

MODERNITY

Fate Edition

Fight the Darkness



A Contemporary Occult Noir Roleplaying Game

Full
Color

POWERED BY
FATE

Glacier
Peak
Games

MODERNITY

Fate Edition

Fight the Darkness



What if it's all true?

Glacier Peak Games

A Contemporary Occult Noir Roleplaying Game

POWERED BY
FATE[™]

Modernity Roleplaying Game, Fate Edition (First Edition)

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All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Even if hilarious. In the case of still-living evil monsters, human or otherwise, this is an oversight on the part of our teams of stalwart guardians who will rectify the situation as quickly as humanly possible. Nominations of evils to vanquish are always welcome.



Devil Red

Special thanks to the many men and women who provided countless hours of entertainment and invaluable lifetimes of inspiration through their art, their writing, and their games.

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“No hero is immortal till he dies.”

W. H. Auden



Dark heek

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AWAKEN TO MODERNITY

What is Modernity? Who are you? Why are we here?

“The thriller is not a recent invention.
It probably goes back to the dawn of storytelling.”

Lee Child

Our world is replete with tablet computers, smart phones, social networking, frou-frou coffees, and 24-hour faux news channels, but. . . Beneath that banal facade, under our mundane everyday lives, past our onerous commute, and outside our boring jobs. . .

Lurking just below the thin veneer of civilization are the government conspiracies we privately agonize over, the implacable evil that we secretly know is real, and all of the truly terrifying monsters under the bed we lie to our children about. The tabloid headlines in Modernity are real. . . And written in blood.

How will *you* fight the Darkness?

Contemporary for the hyperconnected, media-saturated, politically correct, information age that we all live in. **Occult** for the obvious paranormal and supernatural aspects of the world in Modernity. **Noir** for the bleak, hopeless odds that our heroes fight against to keep the shadowy things where they belong.

WHAT SORT OF HERO ARE YOU?

Modernity is a thriller setting where modern meets mystery, where fact fights fiction, and where skepticism slams headlong into superstition. The several billion denizens of an otherwise mundane Earth circa “right now” share reality with tabloid headlines that can be revealed in all their grisly truth by heroes who dare to uncover their secrets.

Artifacts of enormous power bend reality causing inexplicable disruptions and mysterious deaths. Bizarre, alien creatures appear, terrorizing those they prey upon in the dark. Conspiracies on a massive scale manipulate the population for inexplicable purposes, using bureaucracy as a tool and people as currency. Ambitious, amoral individuals and organizations profit by any means necessary, regardless of who is harmed in their pursuit of wealth and power.

Some modern buccaneers seek secrets kept by the wealthy, the powerful, and the privileged in order to leverage their knowledge of these arcane truths for personal gain. Some misguided crusaders delve deep into nightmares in order to shine the light of public disclosure upon the darkest truths. More altruistic heroes seek to guard the innocent denizens of this fragile little ball of mud and muck from the evils that lurk just out of sight, just out of reach, just beyond the edge of sanity, by investigating the mystery, finding the truth, and killing it.

Are you afraid of the dark?

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

This book contains a complete, detailed setting for roleplaying in the modern world, in all of its inexplicable, terrifying, socio-political, and occult mystery. This book also contains the necessary tools to open arcane portals into other, even more alien worlds than our own that are published in **other Modernity briefing books**.

THE CORE

This edition of Modernity is powered by the award-winning Fate Core Roleplaying Game created by Evil Hat. If you're already familiar with Fantastic Adventures in Tabletop Entertainment (Fate), you'll feel right at home. At least as comfortable as you can feel inside a home that is slowly savoring the digestion of every last sweet morsel of your tasty immortal soul.

If you're not familiar with the Fate Core rules, try to modulate the function of your amygdalae as best as you can while I explain more than you ever wanted to know. You'll find it frighteningly easy.

THE GOAL

The primary design goal for Modernity is to be fun for everyone, the players and the coordinator. If some part of the framework isn't expediting the fun, the group can decide how to change or ignore them in the name of having fun.

THE BELIEF

The game is not a simulation of reality. It's a game. The purpose of the game is to provide drama and fun for the participants. The game provides enough of a framework to represent a version of an imaginary reality that the participants will enjoy exploring and sharing.

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

Modernity, first and foremost, is about heroic characters imagined by the players who explore and interact with a universe imagined and shepherded by the coordinator for them all to share their stories in. Modernity is, at its core, a narrative-driven, story-oriented, character-focused game.

Your Duty

The duty of everyone at the table is to make everyone else at the table look awesome. Period.

Figure out how to make the others shine brightly when it's their turn in the spotlight, and they will do the same for you when your hero takes the stage in a scene.

Gameplay is generally comprised of a session containing a series of scenes describing the heroes' interaction with the story and its denizens. These scenes come to pass based on planning by the coordinator and toward goals set by the players.

During a session, the characters engage in various activities to achieve their goals. In various kinds of conflict, the outcomes often arrive in the form of rewards, but sometimes in the form of an opportunity to imagine a new character! (Like it or not, we all have to die sometime.)

Heroes and **actions** are complex enough to be described in several more separate sections, which makes up the majority of this framework along with the **conflict mechanic** that is the heart of the Modernity framework presented herein.

Summaries of most other game dimensions are presented in this book, but complete alternative milieus, entire conspiracies, and full-fledged operations rate their own separate reference tomes. Look for **many other great briefing books** from Glacier Peak!

TAKE A SEAT AT THE TABLE.

At the center of the Modernity framework is the group of players, which includes the coordinator, although I will usually mean just the non-coordinator players when I use the word *players* throughout the book.

Everyone involved in the game is collectively called “the table.” Everyone at the table has a mostly equal stake in the game and the story, with the forward momentum of the story controlled by the coordinator, at least when there isn’t **consensus**. (You don’t actually need a table, but it helps to have something to roll dice on.)

Table Expectations

There are a large number of things that everyone at the table has to come to an agreement on, not the least of which is the “game rating” that makes it fun for all. Carefully agree in advance on the use of profanity, adult situations, descriptions of gore, etc. Modernity game materials as-is are too much for some people.

The players, by exercising their imaginations, are front and center. The players should be having fun and engaged in interactive storytelling, not managing carefully hoarded resources against the unlimited might of a dictatorial “dungeon master.” The coordinator and the other players should be completely focused on the enjoyment of the collaborative, impromptu nature of shared storytelling, not on nitpicking each application of “the rules.”

To prevent pronoun insanity, the coordinator will be referred to using feminine pronouns while players and heroes will be referred to using masculine pronouns.

You and I both know boys are smart enough to be game coordinators and vice versa, it would just make you crazy to read “he, she, or it” in every other sentence. You’re welcome.



Deodor

THE PLAYERS

The players have the entertaining job of pretending to be characters in an imaginary world. The players decide what form their avatars, imaginary representatives, and alter egos take in conjunction with the limitations agreed upon with the rest of the table.

As with most roleplaying games there is a blurry line between player and character. That's why you came to an escapist fantasy in the first place, right? However, players play heroes, and (more so in Modernity than others) the distinction between the player doing or deciding something separately from the hero can be important.

This distinction particularly manifests itself in keeping player knowledge separate from character knowledge for the sake of the story, such as accepting **compels**. It's OK (and expected) that a player will delight in the complexities and horrors visited upon his character in the name of drama. It's in his best interest for bad things to happen to his hero, especially early in the story, to **earn more fate points**.

This player-hero distinction is especially important for the player who bears the title coordinator. . .

THE HEROES

Modernity assumes that any character with a positive **refresh rate** is a hero. Heroes are proactive and competent human beings. At least they try to be whenever possible. . . But things will often still not go their way!

Given a choice, heroes happen to things. . . Mostly.

Most people don't find playing helpless, sedentary characters to be fun. When you're choosing **aspects** for your hero, imagine how each develops a dramatic, full-fledged persona. Players with responsibility for only one character are playing the heroes.

The rest of the **Denizens of Modernity** (represented by the coordinator) are also characters, but they aren't the real heroes of the story.

THE COORDINATOR

The coordinator's job is to organize the details of the story and arbitrate the characters' interactions with the imaginary world and its denizens. The coordinator is part chief daydreamer, part story narrator, part referee, part arbitrator, and part dramatic physics engine.

The coordinator's primary concern is to keep things fun, lively, and moving right along. She has to keep the big picture in mind, all the while administering the vast quantity of minutiae. However, the coordinator should always remember that the game is the collaborative exploration of the shared story that the players and the coordinator tell each other, not her own personal fantasy.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

The gameplay elements create atmosphere, tension, and risk to the things our heroes care about. Overcoming long odds, surviving great risks, and achieving grand objectives results in a variety of rewards. Small, tangible rewards are generally granted at the end of a session and larger rewards at the end of an operation.

ADVENTURE

The primary reward of playing Modernity is the experience: the bells, the whistles, the fear, the joy, the terror, the lasers, the explosions, and the smoke generators. The shared storytelling is a reward unto itself for many players who are happy with any outcome of a tale well told.

EXPERIENCE

Our heroes become more experienced and more capable over time, assuming they live long enough to pass various types of **milestones**.

TREASURE

Financial gain comes in all shapes and sizes. It can be purely monetary, or it can be in the form of expensive items of equipment that enable greater capabilities for the characters. Treasure rewards are largely narrative flavor without mechanical impact, in the same way that heroes being down on their luck changes the feel of the game.

FATE POINTS

At the outset of every session, the players receive a set of fate points. They **earn additional fate points** along the way for a variety of different behaviors: extreme heroism, voluntarily taking on challenges when aspects are **compelled**, when forced to make a **Decision** contrary to their rational best interests (for the sake of character development and drama), spectacular roleplaying, when they complete objectives in an amazing way or “do the right thing” in spite of difficult choices or moral ambiguity, when they suffer the cruel whims of fate as **Events** inevitably do not go their way, and when they otherwise act in an altruistic fashion or contrary to their self-interest in a believable fashion. Any fate points you accumulate along the way, are yours to keep for future sessions.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

All you need to get started on your adventure is one person to be the coordinator, one or more other players, an idea for where the story should go, and this book. Having some pencils, paper, and at least four 6-sided Fate Dice™ (a.k.a. Fudge Dice) will also be crucial (having a set of four Fate Dice for each player can really speed things up, especially during conflicts), and a bucket of tokens (poker chips, glass beads, and pennies all work well—marbles not so much).

Everything else (maps, miniatures, music, whiteboards, computers, projectors or TVs, dioramas, live action props, whatever) is just frosting!

Modernity is different from most roleplaying games because it's intended to model fiction, not reality. The rules are not intended to be a simulation of physics. In Modernity, the laws of drama trump the laws of physics, as long as everyone at the table is good with the outcome. It's more fun that way. Trust me.

Modernity can be played using **published operations** or the coordinator and the other players may collectively create a story concept for the operation that embodies the themes, issues, and the kind of drama that the table chooses for itself. In either event, the players create their characters at the beginning of the first session, working together with the assistance of the coordinator to imagine a cohesive group of heroes who each have history with one another.

Before subsequent sessions, the coordinator will spend some time preparing the possible scenes of the first operation based on what the players have indicated they want to explore. She and the players then imagine the outcome of the operation together, scene by scene. If play time for the session runs out before the end of the operation, play will continue into subsequent scenes in future sessions.



DeviantArt

STORY TIME

Humans are a species of storytellers. We thrive on tales. We remember stories far better than we remember facts. We react emotionally to stories as much as we react to the characters in the stories. The story is a collection of adventures, the plot threads that weave the heroes' individual narratives together into a shared whole.

The coordinator is first and foremost the caretaker of the story, and the players are the gardeners of individual plots within it. Even if the players are not fully aware of all the moving parts behind the scenes, the coordinator should know the full arc of the tale unfolding on the grand stage. That said, the heroes themselves, their very natures and capabilities and backstories, should usually be the genesis of the majority of the events in the story.

Time passing in the story is segmented into a hierarchy as follows: the campaign, the conspiracy, the operation, the session, the scene, the exchange, and the moment.

THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign is the collection of all of the adventures of the heroes involved in your Modernity game for as long as the players continue to play it together. Most campaigns have a single coordinator for their lifetime, but others are shared worlds with coordinators taking turns running operations and many different heroes for each player. It's up to you and your table how long it can go on. Millennia, if you like.

THE CONSPIRACY

A conspiracy is a long-running collection of operations akin to an epic or an overarching plot that makes up the length and breadth of the story. The villains and other motive forces in the story will typically operate at this level and provide impetus and fuel for individual operations. The conspiracy will define the recurring themes, the locales for the scenes, and the frequent guest stars among the **denizens** of the game.

THE OPERATION

An operation can be thought of as a novel or even just a chapter of the story, depending on its length and the complexities of its plot.

Every operation should have a plan with a recognizable beginning, muddle, and end. Yes, *muddle*, not middle. Because no operational plan survives first contact. . . with the players. Read more about the muddle in **Operational Considerations**.

Lives are messy and full of drama, especially the imaginary lives of our alter egos. The operation encapsulates part of the overall plot, but is self-contained enough that its boundaries can be clearly articulated. An operation describes one of the plot arcs of the story and provides the vehicle in which each hero's individual story is advanced.

Because rewards are generally provided at the end of an operation, be they monetary or otherwise, an operation should have a relatively clear set of goals. The goals themselves can (and often should) change during the course of the operation as the heroes gain more information and clarity, and suffer setbacks, but the initial hooks, carrots and sticks which got the heroes motivated to execute the mission of the operation, usually come with the promise of some reward, be it worldly gain or otherworldly redemption.

THE SESSION

This is a very simple concept. A session is the length of time from when the coordinator initiates gameplay until the time when the players all leave the table. A session is an arbitrary, story-neutral segment of time. I recommend that scenes occur completely within one session in order to minimize the amount of bookkeeping required between sessions to track fate points, consequences, etc.

Unlike other games that operate on an objective resource replenishment calendar, fate points refresh at the session boundary, not some other story-centric point in time. This makes tracking them simpler.

Sessions are best wrapped with a cliffhanger at the end of a scene. . . It's always best to pause with everyone wanting more.

Try not to get too hung up on tracking the passage of time. I've found that treating each session like a single episode of a TV show works best. Build up or down from there. It's easiest to adjust game time via narration in between individual sessions and between operations than it is to make big adjustments in between scenes, exchanges, or moments.

THE SCENE

A scene is a series of moments that are the result of a specific opportunity in the story. Many of the parameters of a scene are often preplanned, such as which denizens of the world the heroes will interact with and which, if any, conflicts will likely take place (remember: muddle). An operation will generally consist of 7 or more scenes, depending upon the complexity and length of the operation.

Many scenes will explicate events to farther the plot or provide purely roleplaying and information-gathering opportunities without resolving any conflict. Some scenes will be completely impromptu because of some wacky choice the players have made to chase a red herring. Other scenes will be very conflict-oriented, perhaps even violently combative. The coordinator should mix up these kinds of scenes in order to keep the pace of the game varied and interesting to every type of player at the table. Check out **Fight the Terror** for basic scene frameworks.

THE EXCHANGE

Every scene contains a series of sequential beats that represent the back and forth of the dramatic interaction of the characters in the scene and those beats are called exchanges. During each exchange, every participant in the scene will usually have a moment to take action. See the **Scene Frameworks** section for more details about what can happen in just a single moment.

THE MOMENT

The smallest increment of action in Modernity is the moment. Each beat of the action is represented as a moment. The time scale of the scene determines the actual length of a moment. Each moment of the scene could be one second, as in an exchange during a tactical encounter, or measured in hours or days during a scene with a longer time scale.

A moment is the length of time that the imaginary camera is focused on the one character taking action. As a rule, each character (hero or denizen) may take one and only **one action** per moment.

When it's your turn to act, make it count!

“We don't remember days, we remember moments.”

Caesar Pavese



Dark Lord



CHOOSE YOUR FATE

Just enough of the basics to make you dangerous.

“One day your life will flash before your eyes.
Make sure it’s worth watching.”

Gerard Way

EVERYBODY HAS PROBLEMS

At the core of every story is conflict and problem solving. The protagonists must overcome the opposition, defeat the villains, and save the day. Most stories plot along a similar track, which is fine. The proverbial devil is in the details. The details and differences are what attract us, excite us, and engage us.

The coordinator typically presents the problems for the players to solve vicariously through their characters, but I encourage you as a player to get involved in making your character’s life complicated, drama-filled, and exciting. Propose ideas to the table which will make your heroes miserable, then work like hell to overcome the adversity you created.

The purpose of these rules is to give you a common problem solving framework for the whole table to share. They’re just tools for you to use and toys for you to play with.

Have fun!

BASIC PROBLEM SOLVING

In a storytelling game like *Modernity*, you only need rules to cope with uncertainty and provide conflict resolution. Whenever the table agrees about what should happen, *do not use the rules*, just tell the story that everyone agrees upon and proceed to the next part of the story. If there's some uncertainty or ambiguity in the outcome, ask the following questions in order. Stop asking the questions and move onto the next part of the story as soon as it makes sense to do so.

1. What do you want to happen?
2. Is the outcome uncertain or is your action opposed?
3. Can you buy the result you want?
4. Which skill applies to your desired outcome?
5. What is your opposition?
6. Do you like the outcome on the dice?
7. How much is success worth to you?

The entire rest of the book is about how to develop the drama inherent in your story using the rules provided to cope with uncertainty, opposition, and the consequences of dramatic action. It might seem strange for a rulebook to constantly be talking about *not using the rules*, but you'll get used to the irony. Welcome to *Modernity*.

Although each player “owns” his own character, he has a responsibility to everyone else at **the table** to plausibly fit his decisions into the context of the story they all share.

Let's just run through those seven questions in a little more detail real quick before we dive into the rules.

What do you want to happen? Always describe what you want to happen in terms of the story first. If everybody likes your proposed addition to the story you're sharing, you're done. Move on to the next part of the story. If there's another proposal, consider it instead. Whenever possible, negotiate the outcome you want. Achieve **consensus** and move on.

Is the outcome uncertain or is your action opposed? If you're attempting something a bit more daring than getting out of bed or walking down the hall, there might be an element of risk. If another character (hero or

denizen) is trying to prevent your action, the outcome is automatically uncertain. The coordinator will decide when she thinks that your action is automatic or if you'll need to apply a skill to the problem to get the outcome you want.

Can you buy the result you want? Before you give up negotiation and roll the dice, consider whether you can trade something for what you want. Anything is up for negotiation. To get what you want, you can offer a fate point, or a consequence to your hero, or even a story detail that complicates things in an interesting way.

Which skill applies to your desired outcome? If the price is too high or the coordinator refuses your offer, she'll tell you which **skill** to use to attempt what you want. Feel free to negotiate that, too, if you think another skill makes more sense for this particular action.

What is your opposition? The coordinator will tell you whether you have static or active opposition. If it's static, she'll tell you how high it is. If it's active, she'll usually tell you the skill level of the opposition. Roll your dice and add the appropriate skill to get your result. In it's simplest form, **every action** is that simple: roll dice, add skill, compare results.

Do you like the outcome on the dice? If you don't like the result you got, you have some choices to make. There are **four different possible outcomes**, and there are **several different ways** you can still try to manipulate the outcome in your favor, for a price.

How much is success worth to you? One of Modernity's central themes is about succeeding at worthy goals even at a terrible cost. Every time you toss the dice, you have an opportunity to buy the success that you want by spending fate points and suffering consequences to succeed. If this sounds like #3 above, you're right. It would've been a whole lot faster to pay for what you wanted earlier in the process. In any event, you can always choose to succeed, you just have to **decide if it's worth it**.

THE RULES OF FATE

In Modernity, there are very few hard and fast rules, but there is one overriding law. Be sure to apply it liberally. There are three simple rules (Golden, Silver, and Bronze) that all Fate-based games have in common. Modernity is no different. Modernity also adds a few caveats and addendums of its own, some of which have already been mentioned earlier in this book.

THE LAW

If something can go wrong, it will. The Law is sometimes referred to as Murphy's Law. This manifests itself in pessimistic game terms. When something is unclear, always err on the down side, the direction that makes it worse for the heroes. It's their lot in life.

YOUR DUTY

The duty of everyone at the table is to make everyone else at the table look awesome. Period. Figure out how to make the others shine brightly when it's their turn in the spotlight, and they will do the same for you.

THE BELIEF

The game is not a simulation of reality. It's a game. The purpose of the game is to provide drama and fun for the participants. The game provides enough of a framework to represent a version of an imaginary reality that the participants will enjoy exploring and sharing.

THE GOLDEN RULE

You can always change it later. In life, ambiguity is a fine thing. In a game? Not so much. In Modernity, make a decision about how to deal with it right now, and move on. If the story dictates a change and everyone agrees to revisit the decision later, by all means, do so!

THE SILVER RULE

Never let the rules get in the way of what makes sense. As I'll cover later in **Operational Considerations**, the story's the thing. Never let a game get bogged down in rules-lawyering. Propose what makes sense instead of the rule that seems to be in the way, take a quick vote at the table, and move on. See the Golden Rule.

THE BRONZE RULE

You can treat everything like a character. Need to add a new kind of thing to the game? Easy! Just imagine that it's a character, give it an aspect or two, maybe some stress boxes if that makes sense, and whatever skills seem appropriate. Bam! There you go, instant extension of the game: a **secret hideout**, a **new kind of opposition**, an **organization**, whatever.

THE ASSUMPTION

All heroes are created equal, unless otherwise specified. The baseline assumption is that each hero represents the everyman. Every hero has the same likelihood of taking actions and completing actions, unless otherwise specified by the hero's aspects, skills, stunts, etc.

THE PRINCIPLE

Specific always trumps general. When two parts of the framework seem to conflict, the more specific element always applies, overruling the more general one. This is especially true with **stunts** and **extras** which bend (or in some cases, break) the established rules.

THE GOAL

The primary design goal for Modernity is to be fun for everyone. If some part of the framework isn't expediting the fun for the players or the coordinator, the table can decide how to change or ignore them in the name of having fun. Use just enough of the framework to keep the story fun for everyone. It's incumbent upon the players to let the coordinator know whether or not they're having fun (which shouldn't always require rolling the biggest numbers). It's also crucial that the coordinator have as much fun as the players do.

THE EXPECTATIONS

Always strive to meet expectations. There are a large number of things that everyone at the table has to come to an agreement on, not the least of which is the "game rating" that makes it fun for all. Carefully agree in advance on the use of profanity and adult situations as well as how graphic your descriptions of gore, viscera, and sex will be.

THE CONSENSUS

It's really all about the table. Without the other players at your table, you wouldn't have a Modernity game. . . Pay close attention to how your tablemates are responding during the game. Remember that when story details are proposed that make one or more other players react negatively, you should seriously consider rephrasing or rethinking in order to meet everyone's expectations.

THE MECHANIC

Keep it as simple as possible, or simpler. All **four actions** that a character can take (there are only four) boil down to one simple mechanic: roll four Fate Dice, add the appropriate skill (only one!), compare the result with the opposition (either static or active), and, if necessary, **spend resources** (usually fate points) to get the result you want, if you dare.

RULE ZERO

The coordinator is always right. As with most things, somebody has to be in charge. In the Modernity framework, that somebody is the coordinator. The players get a voice throughout the game, and the coordinator would be wise to take the players' input (because players can readily quit, or even may be the coordinator next time!), but in the end, adjudicating the framework and explicating the story is the duty of the coordinator.

In service of that duty, the coordinator must ensure that everyone is having fun! The entire **Operational Considerations** section is devoted to the unique fun and challenges of being a coordinator.

FOUR BASIC ACTIONS

Despite the infinite possibilities that you can imagine, when it comes down to actual game mechanics that don't immediately involve spending fate points, there are only four basic actions that a character can take:

- **Overcome**
- **Attack**
- **Defend**
- **Create Advantage**

That's roughly in order of complexity, although each involves only a single die roll for each character involved. During each character's

moment, regardless of the **scene framework** used, he will likely do just one of those four things.

RESOLVING UNCERTAINTY

Every potentially uncertain element of the game is handled as an action. In the interests of speed of play, remember to look for reasons *not* to roll the dice if at all possible. Just do what makes sense and adds the most enjoyable drama to the scene. If there is more than one reasonably possible outcome, then it's time to get out the dice.

THE BASIC ACTION MECHANIC

Resolving uncertainty is simple, roll four Fate Dice, sum the upward facing sides (+, -, or ■), and then add the relevant character skill bonus to get your initial result. If the result is high enough to accomplish your goal, you're done.

If not, then commence with spending resources (fate points and free invocations) on aspects in order to bid up your result to the point where you either get what you want, or you run out of resources.

THE OUTCOMES

Once you have your results (see **The Ladder** for how to compare them), there are **four possible outcomes**. In short, fewer than 0 shifts is a **failure**, 0 shifts is a **tie** that isn't a complete success, with 1 or 2 shifts you **succeed**, and with 3 or more shifts you achieve a spectacular success, a.k.a. **succeed with style**.

STUNTMEN & STUNTWOMEN

Some characters have more than **skills** that come into play for actions. These characters have **stunts**, **extras**, etc., which give them a bonus or a way to change, bend, or break the rules in their favor.

THE ART OF OPPOSITION

The art of determining the difficulty of actions is the subject of **Becoming the Opposition**. For static opposition, it's easier than active opposition when it's all relative to the hero's skill level. Equal opposition is a coin toss, and higher or lower opposition adjusts the risk of failure geometrically.



David Kesh

FOUR BASIC OUTCOMES

The action is over. The final results have been calculated. Nobody is spending any more resources (fate points and free invocations) to change the outcome anymore. Now it's time to determine how good or bad it was! There are only four possibilities:

- **Failure** (or succeed at a major cost)
- **Tie** (or succeed at a minor cost)
- **Succeed**
- **Succeed with Style**

The player controlling the action will offer a description of the outcome of the action that becomes part of the story, if the table concurs.

ADD TO THE DRAMA

When you're narrating your outcome, give it some visceral punch. Make it more dramatic for everyone, *especially* your own hero. Think about what was at stake, what was being risked. Describe both what happens in the story *and* what it means for the heroes.

MAKE IT MORE INTERESTING

Especially in the back and forth, Attack and Defend of a conflict, it's easy to say things like "I hit him for 2 stress. Booyah!" However, that's really not very interesting, even for the two characters involved.

Take some time to polish your description of the outcome of an action a little more. Celebrate the value of each action and outcome. Consider instead "I drove him backward, beating down his pathetic defense, punching him squarely in the throat. Take 2 stress, biatch!" Just make it consistent with how your character would behave and speak.

The Art of the Possible

Coordinators: Every once in a while, you'll run into an outcome that should be something other than one of the four basics outlined in Modernity. As long as you're within the spirit of your game, feel free to substitute an outcome that makes sense for the kind of action in question, and let me know. I'd love to hear about the unicorn you found!

THE LADDER

In Modernity, we use The Ladder for the purpose of evaluating and comparing action results produced by the dice, either numerically or adjectivally. (Yes, that's a real word—look it up!) In **Get Rolling**, I'll describe all the other things that you can do with the dice.

THE END RESULT

After adding up your four dice plus your skill plus any invocation bonuses to get your final result, the Ladder represents the objective result of an action. This enables a player to say things like, "I got a Great roll!" and mean more than "I hope that was enough."

Some players prefer to use the adjectives. Some prefer to use the numbers. Really obsessive-compulsive players must use both. At all times. It's the only way to be sure.

COMPARING RESULTS

Whenever a character attempts a challenge, or whenever two or more characters are involved in a contest or a conflict, it will become necessary to compare their results to the opposition directly. **The difference between two results (or the result and the static opposition for a challenge) is a number of shifts.** Shifts can be used by the coordinator to represent any number of things, based on the type of the action in question.

These shifts could be interpreted as how many seconds faster your lap time was than your opponent. It could be how much prettier the judges thought your costume was than the rest of the pageant contestants. The one place where shifts have a significant, clearly defined meaning with more than a narrative value is damage done to a target by an Attack. I'll cover that in detail in the sections **When Things Get Stressful** and **Suffer the Consequences**.

Inconceivable	+10
Unbelievable	+9
Legendary	+8
Epic	+7
Fantastic	+6
Superb	+5
Great	+4
Good	+3
Fair	+2
Average	+1
Mediocre	+0
Poor	-1
Terrible	-2
Awful	-3
Pathetic	-4

ASPECTS DEFINED

Aspects are the descriptors of everything important in Modernity. They are shorthand descriptions that can be used to explain who, what, when, where, why, or how. They are the levers with which the heroes and the coordinator may move the world, the narrative, and the game. Everywhere you read text in ***bold italics***, you're seeing an aspect.

Connecting the Dots

Nearly every game mechanic in Modernity is attached to aspects in some way, whether declaring a fact to create a new aspect, invoking aspects to manipulate dice, or compelling aspects to force a **Decision** or an **Event**. Always look for a way to connect your narrative fun to game aspects.

Aspects are short phrases that identify something unique or noteworthy about people, places, and things in the universe, such as *A Melancholy Hitman* (to describe either a non-player character or a hero), *A Big Kettle of Crazy* (to describe an out of control situation or a mob of mental patients), or *The End of the Line* (to describe the scene of the big finale at a rail yard or something equally dramatic).

THE PURPOSE OF ASPECTS

There are several different kinds of aspects: game aspects, character aspects, consequences, situation aspects, zone names, and boosts. They are different primarily in what they are used to describe and how long they last. They all enhance and further the story, and can be used to grant narrative permission by the players and coordinator. *Any aspect may be invoked by anyone, and can be compelled by anyone.*

Aspects are important. They must serve many different purposes.

Aspects tell everyone what is important about the game and provide a way to decide when to use the game mechanics (such as dice and fate points) to deal with a situation.

ROLEPLAYING ASPECTS

The universe of Modernity is made up of aspects that you create. If they don't inspire the mood and type of roleplaying that your table wants, change them! Find the right hooks to hang your proverbial roleplaying hats on and use them to your benefit whenever and however you can.

ENHANCING & FURTHERING THE STORY

Think of aspects in Modernity as labels and arrows. They define the qualities of things in the universe and point in the direction of the fun that everyone has agreed upon. Good aspects should contain elements of drama and conflict. They define what a thing *is not* as much as they define what a thing actually is.

The coordinator, often at the prompting of or with the help of the players, will be sticking aspect labels to all kinds of things, including game defining aspects, scene titles, the props in a scene, and all the things that present obstacles to the heroes.

It's up to the entire table, especially the coordinator, to make sure every aspect gets abused a little bit, but not too much. . .

One game aspect that the table can choose to make available at all times is the premise Modernity: *What if it's all true?* All the scary things that you could possibly imagine are real, and good for an **Event**.

GRANTING NARRATIVE PERMISSION

Perhaps the feature of aspects with the most power is that they can eliminate the need for unnecessary rolling of the dice and expedite gameplay by focusing on what's automatically true in the story.

For example, a hero with the **High Concept Crazy Helicopter Jock** doesn't need to roll dice to find out if he can fly a helicopter: it's already an established fact. If it makes sense for there to be a helicopter in the scene *and* nothing interesting is really at risk if he makes a pilot error (as might happen if there is a situation aspect in play like *A Storm's A-Brewin'*), there's no reason to roll dice or spend fate points to find out if he can successfully fly the helicopter from Point A to Point B. Just assume that it's done. Maybe narrate some descriptive flavor about what happens, and then just call it good.

Any aspect can be used this way to describe the facts as the table agrees upon them. If there's any creative doubt about the possible outcome (i.e. you can imagine *interesting* success *and* failure conditions), then it's time to get out the rest of the rules and the dice. Otherwise, just agree on what happens and proceed.

TYPES OF ASPECTS

There are several different kinds of aspects that will be described in great detail elsewhere, but I want to touch on them briefly now so that you'll have placeholders for them in mind as you read. You'll spot them easily once you learn them.

- **Character aspects** describe the parts of our characters that influence the story.
- **Game aspects** describe the themes, issues, and setting of your entire game.
- **Situation aspects** are the catch-all category any temporary aspects that are currently in force in the scene.
- **Zone names** are a special case of situation aspect that describe specific locations in the scene.
- **Consequences** are special class of character aspects that describe the effects of more serious kinds of stress that might otherwise take a character out of the game.
- **Boosts** are single-use situation aspects the disappear after one invocation or at the end of the scene.

DISCOVERING ASPECTS

Open all seven of your senses to the world, and you'll discover the wondrous aspects around you. Most of the time, the coordinator will initially provide a quantity of aspects for the heroes to interact with in the current scene. Often, the heroes will ask for more information, more narrative, and more aspects. (Coordinators: this is usually a clue that the obvious interaction opportunities with the extant aspects that you imagined aren't as obvious as you thought.)

Observing aspects that are self-evident rarely requires an action. They are simply narrated into the scene. Write them down for future reference

and move forward. In fact, there are only two circumstances in which the dice are even necessary for the purpose of discovering aspects:

- The aspect is a secret and literally must be discovered.
- The acting character wants a mechanical advantage from the aspect in question, like a **free invocation**.

PLAYER KNOWLEDGE VS. CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE

Modernity makes a rather big assumption that players can know things that their heroes do not, and still keep the game interesting and fun, because it's the players' job to inject drama into their heroes' lives. For that reason, most aspects (even tacitly secret ones) will and should be available to the players to offer self-compels, etc.

When the potential risk to the story is too large, the coordinator may elect to keep some aspects a secret until such time as they're used in play and become self-evident to everyone at the table.

The same goes for denizens. The coordinator must take actions on their behalf that only takes into consideration knowledge of aspects that the denizens in question could reasonably have had. However, sometimes the fact that a given denizen knows something that players didn't expect can be a turning point in the story. . .

No One is Omniscient

Heroes and denizens alike do not have perfect universal knowledge of one another's aspects if they're not immediately visible or previously known to the character in question. **Create Advantage** is the action most often used to discover aspects about other characters.

LEARNING SECRETS

When it doesn't make sense for players to have specific information about the universe, there are four ways for a character to go about learning aspects that are labeled secret:

1. The character learns it (or deduces it from other information) through the normal narration of the story. Players figuring it out for themselves is the most satisfying means of discovering secrets.
2. The character defeats the opposition that is trying to keep the secret in question (for example, **Empathy** used to **Overcome** the **Deception** skill of the opponent in order to detect a lie).
3. When the secret isn't actively being kept or is just naturally difficult to discern, **Create Advantage** is likely to be the more appropriate action to ferret out a new story detail.
4. Often a coordinator will trade **consequences** for secrets, usually consequences describing mental stress and strain, and often in between plot points, trading character durability in exchange for information where it makes narrative sense. For example, at the end of an operation, the gestalt awakens within the hero a terrible knowledge (and a serious consequence) about how the dark conspiracy comes together, but the hero can't prove it. Yet.

CHANGING OR ELIMINATING ASPECTS

There will always come a time when a player needs or wants to change an aspect. The game mechanics for doing this depend on the kind of aspect it is and how it was initially created. Character aspects, for example, can only be changed at **milestones** or when suffering an **consequence** in lieu of **getting taken out**.

Some aspects will even be actively defended by another character or require that static opposition be **Overcome** in order to change or remove them. The mechanism for changing or removing each type of aspect is described with that specific type of aspect.

When you're ready, read about some aspect-related gameplay strategies in **Leveraging Aspects**.

WRITING GOOD ASPECTS

Aspects are central to everything in Modernity. Writing good aspects will make all the difference between a ho-hum game and game that is remembered fondly for years to come.

I like to think of a good aspect as a three-edged sword:

1. An aspect must clearly describe the truth of what it's attached to for the entire table.
2. An aspect must be invocable for a benefit by characters who appear in a scene.
3. An aspect must be compellable for a complication against the characters in a scene.

Sometimes situational aspects are just descriptive of scene contents and may not enable or prevent specific action, but it's always better if they do! Don't feel as though you need to provide an aspect for *The Office Flowerpot* unless it's really important that the heroes notice it and interact with it. If it acts, thinks, or speaks, it deserves at least one aspect.

CLEARLY DEFINING

A good aspect cuts clearly across many issues and is both **inclusive** (defines what it can be used for) and **exclusive** (what it doesn't make sense for it to be used for). A one-sided aspect or a universal aspect either won't be used, or it will be overused.

If an aspect doesn't differentiate its antecedent from the rest of the universe in some meaningful way, change it or drop it. For example, although it might be descriptive of your villain, *A Terrible Human Being* doesn't provide a lot to distinguish him or her, unless that phrase has a lot of significance for everyone at your table. Consider instead an aspect like *A Yogi from the Dark Side* or perhaps *Reiki Isn't Just for Healing Anymore* to describe the villain.

DOUBLE ENTENDRE

Every aspect needs to “cut both ways,” i.e. be useful for **invocation** on behalf of the owner and useful for being invoked against the owner and **compelled** by the coordinator. Aspects that provide both advantages and disadvantages to characters will get more mileage in your game.

For example, *Not Good with Living People* could be used as an aspect for a “cleaner” (who takes care of the mess left behind by assassins and generally sanitizes a crime scene) to invoke to get the job done, in a forensically stealthy sense. But at the same time, it can be invoked or compelled against him when interacting with living people to complicate a social goal that he might need to pursue.

When designing an aspect, consider listing at least two ways that it can be used to “power up” a skill or an action to make it more awesome, and conversely list at least two ways that it can be used to “power down” an action or to compel an **Event** or **Decision** to complicate the story.

MULTIPURPOSE

An aspect, especially character aspects, should serve more than one purpose. When pondering character aspects, try to find catch phrases or mottoes that can cover more than one skill *and* more than one story element or skill for the character.

On the surface, **Grant Andersen’s High Concept, *Loud Pipes Save Lives***, seems to only apply to noisy motorcycles, and possibly biker gang activities. But with a little creative interpretation, it can be applied to any situation where Grant is being loud, boisterous, or intimidating. By extension, it can also be used in situations where safety or saving lives is a serious consideration, depending on the narrative of Grant’s action.

Grant himself can also be compelled to involve himself in situations that complicate the story where his sense of camaraderie and *esprit de corps* trumps his common sense. Because it’s part of his ex-military backstory, the rest of the table will know that ***Loud Pipes Save Lives*** also applies to his harrowing and hilarious experiences with a Marine Corps Field Artillery unit in Iraq during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.

If an aspect feels *fuzzy* or *single-purpose*, make a list of at least two kinds of actions that it can be used to enable and two kinds of actions that it cannot be used for or that it prevents. This is especially important for game aspects and character aspects. If it can’t serve more than one purpose, cut it or change it so that it can.



ACTIVE & VISCERAL

The most useful and powerful aspects are often stated as a catch-phrase or a battle cry. These are sentences in the imperative form or written as an implied command. **Roberto**'s High Concept, *Protect and Serve!*, follows this pattern. It allows Paul to accept **Decisions** like, "Of course, Roberto charges into the fray. He must *Protect and Serve!*"

Wherever possible, an aspect should also be loaded with sensory language. Humans are, for the most part, very visual creatures, and to be effective aspects will need lots of visual information. For that reason, many aspects will include descriptions of what something looks like.

However, if you simply add in another sense, you'll find that the extra sense greatly enhances the emotional loading of the aspect. The sense of smell is particularly powerful. Imagine the difference between *A Food Cart Vendor* and *The Burned Popcorn King*, which could describe the same character. Experiment with ways to include taste, touch, smell, and sound into your aspects to give them more visceral punch—especially situation aspects that describe a scene. Imagine, if you dare, the scene that includes *A Fragrant Fog of Rotting Offal*.

FATE POINTS

Fate points are a reservoir that all heroes possess. It's a deep well of talent, energy, or other reserves that each hero can tap when the chips are down. Heroism manifested as fate points is what separates the masses of denizens that populate the universe from the truly exceptional. It's the capacity that enables heroes to make their own luck and be captains of their own fate.

Fate points can represent free will, extraordinary creativity, having just the right gadget at just the right time, an unexpected second chance, and even common sense that prevents a character from making an otherwise grievous error. Fate points can also represent unusual abilities, the assistance of allies such as patrons, contacts, and favors owed the hero either by individuals or organizations.

Denizens have no fate points of their own, since it's one of the defining characteristics of characters in a lead role, the heroes. The coordinator always has two different pools of fate points with which to manipulate the story as well, but those are not "owned" by the **Denizens of Modernity**, the non-player characters.

REPRESENTING FATE POINTS

As mentioned at the beginning, one of the things you need to play Modernity is a bucket of tokens of some kind. Things I've used successfully in the past include glass beads (that are flat on the bottom), poker chips, pennies, playing cards, dice (that are not Fate Dice), and hash marks on a whiteboard.

Things that do *not* work well to represent fate points, in my experience, are anything heavier than a #2 pencil, marbles or anything else that can roll off the table easily, and any sort of edible substance (popcorn, cookies, pretzels, whatever). *Ask me how I know.* I'm sure you can figure out why those three classes of objects don't work well to represent fate points.

Strong Warning: Do not use anything edible to represent fate points. You have been warned.

USING FATE POINTS

There are a few different ways you can use fate points:

- Declare a story detail.
- Re-roll the dice.
- Add a +2 bonus to the dice.
- Enable a particularly powerful stunt or extra.
- Compel a character to make a specific choice in a **Decision**.
- Cause a specific **Event** to occur.

These all can be boiled down to four simple game mechanics:

1. **Declare a fact.**
2. **Invoke an aspect.**
3. **Compel an aspect.**
4. **Power a stunt or extra.**

These mechanics are not **character actions** that take up a character's turn during his **moment**, they are player actions that don't take up any story time at all. All four player actions will all be explained in detail in **Fight the Terror**.

Make It Count!

The use of a fate point during the game should be as memorable an occasion as earning it! Whenever a fate point gets spent, its use is tied to an existing aspect or creating one to modify the flow of the story. Make it a big deal. If it's not a big deal, why waste a fate point on it at all?

POOLS OF FATE POINTS

There are three different kinds of pools of fate points that underly the mechanics of Modernity. Each one is controlled by a single player. Two of them have a finite number, and the third is infinite.

THE PLAYER POOL

Each player has a pool of fate points that represent his hero's ability to influence the story. This pool is drained as the player uses these fate points to declare story details and invoke aspects to drive toward the

outcomes that he desires for the hero.

This pool accumulates new fate points when he accepts compels that force **Decisions** or **Events**, when aspects are **invoked** against the hero, and at the beginning of a session when he has fewer fate points than the hero's **refresh rate**.

THE SCENE POOL

The coordinator has a number of fate points at the beginning of every scene equal to the number of players with heroes in the scene. If a player's hero isn't involved in the scene, don't count that hero.

These fate points represent the coordinator's ability to invoke aspects in the denizens' favor. Scene pool fate points that are not spent during a scene do not accumulate and are returned to the universal pool at the end of each scene and replaced with a new set.

THE DARKNESS POOL

The coordinator also has an empty pool of fate points that grows over time by accumulating new fate points when the heroes fail to thwart the plans and activities of the villains. These fate points may only be used by the villain and its direct agents.

These fate points represent the looming evil and its growing power. The players can see directly how their failure to act, their lack of heroism, or their concessions to the Darkness cause the threat to increase. See **The Darkness** and **Fight the Darkness** for a more detailed description.

THE UNIVERSAL POOL

There is an unlimited pool of fate points available to the coordinator that may be used to compel **Decisions** and **Events**. This infinite pool is not intended to be used to influence actions in a scene, but to guide the overarching story and its associated complications and drama.

Coordinators: Don't abuse the infinite power at your disposal to the detriment of the fun of the game. See **Operational Considerations** for lots more detail on how to manage the story to everyone's enjoyment.

EARNING FATE POINTS

I've been talking a lot about spending fate points, and I'm sure you've been wondering about how you get more. Fate points are gained at the **beginning of a session** or when things don't go the hero's way due to complications: **Being Compelled**, **Being Invoked Against**, **Making Concessions**, **Compelling Decisions**, and **Compelling Events**.

LIMITS

Fate points earned during a scene are gained at the end of the scene, regardless of how the fate point is earned. There is no limit to the number of fate points that a hero may possess at any given time nor the number that he may gain during a scene, just as there is no limitation to the number of fate points that may be used during a scene.

PURPOSE

Fate points are the reward for good roleplaying and imagination, especially when a player directs a hero intentionally to actions contrary to his best interests for the sake of staying in character, or acts altruistically or above and beyond the call of duty. The goal of the fate point mechanic is to encourage a consistent pattern of extraordinarily heroic, dramatic, and interesting behavior on the part of our heroes.

Bribery

Coordinators: Be generous about rewarding players for bringing comestibles and other resources to share with the table. Depend upon the Pavlovian nature of human behavior.

ASPECTS

With the possible exception of bribery, earning fate points should always be attached to aspects (usually game and character aspects). Figure out how to use the **Compelling Decisions** and **Compelling Events** mechanics to achieve your goals.

If there's not a game aspect that applies to your specific case, create one and immediately compel it!

ALTRUISM

When a hero intentionally acts without regard for his own best interest, for the sake of behaving heroically, then a reward is definitely in order. Whether he chooses to stay behind and fight a doomed rearguard action or forgoes a potential payday in order to “do the right thing,” the coordinator should reward his commitment to heroism. Simply doing what any average good citizen would do is not heroic, even if it’s the right thing to do, but altruism above and beyond the call of duty should be rewarded. Apply the same consideration for the group collectively.

DISADVANTAGE

Fate points are earned when a hero volunteers an additional difficulty for himself, usually based on an innate challenge or some part of the hero’s background, like his **Trouble**, such as interference by an enemy, or lack of familiarity with a specialty or a piece of technology. This is a classic **self-compel**.

The player should decide for himself the reason for taking on the challenge during the scene, and how it complicates the story as a **Decision** or an **Event**. Each different type of self-imposed challenge should be considered separately for a heroism award, but most compels are in exchange for a single fate point. These fate points are offered as an inducement by the coordinator when a player is hesitant about accepting the consequences of a hero’s challenges (a compulsion, risk to a dependent, the interference of an enemy, etc.).

ENTERTAINMENT

Sometimes players will just do or say hysterical things in the course of gameplay. Reward particular entertaining actions or dialogue with fate points upon occasion. Such behavior should be encouraged so long as it does not become a distraction from the game or result in one character always hogging the spotlight to the detriment of everyone else’s fun.

PANACHE

Doing deeds with a flair should count for something, because *it ain’t bragging if you can do it*. Some players will have more of a flair for the dramatic than others, and that’s fine. Players will notice and respond accordingly to what gets rewarded.

MILESTONES

Milestones occur when your characters change in some way, heroes and denizens alike. This could be for the better or for the worse. Whichever one is more interesting and makes the most sense at that time. In fiction, these growth moments are usually painful. The principal themes for milestones are: change, recovery, growth, and resolution.

Milestones often occur based on the completion of story goals and will come frequently at the end of an operation or the end of a conspiracy, but they don't have to. As the coordinator, you can choose to insert milestones wherever it makes sense, including as a scene during an operation. There is nothing more dramatic in fiction than a training montage or a preparing for war montage. At the beginning of a session!

Cue the *Rocky* theme music.

Everything Changes

As your hero grows in power and capability, remember that many of the **Denizens of Modernity** also are not static. Some of them will grow, change, and prepare along the way too. Not all of them, but don't be surprised when friends become enemies and enemies become more powerful.

