d20). The player rolls: 2 - a departure, and target (d10): 8 - a foe. That could have been an interesting result but there is currently no foe in this scene, so the player decides to ignore the result. The unexpected event cuts plot stress in half, from 8 to 4.»

Reyhen coolly dictated the facts to Gortais. "Early in the morning, brother Bashak was was taken from the city streets. I had hoped to be discreet in finding his abductors. His life is probably in danger. Who knows? He may already be dead. Of course this scandal didn't stay quiet for long. Every gawker and busybody in this city wants to know what I shall do about it. I'd send my guards into the streets if I thought it would help. What I really need is someone who can work more discreetly to find out what happened, and perhaps effect a rescue."

«The player looks through structured questions, and decides Gortais will ask: "Does the person have an(other) item to help with the mission?" Given the circumstances, the player decides it does not require a social skill check. The player asks a yes-no question to see if Reyhen knows anything, with the odds at 50/50 moderate: 46 - yes. Plot stress increases to 5. The resulting item roll as a clue: 19 - leathers/riot gear. Rather than have this as an item of interest on the scene, the player decides this is a clue.»

Gortais was dumbstruck. Finally he managed to ask, "do you know anything about whoever took Bashak?" Reyhen said, "I heard the force that took him wore matching leathers. This wasn't a rag-tag band. It was an organized contingent. Organized by someone. Perhaps one of our city's wealthy families? Or one of the other counselors? But surely none of them would want to risk the temple's wrath. That's for you to find out."

«The player looks around the structured questions for persons options, and decides to ask: "Does the person offer (extra) valuables for completing the mission?" That will require a social skill check but Gortais is a shrewd negotiator. Gortais has negotiate skill +1 and the player decides the half-brother's well-being also merits at least a +1 shift. The skill check is very likely to succeed: 21 - easily done. The skill check increases plot stress to 6. The player decides not to roll whether Reyhen can afford it or will pay. His half-brother is more important than a little extra cash. **»**

Gortais put on his best face of concern. "I can help, but I'll need to grease palms along the way. I'll make sure to do everything I can for the safe return of our high priest. But with the people I know, that will take coin." Reyhen barely hesitated, glanced toward the low roar of the crowds in the hall on the other side of the chamber doors. "Whatever you need for his safe return," the counselor replied to the rogue.

«One more question the player decides to ask: "Will the person provide an(other) ally for the mission?" This should require a skill check, but the player decides again that Gortais with a negotiate skill +1 and Reyhen's concern over his brother merit another +1 shift. Again this skill check is very likely to succeed. The player rolls 43 for another easy success. The skill check increases plot stress to 7. Again the player decides it isn't necessary to roll whether Reyhen would

have an ally available to supply. Clearly he has the authority and his brother's life may be on the line.»

«The player rolls on the foe (d20) table for an ally. With a 19, the result is d100: captive. The player rolls again, d100 for a random person of interest and the result is 18 - mercenary, arms leader or boss. Whose captive and how? Maybe someone who was somehow implicated in the priest's being abducted and was arrested? The player asks a yes-no question at 50/50 moderate: "Was this mercenary involved in the kidnapping?" The result: 09 - yes. Plot stress is up to 8. A follow-up yes-no question set at likely, because it makes sense for the story: "Is that person now repentant?" The result: 49 - yes. Plot stress is up to 9.»

Gortais turned up his palms to Reyhen, pushing his luck further. "Look," he said, "I'm just one person, and the coin helps. But things could get rough. There is big danger with such a high-profile kidnapping. I could use some backup." Reyhen fixed Gortais with an icy gaze and paused for a long time. Finally the counselor snapped, "yes, I have what you need. But not one of my men, who would be recognized. A Kos mercenary who is familiar with the happenings last night. He surrendered himself to the mercy of my household this morning. This mercenary claimed he had met some other warriors in a tavern last night. Warriors wearing matching leathers. After drinks and some boasting, he said that they asked him questions about Artanes' high priest. The mercenary didn't think much of it. Then he heard news of the abduction. This Kos mercenary showed up at my household. I don't know the truth of it, but I also don't see the sense in imprisoning and torturing him -- for now. Whatever his guilt, he can repay by helping you. Maybe he can identify these people who have taken Bashak, or at least he can recognize them, if you find them."

«This is an odd case for an ally: A captive is usually a non-combatant, but this captive is a mercenary. The player decides this ally is an average individual NPC. that means the mercenary has a base conflict 0. Usually an average NPC has a single skill at +1; the player decides this 'captive' is totally generic. Every ally gets a trait (d20): This one has 19 - unflappable. The player decides to call him, Oen Bjornos, an appropriate Kos (barbarian) name. Narrating out these NPC details does not affect plot stress.»

«For a last question, the player decides to break from structured questions and ask specifically: "Does Reyhen have a guess where Bashak was taken?" The player decides it doesn't require a social skill check, sets the yes-no question at 50/50 moderate: 11 - yes. The yes-no question increases plot stress to 10. The player decides the question reveals a civilized place (d20): 9 - arena/sporting place.»

Gortais asked, "So did this Oen tell you where he spoke with these thugs, or did they say anything about their plans?" Reyhen's eyes narrowed. "No one outside my trusted circle knows this, so be careful with this information. The Kos mercenary thinks my brother was taken near the city's coliseum. Do not share this. I do not want Bashak's life at risk, if he is still alive. If he is returned unharmed, I will reward you. If he is not returned alive, I will hold you and this Kos mercenary responsible. We are clear, yes?" Gortais smirked, "very clear, counselor. I will find your brother and make sure he is freed safely." The rogue wished he felt more certain that this reassurance to counselor Reyhen Oricos would turn out to be true.

«Current plot stress is 10, and the player must test for plot stress one more time before closing out the scene. The d100 roll returns a 63, well above 10. The scene closes without further incident, and the player carries over plot stress to the start of the next scene.»

SCENE II

The player decides to make this an obstacle scene. The player character's group consists of Gortais (the player's character) and Oen Bjornos (an average NPC ally). Since Bashak disappeared somewhere around the city's coliseum, the player decides that the scene will concern Gortais snooping around the place, so the scene will happen in a civilized place. The player's purpose for the scene is to have Gortais figure out more about what happened. Any new information should help move the plot forward. Oen Bjornos can assist in skill checks. Oen might also be a good source for when the player needs to ask for trouble.

The player settles on three skill checks that Gortais will need to beat with 50/50 moderate or lower odds of success. The player forecasts the first skill check to be

streetwise. Gortais will collect word on the street from potential witnesses or others who might be in the know about the kidnappers' whereabouts. The second skill check will be negotiate. If Gortais needs to get into the coliseum to look for clues, he will need to get past some guards assigned to keep rabble like him out. The player forecasts the third skill check will be sneak, necessary at some point either to get past guards, or get past people inside the coliseum without raising an alarm.

«The player could use structured questions for persons to try and successfully interrogate Oen Bjornos, which might yield more information. But the player decides against this, in part because it's not that interesting as a scene; and in part because Gortais interrogating Oen would default to the player character's untrained social skills, which is -1, unlikely to succeed.»

«The player rolls the following scene qualities before the scene opens: 33 - curtained; 41 - ditch; and 62 - overcast. The player decides that overcast has no direct effect on lighting for the scene. Maybe it will make some indoor spaces dimmer. The curtained aspect also doesn't work directly, but the player interprets this quality as garish banners hung around the coliseum's gate entrance. The player reinterprets and modifies the ditch scene quality as a set of trenches that are part of a larger drainage system for the coliseum. None of the qualities were off the mark enough that the player felt the overall scene concept had to be changed.»

«The player also decides to add a random person and gets 03 - national leader staff. The player interprets this to be the master of the coliseum. The player also rolls a random item and gets 79 - animal parts. Ick. The player decides to ignore this for the moment. Maybe later in the scene Gortais and Oen could find a larder inside the coliseum.»

«The player is ready to start the scene, and adds 5 to the plot stress carried over the past scene, to total 15. The player tests plot stress before opening the scene, rolls a 69, starting the scene without any incident.»

"The Bjornos family is a proud..." Oen started. "Save it, I don't care," the rogue cut him off. Gortais didn't want to waste time on the warrior. He'd known enough Kos people, and Oen seemed typical of his kind: dour, earnest, too much of a simpleton to be a liar. "Just stay close to me. Don't say anything," Gortais instructed the mercenary. Then Gortais hit the streets around the coliseum. First he went to the beggars and urchins,

anyone who might have been out on the streets in the area the last night. Gortais mused that if the homeless turned up no information, next he could try the poor houses and tavern common rooms, seeking out anyone still sodden by last night's drink. If that didn't work, the options would get thin. Last resort, Gortais thought, he could always go door to door, asking any residences in the area of the coliseum whether they heard anything last night.

«The player notes that a gather information skill check is a "direct contest." Gortais is on his own, without Oen assisting. The player wants this skill check to count towards a meaningful success, which means the odds can be no higher than 50/50 moderate, not counting any qualifying magic scene qualities. If Gortais makes his gather information skill check at +2 (very likely), it won't count toward meaningful success. The player decides Gortais has some circumstantial penalties to the roll. Anyone brash enough to kidnap the high priest of Artanes is bound to be powerful, so it will be harder to get people to talk. That's good for a -1 shift penalty. Gortais also is not a regular in this part of the city. He is outside of his element, good for another -1 shift penalty. The player could decide that Gortais greases palms to increase the odds by +1 shift, but needs to keep the odds at 50/50 moderate for the skill check to contribute to a meaningful success.»

«The player rules if the streetwise roll fails, the consequence is that gossips or snitches among the people Gortais tried to chat up will alert others around the coliseum of his snooping, which will hurt further social skill checks for that scene. The player picks up the dice and rolls the skill check: 21 - yes, meaning success. Plot stress increases to 16.»

The first few attempts to chat up the poor and indigent around the coliseum came up empty. One man insisted, maybe a little too hard, that he had seen and heard nothing. Gortais kept one hand at his knife and the other clutched on his purse strings. No sense in spending money until it's needed, the rogue figured. After the fourth person came up empty, the Kos mercenary suggested: "Maybe we should ask questions from more reputable people." Gortais glared at him, and the Kos warrior shut his mouth. The next pile of rags Gortais prodded stirred up an emaciated, stringy gray-haired mess. "You there, do you know Bashak Oricos, the temple priest? Did you see him last night?" Gortais asked. The scraggly old man stared stupidly at the space

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in front of his nose. But then he mumbled to himself, "blessings to the temple of Artanis. They fed me when I was hungry, they clothed me when I was cold, they healed me when I was sick." His swollen, bloodshot eyes bugged out: "Yes I saw men who took away our priest. Five of them. They surrounded him and took him. There was no struggle," he said, and finally wheezed, "Artanis bring them to justice."

«The streetwise roll could use the rules for exposing the unknown (first a skill check, if successful a follow-up yes-no question to see whether anything was there to be found). In this case, the player handwaved the follow-up yes-no question because it's already known that foes in leathers conducted the kidnapping.»

«The player decides that a successful skill check reveals more information about the foe that abducted Bashak Oricos. The player rolls (d20): 8 - weak minions. Since goblins don't roam the city, the player converts the roll directly to a weak team instead. The player rolls d10 for the size of the team: 5 members. The player rolls for culture & occupation (c/o) and gets a neighboring culture, and occupational generalists. From the Artanes setting, neighboring cultures could be from Ras Jadal, Siron or Kos. The player decides they were Kos, which explains why they were so open with Oen Bjornos, and the fact that they wore leathers (an observation from the original cutscene). A weak team of sellswords is the sort of rabble that is only dangerous in numbers. This is just one foe roll revealed from the successful gather infromation skill check. There are likely other (as-yet unknown) foes involved as well. None of these rolls were skill checks or yes-no questions, so they do not increase plot stress.»

«As was pointed out at the start of the scene, Gortais could have interrogated Oen directly via a successful social skill check and then exposed the unknown through a yes-no question, maybe getting about the same result. But this roundabout approach leans on Gortais' skill strengths; led in a potentially more interesting direction; avoids the awkward consequence of a social skill check failure with Oen; and adds a skill check toward meaningful success for the scene.»

After some more questioning, Gortais learned that the group of toughs had been loitering in the shadows of the coliseum. The old man knew saw the person abducted was dressed as a priest of the temple of Artanes, but hadn't known the victim was high priest Bashak Oricos.

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After Gortais was satisfied the old man had nothing more worthwhile to say, he returned to the main gates to the coliseum. It seemed to him the next best place to go looking for clues about a missing priest. There he approached the guards, hands out, smiles and charm. "Hail, friends," he called out to them as he approached.

«The player decides this skill check will be a negotiation, and social skills are direct contests by default. That means Gortais has a base +1 negotiation skill for a base +1 likely chance of success. The player would need to get that down to 50/50 moderate for the skill check to contribute toward meaningful success for the scene. The player decides just to take the +1 odds, get in the door, and look for better skill check opportunities once Gortais is inside the facility. If the skill check fails, what is the consequence? The player decides that the guards will rebuff Gortais, be alert for trouble, and the rogue will not be able to make any more social skill checks against them.»

«Unfortunately the skill check result - 99 - means the attempt fails miserably. Plot stress increases to 17.»

Gortais saw the guards flinch as he came to them, hand extended. The rogue sensed the cool attitude and change in posture. Then he knew he had no chance of talking his way past the gate. The guards were in no mood to let Gortais and Oen pass. "If you want in," one of the guards snorted, "you'll have to wait for an event, just like everyone else." The other guard mumbled to Gortais under his breath, "sorry, friend, master of the place has been around, and he's in a foul mood."

«The player could easily have introduced the person of interest, the master of the coliseum, here. But the player already tried a negotiation skill check and failed, and wants to try a different skill check to contribute toward meaningful success. The player decides to keep the master of the coliseum as a possibility for later in the scene, and moves forward with different plans. Time to use that sneak skill check to try and get Gortais and Oen into the coliseum.»

«Gortais has sneak +2 skill. For this skill check to count toward meaningful success, the cap is 50/50 moderate. Sneaking is an interference skill check, which defaults to the lowest skill in the group. The player needs to use Oen Bjornos' 0 conflict skill (the lowest of the two), which brings the odds down to what's needed for meaningful success. Also, the player can use a scene quality for this check! The player

decides that the ditch scene quality, which he narrated to be part of a drainage system for the coliseum, comes into play. Scene qualities are magical. The player decides sneaking into the coliseum through the ditch and drainage system provides a +1 magical shift bonus. That magical shift bonus makes the sneak attempt likely to succeed, yet the skill check still counts toward meaningful success. »

«The player considers two other issues. First, it's not certain whether the drainage system is actually passable and enters the coliseum. This should remain unknown for now. The player won't know the answer until the player's character tries to enter. The second issue are the potential consequences if the skill check fails. That is easy: There are guards, minions and others about, and with a failure someone will hear Oen and Gortais in the ditch and drainage system, and will get the jump on mounting a response. The player rolls the sneak skill check: 62 - barely a success thanks to the help of the magical scene quality. Plot stress increases to 18. »

Gortais parted company from the guards. Followed by Oen he nonchalantly rounded a corner, then clambered down into the dry drainage moat surrounding the coliseum. He signaled for the Kos mercenary to follow. "Whatever you do, keep quiet!" he hissed at the Kos mercenary, ducked low and slinked away. The ditch passed directly behind and below the guards before they found a pipe large enough to crawl in, under the wall of the coliseum. Gortais ignored the smell as he wriggled into the darkness, the Kos mercenary close behind. A short distance later the pipe became a more passable tunnel.

«The player now has two successful skill checks but has not yet asked for trouble. Two men sneaking in a dark sewer tunnel in a fantasy setting? That is asking for trouble. The player muses that something nasty should be lurking in the darkness. To ask for trouble as part of a meaningful success, the probability must be at least 50/50 moderate. The player asks: "Is there something dangerous in the tunnels?" The player rolls the yes-no question: 19 - yes, and just over the current plot stress of 18, which increases to 19: Dodged an unexpected event roll by a hair!»

«The player rolls on the foe table (d20) and gets 8, weak minions. An ideal foe in a low-fantasy underground sewer are giant rats that have developed a taste for human flesh. The player rolls a d10 for number and gets 4 rats total. Four weak minions have a conflict score of -1. »

The player starts with detection, to figure out which side notices the other first, and at what range. Because the encounter is happening underground, The player decides detection starts at medium range. The player arbitrarily decides the giant rats have at least +1 shift for keen senses, which gives them a to 50/50 moderate chance to detect Gortais and Oen. The player rolls a 90 - no, the rats are unaware. For the player character's side, Gortais has notice +2 skill. Oen can assist and his conflict skill of 0 applies, which means the Kos warrior contributes another +1 shift, giving Gortais' side notice +3 total. The player rolls 81 - yes. Since this was a skill check involving the player's character, plot stress goes up to 20. With such a mediocre roll, the player decides that Gortais' side gets only indirect evidence, and does not sense the giant rats directly. Detection is considered part of a conflict, so while this skill check increased plot stress, it does not contribute toward meaningful success. »

«The player also decides now to ask whether Gortais and Oen are in pitch darkness. That sounds like asking for trouble, but in this case it's the opposite. Tunnels naturally should be pitch dark, so asking for light is doing the player character's group a favor. The player asks: "Is there enough light for Gortais and Oen to see?" The odds are 50/50 moderate: 23 - yes. Plot stress is now 21. But the player also decides the overcast scene quality means that light in the tunnels should be very dim. Going forward, the player will apply a -1 shift penalty for skill checks that rely on vision. »

The tunnels already smelled bad, but then a new and even more awful stench hit Gortais. The tunnel was only lit with a few shafts of dim light, just enough to see dog-sized carcasses and scattered bones picked clean littering the floor of the tunnel. Gortais softly elbowed the Kos mercenary, who was holding a hand over his mouth and nose, and pointed at the evidence of danger. "We will be especially quiet here, and maybe whatever is down here will leave us alone," he said to the Kos mercenary, "but just in case, ready your sword."

<<The player decides that Gortais and Oen will try to sneak past the rats. The player already has one meaningful success using sneak, so can't use the same skill check a second time toward meaningful success this scene. But a successful skill check could avoid the encounter by letting Gortais and Oen sneak past unnoticed. As before, the base odds are 50/50 moderate. The player decides the dim lighting doesn't interfere with the sneak attempt. But it's an opposed

Slowly, quietly, Gortais and Oen felt their way through the underground drainage tunnel, almost entirely in darkness. At first, Gortais noted with satisfaction that the Kos mercenary was competent enough matching his own slow, cautious shuffle. But as they moved along at a crawl Gortais began to get nervous: It was too quiet. If there was something living in the tunnels, they should have heard signs of life by now. That is unless... then the shrieks and squeaks began: The mercenary and rogue drew their blades as half-seen shapes the size of dogs, covered in matted fur and reeking of garbage, bounded out of pipes on either side of the passage.

