STRAYS

BY RUSSELL ZIMMERMAN

POWERED BY
FATE

By Wordsmith Games

It's all Russell Zimmerman's fault!

But he had help:

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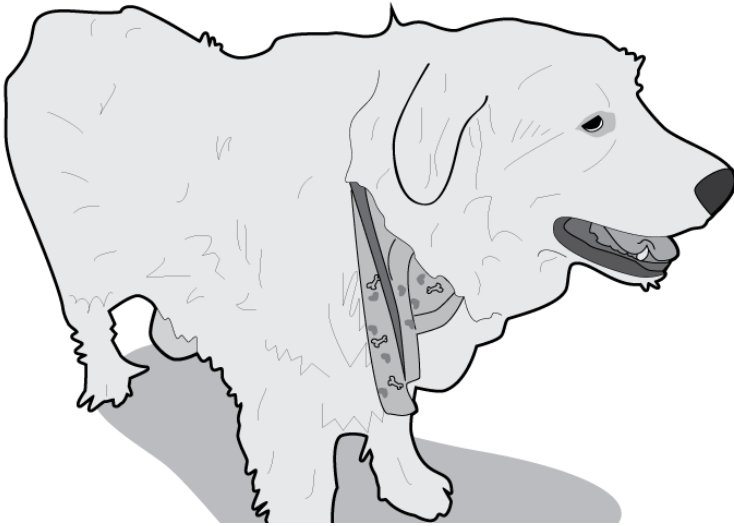
Editing by Patrick Goodman

This book's for **Nana** and all the
other pets we've loved and lost
over the years.

They're not all the way gone.
They're just being loved by
someone else who needs them
more than us.

Miss them, but don't mourn them.
They're still playing.

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Fuzzy fun!

Growing up, many of us loved light-hearted tales about friendly dogs and cats, talking birds and nimble rabbits, paddling fish or eager little mice out to see the world (or even out to save it). In such stories, all these different types of animals worked together to solve crimes, to survive neighborhood bullies, and to go on a whole host of other adventures, big or small.

Strays is a tabletop role playing game giving you and your friends the opportunity to tell those same stories. There are lots of role playing games and settings out there, ranging from high fantasy epics to dystopian future cyber-sprawls, but *Strays* is a little bit different. If you've played any of those before, great, but if you haven't, *Strays* tries to be as accessible an entry point into the hobby as possible, making it great for new gamers, especially kids.

Strays has been developed using the (awesome) *Fate Accelerated Edition*, or *FAE*, game mechanics. It's a "game engine" (kind of like a video game has) that's great for all sorts of stuff, and everyone should check it out at www.evilhat.com when they get the chance.

> **RABBIT FAST**: HELPFUL HINTS!
>
> Throughout *Strays*, we've slipped in helpful little sidebars that recap important things all in one place.
>
> Whenever you see this sort of box, it's a little refresher course or handy all-in-one short version of something!

The world of *Strays*.

Strays takes place in a world a little bit different from ours, inspired by all the best parts of being a kid and loving a pet.

In *Strays*, you're playing a special critter, imbued with a good heart, quick wits, and a desire to make the world a little bit better. Strays are recruited from the very best animals around, and most of them have to prove it by living with and loving a family for a while, helping a kiddo grow up and making a house into a home. Other strays are a little wilder, though, and they looked over humans while living rough on the streets.

Trip loves playing on the farm. Someday he's gonna catch a butterfly, for sure.

When one of these special animals looks sick, or hurt, or old, it's time for them to get hired, so they go live somewhere else, for their training.

Their very best owners and friends miss them, but it's important to understand they've got a new job somewhere else.
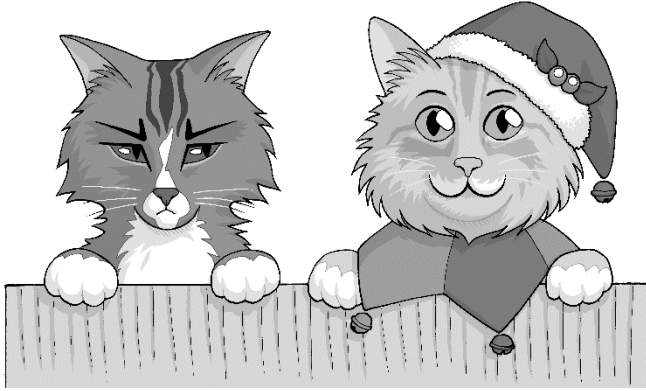
Teddy and Tigger show that some strays are more excited than others about working for Santa.

Santa Claus is the most popular and powerful strays patron, a jolly old fat man who lives way up north. He and Mrs. Claus have a winter house with a big farm just outside of town, with big open spaces for plenty of animals.

When a pet gets old and has shown what a good girl (or boy) it is for long enough, they go on a trip. Out at "Big Red's" place, they have all the room they need to run, and play, and meet other friendly critters, feeling younger and faster every day.

Big Red and Mrs. Claus, and all the folks like them around the world, are special

people with something a little magical about them. They can talk to animals just like animals can talk to each other. While all these strays nap and play and feel better, they're also learning how to work together, and they get told all about the not-so-secret war between Naughty and Nice.

The Nice champion children everywhere, making them braver and gentler at the same time, encouraging them to make new friends, try new things, and grow up to be good people. The Naughty, meanwhile, are wilder and meaner, feral critters that like to scare children, and scared children sometimes turn mean, themselves. They grow up into bullies and jerks, scared of making friends or helping anyone. Every time the Naughty win, everything gets a little darker.

When Santa – or the Tooth Fairy, the Monkey King, the Handsome Prince, the Daring Princess, the Easter Bunny, Old Aesop, whoever's around at that particular farm, outside that particular town! – thinks a stray is ready, they get sent back into a town or city to do good deeds. Your stray might not know what humans are saying all the time, but you *do* know you've got to help them out!

Welcome to the contest between Naughty and Nice. Instead of only worrying about what you're going to eat, finding the perfect place to poop, or lazy naps in the sun, you've got *work* to do.
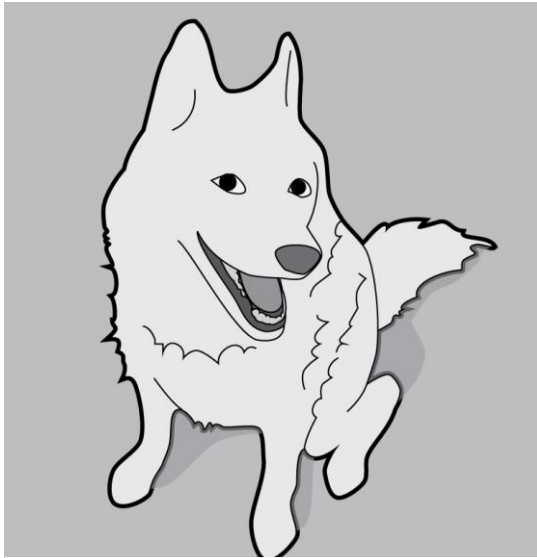
Snax is ready to go on adventures!

I Wanna Play! Wait, How Do We Play?

Most of you playing *Strays* are going to be running one critter, and they're called **players**, while their characters are **player characters**, or **PCs**. During gameplay, they will see things from that character's point of view, will be making decisions for just that one character, and will be telling that character's story.

One of you, though, is going to be the **gamemaster**, called the **GM** for short. While each player does all the decision-making for one player character, a GM does everything else! They're like a referee, a storyteller, and a movie director, all rolled into one. The GM gives the players challenges to overcome, new friends for their characters to meet, and new situations to interact with. Often, the GM will be the most experienced gamer in the group, and they'll probably put in way more work than anyone else. Be nice to your GM! GMs like snacks.

Remember, it's everyone's job to have fun, *and* to help everyone else have fun. The GM is playing the game, too! Everyone should pitch in to make sure their buddies are having a good time, and that includes the GM.

Missy will let you get to your stuff and play some Strays...for some treats.

What Stuff Do I Need?

Most of what you need is right here, in this book.

You'll also need a set of four **Fate Dice** (sometimes called Fudge Dice), and it's a really great idea to have four of these dice for everyone (each player, plus the GM, is going to want their own set). We'll tell you how to roll them and count them later!

Strays uses a mechanic that requires keeping track of some points, and for that you're going to need some sort of **tokens** or **counters**. Lots of groups use poker chips, but colorful beads are also neat, counters/tokens from tabletop wargames or board games can work, or even loose change.

Lots of **scratch paper** or **note cards** or even **sticky notes** are also super handy, for the players as much as the GM. *Strays* stories sometimes have a lot of stuff to remember so having something handy to scribble notes on is a great idea.

Who Is YOUR Stray?

Now that you've gotten your stuff together, it's time to sit down and make your characters, your strays. This is best to do as a group! That way everyone can talk it over and make a fun little group that will make sense, will let everyone share the spotlight, and will make sure all the characters get along!

How Do I Make a Character?

First off, you'll need to describe **aspects**.

An **aspect** is a word, phrase, or sentence that describes something centrally important to your character. Maybe it's your stray's favorite phrase, maybe it's their lucky item, but often it's a short descriptor of a life event, or a set of skills they have. An aspect can also describe the setting as much as the stray it's attached to; if you have "Dog Catcher Johnson's Least Favorite Mutt," it shows that your neighborhood has a mean old dog catcher, AND shows that your stray gets away from him!

Choose A High Concept

Your most important aspect is your **high concept**. That's just a fancy way of saying that this is your simplest, most basic, description of your stray. Arethey a dog or a cat? Are they nice or grouchy? Young or old? This is your character in a nutshell, and it will often describe something good *and* something bad about them.

Examples: *Grizzled Old Sheepdog; Cutest Kitten In Town; Sarcastic Parrot; Hamster Who Outran Her Wheel; Burly Bunny Brawler*

Choose A Trouble

Next, decide on the thing that always gets you into **trouble**. It could be a physical flaw, a sense of obligation, a bad reputation, or someone who doesn't like you. Anything that makes your stray's life tougher can be a trouble!