However, not all milestones are created equal. Some are more dramatic (pardon the pun) than others, more impactful. Bigger sorts of milestones must be earned, because they have a bigger impact on how heroes change over time than the smaller ones.

Modernity recognizes three types of milestones that are described in more detail for coordinators in **Operational Considerations**.

- **Minor milestones** occur at the end of every **session**.
- **Significant milestones** happen at the end of a major plot, usually at the end of an **operation**.
- **Momentous milestones** shake up the whole world and increase the **power level** of your game.

CONDITION BROWN

Using Aspects, Skills, Sanity Check, Consequences

“He who fights with monsters should take care lest he become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

Roberto Moreno is a patrolman for the El Paso Police Department. El Paso shares the border between Texas and Mexico with the infamous Ciudad Juárez. His precinct has been responding to a large number of 911 calls reporting werewolves, chupacabra, and other fanciful creatures in the barrio lately.

At roll call, the duty sergeant drones on and on about how this is just another example of crazy mass hysteria spreading, causing superstitious but otherwise rational people to suffer a shared delusion.

“Chupacabra indeed! Stay safe out there, boys and girls,” the duty sergeant says gruffly. “Dismissed.”

Roberto is Paul’s new character, which he’s creating using the Head First character creation rules to develop him as he goes.

Zoë named this scene **Condition Brown** as a play on Roberto’s last name. Roberto’s Trouble and nature, *Latin Chivalry Lives!*, calls him to follow an outmoded code of honor wrapped up with a big impulsive, macho bow. Zoë offers Paul a fate point to compel Roberto to ignore

orders and skip calling for backup prior to each call that he's dispatched on this shift.

Paul agrees that dealing with the routine calls of the watch on his own is exactly what an impulsive, macho kind of guy like Roberto would do. He'll get the fate point at the end of the current scene.

Who needs backup anyway?

Body text in dark blue ink like this are examples of gameplay vignettes in *Modernity* designed to give you a sense of how you might choose to play. Each game mechanic demonstrated in these vignettes will be explained in detail throughout the rest of the book.

These gameplay vignettes are based on one table's experience with *Modernity*, expanded to better explain the rules. They inspired the *Iniquity*, the first novel of **The Seraphim Conspiracy**.

Roberto is a police officer played by a new guy named Paul. Zoë is the coordinator responsible for the game. The other players are all late, but that's no reason not to get started!

Because it's always good to start off with a bang, Zoë drops Paul immediately into the action. This is a high stress scene with consequences that will ripple throughout the rest of the book.

Even though Zoë determined in advance that the third call of the day was the Big One (even if Roberto resisted the temptation not to call in as ordered), it would only be a matter of time before an impulsive, macho guy is caught alone without backup. Zoë briefly narrates the outcome of those typically boring police responses.

For the first two calls today, against his nature, Roberto did as instructed by the shift sergeant and waited for backup, only to be subsequently embarrassed that the calls turned out to be routine, mundane calls. After dropping off the second drunk and disorderly of the morning (and suffering the teasing of his fellow officers), Roberto is dispatched to a domestic disturbance in progress. . .

When the third call comes in, Roberto has the poor judgment to investigate it alone. Qué será, será.

Roberto enters the ramshackle home through the broken front door, expecting another unfortunately all-too-typical domestic disturbance. The front door looks as though it's been kicked in. Not all that unusual on a bad day in this neighborhood.

Zoë suggests that Roberto does not intentionally take the time to inspect the residence carefully before entering, offering a fate point with a wink to compel the Decision. With a sigh, Paul nods.




He's way too macho and impulsive to be bothered with that! Roberto charges through the shattered front door of the one-story home, not noticing anything strange about the scene on his way in.

Zoë does not tell Roberto that in his hurry, he failed to notice the claw marks cut deeply into the facade of the shattered wooden door, or the movement behind the curtains of the street-facing bedroom.

“Never mind!” Zoë says with a wicked grin.

Roberto begins looking around the front room for the usual threats, like angry wives, teenage gangbangers, and drunken husbands. The howl and growl that he hears down the hallway raises his hackles and jacks his heart rate like nothing he has ever experienced on the street before as a cop in El Paso. The shrill scream that follows it sounds like a terrified little girl.

Zoë says, “The werewolf’s howl is a psychic Attack. Roll four dice and add your Sanity to Defend.” She ignores the little girl, for now. Not really relevant to the scene at the moment, in her mind.

Paul rolls  plus Roberto’s Sanity +0 is a result of +1, three shifts lower than the Attack made by the werewolf’s howl,   plus the werewolf’s Provocation +2, for a result of +4. Although he could invoke **Protect and Serve!**, or one of Roberto’s other aspects, Paul bravely decides to conserve his fate points and takes the hit to his state of mind. (New players are always curious to see how things work.)

Roberto suffers the psychic damage in the form of marking off his number 1 mental stress box plus a Minor (2-point) consequence, which they agree to call **Terrified**, and Zoë makes a note of the free invocation for use later.

“Surely there are no such things as werewolves!”

As farther examples, the outcome of Roberto’s adventure and his friends’ efforts to rescue him from himself are described throughout the book. Read on.



POLICE

Revoled

BE A HERO

Everything you need to create the hero you're meant to be.

“A hero is no braver than an ordinary man,
but he is braver five minutes longer.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

THE HEROIC EVERYMAN

Characters are the center of Modernity. Anything in Modernity can be treated like a character: any person, place, or thing. There are two types of characters: heroes and **denizens**. Where a significant distinction is made is that the characters played by the non-coordinator players are referred to as the heroes.

The Assumption

The baseline assumption is that each hero represents the everyman. All heroes are created equal, unless otherwise specified. Every hero has the same likelihood of taking actions and completing actions, unless otherwise specified by aspects, skills, stunts, etc., that are unique to the hero.

The heroes are the alter egos of the players. All of the other characters represented by the coordinator are referred to as denizens. Whenever I

talk about characters, I'm usually talking about both. Whenever I mean only the non-coordinator players' characters, I'll talk about heroes. Remember that coordinators are players, too!

Each hero should be defined by more than a name and a number of lists and a list of numbers. A hero should be a living, breathing, multidimensional persona in the players' imaginations. When a hero speaks or acts it should be absolutely clear that someone besides the player is on stage.

THE PEOPLE PROCESS

I *strongly* recommend that the gaming group create heroes together, using index cards or a whiteboard or some other mechanism to communicate toward building up a cohesive group. Not every hero has to “get along” with every other hero (it's more fun if they don't!), but having group cohesion helps support the game in the long term by creating heroes that “make sense together” in whatever way that can be rationalized collectively by the table.

The Character Sheet

Feel free to keep track of your hero any way you like. Modernity is simple enough that blank paper can be used to track a hero. If you'd like a fancier Modernity character sheet, you can download a free PDF at <http://x.co/modheroes>

Here is a rough checklist, but feel free to do things in another order if something speaks to you. (The voices do get grumpy when ignored.)

1. Imagine the basic concept.
2. Describe backstory, demographics, and identifiers (like a name!).
3. Choose a High Concept.
4. Choose a Trouble.
5. Choose **Skills** and **Stunts** (sometimes these can be deferred).
6. Make note of typical gear (**retroactive preparation** FTW!).
7. Play the game! Start with **The Phase Trio** or go ahead and jump in **Head First**.

HERO DEFINED

A hero's personality and background, as manifested in the aspects, are crucial for roleplaying purposes because they define how one hero interacts with the other heroes and the rest of the story.

BASIC CONCEPT

The basic concept is a starting point to develop into a hero. You have to have an idea where to start with your hero before you can imagine his origin and life prior to the beginning of the first session. This is a creative brainstorming exercise that everyone does differently.

Iterate, Iterate, Iterate

The process of creating an enjoyable hero for any roleplaying game is usually an iterative one. Imagine something, try some different things out, and see what feels like it would fit together and be fun!

Feel free to borrow ideas for characters from books, TV, movies, or video games and adapt them for your own use. Just be sure to make them your own distinctive creation and you'll enjoy the long-term result more. The cognitive dissonance of playing a character which everyone at the table knows from someone else's fiction can be pretty high.

CHARACTER ASPECTS

Character aspects are just like other **aspects**. Their only distinctions are that they are personal to the hero they belong to, they tend to be persistent between scenes, and they are occasionally subject to change at **milestones** as the hero grows.

The aspects that define a character are always available, to friend and foe alike, though some will be more apparent than others. Character aspects are the most important aspects in your game, because they drive the heroes' actions and their impact on the story, as well as the denizens' motivations and appearances and the obstacles and decorations that they provide to the story.

Character aspects are probably the most frequently **compelled**, although any aspect can be used as the springboard or inspiration for a **Decision** or an **Event**. They describe anything that can uniquely differentiate one character from another. Here are some examples of the infinite variety of character aspects that you can use in your game:

- Personality, demeanor, beliefs: *I'm Your Huckleberry* –or– *Qué Será, Será* –or– *The End Is Nigh*
- Backstory, career, education: *There Ain't a Prison That Can Hold Me* –or– *Criminal Profiler on a Mission* –or– *Trained by a Voodoo Master*
- Distinctive feature or possession: *Distinctive Facial Scar* –or– *Yeah, it's an Eyepatch* –or– *It's an .88-Magnum*
- Membership in or connection to an organization: *We Live for the One and we Die for the One* –or– *Touched by the Fae* –or– *A Chicago Wise Guy* –or– *Witch of the Shadow Coven*
- Relationships with important people: *Friends in Low Places* –or– *The Mayor's Confidant* –or– *Student of the Drunken Master*
- Motivations, goals, or dysfunctions: *Zero Tolerance Policy* –or– *I Shall Cleanse the Earth* –or– *Afraid of the Dark*
- Duties, reputation, or authority: *Protect and Serve!* –or– *Fringe Tabloid Reporter* –or– *Gentleman G-Man*

All of the attributes of **aspects in general** apply to character aspects, but there is specific tactical consideration for players when deriving their hero's aspects from his backstory. Make certain that you have a variety of difference types of aspects for your character so that you are more likely to have one that will work in any given situation.

For example, if you have five personality traits for your character, but nothing that implies action or relationships, you'll probably struggle in a conflict or exposition sequence to explain how any of your aspects apply to the part of the story at hand. Be sure to review all of the different types of **character aspects** to be sure you covered several different kinds before you call hero creation done.

CHANGING CHARACTER ASPECTS

Character aspects usually change a little more frequently than game aspects, and sometimes against a hero's best interest. Character aspects can change under the following conditions:

- An adjustment or revision (not a wholesale replacement) of one character aspect (except High Concept, Trouble, and Extreme Consequences) may occur at each **minor milestone**.
- A complete replacement of any character aspect (except High Concept and Extreme Consequences) may occur at each **significant milestone**.
- A complete replacement of a High Concept or renaming of an extreme consequence to indicate improvement in its condition may occur at a **momentous milestone**.
- A complete replacement of an extreme consequence may only occur at the *second* **momentous milestone** the hero reaches.

Although changing a character aspect is a big deal, I suggest that coordinators be more lenient with players who are new to Modernity for the first couple sessions while they figure out how the system works and the black art of naming aspects. These limits are intended to make character aspects more meaningful and enduring, not to suppress the enjoyment of the game for players who are stuck with character aspects that they can't effectively play.

HIGH CONCEPT

Defining the hero's High Concept is arguably the most important part of the process for each player, and really should be done before proceeding with the rest of the hero creation sequence. The High Concept defines "your thing" from the character's perspective and how he sees the rest of the world. A hero's High Concept is a very specialized aspect.

The High Concept should be an anchor upon which to hang each of the hero's skills, which enable all of the daring heroics that are the stuff of legend, and even some of the challenges your hero faces in order to earn fate points along the way.

Examples of High Concepts for the heroes in this book include:

- *Protect and Serve!* (Roberto Moreno, a police officer)
- *The Celtic Oracle* (Shannon O'Malley, an Irish psychic)
- *Loud Pipes Save Lives* (Grant Andersen, a biker brute)
- *A Real Dragon Lady* (Grace Xú, a well-connected private investigator)

Ultimately, the High Concept is the most frequent mechanism through which the character fits into and acts upon the story. The High Concept is typically the most invoked character aspect when fate points are spent to influence the outcome of an action.

ARCHETYPE

A common way to define the High Concept is by starting with a **heroic archetype** and making it your own. At its core, a High Concept is often an archetype plus a qualifier, such as *Muscle for Hire* or *Kung-Fu Showoff*.

An archetype is only one way to define your High Concept. A hero's species, native planet, homeland, the plane of existence of its birth, etc., has a great deal of bearing on how the character develops. The milieu will generally describe what archetypes are available, subject to the imagination of the players. Archetypes provide a sort of shorthand for briefly describing the hero's general nature.

See the **Heroic Archetypes** section for some ideas to make your own.

TROUBLE

The hero's Trouble is also arguably the most important part of the process for each player, and really should be done before proceeding with the rest of the hero creation sequence.

A hero's Trouble should be the source of much of the drama in the character's life. It will be the engine by which the hero generates additional fate points (beyond the few that he begins with at the start of each session). Whenever a Trouble is invoked by the coordinator (called a **compel**) to force a particular **decision** by the hero or a troublesome **event** is incited by the invocation, the player gets an additional fate point to use in the future at the end of the scene.

Examples of Troubles for the characters in this book include:

- *Latin Chivalry Lives!* (Roberto Moreno)
- *Everyone Needs Mothering* (Shannon O'Malley)
- *I Can Quit any Time I Want* (Grant Andersen)
- *When In Doubt, Don't* (Grace Xú)

Choose a Trouble that helps to define the concept you've imagined *and* that you're willing to roleplay. The more likely a Trouble is to come up during each session, the more your hero can accumulate fate points each time his Trouble is compelled.

Embrace your inner drama queen! Your Trouble is one of the many ways you signal to the table how you expect your hero's life to go wrong. . . in an entertaining and enjoyable way!

BACKSTORY

A hero's tale is a living document, an ongoing and evolving story that celebrates each win and mourns each loss as the adventures unfold. In the initial backstory for your hero, be sure to include origin, meaningful formative experiences, career or life path, personality, especially quirks, demeanor, mannerisms, appearance, and significant challenges.

If you enjoy imagining the hero's life to date, vicariously roleplaying by imagination, create a detailed narrative of his experiences prior to the beginning of the first game session. In any event, make some notes for the backstory that will inform your roleplay and help the coordinator put together operations that would be interesting to your hero.

Imagine your hero conceptually, including a name, adjectives that might define the persona, and personality quirks that would make for a distinctive, memorable alter ego. At a minimum, give your hero some distinctive characteristics like age, nationality, and race.

RESUME

Optionally, a hero's life prior to beginning play can be a helpful creation tool using the career options to develop him on a year-by-year basis beginning with childhood, describing any significant events or

accomplishments and the costs for different talents, assets, and skills developed during that time period.

A resume is not strictly necessary unless the players agree to require one of each other, but it can be a fun way to vicariously play by imagining other adventures for your hero before joining the current group.

SKILLS, STUNTS, & EXTRAS

In simple terms, skills give you a bonus to actions. Stunts make your skills more awesome or allow you to break certain game rules under special circumstances. Extras can be all that and a bag of chips! Skills and stunts are described briefly extensively in **Master the Fundamentals**. Extras are fully described in **The Toy Box**. You get a certain number of each based on the **power level** of your game.

GEAR

Be sure to describe the common equipment that your hero is likely to be carrying at any given time. It's assumed in Modernity, barring situational aspects to the contrary, that a hero always possesses the requisite equipment necessary to engage his skills.

Gearing Up

Narratively-speaking, you can have anything you want in Modernity for free under two conditions: 1) the table concurs that it makes sense, and 2) it doesn't give you a bonus or change a game mechanic in some way. If you want more than story frosting, you'll have to pay for it in some way.

Unusual or very expensive equipment will have to be acquired separately, particularly if it provides bonuses to actions, exceptions to the rules, or other story-bending functionality.

Don't be afraid to engage in **retroactive preparation** by spending fate points to make declarations of fact. See **Choose Your Fate**.

SKILLS DEFINED

The quantity of skills, stunts, and extras are initially assigned based on the **power level** of the game. All **stunts** in Modernity cost one point of refresh rate each, but some more powerful **extras** have a greater cost.

Skills describe the basic problem solving and difficulty management assets that characters can apply to problems. That's a fancy way of saying that skills are a numeric representation of how a character solves his problems in life. Skills can be used accomplish actions as negotiated with the coordinator and the rest of the table.

Just describe your permission, the type of action you're attempting, and apply the appropriate skill to the dice. However, the action must make sense to the table. Use the table in the facing page as a guide. Each skill and examples of related stunts for each skill are described in detail in **Master the Fundamentals**.

How HIGH?

The magnitude of a skill is measured as a character's general deviation from the baseline everyman norm of Mediocre (+0). Skills for heroes can range anywhere from Mediocre on up **The Ladder**. It's unlikely that a hero will ever have a skill rated Inconceivable (+10), but it's theoretically within the realm of the possible. Any skill that is not specifically enumerated for a character is presumed to be Mediocre (+0).

Any hero's skill rated at Good (+3) or better must have permission based on a character aspect to justify its rating.

THE DEFAULT SKILL

The premise of gameplay in Modernity is descriptive storytelling. Whenever you want to apply a skill to a problem, just like any other element of Modernity, you must narratively justify it. If the coordinator or the majority of the table don't think it makes sense, you'll have to come up with another option. In the worst case, if you can't justify any of your skills for the action you want to take, you can always accept the default of Mediocre (+0) for the action in question.

Skill	Actions			Defends Against	
Athletics				Athletics, Brawn, Fighting, Shooting	
Awareness				Crime, Stealth	
Brawn				Athletics, Brawn	
Crime				Crime, Investigation	
Contacts					
Deception				Deception, Empathy, Finesse	
Driving				Driving	
Empathy				Deception, Finesse	
Engineering					
Finesse				Deception, Finesse	
Fighting					Athletics, Brawn, Fighting
Hacking				Hacking	
Investigation				Crime, Investigation	
Knowledge					
Lore					
Provocation					
Resources					
Sanity				Psychic Assault, Some Occult Spells	
Shooting					
Stealth				Awareness, Investigation	
Survival					
Will				Provocation, Some Occult Spells	

STUNTS DEFINED

In Modernity, stunts are unique or unusual characteristics that provide a character with permission to ignore, bend, or outright break (in some cases) the rules of the game. While stunts are often tied to skills or aspects, they can be applied to any rule in the game within reason and the coordinator's or the table's tolerance. There are examples of all sorts of stunts throughout this chapter, and there are guidelines in **Do Your Own Stunts** for creating new ones.

EMPLOYING STUNTS

Using a stunt is pretty simple. When an action is declared, before the dice are rolled, include the stunt declaration along with the permission and the declaration of the action. Typically only one stunt should ever come into play for each action.

Because stunts define a sweet spot for the character, the player (or the coordinator) will look for excuses to do things the stunt applies to by preference over other less interesting actions.

STUNTS & SKILLS

Many stunts are tied directly to a skill. They either provide a +2 bonus to a skill under a specific circumstance for a specific action, or they broaden the scope of a skill's influence in some way, such as allowing a normally passive skill like **Lore** to be used to make Attacks.

STUNTS & ASPECTS

Some stunts are tied directly to a specific aspect. In this case, they usually provide a free invocation of the aspect once per scene or once per session in order to provide a declaration of fact or some other sort of exception to a rule. Often these stunts are named similarly to an aspect and work like "Because I [fill in the blank], I can [fill in the blank]."

STUNTS & RULES

Some stunts simply provide a limited exception to a rule, or an exception to logic in a few cases, such as movement rules, order of action rules, etc. Just about anything can be justified, if balanced carefully against other comparable stunts, and the coordinator and the table are willing. These

can be as simple as allowing a character to move farther than normal or as complex as allowing the character to act out of turn.

BUYING MORE STUNTS

Each stunt costs 1 point of refresh. Characters at the everyman **power level** begin with a refresh rate of 3 and 3 “free” stunts. Additional stunts may be acquired at the cost of 1 point of refresh rate each.

THE BALANCING ACT

In Modernity, stunts are purposefully balanced against one another to make the 1 refresh cost for a stunt the universal standard. To keep this balance, some more powerful effects only work a limited number of times per scene or per session, or for a cost like a fate point, stress, or consequences, or to have prerequisite stunts that must be owned first before acquiring the more powerful stunt.

STACKS OF STUNTS

When a stunt has a prerequisite, the character must keep the prerequisite at all times in order to continue to qualify for the more powerful stunt. Think of these like a stunt tree. If you retrain or replace a stunt lower in the stack, you also have to give up all of the stunts higher in the stack.

GETTING STARTED

Once everyone in the group has a hero at hand, with at least a name, a High Concept, and a Trouble, you're ready to do one of two things:

- Jump in Head First, or
- Begin the Phase Trio.

For groups of entirely new heroes, start with the Phase Trio in order to give your group the cohesion necessary for it to function well (dramatically-speaking, totally dysfunctional groups are more fun!) and to give everyone at the table a better sense of each character's personality and quirks.

For established groups who are just adding one or two new players to the table, jumping in Head First might be the way to go. Making the new players' first session "their story" (in Phase Trio parlance). This allows the group to continue to build story momentum, and introduce the new players to game mechanics at the same time as they define their new alter egos.

For groups of veteran players who like diving into the deep end (or games with only one player), Head First might be the way to go, but I don't recommend it for folks who aren't familiar with one another's playstyles and Modernity's mechanics.

Whatever your group, I do *not* recommend that characters be constructed in isolation. Character creation is part of collaborative gameplay in Modernity, regardless of how you accomplish it. Having other people as a sounding board *and* as guardrails while defining your character will help to ensure that everyone at the table has the fun they expect to have along the way.

Be sure to carefully balance Table Consensus, even during character creation, regardless of how you do it. . .

Nothing would be more embarrassing than imaging a character for yourself whose Trouble is *Nymphomania*, only to find out that when you get to the table, that entire game will be rated PG because the coordinator's preadolescent children are also players. (This is only hypothetical embarrassment. I'm not saying that this has ever actually happened at a table that I've been present at.)

HEAD FIRST

If all the players are comfortable with Modernity game mechanics, and the coordinator is ready to jump into the first session, the players can all jump into the game with minimalist character skeletons. Each hero only really needs:

- Name
- High Concept
- Trouble

If those are present, you're good to go. However, gameplay will require a little more thought along the way for each minimalist hero, and some careful bookkeeping as new aspects, skills, and stunts are added during subsequent scenes.

Key Assumption

One key assumption that Head First character creation makes is that the current operation is the Head First hero's "rude awakening," i.e. his first introduction to the occult. The first game session for a Head First hero is equivalent to his Phase One of the traditional Phase Trio, and possibly the other phases, too.

HEAD FIRST CHARACTER ASPECTS

Your hero's aspects serve several important purposes. In addition to providing pithy catchphrases that concisely describe your hero's *weltanschauung* (look it up!), your hero's aspects also provide permission to do things that other characters cannot do and they provide a mechanism through which he can access and manipulate the story.

Something to keep in mind about character aspects during your Head First character creation that distinguishes them from any other kind of aspect is that they can only be changed in one of two ways:

1. Most commonly, a character adjusts or changes an aspect at a **milestone** to reflect change and growth.
2. Rarely, a character takes an extreme consequence in order to avoid being taken out. See **Consequences**.

TIME TO ROLL

For Head First heroes, whenever a situation comes along that requires an action using a skill that he doesn't have defined yet *and* he still has remaining slots in his **skill pyramid**, the player will have to decide whether or not the required skill is one the hero has in his repertoire. If so, write it down as if he always had that skill. Once a skill is committed and used this way, it can't be changed again until a future milestone when it makes sense for the hero to be adjusted.

DEFINING MOMENTS

Eventually, situations will come up when the player of a Head First hero wants to reroll or gain an invocation bonus (both will be explained later), but none of the available situation aspects or character aspects or stunts make sense, or are not available for some reason. Then it's possible for the hero to have a "defining moment" and derive a new character aspect or acquire a new stunt into an unassigned slot. This new aspect or stunt is now a permanent part of the character. (Well, as permanent as anything in Modernity can be.)

TAKE YOUR TIME

The trick with Head First character creation is to take a little more time in each scene to think during each moment so that heroes who still have empty slots for new skills, stunts, and aspects to decide whether *now* is the moment to define one.

THE PHASE TRIO

The Phase Trio is a time-tested process for developing character aspects from the backstories of the heroes. As with Head First character creation, each character needs to have the following defined before beginning the first phase:

- Name
- High Concept
- Trouble

The remaining three aspects are cooperatively defined in three phases. This is an opportunity for the table to share stories about their heroes, and contribute connections to one another through the development of their shared backstories.

ACTIONS & OUTCOMES

Each phase of the trio will require you to write down two things about your character:

- A narrative summary about the hero's actions in the phase,
- And an aspect that he derived from that phase.

A sentence or a short paragraph summarizing each phase is all that's really necessary to get a flavor for that part of the backstory. Every table will decide for itself how much detail is necessary, but remember that you are defining historical facts for your game in each phase.

Each phase is a “defining moment” or “defining element” of how the character interacts with the story from that moment on. See **Aspects Defined** if you'd like more detail on what aspects are, how to write good ones, and how they're going to be used during the game.

WORKSHEETS

You can use the spaces designed for this on the back of the official Modernity character sheet to work out each of these elements if you wish. You can find a link to download the interactive PDF at <http://x.co/modheroes>. Many tables use index cards or other types of deceased topiary to write on as they work through the Phase Trio.



PHASE ONE: YOUR RUDE AWAKENING

This phase is written by the player who owns the hero. This can be just about any past adventure that you care to describe, but in Modernity, it's usually the “defining moment” when your character came to realize that there are more things in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in the philosophies of most modern mortals.

Timing Is Everything

Because two other characters are going to participate in your Phase Trio, the story needs to happen in a place where they're likely to have been and unfold in a way in which they could have reasonably participated in your story in some meaningful way, for better or for worse.

Unless you plan to play a character who is a “mundane” (i.e. blissfully ignorant of the occult) in your first operation, this is where you get to describe what happened that opened your eyes to “the truth,” and how it changed you. The aspect you derive from Phase One should reflect your outlook on the occult and your typical approach to interacting with it, be that *Kill it with Fire* or *Once You Go Fae*. It's up to you.

GETTING UNSTUCK

Sometimes you'll need some inspiration to get over the hump (also known as writer's block). Look at your character's High Concept and Trouble. What kind of Trouble would that kind of character have gotten into that "woke him up" to the reality that all is not as it seems? Was it part of "the job"? Did something happen to someone you loved? Talk to the rest of the table and get their input if you need some help jumpstarting your story.

Ask yourself these questions to get unstuck:

- Assume that something horrible occurred to you or someone that you care about deeply. What was it? Was it your fault?
- What did you *choose* to do about it? Aspects are about being proactive and making choices, not usually about things that just happen to you.
- Who did it? What were the antagonists like? What were their motivations? Was it random? Or did you or your loved one invite it in some way?
- Win or lose, what happened? How did that change you forever?

Once you've got those details, write the aspect that relates to some part of what happened that will become your vehicle for influencing the narrative in the future.

PHASE TWO: YOUR FIRST GUEST ROLE IN ANOTHER'S STORY

This phase takes your hero into another's story as a guest star or a cameo appearance, if you will. There are lots of different ways to determine which hero goes into which other hero's story:

- Draw straws, roll dice, consult the Tarot.
- Shuffle them randomly and draw.
- Trade to the left or right around the table.
- Discuss what makes the most sense to everyone.

However the table collectively chooses to do it, make sure that each player is holding someone else's hero's Phase One story.

Remember, this is *not* your story. Your hero is participating in a supporting role. Ultimately, the other player whose hero owns the Phase One story that yours is making an appearance in makes the decision

about whether to accept the new story details you propose. Keep the following options in mind when determining how your hero might extract an aspect of his own from someone else's story:

- **Inciting action:** Does the guest star kick the star “out of the nest” as it were? Does the guest star cause the problem in the first place? How does the kicking hero feel about doing it?
- **Complicating the story:** Are the two heroes at odds? Does the guest star make it harder on the star in some way? Or is the guest star's appearance to be an object lesson for the star?
- **Providing camaraderie:** Is the guest star the buddy or sidekick that provides comic relief or character development for the star?
- **Deliver resolution:** Does the guest star save the day? Or just provide part of the solution? Does the guest star teach the star something important about life, the universe, and everything?
- **All of the above:** Does the guest star both make it worse and provide some sort of aid? If so, how?

Be sure to let your hero show off a little bit and make a nontrivial contribution to the narrative. Chose whichever option makes the most sense to you, make sure that the other player agrees to your additions to his story. Then write down the aspect for your hero that you will use to shape the narrative in the future that came out of the new story detail.

PHASE THREE: YOUR SECOND GUEST ROLE

By this time, you should know the drill. Follow whatever method you used in Phase Two to rearrange who is holding which story, and then rinse and repeat. You'll be following the same guidelines as with Phase Two in yet another hero's tale.

LESS THAN THREE PLAYERS?

Modernity can cope with one or two players much more readily than other games that require more careful balancing of encounters and challenges. However, the Phase Trio has a built-in assumption of three players. . . Go figure!

Fortunately, it's pretty straightforward to accommodate fewer players using the Phase Trio process. Here are some suggestions:

- Treat Phase Three the same way as Head First character creation. Just keep an eye out during gameplay for the right “defining moment” to flesh out your hero’s fifth aspect.
- Imagine another shared story that the heroes all participated in, and derive Phase Three aspects from the shared story.
- **Fate Core** (p. 44) suggests having the coordinator create a character for participating in Phase Three. I will only add the caveat that it’s crucial that this so-called “GM PC” go away, or risk having the coordinator engaging in the story both as a hero’s player and everything else.
- As noted earlier, games in which there is only a coordinator and one player are usually best played starting with Head First character development.

EXAMPLE PHASE TRIO

If Paul (Roberto), Vanessa (Shannon), and Eliza (Grace) had engaged in the Phase Trio for Roberto's story instead of diving in Head First, their aspects might look something like the notes on the facing page.

- Roberto: *Love at First Bite*
- Shannon: *I Keep my Friends Close*
- Grace: *I'll Make a Couple Calls*

Roberto's Aspect: Love at First Bite

Roberto charged into an incident of domestic violence that was even worse than a typical mundane abusive situation. He was bitten by a werewolf in the process, but not before the werewolf slaughtered his own wife. Roberto was able to save the werewolf's young daughter.

Shannon's Aspect: I Keep my Friends Close

Roberto goes AWOL after being bitten. Because Shannon is friends with Roberto's wife, Maria, at Maria's pleading request, Shannon tracks Roberto down with her magic and helps him begin learning to control the changeling spirit that has come to possess him.

Grace's Aspect: I'll Make a Couple Calls

Roberto has a lot of questions to answer to internal affairs after he's stabilized and in the hospital. He is delirious and makes crazy statements to the detectives. Grace reaches out to her network of contacts to make sure he gets a good lawyer and a good union rep to smooth things over.

ACCUMULATING EXPERIENCE

Each new hero begins with a baseline amount of experience defined by the **power level** of the game. He accumulates more as he grows and changes along the way. Experience is not necessarily tied to years of existence, training, or actual life experiences, but is a measure of general capability, including hobbies. It doesn't matter how your character came by the skills he has, only that it make sense to the table that he has them.

RETRAINING

Change happens. Often a player will need or want to rewrite aspects or reassign skills for a variety reasons, so don't be afraid to decide now, knowing that you can change and reassign things later. Just discuss it with the coordinator and create a suitable explanation as part of the character's ongoing backstory. This is typically done only at a **milestone**.

ADVANCEMENT

Heroes accumulate experience through gameplay. It's earned for taking risks, accomplishing goals, and, most importantly, enjoyable roleplay for everyone involved. Each milestone has the potential for a hero to change his aspects or to improve his skills and stunts by permanently acquiring the next level of proficiency. As heroes advance in skill, they will eventually increase the power level of your game.

HEROIC ARCHETYPES

These are some suggestions for character archetypes that might get you started on imagining your High Concept. Although some overlap a little, they are broadly classified into five groups:

1. The Adventurer
2. The Brain
3. The Conscience
4. The Muscle
5. The Showoff

Alone, those archetypes aren't enough. You will want to add an adjective of some sort into the mix when you take an archetype, make it your own, and convert it into a High Concept.

THE ADVENTURER

Any character that performs better outside of civilization than inside it is an adventurer at heart. Someone who is compelled to seek out new and unusual experiences. Someone who needs novelty just to feel alive. Someone to whom taking risks is like breathing. Enterprising TV executives have created successful reality TV series just by following an adventurer around with a camera, but real adventurers don't care if anyone is watching or not.

Whether the adventure is found in the forgotten ruins of an enjungled city or the airless corridors of an alien asteroid that was once home to humanity's ancient benefactors, an adventurer in action outside the norm is capable of feats that he could not accomplish confined in a banal setting in the civilized world.

Adventurers eschew calm, predictable, civilized settings. They only come into their own when outside the normal parameters of the milieu and believe themselves to be operating without a safety net of any kind. Adventurers generally take risks that others won't, and are uncomfortable in the presence of civilization.

For an Adventurer, consider High Concepts like:

- *Crazy Treasure Hunter*
- *Have Map, Will Travel*
- *Lonely Soldier of Fortune*
- *Archaeologist Without a Clue*
- *Dedicated Combat Medic*
- *Photojournalist on a Mission*
- *A Legend on my Own Show*

THE BRAIN

A character whose primary interest is figuring things out, be that solving riddles and puzzles, creating gadgets, or hacking apart systems to figure out how they work is a brain. Once upon a time, brainy types were eschewed as nerds and geeks, left to their own esoteric devices with hobbies that nobody else understood.

Today, brains are the rockstars of the tech startup world, creators of patentable things like drugs and microchips and every modern convenience you can think of, and in many ways make the modern world go round. Often more than a little eccentric, the brain can find connections and patterns where others only hear noise.

The brain is the archetype that truly believes nothing is impossible, and is just as likely to be a magical practitioner as a private investigator or an electrical engineer. The brain solves problems intellectually, and is more often than not averse to violence.

For a Brain, consider High Concepts like:

- *Relentless Investigator*
- *Doctor of Awesomeness*
- *Unparalleled Spy*
- *The Other Kind of Cleaner*
- *Wizard of The Hidden College*
- *Mad Scientist for Hire*
- *Professor of the Weird*

THE CONSCIENCE

Every collection of badass antiheroes needs a conscience, since they tend to be in short supply among antiheroes themselves. A conscience is more than a hopeless, nagging goody two-shoes. A conscience is a driving force and an agent of change. A conscience is the character who will observe injustice and demand that action be taken to make it right.

Rose-colored glasses are standard issue to consciences everywhere. They know, deep down inside, that the world is not perfect, that things don't always work out in the end, and that bad things happen to good people for reasons they don't understand. However, they are unafraid to stand up and shout, "That's not how it should be!"

A conscience is as likely to be a person made of high moral fiber as a person with a much more promiscuous nature. So long as nobody gets hurt, where's the crime, man? A conscience is a character who does more than talk, though. A conscience is compelled to act, and thereby make the world a better place. Or die trying.

For a Conscience, consider High Concepts like:

- *Reluctant Divine Guardian*
- *We're the Good Guys, Dammit*
- *Priest on a Mission from God*
- *Just a Little Martyr Complex*
- *Starry-Eyed Journalist*
- *Crusader in Search of a Cause*
- *Confession is Good for the Soul*

THE MUSCLE

The easiest to identify, but perhaps the hardest to quantify, are the characters who approach every problem as if they are a hammer and the problem is just another in a long list of nails. Not always muscle-bound barbarians, the muscle can be a more cerebral character that applies force in other ways.

The muscle is often a part of the team in order to take the beating so nobody else has to. They're also most often the hitter of the group, when the gloves come off and the chips are down. Sometimes the muscle is war-sick and reluctant to fight. Sometimes the muscle is a bloodythirsty, itchy trigger finger who is always trying to start something. Most muscle

is somewhere in between.

More than other archetypes, the muscle is the most likely to be jaded, cynical, and sarcastic. Most muscles tend not to be adrenaline junkies like adventurers or showoffs because they know better than anyone else how much a fight can hurt, win or lose. Many examples of muscles are laconic and lackadaisical. . . Until the shooting starts.

For Muscle, consider High Concepts like:

- *I Only Need to Know One Thing*
- *High Explosive Problem Solver*
- *Old Soldiers Never Die*
- *Eldritch Warrior*
- *The Professional*
- *Another Drunken Master*
- *Grizzled Monster Hunter*

THE SHOWOFF

Adrenaline junkies require risk to feel alive, but unlike adventurers, a showoff needs an audience. A showoff doesn't necessarily need the direct and immediate personal risk, but boredom caused by banal and mundane activities are anathema to them. The showoff needs both the thrill and someone to witness how amazing they are.

Many showoffs are professional entertainers. They may be physical or dramatic entertainers. They may be politicians or hustlers or television anchors. Wherever you find a showoff, they will have an audience. Sometimes it will be a paying audience, sometimes it will be an audience of convenience, like a street performer.

In short, showoffs are people people. Wherever a showoff goes and whatever a showoff does, he needs to feel appreciated. The worst punishment for a showoff as a child was being sent to his room and isolated from people. That's a punishment guaranteed to bring out the showoff's inner drama queen.

For a Showoff, consider High Concepts like:

- *Unprofessional Daredevil*
- *A Hustler on the Make*
- *Unrepentant Socialite*
- *Gorgeous Supermodel*



Dead Island

EXAMPLE CHARACTERS

The example heroes used for all of the gameplay vignettes are designed around the characters of the *Seraphim Conspiracy* series of novels which interleave with the **series of Modernity operations** of the same name. The aspects and other character elements generally reflect their status during or at the end of the first novel, *Iniquity*.

“People’s fates are simplified by their names.”

Elias Canetti

The four heroes are not intended to be a comprehensive example of a well-rounded party of adventurers any more than your table will have the same. They are just examples of interesting characters that I thought would be fun to play. All four were adjusted based on input from formal playtest groups.

Feel free to use them as templates or use them as-is.



ROBERTO MORENO

Officer Roberto Alfonso Javier Jesus Santiago Moreno is a descendant of original Tejano settlers who came to the El Paso area in the 1700s. He is so assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture that he speaks Spanish with an Anglo accent. Despite his lack of cultural roots, Roberto identifies very strongly with honor, dignity, and service, which drew him to serve as an officer in the El Paso Police Department. Roberto married his high school sweetheart, Maria, a first generation Mexican immigrant. They have three children together: Alma, Frasco, and Javier.

ASPECTS

Roberto's aspects all support his role as the investigator of the group.

- High Concept: *Protect and Serve!*
- Trouble: *Latino Chivalry Lives!*
- *Love at First Bite* (lupine changeling aspect)
- *Sure, I Can Look Into That*
- *Top of My Academy Class*

SKILLS {CHANGELING}

- Great +4: Awareness {Awareness}
- Good +3: Shooting, Investigation {Athletics, Stealth}
- Fair +2: Athletics, Contacts, Empathy {Brawn, Fighting, Will}
- Average +1: Brawn, Crime, Drive, Lore {none}

STUNTS & EXTRAS

Roberto's refresh rate is 1.

- Lupine Changeling: See **Changeling Magic** and **Changeling Spirits**.
- Changeling Symbiosis: See **Changeling Magic**.
- Terrifying Werewolf Howl: See **Changeling Magic**.
- At Peace with Rage: See **Changeling Magic**.
- Preternatural Speed: See **Changeling Magic**.



Dickler2



SHANNON O'MALLEY

If ever there were ever a poster child for all red-headed Irish stepchildren, she would look just like Shannon O'Malley and have a temper to match her curly flame-colored hair. The youngest of a long line of Celtic ancestors who can trace her lineage all the way back to ancient druids of yore using secret family records.

A devoted pagan and of flexible sexuality, Shannon also carries the torch for oppressed minorities everywhere, often to the chagrin of her current lover, Grace Xú.

ASPECTS

Shannon's aspects all support her role as the team occult specialist.

- High Concept: *The Celtic Oracle* (occult aspect)
- Trouble: *Everyone Needs Mothering*
- *I Keep My Friends Close*
- *Get to the Point, Dammit*
- *Druidic Ancestry*

SKILLS

- Great +4: **Empathy**
- Good +3: **Lore, Athletics**
- Fair +2: **Provocation, Crime, Drive**
- Average +1: **Contacts, Engineering, Shooting, Survival**

STUNTS & EXTRAS

Shannon's refresh rate is 1.

- **Rational Magic**: See **Rational Magic**.
- **Natural Magi**: See **Rational Magic**.
- **Intuitive Magi**: See **Rational Magic**.
- **Aura of Command**: See **Rational Magic**.
- **Words of Power**: See **Rational Magic**.

GRACE XU

Born in Hong Kong, Grace immigrated to Los Angeles with her famous physician parents at the age of six. An upper class lifestyle taught her sophistication foreign to most of her generation, and gave her access to education and contacts that are still valuable today. Her parents are still horrified that she is using her Harvard MBA to chase down felons and spy on other people for a living as a private investigator. Her parents would be even more horrified to learn that Grace had been held captive for three days by a misogynist campus cult before she managed to kill one of her captors and make her escape. But Grace would never tell them, nor how she eventually crossed all of the cultists off her hit list, one by one, rather than report the crime. She still only feels safe exclusively in the company of women, especially her current lover, Shannon O'Malley.

ASPECTS

Grace's aspects all support her role as the spokesman for the group.

- High Concept: *A Real Dragon Lady*
- Trouble: When In Doubt, Don't
- *Born a Sophisticate*
- *I Do Sudoku Puzzles in Pen*
- *I'll Make a Couple Calls*

SKILLS

- Great +4: **Finesse**
- Good +3: **Contacts, Investigation**
- Fair +2: **Awareness, Hacking, Resources**
- Average +1: **Deception, Knowledge, Shooting, Stealth**

STUNTS & EXTRAS

Grace's refresh rate is 3.

- **Scary Little Woman**: I can use **Finesse** instead of **Provocation** to **Overcome** when intimidating others who know my reputation.
- **Shameless Voyeur**: See **Investigation**.
- **Trained Observer**: See **Awareness**.





GRANT ANDERSEN

Grant looks like his name sounds: a tall, muscular, bald man of obvious blue-eyed Scandinavian descent typically sporting traces of a three-day blond beard that's starting to frost a little gray around the jowls, usually dressed in a biker's obligatory denim, leather, and chains. A veteran of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, he was the sergeant of a 13 BRAVO company that encountered an occult horror that killed many of his Marines. The closest that Grant has come to adjusting to civilian life is buying a Harley. A habitual drug connoisseur since mustering out, Grant has recently developed a **faerie dust** habit that helps him cope.

ASPECTS

Grant's aspects all support his role as a biker brute in this crew.

- High Concept: *Loud Pipes Save Lives*
- Trouble: *I Can Quit Any Time I Want*
- *Always Bet on the Underdog*
- *Ride It Like You Stole It*
- *Once a Marine*

SKILLS

- Great +4: **Fight**
- Good +3: **Brawn, Athletics**
- Fair +2: **Provocation, Crime, Drive**
- Average +1: **Engineering, Lore, Shooting, Survival**

STUNTS & EXTRAS

Grant's refresh rate is 3.

- **Badass Biker:** I get a +2 bonus with **Provocation** to **Overcome** when intimidating others while dressed in my traditional biker attire, such as denim and leather and chains.
- **Itchy Trigger Finger:** Once per session I can choose to go first in a tactical confrontation.
- **Rage Control Issues:** When I suffer a physical consequence, I can invoke each new consequence once for free on my next Attack during this scene.

LOOKING FOR LOVE

Scene Cut, Decision, Overcome, Declare, Invoke/Bonus

“Conflict builds character. Crisis defines it.”

Steven V. Thulon

Roberto began the first scene with 3 fate points. The coordinator admirably granted him two more fate points for accepting the penalty of his natural challenges (impulsive and macho) without trying to resist their effects, which he'll get at the end of the scene.

Roberto is not off to the best start in this operation, and he's going to need all the heroism he can muster.

At that moment, Vanessa (Shannon) and Eliza (Grace) arrive to join the game, explaining that John (Grant) is on his way to pick up the pizza. That gives Zoë a good idea for a compel when Bill gets there.

As coordinator, Zoë says, “Let's cut to another scene to get Vanessa and Eliza right into the game, and give Paul a chance to consider the error of his ways.” Zoë winks at Paul jokingly.

In the previous session, Shannon and Grace had gotten mixed up in a terrorist/gang attack at the airport and were in the midst of tracking an escaped federal fugitive. A non-player character, Maria, calls Shannon on the phone in a panic. Her husband, Roberto, has gone missing and the duty sergeant called home to see if he was there.

Paul groans because he knows that means things are only going to get

worse for Roberto when they cut back to his scene, **Condition Brown**.

Zoë offers Shannon a **Decision** due to her Trouble, **Everyone Needs Mothering**, and to Grace due to her Trouble, **When in Doubt, Don't**. She proposes that Shannon and Grace would drop the chase of Raúl Salazar, alleged drug lord and federal fugitive, in order to help a friend in need (Shannon) and because getting mixed up in US Marshal business without permission or backup seems like a sketchy plan at best for a professional investigator (Grace). Having missed what transpired so far in Roberto's first scene, and curious to find out, the two women agree to accept the compel and the fate point.

The lovers briefly strategize, and determine that the fastest way to find a missing person would be for Shannon to use her magic to track him down.

Zoë offers that in order for Shannon to perform a Ritual of Discernment to locate Roberto, she needs to know where to begin, a starting point as it were.

With Roberto missing and Grant AWOL, Shannon resorts to an even more direct approach than usual. Time is of the essence. Every hour that Roberto is gone will make the spell that much harder to cast. The last place that Roberto was known to be would be a good place to start. . . if the desk sergeant at the police station would be so kind as to tell her.

Zoë says quickly, "Let's call this scene, **Looking for Love**."

Paul groans again and the women giggle. She decides that other situation aspects include **Busy Police Precinct** and **Budget Cuts Everywhere**.

Shannon starts talking, explaining what she needs to the sergeant.

The coordinator tells her to make a Finesse action. The coordinator decides that it's Great (+4) static opposition, because she is asking the sergeant to violate police procedure, and common sense. The sergeant has a neutral outlook toward her, having never met her before.

She rolls well, + + + - plus her Finesse +1 gives her a total effort of +3, which would normally be a failure or a success at a major cost.

Zoë says, "Shannon's abrasive personality aspect, **Get to the Point, Dammit**, is going to be a challenge this time. I'm going to invoke that for effect." She grins and hands Vanessa one of the fate points from her scene pool. This increases the static opposition to Fantastic (+6). (Zoë could've offered an **Event** or **Decision** instead, the net result being the

same: Shannon gives up.)

Vanessa nods grudgingly and accepts the fate point. The desk sergeant won't cooperate with Shannon.