«Time for combat! the player adds up the odds and factors for each side:»

Gortais: Skill 1 Knife fighting
Oen Bjornos: adds 1 to assist
Other factors: -1 (dim lighting from scene quality)

4 giant rats: -1 conflict rating (weak minions)
(giant rats see in the dark – no penalty)

Combat difficulty = 2 shifts (2 -1) – (-1)

«Gortais' side has +2 shifts, so is very likely to succeed. For the first round of conflict the player rolls 25, a success. Plot stress goes up to 23. Because it is a pulpy setting, the foes take 2 levels of damage. Each level of damage takes out 2 minions, so the single success takes out 4 minions, leaving just 1 giant rat.»

«It would be possible to play out another round of combat, but the player decides a lone rat is not going to fight to the death. The player asks the yes-no question: "Does the remaining rat run away?" The result: 11 - the rat scampers. The 11 result also is less than current plot stress, so it generates an unexpected event that the player will get to in a moment.»

«Officially, the rat needs to make a retreat maneuver, inviting an attack. The odds now are:»

1 giant rat: -3 conflict rating (weak minion)
Combat difficulty = 3 shifts (2 -1) – (-3)

«Technically the combat skill check is at +4 shifts. But all skill checks top out at +3 shifts and bottom out at -3 shifts.»

«The player decides Gortais' side does not attack. There's no sense in spending another round on another skill check (and point of plot stress) to kill an escaping giant rat. In fact, the rat might be useful to ask for trouble later.»

Now back to the unexpected event: Plot stress is cut in half and rounded down, from 23 to 11. The player rolls d20 and gets a 4 result, invoke a negative trait. The player follows up with a d10 focus and with a 1, the focus is self or rival. What about Gortais' personality would be an issue here? A rogue fighting in a dark tunnel isn't going to face a personality backlash, and no rival is going to show up here. The player decides to let it drop and moves on.»

As a skill challenge, this battle started at +2 (very likely to succeed) for the player character's group, so it was not even close to a moderate challenge. Therefore the victory does not contribute to a meaningful success.»

The assault was over in seconds. In the darkness lay ragged, dark lumps, oozing dark blood. Gortais and Oen's blades and hands were slick with oil and fetid water. The rats must have been accustomed to different prey than armed fighting men, Gortais thought. He heard more than saw the last rat rush off squeaking into the darkness, scrabbling into a pipes to safety.

«The player has asked for trouble once, and here is a second opportunity. Between the quick fight and the retreating rat, the player asks: "All that action just made a lot of noise. Do any bad guys hear it?" The player decides a yes result means that Gortais and Oen will have no chance to sneak and ambush for a next encounter, whether in this scene or any follow-up scene. Usually asking for trouble should have immediate consequences, but in this case the player made an exception. The player sets the odds at 50/50 moderate and rolls: 04 - yes. Anyone else hostile in the area now knows that something is happening in the tunnels. The 04 also generates another unexpected event, and cuts plot stress in half again, rounding down to 5.»

«The player rolls for the unexpected event (d20): 10 - an item intrudes. The player doesn't have an item of interest in this scene and so rolls d100 for a random item. The result is 70 - industrial metals. The player considers that Gortais and Oen both wielded blades in the combat that just ended. One obvious result would be that a weapon broke. The player

asks: "did a weapon break in this battle?" Given that rats in a tunnel are soft targets, the player decides the result is -1 unlikely. This is dealing with an unexpected event, not asking for trouble, so this roll does not contribute toward meaningful success. The player rolls: 25 - yes. Plot stress goes up to 6. The player flips a coin (not a formal yes-no question) to determine whose weapon. The result is Gortais. Snap! There goes the dagger.»

As Gortais wiped his dagger clean, he noticed the grip rattling loose, and the haft separating from the blade. He sighed and tucked it away, now useless. That fix was going to cost money. "Let's go," he said to the Kos mercenary, and the pair again started picking their way through the drainage tunnel.

«The player has now had 2 skill successes and asked for trouble twice. One more of each check will make this scene a meaningful success.»

«The player thinks about what other troubles there could be, and decides since whatever other hostiles there are now know there's someone in the drainage system, they might be able to flood the system with water. The consequence, the player decides, is potentially some desperate swimming that could mean taking a level of damage, and at worst the player character's group being swept back out to the ditches outside the coliseum! The player asks: "Do the bad guys manage to flood out the drainage system?" The yes-no question is at 50/50 moderate. The roll is 83 - thankfully no. Whatever the reason, there is no deluge of water in the tunnels.»

«The player needs one more successful skill check, and wants to try something different. The player latches back onto the idea of a swimming roll, and decides that the pair come to an internal collecting pool that they must swim across. Swimming is part of athletics, which defaults to physical/melee skills. Gortais' untrained skill is -1, and Oen would use his conflict skill of 0. The player decides this swimming skill check qualifies as a direct contest: Each person will have to roll separately for success. The player decides for Gortais, the consequence of failure will be taking a level of damage from near-drowning.»

«The player rolls the -1 swimming skill check for Gortais and with a 05, he makes it! Plot stress goes up to 7 (the skill check adds to plot stress but does not test plot stress). Oen swims separately at 50/50 moderate: 11 - yes, makes it also. Since Gortais did not participate in Oen's skill check, that roll does not affect plot stress.»

Still fumbling in the near-total darkness, the pair made their way through the tunnel. Gortais suddenly stopped and bumped his arm against Oen's chest. "Can you see that?" he said to the Kos mercenary. In front of them lay an expansive underground chamber. It glinted with light reflected off stagnant water. The Kos mercenary grunted. "I think I see the other side." Gortais swung a foot into the chamber and dropped it into the chilly water, testing for a bottom with no luck. "You know how to swim?" Gortais asked the mercenary. "Maybe," Oen said dryly. "That goes for both of us," Gortais said. The rogue slowly slipped into the water, shivering, and finally pushed off from the wall, floating deep out into the darkness of the chamber.

Minutes later the pair were on the other side of the chamber, shivering, miserable but alive. "I am not coming back this way," Oen said flatly to Gortais. The pair checked their gear and moved on.

«With 3 successful skill checks and 3 times asking for trouble, the player has achieved a meaningful success for this scene! The player plans to close the scene here, but must test against plot stress of 7 first. With a roll of 61, there is no unexpected event and the player can close the scene successfully. In this case the player has to keep in mind that whatever hostile forces there are, as a consequence carried over by this scene they will be aware of Gortais and Oen, and cannot be caught by surprise. Usually all consequences should be resolved in the same scene. But the player does have the option to carry over a consequence, which forces a follow-up scene that plays out the consequence's effets.»

SCENE III

The player is riding on the meaningful success from the prior obstacle scene, and decides to make this an encounter scene. If the player character's group can best this ecounter scene, it will generate a second meaningful success. That means the player could conclude this short mission with a positive outcome.

«The player expects the big fight will happen in an underground maintenance chamber that serves the drainage system. The player rolls three scene qualities for the encounter scene: 46 - shadowy, 62 - overcast, 82 - arguing/debate. None of those qualities alter the scene as the

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player envisions it. The player decides to use the rolled-up scene quality (arguing/debate) as the rationale for the foe group.»

«Next, the player rolls up the foe budget. From prior scenes, the player knows that there is a weak team with 5 members. At 2 points apiece, that team is worth 10 points. The player rolls d10x10 for the foe budget and the result is 2 and 8, for 16. That means there are just 6 points left to spend. The player rolls d20 for foes: 16 - an automaton. There are guardian statues in the setting, so the result makes sense. The automaton is worth 10 points, which consumes the rest of the foe budget. The player decides to assign a flat conflict +2 skill to the automaton, with no special abilities.»

«The player also narrates some window dressing: An entrance to the dimly lit drainage system; and the fact carried over from asking for trouble last scene that the foe group is aware of the player character group's approach.»

«It's time to open the scene, which brings plot stress up 5 points, from 7 to 12. With a roll of 83 there are no unexpected events, and the scene can start as planned.»

«The player jumps right to detection. The foe group is already aware of the player character's group. The player rules that Gortais and Oen get their first detection attempt at medium range. Since the foe group has the rationale of arguing/debate, the player rules that the foes won't oppose the roll by trying to sneak. It's an assisted skill check, so Gortais has a notice +2 and Oen contributes +1, for +3. The player decides any vision penalties for dim or shadowy conditions don't affect notice because the check involves all the senses. The player rolls: 60 - yes, Gortais and Oen hear the foe group at medium range. Plot stress goes up to 13.»

Gortais could see brighter light ahead. But even before he could make out what was happening at the far end of the tunnel he heard distant arguing; and the thumping footfalls of something inhumanly big and heavy. Cursing his broken knife, Gortais readied his bow.

«Each side is aware of the other at medium (missile) range. The player asks: "Do the foes have ranged weapons?" and sets the probability at 50/50 moderate. The roll is 47 - yes, and the player decides they are wielding short bows. Plot stress goes up to 14.»

The first round, Gortais and the human foes can fire a volley from their bows. Oen and the foe automaton have no missile weapons. The player takes the advance maneuver for

Oen to move into melee range. The player is unsure if the statue can get into the tunnels, so asks the yes-no question: "Is the automaton in the drainage tunnels?" The result: 48 - yes. The player assumes there must be a ramp, stairs or other conveyance for the statue to enter the tunnel, and decides the statue also takes the advance maneuver. Plot stress goes up to 15. That leaves the odds for this round:»

Gortais: Skill 2 bow
Oen Bjornos: advancing (no effect)

foe team: -1 conflict rating (5 weak members)
automaton: advancing (no effect)

Other factors: ∅ (dim lighting from scene quality affects everyone)

Combat difficulty = 3 shifts (2) - (-1)

«At +3 for the skill check, the player rolls 85 - yes, Gortais' side succeeds. Plot stress goes up to 16. Because of the pulpy setting the foes take 2 levels of damage. The guardian statue is too important to take the hit, so the player decides to whittle down minions. 2 levels damage, each killing 2 minions, means that there is just 1 minion left and the advancing guardian statue.»

When the arguing stopped and arrows started to fly towards Gortais and Oen, the rogue was ready. Their foes were poor shots, and they were firing into the darkness of the tunnel. Gortais was soaked and cold, but they were still no match for his training. As Oen ducked and weaved down the passage, the rogue fired volleys of arrows over the Kos warrior's head, squarely hitting their marks. Then the hulking shadow of a living statue filled the corridor. Gortais cursed again.

«Oen and the statue are now at close range. The next round is led by melee, and ranged weapons become support. The odds now change steeply:»

Oen Bjornos: Skill ∅
Gortais: adds 1 with bow

automaton: Skill 2
foe team: adds 1 with bow

Other factors: ∅ (dim lighting from scene quality affects everyone equally)

Combat difficulty = -2 shifts (1) - (3)

«Gortais has a -2 for the skill check. The player grits his teeth and rolls 90 - no. Plot stress goes up to 17. The player character's group takes a level of damage. The player does not want Oen taken out, because without a melee fighter, and without a weapon for his knife fighting, Gortais could be in even more serious trouble. The foe group still has an archer, so Gortais can take a level of damage from an arrow. That is what the player decides. The player ticks the grazed condition for Gortais.»

The Kos mercenary fell back under the hammer blows of the statue, and the rogue fired arrow after useless arrow at the hulking monstrosity. Gortais had forgotten about the other archer, and yelped in surprise when an arrow struck his side. Just a little blood, the rogue grimly took account, not too bad. One way or another he would make the archer who fired that shot pay.

«Round 3 the odds do not change: the combat difficulty is still -2 shifts. The player rolls and the result is 10 - yes. This was a conflict skill check, so it did not test plot stress and trigger an unexpected event. Plot stress goes up to 18. The foe group takes 2 levels of damage because the setting is pulpy. The automaton takes 1 of those levels, and the final team member takes the other level, which would have been enough to remove 2 team members. With the foes defeated, the player has achieved a meaningful success for this scene. But the scene isn't closed yet.»

What happened next gave Gortais some new respect for the Kos people. With a bellow, the mercenary lowered his blade, body-slammed the statue and brought it to the ground. Using the sword more like a cudgel than blade, the mercenary straddled the prone statue and chipped away at its head as it struggled to rise. Gortais only took his eyes away from the spectacle long enough to place an arrow in the back of the final archer, who had turned to flee. Finally the statue stopped moving. Still the Kos mercenary hammered blows into the creature. Then the warrior slumped over the thing, breathing in ragged gasps.

«The player asks the yes-no question: "Is there anyone in the foe group who is still in shape to talk?" The intent is to use structured questions for foes to gain more information, and possibly treasure. The player sets the odds at 50/50 moderate and rolls: 08 - yes. But that also triggers an

unexpected event and cuts plot stress in half from 18 to 9. The unexpected event result is 2, a departure, and the focus is 10, a foe. In this case, the player decides it means there was a minion who was well enough to talk, but he was also well enough to crawl away from the battle, and stumble away into some other part of the coliseum complex. The player could opt to continue the scene and have the player character's group pursue. But at this point the player has achieved a meaningful success and wants to wrap up the scene, without risking complications.»

«The player decides to ask the yes-no question: "Is Bashak here and alive?" That's a compound question, so the player sets the odds from likely to 50/50 moderate. The result: 23 - yes. The bound Bashak Oricos is nearby and they rescue the high priest. Plot stress goes up to 10.»

In hindsight, the rest was almost too easy, Gortais mused, but not without its worries. Where the rogue knew there were five archers, he could only find four bodies. Bashak had been propped up, tied and gagged nearby. The high priest was sore and tired from the ordeal, but unharmed. In the company of the high priest of the temple of Artanis, Gortais and Oen could practically dance out the main gate of the coliseum. The master of the coliseum would probably be brought before the counselors, and would need to explain how the abducted high priest had been found inside the walls of his complex. For now, Gortais was more interested in searching the bodies for identifying marks or valuables. He was already counting Reyhen Oricos' coins for the safe rescue of the high priest. He'd be able to afford to replace the knife, and then some.

«The player decides that Gortais has a chat with Bashak, under structured questions for persons. Bashak was not a person of interest at the start of the scene, but he is a person of interest in the plot as a whole, and the player decides that this rightfully qualifies.»

«The first question to Bashak is: "Why did they abduct you?" (a form of 'what is the reason behind the need', structured question for persons, generating a rationale): The player rules no social skill check is necessary. But it is exposing the unknown, so he must first ask the yes-no question: "Does Bashak know why he was taken?" The player decides the odds are 50/50 moderate and the result: 33 - yes. Plot stress goes up to 11. That lets the player in turn roll

rationale, and the result is 5, guard/vigilance. The player thinks about this and decides someone has been vigilant about monitoring the temple of Artanis and the order, and there was a trigger event that caused the abduction.»

«The player next asks: "is it some sort of counter force testing the city state?" The odds are 50/50 moderate and the result: 71 - no. This does not have to do with outside power politics. Plot stress goes up to 12. The player follows up with the yes-no question: "Did the kidnapping serve as a distraction for someone pursuing another goal?" The odds again are 50/50 moderate. The result: 08 - yes, and the trigger for an unexpected event, which cuts plot stress in half to 6. The unexpected event is 13, a special item used by a foe. The player decides it's obvious that the previously escaped foe is using some sort of communications item, perhaps magic, to alert whoever is in charge that Bashak's kidnapping had been compromised and their force was neutralized. Maybe the plan, whatever it was, is off? What might happen next is fodder for future adventures in the city of Artanes! The player decides to close the scene here. With a roll result to test plot stress at 84, the scene ends without any further unexpected events.»

SCENE IV

«Plot stress of 6 carries over from the prior scene. The player forecasts this scene to be where he'd planned the start of the story, a discreet meeting at a local tavern over a goblet of wine. Except this time it will also involve a hefty pouch of silver coins in payment for Gortais' actions. The scene quality rolls: 48 - foggy, 42 - dank/damp, and 76 - floral/sweet smells. The player decides this sounds more like Reyhen invited Gortais and Oen to the gardens at his estate and vineyards the next morning, a shrouded sunrise after a heavy overnight rainfall. Plot stress goes up to 11 to start the scene, and with a 32, the scene opens without any trouble.»

Gortais fidgeted uncomfortably in the grand estate and manor of Reyhen Oricos, high up the mountainside. Bees buzzed in the early morning hours, the vineyards spread into the distance, and a fog lay over the shoreline of the city-state far below. "Artanes is grateful to you," Reyhen said, and nodded for a servant to bring over a pair of clinking purses to Gortais and Oen. Gortais noted that the Kos mercenary looked nearly as uncomfortable as he himself felt.

«The player uses the simple rewards system to calculate the take: 2 meaningful successes mean 1/2 month's reward, or 50 silvers for a struggling rogue. Gortais had managed to talk up the pay, which increases it by another 50% to 75 silvers. The 16 point foe encounter yielded mixed coinage worth a total of 16 silver, and the player generously decides to add another 10 silver to the total take for the giant rats. The total of 101 silver pennies gets divided equally with allies, so Gortais' take rounds up to 51 silvers. A new knife is going to cost 25 of that.»

«Given the circumstances, the player decides Gortais will try to ask whether Reyhen owes him a favor to repay in the future. The player starts with Gortais' negotiate +1, and decides the value of saving Reyhen's half-brother probably zeroes out the audacity of the request, so the final result is likely. The consequence for failure will be shutting down any further requests. The player rolls 19 - yes. Plot stress goes up to 12.»

"Seeing as we've done such service to Artanes," Gortais said, "may I call upon your aid, or your mercy, in the future?" Reyhen paused, but didn't show any sign of emotion. "If you have a need, speak it and you will have it, citizen of Artanes. As for you," Reyhen pointed at the Kos mercenary, "you are guilty of no crime, and may walk our city's streets a free man. You have proved your goodwill to this city." The Kos mercenary nodded and said nothing.

«The player decides this is a good wrap-up point. He tests against plot stress to close the scene, and with a 20, the scene closes successfully and the mission is over.»

«The player assigns Gortais 3 XP: +1 for each meaningful success (two), +2 for completing the mission, and -1 for each ally (one).»

For Oen Bjornos, the player asks: "Did this ally learn enough from this experience to advance?" The player decides to set the odds based on the experiences and challenges at 50/50 moderate. The roll result is 94 - no, Oen remains at his current power level. If the result had been yes, Oen would have picked up a skill at +1 over his base 0 conflict rating»

Finally, the player takes down notes of the adventure elements for future stories of Gortais, rogue of the city-state of Artanes!»