Examples: *I Miss My Humans; Ooh, Yummy!; Gotta Protect The Pack; I Hate Flying So High; Gray Muzzled and Tired; Those Uptown Dogs Hate Me*

Pick Another Aspect

Now compose another aspect. Think of something really important or interesting about your character. Do they work really hard to be the best at something? Are they really popular with the other animals in town? What part of being a stray do they like the best? Are they new at this, or have they been at it a long time? When they work with their friends, what's their job?

Good Idea: One or Two Additional Aspects

If you want to, create a couple more aspects. It's normally a good idea if a couple of these extra Aspects can also tie in another player (like by describing

something awesome you both did, or something else you have in common).

Or, you can leave 'em blank, and figure it out after you've played for a while, and your stray develops more naturally!

Totally Extra: Tangles

"Tangles" are a completely optional new thing in *Strays*, check 'em out later in the book if you want a little more complexity and customization!

Choose A Name and Appearance

What's your stray's name, and what do they look like? Have fun with this part, there are no rules!

Assign Your Approaches

Choose your **approaches**. These are descriptions of how you accomplish tasks. Every character has the same six approaches:

- Careful
- Clever
- Flashy
- Forceful
- Quick
- Sneaky

Choose one at Good (+3), two at Fair (+2), two at Average (+1), and one at Mediocre (+0). You can improve these

later. Don't worry, we talk about how approaches work later on!

Your approaches can say a lot about who you are. Here are some example "packages" that kind of describe each stray:

- **Big Old Dog:** Forceful +3, Careful and Flashy +2, Sneaky and Quick +1, Clever +0
- **Athletic Rabbit:** Quick +3, Forceful and Flashy +2, Clever and Careful +1, Sneaky +0
- **Sneaky Crow:** Clever +3, Sneaky and Quick +2, Forceful and Flashy +1, Careful +0
- **Wary Sheep Dog:** Careful +3, Forceful and Clever +2, Sneaky and Quick +1, Flashy +0
- **Black Cat:** Sneaky +3, Careful and Quick +2, Clever and Flashy +1, Forceful +0
- **Show-Off Lizard:** Flashy +3, Quick and Clever +2, Forceful and Sneaky +1, Careful +0

Stunts and Refresh

A **stunt** is a special trait that changes the way an approach works for your character. Most of the time, stunts give you a bonus (normally +2), but only when you're using a specific approach under specific circumstances.

You start with **one stunt** and **three refresh**. You can spend one or two of your refresh to get another stunt or two, if you want.

Your refresh is how many Fate points you get at the start of every session. It's a *minimum*, though, so if you end a game with extra Fate points, you get those bonus ones, too. If you spend Fate points willy-nilly, though, you still get your refresh worth at the start of the next game, no matter what!
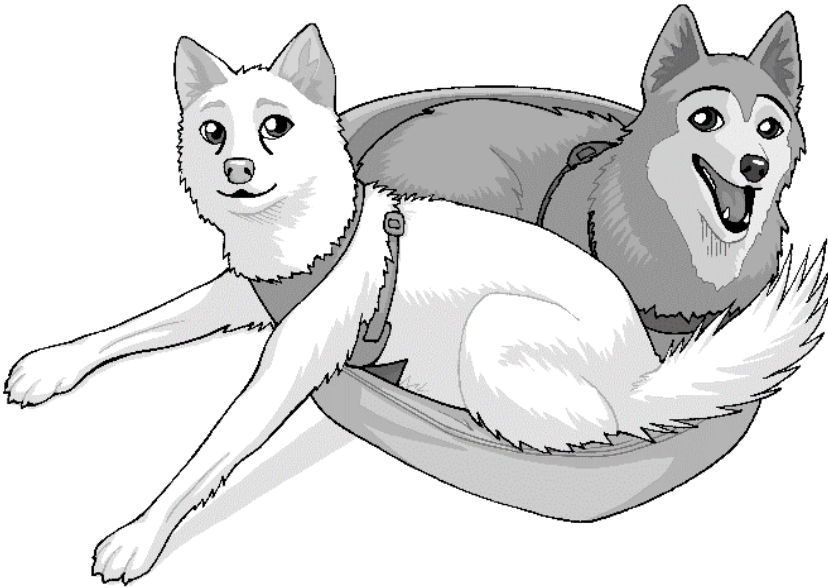
Kaze and Suki don't always get along great (someone being bossy kind of ruins that), but most of the time they're fine. And snuggling rules!

Doing Stuff!

In *Strays*, outcomes, actions, and approaches, are how your character will do cool stuff (or how bad guys will try to do uncool stuff against you). You want to bark to scare away a mean dog, you want to swipe a mean dog on the nose with your claws, or you want to run away from a mean dog…but how do you do it?

First, you describe your action. The point of most role playing games is to tell a neat story, so do exactly that; tell a little story about the cool thing your character is trying to do. Your aspects can really help here, and remind you of how your character is supposed to work. A big dog trying to scare someone is going to look different than a bird trying the same thing, right?

Next, talk to your GM about exactly what sort of **action** you're attempting. Are you creating an advantage, overcoming, attacking, or defending?

RABBIT FAST: DOING STUFF!

1: Describe what you're doing.

2: Agree with your GM on an action (attack, defend, create an advantage, or overcome).

3: Choose your approach.

4: Roll Fate dice.

5: Use aspects or stunts to modify your total.

6: Check your outcome.

Mittens has tailed some Naughty squirrel thieves back to their hideout, and spies on them…

Approaches: p. 24

Then, decide which **approach** you're using with your attempt. Here, your description of the action should help out. There's a difference between someone being careful and being flashy, right? Think back to what you're trying to do, and how you're trying it, and agree on which approach you're using.

Last up? Decide (with your GM) if you even have to roll the dice. If you're just doing something neat, and no one's even trying to stop you, don't bother! Describe your cool action, and carry on.

If you DO need to roll the dice, though, that's the very next step. Your GM decides how tough it is (sometimes by having an NPC directly oppose you), and then you roll the dice and see what happens.

Rolling The Dice

A *Fate Accelerated* game like *Strays* uses what are called Fate dice as the random-number-generator to see if an action succeeds or fails.

Everybody rolls their dice four at a time, as one "set" of dice, no matter what they're rolling for, how high or low their skill is, or whether they're the player or the GM. Every die will come up either blank [ ], plus one [+], or minus one [-], and you just add up the results of your four dice to get a number somewhere between -4 and +4.

Every [+] adds +1 to your roll, every [-] subtracts 1 from your roll, and every [ ] just sits there like a lazy cat in the sun, doing nothing.

Example rolls:

- [-] [+] [ ] [+] is +1
- [+] [-] [ ] [ ] is 0
- [+] [+] [+] [-] is +2
- [-] [ ] [ ] [-] is -2

…but some Naughty birds are spying on Ranger and Vixen, while they wonder where the squirrels went.

If you don't have Fate Dice to use, you can use four regular six-sided dice, or "4d6," as gamers call them. If you do that, a roll of a 1-2 is the same as a Fate minus [-]. Each roll of a 3 or 4 is the same as a Fate blank [ ]. Each roll of a 5-6 is a Fate plus [+].
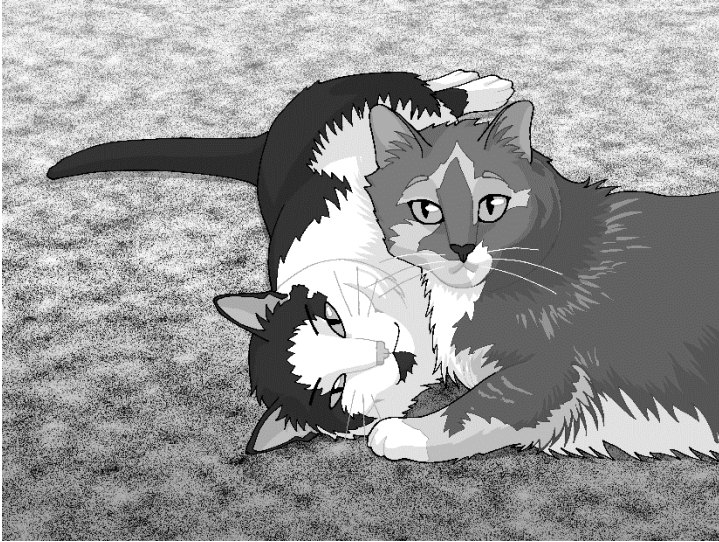
Before we start on actions, Ares and Psycho would like to remind us, on behalf of the Cat Union, that napping is always a valid lifestyle choice.

Actions

So you've decided what your PC is trying to do, and you've established that there's a need to roll. Next, figure out what **action** best describes what you're trying to do. There are four basic actions that cover everything in the game.

Create An Advantage

Creating an advantage is anything you do that's going to help your or your

friends later on. Spilling oil on the floor to make it slippery, flapping your wings extra hard to build up height before a really hard dive, or barking and growling to wake up the neighborhood and get humans involved, are all examples of trying to create an advantage. The advantage you create lets you do one of the following three things:

1. Learn about an existing aspect (whether on a scene/situation, or on another character).
2. Create a new scene/situation aspect.
3. Take advantage of an existing aspect that you know about (whether on a scene/situation, or on another character).

The outcomes – fail, tie, succeed, succeed with style – all vary based on what exactly you're trying to do with your Create an Advantage action.

If you're learning about an existing aspect or creating a new one:

- **If you fail:** Either you don't create or discover the aspect at all, or you create or discover it but an *opponent* gets to invoke the aspect for free. The second option works best if the aspect you create or discover is something that other people could take advantage of (like **Rough Terrain**). You may have to reword the aspect to show that it benefits the other character

instead of you—work it out in whatever way makes the most sense with the player who gets the free invocation. You can still invoke the aspect if you'd like, but it'll cost you a Fate point.