*Fortunately for Roberto, Shannon didn't come alone. Grace was **Born a Sophisticate**. Being well-versed in social situations, she is normally the one "encouraged" to deal with the more polite problems that the group finds themselves confronted by, but being in too much of a hurry, Shannon let her mouth get too far ahead of them.*

"We probably got off on the wrong foot, sir," says Grace in her silky voice. "My friend often comes on a little too strong," she says apologetically. "What she meant was that we're sure you're as worried about our missing friend, Officer Moreno, as we are. We just want to do everything we can to help look for him. . ."

Eliza informs the coordinator that she wants to use a fate point to declare a fact. She has five fate points left from the previous session, which was more than her refresh of 3, so she gets to keep them all.

Grace and the desk sergeant have worked together in the past (when she was a cop), and she knows he's loyal to a fault to his fellow officers. She plans to take advantage of that fact to get him to cooperate.

Eliza proposes that he has the aspect, **My Heart Bleeds Blue**. Zoë agrees to name the sergeant Fred and work out the rest of the details of their relationship in the future as needed.

After stating her case to the sergeant, Grace rolls a wash  plus her Finesse (+4) for a tie, because the opposition for Grace is back to Great (+4). A success. Barely.

Zoë still has one fate point in her scene pool, and she winks at Eliza. "I'm going to invoke Fred's new aspect, **My Heart Bleeds Blue**. Fred has always carried a torch for Grace, and she's never reciprocated." Zoë drops the last scene fate point into the universal pool, taking the static resistance back to Fantastic (+6) for Grace.

Fred winks at Grace.

*Grace grimaces. Not the way she'd planned for that to go. Though she could still use Fred's aspect, she decides to invoke the scene title, **Looking for Love**, for another +2 bonus, bring the bidding war back to a tie. It's important that they find their friend Maria's husband.*

Since it's still a tie, Zoë proposes success with a minor narrative cost.

“You’re right, ma’am. This is a weird case, and today’s a weird day,” the sergeant agrees. “We could use all the help we can get. If you’ll have dinner with me, maybe we can help each other out.”

Grace agrees with a fake smile. She knows that dinner with Fred will annoy Shannon, because Fred will have delusions of romance. She sighs at the inevitable drama.

Looking over his shoulder to make sure no one is around to overhear him break the rules, he confides in a hushed whisper to Grace the address where Roberto’s cruiser was found, empty. An address that is now a crime scene complete with two dead bodies.

“Be careful, ma’am. I’d hate for anything to postpone our dinner,” Fred says in a concerned voice.

Shannon storms out of the station in a huff.

Thanking the sergeant with a big smile, Grace follows her lover out in search of Roberto. She resists the temptation to tease Shannon about smiling and politeness being simple but very effective magic.

As the two women get into Grace’s Toyota urban assault vehicle to head over to the crime scene, jealous drama crackling in the air.

Zoë turns back to Paul. “Okay, Roberto. Let’s rewind a little bit and cut back to your current predicament. Where were we?”



FIGHT THE TERROR

Challenges, contests, and conflicts. . . To the death.

“The world is a fine place, and worth fighting for.”

Ernest Hemingway

SCENE FRAMEWORKS

Modernity is a more free-flowing game than most, with time passing, or not, as it adds drama and entertainment to the story. The level in the story time hierarchy where structure is most needed is at the scene level, primarily to provide a reasonable sequence of events and to insure that everyone at the table gets the same amount of time in the proverbial spotlight.

Manifest Your Destiny

Any character’s course of action should be expressed narratively with a particular eye toward how it will affect the ongoing story. . . *And then the mechanics rationalized.* Not the other way around. Characters should never be limited to an expression of just what’s on the character sheet.

Some coordinators who have a penchant for storytelling might have scenes that are entirely exposition. Some tables will be fine with scenes that have no structure whatsoever and consist entirely of the back and forth banter between the heroes. Both are great—if everyone is having fun. Most folks who play *Modernity*, though, will probably not feel as though the story is making much forward progress if those are the only kinds of scenes in your game.

The scene structures described in this section can be combined or sequenced in any way that's fun for your table. After all, it's your game!

TYPES OF SCENES

Scenes can be described with different kinds of **challenges**, **contests**, and **conflicts**. These different types of scene structures are only suggestions. Feel free to make up whatever combination of scene arrangements make sense and feel dramatically appropriate to your table. Anything you imagine is possible, and if it seems like fun, explore it!

See **Operational Considerations** section for guidelines and examples. You will find detailed examples of specific kinds of challenges, contests, and conflicts in other **Modernity briefing books**.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

The players should always have some idea what's at stake in a scene, even if the risks and rewards will change during the course of events, and especially if they wind up offering a concession. In order for them to engage their heroes effectively and deploy their resources to accomplish their goals, the coordinator should be as scrupulous about clarifying the possible outcomes that the heroes perceive, based on the information that they have, as he is about envisioning the scene aspects. Be sure to update the victory conditions for the scene whenever the visible particulars change.

SITUATION ASPECTS

Any aspect that is temporary in nature and describes some part of the environment or the story is a situation aspect. They are used to set the scene and provide hooks on which to hang the narrative. They are the mechanism through which the heroes interact with the rest of the universe that are not denizens.

Because most situational aspects, especially boosts, are so short-lived, it's not worth devoting too much game time to "getting them right." Pick phrases that the table can accept and keep the story rolling!

Situation aspects typically don't last longer than a session, and usually persist only for the duration of the scene. The operative test for a situation aspect is: *Does this aspect still make sense in the current scene?* If it doesn't, simply remove it from play. Where game aspects cover the campaign and the operation, situation aspects cover all the shorter time slices than those. It is the catch-all category of aspects.

A few examples of situation aspects are:

- Plot elements that drive the current session or the current scene: *The Druglord Cometh* –or– *Virulent Pandemic Outbreak* –or– *Wanted, Dead or Alive*
- Features of the landscape in the scene: *Tear Gas Everywhere* –or– *Dark, Cluttered Warehouse Aisles* –or– *An Altar of Bloodstone*
- Position or placement in the scene: *On the Dance Floor* –or– *A Highly Enlightened Position* –or– *The Conservatory*
- Challenges and obstacles to Overcome: *Grasping Tentacles* –or– *Man-Eating Venus Flytraps* –or– *A Narrow, Rain-Slick Precipice* –or– *An Overpowering Stench* –or– *The Safehouse is Burning*
- Details that provide story context: *Suspicious Neighbors* –or– *Orwellian Surveillance* –or– *Riot in the Streets*
- Conditions imposed by one character on another or due to a change in status: *Out of Ammo* –or– *Dazed and Seeing Stars* –or– *Cornered* –or– *Tied to a Chair*

Situation aspects are normally described by the coordinator as part of the scene setup or put in place by a character (heroes and denizens) during the scene through **Create Advantage** actions to create or discover new aspects for use.

CHANGING SITUATION ASPECTS

The biggest churn will always be found in situation aspects. If the heroes are doing their J.O.B. then the situation aspects will be constantly in flux.

Naming Scenes?

No, you don't have to name every scene, but I've found that it helps a little bit in developing situation aspects to make the scene title a full aspect. It sets the mood and creates unexpected drama!

For example, the following are some of the circumstances under which situation aspects can change (the possibilities are almost limitless):

- A new scene starts and the coordinator removes the situation aspects that don't make sense anymore from the previous scene. *Shannon and Grace leave the **Dingy Old Warehouse** and find themselves ambushed in **A Junk-Filled Parking Lot** instead.*
- A predetermined amount of time passes, either changing or eliminating an aspect from play. *Although there were **Five Hostages Left**, the **Unreasonable Deadline** imposed by the kidnappers passes and they kill a hostage, leaving only **Four Hostages Left**. The **Ticking Time Bomb** explodes when the timer reaches zero, killing or maiming (i.e. an extreme consequence) anyone left in the scene.*
- A character uses a **Create Advantage** action to discover or impose a new aspect in the scene. *Roberto dumps a bag of ball bearings all over the hardware store to create a **Slip-And-Fall Hazard**. Grant out-muscles his opponent into a place where he's **Cornered**.*
- A character uses an **Overcome** action to remove an aspect from a scene. *In a fit of impatient rage, Grant kicks in the front door to eliminate the **Locked Front Door** aspect from the scene. The villain has Roberto **In a Headlock**, until Roberto is assumes his wereform and is then able to use his superior Athletics to escape.*
- A character uses an **Attack** or **Overcome** action to change an aspect in some way. *Shannon uses one of her many spells to temporarily change the homeless man's **Hostile Demeanor** into **Cordial and Cooperative** to more easily learn what he saw.*

As always, describe what you want the narrative to be *then* figure out which game mechanics are required to make it so (if any).

BOOSTS

There are some aspects that are very ephemeral. They only last until they are used once, then they disappear. You create a boost when you make an attempt to **Create Advantage**, but don't succeed well enough to create a permanent aspect, when you tie on an **Attack** or **Defend** action, or when you **succeed with style** on an Attack or Defend action.

You may invoke a boost once for free, then it disappears and is removed from play. Boosts may not be used for additional, subsequent invocations beyond their one-time free use. You may allow other characters to use your boosts, if it makes narrative sense for them to do so.

LEVERAGING ASPECTS

Players who are new to Modernity frequently tend toward creating a plethora of aspects. As play in a scene progresses, things slow down as the table struggles to come up with more and more new and unique aspects for each boost or free invocation created. This creative fatigue doesn't have to be inevitable!

A more flexible and scalable approach is to have a few preplanned aspects that are used frequently by each character, especially if these "status effects" are tied to stunts that are the heroes' signature moves, and then build additional free invocations on top of them as desired.

Whenever a player wants to give himself an edge, the coordinator should encourage him to add free invocations to existing game, situation, or character aspects with a **Create Advantage** action. In conflict situations, it's even plausible for one character to create free invocations on top of another character's consequences to his and his team's future advantage!

Another pitfall that I observed in many playtest sessions of Modernity is players being overly specific in naming their aspects, especially character aspects and consequences. The more general purpose aspects are, the more likely it is that they will be used. The more different ways they can be interpreted for sharing between characters, the better they will serve to share free invocations between characters.

Players experienced in other systems also take some coaxing toward the cooperative tactics that Modernity rewards most highly. For example, if every hero takes his turn to Attack during a **conflict**, instead of cooperating to Create Advantage and produce aspects to share with

the heavy hitter, the conflict will take much, much longer and cost the heroes more resources to complete. The most effective strategy is often to accumulate enough advantages to support one Attack to deliver more stress than the target can absorb and take it out in one shot.

Another thing to keep in mind is that, as described in **Invoke an Aspect**, you can only spend one fate point to invoke a single aspect once for a single action (i.e. one die roll). However, you can spend an unlimited number of free invocations stacked on an aspect for a single action *and* spend that one additional fate point as well. When the story you're trying to tell at that moment in the scene is about how amazing your hero's High Concept is then you'll want to stack as many free invocations on it as possible.

Remember, a free invocation on an aspect is the equivalent of a fate point (it can do all the things a fate point can do), it's just narratively tied to that one specific aspect, which necessarily limits its utility. Because you can create free invocations on existing aspects with less effort than accepting tons of compels, use those whenever it makes sense rather than spending your precious few fate points.

Whether you're using aspects as a springboard for each roleplaying moment, or using them as a launchpad for an amazing action, be sure to leverage every aspect to its fullest extent. They are your tools of the trade, and your keys to the kingdom.

Aspects rarely *do* anything until a character comes along and provides the narrative force to make them meaningful.

IN THE ZONE

Modernity is more of a “theater of the mind” than other roleplaying games that many players are familiar with. Although you can absolutely represent characters with miniatures on the table, it’s not necessary nor even desirable sometimes. For example, the exact distance between antagonists in a firefight isn’t necessary to know, unless it creates a difference in the dramatic outcome of a scene.

In addition to the situation aspects that describe a scene, the coordinator may define “zones” in the scene to facilitate the discussion of spatial relationships. These are particularly relevant in physical confrontations and combative conflicts, but can also be useful in other sorts of challenges and contests.

An emotional confrontation, like an argument or debate, could have zones defined as which side of the proverbial aisle each participant is on or their emotional state at any given moment.

Purely mental or emotional scenes may not even need zones, unless they’re relevant to the drama.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A zone name is an aspect like any other. For example, the *Edge of a Cliff* is a very important zone boundary for anyone subject to the laws of gravity. It’s also useful to add other special situation aspects which only apply to the zone or characters in that zone.

IN PROXIMITY

Characters who are in the same zone are considered to be “in proximity” for the purposes of Attack and Defend actions with the **Fighting** skill or any other action requiring hands-on proximity. Characters who are in different but adjacent zones or are separated by one or more zones may only make ranged Attacks with weapons or spells that can reach that far using **Shooting** or another appropriate skill for the Attack at a distance. See **Guns & Ammo** for more about tactical weapon range.

Front
Yard

sun
safe

Den

Living
Room

Utility
Room

Dining
Room

Kitchen

Bedroom

Bedroom

Prisoners

Patio

MOVING TARGETS

In order to move into an adjacent zone, a character need only declare that he is moving as part of his action, unless the character is prohibited from doing so by an aspect that blocks movement. Moving into an adjacent zone presents no difficulty and requires no other action than the narrative description. Give the character an aspect like *Moving* or *In Motion*, if you like, with no free invocations.

In order to move more than one zone, a character must either forfeit his action that moment or make a successful Overcome action with **Athletics** against an appropriate difficulty defined by the coordinator in order to move one additional zone. Typically this would be Fair (+2) opposition unless there are other mitigating factors to contend with while moving rapidly, such as aspects which would hamper movement. Obviously, stunts may have rules exceptions that allow characters to move even faster or farther in one moment.

SPACE PLANNING

If your scene happens in a small space, don't feel obligated to divide it up into zones. If the layout of your scene contains more than five or seven different zones, you're over-thinking it—or the scene is too big. Here are some guidelines:

- A typical, 2-story residential home might have two sets of zones, upstairs and downstairs, with each room a zone.
- A scene in a shopping mall could cover three or four zones is too large: the food court, the upper floor/balcony, the big adjacent department store, and a couple smaller shops.
- An aerial dogfight could be divided up into altitude bands and a number of zones distance between combatants.

Always keep your space manageable or risk your conflict being drawn out into hours rather than minutes. If you can't draw it in a couple seconds on the back of an index card, you're making it more complicated than it needs to be.

CHASE SCENES

When you have a chase scene, don't bother trying to lay out all the zones that the chase is going to rampage through. Instead, keep track of the number of zones in between participants as an aspect. All that matters is

their relative position to one another.

As the scenery changes around the chase, adjust the scene aspects so that the participants can use their environment to their advantage. As the pursuer gets closer, reduce the distance. As the pursued gets closer to escaping, increase the relative distance.

CHALLENGES

Any time the heroes are working to Overcome an obstacle or opposition of some sort, they will be engaged in a challenge. Challenges represent anything the coordinator models as a static (usually) or active (less typically) opposition to the heroes' skills. Challenges could be:

- Picking a lock to gain entry to a secure facility.
- Hacking a computer system to find secret information.
- Rappelling down the side of a skyscraper to escape.
- Fighting off a gang of thugs who are trying to block their path.
- Breaking a curse laid upon the group by an evil witch.
- Finding forensic evidence at a crime scene.
- Obtaining otherwise illegal equipment for a dangerous raid.



Any of these could be modeled as a single action challenge or a multi-step scene during which the heroes have several **exchanges** to Overcome the obstacles in order to achieve (or fail to achieve) their stated goal or goals.

Challenges are all composed purely of Overcome and Create Advantage actions against static or active opposition. There are no Attack or Defend actions in a challenge. If characters are attempting to do each other physical, psychic, or other kinds of harm, fast forward directly to a conflict.

WIN OR LOSE

When setting the victory conditions for a challenge, be sure the players know how many successes they need to complete it successfully, and what's at risk if they don't. This could be a majority of the characters must succeed, only one of them has to succeed, or none of them may fail in order to proceed. See **Teamwork**.

The victory conditions provided by the coordinator or the ones that the heroes set for themselves must be balanced against the risk to the heroes (in the form of stress or consequences) or against the risk to the story, because often the risk of failure will only be a narrative one.

MAKE IT INTERESTING

Don't follow the same pattern for every challenge. Mix it up. Put different things at risk and use skills in unexpected ways. Make it fun!

KNOW THE RISKS

Stress as a possible outcome of failure of an action makes sense for a big multi-exchange challenge, as the accumulation of stress could eventually result in consequences. In single-step or one-obstacle challenges, stress is probably not an appropriate risk.

CREATING ADVANTAGES

During his **moment** in each exchange of a challenge, a hero may attempt Create Advantage actions prior the Overcome action, either to help himself or his allies. Although Create Advantage actions do not represent successes or failures toward a challenge, they can provide much needed support for heroes with weaker skills that are required for the challenge. **However, each Create Advantage action that fails will result in the manifestation of a risk or a negative outcome that the coordinator chooses.** This detriment could be in the form of stress or consequences, increased difficulty for the next action in this challenge (i.e. a new aspect created with free invokes used to increase the static difficulty), etc. Consider **teamwork** as an alternative to Create Advantage actions. *Any Create Advantage actions in a challenge will also be against static opposition, which should be set comparably to the challenge difficulty.*

COORDINATING CHALLENGES

The coordinator may spend fate points from the scene pool against hero action in any challenge, although I don't recommend it simply because doing so will prolong the scene or drain the resources at the hero's disposal outside of a conflict situation. In the case of decision and event compels, the challenge becomes moot because a compel would force one outcome over another. Do a challenge or a compel, but not both.

If nothing is really at risk, don't bother setting up a challenge, just narrate the outcome and proceed, especially in the case of a challenge that is hard enough to require the expenditure of resources like free invocations and fate points. *Unless the point is to drain those resources.* See **Operational Considerations** for the reasons why this may be desirable.

CONTESTS

Whenever the heroes are up against active opposition that has a different goal (not necessarily directly opposing), even against one another, they are in a contest. The coordinator may use a contest to represent any sort of active opposition. A contest is a middle ground in terms of complexity and cost in time between a challenge and conflict. Some typical examples of a contest are:

- A getaway car chase between the heroes and the police.
- A cybernetic duel between teams of hackers on the open 'net.
- An amateur mixed martial arts match against a werewolf.
- A footrace to catch a suspect sorcerer before he escapes.
- A struggle between two spellcasters for dominance of a victim.
- A deadly game of hide-and-seek to escape detection by the guards.



A contest will always be a series of opposed Overcome actions. The coordinator will typically advertise how many **exchanges** the contest will last, and how many victory points are required, but not always. It's more frightening for the players not to know.

CONTEST VS. CHALLENGE

There are two principal differences between a challenge and a contest.

1. Each contestant makes a single Overcome action during each exchange, which is compared to the other contestants'. In essence, every character's **moment** occurs simultaneously.
2. Only one contestant or team of contestants will receive credit for one or more victory points toward winning the contest.

COUNTING COUP

After each contestant makes an Overcome action during the exchange, compare the results, and count victory points as follows:

- The contestant with the highest total wins the exchange and receives one victory point.
- If the winner of the exchange also manages to **succeed with style**, he receives an additional victory point (total of two).
- If there is a tie for the highest total, no one receives a victory point *and* an unexpected twist occurs.

UNEXPECTED TWISTS

An unexpected twist depends very much upon the contest and the environment. The coordinator will probably create a new aspect that describes how the game has changed. Perhaps the environment shifts or the rules change, or a new challenger enters the arena. Whatever the unanticipated variable is, it should affect all contestants equally.

WIN, LOSE, OR DRAW

When describing the contest, be sure to cover the basic ground rules. Some elements that define completion of a contest are:

1. The number of requisite victory points to declare a winner, or simply that the highest score wins at the end.
2. The number of exchanges before time runs out, if there is a time limit or limited number of possible exchanges.

The victory conditions could be a variety of different constructs, depending on the type of contest. For example:

- The team with the most victory points after 3 exchanges wins.
- The first team with 3 victory points wins, regardless of the number of exchanges it takes to get there.
- The first team with 5 victory points or the contestant with the most victory points after 5 exchanges wins.

Use any combination of options that makes sense and seems like fun. Often you'll want to give a meaningful name to each exchange, like an event in a triathlon or pentathlon, in order to give some additional narrative meaning to the Overcome actions.

Coordinators: It's unusual for a draw to occur in a head-to-head contest, but if it makes sense in your specific case, feel free to allow it to happen. Otherwise, tack another exchange on the end to represent "overtime" until someone wins, unless you already defined what happens when there is still a tie at the end.

CREATING ADVANTAGES

A hero may attempt one Create Advantage action prior to each Overcome action in an exchange, either to help himself and his allies or to oppose his enemies. If the Create Advantage action targets an enemy or if an enemy is in a position to interfere with the attempt, he may provide active opposition to the attempt by making a Defend action.

Although Create Advantage actions do not represent successes toward winning a challenge, they can provide much needed support for characters with weaker required skills. However, each Create Advantage action that fails will result in the lost opportunity to make an Overcome action during that exchange and an automatic forfeit of the exchange to the opposition. Split your focus and effort during a contest exchange at your own risk.

Any Create Advantage action that at least ties the opposition will create a **boost** for the character attempting to create an advantage, and still permit the contestant to make the Overcome action normally.

Especially during a contest, consider **Teamwork** as a viable alternative to the risk of Create Advantage during a contest.

CONFLICTS

THE ETERNAL NOW

Tachypsychia can make a split second under stress seem like eternity, or hours seem like only a few seconds have passed. The human response to stressors varies widely. Modernity provides a framework for resolving conflict of any sort you can imagine. To supplement this pluggable framework, you'll find more detailed conflict maneuvers in **Operational Considerations** and in **other Modernity briefing books**.

This framework can be used to resolve international or interdimensional wars, social conflict, interpersonal conflict, and life-or-death, hand-to-

hand combat. Typically, a conflict will last for an entire scene.

Conflict takes place in a series of **exchanges** during sequential **moments** each containing a turn for each character involved that lasts somewhere between no time at all, and hours of subjective local time.

During each conflict moment, the acting character may engage in a variety of **actions** to give himself the upper hand over his enemies. Characters each get one and only one action per exchange during their moment in the spotlight. Conflicts are separated from one another by mutually agreed upon truces, or the end of a scene.

GROUND RULES

The coordinator will give the participants in the conflict a general idea of how long a moment will last during each conflict and the skill used to determine **initiative**. Use Awareness for physical conflicts and Empathy for interpersonal conflicts. Some kinds of conflicts will use different skills for initiative. Negotiate the skill that makes the most sense to the table. The length of a moment is an important variable in both strategic and tactical decision-making when deadlines are at risk and loom large over the conflict.

For example, during hand-to-hand combat, one moment can represent one-ish seconds of objective time, or longer. An interpersonal conflict in a high-end restaurant at the top of a towering skyscraper over who will pay for this really expensive dinner might occur in two-minute moments. A conflict moment is the length of time the “camera” focuses on one character during a fast-paced scene. . . Just long enough for that character to be awesome, or something complicated or tragic to occur.

Any specialized cases related to the execution of the conflict will usually be explained by the coordinator at the outset. Any changes to those cases along the way will also be explained by the coordinator when it becomes important, relevant, or necessary. Things like:

- Special environmental aspects in play.
- The different zones in the conflict space.
- The arrangement of different characters in each zone.

Often the most urgent piece of information is which skill will be used to sequence actions. Typically, Awareness will be used for combat-type conflicts and Empathy will be used for interpersonal-type conflicts. The coordinator, with input from the table, can choose any skill that seems

to be make sense. See Take The Initiative below.

Also, be sure to take a look at the different sections of **Operational Considerations** which describe different kinds of conflicts.

THE STAKES

There is something at stake for each participant in every conflict. In a tactical encounter, the characters' physical health and well-being are at risk (perhaps measured in terms of the characters' survival and physical stress). In a social setting, each characters' pride might be at risk during a battle of wits (measured as mental stress). Money would obviously be the stakes in a gambling conflict, or an auction.

The coordinator will outline the stakes for the conflict (to best of the heroes' knowledge at the outset) so that the characters involved know what's at risk. Sometimes the stakes will change mid-scene, such as when the villain produces a hostage that the characters could not possibly have been aware of at the beginning of the confrontation.

Most conflict scenes should clearly describe the stakes for the characters involved. A variety of encounters with different stakes can make for a more interesting operation than one combat grind after another. But if another bug hunt is what your player want every week. . . By all means give them yet another bug hunt!

VICTORY CONDITIONS

Every conflict has one or more desired outcomes, which may be different for different participants. Each participant should be cognizant of what "winning" looks like and what the consequences of "losing" look like. This will also shortcut some potentially long conflict scenes because the successful and aggressive players will find a creative way to concede and still get at least some part of what they want out of the conflict as they learn to excel at failing forward.

The only conflict you don't want to shortcut is the big finale for the operation.

For the victims of an ambush, survival and just exiting the kill zone could be a big victory. Alternatively, in a political debate, increasing a candidate's favorable rating by two or more points might be a huge

victory during a run for office.

Often, the victory conditions will be stated by the players or negotiated with the coordinator. They can be as complex or simple as the scene and its participants require. Different characters can (and probably will) have different, even possibly opposing or orthogonal, victory conditions. Remember that every conflict doesn't have to be (and shouldn't be) a fight to the death. Some conflicts should occur just to allow the heroes to be awesome once in a while.

ACTIONS

Each character can execute one action per moment during a conflict. This includes continuing with the progress of an ongoing maneuver that takes more than one moment to complete. I recommend setting up this more complicated maneuvers as specialized tasks that depend upon or leverage one of a character's skills but take more than one exchange to complete. Use the **Create Advantage** action to accumulate a sufficient number of aspects or invocations to complete the task.

In the interests of expediting play, the actual, objective length of a single conflict moment and the rest of the ground rules established for the conflict should be such that each character gets one and only one action when it's his moment to shine.

TAKE THE INITIATIVE

A scene enters conflict time when one or more characters initiate a conflict, usually by attacking someone. The first thing everyone does is complete a brief contest to determine who goes first. Everyone makes an Overcome action using the skill defined by the ground rules to determine who goes first.



As with any contest, the participants may bid up their result in order to go earlier in every exchange. Resolve ties by offering a decision compel to one of the parties to the tie to take the subordinate position in initiative based on an appropriate aspect.

For simplicity's sake, this order doesn't usually change during a conflict. Truces (described below) are one good reason, but conflicts should be so brief that rearranging initiative is moot.

A series of **exchanges** then take place in which each character takes his desired action, in descending order of initiative, during his **moment** in the exchange. The coordinator will facilitate the count of moments and adjudicate any conflicts.

For speed of play, the coordinator may choose not to roll separately for the opposition, instead having them all act at the same point in the initiative. In this case, I recommend that all the heroes go first, following initiative order. The exception would be in an ambush-type situation where it makes more sense for the opposition to all go first.

The conflict is over when everyone on one side has been taken out, concedes, or a truce is called (see below).

COORDINATING CONFLICTS

Because conflicts are more involved and time-consuming, more careful thought should go into laying out the situation aspects and the zones for each conflict. See **Operational Considerations** for more help.

WAITING FOR AN OPENING

Inevitably, someone will want to go out of sequence. This usually happens in one of two cases: a character wants to delay his action until some specified trigger occurs, or a character wants to act earlier in order to interrupt someone else at a crucial moment.

In the first case, have the player (or the coordinator for a denizen) explain the planned action and an appropriate trigger for that action. Then move on to the next character in the initiative.

If the trigger occurs before the character's next **moment**, allow the character to take the action (but not an alternative or substitute action). If the trigger does not occur, the character forfeits that action waiting for a moment that never came, and then gets one new action during the character's subsequent moment.

In the second case, only allow this sort of interruption based on a special stunt available to that character. As described in the stunt, this will always be in exchange for his moment later in this round. It should never allow a single character two moments in the same round.

TRUCE?

Truce describes any cessation of the conflict. Truce does not require surrender, just a temporary pause or break in frenetic, opposed or contested activity.

At the end of each exchange, any character may initiate a vote for a truce. If all participants agree to the truce, the conflict is paused until one of the combatants decides to reengage. Inactive participants automatically vote in favor of a truce. If the vote is not unanimous, the conflict continues.

During a truce, time resumes its normal coordinator-controlled flow, allowing combatants to take whatever actions they choose, such as move, talk, pray, etc., at the risk of re-exposing themselves to danger on the larger timescale defined by the coordinator. If a conflict is resumed, use the initiative that was already established for this scene.

OVERCOME



When you're a hero, something is always in your way. There is always a hill to take, a mountain to climb, a tall building to leap. . . Sometimes the opposition is easy to assess, sometimes there are variables that are hard to account for. In any event, these obstacles must be Overcome. By you.

Situations such as:

- Sneaking past the security guards patrolling the museum.
- Driving the getaway car too fast down the wrong side of a highway. At night. In the rain.
- Climbing up the wall of a prison building using a rope and grapple made of bedsheets and kitchen utensils.
- Skydiving into restricted airspace to reach an unguarded rooftop.
- Preparing a magical ritual to track down a dangerous suspect.

YOUR SKILL

In any challenge, the first thing you need to know from the coordinator is which skill is applicable to the challenge. That will determine how much you have to worry about it. Some challenges will be presented just for the characters to show off what they're awesome at. Others. . .?

The skill in question will also determine whether you possess any

stunts that could help you out. Skill ratings are covered later, but they're a simple integer you can apply as a bonus to your action. In Modernity, any skills that you don't have a rating for always give you a bonus of +0.

YOUR OPPOSITION

There are two kinds of opposition for Overcome actions: static and active. Static opposition is a fixed number, such as Fair (+2), that the character must Overcome. This is the most common Overcome action.

Active opposition is defined by another character's Defend action and skill bonus. The coordinator will usually be the one rolling the dice for the active opposition, unless your action is against another hero. In an Overcome action, anyone who can reasonably interfere with the action can Defend against it. **Defend actions do not cost you your moment.**

Typically the skill used to Defend against an Overcome action is the same skill used by the character taking action, but not always. The coordinator will make the call. See **Skills Defined** for the big matrix.

ATTACK



Whenever you are actively trying to do harm to another in a conflict, you make an Attack. The goal of any Attack is to deliver a sufficient amount of stress to take the enemy out of the conflict, regardless of it's a mundane physical or supernatural psychic confrontation. Most Attacks are opposed by a Defend action.

YOUR SKILL

See **Skills Defined** for the chart that describes which skills can be used to Attack. Not all skills are useful in a conflict. Some stunts will bend or break the rules. Attacks are simple. Roll the dice and add your skill. See **Get Rolling** and **When Things Get Stressful** for more.

YOUR OPPOSITION

The victim of an Attack almost always gets a Defend action to provide active opposition to the Attack. If the victim of the Attack is incapacitated or unaware of the coming Attack, passive opposition may be appropriate because the victim cannot use full effort to protect himself. In the case of low-value denizens who aren't important enough to bother with dice, the coordinator may substitute passive opposition to an Attack

representing an uncertain outcome that's simpler to resolve. If there is no doubt about the result of the Attack, don't bother with the dice, just narrate the outcome. Nuclear weapons come to mind.

DEFEND



Whenever you are actively trying to avoid harm or oppose another's action, you make a Defend action. You'll make a Defend action whenever you're under Attack or you are opposing someone else's action, such as a Create Advantage or Overcome action. **Defend actions are free actions and do not cost you your own action during your moment.**

YOUR SKILL

See **Skills Defined** for the chart that describes which skills can be used to Defend against Attack or hostile Create Advantage actions. By default, **Athletics** and **Fighting** may Defend against physical Attack, and **Will** may Defend against mental Attacks. Not all skills are useful in a conflict. Some stunts will bend or break the rules. See **Stunts Defined**, **Get Rolling**, and **When Things Get Stressful**.

YOUR OPPOSITION

As the victim of an Attack, you almost always get a Defend action to provide active opposition to the Attack. If you are incapacitated or unaware of the coming Attack, passive opposition equal to your skill may be appropriate because you cannot use full effort to protect yourself against the aggressor.

FULL DEFENSE

As a special case of Defend, any character may forgo an action during his moment in order to concentrate wholeheartedly on defense. In return for doing everything humanly possible to Defend, a character in full defense mode receives a +2 bonus on all Defend actions for the remainder of the current exchange and the subsequent exchange until his next moment.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Of the four actions, Create Advantage is often the most misunderstood and the most ignored. However, it's arguably the most powerful and most flexible action of the four. In Modernity, a Create Advantage action allows you to discover and power up aspects, preserving your precious few fate points.

The Create Advantage action covers a broad swath of options, some of which take time, some of which take no time at all. For example:

- Using **Empathy** to read the mood of a mob on the street.
- Using **Athletics** to force an opponent into a corner to box him in.
- Using **Shooting** to aim very carefully with your sniper rifle.
- Using **Investigation** to do background research on a mark.
- Using **Lore** to question a summoned demon for information.

Often, you will be creating or discovering new aspects, but sometimes you will be using Create Advantage to add free invocations to an existing aspect in order to use them in a future aspect as the equivalent of fate points. The one drawback of free invocations is that they are tied to one specific aspect, and are not transferable to another.

YOUR SKILL

Any skill that makes sense in the situation can be used to Create Advantage. Additionally, some stunts will bend or break the rules. Describe what you want to the coordinator and then figure out together which skill makes the most sense to create the advantage you want. Then roll the dice and add your skill. See **Get Rolling** for more information.

YOUR OPPOSITION

A Create Advantage action may have static opposition or active opposition. Static opposition is a fixed number, such as Fair (+2), that the character must beat in order to create the advantage. This is the most common Create Advantage action.

Active opposition is defined by another character's Defend action. The coordinator will usually be the one rolling the dice for the active opposition, unless your action is against another hero. In a Create Advantage action, anyone who can reasonably interfere with the action can Defend against it. **Defend actions never cost you your own moment.**

The victim of the Create Advantage action almost always gets a chance to Defend against it. The skill to Defend with is almost always the same as the Create Advantage skill. The coordinator will make the call. See **Skills Defined** for the big matrix.

If the victim is incapacitated or unaware of the Create Advantage action, passive opposition equal to the victim's Defend skill bonus may be appropriate because the victim cannot use full effort to protect himself. In the case of low-value denizens who aren't important enough to bother with dice, the coordinator may substitute passive opposition to a Create Advantage action representing an uncertain outcome that's simpler to resolve. *If there is no doubt about the result of the action, don't bother with the dice, just narrate the outcome.*

CREATING OPPOSITION

Often the purpose of the Create Advantage will be to create opposition for an enemy that behaves like a status effect in other games like **Stunned**, **Dazed**, or **Slowed**.

As described in **Invoke an Aspect**, as soon as the free invocations are created on an aspect, the creator may invoke them immediately to create a level of opposition to future action on the part of the victim.

For example:

- Throwing over a merchant's cart in a chase through the bazaar to impede pursuit with **An Upset Apple Cart**.
- Casting a spell over the enemies to prevent them from leaving the zone they are currently in with **A Circle Of Flame**.
- Grabbing and holding a suspect to prevent her from fleeing the scene of the crime by holding her in **A Painful Joint Lock**.

GET ROLLING

You have decided which course of action you want to take. You know which skill applies to the situation and whether you have any special stunts that can help you. You know which of the **four actions** is required to achieve your goal. You know what sort of opposition is in your way and how hard it's going to be. Now what do you do?

SUCCEED BY DEFAULT

Unlike most games, Modernity makes a very fundamentally different assumption about uncertainty. The presumption in Modernity is that you will succeed. . . Somehow. You always have a **choice** to succeed at an action. If you want it badly enough and are willing to pay the price. The section on **failure** gives you some suggestions about failing forward.

PHONE IT IN

Against static opposition, a character may always choose to assume an average roll of the dice and take a zero instead of risking a roll. Obviously, if your skill bonus isn't high enough, you'll be invoking aspects, or suffering a minor or major cost, to bring home a success. You may not take a zero against active opposition of any kind.

ROLL 'EM

The action mechanic in Modernity is pretty straightforward:

1. Describe the narrative justification for your action.
2. If you're not taking a zero, roll four Fate Dice™ and sum them.
3. Add your skill bonus and any stunt bonus that applies.
4. Compare against your opposition. **The difference between the results is a number of shifts, either a positive or negative number**
5. If you don't have the outcome you want, decide whether to invoke aspects or propose the cost required to get the result you want.

For simplicity, Modernity includes no penalties, but bonuses to the opposition have the same effect, philosophically speaking. See **Four Basic Outcomes** for a discussion of the possible results of any action characters attempt. Also take a look at **Roll the Dice** for a discussion of Modernity's probability curve.

NARRATIVE JUSTIFICATION

A new character begins play with a general familiarity with how things work within his small corner of the universe. As described in **Skills Defined**, characters usually have the equipment that they need to use their skills most effectively.

The part that a player or the coordinator has to do is rationalize the action within the context of the scene. The employment of a specific skill has to make sense in the overall story and in the world they share.

Narrative justification may seem like a trivial concept, but there will always be situations where players will want to use a skill with a higher rating that doesn't make sense to everyone at the table. It's the coordinator's job to look at the **Master the Fundamentals** section and determine whether there's an adequate justification for the proposed narrative or granting an exception.

There are two exceptions to the mutually exclusive limitations of each skill definition:

- Stunts that bend or break the rules.
- Aspects that naturally and automatically prevent the action.

If Grant is **Tied to a Chair**, then it makes no sense for him to be able to get up and run out of the room, especially if it's bolted to the floor. There is no narrative justification that can permit the action. He will instead have to take an action that will remove or negate the **Tied to a Chair** aspect.

Perhaps he's strong enough to break the chair legs and get up and walk out of the room with the chair still tied to him, but an Overcome action using **Brawn** would be required to break the chair in this way and revise the aspect to **Still Tied to a Chair, but Moving On** or some such.

Perhaps, if he was Roberto, he'd be agile enough to slip his bonds by making an **Athletics** action to slip out of the confining ropes and leave the entire aspect behind.

It's up to the table (especially the coordinator) to judge whether the narrative justification provided passes muster in this scene.

FAILURE

We can talk about failure when your result is lower than the opposition, but that's not very interesting. You simply don't get what you want. Boring! If you're willing to "let it go" when you don't have a high enough skill or roll big enough numbers, that's the end of it. Not much more to discuss, just narrate how you pathetically missed your target or failed to save the poor woman who was dangling over the edge and is now falling helplessly to her death. Loser.

However, if you're willing to drive the story forward at some sort of personal cost to your hero (or denizen, if the coordinator is the one making the decision), then you can *succeed at a major cost*.

FAILING FORWARD THE HARD WAY

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Modernity is that every outcome should maintain the forward momentum of the story. Instead of settling for a failure, you have the option to propose an interesting cost to your hero to still get what you want. The major cost is open for negotiation with the coordinator and the table.

Enlist everyone to help you think of a creative way to fail forward.

Instead of settling for a missed shot with your *Powerful Hand Cannon*, a highly customized pistol that does Weapon/2 damage and that your hero cherishes and carries everywhere (and that cost you a stunt slot to get in the first place!), consider offering a major cost of the pistol becoming *Jammed!* in order to get the hit. The gun is rendered useless for the rest the scene or until repaired—whichever removes the *Jammed!* aspect first.

Instead of settling for a botched magical ritual to track down the missing child, consider offering a major cost of a severe consequence (the next available consequence slot) of *Spiritually Drained* in order to still complete the spell and know what direction to go.

A major cost must always make the situation worse for the hero or denizen paying it. Stress may be appropriate in a conflict, otherwise consider consequences, new opposition or a new obstacle in the scene, or a new aspect with a free invocation given to the enemy.

TIE

When your result is equal to the opposition, you don't fail, but you don't get exactly what you want, either. You may get part of what you want, you may get a lesser version of what you want, or it may cost a little more than you anticipated to get what you want.

In an Attack/Defend scenario, this is very straightforward. On a tie, the attacker gets a boost (single invocation temporary aspect) for use against the target later and the defender avoids getting hit.

For an Overcome action, the only way to get what you want is to pay a minor cost, even if it's just a narrative cost that only has story impact.

FAILING FORWARD THE LESS HARD WAY

As with failure, getting something less than what you wanted out of an action isn't as interesting as getting what you want with a little pain and suffering. Instead, consider a tie a chance to *succeed at a minor cost*. The minor cost is open for discussion with the table, as with everything, subject to veto by the coordinator.

Enlist everyone to help you think of a creative way to fail forward.

Instead of failing to find anything of use during your late night research at the oldest library in town, consider becoming so excited when you find a relevant clue that your shouting and carrying on results in the librarian calling security and banning you from the premises.

Instead of letting the woman (whom you've been struggling to protect from a curse all week) who is dangling helplessly over the edge slip out of your grasp and fall to her death on the street below, perhaps the police show up to help you pull her up, but then arrest you on suspicion of stalking and attempted murder.

A minor cost during a conflict could be stress, otherwise a minor cost could be a minor consequence, another small setback of some kind, including a purely narrative cost. A minor cost should be an inconvenience, but should never present a serious obstacle or harm to a character or the story.

SUCCEED

Easiest of all, you get what you want. Your die roll was big enough or your skill was so much higher than your opposition that it really wasn't much of a contest. You get what you want!

For an Attack, your victim fails to Defend and you do stress to your target equal to the number of shifts you achieve over the Defend result plus additional stress equal to the damage rating of the weapon you're using. See **Attack** and **Guns & Ammo** for more information.

On the flip side, for a Defend, you simply don't get hurt.

With a Creating Advantage action, you create the aspect you wanted and you get 1 free invocation of that aspect in the future. Write your new aspect down on an index card and put one empty box next to it to represent the free invocation. If the aspect already exists, simply put a new empty box for the free invocation on its card.

Then narrate the outcome that describes getting what you want.

Celebrate Your Wins!

Players: It's OK to do a little victory dance and celebrate to a small degree, as long as you don't go too far with it.

Trust me. It won't happen very often.

SUCCEED WITH STYLE

Spectacular! Home run! Amazing!

These are all outcomes that we dream of when we attempt something. Most people don't daydream about just crossing the finish line, just winning the game: they fantasize about winning big!

Coordinators: Feel free to add some flair to when a hero succeeds with style, but resist the temptation to go overboard.

Success with style occurs whenever a character's result exceeds the opposition by 3 or more shifts. Succeed with style has slightly different mechanics depending the kind of action:

- **Overcome:** You get a boost in addition to achieving your goal.
- **Attack:** You have the option to reduce your success by 1 to receive a boost in addition to your slightly reduced damage.
- **Defend:** You avoid the Attack and gain a boost against your attacker.
- **Create Advantage:** You can add an additional free invocation (for a total of 2) on the aspect that you created or improved.



TEAMWORK

Situations will come up frequently where the heroes (or the denizens) need or want to work together to accomplish a goal. The basics of the Modernity action framework still apply, with some caveats. I recommend that characters render aid using Create Advantage actions wherever possible, but sometimes it makes sense to provide help in a more direct fashion. These additional rules will come into play frequently in challenges and group maneuvers as described in **Operational Considerations**.

A HELPING HAND

Most actions can be assisted by one or more characters who aren't otherwise occupied. If the characters can narratively justify it, allow each of the assisting characters to spend their moment during this exchange to give the acting character a +1 bonus to the action.

The assisting characters must have an Average (+1) or better rating in the skill in question in order to assist, otherwise they're not much help.

The coordinator will determine what the reasonable maximum number of characters who can help is based on the narrative justification for the action being attempted. It will rarely make sense for more than 1 or 2 people to be able to assist directly with an action.

DECLARE A FACT

There will be times when a player very much wants something to be true, and is willing to part with a precious fate point to make it so. When this happens, the table has to bear in mind the relative scale of this declaration vs. the utility of fate points elsewhere in the game. A fate point could be used by invocation to improve the result of an action by two shifts on **The Ladder**, and a declaration should come out about that level of story impact, or perhaps a little more if it's a creative declaration.

A declaration of fact is not a “get out of jail free” card, a granted wish, or magical “easy button.”

In most cases, a hero will need to relate the declaration of fact to an existing aspect (usually, but not always, a character aspect), unless the declaration is establishing a new aspect that defines the story fact.

Some examples of where a declaration of fact makes sense are:

- Establishing a preexisting relationship between the hero and a denizen or organization that makes sense given the hero's preexisting background.
- A previously invisible (or nonexistent) route that the heroes could use to sneak into the enemy stronghold.
- Create a new subplot, either out of whole cloth or from an existing red herring.
- Cause an otherwise unexpected coincidence to occur.
- Find or deduce a lead where no path forward seemed self-evident to the hero.

The established fact should typically help things work out in the declaring hero's favor, although additional drama or complications stemming from the declaration are delicious frosting.

Coordinators: Remember that fate points are the players' mechanism for influencing the story in the direction they want to take it. In the interests of maintaining story momentum, the best way to deal with proposed facts is to say, “Yes! And. . .” using the opportunity to add a wrinkle of your own.

RETROACTIVE PREPARATION

One special case of declaring a fact is using hindsight to do a quick flashback to an earlier scene that is established to have happened by retroactive continuity (a.k.a. retcon-ing). Retroactive preparation ensures that our proactive, competent heroes always have what they need at hand in order to accomplish their stated goals. This saves time by cutting out the otherwise boring **shopping sprees** and jumping into the action with the confidence that the heroes have the ability to establish what they need later by spending fate points.

A typical retroactive preparation might be, “Of course, I brought my lockpicks. I’m *A Second-Story Man*.” Or perhaps, “Yeah, sure, we brought a rope and grappling hook! After all, *We’re the Good Guys, Dammit!*” Or maybe, “My motorcycle has got an after-market engine in it, and I can outrun those flying terrors. Remember, *Loud Pipes Save Lives*.”

Table Consensus (Again)

Ultimately, it will be up to the **table consensus** whether the declaration of fact, such as retroactive preparation, makes sense, subject to coordinator veto, of course. Sometimes, it will require a creative flashback mini-scene to justify to everyone’s satisfaction how this came to be, just like on TV.

As long as the table (and the coordinator) buys it, the sky’s the limit. That said, if your table *loves* shopping trips and you can make the scenes wherein such preparations are made interesting for the whole table, by all means, go shopping!

INVOKE AN ASPECT

When a character attempts an action for which the outcome is uncertain or opposed by another, **dice are rolled**. Sooner or later, the outcome of an action will not be what the player wants it to be. When that eventuality happens, there are **four choices in outcome**, including failure. If failure is not an option, the player can spend a fate point to invoke an aspect.

WHEN

Invoking an aspect almost always happens *after* the dice have been rolled, except when creating opposition. There's no reason to preemptively declare the use of an invocation until things don't come out the way you want.

WHAT

When invoking an aspect, the player chooses an aspect that makes sense for the current narrative and justifies it to the table in some way. Sometimes how the aspect applies will be obvious, but sometimes it will require some creative storytelling to convince the table.

Invocations must always be paid for, either at the cost of a fate point or the cost of an available free invocation already attached to the aspect. Remember: free invocations are the equivalent of a fate point that are tied to a specific aspect and may only be used on that specific aspect.

Then the player chooses one of three options in exchange for the resource (fate point or free invocation) that he is spending:

1. Reroll the dice.
2. Add a +2 bonus to the current total.
3. Create opposition equal to +2 for each free invocation or fate point spent on an existing aspect.

After getting table buy-in for his narrative, the player gives the coordinator a fate point to dump back into the universal pool or crosses off the free invocation from the aspect.