LiRE

Appendices

UNEXPECTED EVENTS (l)

	Type	Description
1	Person: Arrival	A new person or foe arrives at the scene. Roll P:Focus (d10). If P:Focus is a foe, add a foe (d20): This is either a new force entering the scene, reinforcements, or a third-party force (whether friendly or hostile to other foes in the scene).
2	Person: Departure	A person/foe on the scene leaves (withdraws or disappears). Roll P:Focus (d10). Only a person or foe who is already in the scene can leave it. If an ally withdraws, ask a yes-no question whether that ally is gone just for that scene, or for the rest of the mission. If the ally returns in a future scene or cutscene, a rationale (d20) roll could explain the reason for the departure.
3	Person: Trait Positive	Invokes an existing trait (for persons) or an existing rationale (for foes) that may benefit that character in the scene. Roll P:Focus (d10). A P:Focus of "Self" can mean that something about the player character's personality may be a benefit in the scene.
4	Person: Trait Negative	Invokes an existing trait (for persons) or an existing rationale (for foes) to the detriment of the player's character. Roll P:Focus (d10). A P:Focus of "Self" can mean that something about the player character's personality may be a drawback in the scene.
5	Person: Trait Random	Roll a P:Focus (d10). The target person/foe in the scene acts on their dominant trait or rationale. Roll a random trait (d20) or rationale (d20) if the P:Focus target doesn't already have one. The action might help or hinder the player's character.
6	Person: Skill Check	Something happens that forces the target person/foe to make a skill check. If a focus target isn't obvious, roll P:Focus (d10). The skill check may be related to exposing the unknown (p.31,36) whether or not it is also asking for trouble.
7	Person: Rationale New/Change	Roll a rationale (d20) and P:Focus (d10). If the scene is happening in a place where there are (generic) people, you may convert the rationale into a new scene quality. If the P:Focus target had a rationale, it changes to the new rationale. If you are introducing any persons in the scene, you can introduce them with the rationale.
8	Person: Mission Twist	The player's character may get a new side goal mission. Otherwise, something happened that affects the main mission or side goal. Either take note that the P:Focus target has a different attitude/agenda for the mission; or roll a random mission (d20) that alters/affects the existing mission; or choose or roll under appropriate tables for new person (d100), foe (d20), place (d20) and/or item (d100). Unlike other unexpected events, you don't have to play this event right away: Introduce the change when it makes sense.
9	Person: Scene Quality Intrudes	Roll P:Focus (d10): A scene quality has an effect on the target. The target might be forced to make a skill check, with a possible follow-up yes-no question asking for trouble. A scene quality may give an extra magic shift (i.e., to total +2 or -2 shifts) to one skill check for that scene, instead of the usual +1 or -1 shift.
10	Person: Item Intrudes	Roll P:Focus (d10): An item of interest comes into play with the P:Focus as target. Some possible item relationships: The person might covet it, fear it, was a previous owner, or was involved with the item's past in a significant way. If no item has been part of the story, you may roll (d100) and introduce an item. Whatever the relationship, the P:Focus character takes an action related to that item.

UNEXPECTED EVENTS (ll)

	Type	Description
11	Foe: Start / Cease Hostilities	In an encounter scene where conflict is underway or about to start, the foe group stops hostilities for some reason, at least temporarily. If there is a foe in the scene but no conflict yet, hostilities ratchet up. If there are no foes in the scene, ignore this result.
12	Foe: Leader Emerges	If the encounter has any team(s) or minion(s), one member of that contingent is actually a competent leader, ramping up the threat (as per the "add leader" result when rolling foes). Choose or roll if there is more than one contingent of teams or minions.
13	Foe: Special Item	One or more foes in the scene has special gear to aid hostilities. Depending on setting that might be explosives or weapons (p.86), high-tech gadgets, psionic enhancers, or a mystic/magic item. The item(s) can come into play at any time through the end of the scene.
14	Foe: Call for Backup	Whether or not there is active conflict, a foe on the scene requests reinforcements, which the player character's group may or may not know about (the group might hear a horn or alarm bell, but not a mystic missive or cell phone text). Make a foe (d20) roll for the backup, then judge whether the reinforcements arrive in the same scene. The player character's group might be able to leave the area (i.e., close the scene cleanly) before backup arrives.
15	Foe: Adds / Reinforce-ments	Either a call for backup had already gone out and is answered now; or else by coincidence another foe enters the scene now. Roll up a random foe (d20) who enters the scene. The new foe shows up immediately. The new arrival might be friendly or hostile to other foes in the scene.
16	Monster / Beast	One or more dangerous animals, a horror from beyond, or other powerful creature comes onto the scene (see appendix U). If it has intelligence, give the creature a rationale (d20), which guides its intelligence or instinct. For settings with no monsters, bring a rival onto the scene, or introduce one or more foe(s) instead.
17	Trap/Ambush: (Arrest / Confline)	The player character's group needs to make a skill check or else become trapped, unable to exit the scene without making one or more additional skill checks. Possibilities include a pit or gate, security doors, entangling goo, paralyzing powers or knockout gas. Ambush attempts include a dropped net or being surrounded, or having egress cut off. Make a best assumption based on the circumstances and confirm with one or more yes-no questions.
18	Trap/Ambush: Damage / Incapacitate	The player character's group needs to make a skill check or be harmed by a one-time trap or attack (take a level of damage). Possibilities include poison gas and toxins, sentry gun/rigged missile weapons, boiling oil, a pit lined with spikes, minefield, or triggered power effects. Ambush attempts include a surprise attack from behind. If in doubt, make a best assumption based on the circumstances and confirm with one or more yes-no questions.
19	Scene Quality New/Change	Roll a new scene quality (d100) using the appropriate (wilderness or civilized) field on the action table. Add the result to the existing list of scene qualities. If it contradicts an existing scene quality, the new scene quality replaces the older one.
20	Scene Quality Ceases	One of the existing scene qualities (choose one or roll randomly) goes away.

Focus for Persons target is 1d10: 1-3 self or rival; 4-5 ally or patron; 6-7 person(s) or ally; 8-10 foe or rival. If there is no suitable target, the player may roll a random person (d100) or foe (d20) and introduce that result into the scene.

Focus for Foes affects all foes in the scene. If there are no foes in the scene when a foe focus is rolled, the player should roll a random foe (d20) and introduce the foe result into the scene.

TYPES OF FOES (1)

	Type	Number	Point Value	Description
1	Weak team (%)	1d10	2 pt. each	Poorly outfitted and trained foes. Weak teams are lackeys that are not too competent or dangerous. They have strength in numbers, but aren't much of a threat individually. Examples: thugs, bandits, martial arts students, military conscripts, general rabble. Use generic stat blocks or similar rules for entry-level foes, to handle them in numbers.
2	Average team (%)	1d10	3 pt. each	Average outfitted and trained foes. Average teams are more competent and better equipped than weak teams. Use generic stat blocks or simple rules to handle these foes in numbers.
3	Average NPC (%)	1	5 pt.	A competent threat, but not nearly as experienced as the player's character. This type of character will have one or more specialty skills. Use a short-form character sheet to describe an average NPC.
4	Talented NPC (%)	1	10 pt.	This threat approaches the power level of the player's character. Use an abbreviated character sheet to describe this threat.
5	Add Leader (%)	1	10 pt.	This competent foe can head up any teams and/or minions on the scene. The character may have special leadership abilities to motivate any teams or minions in the scene. Use an abbreviated character sheet to describe this threat, noting the strengths and bond the leader may have with followers.
6	Animals/ Mounts	1 or 1d10	2+ pt. each	Animals or mounts can consist of war dogs or wolves, horses, or more unusual creatures suitable to the setting. If they are mounts, assign them to people in the group. If they are animals, assign someone in the group as the minder of these animals. Treat these animals and mounts are typical for their kind, and use a generic stat block.
7	Non-Combatant	1	1 pt.	This person does not wish to engage in violent conflict: The interests just run counter to those of the player's character. Roll a person (d100). If the result is 81-100, indicating a foe, choose the foe encounter instead. The player might need to note social skills for a non-combatant, but shouldn't need a stat block.
8	Weak minions	1d10	2 pt. each	Small, relatively ineffective monstrous foes that work together (e.g., goblins). If there are no humanoids in the game world, replace with a weak team as described above. Use a generic stat block.
9	Average minions	1d10	3 pt. each	More effective monstrous foes that work together (e.g., orcs). If there are no humanoids in the game world, treat as an average team as described above. Use a generic stat block.
10	Big Brute	1	10 pt.	This should be a giant, beastly humanoid. A troll, a great big mutant, a massive bodybuilder. Any encounter that is strong and resilient for the setting should fit the bill. Use a generic stat block.

TYPES OF FOES (II)

	Type	Number	Point Value	Description
11	Vehicles/ Mounts	1 or 1d10	2+ pt. each	Here are some sample vehicles or mounts and their point values: War horses, riding lizards and other unusual mounts may be 4-5 points. Conventional vehicles: Motorcycle/personal transport (2 points), car (3 points), van/pickup truck (4 points), high-end race car (5 points). The maximum value is 10 points for the likes of wyverns or ground/air/space assault vehicles.
12	Weak mindless minions	1d10	2 pt. each	Minor monstrous foes such as undead (skeletons/zombies) or low-end robot minions. If there are no mindless creatures in the game world, substitute with weak minions or a weak team, preferably with a singular purpose, such as cultists. Use a generic stat block.
13	Average mindless minions	1d10	3 pt. each	More dangerous monstrous foes such as undead (ghouls) or more resilient robot minions. If there are no mindless creatures in the game world, substitute with average minions or an average team, preferably with a singular purpose. Use a generic stat block.
14	Hybrids/ Animals	1 or 1d10	5 pt. each	These may be an anthropomorphic creature (e.g., lizard man, centaur, fish-man, frog-man, etc). If this is the first or only foe rolled for the scene, you may roll d10 for number of creatures. If it is part of a larger foe group, just add one of its kind. These creatures often have a special ability. If this result isn't appropriate for the setting, substitute with a large animal (such as a wolf-hound, or something exotic like an alligator or tiger). Use a generic stat block.
15	Powerful Entity	1	10 pt.	In game worlds where the supernatural exists, this might be a powerful undead or other evil-infused entity, probably a leader, lieutenant or advisor to even more powerful foes. This foe should be a serious threat to the player's character. If supernatural threats don't exist, susbstitute with an especially villainous talented NPC. Use a modified stat block, or a full character sheet.
16	Automaton	1	10 pt.	This may be a big robot or something similar, like a living statue. It should be tough, mindless and amoral. If this kind of entity doesn't suit the setting, substitute with a big brute. Use a generic stat block.
17	d100, Average NPC ( )	1	5 pt.	Roll up a person of interest under the d100 table, then stat out that person as a mediocre NPC. The foe has the experience/status of the person rolled up, plus the skills to be a competent threat. Use a short-form character sheet. If the person result is 81-100 substitute with the rolled foe.
18	d100, Talented NPC (%)	1	10 pt.	Roll up a person of interest under the d100 table, then stat out that person as a talented NPC. The foe has the experience/status of the person rolled up, plus the skills to be a highly competent threat. Use a short-form character sheet. If the person result is 81-100 substitute with the rolled foe.
19	d100, Captive(s)	1 or 1d10	0 pt.	Roll a person of interest: Based on the result, add either one captive or roll for d10 captives. Captives are non-combatants. If the result is 81-100, the rolled foe is being held captive. If the captive foe(s) is/are set free, they are unlikely to fight, and the player may interrogate with structured questions for foes.
20	Infiltrator/ Spy	1	15 pt.	This person may appear to be friendly (or captive), but is secretly hostile. Fantasy possibilities include shape-changer, doppelganger or were-creature. In conventional settings, an infiltrator/spy is a person with extraordinary skills. Depending on the circumstances, the person may try to join the group as an ally. It's up to the player to decide how to handle this circumstance, and if so, if/when to play out a potential betrayal in an obstacle scene. The infiltrator may become a recurring rival.

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CULTURE & OCCUPATION (%)

	Type	Description
1-3	Majority/ Native	These people are of the same nationality, culture, species as the majority of local people in the area. Generic fantasy examples might be subjects of the local kingdom.
4	Native Minority	These people are from a nationality, culture or species that is either native, or is a minority that is naturalized with local people in the area. Fantasy game examples might be elves or halflings that live within the local kingdom's realm and are part of its society.
5-6	Affiliated/ Neighbor	These people are from a different nationality, culture or species, but one that is not unusual for the area. If the player's character is in another nation, this might be someone from her/his own society. Generic fantasy examples in a local human kingdom might be dwarves who are from nearby mountains, or elves who hail from nearby forests.
7	Far-Away/ Foreign	These people are from a different nationality, culture or species that is familiar, but from far away. If the player's character is in a far-off land, this might be someone from her/his own society. Generic fantasy examples might include elves from the northern taiga in a temperate kingdom, or humans from other regions of the known world.
8	Unusual/ Exotic	These people are an unusual species, culture or nationality. In fantasy, space/future or supers scenarios, this can be imagination run wild: centaurs or reptile folk, silicon life forms or strange mutants.
9-10	Opposed	These people are from a nationality, culture or species that opposes the player character's affiliations (that particular person may be tolerated in the local area). Fantasy examples might be people from barbaric lands that regularly raid the local kingdom, or from a country that is ruled by necromancers and powerful undead. The persons from the opposed kingdom may not be hostile personally, but default relations in the setting's homeland are cold.

	Type	Description
1-2	Common	Assign the most common "adventuring" talents for the setting: The person is well-rounded, with some skill across many areas.
3	Social/ Leadership	Leaders or influencers, skilled to rally and inspire (or intimidate and dissuade) others: Politicians, ambassadors, tactical squad leaders, bards, artists or performers, and con artists.
4	Fighters/ Warriors	Anyone accustomed to melee and/or ranged weapon combat: Trained soldiers (infantry, cavalry, archers), barbarians, or gladiators.
5	Travelers/ Rogues	Anyone who is good at detecting trouble and avoiding it; and who prefers surprise and subterfuge over a straight fight. Smugglers, gamblers, bandits, and burglars.
6	Wilderness Specialist	Someone who is trained to live off the land, detect trouble and ambushes, and can fight when necessary, using terrain for tactical advantage: Scouts, guides, rangers, and survivalists.
7	Officers/ Special Forces	Fighters or warriors with special equipment and/or expertise. Where footsoldiers are more common, these may be vehicle or equipment experts (tanks/artillery), knights, paratroopers, or underwater demolitions specialists. Assign expertise and/or appropriate equipment (e.g., an anti-tank rocket, full plate armor, or radios with the ability to call in an airstrike).
8	Academic Specialist	Researchers, scholars, electronics/computer experts, or other professionals with helpful knowledge skills. In settings with powers, likely to exhibit talent.
9	Religious/ Inspirational	Clerics, shamans, cultists attuned to divine or supernatural energies. May have powers.
10	Settings skill Specialist	Assign a specialty occupation specific to the setting. Examples: mutant/superheroes not represented by occupations, gadgeteers, alchemists, xenoscientists, steamworks engineers.

TYPES OF MISSIONS (I)

	Type	Typical Target	Description
1	Patrol	Place	Travel to the edge of a familiar/controlled area. Maintain safety and order in the area by removing potential threats.
2	Scout	Place	Travel to an unfamiliar/uncontrolled area. Investigate possible opportunities and hostile activity (without necessarily engaging); return with information and insights.
3	Find/ Recover	Person/ Item	Discover the whereabouts of a (missing) person or special item(s). Once found, rescue the person or 'liberate' the item from its present holder.
4	Explore	Place	Travel to an unfamiliar/uncontrolled area, discover what lies there, and then decide what actions to take based on what's learned. The classic dungeon crawl is an exploration mission.
5	Hunt	Person (Beast/ Monster)	Find a person or animal (possibly a beast or monster) hidden and/or in a remote place. It may mean bringing someone to justice (person), or slaying (animal). A mission going after animals may be to retrieve valuable organs for drugs or components, for species research, for neutralizing a local threat to people, for food, or even just as a trophy wanted by a wealthy patron.
6	Capture	Person (Beast/ Monster)	Find and confront a person or animal (possibly beast or monster). Unlike hunting, the person may be in plain sight and the mission is abduction. While a Hunt may involve the death of the hunted, for capture missions the patron wants the subject alive and (as much as possible) unharmed.
7	Spy	Place/ Person	Infiltrate foes (possibly a hostile organization) and find out more about its leadership, makeup and intent. Return with information and insights.
8	Escort	Place(s)/ Person	Accompany people or items to make sure they get to their destination safely. A mercenary guard working with a caravan, or a bodyguard assigned as a minder for an important person, is on an escort mission.
9	Deliver	Person/ Item	Bring an item to another person or organization. Where an escort works to protect people (and potentially their wares) to reach their destination, a patron entrusts one or more persons or key items directly to be brought safely to their destination.
10	Investigate	Place/ Person	Look into a crime that has been committed, or an event that has happened. The concept is to gather information and follow the trail wherever it may lead. If it relates to a crime, the mission may include bringing those responsible to justice.

TYPES OF MISSIONS (II)

	Type	Typical Target	Description
11	Negotiate	Person	Meet with another party (potentially hostile), and target the leadership of the opposing party to sign a truce, settle a dispute, or forge a treaty.
12	Win over	Person	Improve relations to a point that the leadership of the opposing party stands down from a threatening stance (if currently hostile), or assents to a friendlier stance (if currently neutral). Where negotiations have a specific goal in mind, winning over is about making a positive impression with the target, to improve relations.
13	Survive	Place	The player's character (or a person of interest) is in a tough spot. The player's character her/himself, or that person with assistance from the player's character, must live through hostile encounters and/or a dangerous environment and elements to make it to safety. Most disaster scenarios have self-survival as their main mission.
14	Evade	Person	Similar to escape or survival scenarios, the player's character or another person is aware of a (usually overwhelming) hostile force. The player's character and/or any persons being assisted usually try to remain undetected by the enemy force. If detected, the goal shifts to finding safety while being pursued by elements of the overwhelming force.
15	Escape	Person	Resembles survival, evade and rescue scenarios. The player's character and/or other person(s) of interest have been captured by hostile forces. The goal is to break free and travel to safety, possibly while being pursued by elements of an overwhelming hostile force that is trying to recapture the escapee(s).
16	Defend	Place	The player's character is tasked to hold a particular place against foes, and repel foes that might try to take it. Defense might be direct, as enemies might attack in a straightforward way; or more subtle, requiring the player's character to fight back against infiltration and conspiracy.
17	Protect	Person/ Item	The player's character is tasked to keep an opposing force from getting hold of particular person(s) or item(s), unlike defending, which is about holding a particular place. Enemies might try to get the person(s) or item(s) by force, or might try to succeed through infiltration and betrayal.
18	Attack	Person/ Place	Through straightforward battle or indirect infiltration and machinations, the player's character is tasked to damage or harm a person, or take a place from hostile foes and force them to retreat.
19	Rescue	Person	The player's character seeks to find and retrieve person(s) who have gone missing or are being held by others. Rescuing persons resembles a find/recover scenario. The rescue target isn't necessarily cooperative.
20	Research	Person/ Place/Item	The player's character is tasked with finding out more information about a person, place and/or item. This is an open-ended intelligence gathering mission, using research and social skills to find out where the trail leads. It resembles an investigation, except no crime has occurred.