- **If you tie:** If you're creating a new aspect, you get a boost. Name it and invoke it *once* for free—after that, the boost *goes away*. If you're trying to discover an existing aspect, treat this as a success (see below).
- **If you succeed**: You create or discover the aspect, and you or an ally may invoke it once for free. Write the aspect on an index card or sticky note and place it on the table. Unlike a boost, the aspect stays!
- **If you succeed with style**: You create or discover the aspect, and you or an ally may invoke it *twice* for free. Usually you can't invoke the same aspect twice on the same roll, but this is an exception; success with style rules!

If you're trying to take advantage of an aspect you already know about:

- **If you fail:** You don't get any additional benefit. You can still invoke it in the future, at the cost of a Fate point.
- **If you tie or succeed:** You get one free invocation on the aspect for you or an ally to use later. You

might want to draw a circle or a box on the aspect's note card, and check it off when that invocation is used.

- **If you succeed with style:** You get *two* free invocations on the aspect, which you can let an ally use, if you wish.

Overcome

The next type of action is an **overcome**.

You use an overcome action to get past something (or someone) that's in your way. If you're trying to sneak past a dog catcher, chase a cat through an alley full of garbage, jump a fence, or wrestle yourself out of a big dog having you pinned, you're using an overcome action. You can also use an overcome action to try and fix it when an opponent has created an advantage against you (as long as it makes story sense).

Overcome actions are often resisted by an opponent (rolling Forceful vs. Forceful to win a game of tug-o-war, for instance), but can also have a difficulty assigned by the GM.

- **If you fail:** Things get complicated! You can choose to fail, which just means you don't get what you were after. Or, you can *succeed with a cost*, which means you and the GM figure out what might have gone wrong. Maybe you dig your way under a fence but lose your collar in the process, or

you're able to get away from those mean cats, but you get separated from your friends in the chase scene. It's up to you to decide if you want to fail, or succeed with a cost, and it's up to you and the GM to work out the details.

- **If you tie:** You attain your goal, but at some minor cost. The GM could introduce a complication, or present you with a tough choice. This cost shouldn't be as bad as the one for a failure, but it should complicate the story (and provide some drama).
- **If you succeed:** You accomplish what you were trying to do! Good job. You get the tug-rope from the other dog, you catch the red laser dot, or you find something tasty in that garbage (blech!).
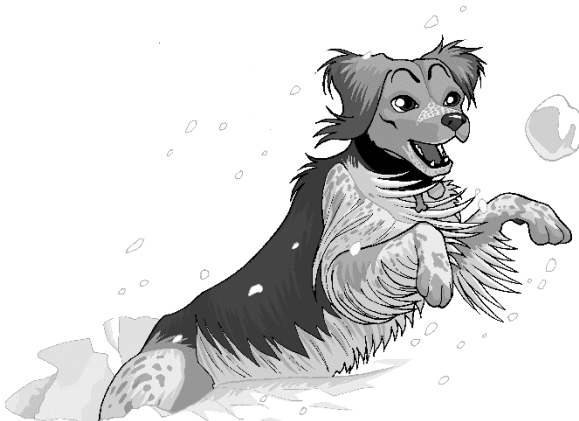
Emmett might be succeeding at overcoming that deep Oregon snow, but playing "snowball catch" is a whole different action.

- **If you succeed with style:** As success (above), but you also gain a *boost*.

Attack

The **attack** action is what's used whenever someone's trying to hurt someone else. This doesn't have to mean clawing or biting them, it can mean barking really loudly, saying something especially mean, or anything else. There are more ways to fight someone than hitting, right? Hissing at a mean critter and making it leave the scene is just as effective as swiping at it with your claws. We'll talk about the details of damage later on in the book, the big thing to remember is that "taken out of the scene" just means "taken out of the scene."

The target of your attack gets a chance to use the **defend** action to stop you (defend is up next).

- **If you fail:** You miss, nothing happens. Sorry! It happens to everybunny.
- **If you tie:** You almost get them. You get a *boost* (probably to use on your next attack or defense).
- **If you succeed:** Good job, you got 'em! You hit, and do damage (see **Damage, Stress, and Consequences**).
- **If you succeed with style:** Just like a success, but if you choose to, you

can do one less point of damage, in order to gain a *boost*.

Defend

Use **defend** when you're trying to stop someone from doing any of the other three actions, creating an advantage against you, overcoming you, or attacking you.

That makes defend the only action that's normally used on someone else's action. You can also roll defend to help your other players, sometimes, or even a friendly non-player character (NPC). As long as the players and the GM agree that it makes sense for someone to help out their buddy this way, they can give it a shot.

If you choose to try and defend someone in this way, you become the target of the attack.

- **If you fail:** Your opponent succeeds (based on their action type, of creating an advantage, overcoming, or attacking).
- **If you tie or succeed:** It could have been worse! Look up what a tie or a failure does based on your opponent's action type.
- **If you succeed with style:** Nice work! Not only does your opponent fail, but you gain a *boost* against them.

Helping Out

Under defend, we talked about how one player can help out by becoming the target of an attack, defending their buddy. That's not the only way you can help each other out, though. An ally can help someone accomplish any action (as long as it makes sense!), by giving up their action in order to help their friend.

A character gets +1 to their roll for every ally that helps out.

With a little creativity, you might be surprised at what you and your buddies can do with some teamwork.

Teague is a little confused about how to help you get a +1 on your next roll to use the computer.

Choose Your Approach

Tenshi has clearly chosen to use the Sneaky approach.

After you know what type of action you want to use – create an advantage, overcome, attack, or defend – it's time to figure out which **approach** you're using.

Every character in *Strays* has the following six approaches.

- **Careful:** If you're taking your time, being attentive to every detail, and trying to be very precise, you're being careful. Careful characters are great at thinking ahead, but sometimes have trouble under pressure.
- **Clever:** Thinking quickly, outsmarting someone with a spur-of-the-moment idea, and coming up with a great idea at a moment's notice? Then you're being pretty clever. Clever characters are great

under pressure, but sometimes don't do so great in the long run.

- **Flashy:** Flashy actions are great when you're trying to be the center of attention by showing off, making a lot of noise, and being noticed. Flashy characters can be a lot of fun and look very impressive, but in some situations you're better off with another approach.
- **Forceful:** Who has time to be subtle? Forceful actions are big and loud and direct, without showing any finesse or style. Forceful characters can be strong and intimidating, but that's not always the best option.
- **Quick:** Quick actions are great for defense and when you're in a hurry, like racing away from some trouble, chasing your friends, or darting across the street. Quick characters sometimes have trouble acting before they think, though.
- **Sneaky:** Any time you're trying to do something a little shady without being caught, you're probably being Sneaky. This could be fibbing to someone, following someone without being seen, or vanishing into a crowd. Sneaky characters can get away with a lot of stuff, but it always seems to catch up to them in the end.

Every character in *Strays* starts by having one approach at Good (+3), two at Fair (+2), two at Average (+1), and one at Mediocre (+0). You can improve approaches later, but never past +5.

It's awfully tempting to just choose your best approach, and try to get through the game doing everything with a +3, huh? But, just like in real life, it doesn't always work like that. Everyone is good at different things in real life, just like in the game, and that's a good thing!

You see, you have to choose your approach based on what you're trying to do in the game, and based on which approach makes sense for your action.

You can't use Forceful to cross the street, no matter how big and strong you are, cars are bigger and stronger! You can't use Flashy to sneak somewhere, either, now matter how great a show-off you are, the whole point of sneaking is to NOT be spotted, right?

Your choice of approach has to make sense based on what's going on in the game, so lots of times you'll have to use a +1 or a +2 – or even a 0! – instead of your character's best approach. But don't worry! If you and your friends are creative, you can still **help each other** out and use your best stats, sometimes. Maybe you can use your Flashy to help your friend sneak somewhere, by distracting everyone and helping her out!

Helping Out, p. 23

Worry about being creative and telling a good story, not just choosing which approach is your highest number, and it will probably all work out in the end!

Add Your Bonus

After you've rolled your dice and added up your result (somewhere from a -4 to a +4), you do a little bit more math. Take the bonus from your **approach** (Clever, Quick, and that stuff!) and add it to your dice result.

Now, add in any **stunts** or **tangles** that might be helping (or hurting) you. These will normally be a +2 for stunts, and a +1 or -1 for tangles.

This gives you your total result. Ask your GM if your total result is good enough.

Decide Whether to Modify the Roll

Once your GM tells you if you're going to fail, tie, succeed, or succeed with style, you've still got a decision to make! You can decide whether or not you want to 'cash in' a *boost* (a one-time aspect), or if you want to spend Fate points to use a full aspect.

You get to see what the result is first, *then* decide to spend these bonuses!

Outcomes

Once you decide what to spend – if anything – to help your roll, it's time to

figure out just what happened, and for you and the GM to narrate the cool stuff you just did (or tried to do).

- If your total is less than the difficulty, you **fail.**
- If your total is the same as the difficulty, you **tie.**
- If your total is better than the difficulty, you **succeed.**
- If your total is three or more better than the difficulty, you **succeed with style.**

Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts

Most of the time, actions are pretty straightforward. You're either rolling against a static difficulty set by the GM ("The wall's pretty high, you'll need a +3 or better total to scramble over it!"), or you'll roll and compare your total against the total of your opponent ("The bird squarks out a challenge and dives at you, quick, make a roll to get out of the way!").

Sometimes, though, things get a little fuzzier than that. There are some frameworks that actions and groups of actions fall into, and we'll discuss them next.

Challenges

A **challenge** is a whole pile of overcome and create an advantage actions that you use to resolve an especially complicated situation. The GM sets up all the different obstacles that need to be overcome, and each player helps the team out.

Your GM will create a challenge by deciding what goals the group has (which is where the players come in!), and figuring out what individual overcome rolls to use – with some create and advantage rolls from helpful teammates! – to resolve the situation.

Sometimes this will mean one player making lots of overcome rolls while everyone else pitches in, but just as often it can mean the GM has set up a big action montage, with each player tackling their own obstacle.

A sample challenge could be the PCs helping a bunch of critters escape from the pound, and they have to get the whole group to safety.