WEAK INVOCATION

If the table's not buyin' it, consider invoking a different aspect instead.

How Many

You may only invoke an aspect for cost (i.e. for a fate point) once per action. However, you may stack any number of free invocations of an aspect onto an action. You may invoke as many additional aspects by spending fate points as you have available fate points.

It's definitely to your advantage to use **Create Advantage** to build free invocations on existing aspects to prepare for more daring heroics!

The Odds

Note that, mathematically-speaking, you're almost always better off to take the +2 per invocation, unless the dice total -3 or -4. But, it's your fate point. If you're a gambler, and you want to bet on a much bigger roll instead of bidding higher up the ladder with additional aspect invocations, go for it! If you're curious about the actual odds of getting a specific result on Fate Dice™, see **Roll the Dice** for an explanation.

COMPEL AN ASPECT

Often the most entertaining parts of a game occur when an aspect causes a problem or creates unexpected drama for one or more of the heroes. That's why we engage with stories after all, isn't it? A compel is a negotiation between two parties, usually the coordinator and a player, about whether an aspect would cause a particular event or decision.

Who

Compelling aspects is done most often by the coordinator, but any player may offer compels to any character based on any aspects in the game. This includes compels against denizens based on the available aspects, although it's not often a wise strategy to give fate points to the opposition for use in the future. Players may self-compel to earn fate points or suggest possible compels for others. The coordinator may always compel aspects for free using the **universal pool**.

What

A compel is offered whenever it makes sense to the table to "force" either a **decision** or an **event** that complicates the story. Keep in mind that compels are not intended to stop the story or block player action, but to provide an interesting opportunity for a character to gain a fate point and

provide some narrative variety. In order for a compel to work properly:

1. The aspect being compelled must be selected.
2. The characters suffering a compel have to be clearly identified.
3. The narrative justification must be accepted by the table.
4. The compel must be paid for with a fate point.

See **Compelling Decisions** and **Compelling Events** in the **Operational Considerations** section for more coordinator-focused details.

THE COST

A compel costs somebody a fate point in order to compensate the affected character for the narrative disruption. The players only have a single pool of fate points each to compel with, which reduces the likelihood that they will compel one another or denizens, but they can do so if they really want to force the issue. The coordinator may compel from the scene pool, if she wishes, although it makes much more sense to compel from the universal pool of fate points. I don't recommend compelling denizens in order to increase the fate points available to them during a scene, as that just artificially prolongs the current scene.

REFUSING COMPELS

If a player doesn't want to accept a compel that the table feels is reasonable, he must pay a fate point to the universal pool in exchange for avoiding the consequence of the aspect in question. This represents the exercise of the hero's free will and narrative independence within the story.

Be Gracious

Just because a compel is proposed by the coordinator or another player doesn't mean that it automatically costs the "victim" a fate point to refuse. The compel is always open for negotiation. If it makes sense, keep talking it through until everyone agrees. . . Or just drop it and move on.

Compels should be self-evident to the table and (especially when a hero's Trouble is compelled) should be readily accepted by everyone in question. It's to the "victim's" benefit as much as it is to the benefit of the story to have the conflict escalate or dramatic twist taken along the way.



POWER A STUNT

There are stunts available to characters that are so powerful that they have a cost in fate points that must be paid in order to power the stunt effect. This is usually included as part of the stunt definition in order to balance its effect against other less powerful stunts. Many occult effects and magical spells have a fate point cost. See **Enter the Occult**.

Whenever a character engages a stunt that has a fate point cost (usually just 1 fate point, but it could theoretically be more), the player must pay the cost in fate points into the universal pool and then narrate the use of the stunt as part of the action.

If the character has no fate points available, the stunt cannot be used. (You should've accepted that compel earlier, eh?)

REFRESH

A player always begins a new session with a number of fate points equal to his refresh rate (at least 1 fate point), if he does not already have at least that many. Additional fate points accrue to each hero as he earns them, and continue to accumulate throughout the operation for each kind of compel or concession that a hero suffers or imposes upon himself.

The Fate Point Economy

The cost of the give-and-take of the fate point “bidding war” over story outcome in Modernity is balanced by the heroes’ refresh rate of fate points at the beginning of each scene and their willingness to accept compels and concede conflicts in order to accumulate more fate points.

REFRESH RATE

In Modernity, the default refresh rate is 4 fate points. This will be adjusted based on the number of **stunts** a character possesses and the amount of experience that a character has accumulated during his adventures. The default refresh rate for your game can also vary based on the **power level** selected by the coordinator. Subtract fate points from your hero’s refresh rate equal to the cost of any additional stunts he possesses.

THE MINIMUM

A hero many never have a refresh rate less than 1 fate point. Having a refresh rate of at least 1 fate point is the defining characteristic that separates heroes from denizens. The difference between the heroes’ free will to act upon the story and the rest of the universe, which cannot.

YOU KEEP WHAT YOU EARN

Unused fate points are always retained at the end of a session (with one exception). Heroism has no expiration date.

If there is a big enough **milestone**, it makes sense to reset everyone’s fate point totals, which should be a very rare occurrence. Such a major reset should come along with an increase in hero capability, including a higher refresh rate (see **power level**) and the passage of time.

BEING COMPELLED

Whenever a character (hero or denizen, but usually hero) has an aspect compelled against him to **force a decision** or a **complicating event** happens to him based on an aspect, the character receives compensation in the form of a fate point. It's in a player's best interest for his hero to be compelled *a lot*, especially early in a session, in order to accumulate more fate points for use later.

PURPOSE

The compel mechanic is designed to encourage meaningful conflict and drama in the game. The primary driver will often be the heroes' **Troubles** (but compels can result from any aspect): **Trouble** is the license players give the coordinator to "mess with" their heroes in specific ways to drive interesting and unexpected (or maybe expected) difficulties into the heroes' lives and stories.

SOURCE ASPECTS

These compels are typically based on character aspects, but may be based on game aspects, consequences, or really any aspect that makes sense to force the **decision** or the **event** in a direction that complicates the story or thwarts the hero's intended action.

FAILING FORWARD

The result of a compel should never bring the story to a halt. Whenever a compel is offered, it should come along with an explanation of how the story momentum will be maintained, despite the new wrinkle.

If you can't think of an interesting way (or six!) that a compel closes a metaphorical door while opening an equally metaphorical window, an escape hatch, or even a magical portal that keeps the story moving, consider withdrawing the compel as offered.

YOU CAN'T MAKE ME

A player never has to accept a compel that is offered. . . As long as he has a fate point left in his player pool. If the table consensus is (and the coordinator's considered opinion concurs) that a compel is reasonable based on the aspect in play, then the player refusing the compel of the hero must pay a fate point into the universal pool to refuse the compel.

BEING INVOKED AGAINST

Although the end result of having an aspect invoked against a character (hero or denizen) may seem similar to a compel, the mechanical outcome and the purpose are very different. The difference is that an invocation does not force a decision or an event, just a mechanical advantage in a contest or a conflict.

An invocation against a character's aspect is almost always in a contest or an exchange in a conflict in order to leverage the character's intrinsic characteristics against him.

Give and Take

Many novice players will do anything to find an alternative aspect to invoke before “giving a fate point to the enemy” by invoking one of its aspects. . . But sometimes the most dramatic and memorable moments of any conflict will be found in using an enemy's own nature against him. . .

When a character's own aspect is invoked against him, the fate point spent on the invocation (either to reroll or to gain the +2 bonus to the effort) is awarded to the “victim” of the invocation, instead of being paid into the universal pool.

If the invocation is against the aspect of a denizen, the fate point goes to the scene pool for the coordinator to use in the scene. If the denizen survives the scene, the coordinator could choose to carry that fate point forward into the narrative future with the character in question.

MAKING CONCESSIONS

Based on playtest data, one of the most underutilized and misunderstood mechanics in *Modernity* is “failing forward.” The concession mechanic, much like the compel mechanic, is designed to keep the story momentum high and moving forward by encouraging the coordinator and heroes to work together to find creative ways to generate conflict and drama in the heroes' lives. The concession has to be offered and accepted before dice hit the table. See **Accepting Concessions**.

WINNING BY LOSING

When the heroes concede a scene, they get to participate in the narration of the concession, rather than losing control entirely when they're **taken out** by the opposition. Characters who get taken out have no control over the narration of their defeat or demise. Also, the heroes receive 1 fate point each for conceding the scene, as well as 1 additional fate point for each consequence they individually suffered during that scene.

Players: Consider conceding early and often, as long as you can come up with a creative narrative about how the story will still move forward, despite the temporary setback that you will suffer.

YOU CAN'T WIN 'EM ALL

Because Modernity is modeling fiction (not “reality,” whatever that is), consider that things rarely go the protagonists’ way for most of the story, especially in Act 1 and the pinch points in Act 2. Sometimes things even go dramatically wrong in Act 3 of a story during a false victory or false defeat. It’s in the heroes’ best interests to have things not “go their way” early on in the conspiracy in order to accrete a warchest of fate points with which to influence the story later on to the end they want.

DENIZEN CONCESSIONS

If the denizens concede a conflict to the heroes, the coordinator will add the fate points for the concession to the total available in the scene pool in the next logical scene where those particular denizens have the opportunity to turn the tables on the heroes.

NARRATIVE COST

Imposing a narrative cost for a compel is typical. The **Event** occurred because *The Reborn Want Me Dead* or the hero made a very poor **Decision** because *I Can Quit Any Time*. Negotiation between the player and the coordinator results in the proper story outcome. Whatever it is, just be sure it makes sense in your game and the table is good with it. If the coordinator can’t think of something, I’m sure the players can.

A narrative cost for a failure at an action is sometimes more challenging to come up with, because it’s smaller in scope and there is no fate point

as a consolation prize. Remember that the victory is not measured by the size of the prize, but by the difficulties Overcome to win.

For example:

- If you're considering a minor narrative cost, it's not a big deal, but a hindrance. *You momentarily lose track of your enemy and fail to warn your allies of the impending ambush.*
- If you're considering a narrative cost for a major narrative cost or a compel, the hero lost something significant that he cares about, but not enough to completely derail the story. *Your informant dies in your arms as the enemy flees with the mysterious package that he was bringing to the meeting. But he left behind a clue to where he was heading.*

Coordinators: Be creative in the small details of the complications you propose. Negotiate the narrative cost to the point where the player is cringing because you're being a jerk, but not to the point where the player is crying. At least not every time.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

It's inevitable (and desirable!) for things to go wrong in the story. These "negative" events whether induced by a compel or a failed action or the result of a concession are what add drama to the story. Things would get pretty boring very fast if the heroes had no obstacles to Overcome and everything was wine and roses. Maybe it would be fun in another game, but not in Modernity.

In any scene, things can go wrong for the heroes in two different ways: they can suffer narrative consequence as the story doesn't go their way usually due to **Decisions** and **Events**, and they can suffer **consequences**. In a conflict when the adrenaline is flowing as freely as blood, the characters have the additional option of taking stress and, ultimately, the possibility of getting taken out. In all cases, obey **The Law** and try to find a new and interesting twist for how things go wrong in a scene.

- A big, public argument with a suspect doesn't have to be (and shouldn't be) a life-or-death struggle. An emotional conflict in which the various participants can lose their tempers, take mental stress, suffer public embarrassment, or private humiliation is entirely appropriate and just as entertaining as a gun battle.
- Every gunfight doesn't have to be a shootout at the OK Corral. Have the bad guys concede and run away as often as not. In exchange for their concession, did they get the information or the McGuffin that they were after?
- The consequences of the heroes conceding the fight may not be immediately apparent. Perhaps they survived overwhelming odds *and* rescued the foil from danger. . . But now they are wanted fugitives, and they didn't even know it until they were watching the news over dinner in a public tavern frequented by the local constabulary and dozens of innocent bystanders.

WHEN THINGS GET STRESSFUL

Sometimes your best defense (or offense) won't be enough, and an Attack will get through your armor (physical, mental, or metaphorical). The number of shifts by which the Attack result exceeds your Defend result is the amount of stress you suffer, modified by any weapons or armor that are applicable. See **Guns & Ammo** and **Heavy Metal**.

When this happens, you have a choice:

- Absorb the shifts of the hit entirely,
- Or get **taken out of the conflict**.

In a conflict, you have the option of absorbing stress using stress boxes. (They're actually circles on the **official character sheet**, but don't let that distract you.) These stress boxes are always cleared at the **end of the scene**, because they represent relatively trivial hindrances.

Stress boxes are simply a measure of your durability. Given a choice, you should always prefer taking stress to any other alternative. Taking stress is no big deal. Until you can't take any more.

Each stress box represents an amount of stress equal to its value. Stress box #1 can absorb 1 stress when it's marked off. Stress box #2 can absorb 2 stress when it's marked off. And so on. Once a stress box is marked off,

it may not be used again until the following scene.

When absorbing stress, a character may use one and only *one* stress box. All of the additional stress must be absorbed using consequences, which are more permanent and more impactful to the story.

In Modernity, heroes always begin with 2 physical stress boxes and 2 mental stress boxes. Additional stress boxes become available for higher values of **Brawn** (more physical stress resistance) or higher values of **Will** (more mental stress resistance).

For simplicity, lower level denizens in Modernity may have universal stress boxes which may absorb either kind of stress, mental or physical.

Remember: If you're not in a defined conflict, you cannot use stress boxes to absorb the results of incompetence, inattention, or ill-fortune.

SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES

When you can't absorb some or all of the stress of an Attack, your only choice to avoid being taken out is to take consequences equal to the amount of the remaining stress. This will not have an immediate effect on the game, other than a narrative one, unless the attacker **invokes the consequence** immediately to create opposition.

Consequences can be used for narrative permission, invoked, or compelled just like any other aspect.

As aspects go, **consequences** are the ones that can be the most one-dimensional. They're not intended to be a benefit to the hero, and they should be invoked or compelled against the hero *often* in order to make the consequence have the narrative weight it's due. The attacker who causes the consequence gets *one free invocation* of the consequence in the future in whatever way he chooses (including immediately invoking it to create opposition).

Each type of consequence slot represents a finite amount of stress:

- Minor consequence: 2 stress
- Moderate consequence: 4 stress
- Severe consequence: 6 stress
- Extreme consequence: 8 stress

Note: Only heroes are eligible to take an extreme consequence to avoid being taken out. Heroes may only take an extreme consequence *once* between **momentous milestones**.

Mild consequences are usually no big deal and present only a minor inconvenience that will typically be around for only a short period of time, and should be described as such. Moderate consequences are a bigger deal, and probably require some sort of professional treatment (medical or mental or spiritual, depending on the kind of consequence they represent) before they will begin to resolve. Severe consequences are a much bigger deal, because they represent a massive level of stress.

Most **Denizens of Modernity** would be taken out by the stress represented by a severe consequence, but a hero can absorb it and keep going. Name severe consequences appropriately. See **Writing Good Aspects, Recovery**, and **milestones** for how these work in practice.

Coordinators: Refer to **Becoming the Opposition** for more details on how to define and manage denizens. Most denizens either have only a minor consequence slot or none.

A consequence all by itself only causes a mechanical effect in two ways:

- It prevents narrative permission for some set of actions. For example: A character with **A Broken Leg** can't run.
- It can be compelled and invoked against the character.

Other than those two situations, consequences do not cause penalties or impairment beyond the cosmetic, narrative description. A character may take more than one consequence at a time in order to absorb the entire Attack. If you can't absorb the entire Attack with a combination of stress boxes and consequences. . . Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200.

Get taken out.

RECOVERY

When bad things happen to the heroes (nobody worries much about the denizens), it takes time and effort for them to get better. There are two different kinds of recovery to consider in Modernity: recovering from stress and recovering from consequences. See also **milestones**.

Recover, if You Can

Use your imagination to make recovery an interesting part of your drama in a scene. The emergency room might be uninteresting, but convincing the ER doctor not to report gunshot wounds to the police *while* getting treatment at the same time. . . Might be interesting. . .

RECOVERING FROM STRESS

This happens automatically at the **end of a scene**. All the stress boxes that were used to absorb stress are erased or cleared and available for the next scene. Stress is just a representation of things not working out the character's favor: little abrasions, lacerations, and contusions along the way. Stress represents flesh wounds that don't prevent them from heroic action. As soon as the coordinator yells "Cut!" or something less dramatic to declare the end of the scene, it's as if the stress never happened.

Feel free to narrate some first aid, taking some aspirin or a big deep breath, whatever seems to make sense for the story and move on to the next scene whenever you're ready.

RECOVERING FROM CONSEQUENCES

Recovering from consequences is another story all together. Characters recover from consequences in two phases. First, a recovery action must be made, either by the character himself (if that makes narrative sense) or by another character. Recovery is an Overcome action against static opposition defined by the severity of the consequence.

- **Minor:** Fair (+2)
- **Moderate:** Great (+4)
- **Severe:** Fantastic (+6)
- **Extreme:** Legendary (+8)



CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS

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Physical consequences will often be Overcome with **Knowledge** or **Survival**, and mental consequences will most often be Overcome with **Empathy**. Other skills can be substituted where they make sense.

Often an entire scene (or more!) will be devoted to overcoming a consequence. Extreme consequences in particular are worthy of an entire subplot unto themselves to Overcome. This is the necessary narrative permission to begin the recovery process.

Second, after the recovery action is made and the requisite narration delivered, time must pass before the consequence can be removed. As soon as the recovery action is made successfully, the consequence may be renamed to reflect that the character has begun the recovery process. However, the consequence itself must remain largely negative (but perhaps less so after the recovery action and renaming). The consequence slot remains occupied, impairing the character's ability to absorb additional stress until a sufficient amount of game time has passed based on the severity of the consequence.

- **Minor:** One full additional scene after recovery
- **Moderate:** The next **minor milestone** after recovery
- **Severe:** The **significant milestone** after recovery
- **Extreme:** The second **momentous milestone** post-recovery

Sometimes it won't make sense to rename the consequence after the recovery action. In that event, just make note of it with an asterisk or other mark to remind yourself that recovery has begun.

TOUGH GUYS & GALS

Some heroes think that they don't need others. Those that try to make their own recovery actions increase the difficulty by two steps on **The Ladder** automatically (i.e. a +2 to the static opposition). Going it alone makes a minor consequence as hard as hard to recover from without help as a severe consequence is with help: Great (+4) in either case.

It's OK to be afraid. Just don't be afraid to ask for help.

DENIZENS MAKING RECOVERY ACTIONS

Inevitably, somebody will wind up in the emergency room of a hospital or the intake wing of a mental health institution. The coordinator may choose to make or waive the recovery actions in those circumstances automatic (unless drama can be better served otherwise!) so long as the narrative cost is paid: the character is out of commission for a scene or two, a valuable asset is lost, etc. Note that the time will still have to pass according to the severity of the consequence being recovered from.

Coordinators: Be creative when offering free recovery actions to players. There ain't no such thing as a free lunch. TANSTAAFL. Make 'em pay for it.

SANITY CHECK

Modernity differs from typical roleplaying games in that characters are not '80s B-movie action heroes who can shrug off blood and gore like wading through an army of undead composed of their former friends and family, chopping them apart with glee. Traumatic events take a toll on a person, diminish the soul, break down the walls around reality.



When a hero encounters a traumatic or reality-breaking phenomenon, whether it's a werewolf or a mass casualty situation like a bombing, he is going to potentially suffer some consequences. The hero will make an **Overcome** action using his **Sanity** against active opposition. The severity depends on the nature and magnitude of the event and the hero's innate mental armor against psychic assault (**Sanity**). Note: The same cause can only assault your Sanity once per minor milestone.

Examples of the opposition bonuses for different kinds of horror:

- Someone you trust tells you a terrifying story, you watch a horrific event on live TV, or you read an authentic scroll containing occult lore that contradicts reality as you know it: **Pathetic** (-4)
- You witness a stranger get maimed or murdered: **Awful** (-3)
- A close friend (denizen or hero) is murdered (whether or not you witness it): **Terrible** (-2)
- You have to see or work in the aftermath of a bomb going off in a bus or an airport full of people: **Poor** (-1)
- A close friend or family member is dismembered in front of you by a mundane threat or event like an explosion: **Mediocre** (+0)
- An occult thing or effect manifests itself in your presence beyond a shadow of a doubt: **Mediocre** (+0)
- An occult thing or effect maims or murders a stranger in your presence: **Average** (+1)
- An occult thing or effect maims or murders a close friend or family member in your presence: **Fair** (+2)

The Sanity and In Cold Blood opposition ratings seem crazy weird and upside down when you read Mediocre or Fair. I know. It's a math thing. Try not to lose any sleep over it.

IN COLD BLOOD

We humans are wired to preserve life, barring well-rationalized circumstances: under the influence of a fight-or-flight adrenal response, trained hunters, direct orders in wartime, etc. This is the reason that most societies punish “depraved heart” or “aggravated circumstance” or “premeditated” violent crimes much more severely than mere “crimes of passion.” We like to pretend that we’re not natural predators.

ON KILLING

Even in wartime, militaries spend an inordinate amount of time breaking down these unconscious social taboos against killing and preparing the soldier or warrior to cope with killing. Often the act of killing in a life-or-death situation will still cause nontrivial mental or emotional trauma to the killer. *Players may choose to take aspects or consequences to reflect this, if they wish.* This is fiction, after all. Reward good roleplay.

VILLAINS IN COLD BLOOD

With regards to violence, villains are an entirely different story. Among denizens, what normally delineates “us” from “them” is the level of sociopathy or psychopathy displayed by the “bad guys” lack of empathy, their casual indifference to violence, or worse, a lack of respect for the value of life at all.

Coordinators: Don't allow the heroes to hold up your villains misbehavior as justification for their own antisocial actions.

HEROES IN COLD BLOOD

There are two ways to deal with seriously antisocial actions that a player may want to engage in. The first, obviously, is to compel a **Decision** in order to keep the hero behaving like a hero and acting on the straight and narrow. Some tables prefer to use dice. In those cases. . .

To harm an innocent, unresisting, or helpless victim outside of a violent conflict or other survival situation (any time that the hero will not have the benefit of an adrenaline blanket over his emotions), the hero taking action must *fail* an Empathy action against static opposition of Mediocre (+0) or less.

Set the opposition to Average (+1) if the victim is alien, aberrant, or occult in nature but still recognizably humanoid. Increase the opposition to Fair (+2) if the victim is a villain who recently committed some sort of significant evil that the heroes have direct knowledge of.

Characters who succeed at the Empathy action may still take the action, but they immediately suffer a mental consequence of stress equal to the character's **Empathy** score plus the number of shifts by which they succeeded the In Cold Blood action.

GETTING TAKEN OUT

If the heroes aren't willing to concede and fight a conflict to the bitter end, it's possible that they will eventually suffer enough stress that they'll be taken out of the scene against their will. This could be public humiliation in an argument with a news anchor on live TV. This could be taking a full burst from an assault rifle to the face.

A character is taken out when he suffers 1 or more shifts of stress that he cannot absorb with stress boxes or consequences, or when he chooses not to take a consequence when one is required. A character may have used all of his stress boxes and consequence slots and still be up and fighting. Remember that **concessions** must be offered and accepted before dice hit the table for an action. Once the dice hit the table, it's too late! When things look grim, begin negotiating a concession before the next exchange. . .

THE VICTOR WRITES THE HISTORY

The winner gets to decide how to narrate the victim's demise. Quite often this won't be fatal, and the character will live to fight another day. The narrative consequences have to make sense within the story, and the table should concur that the narrative is acceptable, or at least understandable, to them.

DEATH & DISMEMBERMENT

Modernity is a dark game. There should be a real possibility of death (or worse) when a hero or denizen is taken out in a violent conflict. High explosives, machineguns, and magic do not leave much room for error, or much left for the trauma surgeon to work with.

It's not enough to announce at the outset that "Your character may die in this game." Be sure that the narrative of and the dialog with the opposition, if appropriate, makes it clear that no quarter will be asked and none will be given. *Sometimes it helps for a new group for the coordinator to secretly plan a hero death with a veteran player to make sure everybody understands the table stakes.*

Telegraph Your Intentions

Coordinators: Be sure that you telegraph the lethal potential of a conflict early so that everyone at the table understands that the opposition is playing for keeps. Many players who feel as though their characters were killed without due warning will be resentful, and may just quit playing entirely.

When the heroes' lives are on the line, be sure that they have enough resources or at least a plausible way out so that they can exercise the better part of valor and. . . Run for their lives!



Profil

ANY LAST WORDS?

You know that feeling. Your favorite character in a novel, TV show, or movie just died. When that happens, there is usually an adequate amount of denouement to assuage the fans' pain at the character's passing. (Usually. I'm looking at you, Joss Whedon and George R.R. Martin!) Make sure that everyone has the opportunity to properly mourn a character's passing.

But before everyone gets to the wake to drink their sorrows under the table, we have a *death scene* to do!

Ham it up! It's your last chance.

When a character (especially a hero, a villain, or other important denizen) bites the dust, they should have the opportunity to make their demise count. Everyone has last words that they want to say. Warlocks may have a death curse that they want to cast upon their foes. A father-figure may have a last gift or piece of wisdom to bestow upon one of the heroes. *Be creative. Make dying as memorable as living.*

CONDITION BROWN, CONTINUED

Invoke/Free, Attack, Defend, Armor, Extreme Consequence

“Heroism is latent in every human soul.

However humble or unknown, they have renounced what are accounted pleasures and cheerfully undertaken all the self-denials: privations, toils, dangers, sufferings, sicknesses, mutilations. . .”

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

Zoë cuts the metaphorical camera back to Roberto’s predicament. Paul grimaces. This is not exactly what he had in mind, but. . .

Conflict time now commences. The ground rules are standard tactical combat. The stakes, of course, are the characters’ physical well-being, mental health, and reputation. Vanessa and Eliza had warned Paul that characters in Zoë’s Modernity game can and do die. . .

Paul decides that Roberto’s victory conditions are surviving the scene without hurting any innocent bystanders.

“Protect and Serve!”

Zoë privately plans her own victory conditions: Roberto gets bitten and infected by the werewolf.

Zoë points to the index cards on the table and says, “Just a reminder, we’re inside a ***Cramped Ranch-Style House*** and it’s ***Getting Dark Out***.”

In a physical conflict, Awareness is typically the skill used to determine

the sequence of combatants. This one is no different, but even though no one else has entered the scene, Zoë asks Roberto to make his Awareness action and secretly makes rolls for the other characters.

Roberto rolls a ■ ■ + + plus his Awareness +4 which gives him a total of +6. Paul smirks a little. Things are finally looking up!

Zoë grins back. “I’m going to use that free invoke of **Terrified** now.”

“What does that mean for Roberto?” Paul asks with trepidation.

“Nothing. Just that something else Roberto hasn’t seen yet gets a bonus in the Awareness challenge to see who goes first every exchange. Do you want to use any of those fate points to bump up your total?”

“No.”

“OK, then.” Zoë rolls some dice for no reason and pretends to study them intently. “Roberto hears a scream down the hall, some banging against a wall, the crash of broken glass, and a scream. What do you do?”

Roberto draws his sidearm, and aims down the hallway where he hears the scary noises and wait to shoot the next thing he sees.

“The next thing? Any next thing?” asks Zoë with mock concern.

“No, the next hostile thing.”

Although, “shoot the next hostile thing I see” is vague, Roberto and Zoë agree that it means Roberto will prepare a triggered action to Attack with his sidearm the first hostile target that appears in his field of view.

Nothing visible happens as Roberto scans the hallway, but he hears the pounding of running feet, perhaps his own heartbeat and the scrape of something unidentifiable on wood. A long moment slides by while Roberto waits with his drawn sidearm without any action visible to him. Waiting is stressful!

Next, before the action begins in earnest, the Zoë offers another compel of **Latin Chivalry Lives!** to Paul. She suggests that Roberto forgot to follow procedure and indicate his status to dispatch before he left his patrol car parked in the street.

Dispatch will know where the car is based on its GPS transponder, but if he forgot to hit the “leaving the cruiser” button on the patrol computer, nobody will know he’s not in it.

She expected that Roberto would argue that a five-year veteran police officer would do so reflexively, and was already prepared to concede the compel, but Paul rolls his eyes and holds out his hand for the proffered

fate point. Zoë shakes her head and puts it aside. “You can have it at the end of the scene, ‘vato!’”

The stakes just went up!

Vanessa and Eliza make strangled noises in the background.

Even though he should’ve known better, Roberto realizes with the clarity provided by adrenaline that he forgot to notify dispatch he was getting out of his patrol car when he arrived on the scene. Doh! Reaching for the radio microphone at his shoulder doesn’t seem like a good interruption at the moment. He’ll worry about dispatch later.

Roberto’s target identification skills in the dark hall will be an interesting part of the triggered action, once potential targets begin to appear. The first “target” that comes into view is running down the narrow hall toward Roberto.

Zoë says, “Make an Awareness action to determine whether the target is ‘hostile’ or not. I’m thinking that because it’s **Getting Dark Out**, Roberto might have some challenges distinguishing friend from foe in a low-light situation.”

Paul protests. “Come on! A veteran police officer would automatically deploy his flashlight whenever he draws his sidearm in any low-light situation.”

Zoë teases, “I’m offering a compel of **Getting Dark Out**. . .” She dangles the fate point above the growing pile that he’ll have, at the end of the current scene.

Paul hesitates for a couple seconds, and then nods curtly.

The flashlight remains forgotten on Roberto’s belt. This charlie foxtrot keeps getting better and better.

Paul makes a target identification action for Roberto. Being a veteran police officer, Roberto has learned to pay attention well under stress. He has Awareness +4. His roll is **— — — +** plus +4 for a total effort of +2. Paul cringes.

Zoë estimated that under “normal” stressful circumstances, the static opposition for identifying a surprise target would be Mediocre (+0), but now that it’s **Getting Dark Out**, she assessed it as Fair (+2), but Paul doesn’t know that. Zoë makes a moue and regards Paul without comment for a moment before continuing the narration.

Based on his natural ability, his training, and the small size of the target,

Roberto distinguishes that the child fleeing toward him down the hallway is not a hostile target and does not fire at her.

So far, so good.

The next target to come into view is also running. Clearly chasing the child.

Paul rolls ■ + ■ +, easily making the identification with his naturally high Awareness.

He successfully identifies the werewolf charging down the hallway as hostile. Roberto now has to resolve his first shot, in the dark, at a moving target. . . Now is the moment of truth.

“First,” Zoë says. “Make a Sanity Check. Mediocre (+0) opposition. It’s no surprise really that a werewolf shows up. But it’s really not a pleasant unsurprise for Roberto.”

Paul rolls ■ + ■ ■ for Roberto plus his Sanity (+0). Average (+1) beats Mediocre (+0), so he’s good. The last thing he needs is more stress.

His triggered action benefits from his training and experience. He’s not doing anything fancy, and simply applies all of his considerable Shooting +3 (he’s on the department shooting team) to making his one shot count.

The werewolf is a moving, man-sized target, but, fortunately (or unfortunately) for Roberto, it’s action is interrupted by his triggered action and it’s at close range (in the same zone), which presents no difficulty to his Attack.

Zoë reminds him that he accepted the compel of **Getting Dark Out**, which means the lowlight conditions hamper his aim and increases his target’s defenses.

Paul rolls + + ■ ■. Yes! With his Shooting +3, his total Attack effort is +5. Take that Mr. Furry!

Zoë rolls ■ ■ ■ + plus the werewolf’s considerable Athletics +3 for a total defense of +4. Roberto will do 1 shift of stress to the werewolf at this point.

“Do you want to invoke any aspects and bump up that number? Roberto’s standard 9mm sidearm doesn’t give you any bonuses to damage, just a Weapon/1 floor for a minimum of 1 stress.”

“Nah, let it ride. Let’s see what Mr. Furry there can take!”

Zoë takes a blank index card and writes Mr. Furry at the top. Why not? It wasn’t the aspect she’d planned for the werewolf, but Paul offered it for

free. She adds another one to the same card below it. **Lupine Durability (Armor#2)**

Paul blinks. “What does that mean?”

“That means your puny pistol didn’t do enough lasting damage to overcome his innate defenses.”

Cursing, Paul begins to understand the scene title: **Condition Brown.**

Zoë winks at Paul. “We can continue to fight this all the way through while Vanessa and Eliza wait, or. . .”

“Or what?!” he demands. “I just lay down and die? Make a new character and start over?”

“No, not at all,” she says, laughing. “In Modernity, you can concede a conflict and participate in narrating how it comes out. Usually complicated and not so much in your favor.”

Paul mulls this over for a bit. **Mr. Furry** had taken his bullets and all but spit them back out at him.

Vanessa interrupts with a look at Eliza for support. “If you want to fight it out, Paul, that’s OK with us.”

At that moment, John comes through the door bearing pizzas.

“Heya, pizza man!” crows Zoë, who has been looking forward to this next scene all night. “Have I got the event compel for you!”

John chuckles, putting the pizzas on the counter. “Let me guess, **I Can Quit Any Time I Want?**”

They both laugh at the recurring gag for John’s ex-Marine character in this campaign, Grant Andersen.

“OK, Zoë,” interrupts Paul. “What’re my options? I want to make sure the little girl gets out safely. What do I have to give up to make sure that happens?”

John looks quizzically at Eliza and Vanessa, who both cover their lips with an index finger. Shhh!

Smiling, Zoë says, “I wouldn’t expect anything else, Mr. **Protect and Serve!** Let me think for a minute.”

She looks over her notes and pretends to consider options, all the while knowing what she always planned to offer Paul.

“How would you feel about being a werewolf cop?”

Paul blinks. Vanessa and Eliza gasp and giggle, respectively.

John interjects, “Hey, no fair! How come I can’t be the werewolf? Grant is already the hairiest and scariest.”

“Isn’t Grant bald?” giggles Eliza.

Ignoring them both, Zoë continues, “Since you’re creating this character Head First-style, you don’t have all your aspects yet. If you did, I’d offer you an extreme consequence in exchange for living through this fight and saving the little girl. Considering that Roberto is alone and not trained or properly equipped for this.”

“Uh, I don’t have an extreme consequence slot on this character sheet,” Paul says dubiously. “Just minor, moderate, and severe.”

The other players share knowing smiles with one another. With a giggle, Zoë explains, “No, an extreme consequence replaces one of your character aspects. In your case, we just define one of your new character aspects instead. How ‘bout *Love at First Bite?*”

With a grimace, Paul nods. “One more condition, Mr. Furry dies in the process. The little girl gets away. And I guess Roberto gets bitten pretty badly doing what he does. *Protect and Serve!*, baby!”

Suppressing her mirth, Zoë agrees. “One dead werewolf, coming up! We’ll narrate the details in a few.” She slides the four fate points Paul earned accepting compels over to him before she dives into a pizza box, pulls out several slices, and turns to John. “Thanks, pizza dude!”

A LITTLE DUST UP

Initiative, Teamwork, Create Advantage, Stress, Invoke/Reroll

“Don’t follow your dreams. Chase them.”

Anonymous

John takes a mock bow. He’s always late. It’s the least he can do to bring food when he does arrive. He’s not the guy who’s always late, he’s the guy who always brings pizza!

“Awright, have I got the compel for you,” Zoë repeats herself. “This scene is called *A Little Dust Up*.”

She waves 2 fate points at John. He raises an eyebrow, knowing he’ll get them at the end of the scene.

“One for the pizza. And one for coming to what’s left of your senses, half-dressed, in a little place called *Bubba’s Icehouse* on the outskirts of El Paso. You’re not sure how you got here, but those dudes look angry.”

John cracks his knuckles. “Let me guess, they wanna fight, eh? My refresh is 3, so pass ‘em over.”

“There are three zones in this conflict,” says Zoë. “The pool room and bar. The kitchen. And the parking lot.” She draws a couple rectangle-ish looking shapes on an index card, marking them P, K, and L.

*The mob of pool cue wielding badasses who populate **Bubba’s Icehouse**, especially one particularly scarred and muscled bruiser at the back, apparently take issue with something Grant has said or done. Or both.*

Or maybe just Grant. Nobody really knows what or why. It doesn't really matter in this case. It never does. To Grant.

“OK, I’m going to keep this simple,” explains Zoë. “Grant is still a little fuzzy as he comes down from his faerie dust trip, in complete violation of his parole. There are two mobs of rival bikers that we’ll give the aspects **Black Mob** and **Blue Mob**, respectively. Plus Grant’s archnemesis, **Lil’ Ritchie**. I’m going to let two of you play one of the units of bikers each and one of you can play **Lil’ Ritchie**. Who wants which card?”

The fight lasts as long as the pizza. Not long.

In a physical conflict, everyone roles for initiative using Awareness. Grant doesn’t really expect to go first with a Mediocre (+1) Awareness, but he is surprised that Paul rolls so badly for **Lil’ Ritchie** that he goes last this time around.

The two units of bikers (Level 1 Threats), controlled by Eliza and Vanessa, go down pretty quickly, as mobs of minion-types usually do. Exchange #1 starts.

Eliza orders the biker unit named **Black Mob** to use their collective Brawn to Create Advantage to put Grant **In a Corner** between a pool table and the wall. Four bikers in the unit sum their Average (+1) Brawn for Great (+4) through good teamwork and ■ ■ ⊕ ⊖ against Grant’s Good (+3) Brawn and ⊖ ⊖ ■ ■ and come out on top, with two free invokes. John decides not to spend any fate points.

Grant shrugs. Whatever.

Vanessa decides that **Blue Mob** has time to get ready to finish Grant off while Black holds him at bay with a Creating Advantage of **Broken Pool Cues**. Zoë sets Mediocre (+0) static opposition to Engineering to acquire these makeshift weapons (they’re in an icehouse!). The bikers have a Mediocre (+0) Engineering skill. Vanessa rolls ⊕ ■ ■ ⊕. They get one free invoke on **Broken Pool Cues**.

Grant pounces on the members of Black, smashing them barehanded.

His Great (+4) Fighting skill plus ■ ■ ⊕ ⊕ against their pooled Fight (+4) and ⊖ ■ ■ ⊖. Zoë only has one fate pool in the scene pool, and she decides not to let Vanessa to use it. Grant grabs two of the bikers and smashes their heads together (two stress takes 'em both out). **Black** is now half as effective as it was a second ago, with only two left.

Lil’ Ritchie (a Level 4 Threat) wades in and takes a swing at Grant, a

massive haymaker intended to take Grant's head clean off his shoulders.

Lil' Ritchie pits his Great (+4) Fighting and ■ + - + against Grant's Great (+4) Fighting and ■ ■ ■ ■.

Grant ducks his head too slowly and takes the punch to his forehead. He smiles. "Now this party's started!"

John fill the #2 stress box for Grant.

Exchange #2 begins with the two remaining members of **Black Mob** cautiously advancing on Grant, fists swinging.

Black Mob's combined skill is lower now, Fair (+2) Fighting plus ■ - ■ + to Grant's Great (+4) Fighting and ■ - ■ ■. Eliza invokes both of her free invocations on **In a Corner** for a +4. John decides to let Grant take it on the chin and fills his #3 stress box with a wicked grin.

"Is that the best you've got?!"

Blue Mob, at Vanessa's behest, piles on with their **Broken Pool Cues**. She rolls - ■ - - plus their combined Great (+4) Fighting. Yuck. Grant's Defend roll is ■ + ■ ■ plus Great (+4) Fighting. Vanessa invokes her free use of **Broken Pool Cues** to reroll, getting ■ + ■ +. Much better! John grimaces and fills in stress box #1.

Getting beaten about the head and shoulders with wooden sticks is annoying. "Bring it on!"

Grant decides it's time to eliminate **Black Mob**. He grabs a nearby table (for dramatic effect only). "Oh yeah! Kool-Aid's here!"

John rolls + + + + plus his Great (+4) Fighting.

Eliza rolls - - ■ ■ plus the reduced Fair (+2) Fighting. Zoë shakes her head. Even if she invoked **In a Corner** for a bonus or a reroll, it wouldn't matter.

Grant easily takes out both of his adversaries in **Black Mob**, burying them beneath the table. Blood is everywhere by now, and he is no longer trapped **In a Corner**.

Somewhere in the back of the icehouse, a man is shouting unintelligibly (to Grant) into a telephone at a police dispatcher.

Lil' Ritchie tries to take Grant unawares with a double-fisted hammer blow while he is celebrating his momentary victory.

Lil' Ritchie's Great (+4) Fighting and ■ + + + gives him the edge over Grant's Great (+4) Fighting and - ■ ■ ■. John grunts and fills in his #4 stress box. All full up!

“Trying to conserve fate points, John?” Zoë teases.

John smirks. “I don’t need ‘em against these punks.”

Exchange #3 rolls around. **Black Mob** is down and out. Vanessa sends **Blue Mob** into a circling maneuver to create the advantage **Completely Surrounded**. The combined Great Athletics (+4) for **Blue Mob** and ■ ■ ■ gives them the edge over Grant’s Good (+3) Athletics and ■ ■ ■ ■ ■. Not enough for success with style, so Zoë holds up her one scene fate point and drops it into the universal pool.

“Because they have **Broken Pool Cues**, I’m sure **Blue** can do better than that!”

Vanessa adds +2 for the invocation. John rubs his chin carefully, and then shakes his head.

“It didn’t work out for **Black**, and it won’t matter for **Blue**, neither!”

Zoë marks two free invocations on **Completely Surrounded** and gives him a nonchalant shrug and a knowing smile.

Grant decides to upend the pool table and try to eliminate all four of Blue’s members at once.

His Great (+4) Fighting plus ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ gives him enough of an edge over **Blue Mob**’s combined Great (+4) Fighting and ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ to take out only one of them. John is still doggedly clinging to his own fate points.

A biker screams in pain from underneath the massive pool table. With a howl of triumph, Lil’ Ritchie charges through the empty space where the pool table used to be.

His Great (+4) Fighting plus ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ give him a tie with Grant’s Great (+4) Fighting and ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ result.

“Can I use the free invocations on **Completely Surrounded** to power up **Lil’ Ritchie**’s Attack?” Paul asks.

Zoë says, “That’s up to Vanessa.” Vanessa nods vigorously.

John grunts in disgust.

“Yeah, I’ll use one then!” Paul hoots.

“Going to invoke anything, John?” Zoë inquires sweetly.

“Nope. I’ll take a **Bloody Nose**. It’s only a minor consequence.”

Lil’ Ritchie plants his elbow squarely across Grant’s nose. Crunch!

Exchange #4 begins.

A man down, **Blue Mob** wants some payback now. **Broken Pool Cues** whirling, they wade back into the fray.

Good (+3) Fighting and ■ ■ = = gives them no joy against Grant's Great (+4) Fighting and + - ■ +.

"I'll take **Completely Surrounded** for a reroll, please, Alex," sighs Vanessa sarcastically marking off a free invocation. The reroll is inexplicably worse, ■ = = =. "You've got to be kidding me! That's not even right."

Grant cuts loose. Fists. Feet. Elbows. Knees. Oorah, Marine!

His Great Fighting (+4) plus + + ■ = gives him a slight edge over **Blue Mob's** Good (+3) and ■ + = +.

"Because I have **Rage Control Issues**, I get to invoke **Bloody Nose** this moment for free," says Grant smugly. Vanessa rolls her eyes. The +2 for the invoke leave Grant stomping the remaining members of **Blue** into the peanut shells and sawdust that litter the floor.

Zoë expected the knock-down drag-out brawl between **Lil' Ritchie** and Grant to take the longest. Grant's used up all his physical stress boxes and taken a mild consequence, **Bloody Nose**. Zoë has used up all of her scene pool fate points making it "interesting" for Grant.

Lil' Ritchie swings a barstool overhand, trying to smash Grant into the floor like a hammer driving a nail.

Paul, who's playing Lil' Ritchie, rolls ■ ■ = + and adds **Lil' Ritchie's** Great (+4) Fighting against Grant's unlikely ■ + + + plus his Great (+4) Fighting for an Epic (+7) Defend result. John cackles, "I'll call this boost, **Miller Time**."

Grant dodges out of the way, getting a slightly better position. And picks up a full bottle o' brew.

In the next exchange, #5, **Black Mob** and **Blue Mob** are out of the fight. Grant goes first and makes his Attack action. The dice turn up + + = ■ plus his Great (+4) Fighting. Paul rolls ■ ■ + + plus Great (+4) Fighting, a Fantastic (+6) for Lil' Ritchie. Paul smiles.

With a yawn, John tosses Zoë two fate points and says, "I guess you know you should **Always Bet on the Underdog** and **Loud Pipes Save Lives**, and yell as loud as I can, "Take that you sumbitch!" as I pound him over the head with my bottle, because. . . It's **Miller Time**."

The invocations add another +6. Lil' Ritchie doesn't have enough

resources to match a result higher than Inconceivable (+10), which makes the fight over.

As the dust settles, Grant's mind is a whole lot clearer than when he started. The sirens in the background are playing his song.

*Holding a bag of ice to his upper lip, Grant surveys the wreckage that was **Bubba's Icehouse**. With a smile.*





ENTER THE OCCULT

Whatever the means. Whatever the cost.

“Don’t look for miracles.
You yourself are the miracle.”
Henry Miller

THE DARKNESS

Beyond the light cast by the flickering candle of civilization, beneath the veil of creation that covers all of the things that most sane people disbelieve lies an all encompassing void filled with nothing but shadows cast by aberrant beings beyond our comprehension. This Darkness encroaches upon our reality seeking to sate its bottomless hunger with our very essence. These entities from outside our reality feed in many ways. The effect that this has on the general populace is discussed in the **Fight the Darkness** section of **Operational Considerations**.

Casting occult spells, employing arcane artifacts, and causing reality-breaking effects has a drain on the human psyche that pulls every soul that uses the occult down into shadow. At the end of *every session* in which a hero deploys any occult capability, a **Sanity Check** must be made vs. active opposition beginning at Pathetic (-4) with an opposition bonus of +1 for each and every scene in which the hero deployed any occult capability, including artifacts, spells, stunts, rituals, etc., regardless

of the nature, occult discipline, or source of the capability.

Using the occult, for good or evil, takes a toll on the heroes and causes a breakdown of the veil between our world and the void beyond which specifically menaces the mind of the hero deploying the occult capability.

Because the Darkness assaults the occult user outside of a conflict scene, any stress resulting from the mental drain may only be absorbed in the form of consequences.

Because the employing occult in Modernity is more powerful than other skill or stunt use, it's carefully balanced to be much more expensive. When thoughtfully planned and employed, it is a powerful weapon against the Darkness. If overused or used incautiously, it can be very costly to the heroes.

PAYING THE PRICE

While any hero may use **artifacts** and other brute force magic, skillful use of the occult is not a right. Knowledge of the occult and skill with magic is a privilege that is hard earned through the toil of repetition, devoted study, or passed down by blood inheritance.

Modernity's magic system is heavily weighted toward specialization in a particular type of magic. If you want to gain stunts from more than one occult discipline, you must designate separate aspects for each distinct occult discipline that you choose.

EARNING THE PRIVILEGE

Any hero who wishes to have occult influence over the story using his skills must satisfy three criteria:

1. A character aspect designated as your occult aspect that gives you access to your occult discipline. This character aspect is quite often your High Concept.
2. At least one stunt from an occult discipline that matches your occult aspect. Every occult discipline has a gateway stunt that is required by all other stunts in the discipline.
3. A minimum Lore rating of Average (+1) *and* an Average (+1) or better rating in the control skill for your occult discipline, if any.