OBSTACLE CHALLENGES (1)

Scene Goal	Possible Skill Challenges
Civilized Places	
Infiltrate	Lockpick; social skills (get past a guard); sneak (past sentries).
Negotiate	Etiquette or bureaucracy (gain an audience with the right people); negotiate to come to agreement; appeal (to help make the case); law; intimidate (dealing with opposition).
Investigate	Notice (find visual clues); research; empathy (detect emotional cues); information gathering (to pick up rumors and word on the street); social skills (pull information from people).
Escape, Evade	Running, hardy (to evade pursuit); dodge (jump over/duck under obstacles, push through crowds); negotiate or appeal (for someone to give shelter); hide.
Spy, Infiltrate	Acting/disguise; deceive (to get past guardians); shadowing; notice (over-hear useful information).
Avoid	Notice (detect foes); sneak, hide; deceive (distract sentries); shadowing (follow and over-power a guardian).
Research	Information gathering (get word from the streets); research (information sources); appeal (to convince people in the know to talk); intimidate, deceive (convince others to assist with access to restricted information sources).
Acquire	Climbing, jumping (across rooftops), dodge (athletics involved in infiltration); notice (foes); lockpick, disarm traps, electronics/security (mechanical and computer-based dangers); sneak (avoid detection).
Wilderness Places	
Escape, Evade	Running, hardy (evade pursuit), swimming (cross a body of water to throw off the scent), survival (evade tracking, forage).
Patrol	Navigation (avoid getting lost); survival (forage to supplement rations); tracking, sneak and/or hide (avoid dangerous beasts).
Scout	Notice (to detect others and get useful information from those being spied on); sneak (get close to others without detection); shadowing; additional languages; empathy (to get a read on others).
Explore, Recover	Survival (mountains, underground, etc.), swimming, jumping, dodge, nimble and hardy (athletics to deal with dangerous terrain); notice (dangerous beasts and/or traps); sneak or disarm (to bypass beasts or traps).

OBSTACLE CHALLENGES (II)

Scene Goal   **Possible Skill Challenges**

Travel

Scene Goal	Possible Skill Challenges
Hard Overland Journeys	Hardy; running, orienteering; climbing or mountain survival (steep/vertical terrain); ride/handle animal (pack animals and mounts); other forms of survival (for inhospitable terrain); swimming (to cross bodies of water).
Underground Exploration	Underground survival; climbing; nimble (to avoid falls); dodge (to navigate tight spaces); map-making (to avoid getting lost); other forms of survival (for inhospitable terrain); swimming (to cross bodies of water).
Vehicular Travel	Drive and pilot skills; mechanical; navigate; crew skills (as a coordinating crew member of a large vehicle).

Components of Wilderness Challenge Encounters

Vertical Spaces	cliff/chasm, underground shaft.
Difficult Natural Environments	High/low temperatures; driving precipitation; harsh sun; extreme dry conditions.
Specific Natural Hazards	Bogs & quicksand; loose rock/shale slope, rockfall; body of water; heavy swamp/mud.
Natural Disasters	Avalanche/landslide, mudslide; earthquake; tsunami; fires; volcanic eruption; whirlpool/maelstrom.
Difficult Terrain	Swamps & mud; heavy brush & forests; boulders, shale & rough/broken ground; steep/vertical surfaces; sandy surfaces where it's hard to get traction; bodies of water (shallow or deep, placid or running, fetid or clean).
Additional Challenges	Infection and disease; lack of water (potable or any water at all); lack of natural food sources.

SCENE QUALITY INFLUENCES

Type	Examples	Possible Category Shifts
Noise	animal sounds, birdsong, background, music, machinery, work, patter, running water	Penalty to detecting sounds. Bonus to sneaking/masking noise.
Quiet	empty, eerie, deserted, abandoned, quiet, still	Bonus to detecting sounds. Penalty to sneaking/masking noise.
Air Circulation	breeze, wind, gale, storm, blowing	Penalty for ranged weapons. Penalties for travel. Bonus to masking sounds, or to avoid detection by smell. Penalty to detecting sounds, or to smell anything.
Smells	floral, offal, garbage, chemicals, stuffy/stale, smoky, fumes, cooking, smog	Bonus to avoid detection by smell. Penalty to smell anything. Possible long-range visual detection and ranged weapon penalties.
Precipitation	rain, sleet, downpour, blizzard	Penalty to travel and movement, ranged weapons. Bonus to avoid detection by sight, sound or smell. Penalty to detect by sight, sound or smell. Penalties to running/fast maneuvering.
Ground Conditions	hard, plush, smooth, slippery, sand, shale, mud, ice, roots, dew	Possible penalty to travel and movement, possibly to avoid falling. Possible penalties to actions that need stability (e.g., fighting).
Ground Obstacles	vines, overgrown, scrub, furniture, sight-blocking, protected, cramped, crowded	Possible penalties to movement, detection by sight, line of sight, ranged weapons and large melee weapons. Bonuses to hide or use cover to evade ranged weapon attacks.
Dim/Dark	cloudy, overcast, shadowy, hazy, foggy, smoky, twilight/dusk, pitch dark, night	Bonus to hide. Penalties to all activities (including combat) involving sight.
High Visibility	wide open space, observation point, bright/well-lit, clear, exposed	Bonus to detection, penalties to hide or otherwise avoid detection. Possible bonus to ranged weapons.
Negative Vibes	fearful, hateful, vigilant	Possible penalties to avoid by sneaking or con. Possible bonuses to incite fear or redirect anger.
Distraction Vibes	argue, study, sick, drugged, hurt, tired, eat/drink	Possible bonuses to avoid by sneaking.
Positive Vibes	friendly, grateful, celebration, reverent	Possible bonuses to negotiate and avoid immediate hostilities.*

Note: Foe rationales can be internal, not necessarily helpful to the player's character. Reverent foes for example might be on the lookout for a sacrifice; celebratory foes for a human-sized main course.

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STRUCTURED QUESTIONS FOR PERSONS

Does the person have a need (i.e., does the person have a mission?)
- What does the person want? (what is the mission?)
- What is the reason behind that need? (i.e., what is the mission's rationale?)
- Does the person reference an(other) item to help with the mission?
- Does the person name a destination place for the mission?
- Does the person offer (extra) valuables for completing the mission?
- Will the person supply special equipment for the mission?
- Will the person provide an(other) ally for the mission?

Does the person reference another person for more information?
Does the person warn about possible upcoming encounter(s)?

* depending on the person, any question may require an appropriate social skill check to unlock some yes-no questions for an answer. Remember, failed skill checks carry consequences (e.g., no more questions/favors may be asked of this person for the rest of the scene).

STRUCTURED QUESTIONS FOR FOES

Do the foes have (extra) money or valuables on them/nearby?
Do the foes have an(other) item (as treasure or a clue)?
What is the reason behind the hostilities (i.e., a rationale)?
- who is the source person/encounter behind the hostilities?
- where is this source person/encounter?

* foes generally require an appropriate social skill check to unlock any yes-no question for an answer. Remember, failed skill checks carry consequences (e.g., the foe stops cooperating).

PERSONALITY TRAITS (I)

Cruel / Malevolent

Gleefully gloats over the misfortune of others.
- Persons with this trait may insult and hurt others when the opportunity presents itself, alienating others and making social challenges harder.
+ Persons with this trait may help with interrogation and intimidation, convincing others into giving up information, valuables or items.

Thoughtful

Considers the possibilities before acting.
- Persons with this trait may hesitate when they need to move quickly or act decisively, and may fail to take initiative on their own.
+ Persons with this trait may help come up with better answers, or help the group reconsider what might be a bad or dangerous choice.

Mysterious / Secretive

Withholds details about background and motivations.
- Persons with this trait may not share what they know. They may act against the group's best interest at crucial moments. It may turn out the person is leaking information to others.
+ Persons with this trait may bring up unexpected knowledge or assistance when in desperate situations. They can keep secrets under interrogation.

Heroic

Seeks to do the right thing, regardless of personal risk.
- Persons with this trait may risk endangering others, as well as risking the mission or goals, in favor of doing what is right.
+ Persons with this trait will step forward whenever there is an opportunity to help others, regardless of the dangers.

Sneaky / Under-handed

Tries to steal or swindle others, given the opportunity.
- Persons with this trait may find it hard to resist a chance to commit theft or fraud. They may have a bad reputation that can catch up with them.
+ Persons with this trait may bend (or break) laws and pull dirty tricks on others in pursuit of goals, without being overly concerned about morals.

Lazy

Does as little as possible or necessary.
- Persons with this trait may fail to carry through a task that is assigned to them, particularly long, boring tasks such as manual labor, research or guard duty.
+ Persons with this trait may be prompted into action when pressed into it. They are low security risks, as they won't take initiative to do things on their own.

Happy / Optimistic

Sees the bright side in all things.
- Persons with this trait may fail to recognize when something is wrong, and may fail to be careful enough in potentially dangerous situations, whether traps or hostile encounters.
+ Persons with this trait may use their cheerful nature to help keep up the spirits of others. They may positively influence others in social interactions.

Dour/Taciturn

Has little to say to others, and none of it is nice.
- Persons with this trait may put off others in their social interactions.
+ Persons with this trait mind their own business, and do not leak information or secrets.

Cowardly

Makes personal well-being and survival the top priority.
- Persons with this trait may duck and cover, run away, go mute, or otherwise fail to render help in a hostile situation.
+ Persons with this trait may convince foes to stand down in a losing situation, e.g., to be taken captive rather than killed. The Person is more likely to survive dangers.

Crude / Capricious

Is tempted by the opportunity to put one over on others.
- Persons with this trait may insult or offend others in social situations.
+ Persons with this trait may successfully pick on someone as the butt of their gibes, either to cow them or infuriate them into action.

PERSONALITY TRAITS (II)

Cautious

Is suspicious of others' motives, and hesitates before acting.

> - Persons with this trait may move slowly when they need to rush, and may refuse to take risks.

> + Persons with this trait may be more methodical to find hidden clues or items, or ferret out hidden traps and other dangers.

Impulsive

Does not think through all the options before acting.

> - Persons with this trait may do something unpredictable, usually some sort of bold action at a point when caution and care are needed most.

> + Persons with this trait may act quickly and decisively under pressure, and may step up to take initiative for action when needed.

Loyal

Puts the mission and others in the group first.

> - Persons with this trait may be more loyal to the mission than to the player's character and allies, or vice versa. They may insist on helping others who are in trouble.

> + Persons with this trait may generate a positive reaction from others in social situations, if they know about that person's loyalties and commitment to help.

Nervous / Awkward

Has difficulty in social situations.

> - Persons with this trait may make it harder for other members in a group to carouse/seduce, or to be diplomatic or authoritative in social situations.

> + Persons with this trait may be more perceptive, helping to yield insights about other persons. They may be underestimated as a serious threat by others.

Loud / Boisterous

Naturally noisy, poor at any task that requires being quiet.

> - Persons with this trait may make it harder for a group to sneak quietly. In social situations, they may leak information about the mission to others.

> + Persons with this trait may help in situations where boasting and making noise is important to get the attention of others, or as a distraction.

Gregarious

Enjoys being with other people, merry-making and carousing.

> - Persons with this trait may lose focus and control in social situations. They may spill secrets, get intoxicated, harass others and generally make a scene.

> + Persons with this trait may get access to people and find out information through their merry-making. They may get positive reactions from other fans of revelry, and do well in eating/drinking contests.

Sympathetic

Is soft-hearted, and wants to assist others.

> - Persons with this trait may be swayed to take pity on foes, making interrogation or intimidation more difficult. They will find it hard to resist a request for help.

> + Persons with this trait may generate a positive reaction from others who are aware of this kind-heartedness, making them more helpful (or at least less hostile).

Accusative / Defensive

Shifts blame for anything that goes wrong onto everyone else but themselves.

> - Persons with this trait may cause negative reactions from other people in social interactions.

> + Persons with this trait may be able to talk their way out of difficult social situations.

Unflappable

Faces dangers, even unknown horrors, without concern to personal safety.

> - Persons with this trait may not realize when it's time to defer or retreat. They may fail to back down, surrender or flee against overwhelming odds.

> + Persons with this trait may face the most daunting circumstances without being fazed. They are naturally hard to interrogate or intimidate.

Lying / Treacherous

Says whatever others want to hear and easily swaps allegiances.

> - Persons with this trait may turn on their colleagues at a crucial moment, for example if the switch sides and pledge loyalty to whoever is winning. They may have their bad reputation for fickle behavior catch up to them.

> + Persons with this trait may refuse to play by the rules, ignoring law and morality in pursuit of goals. They may lie convincingly to talk the group out of difficult social situations.

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ACTION SHEET QUALITIES: PERSONS

1	Local Leader Staff	51	Hostile foreigner
2	Regional Leader Staff	52	Rival of friend/ally
3	National Leader Staff	53	Ideological rival
4	Servant of royalty	54	General troublemaker
5	Local Leader Inner Circle	55	Despicable villain
6	Regional Leader Inner Circle	56	Skilled hero
7	National Leader Inner Circle	57	Aged hero
8	Royal family	58	Liar/braggart
9	Local Leader	59	Craft master/boss
10	Regional Leader	60	Exceptional talent
11	Spy/agent	61	Exceptional beauty
12	Religious lay folk	62	Wealthy entrepreneur
13	Religious meditative/scholar	63	Prestigious family
14	Religious activist/cultist	64	Expert historian/lore
15	Religion staff	65	Specialty academician
16	Religion Inner Circle	66	Expert healer/doctor
17	Mercenary/arms guild	67	Diplomatic expert
18	Mercenary/arms leader/boss	68	Popular entertainer
19	Merchants, business/finance	69	Master builder/engineer
20	Merchant/finance boss	70	Nomad/traveler
21	Rogue guild/smugglers	71	Liar/hoaxer
22	Rogue/smuggle leader	72	Scout/messenger
23	Scholar/scientist	73	Terrorist/anarchist
24	Academic luminary	74	Unremarkable commoner
25	Crafters/manufacturing	75	(Potential) patron/ally
26	Crafter/manufacturing leader	76	(Potential) patron/ally
27	Conscript/militia	77	(Potential) patron/ally
28	Army/marine soldier	78	(Potential) patron/ally
29	archer/air/sea soldier	79	(Potential) rival/past foe
30	NCO/specialist	80	(Potential) rival/past foe
31	Officer/military leader	81	F: Weak team % (2)
32	Police/public safety	82	F: Average team % (3)
33	Cousin	83	F: Average NPC % (5)
34	In-law, indirect family	84	F: Talented NPC % (10)
35	Niece/nephew	85	F: Add leader % (10)
36	Aunt/uncle	86	F: Animals/mounts (2)
37	Parents/grandparents	87	F: non-combat - d100 (1)
38	Brother/sister	88	F: Weak minions (2)
39	Child/dependent	89	F: Average minions (3)
40	Family friend	90	F: Big brute (10)
41	Childhood friend	91	F: Vehicles/mounts (2-10)
42	Neighbor/acquaintance	92	F: Weak mindless minion(2)
43	Early/first love	93	F: Average mindless minion(3)
44	Teacher or colleague	94	F: Hybrids/animals (5)
45	Beggar/poor	95	F: Powerful entity (10)
46	Role model	96	F: Automaton (10)
47	Former friend	97	F: d100, Average % (5)
48	Former love	98	F: d100, Talented % (10)
49	Occupational peer	99	F: d100, Captive(s) (0)
50	Bad blood family	00	F: d100, Infiltrator/spy(15)

ACTION SHEET QUALITIES: CIVILIZED

1	Square/meeting hall		51	Wide open spaces
2	Warehouse/storage		52	High observation point
3	Marketplace		53	Sight-blocking
4	Farm/villa/estate		54	Hot
5	Smithy/factory		55	Humid
6	Crafting-place		56	Cold
7	Shop/store		57	Dry
8	Tavern/inn/hotel		58	Breezy
9	Arena/sport-place		59	Windy
10	Streets/alleys		60	Gale
11	Luxury digs		61	Cloudy
12	Library or lab		62	Overcast
13	Palace/fortress/headquarters		63	Stormy
14	Keep/tower		64	Clear
15	Field/meadow		65	Still
16	Garden/lawn/park		66	Sprinkling
17	Temple/church		67	Rain (sleet/snow)
18	Home/hovel		68	Downpour (blizzard)
19	Cellar/underground		69	Work sounds
20	Port/station/transit		70	Running water
21	Memorial		71	Blowing winds
22	Crowded		72	Traffic/passers-by
23	Plants		73	Birdsong
24	Garbage/rubble		74	Animal sounds
25	Offal smell		75	Quiet/serene
26	Cooking smells		76	Floral/sweet smells
27	Pollution/smog		77	Solid/hard ground
28	Chemical smells		78	Soft/plush ground
29	Incense/perfumed		79	Smooth/slip ground
30	Stuffy/stale smell		80	Rough ground
31	Cramped		81	R: Conversation
32	Furniture-strewn		82	R: Argue/debate
33	Curtained		83	R: Study/learn
34	Machinery/magic		84	R: Guard/vigilance
35	Background noise		85	R: Guard/vigilance
36	Music		86	R: Anxiety/fear
37	Stairs/ramps		87	R: Anxiety/fear
38	Terraced		88	R: Hate/anger
39	Vehicle(s)		89	R: Hate/anger
40	Fence/hedge		90	R: Hunt/scavenge
41	Ditch		91	R: Welcome/friendly
42	Dank/damp		92	R: Worship/reverent
43	Bright/well-lit		93	R: Sick/diseased
44	Gloomy/dimly-lit		94	R: Drunk/drugged
45	Twilight/dusk		95	R: Hurt/suffering
46	Shadowy		96	R: Respect/grateful
47	Hazy		97	R: Celebrate/fest
48	Foggy		98	R: Tired/rest/sleep
49	Dusty		99	R: Cook/eat/drink
50	Smoky		00	R: Lack/hungry/poor