One player may be in charge of navigation and finding a safe way out of town, someone's going to have to keep the other animals together and moving, someone else will have to keep an eye

out for mean dog catchers chasing them, and on and on.
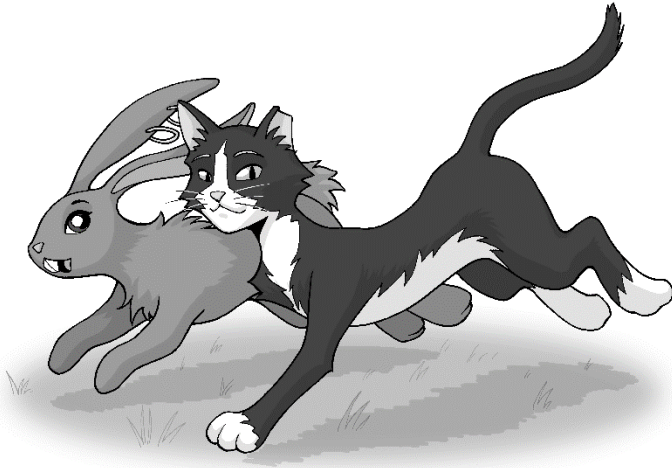
Trip's determined to keep up with Vixen in this contest, even in a three paws against four paws race!

Contests

A **contest** is when two or more characters – PCs, NPCs, or a mix! – are competing over something, but aren't out to actively hurt one another (that's just a normal fight scene, a conflict). Contests can happen all the time in *Strays*. Two alley cats might be showing off for a cute boy's attention, a pair of rabbits might race each other, or a whole bunch of dogs might run an obstacle course and see who does the best job.

Contests take place over a series of exchanges, each one representing a

character doing their best to reach the goal. Everyone declares their approach and rolls like normal, against a difficulty set by the GM.

Whoever gets the highest result wins that exchange, and gets one victory point. If the winner of a given exchange succeeds with style, they get two victory points. By default, the first character to get three victories wins the contest (but the GM can change that for certain contests, of course!).

If there's a tie during an exchange, no one gets any victory points, and the GM gets to throw a curveball at everybody taking part. Often, this new complication will be reflected as a situational/scene aspect (which folks can then use Fate points to take advantage of, later in the contest, to creatively get ahead of their opponents).

Conflicts

Conflicts are fights. Sometimes they'll be physical fights with all kinds of clawing and biting, other times it can mean a more social conflict, with hollering, barking, and hissing. Any time two (or more!) characters square off in order to hurt one another, though, you're looking at a conflict scene.

Setting the Scene

First off, the GM needs to be clear to everyone who is involved, and what the scene is like. This will normally entail a quick recap of who's there (and participating), and also a few scene/situation aspects (quick little phrases like "garbage-strewn alley" or "empty lot with tall grass" is enough).

For a conflict, the GM also has to define **zones**. Zones are the loose measurements of distance in *Strays*, breaking a big area down into smaller, bite-sized, chunks, normally just for a conflict.

The rule of thumb is that anyone in the same zone as you, you can interact with. You can also move one zone away, for free (as part of any other action), as long as there's no one trying to stop you from moving.

You have to use an action to move two zones (and a GM might let you move more, depending on the situation), or if someone is trying to keep you from going from zone to zone (when a dog catcher is trying to block you into an alley, you bust out an 'overcome' action to get past him, for instance).

RABBIT FAST:
CONFLICTS!

1: Set the scene.

2: Decide whose action it is.

3. Take an action on your turn, if needed, defend against actions on someone else's turn.

Zones aren't as strict and well-defined as five-foot-squares or meter-by-meter measurements in some games. Remember, the story comes first! Zones are shorthand measurements, not hard and fast rules.

Mittens talks big about not liking humans, but he's determined to keep the bullies out of his little buddy's zone.

Who's Up First?

Strays has two options for initiative. The default is to determine turn order based on the story, and what would make the most sense and look the coolest if you were a camera following these characters around.

The character who clearly escalated the conflict goes first. Whoever the players and GM agree it makes sense to have

started the fight takes the first action (this is super easy if it's an ambush).

Then, after that character acts, they *choose* another character (player or NPC, whoever makes sense) to go next. Make the decision for who goes next based on what makes sense in the story and where the action is right then.

Then *that* character chooses who goes next, and so on and so on, until everyone has gone once (that finishes the turn). Like a fight scene on a tv show or in a movie, follow the action from character to character.

GM note? It's often easiest to lump all of the bad guys in a scene together when you use this method.

Whoever goes last in the turn then chooses who goes first in the next turn…and it can be *them*! Getting these "back to back" actions can make great dramatic sense, and it can also be mechanically advantageous (getting to create an advantage, then attack, for example).

We're big fans of this narrative method of initiative, but if you prefer a little 'crunchier' way to figure it out, you can compare Quick and Careful approaches. For physical conflicts, whoever has the highest Quick goes first, and for social or mental conflicts, the character with the best Careful (who listens intently for trouble!) gets to act first. Then just count

your way down the Quick and Careful approaches until everyone has acted, and start a new turn.

GMs, it's simplest if you pick your most advantageous NPC to determine your place in the turn order, and let all your NPCs go at that time. But if you have a good reason to determine turn order individually for all your NPCs, go right ahead.

Ouch! Damage, Stress, and Consequences

When an attack hits, it deals **shifts** of damage. You measure shifts of damage by comparing the attack and the defense

Mittens has taken some stress here...
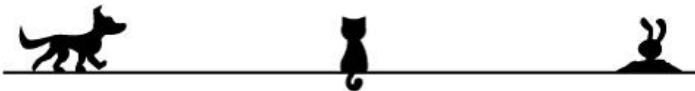
roll. If Ranger clobbers a bad guy with a +4 attack, and the opponent had a +2 defense roll total, they take two shifts of damage (the difference between rolls).

When you take damage, two things can happen:

- You suffer **stress** and/or **consequences**, but you stay in the fight.
- You get **taken out**, which means you're out of the scene!

What Is Stress?

Stress damage is being tired or irritated, getting a little scuffed up but not really hurt very badly. Characters are almost always going to take stress damage first, *then* want to take consequences.

Your **stress track** is a row of three boxes. When you take stress, you put a

...but Vixen clobbers the mean dog and saves the day!

check mark in a stress box, to absorb the damage; Box 1 soaks up one stress, Box 2 is good for two stress, and Box 3 takes three.

You can only check one stress box for any single hit, but you *can* check a stress box and take one or more consequences at the same time. You can't check a stress box that already has a check mark in it!

If you can't absorb all your damage with stress boxes, you have to move on to consequences.

What Are Consequences?

Consequences are more serious than stress marks. A consequence is longer-lasting damage that means you got roughed up pretty badly, and they don't go away very quickly. What's more, a consequences is a new aspect, showing how badly you're hurt (and since it's an aspect, meanies can use them to clobber you some more).

Characters can take three types of consequences, a mild consequence (2 shifts), a moderate consequence (4 shifts), and a severe consequences (6 shifts). This represents the number of shifts of the hit the consequence absorbs.

Remember that whoever dealt a consequence gets one free invoke of that

consequence (or they can give that free invoke to a teammate), which means once someone starts to win a fight, they can often pick up speed and keep winning thanks to free bonuses! The more hurt you are, the more vulnerable you become.   hit you) gets one free invocation on that consequence.

If you can't absorb all of a hit with stress boxes *and* consequences, you're in some real trouble, because you're about to get taken out!

Ranger got pretty dinged up, but she'll probably be okay. Licking is the secret to doggie first aid.

Taken Out?   That Doesn't Sound Good!

Getting **taken out** means you're out of the action for the rest of the scene. Whoever takes a character out gets to narrate what their hit did, and how they took their opponent out.

Being taken out might mean running away with your tail between your legs (from a mental conflict, especially), or it could mean getting clobbered so hard you're knocked out.

In your default *Strays* game, players are Nice critters out to protect, love, and entertain, they're not adventurers out to kill stuff willy-nilly! Taking out a bad guy normally means scaring them off or making them quit fighting, and if *Strays* are being too bloodthirsty – clawing everything up or biting too much! – the GM is free to dock them "Nice points" by taking away a Fate point and reminding them they're supposed to be nicer than that.

Giving In

There's one last way to control the story in a conflict, and that's by taking a look at a bad situation, realizing things just aren't going to work out this fight, and choosing to **concede** or **give in.** You have to do this before your opponent rolls their dice in the conflict, though!

Giving in is mostly like being taken out, except you get to narrate what happens to you. The other side of the conflict still wins, and they get something big from you, but you get to maintain a little dignity, and you also get rewarded with some Fate points. You get one point for giving in, and you also get one Fate point

for every consequence you had prior to throwing in the towel.

Giving in is a way for a player to high-tail it outta there when things get too hot, but it's also a good tool for the GM if he wants a bad guy who can keep coming back for more. The winning side still gets what they were after in the conflict – they get the food they were fighting over, bullies leave a neighborhood kid alone, or they chase off the mean dog catcher – but the losing side is still on the loose, still has a stack of Fate points, and can come back later.

Mia's pretty sure that toys make everything better, even consequences.

Getting Better: Recovering from Stress and Consequences

Stress is easy. At the end of a scene, you just erase all your stress marks. Poof!

Consequences are another story. You've got to have a good in-game reason for a consequences to heal up (some friendly humans take you to the vet, or you get some good food and rest for a while), and you've also got to take some time to heal.

- **Mild consequence:** They go away at the end of a scene, as long as you get the chance to rest
- **Moderate consequence:** Rest and heal, but wait until the end of the session.
- **Severe consequence:** Heal up in-story so it makes sense, but wait until the end of the *scenario*.

Andy's not feeling too good, but his consequences are healing up with some help from the vet.

Moderate and Severe consequences last for several sessions, but you can still downgrade them over time ("deep cuts" might turn into "nasty scratches" or something, as it starts to heal).