THE COST

Most spells, occult effects, and powers have a cost that must be paid each time they're employed. Depending upon your choice of occult discipline, this cost may be paid in the form of mental stress, physical stress, or consequences; or pre-paid in the form of free invocations of an aspect. In any event, the full cost of a spell may be paid in fate points, if you choose, in place of the customary cost at the rate of 1 fate point per 2 shifts of stress or 1 advantage.

Each occult discipline will describe how the cost is to be paid. Some must be paid in preparation by **Create Advantage**, others paid in the form of **mental stress and consequences**. Like any stress, only one stress box may be used to absorb the cost of a single spell, and any additional stress must be absorbed through consequences suffered by the caster, or in the case of some profane magic, a willing or helpless victim.

RITUAL & SACRIFICE

There are large scale occult effects that require more time, effort, and preparation. These are designated by the keyword *ritual* in the stunt title. Rituals consume one or more scenes. These are far beyond the scope of a single spell's effect that could be accomplished during one exchange. Each ritual's requirements will be documented along with the necessary sacrifices demanded by the hungry ritual.

CASTING SPELLS

For the sake of simplicity, all occult effects in Modernity are referred to as spells. Whether you are transforming into a werewolf, foretelling the future, or throwing a fireball, it's a spell. Casting a spell works as follows:

- The cost must be paid. If the caster cannot pay the price, the spell simply cannot be used.
- An action must be taken to control the spell's effect, usually an Overcome action, but for Attack or Defend actions, the caster's action also serves as the control action.
- The occult energy is expended into the environment.

For most occult stunts there is a risk of implosion or explosion, even in simple Create Advantage actions. If there is no roll made, there is no risk of adverse results, but any occult action doubles as a control action.

IMPLOSION & EXPLOSION

On a successful control action, the desired outcome occurs. That's pretty straightforward. On a failure. . . That energy has to go somewhere. The spellcaster has a choice, when it makes sense, to either allow the uncontrolled energy to spill over into the environment in an unintended way (an explosion) or to absorb the stress required in order to achieve a successful result higher than the opposition (an implosion).

The spellcaster may choose a combination of implosion and explosion. The description for each occult discipline will explain whether this stress is mental or physical in nature for an implosion, and will contain suggestions for how the coordinator may choose to apply the stress resulting from an explosion.

The number of shifts difference between the failed control action and the opposition determines the severity of the unintended effect (always bad for the spellcaster and his allies). Something or someone must absorb those shifts as stress or as free invocations added to an aspect for the coordinator to use in the future. See **Fight the Darkness** for ideas.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

For magic that costs stress, remember that an extreme consequence represents up to 8 stress and the table can always choose to accept your hero's death in payment for successfully casting your spell.

IMPROMPTU MAGIC

Eventually, you will want to cast a spell that you do not have a stunt for, whether it's one defined by Modernity or an occult effect that you have newly imagined. You may cast spells in your occult discipline that you do not yet have a stunt for at a higher level of opposition (the impromptu to opposition bonus).

You may not cast spells or use stunts in any occult discipline unless you have at least Novice level mastery in that discipline. Spells which do not define an action are not eligible to be used as impromptu magic.

There are more kinds of magic in heaven and earth than will fit in the pages of this book. You will find detailed briefings about more terrifying sorts, such as blood magic and elemental power, in **other Modernity briefing books**. Keep your mind open and your eyes closed. . .

When creating new spells from whole cloth, use the existing spells in your occult discipline as a guide to determine the cost of the spell and its other parameters, and be sure to apply the impromptu opposition bonus to increase the difficulty based on your current level of mastery.

OBTAINING MASTERY

Mastery of an occult discipline is measured by the number of spells in a given discipline that you have mastered. This is particularly important for the use of impromptu magic (i.e. magic that you have not mastered). Count the spells of a single occult discipline to determine your level of mastery and the impromptu difficulty for casting a spell you have not yet mastered (i.e. purchased with a point of refresh).

- **Novice:** 1 or 2 stunts. Impromptu opposition bonus +4.
- **Initiate:** 3 or more stunts. Impromptu opposition bonus +3.
- **Adept:** 4 or more stunts. Impromptu opposition bonus +2.
- **Master:** 5 or more stunts. Impromptu opposition bonus +1.
- **Grandmaster:** 7 or more stunts. No impromptu difficulty.

The opposition bonus is applied to static opposition directly or to the Defend result of the victim.

CHANGELING MAGIC

Changeling magic answers the call of the beast within. The changeling spirit bound to your soul can morph your physical form, altering your flesh when invoked to give you abilities beyond those granted to mere humans. The technical term for changeling magic is demonic possession. Because a host vessel, a physical body, may only safely contain one spirit at a time, the possession by a changeling always results in a conflict between the host's nature and the changeling's.

The ultimate outcome of any demonic possession will be one of three possible, mutually exclusive results:

1. Peace made between the spirits and a merging of the two into a single new whole.
2. Subversion and eventual death of the host spirit.
3. Expulsion of the invading spirit through exorcism, surrender and exodus, or death of the invader.

Most heroic changelings will have already survived the process of option #1 to obtain their powers, but some may wish to roleplay through the conflict and eventual merging of the two spirits, as Paul does with Roberto. Nevertheless, changelings are rarely in full control of their abilities or the timing of their transformations, and sometimes lose control, especially when under great stress.

See **other Modernity briefing books** that are available from Glacier Peak for other types of monstrous magic.

TRADITION

Changeling spirits of any totem must either break into our world or be invited in. Officially classified as **demons**, they have no physical form of their own and require a host human in order to affect the material world. An uninvited changeling spirit that becomes powerful enough to break into our world will lurk the shadows, hunting its prey: either a host weak enough to subdue with its mental Attacks or willing and depraved enough to permit it to cohabit with the host's soul, resulting in a symbiotic merging and an end to the eternal tug of war for control. See **Changeling Spirits** for more about their origin, their unbound nature, and totem forms.

INITIATION

Each type of changeling spirit is an occult discipline unto itself. The powers of a lupine changeling spirit (werewolf) give you no more ability to grow the lobster claws of a greater devil than to assume the nature of an ursine changeling spirit (werebear). If you want access to other lupine changeling spirit stunts, you must first declare a changeling aspect, gain Lore +1 or greater, and then take this stunt:

Lupine Changeling: When I am compelled by my changeling aspect or when I invoke it myself to force the transformation, I spend 1 full exchange of a conflict to replace my normal skills with the alternative skills for my wolf totem and morph into my totem form, or to morph back.

This book only contains stunts for lupine changeling spirits, which like all demonic possessions are the result of two spirits in the same body: the original host's soul and the changeling spirit. A possession of any kind will result in a conflict between spirits over possession of the host rather than further cohabitation.

THE PRICE

Changeling spirits grow more slowly in power than most other occult disciplines. The principal cost is the stunts required to have a fully capable (or more powerful) totem form, and the fate points or **create advantage** actions required to morph into the totem form by choice. In its totem form, it possesses a different, partial **skill pyramid** defined by the totem form based on the character's original peak skill. In its totem form, a changeling has all other skills at Terrible (-2).

Changeling spirits may not normally shift on a whim, doing so only under extreme stress when compelled and taking one full exchange during a conflict in which to change form. A character wishing to stay in totem form beyond the end of the conflict must invoke his changeling aspect for each additional scene.

Coordinators: It goes without saying that a character in totem form will have extreme difficulty interacting with others. Compel that changeling aspect. A lot. Especially when it's least convenient for your heroes.

Day 1 (be)



THE WOLF TOTEM

The lupine changeling spirit is a spirit of the wild and rage. It's a spirit of the pack and the hunt. It's a primal spirit that calls to the base animal instincts of its host. The wolf totem form has the peak skill Awareness, followed by Athletics and Stealth at the second level. At the third level, Brawn, Fighting, and Will. For example, if your peak skill is Great (+4), you will have Awareness +4, Athletics +3, Stealth +3, Brawn +2, Fighting +2, Will +2, and all the other skills at Terrible (-2) for the duration that you are in your totem form.

MAINTAINING CONTROL

Lupine changeling magic is more straightforward to control than many forms of magic. The control issues surround the changeling's behavior when the transformation occurs, and when employing any stunt that defines an action. When transforming into your changeling shape, whether the trigger is a compel of your changeling aspect (like losing your temper) or intentional invocation (a self-induced transformation), you must Overcome your baser instincts using Will against static Mediocre (+0) opposition to fully control your abilities.

IMPLOSION

You may choose to absorb the necessary shifts to control your rabid tendency to attack everyone around you in form of mental stress.

EXPLOSION

Instead of absorbing the mental stress, your allies may elect instead to absorb the necessary shifts to guarantee your successful control in the form of mental or physical stress, reflecting their concern and fear or unintended injury you do to them during your transformation.

SPELLS & RITUALS

The following are typical lupine changeling stunts. More can be found in **other Modernity briefing books** about monstrous magic.

Changeling Symbiosis: All non-totem skills default to Mediocre (+0) instead of Terrible (-2) while I am in my totem form.
[Requires **Lupine Changeling**.]

More Man Than Wolf: I may declare a full alternative **skill pyramid** replacing the totem defaults to use while in my totem form. [Requires **Changeling Symbiosis.**]

Terrifying Werewolf Howl: Once per scene while in my totem form, I can make a mental Attack with Provocation against Sanity to all targets that can hear me. Lupine changelings are immune. [Requires **Changeling Symbiosis.**]

Law of Fang and Claw: I can use Fighting to make a Weapon/2 physical Attack at one target per exchange in the my current zone while in my totem form. [Requires **Lupine Changeling.**]

Lupine Durability: I have an Armor/2 rating against physical Attacks while in my totem form. [Requires **Changeling Symbiosis.**] See **Heavy Metal** for armor details. Damaged armor is restored after a subsequent scene recovering in human form.

Preternatural Speed: I may move up to 2 zones without making an Athletics action while in my totem form. [Requires **Changeling Symbiosis.**]

Preternatural Senses: I get a +2 bonus to Awareness actions while in my totem form. [Requires **Changeling Symbiosis.**]

At Peace with Rage: I may morph into my totem form (or back) immediately instead of requiring 1 exchange to make the transition. [Requires **Lupine Changeling.**]

Mastered My Rage: I may morph into my totem form and remain indefinitely without a cost in invocations. [Requires **At Peace with Rage.**]

I am the Alpha: I may summon another lupine changeling spirit to attempt to possess any victim that I have taken out of a conflict while in lupine form. [Requires **Law of Fang and Claw.**]

RATIONAL MAGIC

Every being in the universe is connected somehow, most of us in many and unexpected ways. Using rational magic, you magi have the ability to not only explain these connections but also to establish and exploit them as you see fit. Rational magic often operates through or with inanimate objects, but its primary foci are the spirits within animate beings, the cycles of the cosmos, and time itself. More than so-called sympathetic magic or apotropaic prayers, rational magic is the most scientific of occult disciplines with fixed laws and predictable practices. Belief is not required. It just works.

TRADITION

Rational magic is made of connections, influence, probability, and subtlety. Most magi throughout the eons of human history have sought to improve society, its members, and themselves through a better understanding of how all beings are intertwined within the great gestalt of the universe. Because of the emphasis on connectedness, relationships, **Lore**, and **Empathy**, magi have historically held positions of respect and authority in older cultures, including the roles of druid priest, elder, shaman, and witch doctor.

Rational magic, as it's taught in many traditions, is not flashy nor typically dangerous to magi or the recipients of their spells, but it can certainly exert painful force upon those that magi seek to harm. Rational magic is frequently mistaken for hypnosis, voodoo, and darker magics. Although this book contains rational magic primarily derived from a Celtic perspective with some bardic influences, other **Modernity briefing books** contain spells from many other traditions.

INITIATION

To learn rational magic, all magi must first declare an occult aspect, obtain Lore +1 or greater, and then take this stunt:

Rational Magic: I may Create Advantage with Empathy to establish an ephemeral occult connection with another being through touching the recipient, possessing its personal items, and so forth in order to empower future spells cast upon the recipient of the connection.



David Vlat

Free invocations created for this ephemeral occult connection may be used to cast further spells upon the recipient to gather information and to manipulate the recipient's emotions. Connections may not be transferred to another recipient. An occult connection enables abnormal manipulation of the recipient with other skills like **Deception** and **Finesse** using any free invocations created on the connection aspect.

THE PRICE

Because spells cast by magi are primarily initiated with Empathy-created advantages, they tend to be slower than other kinds of magic. Rational magic is usually 1 part Lore and 2 parts Empathy. In a pinch, for immediate or defensive spells, a magi may spend a fate point to **declare a fact** thereby creating the necessary occult connection from thin air.

Advantages created with rational magic may only connect the magi with one other being and must describe either the relationship between the magi and the recipient or some observation of the recipient. Magi may affect an entire **unit of denizens** as if it were one recipient for the purposes of creating connections and casting spells. *Ephemeral advantages always evaporate after about an hour, or at the end of the next scene, whichever makes sense in the story.*

Although magi themselves are externally indistinguishable from other mortals, creating connections as well as most rational spells are not very stealthy, including both kinetic and verbal components following the magi's tradition, as well as visual and auditory emanations from the power being unleashed into the environment. Feel free to describe these harmless byproducts in whatever way suits the caster's occult tradition. Anyone who observes the casting of a spell will know that something odd is going on, will know who is doing it, and will see the mind-bending result take place. Recognizing a magi's specific occult aspect is a function of Lore vs. Deception *after* a successful Empathy vs. Deception result has been obtained, if the magi is trying to conceal his art.

Rituals that consume a scene may be estimated to take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour or more of "real time" depending on the complexity of the effect, which only matters when the heroes are on the clock for some reason. See also **The Law**.

Rational magic is impeded by the presence of large quantities of metal and high technology because of the frequencies it produces, which is one of the reasons magi have become increasingly rare. Although they may, most magi prefer not to carry or use mobile phones and other technology that radiate electromagnetic energy.

When a magi is in the presence of more metal and technology than what is found in a typical modern home, the opposition (active or static) is given a bonus based on the level of the disruption caused. Riding in an automobile might give an opposition bonus of Average (+1) or wearing metal armor might present an opposition bonus of Fair (+2), while standing in the middle of racks and racks of servers in a data center might grant an opposition bonus of Great (+4).

MAINTAINING CONTROL

Magi must use Lore to control the power represented by a spell. The magi must exceed the opposition to the spell with the Lore action result to control the spell and deliver the intended result.

If the recipient wishes to resist or avoid the connection or the spell, he must Defend with Will or another skill specified by the spell, and the result must tie or exceed the caster's Lore result.

IMPLOSION

Magi will typically choose to absorb or power the difference between their spells' needs and the limited power available in order to achieve the desired result. Any lack of shifts in the Lore result may be paid for with an equal number of shifts of mental stress using one mental stress box and the remainder in the form of consequences. In this way, magi may elect to sacrifice their own essence and life energy to force a result.

EXPLOSION

In addition to the desired outcome, the explosion of rational spells are unpredictable, but will always be related to the desired outcome gone awry and aimed at the magi and the magi's allies. Blessings become curses. Shields become magnets. Truths become lies. Reality breaks. The more emotionally connected the magi is to the unintended recipients, near or far away, the more likely they will be targeted.

SPELLS & RITUALS

These are typical rational magic spells. More can be found in other **Modernity briefing books** about rational magic.

Greater Rites of Power: I may spend one invocation on an ephemeral occult connection in order to make it permanent for the remainder of the session or three invocations to make it permanent for the full operation. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Natural Magi: I may use **Rational Magic** in order to create occult connections simply by careful observation of an intended recipient that I can see clearly without a need for physical contact or the recipient's personal objects. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Intuitive Magi: I get a +2 bonus with Empathy to Create Advantage for occult connections. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Ritual of Discernment: I may spend a scene to Create Advantage with Empathy in order to divine or scry current information regarding a recipient with whom I have established a connection. Magi recipients may actively oppose with Lore. Otherwise set static opposition based on distance: Fair (+2) for those nearby, Good (+3) in the neighborhood, Great (+4) in the city, and so on as the distance increases. Increase by +2 for intervening bodies of water. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Aura of Command: I may use Empathy in place of Provocation vs. Will to Create Advantage or Overcome against a recipient that I have an occult connection to. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Words of Power: I may use **Aura of Command** to make mental Attacks. [Requires **Aura of Command.**]

Words of Madness: I may use **Words of Power** to make mental Attacks vs. Sanity, but I suffer the same mental stress as my victim. [Requires **Words of Power.**]

Curse of Binding: I may use **Aura of Command** to invoke my connection with the recipient to create a new aspect of ***Cursebound*** that presents my choice of either static opposition equal to +2 for each invocation or normal active opposition with Empathy as long as I maintain a connection. The recipient is fully

conscious and aware, but unable to act until the opposition is Overcome with Will. I may not cast any other spell or create new connections while maintaining active opposition. To control the spell, my Empathy result must exceed +2 for each invocation. [Requires **Aura of Command** and **Greater Rites of Power.**]

Mask of Lies: I may use Empathy in place of Deception to Create Advantage or Overcome against any recipient that I have an occult connection with. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Trained by a Warrior Poet: I may use Words of Power to make a Weapon/1 mental Attack. I may increase the weapon rating by 1 for each +1 bonus to Defend that I grant the recipient. [Requires **Words of Power**]

Warrior Poet: I get a +2 bonus when using **Words of Power.** [Requires **Trained by a Warrior Poet.**]

Aegis of a Clear Mind: I may use Empathy to Defend against physical Attacks from a recipient. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

My Brother's Keeper: At the cost of 1 fate point, I may Defend a willing ally in my zone using **Aegis of a Clear Mind** in place of their normal Defend action. [Requires **Aegis of a Clear Mind.**]

Aegis of a Hopeful Mind: I may use Empathy to Defend against mental Attacks from a recipient. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Candle in the Dark: At the cost of 1 fate point, I may Defend a willing ally in my zone using **Aegis of a Hopeful Mind** instead of a normal Defend action. [Requires **Aegis of a Hopeful Mind.**]

Crown of Friendship: I may use Empathy in place of Finesse to Create Advantage or Overcome against any recipient that I have an occult connection with. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Cloak of Shadows: I may use Empathy in place of Stealth to Create Advantage or Overcome against any recipient that I have an occult connection with. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]



David Reed

PLACES OF POWER

There are places in the world toward which occult things gravitate. Places where rituals are more readily performed. Places where crossing over is easier. Places where dark things lurk in waiting. These places of power vary widely in their character and capability. Some of them are death to visit. Others are soothing and enervating to mankind.

The name of a place of power itself has power, and should always be a full-fledged aspect for use by any character present such as *Stonehenge* or *La Catedral Murienda*. Each place of power will have an affinity for a certain occult discipline, be neutral toward it, or actively opposed to its kind of power. Depending upon the level of power associated with the place, it will provide an aspect with a number of free invocations per scene. In this regard, a place of power behaves much like an **Asset**.

A weak place of power, such as a *Youthful Coven* with affinity for rational magic, would provide a single free invocation. Magic that is opposed by the place of power should be treated like a compel or an invocation against the opposed magic. Some rituals require so much power that they may only be performed upon a place of power with great affinity and many free invocations.

The older and more invested a place of power is with human or other activity, the greater its impact on occult endeavor will be. A place of power will rarely have affinity for more than one occult discipline, but may oppose many. The following list is an incomplete survey of possible types of places of power. You will find more complete descriptions in **other Modernity briefing books** about places of power.

Altars	Fae Circles	Mosques
Ancient Hearths	Graveyards	Mountains
Burial Grounds	Hauntings	Murder Scenes
Buttes	Homesteads	Oases
Cairns	Ley Lines	Old Growth Forests
Caverns	Meeting Places	Synagogues
Cemeteries	Mesas	Temples
Churches	Monuments	Volcanoes
Covens	Monoliths	Wellsprings
Crossroads		

BLOOD CALLS OUT TO BLOOD

Concession, Rational Magic Connections

“A hero is someone who has given his or her life
to something bigger than oneself.”

Joseph Campbell

Zoë turns to Eliza and Vanessa. “OK, ladies, that scene’s a wrap, and now we’re back to you. Since Roberto conceded that fight earlier, he’s going to be suffering a little memory loss. We’ll come back to him in a few. You arrive at the crime scene, and. . .” She gives John the two fate points that he earned from compels, replacing the two he spent to end the last “blow off steam” scene with style.

Roberto’s police cruiser is still parked out front. Crime scene tape crisscrosses the front door. It doesn’t look like anybody is standing guard, though. There’s no way to tell if anybody is inside, but there are muddy bootprints all over the front yard and the sidewalk, like people were looking all over for something. The front door is smashed in.

“Hmm. We can come back to the cruiser, but I think Shannon’s magic would work best with blood, if we can get it,” Vanessa thinks out loud.

The couple walk carefully inside, trying not to brush the crime scene tape as they squirm past the ineffective yellow barrier.

Inside, there is blood everywhere. An enormous pool of drying blood covers the wooden hallway floor where the living room, which is a shambles, meets the main hallway to probably goes back toward the bedrooms. Past

the pool of blood is the kitchen. Bloody footprints lead out the back door.

Grace kneels to examine the pool of blood. There are deep claw marks in the wood where the pool of crimson fluid is deeper, darker. Pulling an evidence bag and a white handkerchief out of her purse, she begins to collect blood, soaking the cloth and trying not get any on her fingers.

Eliza rolls ■ = ■ ■ plus her Investigation (+3) for a Fair (+2) result. She accepts one free invocation. “**Blood-Soaked Handkerchief?**” she asks. Zoë nods. Eliza writes the new aspect and a hash mark for the free invocation on an index card.

Zoë says, “There’s a noise at the back of the house. Make me some Awareness actions to identify what it is.”

Vanessa and Eliza look at each other and nod.

Eliza replies, “You know what? It doesn’t matter what it is. We’re going to concede this one and get out while we can. We’ll forgo all the other clues at the crime scene, if we can get away clean with just the blood sample that I already have. I just hope it’s Roberto’s. Well, sort of. . .”

Zoë smiles and agrees. “Ah, I didn’t even get to name the crime scene aspect, but OK. Here.” She hands Eliza and Vanessa each a fate point for conceding the scene. “Too bad you’ll never know. . . And there’s a complication, of course.”

As they get back to Grace’s urban assault vehicle, another police cruiser rolls up. Grace tucks the evidence bag in her jacket pocket.

A familiar cop whose name they can’t remember rolls down a window and says, “You can’t go in there, ladies. Crime scene. If you see Roberto, call it in and let us deal with him.”

They both nod in compliance, keeping ironically straight faces.

“Hey, Grace, I heard that you’re going out with Fred now. The whole department has probably heard by now. The mouth on that guy! When did you start batting for our team?”

With a laugh he drives away, continuing his search for Officer Moreno.

Grace wracks her brain trying to remember why that guy looks familiar. Shannon quietly fumes, radiating annoyance. Grace starts the SUV without a word.

Zoë asks, “So. . . Where to, love birds?”

The other two women grimace at the implied drama.

Vanessa says, “I think Shannon would probably want a little more mojo for this. Let’s go to Roberto’s house and see his wife, and my friend. Maria is her name, right? A concerned, loving wife’s bound to be a magical dynamo, especially in her homestead. Worth a free invoke?”

Zoë nods, writing the new aspect down with a free invocation. “The Moreno kids are still at school while you do your occult thing. Let’s call this scene **Blood Calls Out To Blood**.”

*The candles on the dining room table in the Moreno home provide **Dim Lighting** at best. Maria, the **Concerned Wife**, is holding one of Grace’s hands and one of Shannon’s, her eyes shut tightly, trying to unsee the **Blood-Soaked Handkerchief** in the middle of the table. She can’t help but think, ¡Dios mío! That’s my Roberto’s blood! over and over and over.*

*Shannon intones ancient Celtic syllables that her forebears in her **Druidic Ancestry** might have used once upon a time for similar magic amongst the massive megaliths of Stonehenge. One-handed, she draws Elder Futhark runes on her eyelids and on the bare skin above her heart with Roberto’s tacky, nearly dried blood. She is **The Celtic Oracle**. The time-fabric of the universe is hers to fold or spread. The stars will align at her command and reveal their secrets.*

“Ingwaz guide me to this gentle bride’s guardian and husband!”

Vanessa rolls **+** **■** **■** **-** and adds Shannon’s Empathy +4 and her +2 bonus for **Intuitive Magi** to the total. Close, but insufficient to beat the Epic (+7) opposition Zoë set earlier. Not entirely unexpected, given the odds.

“I’ll invoke **Concerned Wife** once for free and again for cost, then I’ll invoke **Blood-Soaked Handkerchief**, because I want success with style for this. I may be Magi Adept, but an impromptu **Ritual of Discernment** is still going to be a beast to cast.”

Vanessa dumps a pair of fate points into the void of the universal pool.

“I like your scene title. Let’s just add two free invokes to **Blood Calls Out To Blood** as my connection aspect to Roberto. It’s time to go hunting for the hunter.”

Zoë nods solemnly.

So mote it be.

HUNTING THE HUNTER

Rational Magic Rituals, Occult Control, Implosion

“Are you sad because you’re on your own?
No, I get by with a little help from my friends.”

The Beatles

“New scene, ladies?” asks Zoë.

“Absolutely. Grant needs to get in on this werewolf smackdown action!” John interjects.

Paul puts up his hands in mock surrender. “Hey, now. I’m a cute and cuddly werewolf. Don’t taze me, bro!”

Vanessa and Eliza roll their eyes at one another then shrug in Zoë’s direction. “Why not?” they chorus.

Zoë begins, “I like your idea, Vanessa. This scene is *Hunting the Hunter*.”

She clears the table of unrelated aspects, intentionally leaving *Blood Calls Out to Blood*, with its two free invocations, in the center of the table. She writes *Hunting the Hunter* on an index card and places it on the table next to the others.

While Shannon begins preparation for her Ritual of Discernment, Grace makes a quick phone call to summon Grant.

“Hey, I’m not one of your spirits to be summoned,” objects John. “I’ll come if you ask nicely, though.”

Eliza raises an eyebrow, leaving the unspoken question hanging in the air: Do you want in on this scene or not?

“Fine, whatever,” John grumbles, doing his customary wordless impression of Yosemite Sam, Grant’s favorite cartoon character.

Shannon begins gathering things of Roberto’s around herself. At her command Maria brings her a well-worn leather bomber jacket that Roberto has owned for years, a comb with strands of his hair still wrapped in its tines, and a scuffed up pair of running shoes that Roberto has jogged in every morning since he became a cop. Shannon takes a picture of the three Moreno children down from the wall and lays it on the dining table in front of her, Roberto’s progeny, his pride and joy.

*Wrapping strands of Roberto’s hair around the fingers of her left hand, Shannon gently takes Maria’s left in her own two hands for a moment, before slipping Maria’s rings from her unresisting finger. Shannon places the engagement ring and the wedding band gently on the picture of the children. The bloody handkerchief still occupies the center of the growing collection of **Symbols of Roberto’s Life**.*


Placing her hands on the edges of the table, emblematically embracing all of the symbols, Shannon begins to chant the ritual words in a language thought dead for a millennia by modern linguists.

*Grant’s arrival rattles the neighborhood, waking children and setting off car alarms with his barely muffled Harley. **Loud Pipes Save Lives**.*

Ignoring the racket outside her sphere of concentration, Shannon peers into the shadowy gray of the spirit world, seeking Roberto’s whereabouts. . . And his fate.

Grace quietly moves toward the front door to intercept Grant and bring him up to speed without distracting Shannon.

Zoë says, “The two free invocations you have should be more than enough to cover the +2 opposition bonus for an impromptu spell by an Adept. Since Roberto is still in the city. That puts you at Legendary opposition to control.”

Although Shannon’s Lore is one of her stronger suits, she’s up against long odds. She rolls  and adds her Lore +3 for an Average (+1) result.

Grrr. Stupid secretive spirits. Why must they always resist her so?

“The two free invocations **Blood Calls Out to Blood** go first. I’m

tempted to re-roll, but I learned my math lesson about that last week,” Vanessa sighs. “I’m tempted to invoke **Symbols of Roberto’s Life** and the others for the bonus and take the simple success, but I’m afraid that I’m going to need fate points later. So implosion or explosion it is. Can I take one stress and a mild consequence?”

“No conflict, no stress. Sorry.”

“Yuck. So implosion for a moderate consequence it is. Hrm. **Strained Friendship** with Maria?”

Zoë thinks for a minute and then nods.

Shannon’s face flushes red with rage, her eyes open staring at nothing in this room. Her mind’s eye sees a playground, empty of children, barren and brown, seeded with trash and littered with refuse, an abandoned place. Her heart yearns for the pack, draws her toward it. She can smell the coming of the hunt. Her keen vision spies her destination in the distance, beyond a copse of stunted desert trees.

Shannon knows the desert willow tree guards water too deep for her to dig for now, but soon her thirst will be slaked with the blood of prey and then she can rest to heal her hurts. She throws back her head and howls, calling the pack to the hunt. Soon. . .

Maria cries out, shattering Shannon’s reverie and the spell with it. . .

Maria’s terrified visage brings Shannon quickly back to herself, shuddering.

“Roberto is in trouble with a capital T. I know where he is and where he’s going, but we have to hurry. We’ve got to stop him before he hurts himself or someone else.”

From the hallway where he stands with Grace, Grant grunts assent. Shannon will tell him what he needs to know on the way. He ought to be used to the creepy stuff that follows that woman everywhere she goes. He shrugs it off. Grant Anderson only needs to know one thing from her about the monsters: Where they are.

Grace’s eyes are impassive, long-practiced at hiding her true feelings. Shannon has used a lot of magic today, and Grace knows that will cost her lover’s state of mind at lot later on.

Shannon lowers her gaze, unable and unwilling to answer the terrifying, unspoken questions in Maria’s eyes.



THE TOY BOX

He who dies with the most toys, still dies.

“To a child, often the box a toy came in
is more appealing than the toy itself.”

Allen Klein

EXPLAINING EXTRAS

During most games, you will come up with ideas for things that are not covered by the existing rules so far. Extras are created the same way as heroes and denizens, with aspects, skills, stunts, stress tracks, and consequences. Extras will often be things that deserve more than a single aspect to describe them, but don't seem to be characters at first blush: vehicles, hideouts, guns, organizations, etc. This chapter covers how to define and integrate these “extras” in with the rest of Modernity.

Extras fall into two categories: character extensions that are entirely under a player's control, and parts of the universe that are under the coordinator's control. From here on out, we will be describing extras as character extensions. Coordinators can use a similar process to create other parts of the universe, but are not limited by permission or cost.

The example categories in this chapter are just a launch pad for you imagine extras for your characters.

WHO CAN HAVE EXTRAS?

An extra has whatever elements are necessary to describe its story impact, similar to a character, plus the additional requirements of **permission** and **cost**. Permission is the narrative justification for the extra, usually a character aspect that is identified as the *raison d'être* for the extra. The cost is what the hero “gives up” in exchange for the extra, such as a point of refresh or a skill slot.

CHANGING YOUR EXTRAS

Like other parts of a hero, extras are relatively permanent. They can be changed at milestone boundaries and should always be generally available to the hero. If your hero loses an extra for some narrative reason, you should recoup the cost of the extra for later use at a milestone boundary, if you chose.

For example, if you have a fancy, expensive gun (such as a **Custom .45 Long Slide**) that gives you a Weapon/2 rating and costs 1 point of refresh to make it your personal weapon, when you lose it in a scuffle with the police that gets you arrested, you get your 1 point of refresh back at the next **minor milestone** and the fate point it represents to compensate for your loss.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The most important part of defining an extra is to imagine how it will impact the story and the game:

- If the extra is descriptive in nature and will influence the narrative, it will need one or more aspects.
- If the extra will participate in challenges, contests, and conflicts as an actor (i.e. it will roll its own dice), it will need skills.
- If the extra makes skills more awesome by providing bonuses, exceptions, etc., then it should contain stunts.
- If the extra can absorb punishment, be damaged, or be consumed during its usage before it fails or is rendered useless, it will have one or more stress tracks. These may be mental or physical stress tracks like a character, or they may be named differently to represent something else entirely.

The occult disciplines in **Enter the Occult** are customizable stunt-based extras. Each occult discipline requires the minimum cost of an

occult aspect, Lore +1 or grater, and the gateway stunt, and may be customized by paying for additional stunts within the discipline and gaining mastery toward reducing the opposition bonus for impromptu magic.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

Use the examples in the categories in this chapter to determine what the extra will cost you in terms of aspects, refresh, and skill slots. Extras differ from stunts in that they may cost more than 1 refresh each.

DON'T MAKE AN EXTRA IF . . .

Not every “new” thing needs to become a full-blown extra. For example:

- If it could be covered by a single aspect, you wouldn't be creating an extra. You'd just make it one of your character aspects.
- If it's simply a new skill, you can follow the rules in **Skills Defined** to make a new one and replace one of your character's skills.
- If it's simply a new stunt, you don't need a full blown extra, just follow the rules in **Do Your Own Stunts** to create your stunt.

If there is already a mechanical way to achieve the same effect and the extra is simply syntactic sugar, take the simple path and use the rules that are already in play.

ALLIES

In Modernity, you can use all the help you can get. True friends are few and far between, but the enemy of your enemy might be just the ally you need for the moment. Allies come in all shapes and sizes: devoted pets and familiars, people that you can call on in need for a specific purpose, or even hired mercenaries to guard you in your sleep.

HOW ALLIES ACT

As extras, allies are all extensions of your character, acting in concert with or in place of your character. One thing an ally will never be in Modernity is an independent character with independent actions of its own. Any such “ally” will be a denizen controlled by the coordinator, separate from your own hero. Any time an ally acts, it will be supporting your own action or in place of it, not as an additional independent action of its own. Modernity is streamlined for simplicity of play, and is focused

on your heroic influence on the story, not about solving numerical puzzles with game mechanics. Hence, the limitation to a **single action** per **moment** per **exchange** for every hero.

How many friends do you have who will take a bullet for you?

If you order your attack dog to fight during an exchange, the Doberman will use your action during your moment in the exchange to make an Attack using its own **Fighting** skill and powerful jaws. The same will be true of a bodyguard or a squad of mercenaries. An ally may act to support your own action using the **Teamwork rules**.

Allies may be used to absorb stress that would otherwise be taken by the hero. However, only one stress box may be used, either the hero's or the ally's, to absorb a single hit. An ally who is **taken out** in this way is eliminated from the scene and the coordinator will determine its fate.

ALLIES AS ASPECTS

If the purpose you imagine for your ally is to provide narrative control over the story in some way, either positive or negative, you can simply define your ally as a character aspect that allows you to invoke it for the purposes you've imagined. An ally can't be your **High Concept**, but could be your **Trouble** or another character aspect.

ALLIES AS STUNTS

If the purpose you imagine for your ally is to provide a bonus to an action (or the semantic equivalent of a higher action result), you can simply define your ally as a stunt that gives you a +2 bonus to a specific skill under specific circumstances, such as a surgical assistant whom you can call for incognito help. No reason to get fancy if you don't need to.

ALLIES AS EXTRAS

If your mental picture of your ally is more complex than an aspect or a stunt, then you have some choices to make about how expensive this ally will be for you. A basic retainer or well-trained pet will use the following template:

- Cost: 1 refresh
- Name (not an aspect)
- **High Concept**
- 1 stress box (physical or mental, your choice) *or* 1 skill rated Average (+1), but not both

You may have more than 1 basic ally of this caliber, if you wish, or expand this ally to describe it as a **unit**, such as a gang, mob, or squad.

DONATING TO AN ALLY

You may donate one or more skills, stunts, stress boxes, or consequence slots from your hero to your ally, with the coordinator's permission and table consensus that it makes narrative sense for your to do so. The character assets moved from hero to ally in this manner are not replaced on the hero's character sheet, and they will only be available when the ally is present in a scene. Remember that an ally is simply an extension of your hero's ability to influence the story.

UPGRADING AN ALLY

Each additional upgrade for your ally costs 1 point of refresh:

- 1 additional mental or physical stress box for the next higher slot
- 1 consequence slot of the next higher value (start with Mild)
- 1 additional aspect (in addition to its **High Concept**)
- 2 additional skill points (must comply with the **skill pyramid**)
- 1 additional stunt slot

ASSETS

Many different kinds of assets and investments can come in handy in Modernity, especially if your table's usual operations will require nontrivial amounts of travel, the purchase of information, or other expensive activities. If you prefer not to model your influence over these elements of the story in terms of aspects, skills, and stunts, you may elect to define your influence in terms of a special purpose stress track. An asset is something valuable that is both finite and renewable.

Money gives you choices. No money? No choices.

Examples of an asset in Modernity might be:

- A trust fund allowance (**Resources**)
- A hedge fund (Resources)
- A niche business (**Engineering, Investigation, or Knowledge**)
- A wide network of **Contacts**
- An equipment rental service of some kind (Resources)

Assets all have the following characteristics:

- A name (an aspect representing its *High Concept*)
- A single applicable abstract skill
- A replenishment schedule
- A stress track

The most common skill for an asset, of course, is Resources. In the case of a private investigation firm or political think tank that you own or keep on retainer, it might support Contacts or Knowledge instead.

ASSET COSTS

A basic asset costs 1 refresh, replenishes once per **operation**, and provides 1 stress box representing 1 stress. Assets may be enhanced at additional cost in terms of refresh.

The asset's replenishment schedule can be increased to once per **session** at the cost of 1 additional point of refresh, or increased to once per **scene** at the cost of 3 additional refresh.

Additional stress boxes may be purchased at the cost of 1 refresh for each additional stress box after the first. There is no theoretical maximum for assets' stress tracks. However, having more than 4 becomes prohibitively expensive and impractical.

ABSTRACT SKILLS

The abstract skill for an asset could be Contacts, Engineering, Knowledge, Investigation, or Resources. Direct application skills like **Athletics** or **Fighting** do not qualify for use as an asset, nor do personal attributes like **Empathy** or **Will**. The coordinator must approve and the table must concur that the desired skill makes narrative sense.

USING ASSET STRESS TRACKS

Whenever you take an action with a specific skill that does not immediately succeed, you may use your asset to absorb the stress equal to the number of shifts by which you fail to achieve success. Remember that a tie is not a success. You must exceed the target opposition by at least one shift to obtain success.

Like mental and physical stress tracks, each asset stress box may absorb a number of shifts equal to its value. Also, like mental or physical stress tracks, you may only choose to use one stress box per action. However, you may also accept consequences to your hero when you are employing an asset in this fashion, in addition to using one stress box to absorb the failure.

You may use stress against this track to buy success with style.

When using an asset in this fashion, you must still be able to provide the narrative that supports the action and how the asset was employed.

DEPLETED ASSETS

Obviously, assets that have had their stress track completely consumed may not be used to absorb further shifts of stress until their replenishment schedule indicates that the stress track may be cleared.

The asset aspect (a.k.a. the *High Concept*) may still be invoked (for normal cost in terms of fate points), even after the stress track has been completely filled.

GUNS & AMMO

Inevitably, somebody in your game is going to want to kill something. Maybe you. Especially when you feel threatened, there's nothing like putting a powerful weapon in your fist to calm your nerves and put steel in your spine. Even if you know a gun is powerless to kill the threat.

For simplicity, I'm lumping weapons of all types in with guns and ammo, with the notable exceptions of **explosives** which fall into their own section.

Coordinators: Many players in a modern setting have a TV-induced need to “get bigger guns” and “kill it with fire.” Every once in a while, you should let them do just that. It's cathartic.

LETHALITY

In Modernity, the baseline assumption is that the most common small arms (handguns), knives, and fists are about the same in terms of lethality. Which is pretty poor, all things considered.

At the risk of trending too far toward simulation, the real world survival rate for injuries with handguns, knives, and fists is about 90% or better. For killing, that makes handguns, knives, and fists alike generally inadequate for determined combatants, trained or untrained.

Players: Note that some types of awakened threats simply ignore conventional weapons of any rating. *If it doesn't bleed, you'll have to find another way to kill it.*

More lethal weapons mean that *characters will get hurt a lot*. What would be a near miss, a graze, or just a flesh wound with a handgun or a small knife, will be an instant moderate consequence or worse for a single hit from common civilian weapons, like shotguns and carbines.

GETTING GUNS

There are more powerful weapons available, but they are generally harder to come by, more expensive, and mostly illegal for civilian's to possess. Obtaining more powerful weapons is usually done one of two

ways. The first is to own the weapon as part of your character, something that is generally always with you that you pay for with points of refresh as extras. The second is to use Resources during a **shopping spree** to temporarily acquire them for a limited duration, perhaps a scene or even a session.

WEAPON RATINGS

Every weapon in Modernity is rated on a relative scale of lethality. The weapon rating indicates a minimum amount of damage that the weapon will do on a successful hit (including a tie).

Weapons with a rating of 1 or higher do damage on a tie instead of creating a boost.

A successful Attack with a weapon delivers a number of shifts of stress equal to the weapon rating or the total number of shifts of the Attack result, whichever is the higher amount. Expertise (or exceptionally good luck) make weapons much more effective.

WEAPON RANGE

As a theater of mind game, Modernity does not encourage the counting of squares or marking off the number of meters between shooter and target. Zones serve the purpose of defining proximity. Use table consensus and these guidelines to determine whether a target is in range or not. If it seems a little farther than optimal, give the victim a bonus to Defend with **Athletics**.

Depending on the size of your zones, handguns and similar low-power weapons (like unenhanced bows, javelins, and slings) as well as close-range weapons like shotguns can be against targets in the same zone or an adjacent zone. For close range weapons, give the target a +1 bonus for each additional zone beyond the adjacent zone between the shooter and the target.

Rifles and other long range, man-portable weapons can generally be used against targets up to 2 zones away. For longer range weapons, give the target a +1 bonus for each additional zone beyond 2 zones between the shooter and the target. Wind, weather, and other impediments like moving targets should be **treated like aspects**.

THROWN WEAPONS

Melee weapons, of course, may only be used to Attack targets in the same zone, unless thrown, which renders the weapon unusable until recovered. Give yourself a **Disarmed!** aspect just for trying, until you can walk over there and pick it up. But don't be surprised if someone else does that first, though, and returns it to you. *The hard way.*

AMMUNITION

Many tables don't find it entertaining to count individual bullets or to spend exchanges reloading instead of engaging the enemy, hence you may elect as a table to ignore ammunition entirely. If you are not going to keep track of individual bullets, do *not* use the rate of fire rules in the following section.

If survival horror is one of your themes, as described in in **Dwindling Resources**, it's incumbent upon everyone to keep track of ammunition, and the resulting fear as you slowly run out. . .

Each time you fire a weapon that consumes ammunition, reduce the number of bullets available to you, whether or not you score a hit. The number of bullets used depends on your rate of fire (below). When you reach 0, apply an **Out of Ammo** aspect to that weapon until the end of the scene or until you spend an exchange reloading. Here are the considerations Modernity takes with regards to ammunition:

- Reliable, military grade magazines and bullets (made of lead or other materials with good ballistic performance) are really heavy.
- Modern firearms, even semiautomatic weapons, have an extremely high rate of fire, emptying an entire magazine in seconds or less to get a hit, even for careful shooters.
- Most small arms are not effective when fired one bullet at a time, necessitating burst fire or rapid fire which consumes a large portion or all of a magazine to achieve an immediate effect.
- Modern firearms training (military, civilian, and law enforcement) often emphasizes both accuracy of shot placement and volume of fire as part of their manual of arms.
- Most gun battles (outside an all out warzone) last only a few seconds involving relatively few exchanges of gunfire. Gunfights involving civilians and law enforcement typically last about 3 to 5 seconds and involve significantly more misses than hits.

Hence a **basic load** for any given ammunition-dependent weapon in Modernity is about two magazines. A character may obtain or carry more ammunition, of course, but keep in mind that a character without a high **Brawn** score will struggle to carry or conceal more.

For comparison purposes, a well-conditioned, highly trained modern infantry soldier carries a total **fighting load** of 210 rounds of ammunition (far too much to conceal) for his primary rifle which is intended to last for an extended period of time and multiple skirmishes. Apply aspects like **Overloaded** with free invocations for the coordinator to heroes that insist on carrying an entire ammo dump directly on their person.

RATE OF FIRE

There will be many times when a hero will want (or desperately need) to fire more than one bullet. Most modern firearms are capable of very rapid fire, which will quickly leave even the highest capacity firearms empty. *Do not use these rules unless you are keeping track of ammunition.*

Coordinators: If the heroes want to play with more lethal guns, don't be afraid to have the opposition bring machineguns or worse to the party once in a while, too.

Rapid fire, burst fire, and panic fire may also be used to interdict a zone with a Create Advantage action instead of an Attack action. The number of targets hit must be equal to or fewer than the bullets fired.

The Modernity briefing book **Lock & Load** contains detailed statistics for a wide variety of modern weapons to support these rules.

AIMED FIRE

A character will normally pull the trigger of a modern firearm once, just follow the Attack or Create Advantage rules normally and subtract a bullet from the number remaining in your firearms ready reserve (magazine, cylinder, etc.).

RAPID FIRE

Especially with low power firearms, such as semiautomatic handguns and carbines, a you may wish to fire more bullets in order to increase the potential damage to your intended target or the number of free invocations established by a Create Advantage action.

You must declare rapid fire before dice hit the table. Subtract five bullets or the weapon's defined rapid fire number from your available ammunition, whichever is lower. Grant your target a +1 opposition bonus to defend against your attack. Increase your weapon's damage class by one for a successful Attack or add an additional free invocation to your aspect for a successful Create Advantage action.

BURST FIRE

Fully automatic firearms have the ability to spray an enormous quantity of bullets into a zone. Burst fire may be used to attack more than one target in the same zone or a single target for higher damage potential. Burst fire must be declared prior to rolling dice for the action. Expend 10 bullets or the weapon's defined burst fire number, whichever is lower. The same action must be used against every target, either Attack or Create Advantage. If you don't have enough bullets, you can't burst fire.

If multiple targets are fired upon, Attack or Create Advantage against every target in the same zone normally with no bonuses for Attack or Defend actions, including allies. If a single target is desired, grant your target a +2 opposition bonus to Defend against your attack and increase your weapon's damage class by two on a successful Attack or two additional free invocations on a successful Create Advantage action.

PANIC FIRE

Unlike burst fire, panic fire may only be directed at an entire zone. Any weapon capable of rapid fire or burst fire may empty its magazine as panic fire in exchange for a higher probability of delivering damage. A minimum of 20 bullets, the weapon's defined panic fire number, or the weapon's entire ammunition capacity, whichever is less, must be available and expended in order to gain the benefits of panic fire.

If you don't have enough ammo, you can't panic fire, but you may always panic instead as a free action.

Attack or Create Advantage against every target in the zone and grant a +1 opposition bonus to each Defend action, including allies. Increase your damage class by one for each successful Attack or add an additional free invocation to each aspect for a Create Advantage action.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Any time you discharge a firearm, there is a risk of hitting an unintended target downrange directly or a target somewhere else on the battlefield with a ricochet. Especially when engaged in Create Advantage actions (sometimes called grazing fire or suppressive fire), when using shotguns, and shooting at higher rates of fire, the risk to bystanders is large.