ACTION SHEET QUALITIES: WILDERNESS

1	Underground		51	Dusty
2	Cave/caverns		52	Smoky
3	Mine/shaft/tunnel(s)		53	Wide open spaces
4	Fissure/crevasse		54	Observation point
5	Ruins/buildings		55	Sight-blocking
6	Taiga/tundra/desert		56	Hot
7	Forest (deciduous)		57	Humid
8	Forest (coniferous)		58	Cold
9	Swamp/marsh		59	Dry
10	Jungle (vines)		60	Breezy
11	Scrub (brush)		61	Windy
12	Steppes/grasslands		62	Gale
13	Broken/blasted area		63	Cloudy
14	Cliffs/crags/gorges		64	Overcast
15	Hills		65	Stormy
16	Mountains		66	Clear
17	Plateau		67	Still
18	Valley		68	Sprinkling
19	Canyon/chasm		69	Rain (sleet/snow)
20	Pond/lake (shore)		70	Downpour (blizzard)
21	Landmark		71	Dew
22	River (shore)		72	Running water
23	Stream		73	Blowing winds
24	Ocean (shore)		74	Rainfall patter
25	Vine-choked		75	Bird calls
26	Overgrown		76	Small animal sounds
27	Vines		77	Large animal sounds
28	Underbrush		78	Quiet/serene
29	Cobwebs		79	Floral/sweet smells
30	Toxic/poison fumes		80	Mildew/mold-smell
31	Disease-ridden		81	Rotten/carrion smell
32	Wildlife signs		82	Solid/hard ground
33	Monstrous signs		83	Soft/plush ground
34	Insect swarms		84	Smooth/slip ground
35	Vermin/pests		85	Rough ground
36	Sandy/loose		86	Deserted
37	Gravel/shale		87	Abandoned
38	Muddy		88	Desolate
39	Icy or wet (slick)		89	Empty
40	Smooth stone		90	Eerie
41	Loose stone/boulders		91	Forbidding
42	Rooty		92	Protected
43	Bright/well-lit		93	Exposed
44	Gloomy/dimly-lit		94	Unstable/hazardous
45	Twilight/dusk		95	Fire (set)
46	Shadowy		96	Mystic/bless/curse
47	Dark as night		97	Artifact/object
48	Pitch dark		98	Guardians/guarded
49	Hazy		99	Illusory
50	Foggy		00	Trapped/warded

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ACTION SHEET QUALITIES: ITEMS

1	Noble dress/accessories		51	Art/scientific instruments
2	Indeterminate clothing		52	Info: Location of item
3	Indeterminate accessory		53	Info: Religious/mythic
4	Military uniform		54	Info: Dimensions/existence
5	Religious vestment		55	Info: Geographic
6	Jewelry adornment		56	Info: History/Lore
7	Gems & jewels		57	Info: Ecology
8	Semi-precious jewelry		58	Info: Medicine/anatomy
9	Concealable weapons		59	Info: Accounting ledger
10	Small melee weapons		60	Info: Diary/personal
11	Large melee weapons		61	Fresh food
12	Small ranged weapons		62	Preserved food
13	Large ranged weapons		63	Raw foodstuffs
14	Thrown weapons		64	Fruits/vegetables
15	Reactive/explosives		65	Herbs/spices
16	Odd/exotic weapons		66	Cheese or meats
17	Armory (collection)		67	Drinkable infusions
18	Light/piecemeal armor		68	Alcohol
19	Leathers/riot gear		69	Mild drug (tobacco/coffee)
20	Medium protection		70	Industrial metals
21	Heavy protection		71	Lumber/organics
22	Shield/riot gear		72	Construction material
23	Helmet		73	Ceramics
24	Exotic armor/protection		74	Cloth
25	Heavy/powered armor		75	Paper/data storage
26	Armory (collection)		76	Oil/grease or fuel
27	Clothes/fabrics		77	Valuable stone
28	Lighting		78	Semi-precious stone
29	Eating gear		79	Animal parts
30	Drinking gear		80	Illustrated/illuminated art
31	Cooking gear		81	Poetry/prose/multimedia
32	Craft tools/machines		82	Statue/sculpture
33	portable shelter (tents)		83	Carving
34	Hygiene/beauty items		84	Drawing/painting
35	Potpourri/incense		85	Big items (machinery)
36	Text/data (religious)		86	Religious place/info
37	Small ceremonial items		87	Political place/info
38	Large ceremony items		88	Fortification/info
39	Door/portal/container		89	Defense weakness/info
40	Images/icons		90	Med. devices/machines
41	Statue/sculpture		91	Shop devices/machines
42	Text/data (sci-/magic)		92	Furniture
43	Herb/organic medicine		93	Symbolic ancestral items
44	Processed medicine		94	Symbolic rulership items
45	Poison/pesticide		95	Cash/valuables
46	Hard drugs		96	Cash/valuables
47	Inert crystal, rare earth		97	Cash/valuables
48	Preserved organics		98	Vehicle (small)
49	Flammables/explosives		99	Vehicle (medium)
50	Occupational gear		00	Vehicle (large)

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Appendix E

ACTION SHEET: CIVILIZED PLACES

1	Square/meeting hall	11	Luxury digs
2	Warehouse/storage	12	Library or lab
3	Marketplace	13	Palace/fortress/HQ
4	Farm/villa/estate	14	Keep/tower
5	Smithy/factory	15	Field/meadow
6	Crafting-place	16	Garden/lawn/park
7	Shop/store	17	Temple/church
8	Tavern/inn/hotel	18	Home/hovel
9	Arena/sport-place	19	Cellar/underground
10	Streets/alleys	20	Port/station/transit

Appendix F

ACTION SHEET: WILDERNESS PLACES

1	Underground	11	Scrub (brush)
2	Cave/caverns	12	Steppes/grasslands
3	Mine/shaft/tunnel(s)	13	Broken/blasted area
4	Fissure/crevasse	14	Cliffs/crags/gorges
5	Ruins/buildings	15	Hills
6	Taiga/tundra/desert	16	Mountains
7	Forest (deciduous)	17	Plateau
8	Forest (coniferous)	18	Valley
9	Swamp/marsh	19	Canyon/chasm
10	Jungle (vines)	20	Pond/lake (shore)

Appendix G

ACTION SHEET: SETUP WINDOW DRESSING

	Temperature	Precipitation	Terrain	(Civilized) Density
1-2	Colder	Wetter	Hillier	More People
3-8		--- as expected ---		
9-10	Warmer	Drier	Flatter	Fewer People

- use this table optionally for base random window dressing for each scene.

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ACTION SHEET: FOES

1	Weak team % (2)	11	Vehicles/mounts (2-10)
2	Average team % (3)	12	Weak mindless minions (2)
3	Average NPC % (5)	13	Average mindless minions (3)
4	Talented NPC % (10)	14	Hybrids/animals (5)
5	Add leader % (10)	15	Powerful entity (10)
6	Animals/mounts (2)	16	Automaton (10)
7	non-combat - d100 (1)	17	d100 Person, Average % (5)
8	Weak minions (2)	18	d100 Person, Talented % (10)
9	Average minions (3)	19	d100 Person, Captive(s) (0)
10	Big brute (10)	20	d100 Person, Infiltrator/spy(15)

ACTION SHEET: CULTURE / OCCUPATION (%)

1	Majority/Native	1	Common/generalist
2	Majority/Native	2	Common/generalist
3	Majority/Native	3	Social/leadership
4	Native Minority	4	Fighter/Warrior
5	Affiliated/neighbor	5	Traveler/Rogue
6	Affiliated/neighbor	6	Wilderness specialist
7	Far-away	7	Officers/special forces
8	Unusual/Exotic	8	Academic specialist
9	Opposed	9	Religious/inspirational
10	Opposed	10	Setting skills specialist

ACTION SHEET:
ENCOUNTER SCENE FOE GROUPS

- Multiply d10xd10 for a foe group point budget.
- Team/minions are always d10 in number. Vehicles, mounts, hybrids, animals are either 1 or d10 (choose).
- Optionally select a team or minions (with d10 members) as the foe group foundation.
- Subtract each chosen/rolled foe or team/minions from point budget total, until the budget is zero or below.
- Roll for foe group's dominant rationale (demeanor before the player character's group is engaged).
- Each side may attempt to detect the other, possibly at extreme, medium, and/or close range.
- Set up defenders to take advantage of place & relevant scene qualities.

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ACTION SHEET: SCENE SETUP INSTRUCTIONS

- Decide civilized or wilderness.
- You may choose or roll (or neither) for place (d20), person (d100) key item (d100), and/or foe (d20).
- Create a thumbnail sketch what the scene should look like.
- Roll three scene qualities (d100); optionally roll four d10 for setup window dressing (appendix G).
- Roll a trait for any person in the scene who doesn't already have one.
- Roll a rationale for any foe(s) in the scene, as their primary activity before PC group interaction.
- Re-frame the scene. Create and write down window dressing that does not contradict scene qualities.

Appendix L

ACTION SHEET: PLOT STRESS INSTRUCTIONS

- Setting up a new scene increases plot stress by 5.
- Each skill check that involves the player's character increments plot stress by 1.
- Each yes-no question tests plot stress, and increments plot stress by 1.
- Open and close each scene by testing plot stress.

- Testing plot stress means comparing the rolled result against current plot stress.
        If the result is lower than current plot stress, it triggers an unexpected event.
- When an unexpected event happens, cut the level of plot stress in half.

ACTION SHEET: RATIONALES

1	Conversation	11	Welcome/friendly
2	Argue/debate	12	Worship/reverent
3	Study/learn	13	Sick/diseased
4	Guard/vigilance	14	Drunk/drugged
5	Guard/vigilance	15	Hurt/suffering
6	Anxiety/fear	16	Respect/grateful
7	Anxiety/fear	17	Celebrate/fest
8	Hate/anger	18	Tired/rest/sleep
9	Hate/anger	19	Cook/eat/drink
10	Hunt/scavenge	20	Lack/hungry/poor

Appendix O

ACTION SHEET: UNEXPECTED EVENTS

1	P: Arrival	11	F: Start/cease hostilities
2	P: Departure	12	F: Leader emerges
3	P: Trait positive	13	F: Special item
4	P: Trait negative	14	F: Call for backup
5	P: Trait, random	15	F: Adds/Reinforcements
6	P: Skill check	16	Trap/Ambush (arrest/confine)
7	P: Rationale new/change	17	Trap/Ambush (damage/incapacitate)
8	P: Mission new/change	18	Monster/Beast
9	P: Scene quality intrudes	19	Scene quality new/change
10	P: Item intrudes	20	Scene quality ceases

Appendix P

EVENT PERSON FOCUS, FOE FOCUS

Focus: Person

1-3	Self / Rival
4-5	Ally / Patron
6-7	Person / Ally
8-10	Foe / Rival

Select whichever of the two options makes the most sense. You may instead introduce one random person or foe rolled to enter the scene (the appearance is the unexpected event).

Focus: Foe

If a foe is not in the scene, you may roll one random foe to enter the scene (the foe appearing is the unexpected event).

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ACTION SHEET: YES-NO QUESTION CHART

SHIFTS		YES	NO
+3	Nearly Certain	1-95	96-00
+2	Very Likely	1-80	81-00
+1	Likely	1-65	66-00
0	50/50 Moderate	1-50	51-00
-1	Unlikely	1-35	36-00
-2	Very Unlikely	1-20	21-00
-3	Nigh Impossible	1-05	06-00

modifiers include:
+1 magic shift for each scene quality the yes-no question or skill check aligns;
-1 magic shift for each scene quality that the yes-no question skill check contradicts.

Appendix R

FOE GROUP CONFLICT RATINGS

# of Members	Weak Team/Minions Conflict Skill	# of Members	Average Team/Minions Conflict Skill
1	Nigh Impossible (-3)	1-3	Unlikely (-1)
2-3	Very Unlikely (-2)	4-6	50/50 Moderate (0)
4-5	Unlikely (-1)	7-10	Likely (+1)
6-7	50/50 Moderate (0)		
8-10	Likely (+1)		

Type of NPC	Individual's Conflict / Other Skills & Abilities
"add leader"	(0). must eliminate groups/minions first.
average NPC	(0). One skill/power at +1.
talented NPC	(0). Two skills/powers at +1.
brute/automaton/ powerful entity	(+2) with no special abilities, OR (+1) with a special ability.
hybrid / (animal)	(+1) with no special abilities OR (0) with a special ability.
infiltrator/spy	(0). Three or more skills/powers at +1.

PLAYER CHARACTER SKILL TREE

Skill Base	Skill Group	Individual Skills
Device and ranged	bows	longbow, shortbow, crossbow, sling
	throwing	rock, knife, axe, hammer, dart, grenade
	guns	pistol, rifle, submachine gun, shotgun
	gunner	(by type of weapon, including vehicular weapons)
	disable	lockpick, mechanical/trap, electronics/security
	dodge	*standalone skill*
Animal and vehicle	ride	horse, elephant, camel, giant flying lizard, etc.
	handle animal	mounts, birds of prey, cattle, large predators, pets, etc.
	wayfind	navigation, astrogation, orienteering
	crew	sailing ship, cruise liner, submarine, space battleship, etc.
	drive	motorcycle, car, truck, bus, ground speeder, etc.
	pilot	jet fighter, helicopter, personal jetpack, etc.
Social	influence	negotiate, deceive, appeal, intimidate
	interact	empathy, leadership, etiquette
Physical and melee	performance	singing, dancing, physical sport
	martial arts	karate, judo, boxing, wrestling, street fighting, capoeira, etc.
	athletics	running, jumping, climbing, swimming
	melee weapon	axes, swords, staves, plasma swords, spears, shields, etc.
Subterfuge and survival	hunt	tracking, fishing, trapping, camouflage
	streetwise	gather information, scrounge, gamble, sleight of hand
	sneak	hide, sneak, shadowing
	notice	*standalone skill*
	survival	tundra, desert, deciduous/coniferous forest, scrub / badlands, underground, mountain, swamp, urban, etc.
Knowledge	craft	cloth, leather, carpentry, writing/poetry, painting, photos, etc.
	medic	first aid, surgery, pharmacology/herbalism
	language	(each additional language is a skill)
	research	*standalone skill*
	profession	any trained science, political or knowledge field: engineering, law, chemistry, theology, history, etc.
Powers (Magic, Psionics, Special Abilities)	melee	{power substitutes melee skill, or +1 bonus to melee skill}
	ranged	{power substitutes ranged skill, or +1 bonus to ranged skill}
	skill, attribute	{power substitutes skill/attribute, or +1 bonus to skill/attribute}
	equipment	{power enables actions/skill checks otherwise only possible with specialized equipment}

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RECOVERY & EXPERIENCE

Recovery after Battle

Make one first aid or other healing check (usually only with limited assistance), adding subject's hardy attribute or conflict rating. Success means the player's character recovers from a wound, or an ally returns to action in the next scene. Team/minion members who took damage in combat roll to recover individually; use the conflict rating of the team/minions left standing.

If the healing check fails for an ally, ask the 50/50 moderate yes-no question: "Is that person still alive?" modified by the hardy attribute or conflict rating. A yes result means the ally is alive but disabled for the rest of the mission. A no result means the ally is dead or permanently disabled. Remember that skill checks involving the player's character, and all yes-no questions, add to plot stress.

Experience Point Rewards & Distribution

At the end of a mission, whether it succeeded or failed, the player character's group gets 1 experience point for each scene with meaningful success. If the mission succeeded (by having the number of meaningful successes needed to wrap up the mission), the player character's group gets an extra 2 experience points. Subtract 1 experience point for each ally or ally team/minions that participated in the mission. Regardless of the final tally, the player's character always gets at least 1 experience point.

All valuables found, won or awarded are divided equally between the player's character and each ally or ally team/minion contingent that participated in the adventure: Non-monetary gains such as patron favors and promotions belong to the player's character and don't need to be distributed.

All allies and ally team/minions that participated in the adventure get 1 experience point and an equal share of treasure, whether they participated for all just just part of the mission, or were healthy, disabled or dead by the end of the mission. Any rivals get 1 experience point. Ask a separate yes-no question whether each ally advances (i.e., gains a new skill or increases an existing skill). Rivals always advance.

Spending Experience Points

General

2 XP - learn a new skill at +1 over base ability

2 XP - increase an existing skill from +1 to +2 over base ability

3 XP - increase an existing skill from +2 to +3 over base ability (the maximum)

6 XP - learn a new skill group at +1 over base ability

9 XP - increase an existing skill group from +1 to +2 over base ability (maximum)

12 XP - raise an attribute from -1 to 0, or from 0 to +1 (maximum). Corresponding base abilities and skills also increase

Magic

1 XP - add a new magic spell at +1 over base

2 XP - raise an existing magic spell from +1 to +2 over base ability

3 XP - raise an existing magic spell from +2 to +3 (maximum)

Psionics

2 XP - add a new psionic talent at +1 over base

3 XP - raise an existing psionic talent from +1 to +2 over base ability

5 XP - raise an existing psionic talent from +2 to +3 (maximum)

Secial Abilities

3 XP - add a new special ability at +1 over base

4 XP - raise an existing special ability from +1 to +2 over base ability

8 XP - raise an existing special ability from +2 to +3 (maximum)

MONSTER CONFLICT RATINGS

Conflict Skill: d10
- re-roll and add 10 to any '10' result.
- divide final sum by 2.
- If the sum is odd, round down
      and add a power (special ability).

# of Damage Levels to Defeat: d10
- re-roll and add 10 to any '10' result.
- Subtract 5 for a final sum (at least 1 damage level).

Foe Budget Point Value
- As a foe, the point value of a monster is 3 x (conflict skill) x (# of damage levels to defeat)
- If the monster has conflict 0, its point value is simply the # of hits to defeat.

9-15 points is a tough creature.
18-27 points a frightening beast.
30-48 points is a terrifying behemoth.
anything over 50 points is a cosmic level horror.

FLEXIBLE POWER MODIFIERS

Use Power on Other
-1 shift for power effect to be used on another person (instead of caster) in melee range.
-1 shift to bestow effect on each additional person in touch range of the power's user.
-2 shifts to bestow effect on any person within close (melee/throwing) range of the power's user.
-3 shifts to bestow effect on any person within moderate (missile) range of the power's user.
-1 shift for each subject trying to resist the effect.
Additional -1 shift if the power user is trying to do something unusual/unconventional with the power.

Amplify Conflict Power
-1 shift to double levels of damage (may invoke consequence if conflict roll fails).
-2 shifts to triple levels of damage (serious consequence if conflict roll fails).
-3 shifts to quadruple levels of damage (catastrophic consequence if conflict roll fails).
-1 shift to affect only foes with melee power in a mixed melee group (when doing extra damage).
-2 shifts for a ranged power to affect only foes in a mixed melee group (when doing extra damage).
-1 shift if the power user is trying to do something unusual/unconventional with the power.

*If a power leads a conflict and the roll fails, ask the yes-no question "was it the power that failed?",
with a base 50/50 moderate likelihood.
     - If no, treat the consequence as normal.
     - If yes, the consequence involves the power itself.