Aspects and Fate Points

In *Strays*, an **aspect** is an important description of…well…anything! They can be a short phrase that describes a character ("heartthrob husky"), a scene or situation ("Crowded pet store"), or even a group ("cats so hungry they're mean").

The aspects you'll see the most are a character's aspects (like their high concept and trouble aspect), but aspects are all around you, in game, any time a GM describes a scene and the characters in it, there are some aspects hiding out!

You get to use aspects in-game not just to understand what's going on, but to manipulate it and get some bonuses on dice rolls. You do this by spending **Fate points** (remember those little coins or glass beads or other handy counters you're using? That's for these guys).

When you **invoke an aspect**, you spend a Fate point, and get to modify your roll as appropriate. If you know that big dog chasing you has an aspect of "huge brute," you can try to get away by ducking through a small space, or turning really quickly, right? To get a bonus on your Quick (or Clever!) roll when you try it, you can spend a Fate point, invoke that "huge brute" aspect on the junkyard mutt, and get a bonus to your roll.

Daisy has lots of aspects. One of them is "expert at begging."

Invoking an aspect (and giving a Fate point to the GM) lets you do one of the following:

- Add +2 to your roll.
- Reroll your dice (you normally want this if you roll a -3 or less on your Fate dice).
- Add +2 to your opponent's difficulty.
- Help a buddy (if it makes sense in-story), and give them a +2 to a roll.

You can only invoke an aspect on time per die roll, but you *can* invoke more than one aspect at a time, or invoke one aspect multiple times across different rolls.

Also, remember, you get to choose to invoke an aspect *after* you roll your dice! You don't have to worry about wasting Fate points, you can always see if you need to invoke it, instead of declaring it ahead of time.

What Kinds of Aspects Are There?

Character Aspects: These are the first aspects you thought of when you made your character, stuff like your **high concept** and **trouble**. Non-player characters have them, too! They describe a character and what that character is known for, what they're good at, and that sort of thing.

High-Strung Chihuahua is a character aspect, and so is Hulking Brute, Dog Show Darling, Nastiest Cat In The Alley, or Brave But Bumbling Bunny.

Situation Aspects: Situation, or scene, aspects are the ones that describe what's going on around the characters, what's in the environment.

Many situation aspects are long-lasting and might as well be permanent, but others are limited by whether it's day or night, or by something specific to the action that's going on. Characters can also **create an advantage** to discover or make new situation aspects, like Slick Floor, Broken Glass, or Wet Paint.

Scene aspects like Dark Warehouse, Grassy Field, Spooky Woods, and Confusionly Huge Mansion are all possible, and so are waaaay more. There are tons of possibilities out there!

The other action you'll see interacting with situation aspects are **overcomes**. You can try to use an overcome aspect to not get distracted in the Meaty, Delicious, Butcher's Shop, to navigate the Overgrown Lot without getting snarled up in the bushes, or to run through the Burning Building and show firefighters where a baby is.

Overcome:

p. 19

Consequences: Consequences are temporary aspects that you take when you get hurt. They work just like a character aspect, except that they're basically always bad, and they go away over time. We talk about consequences in *Ouch! Damage, Stress, and Consequences*.

Damage:

p. 35

Boosts: A boost is a one-shot aspect, that goes away – even if you didn't use it! – at the end of the scene it was created in. Most of the time that you see a boost in game, it's the result of an **attack** roll (either a **success with style**, if you decide to do one less damage in order to gain a shift, or a tie). Boosts don't require a Fate point to take advantage of, but they go away very quickly, so you normally want to use them for an early advantage in a conflict.

Attack:

p. 21

When it's time to describe a boost that you earn, remember, they're temporary! Normally it'll be something like Head Is Spinning, Distracted, or Caught Off Guard; stuff that will go away pretty quickly, but can still give you a temporary advantage.

O'Neill has an aspect of 'Misses You Guys.'

What Else Do You Do With Aspects?

Spending Fate points to get a bennie from aspects isn't all they do in the game, though. You can also **establish a fact** through an aspect, or **compel** them.

Make Something True

You can **establish a fact** with an aspect without even having to roll dice, spend a

Fate point, or do anything else. Just remember that *aspects are always true*.

If one of your character's concepts is *Friend of the Animal Underground*, you're establishing a couple things. First off, there's an animal underground organization, right? And second, you're a member, or at least an ally. Establishing those facts gives the GM lots of plot hooks, and creates some direction for a game. Right away, your GM knows you want there to be some secret organization of animals out to free other critters and help the world and stuff like that, and that your character is part of it.

Likewise, with aspects like *Toughest Mutt on Clancy Street* (Clancy Street has a reputation in town for lots of dogs scrapping over it, and your character thinks she can beat 'em all up!), *Mama Kincaid's Favorite Kitty* (there's a sweet old lady who feeds cats, and she's taken a liking to you), or *The Only Bunny To Outrun Gunny Greyhound* (there's a mean dog chasing rabbits for fun, and your character had some trick to get away). You can build in all sorts of friends, or enemies, in a character this way, and help color the campaign.

Remember, though, that with great power comes great responsibility. Designing an aspect is tricky business, and you don't want to take all the fun out of the game by giving yourself an Aspect

like Best There Is At Everything, just to be able to have lots of chances to roll dice. Talk to your GM about your aspects before you pick them, and find fun ones that help you make the character you want, while still leaving you room to grow, and room for other players to shine! I've Got To Be The Best might work better in that case, to show your character is working hard to improve, while also giving the GM a chance to ask why your character is so driven.

At any rate, **establishing a fact** is a powerful trick for aspects, and part of what they bring to the table. Aspects, not just approaches, are what really define your character and help you to tell a neat story!

Migo didn't have to spend a Fate point establish the fact that this toy is awesome.

Compelling Aspects

Last but not least, aspects help you earn Fate points (just like aspects help you spend them!). Whenever one of your aspects gets you into trouble, makes your life a little harder, or introduces some complications to the plot, that aspect is being **compelled**. This happens one of two ways:

Decision compels: This type of compel forces you to make a hard choice, maybe for some sort of responsibility you have, or a negative character trait that keeps you from thinking clearly. Maybe chasing those squirrel thieves into the dark woods is dangerous, but you've got *Scruffy Justice* as an aspect, and the GM wants you to go running off after them. Your character could also be *Touchy About His Ear*, so if someone makes a snide comment about your scars, you're probably going to flip out and start a conflict.

Event compels: The other way an aspect being compelled can make your life miserable (but net you a Fate point!) is when the GM just has stuff happen based on your aspects. When you have an aspect like *Turned My Back On The Black Cat Society*, and your GM has a secret cabal of black cats show up and ninja-sneak all over town causing trouble? Yeah, that's your fault, so you get a Fate point for it.

Compelling an aspect is one way the GM can keep drama and action going, but it's also a key component of the Fate point economy, because they've gotta bribe you to do the 'hard' thing when they try a decision compel, for instance.

When the GM wants you to step up and do something dangerous or difficult due to an aspect, they offer you a Fate point for it. You two can talk it over for a few seconds, you figure out just what the GM is after, and then you have to decide if you're going to take it or not.

If you accept the Fate point, then the GM steers your character into hardship or danger (but you get a sweet, sweet, point for it!). If you refuse? *You* have to pay a Fate point to the GM.

Which means if you're out of Fate points, the decision isn't yours to make!

Venus isn't above begging for Fate points. Or for anything else.

Never trust a smiling GM!

Merlin isn't a big fan of his GM, Tony, having a stack of Fate points to sling around.

Wait, The GM Gets Them, Too?

That's right! Sometimes you have to pay the GM a Fate point (like when you turn down a compel), but that's not the only time the GM gets Fate points to spend!

As the GM, you start each scene with one Fate point per PC. You can spend these Fate points to invoke aspects (and consequences) against the PCs, just like PCs get to do it against you!

Any time a PC compels an NPCs aspect, that "paid" Fate point goes to the GM's pool. Likewise, any time a PC refuses a compel, that Fate point goes to the GM to use.

Stunts

Stunts little bonuses that a character gets, above and beyond their approaches. Stunts represent a special trick your character can do, something they're especially good at, or a special knack they have for one specific situation.

You buy stunts for your character by spending refresh; essentially, by starting with less Fate points every game, you, instead, get a bonus to something neat every time you do it (without having to spend a Fate point).

Like aspects, we don't supply you with a big list of all the stunts that are allowed. Half the fun is making your own, to fit your character just right!

That said, there are two basic types of stunts, and we can group them into these two categories pretty handily.

First off, there are stunts that give you a +2 when you're using a certain approach, but only under special circumstances.

Here's a fancy way to spell it out (like a math problem), that's probably way more complicated than it needs to be:

Because I **[describe some way you're cool]**, I get a +2 when I **[Carefully, Cleverly, Flashily, Forcefully, Quickly, or Sneakily]** try to **[attack, defend, create an advantage, or**

overcome], but only when **[special circumstances]**.

That's a mouthful, huh? But it's really not that bad! These stunts are actually really pretty straightforward to use.

Because I'm a spooky black cat, I get a +2 when I sneakily create an advantage in the dark. See? Just piece it all together, one little bit at a time. What makes your character special, what approach do they use for it, and what's the special circumstance?

Because I'm a great runner, I get a +2 when I quickly overcome something by running and jumping. Because I'm super adorable, I get a +2 when cleverly creating an advantage based on humans helping me out. Because I hate being tied up, I get a +2 when I cleverly overcome a leash, collar, etc.

Stunts, like everything else, only exist to help the story out. So if it makes for a cool scene, most of the time your GM will let you have some flexibility when it comes to a specific action type (like allowing it for overcome and create an advantage). Don't get greedy, though! If you're getting too much mileage out of a stunt, maybe it's best to improve an approach, instead.

The other type of stunt is a little more complicated, but also way more flexible. Instead of just granting a +2 to a certain roll, it lets you do something that the

rules normally don't allow, or it lets you bend the rules in certain circumstances, or that sort of thing.