The coordinator may establish a *Collateral Damage* aspect and compel it whenever more bullets are fired than targets are struck by an Attack (or any time a Create Advantage action is used) and determine which, how many, and how severely unintended targets are injured or damaged. As an alternative to missing the target of an Attack or Create Advantage, the coordinator may offer a cost of some stray bullets doing stress, consequences, or completely taking out bystanders in exchange for hitting the target of your Attack or gaining the aspect that you wanted with a single free invocation.

PERSONAL WEAPONS

Some heroes (and villains) will want personal weapons that are just downright cooler than anybody else's. If you're one of those, be prepared to spend some refresh points to obtain an "always on my person" kind of lethal "toy."

Each additional weapon upgrade costs 1 point of refresh:

- Every 2 points of weapon rating
- Every additional zone of range beyond "nominal" for the weapon
- For each +2 bonus to weapon accuracy
- For each additional 2 reloads of ready ammunition

For example, a "gun nut" character might have the following:

Desert Eagle .44 Magnum: I own a large caliber handgun with a laser sight, I get a +2 bonus with Shooting to Attack and a Weapon/2 rating. (Cost: 2 refresh)

Just be aware that weapons are less general purpose than stunts or other extras, and more likely to go missing when the proverbial excrement hits the equally proverbial rotating impeller. Most of the really scary things in Modernity laugh at your guns and ammo anyway.

LEGAL ISSUES

Depending upon the geography that your game takes place in, civilian heroes will often have difficulty obtaining weapons quickly and legally. Feel free to ignore the legal issues, if the table wishes, in the interests of entertainment, but if you wish to apply a modicum of sanity to the inevitable arms race, here are some legal challenges that heroes may face when “arming up” in the United States (one of the countries of the world with a more “liberal” public policy on the subject of firearms).

- In most individual states in the U.S., only legal residents of that state over the age of 21 may purchase handguns, and only residents of adjacent states may legally purchase longarms.
- The federal “instant” background check by licensed firearms dealers (including public gun shows) is often delayed by up to 48 hours for as many as 10% of legitimate purchasers.
- Only semiautomatic versions of weapons (handguns or longarms) are generally available for sale to civilians. Only fully automatic weapons manufactured prior to 1986 are eligible for legal civilian purchase after an expensive and time consuming process.
- Medieval weapons, such as swords, spears, and morningstars, may be purchased, but carrying anything that can be defined as a club or an edged weapon over 3” in length is prohibited in most jurisdictions in the U.S. and draws lots of law enforcement attention even when its not strictly illegal.
- Concealed carry of handguns is regulated in most states, and in many states even the “open carry” of a handgun is prohibited.
- Any prospective buyer or seller of illegal weapons could be an undercover police officer.

If it's fun for your table to engage with the crazy quilt of legal issues surrounding weapons, by all means, do some research and apply the irrational real world legal rules in the appropriate setting to your game. If not? Feel free to ignore reality and just have fun!

WEAPON/0

These are examples of baseline weapons in Modernity that do not have a damage floor and result in a boost on a tie. The lethality inherent in these weapons primarily relies upon the skill of the user (or random chance) to insure the kill.

- Body weapons: fists, feet, elbows, knees
- Knives (less than 3")
- Light clubs (sticks, broom handles)
- Light improvised weapons (chairs, table legs)
- Standard handgun (such as 9mm or .45-caliber or smaller) with ball ammo (a.k.a. FMJ or Full Metal Jacket)

These weapons are not generally restricted in the United States, but some legal jurisdictions will prohibit their carry or use by civilians. Most weapons in this category are easy to conceal.

WEAPON/1

These are slightly more lethal weapons that do at least one shift of stress on a tie, or more for larger success. The marginal lethality of these weapons still primarily relies upon the ability of the user (or dumb luck) to insure the kill.

- Long knives and machetes
- Clubs (billy clubs, ASP batons)
- Brass knuckles and similar weapons
- Shortbows and other unenhanced, non-compound bows
- Light slings and slingshots

These weapons are restricted in some parts of the United States, but are generally easy to obtain regardless of the legal restrictions. Most weapons in this category can be concealed with a little effort.

WEAPON/2

These are the very low end of military grade weapons that do at least 2 shifts of stress on a tie, or more for higher levels of success. The improved lethality of these weapons still primarily relies upon the ability of the user (or happenstance) to insure the kill.

- Light swords (saber, epee, foil, wakizashi)
- Heavy clubs (PR24, baseball bat)
- Longbows, recurve bows, and enhanced non-compound bows
- Heavy slings and slingshots
- Large bore handguns (.50-caliber or larger)
- High velocity handguns (FN 5.7x28mm or similar)
- Standard handguns with AET (advanced energy transfer) ammunition like hollowpoints, dum-dum rounds, and the like

They are restricted in some parts of the United States, but relatively easy to obtain for civilians with some caveats (outside the scope of the game). Most weapons in this category are impossible to conceal under normal circumstances wearing normal civilian attire.

WEAPON/3

These are the midpoint of military grade weapons that do at least 3 shifts of stress on a tie, or more for higher levels of success. The lethality of these weapons will allow a relatively unskilled user to more reliably get the kill.

- Submachineguns and carbines firing standard handgun calibers (the longer barrel improves performance over handguns) firing ball ammo (a.k.a. FMJ or Full Metal Jacket)
- Standard shotguns (12-gauge or larger) firing bird shot or low-velocity rounds (for indoor use and easier control)
- Small bore shotguns (less than 12-gauge)
- Short barrel black powder guns

They are restricted in some parts of the United States, but relatively easy to obtain for civilians with some caveats (outside the scope of the game). Most weapons in this category are impossible to conceal under normal circumstances wearing normal civilian attire.

WEAPON/4

These were the norm for military grade weapons centuries ago. They do a minimum of 4 stress on a tie or more for higher levels of success. Even untrained users with weapons of this nature can be dangerous.

- Spears and similar light polearms
- Medium weight swords (longsword, katana)
- Morningstars and other spiked clubs
- Crossbows and compound bows
- Muskets and other long barrel black powder guns
- Submachineguns and carbines firing standard handgun calibers (the longer barrel improves performance over handguns) with AET (advanced energy transfer) ammunition like hollowpoints, dum-dum rounds, and the like

They are heavily restricted in some parts of the United States, but can be obtained by civilians in most jurisdictions of the U.S. They are strictly prohibited for civilian ownership by a large number of other countries. Most weapons in this class are almost impossible to conceal in any way.

WEAPON/5

These are the norm for modern military grade weapons and do a minimum of 5 stress on a tie or more for higher levels of success. Untrained users have better than even odds for getting a kill if they can make the hit.

- Small bore black powder cannon (ball or shot)
- Standard pump action or semiauto shotguns (12-gauge or higher) firing either buckshot or slugs
- Carbines, assault rifles, sniper rifles, and hunting rifles firing light rifle rounds (5.56 NATO or .223 Remington, .308-caliber or 7.62 NATO, 7mm Mauser, and similar)

They are heavily restricted in some parts of the United States, but can be obtained by civilians in most jurisdictions of the US. They are strictly prohibited for civilian ownership by a large number of other countries. Most weapons in this class are almost impossible to conceal.

WEAPON/6

These are generally support weapons in military units carried by a small number of specialists to provide heavier Attack capability to the unit. These weapons do a minimum of 6 stress on a tie, and more for higher levels of success. They can be a challenge for an untrained or weak user to manage, but they are lethal whenever they are employed.

- Heavy swords (bastard sword, 2-handed sword, ōdachi)
- Heavy spears and other polearms (halberd, glaive, naginata, guandao, voulge)
- Arbalest, scorpios, polybolos, and similar weapons
- Fully automatic shotguns (12-gauge or higher) like AA-12, USAS-12, and Saiga-12
- Light machineguns firing light rifle rounds (5.56 NATO, 7.62 NATO, etc.) like the M60, M249, and LSW

They are heavily restricted in some parts of the United States, but can be obtained by civilians in most jurisdictions of the U.S. They are strictly prohibited for civilian ownership by a large number of other countries. Most weapons in this class are impossible to conceal.

WEAPON/7

At this level, weapons are generally not man-portable. They are typically deployed in an anti-materiel capacity, being generally considered a violation of the Geneva Convention to use in an anti-personnel capacity. They are also typically very illegal for civilian ownership across the globe. They do a minimum of 7 stress on a tie, and more if the success is higher than 7 shifts. Weapons in this class rarely leave survivors.

- Large bore black powder cannon (ball or shot)
- Catapults, ballistae, and other medieval siege weapons
- Large caliber sniper rifles (.50-caliber and higher) like Barrett M82
- Flamethrowers and other incendiary weapons
- Crew-served heavy machineguns firing high caliber rounds (usually .50-caliber or 12.7mm) like M2HB, MG42, and DShK

They are heavily restricted in most of the United States, but can be obtained by civilians in a few places like Texas, Alaska, and Arizona. They are strictly prohibited for civilian ownership by a large number of other countries. Concealment is not an option for weapons in this class.

WEAPON/8 & HIGHER

These weapons are not man-portable and generally begin to leave the realm of tactical confrontations and enter the realm of strategic weapon. Weapons in this class also generally have some form of **explosive or incendiary component** to their ammunition, with the notable exception being densified armor-piercing rounds made with materials like depleted uranium. Being hit by a weapon in this class is generally not survivable for a human.

- Light cannons, usually 20mm or greater firing standard armor-piercing (AP) or high explosive armor-piercing (HEAP) rounds
- Mortars firing fragmentation or white phosphorus (WP) rounds
- Artillery, including howitzers and direct-fire weapons like bazookas and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs)
- Anti-armor rockets and missiles, like Dragon, LAW, and similar

They are strictly prohibited for civilian ownership in every civilized country. Weapons in this class usually require vehicular transport and a support crew larger than one to operate efficiently.

HEAVY METAL

People who worry about getting shot either find big, heavy things to hide behind or will eventually want to wear or carry around things to hide behind in order to avoid injury. If you are one of those, you've come to the right section to get some armor.

Armor is only effective against physical stress. It can't shield your mind. Or your soul.

Armor covers anything that shields you from physical stress in some way. Different kinds of armor behave very differently, and have different pros and cons. Some armor works by absorbing some or all of the punishment of an Attack so that you don't have to (flexible armor), some armor works by entirely blocking weapons below a certain rating (rigid armor), and some armor combines the best of both worlds.



PERSONAL ARMOR

A character may spend one point of refresh for each two points of desired total armor rating to add it to the character as a permanent extra that, narrative permission permitting, will always be available.

THE DOWNSIDE

The higher the armor rating for personal armor, the bulkier it is and harder to conceal. During each session, the coordinator may invoke **for free** the aspect *Armor Impairment* once for each level of the total armor rating, plus one additional free invocation for rigid armor.

Rigid armor may not be concealed without extraordinary effort.

For hybrid armor, sum the armor ratings and apply the additional downside for rigid armor. These free invocations may be applied to concealment efforts, movement impediments, or just about anything else. Armor of both types can wear out over time under combat conditions and become ineffective as they get damaged.

FLEXIBLE ARMOR

By and large, flexible armor is designed to be concealable and worn close to the body. It functions like a kinetic cushion. Flexible armor can be made from a variety of materials ranging from the medieval (boiled leather) to the modern (Kevlar or more advanced ballistic materials).

Flexible armor is rated between 1 and 4, representing the number of stress boxes that it provides on an armor stress track. Flexible armor ratings are written with a # followed by a number to indicate its rating.

Example: *Second Chance*™ Class IIIa Kevlar Vest (Armor#3)

The principal advantage of wearing flexible body armor is that you may use 2 stress boxes to absorb a single Attack: one from the armor stress track and one from your personal physical stress track. However, flexible armor degrades as it suffers abuse. **Stress boxes on flexible armor are not recovered at the end of a scene.** When all of the stress boxes on a given piece of flexible armor are consumed, it's rendered useless. Law enforcement, for example, routinely replaces flexible armor after a hit.

RIGID ARMOR

This class of armor includes personal armor made from inflexible materials, such as ceramics and plate steel, as well as vehicle armor and hard cover that you might find on a battlefield to hide behind. Rigid armor does not provide a new stress track, but instead sets a minimum weapon rating required to penetrate the armor because it acts less like a ballistic cushion and more like an impenetrable barrier.

In essence, rigid armor ignores weapons equal to or below its threshold rating. If a Weapon/2 pistol is fired at and hits Armor/2, the armor wins and the character wearing the armor is uninjured. However, a weapon firing high velocity rounds with a Weapon/3 rating will pierce the armor unimpeded and deliver a minimum of 3 physical stress to the victim.

Rigid armor that is penetrated by Attacks a number of times equal to its rating will completely lose its ability to protect until repaired.

For reasons of weight and bulk, personal rigid armor seldom goes higher than a rating of 3, with armored vehicles and hardened concrete walls being rated as high as 6 or more for main battle tanks.

HYBRID ARMOR

The combination of flexible and rigid armor would seem to be ideal. However, it comes at a fairly steep penalty. See *the downside* above for the reasons why you might choose not to wear hybrid armor, or any.

Example: *Dragonskin*™ Class IV Combat Armor (Armor/3#2)

Hybrid armor is tracked with both ratings with a flexible armor stress track and a rigid armor protection rating. When the flexible armor stress track is fully consumed, the rigid armor still functions, but the ability to absorb additional punishment has been exhausted, and the flexible armor components must be replaced.

REPAIRING THINGS

In addition to normal wear and tear that grinds even the best quality equipment down, inevitably things get damaged in Modernity, either in the course of their normal expected use or as narrative consequence. Some things by their nature are consumable and cannot be repaired. Others can have some or all of their original functionality restored.

REPLACEMENTS

When expended, consumable items—like flexible armor, ammunition, and medical supplies—must be replaced, because by their very nature they are not repairable. Use your judgment as the coordinator to determine what if any costs are incurred in the replacement of the item in question. Unless your table enjoys the tracking of and shopping for minutiae like replacement armor and ammunition, whenever there is a reasonable opportunity to obtain replacements during an intermission scene, allow the heroes to do so.

If one of the operation's themes is **survival horror** which includes a presumption of limited and dwindling resources, requiring the heroes to Overcome a **Resources** challenge to find or buy replacements is reasonable. In any event, in the case of personal items paid for with points of refresh, they should always be returned to full functionality in between operations at a minimum, but often in between sessions.

REPAIRS

Whether a worn or damaged item suffers from an aspect that was applied to it to track the diminished capacity or it has a partially or completely consumed stress track, the item can be restored in much the same way as a **Recovery** action for healing consequences. At the cost of spending a scene doing the repair work (typically an **Engineering** challenge) or arranging for and supervising denizens doing the repair work (typically a **Contacts** and **Resources** challenge), the hero responsible for the repairs must Overcome static opposition equal to +2 for each invocation applied to the aspect when it was created plus the total amount of stress absorbed by the stress track. Some items will only have aspects, some will only have stress tracks. Standard **teamwork rules** apply. Reduce the opposition by +2 (one step on **The Ladder**) for each addition scene that the hero is devoted to doing nothing else.



Red-Ned

A LITTLE BOOM-BOOM

Explosives and incendiary devices are the legendary stuff of Hollywood special effects, but they are also extremely lethal in the real world, and hence heavily regulated. Even chemical substances that are precursors to high explosives (such as ammonium nitrate, a common fertilizer) or highly flammable products (but not technically high explosive in nature, like cordite and smokeless powder used in modern firearm ammunition) are well regulated and closely monitored. Only the primers in small arms ammunition are technically high explosive.

IT ALL GOES BOOM

I'm lumping high explosives and low explosives together, despite their disparity in detonation speed vs. deflagration speed specifically because they have in common the ability to Attack entire zones and every occupant of those zones *en masse*.

High explosives detonate at or above the speed of sound causing the resulting shock wave to propagate through and beyond the explosive charge at high speed. This high speed propagation mechanism is primarily responsible for the brisance or shattering/cutting effect of high explosives compared with low explosives. High explosive detonations are often characterized by massive concussion and fragmentation with very little visible effect beyond the resulting dust and debris cloud. The aftermath of a high explosive detonation can be somewhat visually anticlimactic to the untrained eye.

Low explosives and *incendiaries* deflagrate (burn at high speed, but below the speed of sound) rather than detonate, propagating the reaction through heat transfer rather than through shock. These explosions are generally much more flamboyant, colorful, and viscerally satisfying, but usually less immediately damaging than high explosives. Most movie and TV watchers expect the roiling gas clouds and thick black smoke that are characteristic of the (much cheaper and more visually appealing) incendiaries.

Even professional demolition engineers and military explosives experts choose their explosives first based on what's available/affordable and secondarily by the proper tool for the job.

NECESSARY COMPONENTS

In order to set off an explosive device, you need a few common components to construct the device, whether it's an IED (improvised explosive device) or a purpose-built landmine.

1. A trigger or initiator (such as a timer, button, or lighter)
2. A fuse or ignition system
3. A detonator, if the charge itself is not a primary explosive
4. An explosive charge

In many cases, some or all of these components are completely self-contained within the device, such as a hand grenade, a satchel charge, a Molotov cocktail, or a pipe bomb. In other cases, general purpose explosives are carried separately from their trigger, ignition, and detonator systems for safety and versatility.

EXPLOSIVE SKILLS

Use **Engineering** as the skill for any action related to explosives: fabricating them, emplacing them, disarming them, etc. The difficulty associated with an explosive-related task will depend primarily upon the desired amount of precision required for the task at hand. Related skills for explosives would be **Investigation** for analysis (before or after an explosion), **Stealth** to hide an explosive, **Awareness** to locate a hidden explosive, and **Contacts** and **Resources** to acquire the explosives.

EXPLOSIVES VS. ARMOR

In Modernity, there are no sealed and hardened armor systems that would allow a character to completely ignore the effects of an explosion. Even the occupants of main battle tanks, though they are shielded from fragmentation effects that fail to penetrate, are not immune to the ravages of high explosive concussion. Flexible armor may absorb no more than half of the stress of an explosion. Rigid armor will prevent stress due to an explosion equal to half its rating.

EXPLOSIVE RATINGS

In Modernity, explosions are rated from 0 to infinity, based on the estimated amount of stress required to destroy the desired target. Humans require much less than a building to demolish. The explosive rating represents the active Attack strength at ground zero (the epicenter of the explosion) vs. **Athletics** to avoid or reduce the damage by diving to cover, etc. The table contains some example explosive ratings.

Attack Strength	Description
+0	Firecrackers like M80s and artillery simulators (not too dangerous but can still hurt you)
+2	Improvised pipe bomb or Molotov cocktail
+4	M67 fragmentation grenades and similar small hand-held explosive weapons
+8	Structural demolition charge (stick of dynamite, block of C4, or equivalent charge)
+20	M888 HE mortar shell or similar
+200	M84 general purpose air-dropped bomb

There are larger standard artillery and bombing payloads. As you can tell, artillery rounds and aerial ordnance are very large and very lethal.

EXPLOSIVE ATTENUATION

The damage due to concussion, incineration, and fragmentation will diminish the farther from the blast zone the victim is. Depending on the size of your zones, this may be a reduction by half in adjacent zones and half again for each zone distant or some other similar reduction to the Attack strength at your distance from the epicenter of the detonation.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Some common hand grenades are designed to deliver a non-lethal concussion or pyrotechnic effect designed to dazzle or stun a target. Explosive ratings are the same as the M67 above. However, the Attack is against **Brawn** in the case of concussion grenades or **Will** in the case of stun grenades to avoid having an aspect similar to *Stunned* applied with one or more free invocations immediately invoked to create static opposition to taking any action until the aspect is Overcome.

ARTIFACTS

Occult and alien artifacts can have a variety of properties that mimic the behavior of other character capabilities. First, define the narrative role that the artifact is intended to play *then* assign it capabilities as an extra. Wherever possible, try to define the artifact either as an aspect or as a stunt, especially for single-purpose, low-power items.

If your artifact is more potent than a character aspect (for primarily narrative influence) or a stunt (for a skill bonus or a rules exception), then it will follow the same rules as other extras with a total cost in refresh, etc. See also **The Darkness** for the effect of using occult artifacts.

- If it has the elements of an **Ally**, such as skills, stunts, etc., then follow the rules for allies. A *Wondrous Statue* that summons a fell beast from a nether realm is precisely this kind of artifact. Be certain to discuss the story implications of such an ally being taken out and how ownership may be maintained, stolen, or given away in the course of play.
- If the extra has a stress track that works like an **Asset** to support a specific skill, then follow the asset rules.
- Magical or technologically advanced armor may mimic flexible or rigid or hybrid armor, and costs the same as other personal **Armor**, unless it has additional capabilities.
- Any magical or alien weaponry with a non-zero rating will cost the same as personal **Weapons**, unless it has additional capabilities, such as cybernetic concealment or special Attack modes, which will increase its cost for the addition of stunts.
- If the artifact is an occult container (such as a magic ring, wand, or staff) that supports magical use by providing free invocations to pay an occult cost, the aspect will cost 1 point of refresh for each free invocation on the aspect defining the artifact that are renewed each session or may be recharged (up to the artifact's normal maximum during a “recharging” scene) by using the occult discipline's initiation stunt to Create Advantage. Artifacts that absorb a stress cost for the occult effect follow the **Asset** rules.

Other **Modernity briefing books** will contain unique definitions of special purpose artifacts for use in your campaign.



SHOPPING SPREE

When you're gearing up for a fight, many players have a natural inclination to want to arm up and armor up. This essentially comes down to a "shopping spree" to acquire weapons and armor on short notice that won't become a permanent part of their heroes. For the purposes of such a shopping spree scene, it will be a **Resources** challenge with some special caveats.

Gear Shopping Spree: During this scene-long challenge, the hero with the highest Resources will make the final **Overcome** action against static opposition equal to the total of all of the weapon, armor, and explosive ratings desired for each character.

Each weapon that requires ammunition will have 4 exchanges worth of ammunition: +1 static opposition for every 2 additional exchanges of ammunition desired.

All other players may contribute either with Resources by using the rules for **Teamwork** or by making a **Create Advantage** action using **Crime** or **Contacts** to help facilitate the deal.

Remember that there are usually time constraints and nontrivial legal issues for this kind of shopping trip, hence the challenge. And the guns and ammo will only be available for one scene (usually a finale) or possibly a session. Get table consensus on the narrative permission for these guns, ammo, and armor, and how long they will persist.

Depending on the proclivities of your table, feel free to make a shopping trip like this more or less complicated. Some tables prefer to shop for each piece of equipment separately, others will simply spend fate points to declare facts and move on. Which is a perfectly valid approach, just add up the cost and divide by 2 to get the round number of fate points required to pay for what you want.

Whatever you do, tell the story about how it happened to make it fun!

HIDEOUTS & SAFEHOUSES

In Modernity, the availability of secret places and the quality of those secret places will vary widely depending on the type of game you're playing, the **power level** you're playing at, and the support you're provided by your employer or patron (if any). The cost of such accommodations will also vary based on the narrative effect you want them to have on the story.

A PLACE TO HANG YOUR HAT

If your table is made up of undercover law enforcement heroes, or similar characters, I recommend that these sorts of options be available, but they won't generally be high quality digs, and they may not be as secure as you'd like.

Similarly, if your table is primarily operating in one region, the heroes may want to establish places that are ready-made locations for future scenes. In both cases, hideouts and safehouses, the place is just a locale for a scene with no other narrative impact than decoration and flavor.

You can simply decide as a table that you have a "hangout" and give it whatever aspects and benefits you wish, subject to the coordinator's veto, but it's a good idea to have a central location that will serve as a stock setting for scenes, a place to store gear and supplies, and to function as a rally point as needed during inevitable emergencies.

A PLACE TO HIDE

In the event that your heroes want a hideout to actually be somewhat secure or obscure (two different things), then one or more heroes can contribute fate points to the extra that defines the hideout. It's likely you'll at least need to spend a point of refresh or two for one or more of the possible benefits listed below.

A PLACE OF REFUGE

If you need a place where you can feel safe, your lair where you know that when you arm the defenses that you'll have the home field advantage, you'll definitely want one or more heroes to spend some points of refresh on the benefits listed below to enhance its offensive and defensive capabilities.



David Leek

BUILDING YOUR FORTRESS

If you want your safehouse, lair, hideout, fortress, whatever, to become a “character” in your game, use these rules to spruce it up. More than one hero (I recommend equal contributions all around) can contribute points of refresh to the base.

To begin with, for 1 point of refresh, you’ll gain a location with 1 full-fledged aspect of your choosing as the location’s **High Concept**. It’ll be important to decide whether the first aspect is more hideout-oriented or safehouse-oriented in order to decide what additional elements you want to spend points on.

Each additional benefit costs 1 point of refresh:

- Each additional aspect
- Every 2 skill points given to the security systems and/or home automation systems (not every skill will make sense for this) that enable it to act using the **Teamwork rules**.
- Bonuses to specific skills in the form of supporting stunts
- For built-in weapons and armor, use the costs listed in **Guns & Ammo** and **Heavy Metal**

It doesn’t really make sense to give a location stress tracks or consequences, unless it’s a mobile command center like a van. Of course, if (when?) a base of operations gets destroyed, you get your points of refresh back.

THE KITCHEN SINK

There is a nigh infinite number of possibilities for extras that are not covered in detail in this Toy Box chapter, such as vehicles, artifacts of power, trained animals, arcane familiars or stranger occult fauna, portals to other places and times, etc. There simply isn’t room in a book this size for everything under the sun (or moon).

However, many of those things you can use existing rules to model in a satisfactory manner. And you’ll be pleased to know that Glacier Peak has a number of projects in the works to fill the gaps and expand the possibilities for your Modernity game.

See **Also Available From Glacier Peak** section for the big list.

SPRINGING THE TRAP

Event Compel, Transition Scene

“In our lives, we have two or three opportunities to be a hero, but almost every day, we have the opportunity not to be a coward.”

Spanish proverb

Zoë yells into the kitchen, “Okay, you guys. Break’s over! This scene is ***Springing the Trap.***”

Paul groans. “On me? Or on them?”

Zoë grins. “Why? Do I have to discriminate between you? I love you all.” As everyone resumes their seats, she summarizes the hunt for Roberto so far.

*The park where Shannon scryed Roberto is in one of the bad barrios. Shannon could see the neon sign that spells out the name of the nightclub she knows he was headed to: **Iniquity.***

Zoë offers everyone an event compel based on the game aspect **Faerie Dust Bowl** because there is no way they could make it from the Moreno family home across town to intercept Roberto before he arrives at **Iniquity**. El Paso is not a small town. C’est la guerre. And she hints that there are other reasons for compelling that particular aspect.

*Grace is driving as the trio cruise slowly past **Iniquity**, very conscious of the fact that her late model, recently washed and waxed **Urban Assault Vehicle** is very out of place in this part of town, filled with abandoned*

warehouses and other rundown buildings. It looks like there are three men down the block selling dope on the corner.

Grant points at a scruffy little stray dog scampering along the side of the street. “Hey, Toto! Where’s Dorothy? Screw that. Where’s Kansas?”

Paul laughs and the women ignore him.

Although **Iniquity** is closed and its neon dim during the day, several expensive, heavily customized and gaudily painted cars linger in the parking lot. Grace gasps and points when she sees brownish droplets on the new concrete leading to the front door past the valet stand.

“Is he in there?” Grace asks Shannon, the concern and trepidation evident in her voice.

Shannon closes her eyes briefly and tries to reach out to Roberto.

“I don’t know. I didn’t think to create a more permanent link with him when I was scrying before. Why didn’t you remind me then?”

Grace, long used to Shannon reflecting everything back on her when she’s stressed out, says nothing.

The nightclub looks to be new construction and equally out of place in this neighborhood. The two-story building is surrounded by empty, overgrown lots on two sides. There are security cameras on two corners of the building and there’s a large skylight on the roof. Behind the club is what looks like a junkyard mostly adjacent to the large parking lot.

“Eyes on the road, Grace!” says Grant, who is never comfortable when he’s not the driver. And especially when the driver is a girl. “We need to find somewhere to park.”

“And plan,” Grace says, watching Grant grimace in the rearview mirror.

Grace and Shannon recognize the driver of an oncoming car as they begin to pick up speed moving away from **Iniquity**. It’s Raúl Salazar.

The two women chorus, “Oh. My. God.”

Paul looks confused. John shrugs as Grant’s only response. Zoë smiles. “I told you there was more to the compel.”

“That drug-running bastard is mixed up in this?” Grace asks. “That explains that mess at the airport, werewolves and all, when he escaped federal custody!”

Shannon and Grant crane their necks around to look out the back window, and sure enough, Salazar turns into the parking lot of **Iniquity**.

“Wait,” Paul interrupts. “You knew there were werewolves and you didn’t warn me about this?”

“Well,” Shannon begins. “Not that it matters, but if faerie dust is involved in their making, that probably rules out several kinds of werewolves.”

Paul looks nonplussed. “You’ll have to explain that to me at some point, since I’m apparently one of the werewolves now.”

*Grace pulls up behind a Taco Acerco food truck down the block, well past the drug dealers, but still within sight of **Iniquity** with the binoculars she keeps in the trunk with the rest of her private eye gear. Fear always makes her hungry anyway. In her current line of work, at this rate, she should probably start worrying about losing her girlish figure. Besides, they need a place to stop and think. It won’t do for the three of them to kick in the front door and assault the place the way Grant will want to, but. . .*

“Grant, how quickly can your nefarious friends cook up some moderately dangerous pyrotechnics?” asks Grace.

Grant screws up his face like he always does when he’s thinking.

“Hang on,” says Shannon. “Are you thinking what I think you’re thinking? Don’t you remember what happened in Detroit?”

Grant holds up four fingers, wiggling his thumb a little. Four hours, maybe five at the outside.

“How long before it gets really dark?”



OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Your tradecraft: Creating and telling scary stories.

“Stories. . .are like prayers. It does not matter
when you begin, or when you end,
only that you bend a knee and say the words.”

Catherynne Valente

CREATING YOUR GAME

This chapter is primarily for coordinators. Players who read it will have a better understanding of the unique effort that the coordinator will have to expend in order to make the game come alive for the players.

GAME ASPECTS

As noted in **Types of Aspects**, the aspects that define your game are arguably the most permanent of all aspects. However they get defined (imposed by the coordinator, in a **published conspiracy**, or stipulated to by the table), these aspects are always available for anyone to **invoke**, **compel**, or **Create Advantage** upon. Game aspects cover the big defining parts of your game that provide consistency and continuity.

Game aspects have a few unique characteristics:

- Game aspects are typically defined by the coordinator, but it will often help players feel more ownership of the game if they contribute to the process for defining its aspects.
- Game aspects usually change far less often than other types.
- Game aspects are always available for anyone to invoke, compel, or Create Advantage.
- Game aspects are often compelled more than other types of aspects, except perhaps heroes' *Troubles*.
- Game aspects define the theme, tone, the narrative goals of the campaign, and the goals the table shares.

Your game will certainly be more than aspects, but let's start there and work our way down. See **Compelling Events** and **Compelling Decisions**.

Example game aspects might be:

- *What if it's All True?* (The default game aspect for Modernity)
- *Giant Faerie Dust Bowl* (The occult drug crisis in El Paso, Texas, in the published operation **Into the Wolves' Den**)
- *Our Misaligned Stars* (Something has gone wrong astrologically, and the heroes must figure it out and fix it.)
- *We're on the Run, Again* (The heroes screwed up, again, and are now fugitives from justice, again.)

Game aspects will often change over time as the story progresses and new aspects are discovered and new enemies are made, but they will usually endure from scene to scene until something happens in the story to change them. Be sure to write them big and put them somewhere visible so that everyone can see them all the time.

Game aspects are worthy of a lot more consideration, because they are available all the time *and* because they should be actively moving the story forward whenever possible. One thing to consider at length for game aspects is how they will be used to **compel decisions** and to **compel events**.

What really matters to the story? Why does it matter?

Coordinators, as you are engaged in your pre-game preparation and pre-session preparation, consider all of the compels that you may offer your players to keep the heroes moving forward. It won't necessarily keep them on the rails that you've imagined, but it's how you'll keep them failing forward toward the goals they've set for themselves and the resolution of the various plots and subplots in the operation.

YOUR GAME AS A CHARACTER

Remember the **Bronze Rule**: *You can treat everything like a character.* If you think of your game as a character, that will make it easy to balance the right number of aspects that you'll need to keep your game functional without being overloaded with too many aspects. If you limit your total number of game aspects to the same number that a hero in your game has, you'll be in good shape.

You probably won't give your game skills, stunts, stress tracks, etc., but there is probably a case for every one of those things that you very smart coordinators will come up with. For example, a game with a **Death Clock** counting down toward the eventual return of an **Ancient Evil** might use a stress track to record the number of portals opened or innocent victims sacrificed when the heroes fail or concede in various scenes along the way. *What happens when its entirely consumed?*

CLAIM YOUR TITLE

Giving your game a title will provide some succinct clarity and direction, especially if you define it as an aspect that can be invoked and compelled. It might be difficult to name a generic campaign that's just getting started, but identifying the central theme or goal for the first operation can serve as a game title until one manifests itself organically through gameplay. Just because you pick one doesn't lock you into it forever. Remember the **Golden Rule**: *You can always change it later.*

“Words have meaning. Names have power.”

Miguel De Cervantes

You can find possibilities for game titles that work as aspects in fiction everywhere, ranging from the silly to the sublime:

- *The Haunted Castle*
- *Ghostbusters*
- *The Mask Of Horror*
- *Marked For Death*
- *Pet Cemetery*
- *Needful Things*
- *Night Of The Comet*
- *The House Next Door*
- *Birds*
- *Cult Of The Cobra*
- *Judgment Night*
- *Gremlins*

A good title doesn't always make a good aspect, nor a good book or movie. That list is not necessarily an endorsement of quality fiction, just titles that might be readily invoked and compelled.

If you choose to give your game a title, especially if you plan to use it as a game aspect, just make sure it makes sense and is acceptable to the whole table. Talk through ways to invoke and compel it together.

GUARDRAILS

In many respects, game aspects are primarily there to mark what is out of bounds. If your table has Trouble staying on task or if some players have a tendency toward the **inappropriate or antisocial** or less than heroic behavior, use compels of game aspects to keep things on the straight and narrow.

More than herding players' proclivities, game aspects safeguard the narrative. Especially in this genre, it's perfectly reasonable and expected that the heroes will fall down a few rabbit holes and chase more than their fair share of red herrings. One of the things that can make for a **scary narrative**, even for extremely competent heroes who are flush with fate points to buy their way out of Trouble is the uncertainty and the mystery of not knowing quite what's going on. . . Or what they're up against in terms of opposition. Consider:

- *We're the Good Guys, Dammit*
- *Keep the Secrets or No One May Know*
- *A Matter Of Honor or Protect and Serve*

But when the story has meandered too far afield or the players just don't seem to be able to figure out what to do next, drop a compel of a game aspect on them by way of a gift of a fate point, some sort of unpleasant turn of events, and some momentum in the right direction.

THEMES

In other kinds of fiction as in your game, the themes that you choose to explore will add dimension and life to your game far beyond the relative effort you make to define them. Which is more engaging to your table: *Man's Inhumanity To Man* or *Ancient Eldritch Horrors*? Both can be frightening fun to fight against.

Will your game explore the potential risks and downsides of witchcraft? Will your game focus on the irrelevance of belief in the face of immutable laws of the universe? Will your game consider the possibility that madness is not a disconnection from reality, but in truth a deeper understanding of it?

Consider these aspects as thematic expressions of those 3 questions:

- *Everything Has a Price*
- *Belief Is Not Required*
- *The Truth Will Make You Mad*

Not only do aspects like that add depth to your game, they give everyone a framework upon which to hang events and interpret them within the context of the theme. Like all aspects, game themes should serve more than one purpose. If you can find a way to state your theme with ambiguity or double-meaning, that is ideal.

If your game will simply be a monster-of-the-week campaign, that's absolutely fine and can be tons of fun for your table. However, if you have an overarching theme or themes that can help to establish continuity and inspire new operations and new opposition.

CHANGING GAME ASPECTS

Game aspects generally only change when the coordinator determines that the story requires a change, but players are free to propose new game aspects, changes to existing game aspects, or the removal of game aspects. If it makes narrative sense to change them, by all means do so without hesitation and with as much fanfare as is warranted.

EVERYONE HAS ISSUES

Every campaign needs at least two issues. An issue aspect is like the Trouble for your operation. It's the riddle that you're compelled to solve, the opposition that you have to defeat, or the evil that you must vanquish. Each issue will change over time as the story progresses, and it's fine to have more than two issues, but it works best if each session is primarily focused on one issue at a time.

Whether your issues are extant conditions (the earthquake already happened, life already sucks, whatever) or impending disaster (the storm is looming on the horizon, civilization is slipping out of control, etc.), they should cause the heroes to take immediate and proactive action to either solve the problem or prevent it from taking place.

Having one of each kind in play is typical in fiction to provide some narrative tension. An **Impending Issue** provides longer term continuity while an **Immediate Issue** requires intervention and corrective measures to avert dire consequences *right #@%&ing now!*

See if you can guess which popular fiction use these pairs of issues:

- A **Massive Government Conspiracy** is working behind the scenes to bring about an alien invasion while the heroes occasionally get distracted by the **Monster of the Week** case.
- An unscrupulous company is building an **Unshackled Artificial Intelligence** to supplant the existing benign AI all while the heroes must regularly **Save Someone's Life** at the behest of the benign AI when the random stranger's number comes up.
- A **Nameless Evil** from beyond space and time beats upon the walls of reality causing ripples of madness amongst mortals and immortals alike while the heroes must constantly stop a **Platoon of Fallen Angels** from wreaking havoc upon mortal civilization.

The **Immediate Issue** will change more frequently and be renamed to suit the specific nature of the issue, while the **Impending Issue** will present longer term impact before it eventually becomes the **Immediate Issue**. Having the two kinds of issues to alternate between will allow for a variety of operations and give you two different plot vehicles with which to “mess with” your players.

FIGHT THE DARKNESS

There is one issue that you will always have at your disposal in Modernity: the Darkness. As alluded to **Enter the Occult**, the Darkness can have a terrifying impact on the general populace. The default game aspects that Modernity offers to every table define how the Darkness influences the game and the heroes' actions:

1. *Fight the Darkness*
2. *What if it's all true?*
3. *Keep the Secrets*

These two aspects do more than define the underlying uncertainty and possibility inherent in the setting. They also provide the mechanism by which you apply consequences to the heroes for failing in their role as protectors of the sanity of the common folk and civilization at large.

It is incumbent upon the players, not the coordinator, to figure out why their heroes feel obligated to honor the game aspects.

Humans, individually and collectively, react badly to uncertainty and fear, and they react even less well to terror. The vast majority of coping mechanisms that humans have developed to deal with negative stressors eventually develop into psychologically diagnosable neuroses and psychoses. Mass hysteria is a powerful and terrible force, both due to its deleterious effect on civilization and because it feeds creatures of the Darkness. Mobs with torches and pitchforks rarely care who they victimize in their lust for safety and certainty. For those reasons, their own personal convictions, and more, the heroes must ***Fight the Darkness***.

In addition to its normal function as a game aspect, ***What if it's all true?*** acts like a barometer for the terror level of the populace at large. Each time the general public is exposed to an occult phenomenon or horrifying act (not necessarily occult in nature), regardless of why or how or who the perpetrator is, add a fate point to the Darkness pool for the villains to use later as expression of their growing power. Exposure begins with direct contact with one or more survivors who will spread it by word of mouth or mass media. Bad news travels fast.

Keep the Secrets represents the gates of sanity which the heroes must put their proverbial backs to and guard with their literal lives.

When you compel any one of those three game aspects, and the heroes decline the **Decision** or the **Event**, add another fate point to the Darkness pool as the shadows from beyond the veil of sanity grow in strength.

Consider adding fate points to the Darkness pool as part of the cost for concessions when the heroes fail to thwart the villains' public actions.

For example, when the heroes are losing a fight early in an operation, they may concede and live to fight another day, they may consider giving up fate points to the Darkness pool instead of suffering consequences or death.

The result might be that the depredations of the *Satanic Killers* the heroes conceded to make the first segment of the 10 o'clock news, on every station, increasing the unease amongst the general populace and the future difficulty for the heroes because they failed to *Keep the Secrets*.

Use the fate points in the Darkness pool to complicate the heroes' lives in the form of invocations against the heroes' interests, to create static opposition to specific actions, to negatively influence interactions with the general public, etc. Unlike the normal scene pool, there is no expiration date on these fate points. The Darkness is always spreading, always hungry, always growing, always devouring.

SETTING

One of the crucial pieces of any fiction is the setting. Some storytellers go overboard with this and treat the setting almost as if it's a character in its own right. While that certainly could be successful for you, it's imperative to insure that the setting doesn't overshadow the heroes. Ultimately, Modernity is about the heroes. Cool settings really add to the ambiance, but the setting is not the principal focus, the players' experience of the story is through the lens of their heroes.

THE MILIEU

The milieu or game setting is different from scene setting, which you must also always be careful to clearly define. I'll cover **Setting the Stage** later for scene setting et al. The milieu is not a specific room or even a specific building, it's both a sense of geography and a sense of thematic contrast that casts shadows in every scene setting.

MY HOME TOWN

Many coordinators will find it simplest to choose a major metropolitan area as the milieu in order to provide a consistent background tapestry for the game. Consider game aspects like:

- ***The City That Never Sleeps*** if your game is based in New York
- ***The Big Chill*** (not the movie, just playing on the city's nickname *The Chill*) if you choose Chicago
- ***Babylon on Thames*** if your game is based in London

Whatever you choose for the aspect representing your hometown, it should contain some element of occult overshadowing or one of your themes in order to support the overall feel of your game.

JETSETTING

Your game may be a place-hopper, moving from exotic locale to exotic locale, which can be a ton of fun. However, you'll want to establish some continuity of setting. Perhaps the operation briefing and debriefing always occurs in the same or a similar location to provide bookends for the story in each operation, like ***M's Office*** at MI6 for James Bond or the ***Obligatory Tavern Scene*** in traditional high fantasy games. It could be a coffee shop at the airport like ***Latin Brew***, or even a ***Secure Virtual Conference Room*** for games with more of a cybernetic flavor.

SCALE

The scale of your game is directly connected to its **power level**, which we'll cover later. Decide on your story's scale first, and let that influence your choice of power level. (Yes, I'm lumping scope in with scale. Deal with it.) Scale ranges from epic proportions in the large scale to personal heroics in the small scale. Scale is not a value judgment. Neither is better or worse. They're just different. Different tables will want different kinds of stories.

Scale is unlikely to be expressed in a single aspect. But it will influence almost every aspect you create for your game. It's an important choice in order to set expectations for everybody at the table. Choose your place on the spectrum of scale intentionally and you'll be more satisfied with the result, even if you'll quite often find yourself somewhere in between personal heroics and epic proportions.

PERSONAL HEROICS

Every story matters to somebody, or it wouldn't be a good story. If your story only matters to one person or a handful of people, you are probably playing at the personal heroics end of the spectrum. Rescuing a kidnapped child, bringing a criminal to justice, or cleaning up the menace that is terrorizing a neighborhood are all examples of smaller scale stories. Many campaigns start here and grow up into epic tales. Almost every example in fiction begins here, and in some ways every story that matters is expressed at an intimate level with individual characters. What defines the personal heroics level is the amount of impact on the world. If the outcome of your story doesn't change the lives of more than a few people, it's a tale of personal heroics.

EPIC PROPORTIONS

Epic scale stories have a huge impact on the world around the heroes, whether they know it or not. They'll usually figure it out when things that they influence or cause make regional changes around their hometown, result in nationwide effect, or even have global impact. Epic scale stories affect the lives of many people. Anything that is likely to make front page headline news probably rates the description of epic scale, whether it's averting a mass casualty scenario, destroying a cult that menaces the border region, or thwarting a global conspiracy.

David Lee



SCARINESS

Like scale, scariness is a matter of preference. Not every table will want to max all the elements of scariness. While scariness will not often manifest itself as a single aspect, it will influence the vast majority, if not all, of your game aspects. Every element of your Modernity game should conspire to produce the intended emotional state for the players: *Terrified*.

SCARING OURSELVES

The more everyone agrees on which elements of horror to apply in your game, the most satisfied everyone will be with the resulting story. Modernity as a setting assumes that there will be a relatively high minimum amount of stimulation to the players' adrenal glands in all aspects of your game.

In order for Modernity to work, the coordinator and the players must collaborate to evoke the desired ambiance. If the coordinator does not meet or grossly exceeds the players' expectations for scariness, the game will be a broken experience. If the players cannot or will not suspend disbelief sufficiently to empathize with the horrific elements of the game, it will be a broken experience. You will have to work together to intentionally achieve the optimal level of scariness for your table.

The optimal level is usually just *almost too much*. . .

RISK

As will all drama, in Modernity, something that the heroes value highly must be at risk in your game, and by extension, the players must value it as well. Putting things at risk provides emotional energy to the conflict and provides levers for drama. The risk might be simple loss, like death. It could be a more complex, enduring loss like maiming, corruption, or madness. It could be one person or an entire city. Often avoidance of or an aversion to risk can be enough of a driving force for a game.

What is at-risk will vary widely. Often the heroes' *Troubles* will contain clues or outright definitions of what the players are willing to have put at risk. Be careful with springing certain kinds of risks on your unsuspecting players. For example, many parents (especially those with small children) will react badly to putting children at risk.

PERCEIVED POWERLESSNESS

Being powerless to prevent or correct something is frightening for anyone. When a consequence seems utterly unavoidable, even the most taciturn and hard-boiled noir heroes will despair. This element of scariness is often either the initial state for a story or the false failure of “all is lost” at a midpoint in a story or early in Act III.

To pull this lever, establish the heroes’ perceived inability to harm or oppose their enemies. The heroes default response, be it guns or magic, may have no perceived effect upon their foes.

Take careful note of the “perceived” adjective, though. The heroes cannot be truly powerless. . . Otherwise, what’s the point? Modernity is not a game of inevitable doom: it’s a game of heroes succeeding against unbelievable odds and at great cost. The heroes should always have an “out” or an alternative “weapon,” even if it’s an extremely expensive escape or an unpleasant path to obtain it.

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Social isolation is the norm in Modernity. Nobody will believe you if you try to explain to them what’s going on. Worse, simply trying to shine light on **the Darkness** and raise awareness of the occult amongst mundanes is likely to have dire consequences for the heroes:

- Jail time for crimes they may or may not have committed
- Involuntary commitment to a mental institution
- Loss of anonymity due to press coverage
- Increasing power for the occult threat due to rising the terror level and enhanced general public belief in the occult
- Further disturbances in the force of civilization to maintain order
- Weakening the fabric of reality and innocent denizens’ sanity

You can impose social isolation on the heroes through the consequences of “breaking containment” as well as by compelling aspects to enforce the isolation. I recommend doing both. Show them where the social guardrails are by offering compels to **Keep the Secrets** and also reinforce the importance of keeping the heroes’ actions from going “out of bounds” by increasing the power of the opposition unexpectedly due to some action that they have taken to publicly expose it.