SET TREASURE REWARDS (OPTION I)

Trigger Points

- 1/4 of player character's typical monthly income for each meaningful success accomplished during the mission.
- If the player character succeeded in a social skill check to raise the pay, increase rewards for completing the mission by 50%.
- Add 1/4 of typical monthly income for each side goal accomplished.
- Each encounter scene where the player character's group can loot vanquished foes for valuables, yields the foe point budget in % of the player character's typical quarterly monthly income.
- At the end of the mission, distribute rewards evenly between the player's character, ally and ally teams/minions. Intangible rewards like patron favors belong to the player's character.

Appendix X

RANDOM TREASURE REWARDS (OPTION II)

Trigger Points

- Roll d100 once at the end of the mission, adding +20 for each meaningful success accomplished during the mission.
- Roll d100 again, adding +10 for each meaningful success accomplished during the mission, if the player's character succeeded in a social skill check to raise the pay.
- Roll d100 once (no modifiers) for each side goal accomplished.
- For each encounter scene where the player character's group looted foes/foe groups for valuables, roll d100 once, adding the foe group's point budget to the roll.
- Distribute rewards evenly between the player character and each ally and ally team/minions. Intangible rewards like patron favors belong to the player's character.

Roll Result

01-60: Nothing.

61-70: cash/treasure worth 1/4 month salary.

71-80: cash/treasure worth 1/2 month salary.

81-90: cash/treasure worth 1/2 month salary. If this is the end of the mission, the patron also owes the player character a favor (automatic success to any one future social skill check with patron).

91-100: cash/treasure worth 1 month's salary.

100-125: cash/treasure worth 1 month's salary. If this is the end of the mission, the player character also gets public recognition and prestige, and/or a promotion in an organization related to the mission. Alternatively, the player character gets extra training (e.g., +1 skill point at end of mission).

125-150: Either cash/treasure worth 1 month's salary, or a mount or small/personal vehicle (or a partial payment for a special mount or larger vehicle). Alternatively, a modest one-use magic/technology item.

151-175: cash/treasure worth 2 months' salary. If this is the end of the mission, the patron also owes the player character a major favor (automatic success for up to three future skill checks with the patron).

176+: choose either cash/treasure worth 3 months' salary; or a powerful one-use magic/technology item; promotion and/or public prestige; a modest permanent magic item; or another type of unique item of value.

JOURNEYS AND PORTENTS

 - If using an existing map, determine major waypoints between the starting place and destination(s).
     - Decide which waypoints will be in wilderness and which will be in civilized places.
     - For wilderness places, use the set map to determine the type of place for the scene.

 - If improvising the journey instead of using an existing map, roll d10 for travel time (for travel time increments, default to days; but weeks or hours are possible) between each waypoint.
     - Decide the order of scenes in wilderness places vs. in civilized places.
     - Roll (or choose) a place (d20) for each expected wilderness scene in advance. Civilized scene places are not rolled in advance.

 - Optionally, ask the yes-no question: "does the person warn about about possible upcoming encounters?" If the answer is yes:
     - Roll one scene quality (d100) for each scene in advance, dropping results that are impermanent or that don't make sense. This is information known in advance about the scene.
     - Roll for one foe (d20) for each scene. This is a foe known about in advance in the scene.

 - When the player character's group reaches the location of each scene, ask the yes-no question: "Does this scene happen as predicted?"
     - If yes, start the scene with the pre-rolled elements present.
     - If no, change the foe and/or scene quality (but keep any pre-rolled wilderness place).

 - If the scene does not happen as predicted, optionally, ask the follow-up yes-no question: "Does something eventful happen before the player character's group reaches the next waypoint?"
     - If yes, build an entirely new scene and save the waypoint scene for later.
     - If no, use any place that was chosen or rolled in advance, but otherwise roll up the scene (including scene qualities and/or any foes present) from scratch.

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GM ENGINE SETUP

Set up the game

 - Decide whether to use the included RPG ruleset and one of its settings, or to bring your own ruleset and setting.

 - Create a player's character for your chosen ruleset and setting.

 - Decide on an area and known patrons, allies, and other personal connections around the player's character.

 - Make copies of the action sheet and mission sheet. With the RPG ruleset, also have some extra ally/foe NPC character sheets handy.

 - Decide how many meaningful success scenes the story arc needs to succeed (recommend 2 scenes with meaningful success for shorter/first-time storytelling).

Remember!

Plot stress: Every new scene increases plot stress by 5. Every skill check the player's character or an ally makes, and every yes-no roll the player makes, increases plot stress by 1 (see "plot stress", p. 18; or the plot stress rules summary on the action sheet).

Test plot stress at the beginning and end of each scene, and whenever you ask a yes-no question. Testing plot stress means if the yes-no question's d100 rolled result is equal or lower than the curent level of plot stress, generate a random unexpected event (d20). Unexpected events are on the action sheet and in appendix 1). Introduce the unexpected event to the scene immediately or as soon as possible and cut plot stress in half (round down). Disregard the result only if there is no way to incorporate the unexpected event into the scene.

An unexpected event at the beginning of a scene might derail the player's plans for the scene. An unexpected event at the end of the scene can force the scene to stay open until it is resolved.

Contradictions and re-interpretation: Sometimes, rolls will have results that contradict each other or don't make sense. When this happens, see if you can merge or re-interpret information, or (e.g., silence broken by bursts of noise; windy in a spacecraft may be overactive ventilation). If both results can make sense but they contradict each other, the newest roll takes precedence. Otherwise, use the roll results that make the most sense for the scene and drop the result that doesn't mesh.

RPG SKILL CHECKS
Unopposed Skill Checks

Difficulty = 1) take the lead (usually highest) skill rating in the player character's group
2) add +1 for each ally or ally team/minions with at least level 0 skill that can participate
3) add helpful scene modifiers, subtract hindering scene modifiers
4) compare against the estimated difficulty of success for the task

Opposed Skill Checks

Difficulty = 1) take the lead (usually highest) skill rating in the player character's group
2) add +1 for each ally / ally team/minions with at least level 0 skill that can participate
3) add helpful scene modifiers, subtract hindering scene modifiers
4) subtract lead (usually highest) skill rating in the foe group
5) subtract -1 for each extra foe or foe team/minions of at least level 0 skill that can participate

Skill checks may be *direct contests*, where only one person can take part; *limited assistance*, with only one or a few able to assist; *unlimited assistance* from all parties; or be an *interference* skill check, which uses the lowest participant's attribute/skill and has no assistance bonus.

Modifiers can include: Relevant scene quality (+1 or -1); relevant trait (+1 or -1); relevant rationale (+1 or -1); relevant window dressing (may enable checks and set base difficulty); premium gear (+1); shoddy / improvised equipment (-1).

Conflict Checks

Difficulty = 1) take the lead (usually highest) [melee / ranged] combat rating in the player character group
2) add +1 for each extra ally or ally team/minions of any skill level that participates
3) add helpful scene modifiers, subtract hindering scene modifiers
4) subtract the lead (usually highest) combat rating in the foe's group
5) subtract -1 for each additional foe or foe team/minions that participates
6) optionally, assess -1 if one group has clearly inferior [melee / ranged] weaponry

If the foe group succeeds, the player character's group takes 1 level of damage (the player's choice whether to the player's character or an ally or ally team/minions). If the player character's group succeeds, the foe group takes 1 level of damage in a *gritty* setting, 2 levels of damage in a *pulpy* setting, or 3 levels of damage in a *heroic* setting.

Each level of damage takes out 1 individual NPC or 2 team/minion members, or does 1 level of damage to the player's character. A player's character with 2 levels of damage is wounded, and has -1 to all skill checks for the rest of the mission; A player's character with 3 levels of damage is incapacitated. If the player character's side loses the conflict, follow up the next scene with the player's character in some sort of predicament.

At extreme range, missile weapons can attack people who are advancing. At medium range, missile weapons can attack. At medium range, thrown weapons can attack people who are advancing. If one side doesn't have missile weapons and is not in melee, use one person or team/minions with the highest nimble attribute, dodge skill, shield skill or conflict rating to defend. If the defense against missile fire succeeds, the group doesn't take (but also doesn't deal) damage.

At close range, at least one person or team/minions must lead with a melee combat skill; once there is melee combat, ranged (missile/thrown) weapons may only assist. Anyone at close range can be targeted by melee combat damage.

The *advance* action moves from extreme range to medium, or from medium range to close. The *retreat* action moves from close range to medium, or from medium range to extreme (disengage by moving out of range next turn). Anyone moving cannot attack (but may dodge). A group fighting defensively gets +1 bonus if taking no other combat action).

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RPG CHARACTER CREATION

Attributes

The player character's starting attributes are -1 (low), 0 (average) and +1 (high). The assigned stats cancel each other out (ie. they add up to 0). That means the player character starts with one of these arrays: six attributes at 0; one attribute at +1, one at -1 and four attributes at 0; two attributes at +1, two at -1 and two attributes at 0; or three attributes at +1 and three at -1.

Derived Stats

Calculate derived stats by adding up pairs of attributes. These are base abilities: physical/melee, device/ranged, animal/vehicle, subterfuge/survival, knowledge and social. Untrained skills default to each of these base abilities -1.

Skills

Assign 6 points to skills. New characters start with a +1 skill over base ability. It costs 1 point to raise a single skill by +1 over its base ability. For 3 points, a player can raise an entire skill group by +1 above the base ability.

If the setting has powers (magic, psionics, special abilities) and the player's character wants to buy in, the cost is 3 points. For magic, create 3 skills as magic spells; for psionic talents, create 2 skills as talents; or create 1 special ability.

     The base ability for magic skills is smart -1 (individual spells start at +1 above base). Each magic spell can be used for 1 skill check, or for 1 conflict in a scene. Time needs to pass between scenes to recover magic.

     The base for psionic skills is willful -1 (individual talents start at +1 above base). Each psionic talent can be used for up to 3 skill checks/conflicts per scene. Time needs to pass between scenes to replenish the psionic point pool.

     The base for special abilities is based on hardy -1 (the special ability starts at +1 above base), and there is no limit to special ability use.

     Powers cannot be used untrained.

Equipment & Background

Choose (or purchase) equipment suitable for the player's character.

Choose any organizations the player character belongs to, as well as key family/friend relationships, plus one or more patrons, allies and/or rivals.

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LiRE

Player Tools

CHARACTER: __Arthur Falcone__ PLAYER: _____ XP: ___

ATTRIBUTES
(+1, 0, -1)

STRONG (∅)
(lift, push, carry, break)

NIMBLE (-1)
(balance, avoid, manipulate)

HARDY (∅)
(resist fatigue, recover)

SMART (∅)
(general knowledge)

WILLFUL (∅)
(resist manipulation)

SAVVY (1)
(favorable reaction)

DESCRIPTION & GOALS

Arthur Falcone is a private investigator who is a bit awkward, but pleasant to be around. Falcone washed out of the corporate world (field sales job) after uncovering and whistle-blowing on organized criminal activity at his company, which cost him his job: hard-learned lessons about discretion. Falcone started his struggling independent detective agency a few months ago and is desperate for work. Thanks to his people skills, Arthur managed to pal up with Peter Havik-Stand, who thinks Arthur is more successful & experienced than the reality.

◇ GRAZED
(until end of scene or healed; no other effect)

◇ WOUNDED
(-1 to all skill checks until healed)

◇ INCAPACITATED
(ends scene; proceed to next scene)

BASE   UNTRAINED

PHYSICAL/MELEE: (∅)   SKILLS: __brawling 1,__   (-1)
(strong+hardy, untrained -1)   (skill groups: perform, martial arts, athletics, weapon)

DEVICE/RANGED: (-1)   SKILLS: _____   (-2)
(nimble+hardy, untrained -1)   (skill groups: bows, throwing, guns, gunner, disable, *dodge)

ANIMAL/VEHICLE: (1)   SKILLS: __drive car 2,__   (∅)
(strong+savvy, untrained -1)   (skill groups: ride, handle animal, wayfind, crew, drive, pilot)

SUBTERFUGE/SURV: (-1)   SKILLS: __gather information ∅; notice ∅.__   (-2)
(smart+nimble, untrained -1)   (skill groups: hunt, survive, streetwise, sneak; *notice)

KNOWLEDGE: (∅)   SKILLS: _____   (-1)
(smart+willful, untrained -1)   (skill groups: crafts, medic, profession, mechanic, *research)

SOCIAL: (1)   SKILLS: __deceive 2; intimidate 2.__   (∅)
(savvy+willful, untrained -1)   (skill groups: influence, interact)

POWER: (X)   SKILLS: _____   ▨
(special ability=hardy -1;   (types: melee, ranged, attribute, skill, equipment/utility)
magic=smart -1;
psionics=willful -1. No untrained)   *Notice, research and dodge are standalone skills, not skill groups

SIGNATURE GEAR, EQUIPMENT, VALUABLES:

weathered trenchcoat, fedora.

beaten up four-door compact car
        (-1 to drive car checks).

cheap cell phone

wallet with 200 dollars, maxed-out credit cards.

cramped 2nd-story office in dingy city building.

about 2,500 dollars in bank account

PATRONS, ALLIES, RELATIONSHIPS

Peter Havik-Stand: impulsive wealthy
        businessman (patron).

Toni Graham: unflappable part-time assistant
        (ally).

Emily Chan: police detective (rival).

CHARACTER: **Gortais**   PLAYER: _____   XP: **3**

ATTRIBUTES
(+1, 0, -1)

STRONG — Ø
(lift, push, carry, break)

NIMBLE — 1
(balance, avoid, manipulate)

HARDY — Ø
(resist fatigue, recover)

SMART — Ø
(general knowledge)

WILLFUL — -1
(resist manipulation)

SAVVY — 1
(favorable reaction)

DESCRIPTION & GOALS

Gortais is a rogue from the city of Artanis. He occasionally works for Reyhen Oricos — one of Artanes' city administrators.

◇ GRAZED
(until end of scene or healed; no other effect)

◇ WOUNDED
(-1 to all skill checks until healed)

◇ INCAPACITATED
(ends scene; proceed to next scene)

	BASE		UNTRAINED
PHYSICAL/MELEE: (strong+hardy, untrained -1)	Ø	SKILLS: Knife fighting 1. (skill groups: perform, martial arts, athletics, weapon)	-1
DEVICE/RANGED: (nimble+hardy, untrained -1)	1	SKILLS: small bow 2. (skill groups: bows, throwing, guns, gunner, disable, *dodge)	Ø
ANIMAL/VEHICLE: (strong+savvy, untrained -1)	1	SKILLS: (skill groups: ride, handle animal, wayfind, crew, drive, pilot)	Ø
SUBTERFUGE/SURV: (smart+nimble, untrained -1)	1	SKILLS: sneak 2; gather information 2; notice 2. (skill groups: hunt, survive, streetwise, sneak; *notice)	Ø
KNOWLEDGE: (smart+willful, untrained -1)	-1	SKILLS: (skill groups: crafts, medic, profession, mechanic, *research)	-2
SOCIAL: (savvy+willful, untrained -1)	Ø	SKILLS: negotiate 1. (skill groups: influence, interact)	-1
POWER: (special ability=hardy -1; magic=smart -1; psionics=willful -1. No untrained)	X	SKILLS: (types: melee, ranged, attribute, skill, equipment/utility)	▨

*Notice, research and dodge are standalone skills, not skill groups

SIGNATURE GEAR, EQUIPMENT, VALUABLES:

a long knife

small bow and sheaf of arrows; worn while on tasks

indifferently clean clothes

a winning smile

PATRONS, ALLIES, RELATIONSHIPS

Reyhen Oricos (Patron). Works as a "fixer" of political and social issues in the city of Artanes.

ALLY/FOE: ___Toni Graham___ TYPE: ___ally. average NPC___ TRAIT/RAT: ___unflappable___

CONFLICT (∅)

[POWER/SKILL:]
___research___ (1)

[POWER/SKILL:]
_____ (○)

DESCRIPTION & NOTES
Toni is a bookish grad student who is thrilled to work with Arthur Falcone.
For whatever hours he can afford to pay her under the table. She's
tough, but sometimes oblivious of dangers on the job.

___

ALLY/FOE: ___Emily Chan___ TYPE: ___rival. talented NPC___ TRAIT/RAT: ___heroic___

CONFLICT (∅)

[POWER/SKILL:]
___profession. law___ (1)

[POWER/SKILL:]
___intimidate___ (1)

DESCRIPTION & NOTES
Emily Chan is a detective who has run into Arthur Falcone a few times.
who sees Falcone as an irritant. She has warned him to stay out of
criminal matters; she's convinced his meddling does more harm than good.

___

ALLY/FOE: ___Officers (3)___ TYPE: ___avg. team-generalist___ TRAIT/RAT: ___vigilant___

CONFLICT (-1)

[POWER/SKILL:]
___(n/a)___ (○)

[POWER/SKILL:]
_____ (○)

DESCRIPTION & NOTES
Emily Chan has a group of officers that she can bring call for backup if
needed. (If you need names: Jan. Max. Dan.)

___

ALLY/FOE: ___Oen Bjornos-Kos mercenary___ TYPE: ___(average) NPC___ TRAIT/RAT: ___unflappable___

CONFLICT (∅)

[POWER/SKILL:]
___(none!)___ (○)

[POWER/SKILL:]
_____ (○)

DESCRIPTION & NOTES
Oen Bjornos is a Kos barbarian living in Artanis. He caught wind of the
planned kidnapping of Bashak Oricos. priest of the temple to Artanes.
He wears light leather armor and wields a short sword.

___

WEAK TEAM/MINIONS

Members	Conflict Skill
1	Nigh impossible (-3)
2-3	Very unlikely (-2)
4-5	Unlikely (-1)
6-8	50/50 Moderate (0)
9-10	Likely (+1)

AVG TEAM/MINIONS

Members	Conflict Skill
1-3	Unlikely (-1)
4-6	50/50 Moderate (0)
7-10	Likely (+1)

INDIVIDUALS

Type	Conflict Skill, Other Skills/Abilities
"add leader"	(0) must eliminate teams/minions first
average NPC	(0) one skill/power at +1
talented NPC	(0) two skills/powers at +1
brute/automaton/ powerful entity	(+2) with no special abilities, OR (+1) with a special ability
hybrid / (animal)	(+1) with no special abilities OR (0) with a special ability
infiltrator/spy	(0) 3 or more skills/powers at +1

% window dressing: +1 to skill when % aligns;
-1 to skill when % contradicts.