Here's our formula for that one:

Because I **[describe some way that you are exceptional, have a cool bit of gear, or are otherwise awesome]**, once per game session I can **[describe something cool you can do]**.

It's easier to write, but really more complicated than the first type. It's really important to talk to your GM about this second type of stunt, because in some games you might not even need them! One of our iconic characters, Ranger, has a stunt that lets her clearly understand what a human is saying (normally a Stray has to spend a Fate point and use an appropriate aspect to understand humans). In *your* game, though, maybe you don't even need that stunt, because your GM might want to make it easier for the players to understand humans.

Some other examples of this type of stunt might be *Because I know every mutt in town, once per game session I know just the gal for the job*, or *Because I'm the Queen of Shortcuts, once per game session I can show up somewhere in the nick of time*.

Don't freak out if stunts intimidate you. They shouldn't! They exist to help you out. But if you can't think of any neat ones right now, it's okay. You can just start with a higher refresh, and have more Fate points to spend every session. Then, during gameplay, if you see yourself constantly doing the same trick (and you'd like a +2 to it!), or if you keep using an aspect to know something, or to make something happen (and you'd like to do that for free, once per session), maybe it's a good idea to talk to your GM and look into designing a stunt or two!

Nothing helps Ranger refresh quite like a good belly rub.

Teaching An Old Dog New Tricks: Character Advancement

Cats sometimes figure out how to open doors. Rabbits can learn all sorts of neat tricks. Dogs are famous for learning new commands all the time. Characters in *Strays* get better, just like pets learn new stuff, and just like kids get smarter every day!

Milestones

Characters in *Strays* get better by wrapping up story arcs, which is when the GM rewards everyone with **milestones**. After stopping a particularly nasty bad guy, after freeing a bunch of animals, after accomplishing anything that's a big campaign goal, the GM should stop, take a look at the group and their great deeds, and dole out a little extra lovin'.

Milestones in *Strays* follow the basic *Fate* guidelines of being tiered three ways, Minor, Significant, and Major.

Domina wants to use a minor milestone to get three bones. That's not how any of this works, but she doesn't care. She loves bones.

Minor Milestones

A **minor milestone** usually occurs at the end of a session of play, so at the end of every evening or afternoon you spend. Minor milestones aren't too big a deal, they mostly let you custom tweak your character a little, and fix something that's maybe been nagging at you a little. Minor milestones are especially nice early in a campaign, when you're still figuring out your character (and the system).

A minor milestone lets you do one of the following things (but a super cool GM will probably let you do more than one,

if it helps get your character like you want 'em):

- Switch the ratings of any two approaches.
- Rename one aspect that isn't your high concept.
- Exchange one stunt for a different stunt.
- Choose a new stunt (and adjust your refresh as needed).

Consequences: p. 37

You can also clear out a Moderate Consequence if it's been around for a few sessions, during the wrap-up of a minor milestone.

Poseidon is a big fan of sticks. When the lowrider retriever gets a big enough milestone, maybe he can buy a favorite stick as a stunt.

Significant Milestones

A **significant milestone** usually occurs at the end of a big plot event, maybe once every three sessions or so. If completing

one day of doggie obstacle course training is a minor milestone, a significant might be graduating from the whole course.

Significant milestones let you do everything a minor milestone does, but they also let your character not just change, but *grow*. A significant milestone means you're learning new things, you're using those things to help people, and you're getting way better at the stuff you're already good at.

In addition to the benefit of a minor milestone:

- Switch the ratings of any two approaches.
- Rename one aspect that isn't your high concept.
- Exchange one stunt for a different stunt.
- Choose a new stunt (and adjust your refresh as needed).

…you also gain *both* of the following:

- If you have a severe consequence that's been around for at least two sessions, you can clear it.
- Raise the bonus of one **approach** by one (remember, you can't have an approach better than +5, though!).

Approaches: pp. 24

George likes to dress up for fancy dinner parties, weddings, and major milestones.

Major Milestones

Major milestones happy pretty rarely, and only after the players accomplish a major goal; defeating a big bad guy, finishing their exploration of a haunted mansion, neat stuff like that.

These milestones show you're getting better and better. After a major milestone or two, the GM is really going to be able to up their game, presenting these experienced strays with new enemies, more challenging encounters, and crazier adventures.

Achieving a major milestone confers the benefits of a significant milestone *and* a minor milestone.

- Switch the ratings of any two approaches.
- Rename one aspect that isn't your high concept.
- Exchange one stunt for a different stunt.
- Choose a new stunt (and adjust your refresh as needed).
- If you have a severe consequence that's been around for at least two sessions, you can clear it.
- Raise the bonus of one approach by one (remember, you can't have an approach better than +5, though!).

But in addition, you may do *both* of the following:

- Take an additional point of refresh, which you may immediately use to purchase a stunt if you wish.
- Change your character's high concept.
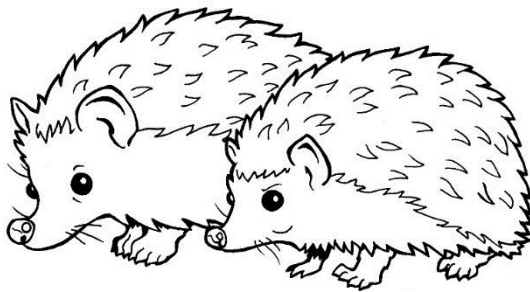
Stanford and Little Bear are proud of all your accomplishments and milestones, even the minor ones. They don't judge stuff for being little.

Boudicca is ready to go. As a brilliant, gorgeous, and super experienced dog-GM, she can skip this chapter. YOU probably shouldn't.

Being the GM

The GM has a ton of work to do in any RPG, but we've tried to make the work pretty fun in *Strays*, and *Fate Accelerated* leaves lots of room for creativity!

Tell Cool Stories!

A **campaign** the basic building block of just about any RPG, and *Strays* is no exception. A campaign is the overarching theme of your game. Our default theme in *Strays* is that the player characters are semi-magical servants of Santa Claus or some other mythical pro-good-children figure, who are helping out their neighborhood and trying to make the place a little better.

Within that framework, you could add direction for your specific campaign by having your characters focus on one or two aspects of that. Your players' aspects are one great way to develop plot hooks, looking into how they've helped you create the game world by adding flavor. Good guys they've helped in the past, bad guys they want to stop, specific locations in your campaign's setting…you can get a lot of ideas from aspects!

Even moreso, of course, is talking to your players themselves and seeing if there are particular hooks they're interested in. Do they want to look after a particular family's child, focus on busting friendly critters out from under the nose of a mean pet shop owner, or anything else in particular?

The default setting for *Strays* isn't the only way you can play a game about

talking dogs and cats, of course! Just look at our media inspirations in the back of the book, and you can get way more ideas. Players could be one gang of cats out to brawl in the junkyard with other neighborhood alley cats, a trio of pets trying to get home on an epic journey, or just about anything else.

Changing some of the mechanics for violence could let you try to run a more adult game about survival on the mean streets, even, if you're not so concerned about using *Strays* for introducing kiddos to the hobby.

At the end of the day, a **campaign** is just another way of saying "your idea for a game," or even "your game's high concept aspect."
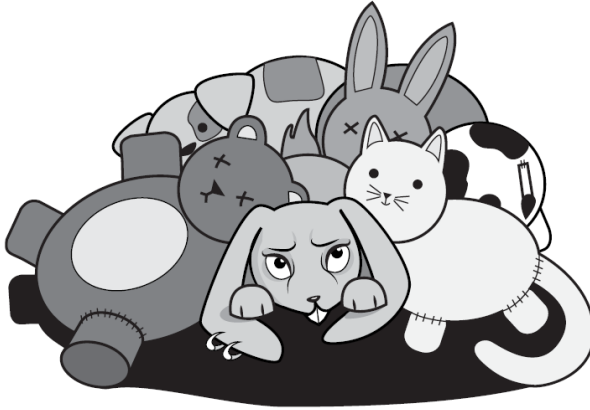

Vixen is a big fan of campaigns that center on her freeing animals...maybe even really big ones, from zoos!

Build Scenarios and Run Game Sessions

A **scenario** is one short bite-sized chunk of story, like you'd probably see in one episode (or maybe a special two-parter) of a tv show. It's an easily understood, clearly delineated start-to-finish story arc.

Then again, sometimes Vixen is also a big fan of telling smaller stories, like the time she had to hide out by pretending to be a stuffed animal.

Scenarios

A scenario needs two things: A bad guy with a goal, and a reason the PCs can't ignore it. So the PCs have to be after something, and there should be someone (or something) between them and what they want. Pretty simple, right?

Bad guy with a goal: You've probably figured this out already. The campaign's

main opposition, or one of his allies, is probably your bad guy.

Something the PCs can't ignore: Now you have to give the PCs a reason to care. The built-in pseudo-setting for *Strays* is normally plenty of reason for them to care, but the fact you're playing with adorable fuzzy-wuzzy critters should be enough to help any reluctant players. No one wants to let baby bunnies get hurt or something, do they?

Running Game Sessions

Now that your bad guy is doing something the PCs will pay attention to, it's time to start them off. Sometimes the best way to do that, especially for the first session of a new story arc, is to put them right in the action. Once the PCs know why they should care about what's going on, you just get out of the way and let them take care of it.

That said, there are a bunch of tasks the GM needs to perform to run the session:

- **Run scenes:** Who's there, what are they doing, and why?
- **Adjudicate the rules:** This rulebook should give you what you need to handle any disputes, but when in doubt, remember to keep the story moving. Look stuff up later!
- **Play the NPCs:** Your players control one character each, but you've gotta control everyone else!

Be sure to do funny voices some times. Players dig that.

- **Keep things moving:** Don't keep interrupting your players or anything, but try not to let 'em sweat the small stuff too badly. Don't let the story bog down and indecision creep in; sometimes, give 'em a nudge!

- **Make sure everyone has a chance to be awesome:** Not everyone needs to make a big, strong, combat monster. Let 'em sneak around, let 'em sway baddies to their side with heartfelt speeches, and let 'em all show off what their characters are good at. Especially when you're playing with kids, it's important to not let anyone get lost in the shuffle.