LACK OF TRUST

A very special, particularly pernicious type of social isolation is created by breaking down the trust between heroes. To use this lever, create a situation in which one or more of the heroes are suspect and untrustworthy. A possible traitor in their midst is one of the most divisive and isolation-inducing conditions that you can inflict on a group.

PHYSICAL ISOLATION

When you constrain the heroes' freedom of movement by locking them in a *Haunted Museum* overnight or restricting them to an alternate dimension that resembles the "twilight zone" of a *One-Horse Town* which they can't escape, you are isolating them physically from being able to summon aid. Many heroes will feel at greater risk simply because they can't dial 911.

In many horror stories, writers feel the need to solve "the cell phone problem" in order to keep everyman characters physically isolated. In Modernity, the cell phone isn't a problem. It's an opportunity to further highlight physical isolation. A cell phone isn't a magic bottle that will summon a law enforcement or paramedic genie to the rescue, or even other team members. . . *It's an opportunity for someone else to listen to a hero's death scream and be utterly powerless to respond in time.*

Geography and the requisite time to travel from one physical location to another are the principal barriers to receiving aid. Response time for emergency personnel like policemen and firemen, especially to dangerous parts of town or rural locations, is measured in minutes or hours or more. Long enough for *Bad Things* to eat you. All while your friends or the dispatcher listen on the line.

For whatever reason, I observed during playtests of Modernity that many tables are willing to "split the party" in a contemporary setting far more frequently than they are in other settings. Perhaps getting in a car and heading off to interview someone or do research feels more like "running errands" than doing something risky, but whenever the table elects to split scenes and have some heroes physically separated from the others, feel free to insert gremlins or other scary elements into the mix to heighten the drama and highlight the heroes' additional fragility when they are isolated from one another.

DWINDLING RESOURCES

There are several types of resources that heroes can run out of that will enhance their fear. In Modernity, chief among those finite resources are consequences and fate points. There are other types of resources that can become depleted, but the two that represent their durability and their ability to influence the narrative outcome are the ones that you can rely upon to cause them concern.

Do not get hung up on the fact that stress boxes are replenished and recovered at the end of every scene. Stress boxes are there to demonstrate a near miss, an injury or consequence that “almost was.” As you reinforce that stress is proxy for consequences avoided, your players will begin to dread taking consequences, because consequences linger and most heroes can only absorb 3 or 4 consequences before being taken out.

Heroes can only take so much punishment before they stop ticking. Keep the pressure on with a variety of opportunities to “earn” consequences of the physical and emotional sorts. Keep the importance of consequences top of mind by stringently enforcing the recovery process and recovery time for consequences of all levels.

The only fight you win is the one you're not in.

Because fate points can be hard to come by, unless the players are willing to accept compels and concede conflicts (they'll learn to do both of those just to survive), watching the available pool of fate points diminish as they are spent to achieve the hero's desired goals can be nerve-wracking for your players.

Keep the importance of fate points front and center by buying them cheaply and selling them dearly. Make opportunities to use them frequent and opportunities to gain them few and far between.

Nothing should be more terrifying than reaching the climax of an operation and going into the final confrontation scene with all of your slots for consequences already full and zero fate points.

THE MYSTERY

One of the defining characteristics of any horror fiction is uncertainty. I divide that uncertainty into three categories. The first is the mystery. The heroes do not and cannot know everything. Their first instinct will be to apply outside knowledge or to do research. They will want to know, to quantify and qualify, as much as possible in order to alleviate the mystery.

Let them try. Tantalize them with hints and vague innuendo. But know that as soon as they fully realize *The Truth*, it will lose its power to frighten. It's best to only deliver revelatory catharsis at or near the climax of the operation. However, the players must feel as though they're learning things and making progress, or they will become rapidly frustrated if the answer is always "There's nothing in Wikipedia about that." So parcel out information slowly, but ultimately, mysteries can and should be solved.

That said, also be prepared at the end of this operation's denouement to drop hints for the future that perhaps what the heroes just learned may not be the whole truth or as true as they'd hoped it would be in order to set up future operations.

THE UNEXPECTED

The second part of uncertainty that fuels the engine of scariness is the things a player didn't expect to happen. The unexpected is a little harder to make formulaic, but if you take your players' basic expectations and turn them sideways, you'll always be close.

Unless you're running a silly horror game (those can be fun!), you never want to completely subvert your players expectations at the risk of breaking their trust in you and their willing suspension of disbelief. You shouldn't do something purely for the shock value. Not often. . .

What you need to find are opportunities to twist the expected outcome of an action or a story element slightly out of phase in a way that still makes sense, but is surprising. If you're able to get the reaction from your players "Oh my God! That's why that happened last time." then you will have successfully duped them into believing that you are a storytelling genius. More genius than you obviously are, I mean.

THE UNKNOWN

The third part of uncertainty are the things that heroes (and by extension, players) can NEVER know. The vast and dreadful cosmos is a very scary place indeed in which we are all very naked and very alone.

There will be things that they want to know, but will never be able to understand. Some parts of the universe and its inner workings must remain a mystery in order for the occult to retain its fearful power over us. There must always be those things that engender a sense of wonder in us. This will drive many players to distraction, but at the same time will keep them engaged with the promise of potential enlightenment at some possible future date.

Resist the temptation to provide purely scientific justifications or dry game mechanical explanations of everything to your players, especially things that are outside the heroes' possible knowledge. Even though you as the coordinator must know how things work on the inside (otherwise your story won't make sense), as a magician, you must never reveal all your secrets.

THE UNNATURAL

One scary element that is easy to add, but sometimes overlooked and frequently overdone is the alien, the weird, and the arcane. It's an essential element of Modernity, but one that you should keep subdued lest the vibrant colors of the odd overshadow the common and the mundane. The unnatural must be rare in order to maintain its contrast with the banal and to keep its terror.

Even if one of your heroes chooses to become a changeling spirit, as Paul does in the example gameplay, you need to reinforce the alien, unnatural nature of the symbiosis that occurs between the two spirits. The changeling spirit must shove unnatural, uncomfortable urges to the forefront of the game in terms of decision compels and event compels of the hero's *Changeling aspect*, otherwise you run the risk of "Yawn. Yet another werewolf. Wake me up when something interesting comes along." That's murder on any horror game.

THE SURREAL

Modernity breaks the rules of reality in many small ways, but in some operations, even if just for a scene or two, you may choose to go even

farther beyond and *completely ignore* the laws we think of as reality. Dream scenes that make no sense and visits to alternate dimensions where the fundamental “laws of nature” do not apply are two common ways to paint your game world in brilliant, unimaginable colors.

The frightening suggestion of occasionally indulging in the surreal is that everything we hold near and dear about reality is a lie, that underneath it all is a truth that we cannot comprehend nor accept. Exposure to the madness of the surreal calls everything else, all things mundane, into question, which is not something the sane can easily cope with.

LIVING WITH REGRET

More than once, I’ve touched on antisocial behavior and immorality, and how to curtail it by your players. If your table is mature enough to cope with it, this is the part where I play the hypocrite. Present your players with a moral dilemma: two equally horrible options and force them to choose between them.

Will you murder your lover in cold blood as a ritual sacrifice to save your daughter, or will you watch the world burn as your enemies triumph?

Living with regret is the hallmark of a survivor, especially a Troubled or guilt-ridden survivor. *PTSD* and *Survivors Guilt* are examples of the consequences caused by witnessing or committing unspeakable acts, even in the name of the greater good. Some players will appreciate the grim reminder of regret as evidence that “I am still alive.” while other players will refuse to continue playing in a game where everything doesn’t go back to normal when the cult is broken or the coven disbanded and everyone’s physical wounds are healed.

In order to maintain this aspect of scariness, there must be reminders of the loss and opportunities to express regret and remorse. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a confessional scene. Often a gentle reminder of the person or thing lost, or the evil action taken, is enough. The fear generated is that more loss and more consequences are just around the corner. *Make sure that your players are up for this much noir before you immerse them in it. Even then, use it sparingly.*

THE TABOO

If your players are willing and able to handle it, there is a long list of cultural taboos that can be broken, usually by villains, in order to evoke terror in your game. In the interests of maintaining your sanity, I won't delve into them at length here. Suffice to say that there are elements of torture, cannibalism, deviant sexuality, and worse that are scary enough for most people all by themselves without commingling them with the occult or other elements of the horror genre.

AMBIANCE & ODOR

The mood lighting in Modernity are the nouns you choose to name your props and the adjectives that you use to paint them with. To properly maintain your desired level of scariness, you must choose your words carefully and cover all five senses.

It's usually easy to cover sight and sound, but do not neglect the sense of smell. Smell in particular is powerfully connected with memory and imagination. Its use can evoke a powerful sense of dread and make subtle connections between things when the odors are related.

You won't have to tell them that there are ghouls in the next room if the scent of carrion and partially digested flesh wafts in from the dark beyond the door.

You won't need to explain that the man standing before them is a devil, if the smells of sulfur and brimstone float in a miasma around him like an aura of evil.

VISCERA, VIOLENCE & GORE

The most shocking elements of scariness are often the blood and guts, and the violence that brings them out. Modernity contains a certain level of inherent violence, but if you choose to increase the level of *splatter* in your game, be sure that you aren't exceeding your table's tolerance for it. It's entirely possible to run an entire operation or an entire campaign without a drop of blood in sight, and still achieve a level of terror higher than your table wants. Don't feel like you need to add blood and gore just for the sake of the shock value, but don't be afraid (pun intended) to toss it on the table if it's appropriate to your scene and you've established that your heroes can handle it.

POWER LEVEL

The power level that the table chooses for the story determines how many aspects a hero has, how many fate points come into play for each hero, and the rating of each hero's peak skill. The Modernity default power level assumption is 4, the everyman power level.

Remember, heroes get two free stunts, regardless of which power level they begin at. Choose them wisely.

Power Level	Refresh	Aspects	Pyramid Peak	Skill Points
1	1	2	Average (+1)	1
2	2	3	Fair (+2)	4
3	3	4	Good (+3)	10
(4)	4	5	Great (+4)	20
5	5	5	Superb (+5)	35
6	6	6	Fantastic (+6)	56
7	7	6	Epic (+7)	84
8	8	7	Legendary (+8)	120

Additional expansions or limitations may be applied by the requirements of the collective story, or the coordinator's discretion in the interests of game balance against the expected adventure challenges she's designed. That said, I recommend treating mandatory aspects like a *Shared Code of Honor* as **game aspects**. Keep character aspects unique to each hero.

Groups familiar with other Fate-based games like *The Dresden Files*™ RPG may elect to increase the power level of their game, but I strongly recommended that new groups stick to the everyman power level to start with, which is the power level assumption throughout this book. Other **published materials** may present greater challenges that expect heroes of greater capability. Power level is based on the peak level of the heroes' skill pyramid.

SKILL PYRAMID

In Modernity, every character *must* always have one and only one peak skill with at least as many skills at each successively lower rating. Begin counting pyramid skills at Mediocre (+0). For game balance, the skill pyramid provides strong niche protection for each type of character that you can imagine as well as broad gaps of weakness for enemies to exploit in the form of challenges, contests, and conflicts. Being awesome at everything all the time gets boring really fast anyway.

Start Small and Grow

Regardless of your table's experience level with roleplaying games in general and Fate-based games specifically, I *strongly* recommend that you start with the everyman power level and grow from there. You'll experience Modernity in all the dark glory that its intended to share.

HEROIC EVERYMAN

Power level 4 gives each character five base aspects, a refresh rate of 4 refresh, 2 free stunts, and a skill pyramid of one skill rated +4, two rated +3, three rated +2, and four rated +1 respectively.

INTERVENTIONARY

At power level 6, employees of Intervention Incorporated and similar agents typically represent a highly trained, highly motivated operative well above what an everyman aspires to be. The Modernity briefing book **Intervention Incorporated** contains more details about these paragons.

Each interventionary begins with 6 aspects (the 5 base aspects plus an additional aspect describing a *Personal Motivation* for fighting **The Darkness**), 6 refresh, 2 free stunts, and a skill pyramid of one skill rated +5, two skills rated +4, three skills rated +3, four skills rated +2, and five skills rated +1 respectively.

GUARDIAN

Guardians are (often self-appointed) heroes dedicated to the protection of reality as we know it and civilization as it defines itself. Guardians and other power level 8 heroes are described in the Modernity briefing book

Protect & Serve.

Each guardian begins with 7 aspects (the 5 base aspects plus an additional aspect describing a *Personal Motivation* to **Fight the Darkness** and an additional aspect describing the *Guardian Duty*, self-imposed or otherwise), a refresh rate of 8 refresh to be spent on stunts as desired plus 2 free stunts, and a skill pyramid with a peak of +8.

Guardians will often seem to be as far removed from the capabilities of normal humans as *Homo sapiens* are from chimpanzees.

BECOMING THE OPPOSITION

As the coordinator, your role in the game as keeper of the narrative and guardian of fun means that you are always going to be part benign dictator and part simulation engine. When you are adjudicating the rules, you must be an impartial arbiter rather than the cheer squad for the heroes or the denizens or the villains. When designing an operation, you must be passionate about the possibilities. When playing the part of a denizen, you must be convincingly committed to the role. The key to your success will be switching in between the many hats you must wear as smoothly and seamlessly as possible.

THE STORY'S THE THING

Deciding when to use game mechanics is possibly the most important type of decision you will make as a coordinator. This will sound strange coming from the game creator, but. . . **Wherever possible, don't use the rules in your game.** I say this because whenever you begin to delve into game minutiae, roll dice, do math, etc., you are no longer telling the story. It's a time consuming interruption to the flow of the tale.

You will have to use the rules from time to time because that's the game that everyone at the table signed up to play and because the rules do add a sense of uncertainty and risk to the gameplay, but. . .

If you can get the players to negotiate a reasonable outcome, you have successfully played the role of the opposition and they have paid for the outcome that they wanted in some way, then you and the players together have narrated a mutually acceptable outcome, and the story moves on much more quickly than if you had dropped into conflict time and begun to take turns during an exchange.

NARRATOR

When you put on your narrator hat (as little as possible I hope) to deliver exposition, make sure that you give a cue so that the table knows that you're narrating. That could be vocal inflection, holding up papers containing your script, what-have-you. If you "inflict the box text" on your table too often, they will begin to tune you out as soon as they detect that you're stepping up on your soapbox.

MAN VS. MAN

Of the three basic conflict types, this is the simplest for most coordinators to assume. Man would represent the heroes, of course, and man would represent the denizens: mundanes, nameless characters, patrons, allies, antagonists, and villains. Any time that you have a denizen who is a reasonable approximation or facsimile of a human, as the coordinator, you simply have to keep in mind the unique aspects and motivations for that individual denizen so that you can portray it clearly as it interacts with the heroes.

MAN VS. BEAST

Any inhuman or alien perspective, be it a terrestrial animal or an occult horror, is represented by the beast. Assuming these roles is harder, especially if you need your beast to carry on a conversation with the heroes at some point. You can often treat demons and devils more like human personas, but with the more alien creatures from the outer void, it's harder to imagine how they interact with the heroes. Unless, of course, the void creature is simply trying to eat them. Put the primary motivation of the beast character at top of your mind and direct all of your energy toward achieving that goal to the exclusion of all else. Beasts have a propensity to be purpose-driven and single-minded.

MAN VS. NATURE

Possibly the hardest, but when you personify a faceless force of nature or an occult effect that is interacting with the players, you still have to bear in mind the purpose of the nature you're controlling. Is the purpose of the storm to slow the characters down? Is it there to demonstrate how awesome the storm sorcerer is? Is the challenge designed to just make them sweat? Or could it possibly kill them? Remember that we humans have a propensity to personify everything, attributing malice or benign intentions to things with no personality all the time, so don't be afraid to portray your forces of nature as having human characteristics, traits, and motivations.

Yes, Virginia, the universe is, in point of fact, actually trying to kill you. Try not to let that fact get you down.

In all three cases see **Building The Bad Guys** for ways to construct the underlying game mechanics for your opposition.

GROUP MANEUVERS

There will be scenes in which more than one character must act in concert to complete a maneuver. By and large these maneuvers will be challenges, not contests or conflicts.

During these collective actions, the success or failure of the team is determined by simple majority of successes. If more characters involved with the action succeed than fail, the entire group succeeds.

Characters who are particularly expert in the skill required by the maneuver in question should take their actions first, because they can provide support to other less expert characters' attempts. A character who achieves success with style on his action may give the boost that he earned to another character to support his subsequent action for the maneuver.

A hazardous group maneuver, like any other, may have consequences for those group members who fail individually as part of the action. These consequences may range from a twisted ankle on a hike to a bruised ego to psychic injury for a failed occult ritual or magical spell to death and dismemberment, depending on the risk and hazard of the maneuver. The consequence should always be commensurate with the hazard, the risk, and the character's ability to avert it.

For example, a team of mountaineers scaling Mount Everest together to find an artifact lost by an earlier expedition would face increasingly difficult challenges as they climb higher. In the early stages, the more accomplished climbers will likely achieve success with style frequently, because they can allocate their boosts to other members of the team to facilitate their climb and make their actions more likely to succeed and avoid injury.

As the climb increases in difficulty in the later stages of the effort, even the more able climbers will have to focus more and more on their own individual efforts as the difficulty increases and they will be less likely to be able to "carry" the less skilled members of the team because they will not be achieving success with style as often.

COMPELLING EVENTS

Of the two types of compels available to you as a coordinator, compelling events is probably the least contentious. It's your job, after all, to figure out what happens next and it seems only natural that the events you imagine to complicate your heroes' lives will be in some way related to the game aspects and the heroes' *Troubles*. Your players are less likely to argue with you about or be opposed to the occasional events that you compel vs. the more frequent decision compels that you propose.

A HELPING HAND

Event compels are one of the big knobs of the fate point economy that you can readily turn in the heroes' favor without seeming to be too generous. If they're running low on fate points during a session, feel free to compel a game aspect, usually the *Immediate Issue*, cause something unpleasant to happen, and then take a little of the sting out of it (but not too much!) by handing them a fate point by way of compensation when you "drop in the ninjas."

SPLASH DAMAGE

When awarding a fate point for compelling a character aspect, consider that the single fate point for a compel normally goes to the hero who owns the aspect. However, if you are compelling a hero's *Trouble*, like Grant's *I Can Quit Any Time I Want*, in a way that drops every hero in the scene into a conflict, it seems more fair to award a fate point to every hero in the scene who is affected by the event. Use your discretion to determine when a compel of an individual character aspect is spilling over onto others. Be generous, especially if they need it.

MASS COMPELS

Game aspects in particular are a natural place for event compels to be mass casualty events. Quite often, when something affects the entire narrative in a big way, it will have a deleterious effect on everyone, justifying a fate point being awarded to each affected character. During the course of planning your game, flag each of the scenes you dream up that might be a good candidate for a mass compel. Not every scene should provide a bonus fate point because it's an inconvenient event, but it's likely to be common early in your sessions.

EVENT COMPEL TEMPLATE

Feel free to use the stock Fate Core™ event compel template and replace the *aspects* with ones that make sense in your situation:

You have *Some Character Aspect* and are in *A Game or Situation Aspect* situation, so it makes sense that, unfortunately, *A Really Unpleasant Thing* would happen to you. Damn your luck.

See the event compel for Grant in the gameplay example **A Little Dust Up** and the tablewide event compel in **Springing the Trap** to see how they work in practice.

COMPELLING DECISIONS

There will be times when the obvious course of action for a hero is suboptimal in the player's estimation. Those are the times that decision compels are made for. These undesirable decisions will often be tied to the hero's *Trouble*, which in essence is the thing the player specifically highlighted as the preferred method for messing with his hero. Do not hesitate to do so, even though veteran Modernity players know consciously that they need the extra fate point, most will harbor unconscious resistance to "having things go wrong."

I KNEW YOU WERE TROUBLE

Although any aspect is eligible to compel decisions upon, the most common one will be *Trouble*. As you're planning your game, actively look for ways to compel each hero's *Trouble* at least once in every session if you can manage it. The heroes' aspects should actively inform every planning session that you spend, and every impromptu narrative direction decision that you make on the fly. It really is all about them.

If a hero's *Trouble* isn't causing enough Trouble, ask the player to consider an alternative aspect that will come up more often. Having a more promiscuous *Trouble* will be beneficial for the player's fate point reserve, and make your life easier if it's better interconnected with the rest of the campaign.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

As with event compels, you should definitely consider awarding a fate point to each hero affected by a decision, even if they are not directly involved in making the decision. This will usually just be the heroes in the current scene, but high impact decision compels will often spill over onto everyone involved in the game. If the decision truly only affects the lone hero, only award one fate point, otherwise you can afford to be generous. After all, you do have a completely infinite supply of fate points to compel with in the **universal pool**.

There will be times when you offer a decision compel to the entire table in the interests of narrative sanity and moving the story onward. These kinds of mass decision compels fall along the blurry border with concessions, which are a specialized kind of decision compel.

DECISION COMPEL TEMPLATE

Whenever you like, use the stock Fate Core™ decision compel template and replace the *aspects* with ones that make sense in your situation:

You have *Some Character Aspect* in *A Game or Situation Aspect* situation, so it makes sense that you'd decide to *Do A Really Suboptimal Thing*. This goes wrong when *Something Really Bad* inevitably happens. Damn your luck.

See the decision compels for Roberto in the gameplay example **Condition Brown** and the mass decision compel in **Looking for Love** to see how they work in practice.

YOU CAN'T MAKE ME, PART 2

Always bear in mind that the player is ultimately responsible for every action the hero takes. You can offer decision compels, but if the player is opposed to it, continue negotiating the terms of the decision and its narrative outcome. The complication arising from the decision should be one that is worthy of a fate point.

In cases where the player is adamant that the hero would do no such thing, consider dropping the compel and not charging a fate point. In cases where you feel strongly that the decision is compel-worthy, use the

table consensus as a barometer of whether or not to penalize the refusal of the compel to be worth demanding a toll in the form of a fate point paid into the universal pool.

RETROACTIVE COMPELS

If a player makes a decision that falls into one of the many categories for **Earning Fate Points**, but fails to ask for one up front either because the decision was just the natural outgrowth of roleplaying or because things were moving along too fast, be magnanimous and award the fate points for the decision retroactively.

ACCEPTING CONCESSIONS

The one thing nobody wants to do is lose. The sooner you can help your players understand that conceding a scene isn't "losing" *per se*, the sooner you will get to a place where your game narrative is proceeding at a more rapid clip. Conceding in Modernity is less like losing or failing and more like accepting temporary setbacks and winning costly victories.

HOW EXPENSIVE WAS IT?

Learn to enjoy the look on your players' faces that indicates that you are being just enough of a jerk to make the concession worth the fate points. As you're negotiating their concession, start high with the "sticker shock" price tag and work your way toward something they'll agree to that is less than death and dismemberment, but much more than just a hangnail.

It's okay if you make your players cry. Once in a while. Just don't do it so often that they quit your game or begin sending you death threats. (Mostly kidding!)

DECISION COMPEL WITH BENEFITS

If you think about offering a concession opportunity to your players as a mass decision compel that comes along with a bonus fate point for each consequence that they have suffered so far, it'll be easier to identify opportunities to fail forward.

PREEMPTIVE CONCESSION

As you see in the gameplay example **Blood Calls Out To Blood**, the players proactively offered a scene concession (it wasn't even a conflict scene. . . yet) in exchange for getting what they came for and getting back out of the scene in one piece. It only cost them any further narrative evidence or aspects that they might have otherwise obtained.

LOSE THE BATTLE TO WIN THE WAR?

There are different kinds of scenes, and concessions are not limited to conflicts. You can use the concession mechanism to negotiate a path through any kind of scene framework, whether it's a challenge, a contest, or a conflict. It's much faster to narrate a mutually acceptable resolution and get on down the road than it is to roll lots of dice.

FAIL FORWARD

Make sure that you know what one or more possible options are for maintaining forward narrative momentum if the heroes don't get what they wanted when you begin negotiating a concession. If you can't think of any, ask the players for ideas. If they can't think of any, either, then you've painted yourself into a story corner, but there's hope!

JUST A FLESH WOUND

If the story comes to a screeching halt when the players don't "win" this scene, consider the alternative of offering them everything they want. . . For a price. Perhaps in exchange for a consequence if they didn't get one during the conflict, or another consequence or an upgraded consequence if they did.

It could simply be a narrative cost, but it also could be something rather significant to the character like a stunt or in earth-shattering cases, an extreme consequence that changes the very nature of who they are.

Whatever the cost, this represents the price to avoid being taken out during the scene and the price of maintaining forward momentum in the story. It will also frequently save you the precious game time of grinding through hours of back and forth exchanges in a massive battle in order to fight a conflict all the way to its bloody end.

Just ask the heroes, "What is it worth to you to win? How much are you willing to pay for a victory?"

ROLL THE DICE

In order to better inform their decisions, some players will want to know the underlying mathematics of the game. Many players won't care at all. You don't need to grok this table in order to have fun.

Total Die Result	Roll Probability	Equal or Higher Probability
+4	1.2%	1.2%
+3	4.9%	6.3%
+2	12.3%	18.5%
+1	19.8%	38.3%
+0	23.5%	61.7%
-1	19.8%	81.5%
-2	12.3%	93.8%
-3	4.9%	98.8%
-4	1.2%	100%

The *Total Die Result* column is the sum of the faces of 4 six-sided Fate Dice™ representing rungs on **The Ladder**. The *Roll Probability* represents the raw statistical probability of achieving exactly that for a single representative roll of 4 dice. The column labeled *Equal or Higher Probability* represents the cumulative likelihood of obtaining that result or better on a single representative roll of 4 dice.

REROLL OR TAKE THE BONUS?

There is a perennial debate about whether to invoke an aspect to reroll or to gain the +2 bonus. A simple reading of the table will tell you that if you have -2 or worse on the dice, there is less than a 10% probability that your next roll will be worse. Obviously, if you have a -4 on the dice, you can't get worse. Take the reroll.

When you get to -1 or better, there's almost a 20% chance of getting a worse roll. I've seen it happen several times in a row. You'll have to decide how much of a gambler you are and how willing you are to risk a reroll to get a better total instead of taking the predictable +2 bonus when invoking an aspect for a bonus.

BUILDING THE BAD GUYS

Unless your game has a lot of inter-hero conflict where the players take turns having their heroes beat up on one another, you are often going to assume the role of the bad guys and the rest of the **Denizens of Modernity**. After you establish their motivations, you'll have an idea about how they'll go about getting in the way of the heroes.

Where **Becoming the Opposition** was about their motivations, this section is about constructing the opposition mechanically. I'm lumping non-opposition characters in with the bad guys in this section, because I recommend, for your own sanity and the players' fun, that you **minimize the number of denizens** that you create with more than names and personalities whenever and however possible.

NARRATIVE PURPOSE

This one should seem obvious and be easy to identify once you get the hang of arranging your story, but just be sure to always know what this particular antagonist is doing here and how it will respond if the heroes try to talk it to death instead of trying to murder it. From the heroes' perspective, is the antagonist:

- A speed bump or an annoyance (Level 1 Threat)
- A resource drain or a big delay (Level 2 Threat)
- A serious danger that could take them out (Level 3 Threat)
- A terminal threat that is likely to take them out (Level 4+ Threat)
- An unassailable opponent that will take them out (Major Villain)

Narrative purpose will help you choose the **threat classification** and **threat level** of the antagonist. How well the heroes work together and how well they leverage the mechanics of Modernity to their advantage will determine exactly what you choose to drop on them.

Speed bumps make the heroes look awesome as they trounce them soundly with little effort. Unassailable opponents force the heroes to seek an alternative resolution and to reconsider that their place on the proverbial food chain may not be at the apex.

MINIMALIST MONSTERS

As a matter of principle, do not spend a lot of time building game mechanics for antagonists that you don't need to. If you only need an aspect or two, a description, and a level of static opposition for a challenge, don't create more than that! If you can achieve the goal of letting the heroes look awesome by thrashing a mob of denizens using a challenge or a contest instead of a full-blown conflict, do that!

THREAT CLASSIFICATION

There are two components to threat class: the degree of organization of members of the threat class and the occult nature of the members of the threat class. This resolves into four quadrants:

4. Mundane Things
5. Occult Things
6. Conventional Menace
7. Awakened Menace

The fundamental difference between mundane/conventional and the occult/awakened should be clear, and represents the narrative flavor of the threat, its *modus operandi*, etc. *Things* are individuals or groups of dangerous members without a specific agenda or stated purpose. *Menaces* are organized things with a purpose.

While *Things* can be extremely dangerous to the physical well-being and sanity of many, things don't change civilization (even in large numbers), because civilization will pick up torches and pitchforks and put an end to the things. On the other hand, *Menaces* are bent on destroying or remaking civilization into an image that the majority would probably disapprove of and not enjoy. Menaces are much more to be feared because they are organized enough to operate more subtly.

THREAT LEVEL

For the sake of simplicity, denizen threats are ranked along **The Ladder** just like **power level**. The actual level of threat that they present the heroes depends on the capabilities and cooperation of the heroes. The threat level represents the peak skill of the antagonist's skill pyramid. The other mechanical elements of the antagonist will be of a comparable level to its peak skill. Examples of different threat levels follow in **Denizens of Modernity**.

It's possible to vary these templates somewhat for variety. See **Denizens of Modernity** and other **Modernity briefing books** for examples.

The Big, the Bad, and the Ugly

The wider the disparity between the threat's peak Attack skill and the heroes' peak Defend skill, the more fate points and free invocations the heroes will require just to avoid being taken out. And vice versa. Don't be afraid to toughen up your villain's defenses if you want him to last longer than one exchange.

LEVEL 1 THREATS

Level 1 threats include nameless low level street thugs, police patrol officers and beat cops, non-combat military personnel, white collar workers, and other relative non-threats to Modernity heroes. Level 1 threats can also include occult things like young ghouls, minor demons, and restless spirits with just enough power to manipulate reality. Level 1 threats are usually no challenge for even everyman heroes, except in large numbers. Example Level 1 threat capabilities:

- 1 aspect (usually the **High Concept** and name are synonymous)
- 3 or fewer skills rated Average (+1)
- No universal stress boxes, no consequence slots, and no stunts

LEVEL 2 THREATS

By and large, Level 2 threats include those with some professional training and present more competent opposition, such as trained soldiers, experienced gang bangers, minor witches, and some nameless devils. Individually, Level 2 threats present, at best, a resource drain or a delay to the heroes. Example Level 2 capabilities:

- 1 aspect (usually the **High Concept** and name are synonymous)
- 1 skill at Fair (+2) and 3 or fewer skills rated Average (+1)
- 1 universal stress box (a 2-shift hit will take out a Level 2 threat)
- No consequence slots and no stunts

LEVEL 3 THREATS

At Level 3, threats include highly trained infantry, SWAT team members, professional assassins and gang leaders, ranking warlocks, and devils. Level 3 threats begin to present a more serious danger to everyman heroes, especially in numbers, but still tend to be nameless fodder. Example Level 3 capabilities:

- 1 or 2 aspects (usually the *High Concept* and name are synonymous with another aspect)
- 1 skill at Good (+3), 1 skill at Fair (+2), and 3 or fewer skills rated Average (+1)
- 2 universal stress boxes (a 3-shift hit will take out a Level 3 threat)
- No consequence slots and no stunts

LEVEL 4 THREATS & ABOVE

At Level 4 and above, threats tend to be named participants in the story and exhibit a wider variety of capabilities. It's advisable to have a nameless brute show up upon occasion to disprove the rule, but by and large the principal villain and his chief lieutenants will fall into this category of terminal threat or unassailable opponent. More than any other threat level, it's worth treating them like full-blown characters, because at Level 4, threats are almost as capable as everyman heroes.

- 3 or more aspects (usually a *High Concept*, a *Preferred Modus Operandi*, and a *Trouble* or *Relationship to the Heroes* aspect)
- 1 skill at the appropriate peak for the threat level and 5 or more skills in the traditional **skill pyramid**
- 2 or more physical stress boxes
- 2 or more mental stress boxes
- 1 minor consequence slot at Level 4 with more at higher levels
- 1 or 2 stunts at Level 4 and more at higher levels

Even solo, a Level 6 threat will present a significantly dangerous threat to a group of three or fewer everyman heroes and should represent a principal villain or antagonist in your game. For recurring denizens, it's worth investing in a wider variety of options, and perhaps even including extras as part of the denizen's definition.

DISCOVERING THREAT ASPECTS

When encountering new threats that they have never been exposed to before, either give the heroes one of the threat's aspects for free or allow them an opportunity to Create Advantage and discover the threat's more obvious aspects about the threat once before the action starts, if it makes sense to do so in the scene. Otherwise you'd better have a generic name to call the things for a while until one of the heroes takes an exchange to figure out what one of its aspect are. A **Sanity Check** is one good way.

CURIOSITIES

This is an antagonist that doesn't normally present a physical threat. Such as a celebrity, a journalist, or a restless but non-hostile spirit. However, if the heroes insist on attacking it, feel free to expand and escalate its capabilities. Curiosities are often primarily intended to set the mood and the tone. These will give the heroes pause, and often look terrifying, but are only there to provide information or a distraction to the heroes. You can use these as foreshadowing or as recurring elements in your game. The actual opposition curiosities present is a delay. Most curiosities will never need more than a name, an aspect, and a skill to provide opposition to information gathering actions. A curiosity can present as any class or level of threat for a peak skill.

SMALL UNIT TACTICS

For the sake of your sanity as a coordinator, consider grouping identical denizens into a single **unit**. Although it reduces the total number of actions that they can take, apply the **teamwork rules**, to empower a **unit** of three Level 1 threats to Attack and Defend like a Level 3 threat. They can combine and split as needed. Have different threats or groups of threats work together to Create Advantage for one another.

What's scarier than two devils? Two devils working together.

As individuals in the **unit** suffer stress and are taken out, the overall effectiveness of the **unit** is diminished. Additional stress beyond what takes out one **unit** member is passed on to the next until it's all absorbed. aspects that affect one member of a **unit** must be described to make sense for the whole **unit**.

SUPPORTING CAST

Regardless of their threat level, the denizens whom you bestow names upon will shape the game simply because the heroes will focus on them more than the horde of nameless denizens. When you choose to create members of the supporting cast, distinguish them from the rest in some way: how often he appears, a special ability that sets her apart from the rest, a unique competence that makes it distinctive and invaluable to the heroes. Supporting cast includes supporting characters like allies and friends, antagonists, tritagonists, foils, etc.

Supporting cast, even at threat levels lower than Level 4, resemble heroes more than denizens. Even so, be sure to give them only the minimal character capabilities that make sense in the role they serve. Remember, you can always give them more later as you need to. Don't over-engineer your denizens until you know that they'll last!

CONCEDE EARLY & OFTEN

Nothing will frustrate your players more than a recurring antagonist that keeps meddling in the heroes' affairs only to melt into the shadows and vanish, or simply run away outright. Not only does the antagonist get a fate point for conceding to use later and probably gets to heal up, but it defines the antagonist as different while demonstrating to players that fighting to the death is not the only course of action. The prolonged tension and much-delayed closure will also pay off in a bigger emotional high for the heroes when they finally "win."

GUEST STARS

Although it has a storied tradition in fiction, resist the temptation to create heroes of your own who are on par with the players' heroes who show up routinely in the game, in essence giving you (the coordinator) heroes of your own to play. While it may solve some balance and plot problems for you, it will cause you many others.

Especially early on in a campaign, this can put an irreparable dent in the proactivity and independence of the heroes if there is always cavalry to rescue them. If you do have recurring guest stars, keep them in the supporting cast level of detail and remind yourself often that they're not the heroes. You'll also have to decide whether their power level will remain static or grow over time with the principal heroes.

PRINCIPAL ANTAGONISTS

Like guest stars, there are two types of principal antagonists: those **dynamic** antagonists who grow over time to continue to always provide the same relative level of opposition to the heroes, and those who are **static** and will eventually be readily vanquished by the heroes as they grow in power. Although they start out on par with the heroes, in video game parlance, principal antagonists are either auto-scaling or not.

Dynamic antagonists provide continuity to a long-running plot by delivering consistency in the opposition. The heroes and the antagonists in this category may never like each other, but they will learn more about each other and perhaps grow to respect one another in time.

Static antagonists may be too powerful to beat the first time they're encountered, but over time the heroes will advance and grow, and the antagonist will not. Until one day the heroes will triumph, possibly more easily than expected, and wonder why they ever felt threatened by such a weak foe.

You will need both types of antagonists over the course of a multi-operation campaign to provide both a sense of growth and a sense of continuity to your story, while still providing a variety of high powered opposition to keep it interesting.

BALANCING THE OPPOSITION

Not over- or under-whelming your heroes is more art than science.

- Only outnumber the heroes when the denizens have lower skills.
- If the heroes take on one big opponent, it must have a peak skill two levels higher than the heroes' highest skill.
- Limit yourself to one supporting cast member per scene, except perhaps for major climactic battles.
- Most of the denizens in a session should be 1 or 2 levels below the heroes, with 1 or 2 supporting cast and 1 principal antagonist.
- Using lower Threat Level denizens means shorter conflicts because they concede or lose sooner. Supporting cast and principal antagonists make for much longer conflicts.
- Vary the primary skills of all your denizens to present different kinds of challenges to your heroes.

SETTING THE STAGE

For some inexplicable reason, a group of people, possibly your friends, have agreed to try this Modernity thing with you. Now you have to figure out where to start, because you want their first (or next) experience with Modernity to be mind-blowing. These are ideas for what to do in the days or weeks before your players show up for a game session. This is only a brief introduction to creating operations for your heroes to conduct. More advanced plot construction and storytelling techniques can be found in the many resources listed in **Further Investigation**. Creating an operation is a lot like writing a novel or a screenplay.

MINIMALIST PLANNING

As with building minimalist monsters, minimize the total number of denizens and plot elements that you have in play at any given time. This will allow you to focus on creating more full-fledged components of your operations. One villain who is more than a cardboard cutout is worth a dozen generic villains-of-the-week who are just names and statistics. You can hint at a broader diversity in your denizens, without actually creating them from whole cloth before you start.

Don't add more than 5 new people, places, or things per session.

A second reason for minimalist planning is that you and your players are only human. Once you exceed 7 plus or minus 2 unfamiliar items, humans tend to lose track of individual new items and get them confused with one another. The underlying psychology around information chunking and George A. Miller's "Magical Number Seven Plus Or Minus Two" manifested itself routinely in early Modernity playtesting. When the number of new moving parts in a conspiracy exceeds about 5, the players begin to reach information overload and frustration.

A big reason for planning is to be certain that your scenes provide enough variety that every hero's peak skill comes into play in every session, though not necessarily in every scene. More is not always better. In Modernity, occasional frustration is to be expected, and in many cases desired, but players frustrated for too long begin to tune out. Routinely frustrated players quit.

CHOOSE A STARTING POINT

There is a lot of guidance formally published and lying about on the internet regarding cooperatively creating a Fate-type game. Some of those works are listed in **Further Investigation**. For many tables, that can work out spectacularly well, and for veteran or highly creative types, that sort of game is usually the most fulfilling.

However, I've observed that for a plurality if not majority of tables (even tables of veteran roleplayers!) starting with “green field, blue skies” game creation can go one of two ways: the entire session goes by with a million great ideas that nobody can agree on—or worse—an hour goes by and nobody has produced any ideas that more than one person likes. It can be a recipe for disaster (not in a good way).

Modernity exists primarily to give tables a framework to imagine within so that there are plenty of starting points to choose from and clear boundaries as to how the story will go. As the coordinator, I recommend that you have a starting point in mind for your first operation before you invite the players in for either **Phase Trio** or **Head-First** hero creation. This will allow you to set expectations about the sort of heroes that will make sense and ultimately be successful as well as just enough backstory to give them mental hooks to hang their heroes' aspects on.

Here's a basic operation checklist:

1. A villain
2. A location
3. An inciting event
4. A basic plot arc (5 to 7 core scenes)

Remember, no matter how easy it is to get carried away, be as minimalist as possible when you're starting out. Every time!

No game plan survives first contact with the players. That's a fact. The less planning you do, the less emotionally attached you'll be to your plan and the more flexible you'll be willing to be to incorporate the cool ideas that your players come up with while they're creating heroes or just playing your game. The more that each player contributes to the overall game, the more they'll enjoy it and the more they'll contribute in the future.

CHOOSE YOUR VILLAIN

Arguably the most important choice you have to make for an operation or an entire conspiracy is the villain. As with most fiction, the heroes begin by reacting to the villain's inciting event or ongoing evil. They have to figure out what's going on and then decide what to do about it. Your choice of villain in many respects will determine the initial trajectory of the plot, and possibly the location for your operation.

There are many good options for villains in **Denizens Of Modernity** to choose from, but you can make up your own just as easily (and be more likely to play it believably if its your own).

Once you choose a villain, you'll have to decide whether the heroes will know who the villain will be or not at the outset. If it's a Head-First hero creation session, you can go either way. If you're going to play through a Phase Trio hero creation session, I recommend that you let them know something about the villain to expect to show up in your first operation, in case they want an aspect related to the villain.

MAKE SOMETHING BAD HAPPEN

Villains do bad things. Have your villain do something evil. This is your inciting event. It can be something evil to one or more of the heroes, or the heroes' loved ones. Look at their **Troubles** to see if they've invited that sort of inciting event for your operation. If not, have them do something evil to random strangers by way of introduction.

In the first case, your opening scene should be the villain and its minions doing bad things to the heroes immediately. Then either the villain concedes and flees the scene when it doesn't go as planned, or the heroes concede (or are taken out) and then things get complicated.

In the second case, the heroes are either present if you want the heroes to witness the evil firsthand (always a good thing to motivate them into action later) or have them show up after the fact to investigate the grisly aftermath of the inciting event.

Either way, the inciting event needs to be within your table's tolerances for **Scariness**. Especially for your first operation, it won't do to exceed the limits of **your players' willingness** to play along.

WHY BAD THINGS HAPPEN

As the coordinator, you need to know why, but it's not always necessary for the heroes (or the players) to know why. It will drive some players crazy trying to figure out *why*, even if the real reason is either illogical or unexpected. Illogical is fine, as long as it has a certain amount of cohesion to it. Even the delusions of insane people make a certain amount of sense if you can get them to put the logic chain together.

A CHANGE OF PACE

Make sure that all of your scenes are a little different. You'll need lighter scenes to contrast with the darker ones. Without occasional humor to lighten the oppressive noir mood, every scene will soon blur together. Also, when setting up your scenes, conflicts or otherwise, be sure to include everyone at the table in some way, even if it's to play the opposition.

FIGHT CLUB

Use conflicts with mundanes to highlight the difference in threat level presented by occult denizens, which can seriously threaten the heroes.

PLOTTING THEIR DEMISE

Keep your core plot arc simple, especially if you're unfamiliar with the fundamentals of the Hero's Journey, Three Act Structure, or other formal theories of story construction. Don't worry about feeling like you're going to be too predictable or railroad your players into a rut. They won't let you. Odds are really good that they'll miss what you think is obvious and invent their own red herrings to chase (even if you intentionally try to provide some of your own).

Basically, what I'm saying is keep your own plan simple, because the players won't let it stay that way for long.

Here's an example of a basic plot structure using the purpose of each scene that you can put your own details into later:

1. Opening Action
2. Looking For Clues
3. Trouble Comes Calling
4. Another Piece Of The Puzzle
5. The Villain Appears
6. A Chase Ensues
7. The Villain Strikes Again

Odds are good that will be more than enough for one 4-6 hour session. Especially for a table that is new to Modernity, start by planning small operations that only last one or two sessions.

Get some 3"x5" plot cards. You'll need more than 7, because you'll wind up throwing some away. Write the purpose of each scene across the top and number them in logical order (your players will make sure that they're never played in their proper order, though). Often, as the coordinator, you'll only really get to choose the first scene of each session with any certainty. From there is entirely up to the players. . .

STORYTELLING 101

Now it's time to fill in the details of your plot cards. You're going to use your mad storytelling skills here. The most important things to put on each card are the things that answer the big questions you learned in the 3rd grade:

- Who?
- What?
- Why?
- When?
- Where?
- How?

There's a lot more to plot points, but if you cover those, you're ahead of the game!

Once you've answered the **big questions** for each scene, go back to each card and add some adjectives that describe the sensory imagery for each scene. Always try to cover all five senses to best immerse your players in the scene. *Prepare to paint word pictures for your players.*

JUST ADD ASPECTS

Now that you've got your storytelling basics down, figure out which ones either make for fun and games in the current scene (dangers, toys to play with, etc.) or logically lead to the next scene. Make aspects from those elements using the answers to your questions and your sensory imagery. Your choice of aspects are clues to your players about how the scene should go and what they're supposed to interact with.

IMPORTANT CLUES

There will be a lot of your operational details that you can get by with as just notes on cards, but there will be things that you need to give the players verbatim in order for it to make sense later. Keep these moments of pontification few and far between, but. . . *If it's important, write it down word for word and read it to them.*

CUT EARLY, CUT OFTEN

The beginning is never the beginning and the end is never the end. When you metaphorically yell “Cut!” whether it’s the end of a scene or the end of a session, always end the action on a cliffhanger. Always leave the players wanting just one more piece of information, only one more thing to find closure, just one more second of action. The storyteller’s mantra for the action is “in late, out early.”

A scene where the heroes join the story already in progress seems bigger than they are, like they’re not the center of the universe. A scene where the action is cut but the tension is not quite resolved is engrossing and immersing. Like good novels, movies, and TV shows, the writers always cut the chapter or the scene at a point where you just have to read the next chapter or sit through the commercials to get to what happens next. The only exception is the end of the operation. In the denouement of the operation, make sure you wrap up all the loose ends, even if you’re foreshadowing the next one a little bit. Ask the players what else needs to be wrapped up. **And then do it.**

EXIT INTERVIEWS

When planning, it’s perfectly normal to begin at the operation level. Even experienced storytellers seldom plot their entire trilogy (or more) all at once. As your first operation leads to your second, you may choose to find ways to tie them together into a conspiracy. It’s often easier in hindsight to see the possibilities for a bigger conspiracy.

In order to find these possibilities, I highly recommend exit interviews after each session, and absolutely after each operation. Ask your players a couple quick questions:

1. What do you think is going on with the villains and the other significant denizens?
2. What are your theories about what’s going to happen next?
3. How do you feel about the pace of the story?
4. Are you enjoying the game?
5. If you could change one thing about the game, what would you change?

I recommend asking these questions of the players for three reasons. It will let you know whether you’re on track or not and whether they are

“getting it” or not, and what you need to emphasize more or what you should focus on less. It will put more brains to work. Your players will imagine all kinds of crazy conspiracies for you that you never would have imagined for yourself. Trust me. Players have devious minds. It tells you what they are paying attention to and what they care about. If you focus more on what engages your players, they will enjoy the game more. And so will you.