MONSTERS

Conflict Skill: (d10)/2, for odd results round down and assign special ability
Damage Levels: (d10)-5, at least 1. All "10" results explode (add 10, roll again)

CHARACTER: _____ PLAYER: _____ XP: ___

ATTRIBUTES
(+1, 0, -1)

STRONG
(lift, push, carry, break)

NIMBLE
(balance, avoid, manipulate)

HARDY
(resist fatigue, recover)

SMART
(general knowledge)

WILLFUL
(resist manipulation)

SAVVY
(favorable reaction)
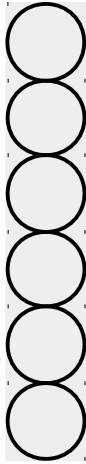
DESCRIPTION & GOALS

◇GRAZED
(until end of scene or
healed; no other effect)

◇WOUNDED
(-1 to all skill checks
until healed)

◇INCAPACITATED
(ends scene; proceed to
next scene)

BASE

UNTRAINED

PHYSICAL/MELEE:
(strong+hardy, untrained -1)

SKILLS: _____
(skill groups: perform, martial arts, athletics, weapon)

DEVICE/RANGED:
(nimble+hardy, untrained -1)

SKILLS: _____
(skill groups: bows, throwing, guns, gunner, disable, *dodge)

ANIMAL/VEHICLE:
(strong+savvy, untrained -1)

SKILLS: _____
(skill groups: ride, handle animal, wayfind, crew, drive, pilot)

SUBTERFUGE/SURV:
(smart+nimble, untrained -1)

SKILLS: _____
(skill groups: hunt, survive, streetwise, sneak; *notice)

KNOWLEDGE:
(smart+willful, untrained -1)

SKILLS: _____
(skill groups: crafts, medic, profession, mechanic, *research)

SOCIAL:
(savvy+willful, untrained -1)

SKILLS: _____
(skill groups: influence, interact)

POWER:
(special ability=hardy -1;
magic=smart -1;
psionics=willful -1. No untrained)

SKILLS: _____
(types: melee, ranged, attribute, skill, equipment/utility)

*Notice, research and dodge are standalone skills, not skill groups

SIGNATURE GEAR, EQUIPMENT, VALUABLES:

PATRONS, ALLIES, RELATIONSHIPS

ALLY/FOE: _____ TYPE: _____ TRAIT/RAT: _____

CONFLICT ◯

[POWER/SKILL:] ◯
_____

[POWER/SKILL:] ◯
_____

DESCRIPTION & NOTES

_____

ALLY/FOE: _____ TYPE: _____ TRAIT/RAT: _____

CONFLICT ◯

[POWER/SKILL:] ◯
_____

[POWER/SKILL:] ◯
_____

DESCRIPTION & NOTES

_____

ALLY/FOE: _____ TYPE: _____ TRAIT/RAT: _____

CONFLICT ◯

[POWER/SKILL:] ◯
_____

[POWER/SKILL:] ◯
_____

DESCRIPTION & NOTES

_____

ALLY/FOE: _____ TYPE: _____ TRAIT/RAT: _____

CONFLICT ◯

[POWER/SKILL:] ◯
_____

[POWER/SKILL:] ◯
_____

DESCRIPTION & NOTES

_____

WEAK TEAM/MINIONS

Members	Conflict Skill
1	Nigh impossible (-3)
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% window dressing: +1 to skill when % aligns;
-1 to skill when % contradicts.

MONSTERS

Conflict Skill: (d10)/2, for odd results round down and assign special ability
Damage Levels: (d10)-5, at least 1. All "10" results explode (add 10, roll again)

ACTION SHEET

LiRE

Persons (d100)

#	Person	#	Person
1	Local Leader Staff	51	Hostile foreigner
2	Regional Leader Staff	52	Rival of friend/ally
3	National Leader Staff	53	Ideological rival
4	Servant of royalty	54	General troublemaker
5	Local Leader Inner Circle	55	Despicable villain
6	Reg'l Leader Inner Circle	56	Skilled hero
7	Nat'l Leader Inner Circle	57	Aged hero
8	Royal family	58	Liar/braggart
9	Local Leader	59	Craft master/boss
10	Regional Leader	60	Exceptional talent
11	Spy/agent	61	Exceptional beauty
12	Religious lay folk	62	Wealthy entrepreneur
13	Relig. meditative/scholar	63	Prestigious family
14	Religious activist/cultist	64	Expert historian/lore
15	Religion staff	65	Specialty academician
16	Religion Inner Circle	66	Expert healer/doctor
17	Mercenary/arms guild	67	Diplomatic expert
18	Merc./arms leader/boss	68	Popular entertainer
19	Merchants, biz/finance	69	Master builder/engineer
20	Merchant/finance boss	70	Nomad/traveler
21	Rogue guild/smugglers	71	Liar/hoaxer
22	Rogue/smuggle leader	72	Scout/messenger
23	Scholar/scientist	73	Terrorist/anarchist
24	Academic luminary	74	Unremarkable commoner
25	Crafters/manufacturing	75	(Potential) patron/ally
26	Crafter/manuf. leader	76	(Potential) patron/ally
27	Conscript/militia	77	(Potential) patron/ally
28	Army/marine soldier	78	(Potential) patron/ally
29	archer/air/sea soldier	79	(Potential) rival/past foe
30	NCO/specialist	80	(Potential) rival/past foe
31	Officer/military leader		
32	Police/public safety		
33	Cousin		
34	In-law, indirect family		
35	Niece/nephew		
36	Aunt/uncle		
37	Parents/grandparents		
38	Brother/sister		
39	Child/dependent		
40	Family friend		
41	Childhood friend		
42	Neighbor/acquaintance		
43	Early/first love		
44	Teacher or colleague		
45	Beggar/poor		
46	Role model		
47	Former friend		
48	Former love		
49	Occupational peer		
50	Bad blood family		

Qualities (d100) / Places (d20)

Places (d20)

#	Civilized	Wilderness
1	Square/Meeting hall	Underground
2	Warehouse/storage	Cave/caverns
3	Marketplace	Mine/shaft/tunnel(s)
4	Farm/villa/estate	Fissure/crevasse
5	Smithy/factory	Ruins/buildings
6	Crafting-place	Taiga/tundra/desert
7	Shop/store	Forest (deciduous)
8	Tavern/inn/hotel	Forest (coniferous)
9	Arena/sport-place	Swamp/marsh
10	Streets/alleys	Jungle (vines)
11	Luxury digs	Scrub (brush)
12	Library or lab	Steppes/grasslands
13	Palace/fortress/HQ	Broken/blasted area
14	Keep/tower	Cliffs/crags/gorges
15	Field/meadow	Hills
16	Garden/lawn/park	Mountains
17	Temple/church	Plateau
18	Home/hovel	Valley
19	Cellar/underground	Canyon/chasm
20	Port/station/transit	Pond/lake (shore)

Qualities (d100) — Civilized / Wilderness

Civilized	Wilderness
Wide open spaces	Dusty
High observation point	Smoky
Sight-blocking	Wide open spaces
Observation point	Observation point
Sight-blocking	Sight-blocking
Cold	Hot
Dry	Humid
Breezy	Cold
Windy	Dry
Gale	Breezy
Cloudy	Windy
Overcast	Gale
Stormy	Cloudy
Clear	Stormy
Still	Clear
Sprinkling	Overcast
Rain (sleet/snow)	Still
Downpour (blizzard)	Rain (sleet/snow)
Work sounds	Sprinkling
Running water	Downpour (blizzard)
Blowing winds	Dew
Traffic/passers-by	Running water
Birdsong	Blowing winds
Animal sounds	Rainfall patter
Quiet/serene	Bird calls
Floral/sweet smells	Small animal sound
Solid/hard ground	Lg. animal sounds
Soft/plush ground	Quiet/serene
Smooth/slip ground	Floral/sweet smells
Rough ground	Small animal sound
Rotten/carrion smell	Solid/hard ground
Deserted	Soft/plush ground
Abandoned	Smooth/slip ground
Desolate	Rough ground
Eerie	Mildew/mold-smell
Empty	Deserted
Forbidding	Abandoned
Protected	Desolate
Exposed	Eerie
Unstable/hazardous	Empty
Fire (set)	Forbidding
Mystic/bless/curse	Protected
Artifact/object	Exposed
Guardians/guarded	Unstable/hazardous
Illusory	Fire (set)
Trapped/warded	Mystic/bless/curse
	Artifact/object
	Guardians/guarded
	Illusory
	Trapped/warded

Items (d100)

#	Item	#	Item
1	Noble dress/accessory	51	Art/sci. instruments
2	Indeterminate clothing	52	Info: Location of item
3	Indeterminate accessory	53	Info: Religious/mythic
4	Military uniform	54	Info: Dimensions/existence
5	Religious vestment	55	Info: Geographic
6	Jewelry adornment	56	Info: History/Lore
7	Gems & jewels	57	Info: Ecology
8	Semi-precious jewelry	58	Info: Medicine/anatomy
9	Concealable weapons	59	Info: Accounting ledger
10	Small melee weapons	60	Info: Diary/personal
11	Large melee weapons	61	Fresh food
12	Small ranged weapons	62	Preserved food
13	Large ranged weapons	63	Raw foodstuffs
14	Thrown weapons	64	Fruits/vegetables
15	Reactive/explosives	65	Herbs/spices
16	Odd/exotic weapons	66	Cheese or meats
17	Armory (collection)	67	Drinkable infusions
18	Light/piecemeal armor	68	Alcohol
19	Leather/riot gear	69	Mild drug (tobacco/coffee)
20	Medium protection	70	Industrial metals
21	Heavy protection	71	Lumber/organics
22	Shield/riot gear	72	Construction material
23	Helmet	73	Ceramics
24	Exotic armor/protection	74	Cloth
25	Heavy/powered armor	75	Paper/data storage
26	Armory (collection)	76	Oil/grease or fuel
27	Clothes/fabrics	77	Valuable stone
28	Lighting	78	Semi-precious stone
29	Eating gear	79	Animal parts
30	Drinking gear	80	Illustrated/illuminated art
31	Cooking gear	81	Poetry/prose/multimedia
32	Craft tools/machines	82	Statue/sculpture
33	Portable shelter (tents)	83	Carving
34	Hygiene/beauty items	84	Drawing/painting
35	Potpourri/incense	85	Big items (machinery)
36	Text/data (religious)	86	Religious place/info
37	Small ceremonial items	87	Political place/info
38	Large ceremony items	88	Fortification/info
39	Door/portal/container	89	Defense weakness/info
40	Images/icons	90	Med. devices/machines
41	Statue/sculpture	91	Shop devices/machines
42	Text/data (sci-/magic)	92	Furniture
43	Herb/organic medicine	93	Symbolic ancestral items
44	Processed medicine	94	Symbolic rulership items
45	Poison/pesticide	95	Cash/valuables
46	Hard drugs	96	Cash/valuables
47	Inert crystal, rare earth	97	Artifact/object
48	Preserved organics	98	Cash/valuables
49	Flammables/explosives	99	Vehicle (small)
50	Occupational gear	00	Vehicle (medium)
			Vehicle (large)

Foes (F:) / Rationale (R:) (two d20)

Encounter Scene Foe Groups:
- Multiply d10xd10 for foe point budget.
- Teams/minions are always d10 in number.
- Option: Select a group or minions as base.
- Subtract chosen/rolled forces from total, until point budget is at zero or below.
- Roll for dominant rationale.
- Each side can roll to detect the other at range: winning side chooses actions.
- Set up defenders to take advantage of place & qualities.

# (d100)	Foes (F:)	Rationale (R:)
81	F: Weak team % (2)	R: Conversation
82	F: Average team % (3)	R: Argue/debate
83	F: Average NPC % (5)	R: Study/learn
84	F: Talented NPC % (10)	R: Guard/vigilance
85	F: Add! leader % (10)	R: Guard/vigilance
86	F: Animals/mounts (1)	R: Anxiety/fear
87	F: non-combat – d100 (1)	R: Anxiety/fear
88	F: Weak minions (2)	R: Hate/anger
89	F: Average minions (3)	R: Hate/anger
90	F: Big brute (10)	R: Hunt/scavenge
91	F: Vehicles/mounts (2-10)	R: Hunt/scavenge
92	F: Wk mindless minion(2)	R: Worship/reverent
93	F: Avg mindless minion(3)	R: Sick/diseased
94	F: Hybrids/animals (5)	R: Drunk/drugged
95	F: Powerful entity (10)	R: Hurt/suffering
96	F: Automation (10)	R: Respect/grateful
97	F: d100, Average % (5)	R: Celebrate/fest
98	F: d100, Talented % (10)	R: Tired/rest/sleep
99	F: d100, Captive(s)(10)	R: Cook/eat/drink
00	F: d100, Infiltrator/spy(15)	R: Lack/hungry/poor

Mission (d20)

#	Mission
1	Patrol
2	Scout
3	Find/Recover
4	Explore
5	Hunt
6	Capture
7	Spy
8	Escort
9	Deliver
10	Investigate
11	Negotiate
12	Win over
13	Survive
14	Evade
15	Escape
16	Defend
17	Protect
18	Attack
19	Rescue
20	Research

Trait (d20)

#	Trait
1	Cruel/Malevolent
2	Thoughtful
3	Mysterious/Secretive
4	Heroic
5	Sneaky/Under-handed
6	Lazy
7	Happy/Optimistic
8	Dour/Taciturn
9	Cowardly
10	Crude/Capricious
11	Cautious
12	Impulsive
13	Loyal
14	Nervous/Awkward
15	Loud/Boisterous
16	Gregarious
17	Sympathetic
18	Accusative/Defensive
19	Unflappable
20	Lying/Treacherous

% Culture/Occupation (2xd10)

#	Culture	Occupation
1	Majority/Native	Common/generalist
2	Majority/Native	Common/generalist
3	Majority/Native	Social/leadership
4	Native Minority	Fighter/Warrior
5	Affiliated/neighbor	Traveler/Rogue
6	Affiliated/neighbor	Wilderness specialist
7	Far-away	Officers/special forces
8	Unusual/Exotic	Academic specialist
9	Religious/inspirational	Religious/inspirational
10	Opposed	Setting skills specialist

Scene Setup
- Decide civilized or wilderness.
- Choose or roll (or don't) for place/person/item/foe.
- Think up a thumbnail sketch for the scene.
- Roll 3 scene qualities, optionally four d10 window dressing.
- Each person has a trait. Foe groups have a rationale.
- Add window dressing through free-form exposition.

Optional Setup — Window Dressing (four d10)

Roll		As Expected	
1-2	Colder	Wetter	Hillier / More People
3-8	—	— As Expected —	
9-10	Warmer	Drier	Flatter / Fewer People

Yes-No Questions (Skill Checks)

SHIFTS	YES	NO
+3 Nearly Certain	1-95	96-00
+2 Very Likely	1-80	81-00
+1 Likely	1-65	66-00
0 50/50 (Moderate)	1-50	51-00
-1 Unlikely	1-35	36-00
-2 Very Unlikely	1-20	21-00
-3 Nigh Impossible	1-05	06-00

+1 magic shift for each scene quality that aligns with the question/skill check.
-1 magic shift for each scene quality that contradicts the question/skill check.

Plot Stress
Setting up a new scene increases plot stress by 5.

Each yes-no question and PC skill check increments plot stress by 1.

Start and end each scene by testing plot stress (d100 roll vs. current plot stress).

A yes-no question result that is lower than current plot stress triggers an unexpected event.

When an unexpected event happens, cut plot stress in half.

Unexpected Events (d20)

#	Event
1	P: Arrival
2	P: Departure
3	P: Trait positive
4	P: Trait negative
5	P: Trait, random
6	P: Skill check
7	P: Rationale new/change
8	P: Mission twist
9	P: Scene quality intrudes
10	P: Item intrudes
11	F: Start/cease hostilities
12	F: Leader emerges
13	F: Special item
14	F: Call for backup
15	F: Adds/Reinforcements
16	F: Monster/Beast
17	F: Trap/Ambush (arrest/confine)
18	F: Trap/Ambush (damage/incapacitate)
19	Scene quality new/change
20	Scene quality ceases

Persons (P:) Focus
1-3 Self / Rival
4-5 Ally / Patron
6-7 Rival / Ally
8-10 Foe / Rival
may generate a person/foe if not already present.

Foes (F:) Focus
may generate a foe (roll once on foe table) if not already present.

MISSION SHEET

Main Mission: _____

Patrons, Persons [Name, Role, Trait]
1.)
2.)
3.)
4.)
5.)
6.)
7.)
8.)

Allies/Groups [Name, Culture/Occupation, Trait]
1.)
2.)
3.)
4.)
5.)
6.)
7.)
8.)

Structured Questions for Persons

Does the person have a need? (always yes for first cutscene)

-What does the person need? [mission]:

-What is the reason behind that need? [rationale]

-Does the person have an(other) item to help with the mission? [item]

-Is there a destination place for the mission? [place]

-Does the person offer (extra) valuables for completing the mission?

-Will the person supply special equipment for the mission?

-Will the person provide an(other) ally for the mission? [ally]

Is there another person(s) to contact with more information? [person]

Can the person warn me about possible upcoming encounter(s)? [foe(s)]

Structured Questions for Foes

Do the foe(s) have (extra) money or valuables on them/nearby?

Do the foe(s) have an(other) item (as a possession or clue)? [item]

What is the reason behind the hostilities? [rationale]

Is there a source person/encounter behind the hostilities? [person]

Scene 1

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success?

Scene 2

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success?

Scene 3

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success?

Scene 4

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success?

(Mission: continued)

Scene 5

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success? ◇ ◇

Scene 6

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success? ◇ ◇

Scene 7

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success? ◇ ◇

Scene 8

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success? ◇ ◇

Scene 9

Place/Qualities, Person/Item:

Foes / Goal & Obstacles:

Plot Stress:

Window Dressing/Notes:

Skill Successes: ◇ ◇
Ask for Trouble: ◇ ◇
Meaningful Success? ◇ ◇

Open Scenes

Make a player's character for the Libre RPG, p.57-66; plus p.75-78 for powers.

Decide on a game style (for conflict): gritty, pulpy, heroic, p.67.

Decide how many successes p.19. Decide meaningful successes p.19: the story needs.

Decide on a scene idea

Start and end stories with dialog cutscenes, p.9,19.

Other options are obstacle scenes, p.12; encounter scenes, p.45.

Decide if you want a specific place, person (patron/ally/rival), foe and/or key item in the scene, sidebars, p.15-16.

Choose civilized or wilderness scene. Describe what you think the scene will be: free-form exposition for window dressing, p.16.

Not sure where to start? See sidebar, p.52.

Prepare the scene

Roll 3 scene qualities (civilized or wilderness) from the *action sheet*.

If you didn't already choose, you may roll a place, person, foe and/or item (or don't – it's up to you)

Do your rolls not square with your idea for the scene? The rolls take precedent. Re-frame the scene and write in window dressing, p.15-16.