Ranger loves chances to be awesome, and playing catch with her human is always fun.

Setting Difficulty Levels

When another character is opposing a PC, their rolls provide the opposition in a conflict, contest, or challenge. But if there's no active opposition, you have to decide how hard the task is.

Low difficulties are best when you want to give the PCs a chance to show off and be awesome. **Difficulties near their approach ratings** are best when you want to provide tension but not overwhelm them. **High difficulties** are best when you want to emphasize how dire or unusual the circumstances are and make them pull out all the stops.

Rules of Thumb:

- If the task isn't very tough at all, give it a Mediocre (+0)—or just tell the player they succeed without a roll.
- If you can think of at least one reason why the task is tough, pick Fair (+2).
- If the task is extremely difficult, pick Great (+4).
- If the task is impossibly difficult, go as high as you think makes sense. The PC will need to drop some Fate points and get lots of help to succeed, but that's fine.

Bad Guys!

When you make a major bad guy, you can stat 'em up just like a normal character, with aspects, stunts, and all that. Save all that work for baddies who are meant to be real threats to the group, or who'll come back later, like these two:
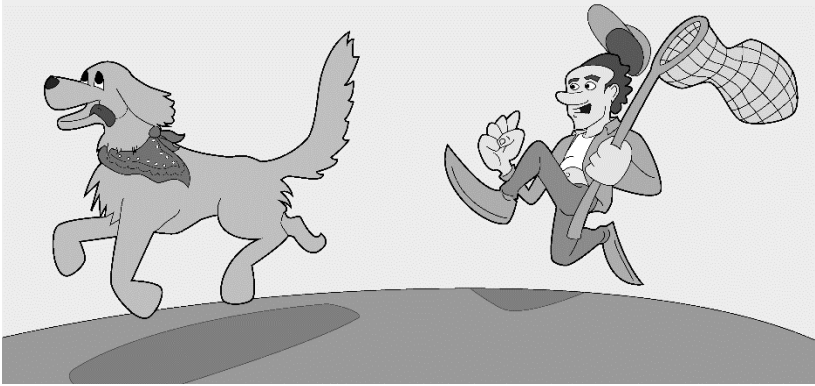
Ranger can run circles around this guy. It's a good thing, too!

DOG CATCHER

High Concept: Goofy Figure of Authority
Trouble: Lazy Government Employee
Other Aspects: *Hey, where's my net?; Why are cats so mean?; I'm on my way!*

APPROACHES

Careful:	Average	(+1)
Clever:	Mediocre	(+0)
Flashy:	Average	(+1)
Forceful:	Good	(+3)
Quick:	Fair	(+2)
Sneaky:	Fair	(+2)

STUNTS

This Ain't My First Rodeo! I gain a +2 bonus with Careful attacks when I try to catch a small critter with my net.
Radio, Rodeo, Whatever! Once per session, I can show up because humans have hollered for help when animals are being wild.

Woah, he looks mad. Luckily that chain slows him down!

JUNKYARD DOG

High Concept: Big, Nasty, Mean, Mutt
Trouble: Heavy Chain

Other Aspects: *This is my junk; I love chasing kids; Woof woof woof!*

APPROACHES

Careful:	Average	(+1)
Clever:	Average	(+1)
Flashy:	Fair	(+2)
Forceful:	Good	(+3)
Quick:	Fair	(+2)
Sneaky:	Mediocre	(+0)

STUNTS

Arroo! Once per session I can howl real loud and a bunch of other wild dogs will show up to back me up.
Boom! I get a +2 when I Forcefully bash something out of my way when I'm chasing someone.

Mooks: Other bad guys are **mooks**—unnamed baddies that are there to be more or less easily swept aside, giving your *Strays* a chance to shine.

Mooks are super easy to stat up (just like they're super easy to take down).

- Mooks get a +2 on one or two things they're *good* at.
- Mooks get a -2 on one or two things they're *bad* at.
- Mooks get a +0 on *everything else.*
- Mooks should have an aspect or two, even if they're really simply ones. "Stinky, mean, alley cat," or "Sneaky squirrel nut-thief" are enough.
- Mooks only need a [1] or maybe a [1] and [2] stress box, and no consequences.

Groups of Mooks: Sometimes, instead of tracking each individual mook, you can keep the action going by running mooks in **groups**. Each of these groups acts like a single character and has a set of stats just like a single mook would.

- Pick a couple things they're skilled (+2) at (and sometimes that'll be "ganging up" or some variation).

- Pick a couple of things they're bad (-2) at.
- Give 'em an aspect or two.
- Give them one stress box for every member of the group, or maybe for every two members.

Mittens has his paws full with these alleycats.

Sample Mooks:

YEAH, DAWG

Aspects: *Pack Follower; Brave Around His Buddies; Hungry*

Skilled (+2) at: Ganging up, barking really loudly, looking mean.

Bad (-2) at: Thinking for himself

Stress: [1] [2]

Quotes: "Yeah!" (after the pack leader says *anything*)

"This is our street!"

NINJA CAT NEWBIE

Aspects: *Black As Night; Shadowy Intentions; Bad Luck For Hire*

Skilled (+2) at: Sneaking Around, Looking Cool, Swiping With Her Claws

Bad (-2) at: Being Brave Whenever She's Not Ambushing Someone

Stress: [1]

Quotes: "My employer is…most displeased."

"Hi-yah!"

"Ack!"

SEWER RAT

Aspects: *Stinky; Starving; Sneaky*

Skilled (+2) at: Skulking Around, Digging, Looking Scary When There's Lots of Them.

Bad (-2) at: Making Good Life Choices, Staying Clean

Stress: none, one hit is all it takes

Quotes: "What'cha got there, chief?"

"You, uh, you gonna eat that?"

"Hey, take it easy, pal!"

Totally Optional Stuff That We Think is Neat

This next little section is where we're going to go off the rails from a generic *Fate Accelerated* game, and offer up some house rules, some setting suggestions, and some things that might make *Strays* play a little differently from most *FAE* games.

Tangles

First up, for increased character customization, we like **tangles**. Tangles are what lots of other RPGs might call "edges and flaws" or "advantages and disadvantages," and function to show that your stray is extra-specialized at something (and, as a result, not so good at something else).

Just like aspects and stunts, we don't offer an exhaustive list of tangles. At heart, a tangle is a +1 on a specific approach or action, and a -1 on, basically, the opposite of that.

Tangles offer a way to help players customize their characters and show off a little, which is cool. They sometimes also offer a way for characters to get *really* good at stuff they're going to try all the time, and to take a penalty on something they hope won't ever come

up. Don't let 'em trick ya! Just like a well-worded aspect can be a positive and a negative thing, a tangle is meant to provide a bonus *and* a penalty, or it isn't doing a good job.

Nice Points

As a supplement (or even an alternative) to Fate points, *Strays* offers up **Nice points** as a way of keeping the campaign with a G or PG rating. Especially in our default setting, *Strays* is meant to be played with kiddos who are eager to tell stories about fuzzy critters doing good, not dungeon-delving adventurers out to get rich (or die trying), swinging swords to hack everything to pieces, and blasting enemies with fireballs.

While the rules for consequences and taking out baddies already allow plenty of leeway here – a "taken out" enemy might just tuck tail and surrender, they're not supposed to be *dead* or anything – it might be necessary to lay it on a little thick, and remind players that they're good-natured rabbits and hamsters and dogs and stuff, by downplaying the violence even more.

Nice points basically work as an **additional, implied, trouble aspect** that everyone has, pointing out that they're expected to be *helping* people and animals, not *hurting* them. Barking to scare away a bully is one thing, chasing that bully and biting him after he's given

up? That's not very nice…or, rather, very Nice.

Sometimes naughty critters need a swipe on the nose from a cat's sharp claws, or a boot upside the head from a rabbit's strong legs, sure, but the default in *Strays* should be a light-hearted, cartoonish, level of violence.

If a player gets a little too into the scratching and biting, try docking them a Fate point here and there (the same as you can with any other Trouble aspect, if they don't quite follow it). If they don't take the hint, it might be time to have a little sit-down and make sure that everyone is on the same page with their expectations for the game. Maybe they're ready for bold adventurers after all, and it's time to change the tone of your game, but maybe it's also something you can work out with a good talk.

Sample Characters

Next up, we've got our sample characters – a dog, cat, rabbit, and bird! – that you can use in your game just like they are, or that folks can use as inspiration for their own *Strays*.

MITTENS THE DESTROYER

High Concept: *One Cool Cat*
Trouble: *Acts Like A Loner*
Other Aspects: *Pfft, Whatever; Sneaky Like A Ninja; I Guess My Collar's Not That Bad*

APPROACHES

|		
Careful:	Average	(+1)
Clever:	Mediocre	(+0)
Flashy:	Fair	(+2)
Forceful:	Average	(+1)
Quick:	Fair	(+2)
Sneaky:	Good	(+3)

STUNTS [Refresh 2]

Super Sharp Claws: I gain a +2 bonus on Forceful attacks…as long as my player hisses and swipes at the air like they've got claws, too.

Tasty: Once per session I can ignore the Nice point penalty for finishing off a small Naughty critter (like a mouse or bird)…as long as I either eat them (gross!), or leave them as a gift to a nearby human (gross!).