Bump up plot stress by 5. Test plot stress (d100) for an unexpected event, p.18.

You'll test plot stress again before you close the scene.

Cutscene/dialog

Use structured questions on the *mission sheet*.

For a starting cutscene, always generate a mission from the *action sheet*. Round out the mission with additional roll(s), p.123-124.

Ask any structured questions you want. You may need to make skill checks & ask yes-no questions to get answers and refine them.

Dialog can request information, valuables, equipment, recruit allies, get side goals (mini-missions), etc.

Every skill checks risks a consequence; each yes-no question and skill check raises plot stress. Choose what questions you ask wisely.

Obstacle scene

For meaningful success in this scene you'll need:

- to succeed at 3 different, moderately difficult (or harder) skill checks.
- 3 yes-no questions that ask for trouble (at least 50/50 moderate chance of trouble), whether or not trouble actually happens.

A conflict counts as 1 successful skill check if it's at least 'moderately difficult'.

Forecast at the start of the scene the skill checks you expect to use. Then re-trench during the scene as needed.

Encounter scene

For meaningful success in this scene you'll need:

- to roll up a foe budget and generate a foe group using the *action table*.
- the player character's group needs to beat the foe group in a conflict.

To make a foe budget roll d10xd10. Then spend the budget by rolling up random foes on the *action table*.

If your plans go too far off track, you may throw in the towel on a scene, p.20,53

Resolve Scenes

Miscellaneous tools and rules to navigate, and end, a scene.

Flipping scene types

You may flip an encounter scene over to an obstacle scene, p.47.

You may flip an obstacle scene into an encounter scene, p.48.

Throwing in the towel

You may close a scene spiraling out of control.

- If the player character's group: (a) is not in active conflict, (b) can leave the area at will, (c) outstanding trouble/consequences are resolved, plan the next scene at will.
- Otherwise you must create a follow-up scene from the prior scene, to deal with the fallout.

You may also abandon the mission, and deal with the consequences of failing to meet the goal, p.19, 53.

Follow-up scenes

See p.53-54.

- Roll new scene qualities (unless it starts in exact same location).
- Convert prior scene qualities to window dressing.
- There is no time between scenes for skill checks (e.g., to repair equipment, heal damage or recover powers).

Incapacitated

If the player's character is incapacitated, shut down the scene immediately. Start next scene with the player's character wounded, having to deal with all fallout from the previous scene, p.74.

Consequence types

When a skill check fails, p.29-31, sample effects:

- Require a follow-up skill check to avoid an immediate, worse threat (e.g., injury).
- Complications make repeat attempt impossible, or more difficult/dangerous.
- The intended result happens, but at a steep price (injury, damaged equipment, lost/spent valuables).
- The intended result happens, but creates a new (bigger) problem.

Positive outcome

Once you get the requisite number of meaningful successes, you may end the story by narrating a positive outcome. That may or may not mean completing the original mission as planned, p.19.

Final wrap

After the story ends, take notes of the outcome. Record advancement of allies/rivals, key persons newly introduced in the story, key places and/or items, progression of relationships, potential recurring key foes, possible plot threads to pursue in future stories, etc.

Recovery from damage

(see p.72-74)

- Treat each person (even team/minion members) individually for recovery.
- Roll *first aid* or other healing skill vs. *hardy* (or at 50/50 moderate).
- If healing fails or isn't attempted, ask "is this person still alive?" at *hardy* or at 50/50 moderate. Even if still alive, anyone other than the player's character is unable to continue the mission.

Loot

After besting foe(s): ask the yes-no question "did the foe(s) have valuables?", or via interrogation, use structured questions to ask "do the foe(s) have valuables on them or stashed nearby/where?" Also see p. 91-92.

Closing a scene

Close a scene when the action has wound down. The player character's group should be: (a) not in active conflict, (b) able to leave the area at will, (c) have all outstanding trouble/consequences resolved, see p.53.

Otherwise, next scene must be a *follow-up scene* to deal with outstanding issues. When ready to close the scene, roll d100 against plot stress. If it generates an unexpected event, resolve it before shutting down the scene. If not, the scene shuts down cleanly, see p.18.

Rewards and Experience

Whether the mission succeeds or fails, assign experience to all parties. For experience in the RPG, see p.82-84. If the mission succeeded, decide or roll randomly for rewards, see p.91-92.

Yes-No Questions

The yes-no questions chart is on the *action table*. Use yes-no questions whenever there is something important the player needs to know about a scene.

When to ask
Before picking up the dice, p.21-23:

- Is the answer important to the scene?
- Are there two or more branching answers?
- Does the question make sense for the story: Is it reasonably possible?

Figuring the odds
50/50 moderate is the default, sidebar p.21.

- Raise or lower likelihood based on what makes sense in the story.
- Shift likelihood based on window dressing and scene qualities.
- Aligned and conflicting scene qualities force an extra magic shift.

Asking for trouble
Ask for trouble to get meaningful success in obstacle scenes, p.35-38.

- Asking for trouble needs at least a 50/50 moderate chance to cause trouble.
- scene quality magic can shift those odds and still qualify for meaningful success.
  - whenever trouble happens, it thwarts the player character's group.

The player needs to ask for trouble 3 times to have meaningful success in an obstacle scene.

Plot stress
Each yes-no question adds 1 plot stress.

Each yes-no question also *tests* plot stress (if the roll result is lower than current plot stress, roll for an unexpected event (d20) on the action sheet, possibly a (d10) focus for the event. Cut plot stress in half (round down).

Yes-no question uses
Use yes-no questions to:

- Clarify or add details about scene elements / dialog.
- Add window dressing after a scene has started.
- Add a person or foe after a scene has started
- After a successful skill check to reveal something hidden/unknown.
- With structured questions, to see if asked-for resources are available.
  - To decide on details of a consequence when skill checks fail.
  - when asking for trouble.

Exposing the unknown
Searching, dialog and/or information gathering may reveal hidden things, p.31-32:

- Make the skill check, with a consequence if it fails.
- Only if the skill check succeeds, then assess the yes-no question likelihood that the search/request/investigation reveals something useful.
- Additional yes-no question(s) can nail down details.

Rule of three
Don't ask more than 2 clarifying yes-no questions; if the first and second roll results are both no, the third possibility is always true.

Skill Checks

The default is moderate difficulty: An average character with some training & talent has a 50/50 moderate chance of success.

With the in-house RPG rules, resolve skill checks through the yes-no question chart on the *action table*. Use shifts on the chart to figure out the likelihood of success.

If you bring your own RPG, you'll need to gauge your skill checks for meaningful success. Ideally, meaningful success is about 50/50 chance of succeeding.

What to ask
Before picking up the dice, p.30-31:

- How would success move the plot forward?
  - What are the consequences for failure? If there isn't a clear setback or dialed-up threat level, don't make a skill check. Just decide success or failure and move on.

Figuring the odds
50/50 moderate is the default, sidebar p.26.

- Raise or lower likelihood 1 (or more) shift(s) based on window dressing.
- Aligned and conflicting scene qualities force an extra magic shift.

Meaningful success
Skill check odds must be 50/50 moderate or lower to qualify for meaningful success, p.26.

- The exception is scene quality magic, which can shift the odds easier/harder, and still qualify the skill check for meaningful success.

- The player's character must participate (but does not need to lead the skill check) to count for meaningful success.

Ally assistance on checks
See p.146

Direct contest: Only 1 person on a side can make the check (duel, arm wrestling, swimming, climbing).
Limited assistance: just 1, 2 or a few extra members can assist (break down a door, lift a boulder).
Unlimited assistance: Everyone can participate (search a room, hear a noise).
Interference: Base the roll off the lowest participant's skill or attribute (sneak, conduct a ritual).
Large group activity: see p. 65-66 (mass combat, crew a ship).

When a skill check fails, everyone involved suffers the consequences.

Plot stress
Each skill check adds 1 plot stress if the player's character is involved.

Skill checks do *not* test plot stress: A skill check roll by itself never generates an unexpected event (d20).

Creature bonuses/penalties
Assess minion/creature skill check bonuses/penalties of +1/-1 or higher to generic *conflict* skill based on their instinct or nature (p.79).

Unopposed skill checks
See p.146

- Figure the odds based on window dressing and scene qualities.
- Take the lead (usually highest) skill in the group.
  - Add +1 for each ally with at least level 0 skill that can participate.

Add positive (+1), subtract negative (-1) extra factors.
Skill checks are capped at +3 and -3.

Opposed skill checks
See p.146

- Any window dressing or scene qualities that help or hinder just one group give a bonus or penalty (those that affect both sides equally have no effect).
  - For each group, take the lead (usually highest) skill.
  - For each group, add +1 for each member with at least level 0 skill that can participate.

Subtract foe group total from player character group total for likelihood.
Skill checks are capped at +3 and -3.

Ally % bonuses/penalties
Allies with a "%" designation have +1 skill when culture and/or occupation align; -1 skill when culture/occupation run counter to the task (p.63).

Conflicts

[Run a combat with individual foes or foe groups using the RPG rules, p.67-74.]

Detection and ambush

Based on the environment, decide the range at which detection is possible (extreme, medium, close), p.71-72.

If neither side is sneaking, use an opposed *notice* skill check to decide who detects first.

If one side is sneaking, make *sneak* vs. *notice* skill check to advance.

Also make a final *sneak* vs. *notice* skill check for the ambush itself.

The side that is successfully ambushed can only defend (vs. missile fire at medium range, vs. missile/thrown/melee at close range) the first round of conflict.
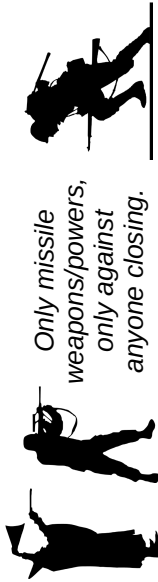
World o' hurt situations

If one side:

- Is successfully ambushed;
- Is at range, but has no one using missile weapons that round;
- Is in melee but only has ranged weapons.

Then it can use its side's single highest of *nimble* attribute, *dodge* skill or *shield* skill (with a shield) to try and avoid its side taking damage that round.
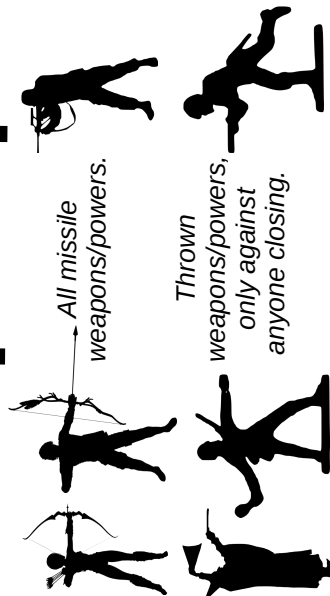
Who takes damage?

Player's choice! (except *leaders*, who are protected by team(s)/minions.

- If one side has only melee weapons, it can only take out others at close range.
- Throwers may target anyone close, or advancing from medium range.
- Missileers may target anyone at medium, or closing from extreme range.

Actions in combat

For each member:

Advance (Extreme → Medium → Close).
Retreat (Close → Medium → Extreme).
Conflict (ie., attack).
Defend (ie. Try to avoid/dodge/block damage if no one on that side can attack).
Non-combat skill check (e.g., use a power, heal a member).
Do nothing.

Skill check

Treat a conflict just like an opposed skill check (see skill checks), except *every* member can assist (no minimum skill bar for conflicts).

Damage

If the player's side succeeds the skill check, it deals 1 damage level (gritty), 2 damage levels (pulpy), or 3 damage levels (heroic) to foes.
If the foe group succeeds the skill check, it deals 1 damage level to the player character's group.

Each damage level: Does a level of damage to the player's character
OR takes out 1 individual NPC
OR takes out 2 team/minion NPCs.

Equipment

If one side has clearly superior weapons, it gets +1 shift.
Armor/shield can prompt a yes-no question whether it stops a level of damage. Once successful, it needs to be repaired before next use.

Extreme Range

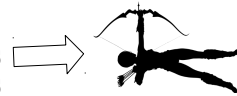*Only missile weapons/powers, only against anyone closing.*

Medium Range

All missile weapons/powers.

Thrown weapons/powers, only against anyone closing.

[Medium Range]

Close Range

Melee weapons/powers lead the skill check.

Missile weapons/powers, thrown weapons / ranged powers can only assist melee (exception: when heavy weapons or power manipulations lead).

Powers

Complex power manipulation

Range penalties

-1 shift: - "self" power is used on another person being touched.
- melee power is used as a throwing attack.
- throwing power is used at medium range.

-2 shifts: - "self" power is used on another person at (or closing to) close range.
- melee power is used at (or closing to) medium range.

-3 shifts: - "self" power is used on another person at (or closing to) medium range.

Overpowering

-1 shift: - double regular levels of damage.*

-2 shifts: - triple regular levels of damage.*

-3 shifts: - 4x regular levels of damage.*

* Overpowering by default is an area attack that affects everyone at a particular range, friends & foes. See manipulations below. Overpowering also jacks up power consequences for failure: very dangerous to utterly catastrophic.

Overpower manipulations

-1 shift: - Overpowered melee attack selectively affects only foes.

-2 shifts: - Overpowered ranged attack selectively affects only foes.

Misc. manipulations

-1 shift: - "self" power is used on an unwilling subject.
- each additional person to affect within touch range.
- any attempt to do something generally unusual or unconventional with a power.

Powers

There are simple and complex rules options for Powers with the RPG rules; use what works best for the type of game you want, p.75-78 & 84-85.

Power manipulation

Powers have one predefined effect. The player optionally can try to use powers in unconventional ways.

Power manipulation in combat

Only one character on each side can attempt power manipulation. The power manipulation must lead that side's combat skill check, including any/all penalties, see p. 78.

Power manipulation and NPCs

Only the player's character and other key figures (e.g., rivals) should use complex power manipulation. If there are exceptional circumstances, conventional allies or foes might use at most simple power manipulation rules.

Powers and consequences

If a power fails, ask at 50/50 moderate: "was it the power that failed?" if yes, it is a power (not conventional) consequence, see p. 77.

A minimum power consequence is temporary loss of all powers (at least until after the current scene, including follow-up scenes, is completed). Magic spell consequences additionally often cause the reverse of the intended effect.

Simple power manipulation

Ask yes-no question capped at 50/50 moderate or lower: "Can person X use this power in this way at *least* -1 shift penalty, then make the skill check with *at* this time?" If yes, then make the skill check with *at least* -1 shift penalty. Ramp up any power consequences in line with the attempt, see p.77.

Types of powers

Magic: Starts with three spells. Each spell can be used once per scene (including follow-up scenes).
Psionics: Starts with two talents and three points. Use of a talent costs 1 point. Talent pool recharges after a set of scenes (including follow-up scenes).
Special Abilities: Starts with one special ability, accessible without restrictions.

Powers for skill checks

Each power can *either* replace a conventional skill check, *or* give +1 shift bonus to an existing skill. Power bonuses never stack. All single/group skill checks are capped at +1 net shift bonus from powers.

Describe what the power is and how it works when it is created.

Power categories

Attribute powers augment use of an attribute.
Melee powers replace/augment a melee attack.
Ranged powers replace/augment a ranged attack.
Skill powers substitute or enhance a particular skill.
Equipment powers replicate specialized equipment (eg. for movement, sensing or defense).

THE FINAL WORD

The past 160+ pages have said a lot about the collection of tools that power the game. It hasn't scratched the surface on game strategy, or covered the ways you can flex the rules as written. I hope you now have a good feel for the tools. The hardest part comes next: This game can tell great stories. The transition from reading the rules to smooth gameplay can be challenging.

That is one reason for the web site www.librerpg.com. I have posted game aids and other content, and also include links to streaming media to demonstrate gameplay in action. It doesn't have production glitz and glamor. Some of the first efforts are raw audio from off-the-cuff solo and duet gameplay.

If you enjoy solo role playing, once you get a feeling for the game, it can be very rewarding. There is strategy involved. In obstacle scenes, you will want to maximize your player character's chances for success when consequences are most risky; aim to make skill checks toward meaningful success when you can line up a scene quality to help the odds; try for rolls that contribute to meaningful success when the consequences for failure are less dangerous. Ask for trouble when there is an opportunity to hang a follow-up skill check off any trouble, which may count toward meaningful success. Keep a healthy pool of potential conflicts and bonus/penalty shifts handy by using all the game's available tools: equipment and key items, ally/patron/rival traits, cultures and occupations, foes and foe rationales, your player character's background, power trappings, and of course the backdrop of scene qualities and window dressing.

There's more to encounter scenes, too. Foe groups can be overwhelming. Rather than be overrun, your player character's group can try to separate or confuse foes. Use yes-no questions and skill checks. Tip scene qualities and window dressing in your favor, or against the foe group. Just like in conventional role-playing games, anything is possible. The answer to "can I do this?" is to assess the likelihood and roll a yes-no question. If the result is yes, add up the skill check and its bonus/penalty shifts, and make the roll.

So far, Libre Solo Role Playing has handled dungeon crawls and wilderness treks, pulp adventure, socially focused investigations, street-level heroic tales, science fiction, even horror. Not all third-party rulesets are a good fit. But when it comes to genre, plug in your favorite setting and give it a try.

As you become more familiar with the game, play with the rules you like. Some players will assemble allies, have recurring rivals, go on journeys and quests, pick up side goal missions, squeeze out every bonus they can find, and rock power manipulations. Others will prefer little story vignettes that follow a lone protagonist. Play the game as a GM looking to stretch your creative muscles in terms of thinking about storyline; or use the GM engine to test drive a game system you own but don't play with a regular group; or try it out as an on-the-fly duet story and conflict generator: one GM, one player, no prep.

In spite of this end note title, this is not the final word. If you haven't already, please find and download Libre Solo Role Playing's Training Wheels Adventure, which has the Special Delivery sample introductory mission. It's free and can help bridge some core concepts in this book. There are healthy online solo role playing communities that regularly swap ideas and stories. Or if you'd like, leave a note through the contact form on the www.librerpg.com website.

We'll end at the beginning. Thanks again for choosing to support Libre Solo Role Playing, and may all your successes be meaningful.

Libre Solo Role Playing lets you tell the stories you want, in your way.

Create your protagonist. Let the world challenge your character with obstacles to overcome, plot twists, setbacks and surprises. Recruit allies to help your player character's cause, and square off against dangerous foes and recurring rivals. Take your character on perilous journeys, conduct thorough investigations, and seek to overcome the threats of an unpredictable world.

The game includes a story engine that creates and runs plots on the fly. Use it as a standalone with your own role playing game of choice. Or combine it with the included role playing game rules, streamlined to plug directly into its game master engine, to support heroes from any setting. Challenge yourself and your protagonist, play to win, and tell great stories along the way.