TANGLES

Fine Feline: I get a +1 to Sneaky whenever I'm actively stalking prey, but a -1 to any rolls whenever I'm wet, or would become wet on a failure.
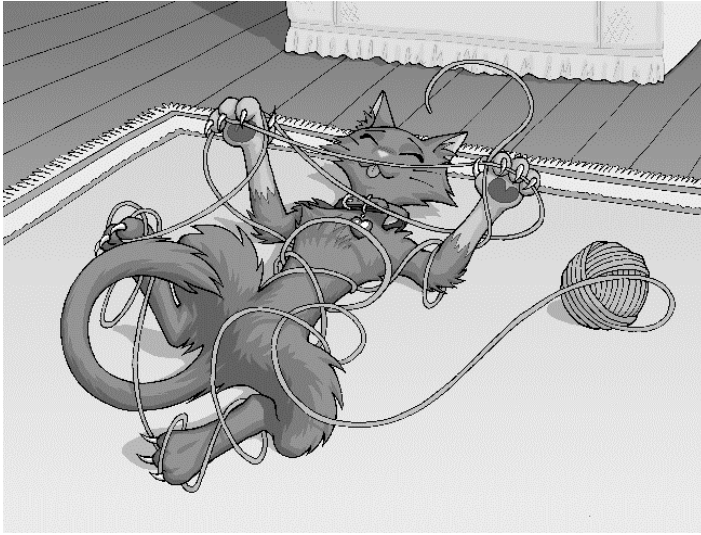
Awwww yeah. Yarn!

Mittens (who insists he be called "The Destroyer") is a solid archetypical cat, with lots of generically cat-y stuff going for him. He's sneaky (like a ninja!), he's got an aloof, feline, attitude, and in a pinch he's got sharp little claws that can get him outta trouble.

He makes a big show of not liking humans, but deep down, he loves his collar and the little girl that picked it out for him.

He's a good character for a player that likes to show off, that tries to act really cool all the time, or that really, really, likes yarn.

VIXEN

High Concept: *Radical Rabbit Rescuer*
Trouble: *Maternal Instinct*
Other Aspects: *Catch Me If You Can; I Can Take 'Em!; Shh, Did You Hear That?*

APPROACHES

Careful:	Fair	(+2)
Clever:	Good	(+3)
Flashy:	Average	(+1)
Forceful:	Mediocre	(+0)
Quick:	Fair	(+2)
Sneaky:	Average	(+1)

STUNTS   **[Refresh**   **1]**
Big Floppy Ears: I gain a +2 bonus on Careful defenses when someone is trying to sneak up on me.
Really Strong Legs: I gain a +2 bonus when I Quickly defend in combat by hopping around.
Cages Are Stupid: I gain a +2 bonus when I Cleverly overcome an obstacle like a lock, latch, snare, or door.

TANGLES
D'aww: I'm so cute I get a +1 when I try to look harmless, but I take a -1 any time I try to look scary.

Vixen is in charge, while Raul gets to work on these cages, she keeps everyone moving to safety.

Vixen is good for older players, who might like her leadership skills and cleverness. She's fast like most rabbits, but she's got clear goals (freedom for animals) and a take-charge attitude that make her the default leader of our group of iconic characters.

RANGER

High Concept: *Good-Natured Puppy Dog*
Trouble: *Easily Excitable*
Other Aspects: *I Love Playing; Pick On Someone Your Own Size!; We're A Pack Now*

APPROACHES

Careful: Average   (+1)
Clever: Fair   (+2)
Flashy: Average   (+1)
Forceful: Good   (+3)
Quick: Fair   (+2)
Sneaky: Mediocre   (+0)

STUNTS   **[Refresh 2]**
I Know Who's A Good Girl!: Once per session I may declare that I clearly understand what a human is trying to say without spending a Fate point.
**Big Loud Barker**: I gain a +2 bonus to Forceful attacks when I'm being loud and intimidating.

TANGLES
Family Stray: I suffer a -1 penalty on scavenging rolls on my own, but gain a +1 bonus on begging rolls towards friendly humans.

Ranger is the biggest, strongest, and bravest of our archetype heroes! Ranger loves humans, and she still remembers a lot of the tricks she learned before she was a stray.

She's a good choice for any player that wants to be brash, and bold, and eager to help.
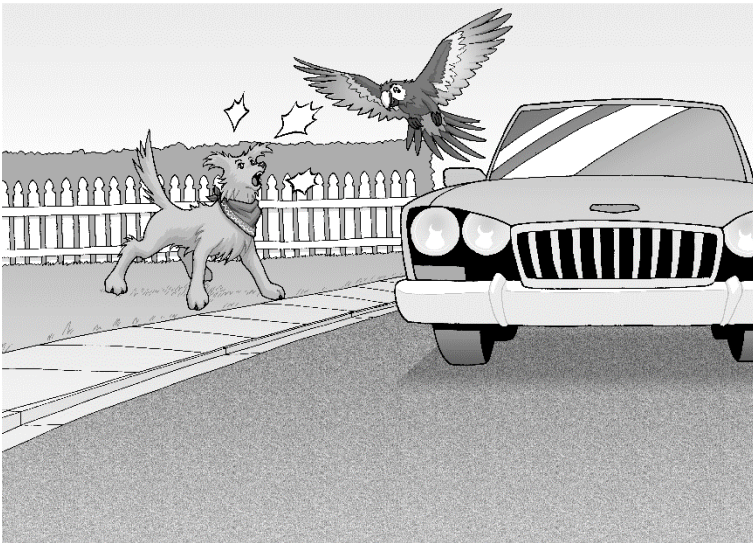
Don't worry, Raul, Ranger's got your back. That car won't get'cha!

Last up is **Raul**, who our *Strays* backers helped us create! Raul seems like a show-off on the surface, but deep down, he's, uh, yeah…a big show-off.

Like Ranger, Raul remembers being a pet, and can do neat stuff, like talk to humans! If a player wants to use flight and tricks to play the game, Raul might be a good fit.

RAUL

High Concept: *Prettily Plumaged Parrot*
Trouble: *Melodramatic Show-Off*
**Other Aspects: "*Raul Wants A Cracker;" No Net Can Catch Raul!; Behold, My Splendid Wings*

APPROACHES

Careful:	Average	(+1)
Clever:	Fair	(+2)
Flashy:	Good	(+3)
Forceful:	Average	(+1)
Quick:	Fair	(+2)
Sneaky:	Mediocre	(+0)

STUNTS   [Refresh   1]

Flappy Wings: I gain a +2 bonus on Flashy defenses when I can show off in front of anyone besides my attacker.

Grippy Talons: I gain a +2 bonus when I Forcefully swoop in and snatch small objects.

I Can Say That: Once per session I can clearly mimic a human phrase I've heard before, without spending a Fate point.

TANGLES

Fantastic Flier, Bad Walker: I get a +1 to most rolls when I am able to use my flight to my advantage, but a -1 in enclosed spaces or when I'm otherwise unable to fly.

Animated Inspirations

Watership Down: Without a doubt the most "adult" movie that even remotely fits the genre, it's a fantastic film (and an even better book, as is often the case), but much darker than your standard animated talking animal fare. A grand adventure about a group of rabbits searching for a new home, it features political commentary, brutal combat scenes, and a haunting soundtrack.

Madagascar: While the stars are a little different mix of animals than your average *Strays* game, there's still a lot to love here (especially those penguins).

Milo and Otis: One of the few movies on this list that aren't cartoons, this tale about a tabby and a pug would fit right in and provide lots of inspiration for your average *Strays* table.

The AristoCats: This one is a seminal "cartoon critter" tale with a fantastic soundtrack and classic animation. Like many others on this list – and great inspiration for a *Strays* campaign! – it features some spoiled house-pets being pushed out of their comfort zone and

learning to adapt thanks to a rough-around-the-edges new friend.

101 Dalmatians: A canine matriarch and patriarch, a gaggle of spotted pups to fall in love with, and Cruella de Ville, one of cinema's most archetypical villains. What's not to love?

Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey: Another non-animated favorite, this one features a trio of friends – a rambunctious bulldog pup, a wise old retriever, and an aloof cat – trying to survive a cross-country hike. Great inspiration for a non-urban setting, with all the trouble they get in.

Bambi: While again featuring animals a little outside *Strays'* default scope – rabbits notwithstanding! – whether these critters are traditionally "pets" or not, there's a lot to love about this classic animated adventure.

Oliver and Company: One of the archetypical inspirations for *Strays*, this kid-friendly flick, inspired by the literary classic *Oliver Twist*, is a perfect *Strays* tale. It's a great piece to showcase some urban adventures for an assortment of player characters.

All Dogs Go To Heaven: A little rockier a production than some on this list, *All Dogs* has some darker tones that may not be quite family friendly, characters who are a little less totally appealing, and musical numbers that don't quite hit the spot; but it's still better than its sequels, and a solid production overall.

Lady and the Tramp: It's got a loving family, an indoor pet and a tramp-a-riffic outdoors stray, nefarious Siamese cats for baddies, and a plate full of spaghetti. How can it not be one of everyone's favorites?

Heathcliff: We're dating ourselves with our fondness for this mid-1980's cartoon, but as an alternate setting for *Strays*, you could do a lot worse. The titular orange cat and his back-alley antics were a big part of the story, but Riff-Raff and the Cadillac Cats (trying to get rich from their lair in the dumpster) were always there, too.

THE NICE LIST

Strays was a silly little idea that Wordsmith Games' founder had one day. It would have stayed that silly little idea if it wasn't for all the folks that pitched in their money, their time, their enthusiasm, or a little of each, to help make it happen. Without your support, this book wouldn't even be a book, the artwork wouldn't be awesome, and the pages wouldn't be filled with pictures of pets you've loved.

From the biggest pledges to the smallest, thank you.

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Bye everybody!

Sling dice, tell stories, and have fun out
there!

And everyone give Baby and Shelly a snuggle on your way out.

ANIMAL ADVENTURES
AND FUZZY FRIENDS!

STRAYS is a light-hearted, story-driven, game where players explore their new neighborhood, defend it from scary critters, and go on kid-friendly adventures. Play as dogs, cats, and other beloved pets, inspired by the animals all around us.

STRAYS is designed to be family friendly and welcoming to all manner of players, whether new or experienced, young or old. With a fast-moving system aimed at just a "PG" level of violence, and full of images inspired by dozens of fans' real-life pets, Strays is accessible, easy to learn, and perfect for younger gamers.

STRAYS was built using the Fate Accelerated roleplaying game, and is easily compatible with other Fate products!

GET READY. GET SET.
GO!

STRAYS

WORD SMITH GAMES

By Russell Zimmerman