Use brief exit interviews to help you tailor your experiences to the players’ expectations. Sometimes you will want to meet their expectations in a head on collision. This will make the players feel smart. They figured it out. They got it. Sometimes you will want to meet their expectations by doing something out of phase that still meets their expectations but in an unexpected way. They will feel surprised and excited. They never thought of that! However, you should never intentionally fail to meet reasonable expectations. Whether you meet them directly or indirectly, you need to meet their expectations.

Disappointed players rarely come back. Make sure that your players feel like they want to and have to come back.

MINOR MILESTONES

A minor milestone usually occurs at the end of every session. Although, as noted above, minor milestones can be a dramatic way to prepare for the big finale of an operation. The purpose of a minor milestone is to allow for minor adjustments to a hero along the way, not to make huge, radical alterations in the character's fabric. Minor milestones are all about change, self-redefinition, and healing.

At a minor milestone, a player may choose to do *one* of the following:

- Switch the rank of any two Average (+1) or above skills, or switch one Average (+1) skill with a Mediocre (+0) skill. You can't go from zero to marksman with just a little practice.
- Change any top of the stack stunt for any other top of the stack stunt or drop it for an additional point of refresh. Changing stunts that are prerequisites for others requires more time and effort.
- Buy one new stunt, if you have a current refresh value above one and all the necessary prerequisites, by reducing your refresh by one. If this happens during a session, the character must surrender one fate point that he would not have had at the outset of the session with a lower refresh rate.
- Adjust or revise (not a wholesale replacement!) one aspect that is *not* your High Concept, your Trouble, or the result of an extreme consequence. Those three types of aspects take a lot more time and effort to adjust.

For example, the aspect (probably a Trouble) *Vendetta Against Evilcorp* is not likely to be resolved at a minor milestone, but *Yeah, I Work Out* might be upgraded a little to *Triathlons Are For Wimps* at a minor milestone because it's still in the same ballpark, but adds some flavor and a little more panache.

Also, at a minor milestone, you may clear any mild consequences and rename any moderate consequences to indicate that you have begun to recover, if it makes narrative sense to do so at this time (i.e. you've succeeded at your recovery action), assuming that you haven't already found a way to begin that process during the session, of course.

SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES

At the culmination of an operation or some other major plot event, you need to insert a significant milestone to reflect the personal growth that the heroes have undergone during their trials and tribulations. This growth comes in the form of new capabilities, usually reflective of the kinds of recent experiences that each hero has survived.

A significant milestone can happen during a scene (highly recommended as a montage of sorts, if you can pull it off), but often happens “off camera” in between operations when time simply passes and the heroes adjust and grow before their next adventure.

A significant milestone gives each hero the following:

- All the benefits of a minor milestone.
- The option to completely rename or replace *one* aspect, including your Trouble (if it makes narrative sense to change it) that is *not* your High Concept or an extreme consequence. Those two take a lot more time and effort to adjust.
- Add one additional skill point that may be spent on a new Average (+1) skill, or to increase an existing skill by one rank. All changes to skills must respect the **skill pyramid**.
- Clear any moderate consequences that are already in recovery.
- Any severe consequences may be renamed to begin the recovery process. This should reflect that recovery has begun, but is still a relatively negative aspect.

Significant milestones are a big deal and should be celebrated. There are still going to be some looming **Bad Things** on the horizon, the villain(s) probably haven't been fully vanquished, and that's to be expected. However, the heroes have survived thus far and there is always some hope when you live to fight another day.

Significant milestones are one place where it makes sense to do radical adjustments in **Story Time**.

MOMENTOUS MILESTONES

A couple of events can trigger a milestone of this magnitude. Obviously the end of a big plot arc, like completing a conspiracy of at least three or more operations, results in a sufficiently large tectonic plot shift. The death of a principal villain or the death of a hero, or another large scale, radical change in the game setting qualifies. The addition or removal of heroes from the table might also need to be treated like a momentous milestone, especially for a big adjustment in **the passage of time**.

The Hard Way

A good indicator that your heroes are ready for a new **power level** is when they have accumulated enough skill points to raise their peak skill to the next level.

Momentous milestones are about dramatic growth and gaining more power. Menaces that were a challenge yesterday simply aren't sufficient to threaten the heroes anymore, but the new threats of tomorrow that they must oppose will be bigger, stronger, faster, and meaner. A momentous milestone completely resets the baseline for the heroes.

A momentous milestone confers all of the following to each hero:

- All the benefits of a minor milestone.
- All the benefits of a significant milestone, except the additional skill bonus, because the entire **skill pyramid** will be re-leveled to the new skill peak for the power level.
- The **power level** of the game is increased to a new level, usually by an increment of 1, and the heroes immediately increase their refresh to the new level and update their skill pyramid.
- Rename an extreme consequence aspect if you have one, to reflect that its most debilitating effects have passed. This will allow you to take another extreme consequence in the future, if you must to avoid being taken out.
- Add an additional point of refresh that you may use immediately to buy a new stunt or extra, or choose to retain it to increase your refresh rate.

- Increase a skill above the current skill peak using the additional skill point due from the included significant milestone, if you're able to while still obeying skill pyramid.
- Rename your *High Concept*, if you wish.

Hint: The **power level** represents both the peak skill value and the maximum refresh each hero will have before subtracting for each stunt or extra (after the first two free stunts).

It's very important to celebrate the major accomplishment that this milestone represents. And the massive change that should become evident in the world around them. An increase in **power level** will change the heroes' priorities and concerns. As befits heroes of their new capability, they must worry bigger.

By this time, the heroes have accumulated many new skills and stunts, making them much more effective. Heroes who choose not to buy stunts with their higher refresh rate will have a much larger fountain of fate points to work with at the start of each sessions, insuring that they'll expect to be a little less reliant on accepting compels and making concessions. Let them have their illusions, at least for a scene or two.

Bigger Worries

When the heroes raise the **power level** in your game, especially because of the increase in the peak skill, you must upgrade **the opposition** you create, because the heroes will require enemies who can match them in order to present a worthy challenge.

Keep some old enemies in play, though, just to kick around to demonstrate the growth the heroes have undergone.



Dear Lord

MOVING ON

I don't think I've ever read any advice in a roleplaying game about how to end a storyline. I don't know if that's because many campaigns never truly end, and just evolve over time as players and heroes come and go. I don't know if that's because some campaigns just fizzle and die for any number of reasons without reaching proper closure. Maybe other game designers just don't think it's worth a page in their books.

EXIT INTERVIEWS, AGAIN

Talk to your players when you think that the campaign might be winding down. Don't shock them with a surprise ending. This is as much their game as yours. Treat it with that level of respect. Ask them what they want to wrap up or tie off before you move onto whatever comes next.

THE AFTERLIFE

If you're ending a campaign with plans to start another one, this playful "moving on" is very important to preserve the trust your players have in you. If they're afraid you'll just grow bored and quit again in the future, they won't invest as much (or at all) in your next game.

One way to keep the game fresh for a jaded table is to reboot the campaign at a new, higher (or lower) **power level**. Perhaps as a sequel, a homecoming or reunion a decade later, or even a prequel to go back and dig into the heroes' origin stories at a lower power level.

THE END

Regardless of when you reach the point in your career as a coordinator where you are plotting conspiracies for your campaign, give some thought to when and how it should end. Although *Modernity* is a dark game, it doesn't have to be a tragedy. Consider a hopeful ending, if not an upbeat one, that leaves room for the players to imagine a future for their heroes. Consider your favorite fiction, noir or not, and how your favorite authors choose to close the last season, the last movie in a series, or the last book in a trilogy. There are many options for denouement of a larger story, and most of them leave the audience wanting more anyway. This will make for fond memories and things to reminisce about later. And who knows? Perhaps if you take good notes, you can pick it up again someday and find out what happens next. . .

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

The Darkness, Sanity Check, Denouement

“Sacrifice is a part of life. It’s supposed to be.
It’s not something to regret. It’s something to aspire to.”

Mitch Albom

*Rooms in the intensive care wing of any hospital in America are barren, boring places. The occupants are often unconscious anyway, so why spend money on decorations they can’t appreciate? The muted television is tuned to a 24-hour faux news channel with a live feed from the scene of a horrific five-alarm building fire. If you squint your eyes, you can just make out the now-dark neon sign on the face of the flaming building: **Iniquity**. The body count slowly crawls across the bottom of the screen, ticker tape style.*

Because Shannon used occult powers in four scenes this session, she has to make her Sanity Check against Mediocre (+0) opposition to resist the Darkness. She rolls **+** **■** **—** **—** plus her Sanity +0 for a Poor (-1) result. She took a mild consequence during the fight inside Iniquity and a moderate consequence earlier from the spell implosion. She can’t use stress to absorb the nefarious influence of the Darkness, so a severe consequence is her only option.

“How ‘bout **Overwhelming Guilt**, Zoë? Shannon knew what the price for using too much magic would be, and her friends are all hurt.”

Zoë smiles. “You’ve much to atone for, chica. I like it.”

“I told you it would be just like Detroit!” Shannon whispers fiercely, her eyes still dilated a little wildly and her hair disheveled from the crazy events of a long night.

And a failed occult-use Sanity Check.

From a chair in the corner farthest from the door, a soot-stained Grant giggles mirthlessly. Shannon puts her finger to her lips before he can say anything inappropriate. Grant is always too boisterous for her liking.

Grace shrugs her aching shoulders and points at Maria, who has both her hands wrapped tightly around Roberto’s right hand. His left hand is hidden beneath the sling that holds his heavily bandaged left shoulder and arm completely immobile. His IV drips occasionally. The heart rate monitor beeps softly to itself over the bed. The nasal cannula dangles just below Roberto’s nostrils feeding him a low flow of oxygen.

“I can’t thank you enough for bringing my Roberto back to me,” Maria begins softly, her Latina accent thick with emotion, not really looking at the others in the room. “But maybe it would be best, you know, if you all went home and cleaned up. I’m sure you need your sleep as much as Roberto does. After the surgery, the doctor said he would need a lot of rest to recover.”

*The trio quietly leaves the room. They already gave their somewhat truthful statements to the police. They hoped that would be the end of that. Maybe nobody would miss **Iniquity** and its owner enough to dig deeper for the truth. Maybe. Except Raúl Salazar. Whatever his business was with the werewolves of **Iniquity**, he looked very angry before he fled the burning building. Maybe he’d come back for them later?*

Want more? Read the novel **Iniquity**.



DENIZENS OF MODERNITY

Death wears many masks and smiles upon us all.

“We can’t all be heroes, because somebody has to sit on the curb and applaud when they go by.”

Will Rogers

THREATS

In Modernity, the vast majority of denizens aren’t dangerous to the heroes. Those are easily described with a name and maybe an aspect. I don’t need to cover them in any great detail, because I’m sure you can manage them on your own. Besides, you didn’t buy this book to read about the boring people. You want the scary stuff. Right?

In this chapter, I will cover four threat classifications:

- Mundane Things
- Conventional Menaces
- Occult Things
- Awakened Menaces

These were all covered in general terms in **Building the Bad Guys**. This chapter will dig into the details of each one and give some concrete examples that you can use in your game. You can create them at any Threat Level you like to challenge your heroes.

Mundane Things are individuals that may cause the heroes difficulty or pose a danger to their physical well-being. They have zero occult

capability, and they are not really organized toward a specific, society-changing end. They just show up and cause Trouble sometimes.

Conventional Menaces are organized entities with an agenda. They usually do not have good intentions toward some or all of society, but they are blissfully ignorant of the occult. Try to keep it that way.

Occult Things are individuals that are probably out to harm the heroes, mentally or physically. The **non-human** occult types fall into two rough categories: **demons** (incorporeal spirits) and **devils** (corporeal spirits).

Awakened Menaces are organized entities with an agenda and occult knowledge beyond what is good for civilization at large. These agencies are often the stuff that nightmares are made of.

Use each of these as a springboard for your imagination to build the villains and other denizens of your conspiracies. Also look for more **Modernity briefing books** to contain ready-made denizens.

MUNDANE THINGS

The following mundane things are included to give a flavor for the sort of “normal” denizens that populate Modernity. Some of them will be friendly, but most will be hostile in some way. Feel free to adjust these examples to suit your needs by upgrading or downgrading their Threat Level. See **Building the Bad Guys** for guidance. They’re listed in no particular order. Welcome to the chaos.

BLING

A supernerd who grew up poor and is now on a power trip to get revenge on the world, and make a pile o’ money at the same time. blIng won’t answer to any other name, even if you can figure out what it was. He typically targets banks and other companies with an incentive to keep any compromising event a secret and just pay up.

- Threat Level 3 human cyber-terrorist
- ***In It For The Money***
- Hacking +4, Crime +3, Investigation +3, Contacts +2, Deception +2, Engineering +2
- **Invisible Man**: May actively oppose Investigation actions to find him or his real identity using Crime
- **l33t Rig**: +2 Hacking from his home base

ELENA SMIRNOV

Either as a contact for illegal identification papers or as an identity thief who has targeted one of the heroes, Elena (not her real name) operates in the shadows. She prefers to talk to strangers.

- Threat Level 2 human criminal
- **Identity Thief**
- Crime +2, Awareness +1, Deception +1
- 1 universal stress box
- **Master Forger**: +2 Crime when creating forgeries.
- **Protected Woman**: Elena can summon local Russian mafia enforcers for help when threatened within 2 or 3 exchanges.

PAULA DiSALVO

As a health and safety inspector, her job is to meddle in other peoples' business and make sure they're following the letter of the law.

- Threat Level 2 human bureaucrat
- **Government Inspector**
- Investigation +2, Awareness +1, Provocation +1
- **Itchy Badge**: Can escalate any Investigation with a phone call into an army of investigators of all kinds, and loves to do it.

ROGER WHITMAN

Overworked and underpaid, his job is to look in on at-risk kids. The Trouble is that he cares enough to do his job thoroughly and well.

- Threat Level 2 human bureaucrat
- **Social Worker**
- Empathy +2, Awareness +1, Investigation +1, Will +1
- **Cares More Than You**: +2 Will against Finesse, Deception, or Provocation about "his kids." Knows the family health and safety law *and* the details of every one of his cases inside and out.

LIL' FISH (A.K.A. RUFUS MALCOLM WAINWRIGHT III)

Trying to outgrow his given name, Lil' Fish is a runner for the gang with delusions of being an enforcer or a boss someday. He's a bigmouth.

- Threat Level 2 human criminal
- **Little Big Gangbanger**
- Provocation +2, Athletics +1, Crime +1

DETECTIVE BEN PHO

Second generation immigrant from Vietnam and first generation cop, Ben has delusions of being undercover someday and taking down Triads or Yakuza in the big city. Too bad the only detective assignment he could get is out here in the sticks where the only thing to investigate are missing cows and misbehaving teenagers. Yawn.

- Threat Level 2 human law enforcement
- *Even My Badge Is Green*
- *I Wish I Could Get In Trouble*
- Awareness +2, Investigation +1, Shooting +1, Empathy +1

OFFICER MARY JO FINLEY

A career traffic cop who enjoys her job, Mary Jo cuts an unconventional figure in her provocatively self-tailored uniform. While she is a subtle flirt and naughty tease, at the end of the day, she's married to her badge.

- Threat Level 3 human law enforcement
- *Lovely Law Enforcement*
- *Shameless Flirt*
- Investigation +3, Empathy +2, Awareness +2, Fighting +1, Shooting +1, Will +1
- 2 universal stress boxes
- **Fourth Generation Cop:** +2 Provocation to Create Advantage against suspects and perpetrators in the line of duty.

CORPORAL DAVID ALLEN, USMC

A corn-fed Midwestern giant, he has been in just long enough to get promoted to sergeant and then promptly demoted to corporal, to his chagrin, after an entertainingly inappropriate shore leave in Bethesda while celebrating his promotion. David is all infantry, all the time. He tries not to think about what he'll do when he retires in twenty years, but he does hope to make sergeant again before then.

- Threat Level 3 human soldier
- *Jolly Green Giant*
- 3 universal stress boxes, 1 mild consequence slot
- Fighting +3, Brawn +2, Shooting +2, Athletics +1, Provocation +1, Survival +1

MEG ANDERSON

People have embarrassing secrets. Companies have valuable secrets. Meg is an expert at obtaining either. She's loyal to whoever hired her first, at least until the job is done, the package delivered, and the payday received. Next time? It might go differently.

- Threat Level 4 human corporate spy
- **Social Chameleon**
- Deception +4, Crime +3, Stealth +3, Hacking +2, Contacts +2, Awareness +2, Finesse +1, Empathy +1, Athletics +1, Will +1
- **Second Story Girl:** +2 Athletics to Create Advantage or Overcome when preparing for or gaining entry during a heist.

FIDO

Despite his unoriginal name and stereotypical spiked collar, Fido can be a problem for anyone trying to sneak into his territory.

- Threat Level 3 canine
- **Doberman Pinscher Guard Dog**
- Awareness +3, Athletics +2, Fighting +2
- 3 universal stress boxes
- **Animal Instinct:** Immune to mental Attacks
- **Pointy, Pointy Teeth:** Weapon/3 bite Attack

BO THE BLUE BEARD

Nothing has been right since he came back from Afghanistan with a psychiatric discharge, paranoid schizophrenia, and PTSD. Bo's wife left him during his second combat tour for another woman, and he lost track of his children after he failed to get work and lost his house. The only thing that makes sense now is guarding his block from "the bad guys." Anybody who doesn't respect the perimeter gets introduced to Bubba the Bowie Knife. That is, when he's not compulsively eating the blueberries that stain his unkempt eponymous facial hair.

- Threat Level 4 homeless human ex-Army Ranger
- **Respect the Perimeter!**
- Fighting +4, Athletics +3, Brawn +3, Provocation +2, Shooting +2, Crime +2, Deception +1, Awareness +1, Stealth +1, Will +1
- 4 universal stress boxes, 1 mild consequence slot, 1 moderate slot
- **Bubba the Bowie Knife:** Weapon/2 physical Attack

CONVENTIONAL MENACES

More than a collection of individuals, these organizations have a potential impact greater than the sum of their parts. While their agendas may differ, they all have one thing in common: they believe that the status quo is unacceptable and must be changed, with as much force as is necessary.

The distinguishing characteristic of a conventional menace is that they are oblivious to the existence of the supernatural in Modernity.

USING MENACES

These groups can be plot drivers in your conspiracy, or they can be the employer or sponsor for your heroes or your villain of the week. You can even use them in headlines to provide a backdrop for your campaign to set the desired tone and mood. As mentioned in **Operational Considerations**, don't introduce too many at once. Even if it seems too simple from your perspective, it won't seem that way to the players.

MENACING MOTIVATIONS

When constructing your own or adjusting these menaces for your own purposes, think of them as a single organism when you define their goals and motivations. While in reality, they may be a heterogeneous chimera of an organism on the inside, in practice and from an outsider's point of view, they will move and act in a predictable, uniform fashion. Consider the following options for conventional menace motivations:

- Greed:** the organization seeks to amass and control wealth
- Power:** political and legal power are the chief aim of the group
- Might:** military-type power is their goal and their business
- Change:** subverting the existing social order is their purpose
- Revolution:** destruction of society as we know it is their objective

MENACING DRAMA

The drama in a menace will often result from trying to achieve their goal and the resulting effect on society, but sometimes the drama will come in the form of whistleblowers and individual consciences. Remember that ultimately stories are about individuals, including the heroes, and yours will be more memorable for having distinctive characters who act in the name of or against the menace in your game.

1RCHY

1rchy is a radical group of hackers who espouse a unique militant libertarian ideology, and are willing to claim credit for some appalling acts of what they characterize as “information age civil disobedience” in their widely distributed manifesto, *l33t 1rchy*, from which they derive their name. The U.S. Department of Justice calls what they do cyberterrorism and has active operations against them at all times.

CHIEF AIM

The stated goal of 1rchy is the *Nonviolent Cybernetic Overthrow* of the U.S. government and reinstatement of their definition of a “true constitutional federal government” with limited powers to ensure the privacy of every citizen (and non-citizen) and the sanctity of states’ rights for self-determination are free from “meddlesome federal abuses.”

MEMBERSHIP

The members of 1rchy are completely unknown. They may, and probably do, overlap with many other active hacker groups with differing agendas. It’s highly likely that more anonymous bloggers claim to be part of 1rchy than actually are. Sites claiming to be authoritative members routinely surface and are often summarily mocked and derided as frauds and pretenders. Talking heads in the media have joked that 1rchy is a haven for political science students with more computer skills than actual political savvy.

MODUS OPERANDI

Pontification and pointless political debates on internet forums aside, 1rchy has demonstrated many times a willingness and a capability to hack their way into the headlines to remind the powers that be of their existence. Interestingly, they tend to eschew the political seasons in the U.S. and have publicly denounced and humiliated any effort to engage in election fraud in their name. True believers, perhaps?

Twice, 1rchy has taken a large metropolitan area hostage through its insecure physical infrastructure automation, both times targeting corrupt political establishments that were engaged in privacy or eminent domain abuses of its citizenry. Most of the time, 1rchy satisfies itself by shining the spotlight on secrets the government keeps.



WARNING

THESE ARE THE
RESULTS OF THE
ANALYSIS OF THE
DATA FROM THE
LAST 24 HOURS.
THE RESULTS SHOW
A SIGNIFICANT
INCREASE IN THE
ACTIVITY OF THE
SYSTEMS. THIS
MAY BE DUE TO
A CHANGE IN THE
ENVIRONMENTAL
CONDITIONS OR
A MALFUNCTION
OF THE SYSTEMS.
FURTHER ANALYSIS
IS REQUIRED TO
DETERMINE THE
CAUSE OF THE
INCREASED ACTIVITY.
PLEASE CONTACT
THE SUPPORT
TEAM FOR
FURTHER
INFORMATION.

David Lee

FOOD PRODUCERS ALLIANCE

There are lawless multinational corporations, and then there are other multinationals that give those multinationals a bad name. The Russia-based “Food Producers Alliance,” officially known as Альянс Производителей Продуктов Питания in Russian is one of the latter.

CHIEF AIM

Establishing a *Global Monopoly on Food Production and Distribution* is the purpose of the cartel, and once that is established, by whatever means necessary, to maintain that monopoly once established to the continued enrichment and power of the members.

MEMBERSHIP

Nearly every major supplier, grower, producer, or transporter worldwide has participated in some cartel action or another to the detriment of competition and the enrichment of members.

MODUS OPERANDI

The cartel delegates operations to trusted, shadowy operatives who work with no oversight to achieve the stated mission. The operatives will hire law firms, journalists, politicians, or mercenaries as they see fit toward that end. The cartel very much prefers that their operatives not make headlines. However, headlines are tolerated in so far as they are not tied by the news cycle to any members of the cartel by name or implication.

Cartel operatives will often work through political lobbyists, lawyers, and marketing executives to achieve the ruination of their enemies and aggrandizement of their members, but many operatives will rapidly escalate to more aggressive methods, especially in less developed countries. At least four brushfire wars in recent history have been fought over the control of food production and distribution.

Members line their pockets most readily in distressed areas when compassionate (or cartel-friendly) governments are handing out copious quantities of “relief dollars” in the aftermath of a natural disaster, as part of ongoing foreign aid, or feeding refugees in warzones.

INTERPOL

While it's often thought to be the laughingstock of international law enforcement, a core cadre of senior executives inside Interpol actively cultivate that image. This allows their agents to operate more freely and gather intelligence more broadly because local law enforcement is less likely to feel threatened by purported incompetents and more likely to be willing to allow Interpol agents to "observe."

CHIEF AIM

As the wardens of elite European interests, the members of the cabal within Interpol seek to maintain the sovereignty of its patrons' interests in exchange for money. Corporations, politicians, ancient families, and powerful individuals have used the cabal to cover up an indiscretion or eliminate competition or undesirables. *Business Simply Gets Done.*

MEMBERSHIP

Though the cabal is an open secret amongst the wealthy and powerful, its membership is a very, very dark secret because not every Interpol agent is a member. Even those who contribute to its various charities, clubs, funds, and foundations are unaware of exactly who they are hiring. Innocent Interpol agents are unwittingly used to resolve matters.

MODUS OPERANDI

In every country in the European Union, someone with the finances and the pedigree can call someone at a country club or charitable foundation and ask a friend if they know someone who can help them with a problem in exchange for a donation. A friend of a friend will mention it to someone at Interpol, it rarely matters who, and eventually an Interpol agent will arrive to take a report which gets filed away more efficiently than most and someone else will pick it up for "investigation."

Deniability is paramount in the manner in which the cabal operates. All communications are done in a very simple manner using public records, reports, and documents within Interpol. Every action taken is presented for all the world as if Interpol is fervently trying to do its job. If evidence goes missing or the wrong person gets arrested or information is inadvertently leaked to the media, who will be surprised to find that an incompetent at Interpol was involved?



MARS UNLIMITED

Possibly the most sought after and most aggressive private military corporation on the planet, Mars Unlimited is the epitome of a *Purveyor of War*. Mars himself would be proud of a company that is not above starting a war somewhere in the world if business is slow solely for the purpose of having a place to deploy its personnel and keep their fighting edge sharpened while getting paid for the privilege.

CHIEF AIM

Brigadier General Mason Hamilton, USAF (Retired) established Mars in the aftermath of Vietnam when it became clear that he would be passed over for promotion to Major General a second time. His son, Colonel George Hamilton, USAF (Retired) now operates the company in his fathers name for the sole purpose of leaving it to his own eldest son.

MEMBERSHIP

The mercenaries who work for Mars come from military services across the globe and all walks of life. In its business, Mars can't be too picky about where the recruits come from so long as they can demonstrate a facility for war, or a willingness to learn it, by passing through its rigorous selection process. Selection is all about applied skill, and has no psychological testing component of any kind. Mars training rigorously breaks down prior service or national loyalty, cultivating instead undivided loyalty to the leadership of Mars personally.

MODUS OPERANDI

Mars Unlimited puts boots on the ground, aircraft in the air, and boats in the water for whoever has the money to afford them. Mars will actively cultivate customers who are known to have a large warchest, or who can amass or borrow one, in order to win.

Mars customers include intelligence organizations, private sector companies, and standing militaries. Mars has been rumored to train both sides of a conflict where there was profit to be made, but actively squelches such rumors as they're bad for business.

Mars is also rumored to have the largest standing force of combat veterans in the world if they were all massed on one continent all at the same time.

THIRD PRECINCT

The thin blue line is everywhere in the civilized world, and in most places is held by men and women of unquestioned loyalty to their oaths to protect and serve. In this particular precinct, however, that's not entirely the case.

CHIEF AIM

Captain Shirley Banks rules the Third with an iron fist to her own aggrandizement, the defense of the status quo, and the enrichment of her officers. Business as usual is their motto in the Third.

MEMBERSHIP

Although there are some conscientious objectors in the Third, they are for the most part ignored by the vast majority who understand *How Things Work Around Here*. From the rank and file beat cop all the way up to the Captain, most of the officers benefit financially and in other ways from “keeping the peace.” Captain Banks goes out of her way to recruit kids from the neighborhood to send to the Academy and then aggressively lobbies to have them returned to the Third after graduation, while equally aggressively keeping other transfers out.

MODUS OPERANDI

The Third is run like the paramilitary organization it is. Anyone who gets out of line is given fair warning. Anyone who doesn't heed the warning is beaten with the *Chain Of Command*. Internal Affairs in the Third is staffed with the Captain's personal adjutants.

All members of the Third actively solicit and collect “contributions” to the various officer-managed charities and booster clubs from local businesses, wealthy residents, and local politicians. Anyone who chooses not contribute will continue to have “accidents” until they get with the program.

Any attempt by outside gangs or other criminal elements to operate in the Third is aggressively discouraged, often with deadly force, by the officers of the precinct. Wise (or experienced) criminals will seek permission to operate, and then are permitted to act against only those who are on the “naughty list” of non-contributors.

TK45

One of the hyperviolent successors to the Bloods and the Crips, TK45 are the spiritual descendants of the ruthless crack dealers of the '80s and '90s. The *New Generation Of Gangbangers*, though, is different than the cultural cliques of earlier gangs. TK45 doesn't care where you're from, what languages you speak, or what color you are. If you're smart, can keep your mouth shut, and can take orders, you can make big money. In the modern world of crime *It's All Just Business*.

CHIEF AIM

Make or steal as much money as possible and live as large as possible for as long as possible. Members will frequently shout "Know No Limits, Bitches!" as a rallying cry as often as "Total Kill 45!"

MEMBERSHIP

Born and bred in all the ghettos of North America, the members of TK45 is most frightening to law enforcement because it does not conform to any ethnic or cultural standard. Impossible to profile, loyalty within the gang is first to your leader, then to the gang, and to in all ways to personal profit.

MODUS OPERANDI

Operations segmented and specialized in a way that would make Harvard MBAs proud, if they were to study the organization. Its many divisions are always growing, especially in the newfound world of *Hackers*, who are actively recruited. *Bangers* are the street thugs who run the traditional crime, like protection rackets and the gambling dens, and generally keep the peace through superior firepower and omnipresence. *Taggers* act as scouts, and are usually the younger members with no other special skills. *Dealers* know their drugs, from production to distribution. *Sellers* operate the very lucrative human trafficking and prostitution portions of the business. *Enforcers* are the few, the proud, and the extremely well-armed. Anybody in TK45 who gets out of line, or anybody the *Bangers* can't handle are descended upon by the *Enforcers*. The *Leaders* in TK45 come from all aspects of the business, and roll up to a single *Boss* for the territory. As with any organized paramilitary unit, the chain of command is a crucial part of TK45's day to day operations.

VIGILANT

After the tragedies of 911 and the massive consolidation of agencies under one umbrella in the Department of Homeland Security, it became much simpler for motivated patriots to hide enormous black budget projects, including Project VIGILANT.

Nominally an interdepartmental think tank of intelligence analysts, VIGILANT is in fact an enormous machine learning project that has piggybacked on the likes of ECHELON, PRISM, and other “official” efforts to mine the big data of the world (voice, video, text) in order to ferret out threats, both foreign and domestic.

CHIEF AIM

Detect and eliminate threats to the peace, prosperity, and security of the United States and the global balance of power.

MEMBERSHIP

VIGILANT maintains a very small core staff of fewer than a dozen people who are read in on the full conspiracy and who report directly to no one else in the government. Under the auspices of PROJECT VIGILANT, hundreds of expert analysts ignorant of VIGILANT’s true nature are routinely rotated through the various offices around the globe, providing linguistic, cultural, economic, anthropological, and other perspectives that inform the architects and hackers behind VIGILANT.

MODUS OPERANDI

The hackers and career bureaucrats who form the VIGILANT conspiracy work together to fund, train, and improve *The World’s Largest Dedicated Neural Network*. Originally built on the largest Beowulf cluster in history, VIGILANT quickly outstripped the capabilities of a single data center. Now a formless, self-sustaining distributed network with thousands of nodes based in every cloud provider on the planet and the support of the largest fleet of botnets on Earth, VIGILANT has a capacity already exceeding 1 exaFLOPS.

VIGILANT is the most powerful data mining tool at the beck and call of a dozen relatively minor and invisible functionaries who are committed to maintaining and teaching it. VIGILANT is not an artificial intelligence in the true sense of the phrase. The algorithms that comprise

VIGILANT's core logic are focused solely on profiling and classifying potential threats. The conspiracy then leverages VIGILANT's massive capacity to seed the news cycle with information designed to spur "corrective action," including maintaining funding for VIGILANT, to anonymously blackmail senators, congressmen, and career bureaucrats in Washington as needed, and insert relevant data into the reports and action plans of various agencies within the Department of Homeland Security in order to eliminate the threats detected by VIGILANT.

Because VIGILANT is not self-aware and all of its human-directed assets are outside the direct control of the conspiracy, it's somewhat slow to act and error prone when its caretakers make an error in judgment or an emotional decision regarding a potential threat or when external agencies act differently than anticipated by the software model. Several overreactions and overreaches have occurred in the past resulting in arrests of innocents and deaths during aggressive no-knock raids conducted by the FBI, ATF, DEA, and other local law enforcement agencies. The single largest social engineering failure conducted by VIGILANT resulted in OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003 looking for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

OCCULT THINGS

The bread and butter of Modernity are the occult elements of the setting. The threats posed by the occult can be loosely categorized into four different types of threats. This section contains specific examples of each type. More horrifying examples can be found in other **Modernity briefing books** from Glacier Peak.

You will note a distinct lack of anything approximating the angelic or denizens of so-called higher planes. If such beings exist, most people have never observed them to directly intervene in human affairs for any reason. If you are already on a higher plane, why would you go slumming on Earth? On purpose? All occult power, regardless of how it's used, emanates from **The Darkness**.

See **Sanity Check** for the effect of witnessing an occult horror.

DEMONS

The essential stuff of occult horror, demons are entities from another realm, plane, or dimension outside what we normally call “reality.” For all intents and purposes demons are “spirits” or energy-based entities that cannot interact with the material world directly without possession of a host, most often a human being. Demons tend to be very disorganized and chaotic by nature

The actual nature and source of demonic beings vary widely. Some are content simply to possess a host and “experience” the wide variety of human sensory input. Some seem to actively feed upon the psyche of a host, slowly driving them insane with depraved suggestions and impulses. Some seem to thrive upon bringing more of their kind to Earth. Some seem to operate with a more broad, sweeping motivation to remake human culture in a form of their choosing.

In order to break into our world, demons must be of sufficiently terrifying power to do so unaided, or be invited directly, either by a practitioner of the occult for a specific purpose, such as providing information, or by the dark desires of a mortal that can be satisfied by the demon summoned intentionally or inadvertently.

DEVILS

The opposite of demons in most senses, devils are entities from an “elsewhere” that is often called the void and they bring their own physical bodies with them. Typically an insane amalgam of natural creatures, devils come in all shapes and sizes. Many have the ability to change their outward shape to conform to something approximating human, although learned occultists who know their **Lore** can spot the remaining characteristics distinctive of different types of devils.

Devils tend toward the organized and respond well to ritual formality. They tend to be less cognizant of or empathetic toward human emotions and motivations. Where demons often feed upon emotional energy, devils almost universally feed upon humans physically in some way.

As with demons, devils rarely break into our world on their own, and are typically summoned or invited by ill-advised or arrogant mortals.

MORTALS

Humans of all shapes and sizes comprise the mortal realm and inhabit the material world. Undead, reborn, or returned mortals still usually fall into this category, even if they have lost their corporeal form. This kind of threat is often the easiest to explain, the hardest to detect, and the most difficult to eradicate.

Sorcerers, witches, warlocks, vampires, werewolves, ghosts, zombies, and such usually all fall into this category. They have some occult capacity that distinguishes them from the rest of the mortal realm, and have come to abuse that capability to the detriment of their fellow mortals.

OTHERS

There are more phenomena than can fit into an oversimplified tripartite taxonomy. All of the scary things that cannot be crammed into the categories of demons, devils, and mortals has to fall somewhere. Others is easier to speak and spell than miscellaneous.

In the category of others are haunted places that don't have a mortal origin, but still exhibit an uncharacteristic intelligence or awareness. Artifacts that act of their own volition and exhibit an active sentience fall into this category. Systems and patterns, like hereditary curses and bad luck that behave in a characteristically alien fashion fall into this category as well. An artificial intelligence is a good example for others.

ARCANE ARTIFACTS

In Modernity, when something extraordinary happens, often something extraordinarily bad, and a physical object is principally associated with the event, an artifact is created that possesses some occult characteristics associated with the extraordinary event. The most well-known of this phenomena are those artifacts associated with murders.

Artifacts are not hauntings per se nor are they truly a reincarnation or embodiment of the person whose action created the artifact. The only rational explanation is that they are a relatively stable (in the thermodynamic sense) and semi-permanent coalescing of universal energies associated with the event that spawned them. In every sense, they are non-spirit entities born of the power unleashed during the event in question. Their motivations are often as single-minded and inscrutable as their origins. Create your artifacts with the rules from the **Artifacts** section of the **The Toy Box**, especially if you plan to allow heroes to play with them.

ACCERSO LUPUS HOMINIS

An ancient tome penned in the early Middle Ages by a nameless insane monk, it's bound in crudely tanned human skin and inked in well-preserved human blood commingled with other horrible, indelible elements. A book so horrible it was never listed in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, simply sought out and summarily destroyed by the Knights Templar and other orders. Its title means something like "the summoning of wolf-beings." The only surviving copy has taken on a life and purpose of its own. It may be read by any literate person in any language. It subtly, wordlessly influences anyone who touches it to act.

- Threat Level 4 arcane artifact
- Compel: ***Just a Harmless Book***
- Secret: ***Beyond the Wild Lies the Hunt***
- Provocation +4, Empathy +3, Finesse +3, Deception +2, Will +2
- 4 mental stress boxes (will relent and ignore a victim if taken out)
- **Mother of Wolves**: May **Create Advantage** and **Overcome** against anyone who holds it with Deception, Empathy, and Finesse. May make **mental Attacks** against a reader at any time with Provocation. If the reader is taken out, he is possessed by a **lupine changeling spirit**. See **I am the Alpha** in **Changeling Magic**.

FAERIE DUST

A recent fad among street drugs, faerie dust is not yet technically illegal, but is aggressively discouraged by law enforcement. The government has Trouble making it illegal because there is no identifiable components in it that are not classified as GAAS (generally accepted as safe) by the FDA and other authorities. The dull butterscotch-colored powder has a distinctive sparkle to it under a black light and the light of a full moon. Most abusers snort or inhale the powder, some dissolve and inject it.

Faerie dust has zero effect on most people, with the majority of claimed effects among users falling into the category of “the placebo effect.” *Among those actually affected, it’s extremely addictive.* Faerie dust has a different effect on every abuser based on sensitivity to the occult, the quantity consumed, the source, the purity, and a panoply of other factors. Effects include heightened occult power (one free invocation of **Faerie Dust**) and a persistent dreamlike fugue that feels like a hallucination but in fact is heightened perception of the spirit realm.

CHANGELING SPIRITS

Classified as demons, there are nameless, wordless spirits that roam many wild realms beyond our own who often seek the more satisfying haunts to be found on Earth. Subject to the laws of **Changeling Magic**, these spirits require a host in order to interact with the material world.

Each type of changeling spirit expresses the totem essence of a wild creature similar in many ways to those that inhabit Earth. Hosts of changelings are, in fact, indistinguishable from members of the totem species they resemble, and are frequently mistaken to be such when transformed into their totem form.

Changeling spirits may only communicate with their hosts in sensory images and emotional impressions, which will often drive weaker minds to madness, as the changeling impulses gradually subsume the host's personality and dominate the symbiosis. A host dominated by a changeling spirit reverts fully to the totem form unless compelled by an exorcism or similar ritual to resume its human form.

When stalking a host on Earth, unbound changeling spirits may normally be perceived only by Empathy vs. Stealth. Recognizing a possessed host's changeling aspect is a function of Lore vs. Deception after a successful Empathy vs. Deception result has been obtained.

LUPINE CHANGELING SPIRIT

The lupine changeling spirit that embodies the wolf totem is a spirit of the wild and rage. It's a spirit of the pack and the hunt. It's a primal spirit that calls to the base animal instincts of its host.

- Threat Level 4 changeling spirit (demon)
- *The Unbound Spirit of the Wolf*
- *Call to the Hunt*
- Stealth +4, Empathy +3, Provocation +3, Deception +2, Finesse +2
- 2 mental stress boxes (will relent and ignore a victim if taken out)
- **Call of the Wolfpack:** May **Create Advantage** and **Overcome** against anyone in the same zone with Empathy, Deception, and Finesse. May make **mental Attacks** with Provocation against anyone it has successfully created advantage against. When a victim is taken out, he is possessed by the spirit. See also **I am the Alpha** in **Changeling Magic**.

HORAMOLOCH

Horamoloch are a type of powerful major devil believed to serve as lieutenants to Moloch, a prince of Hell listed among many hierarchies of Hell documented by various sources over the course of the centuries. In contemporary times, devils such as these rarely find their way from the outer void unaided. When attempted summonings do not fail spectacularly (as it's theorized occurred during the Tunguska Event), ritual attempts to summon Moloch have often resulted in the appearance of one or more horamoloch instead of Moloch himself.

Several codices on the subject of devils posit that the souls released when a horamoloch kills a person are claimed by Moloch himself to serve in his dark, burning realm for all eternity, or until Judgment Day, depending on the source material the book is derived from.

The bat-winged horamoloch are described by witnesses as bull-horned, bipedal, and walk unguigrade on hooped hind feet, often knuckle-walking on their fiery, iron-clawed hands with overlong arms like a gorilla. They wear a hide of molten iron, and are said to burn human souls with a mere glance of their flaming gaze.

HORAMOLOCH

A horamoloch that gets loose on Earth is not a subtle threat. It's primary motivation will be to sow as much death and destruction as possible. Horamoloch will act independently but support one another.

- Threat Level 5 elemental devil
- ***Devil of Fire and Iron***
- ***Blood and Souls for My Lord Moloch***
- Athletics +5, Brawn +4, Will +4, Fighting +3, Shooting +3, Awareness +3
- 4 universal stress boxes, 1 mild and 1 moderate consequence slot
- **Armor of Molten Iron**: Armor/3 against physical Attacks
- **Wings of Terror**: Spend a fate point to move up to one zone and make an additional Attack during this turn
- **Gaze of Flame**: Weapon/2 **mental Attack** against a target in an adjacent zone (not the same zone)
- **Claws of Fire**: Weapon/3 **physical Attack** against a target in the same zone with the horamoloch.

WITCHES

The vast majority of people who lay claim to the title of witch are adherents of a revitalized pagan religion and are law-abiding members of society, utterly harmless in any occult manner. There are a tiny minority of witches in the modern world who have some occult power, and choose to use it to the benefit of mankind when they use it at all. By far the smallest number of self-proclaimed witches are those who use their **Lore** for evil. It's these who give all the others a bad name.

Modern witches of the latter evil category tend to be solitary and self-taught, although upon occasion take apprentices from among their own children or other at-risk youth. Most surviving covens of witches of the inoffensive variety are generally extremely secretive and rigorously self-policing to avoid modern reenactments of the Inquisition and the Salem Witch Trials. Outwardly, witches are indistinguishable from other mortals, their magic talent nominally undetectable without an invasive investigation using arcane Lore. Only their behavior will distinguish them to most people. See **Rational Magic** for more details.

LAYLA GRUBER

When she discovered the dusty tome buried deep in the stacks, Layla's humiliating life as a nerdy old maid changed forever. With a little help from her newfound magic, she takes whatever she wants and looks good doing it. Sly and cowardly, Layla has developed quite a system for her criminal activities, and uses her power over others to obtain whatever she wishes to satisfy herself and assuage any lingering humiliation from her former life. She continues to work at her day job as a librarian, simply because she loves the library, and because it allows her to continue to search for new arcane lore while getting paid to do it.

- Threat Level 3 human witch (rational magi)
- Compel: *Just a Harmless Librarian*
- Secret: *Thoroughly Wicked Witch*
- Empathy +3, Investigation +2, Crime +2, Contacts +1, Knowledge +1, Lore +1
- **Rational Magic**: See **Rational Magic**
- **Mask of Lies**: See **Rational Magic**
- **Crown of Friendship**: See **Rational Magic**

ZOMBIES

Quintessential among modern mythology of the undead, zombies have plagued humanity since time immemorial, rising from their graves to avenge their murders or raised by some necromantic practice for nefarious purposes only known to the bokor or necromancer himself.

There are as many different kinds of zombies as there are mythologies on Earth, including modern fictional conceptualizations of virus or plagued-spawned zombies. Zombies may have the outward appearance of any type of human. Universally, they are in a state of continual decay stabilized by whatever magic or science sustains them. They are extremely durable and immune to pain or fear or mental Attack, but they do not heal in any way, and do not recover stress boxes at the end of a scene like other characters. Necromancers must “repair” their zombies like **consumable resources**, or simply replace them.

Arcane zombies will be in thrall to the bokor or necromancer who raised them. Plague-changed zombies are speculated to be motivated by the search for brains or other human flesh and are excited to aggressive assault by irritating sounds that draw their attention.

Zombies typically act in a **unit** like a mob, but nevertheless being unable to communicate or coordinate their activities in any observable way.

Necromantic practices will be explained in agonizing detail in **other Modernity briefing books**.

RECENTLY RAISED ZOMBIE

Nasty, foul-smelling, utterly fearless, and devoted to whatever purpose raised it, usually seeking vengeance for its own recent murder, the defiling of its grave, or protection of still living loved ones.

- Threat Level 2 human necromorph (undead, zombie)
- ***Slowly Shambling Death***
- Brawn +2, Fighting +1
- 2 universal stress boxes, 1 mild consequence slot
- **Brainless**: Immune to **mental Attack**
- **You Can't Hurt Me Anymore**: Armor/2 against physical Attacks
- **Grasp of the Dead**: Weapon/1 physical Attack against a target in the same zone

AWAKENED MENACES

Awakened menaces can be used to further the same ends in your game as **conventional menaces**. They will have similar motivations, and they can produce similar kinds of drama. What distinguishes an awakened menace is their knowledge of and access to the occult.

NATURE OF THE BEAST

First of all, determine exactly what nature of the occult the menace has access to. This will give you some idea of the additional capabilities beyond the occult that it will require to achieve its goals. Consider how much mortal support it will require to interact with and impose its desired change of state on the world.

HOW IMMINENT IS THE THREAT?

Considering all of the elements of **Becoming the Opposition**, how will your menace first manifest itself? Are the heroes caught in the crossfire as innocent bystanders? Do they read about it in the news? Have they had a vision of impending doom? Is the menace still gathering power and looming on the horizon? If so, do the heroes have time to stop it? Or is the menace at the peak of its occult glory and prepared to strike the final blow? These questions will help you set the level of opposition the heroes face when they first begin to engage the threat.

FITTING IN

More so than a conventional menace, you need to decide how “plugged in” an awakened menace is with the mundanes. Is the menace so old and so established that it has already shaped the world and insinuated its tentacles into many facets of society? Is it newly arrived enough that it’s still somewhat clueless about politics, police, and mass media? How high tech is the menace in doing business and in watching for threats to itself?

RUDE AWAKENING

How will mundanes react when they are confronted with knowledge of the menace? Your other denizens who are ignorant may be aware of it at some point. How will it change their world? Will they deny it and attempt to rationalize it away? Will they run screaming in terror? Will they try to kill it with fire? Will they lock up the heroes and ignore it?

AMBASSADORS

The Ambassadors are a college secret society with delusions of being a religion. They are devoted to welcoming and profiting from beings from other dimensions. The Ambassadors are by and large a naïve organization whose members do not fully appreciate the heterogeneous dangers presented to society at large by occult things. Members have upon occasion interacted with or been possessed by various minor demons, but have never encountered a genuine occult threat. They believe that all occult spirits come from the same realm and are all related in some way or another.

CHIEF AIM

Bring About the Ascension, a new world order in which the Ambassadors will be the high priests of the occult powers and ancient gods they believe they have negotiated with in good faith.

MEMBERSHIP

For the past decade and half, members on several college campuses have engaged in various rituals and “negotiated” with a variety of demons. As they graduated from college, the older members have moved into positions that will enable them to best serve to facilitate the new world order in governments and corporations.

MODUS OPERANDI

The original founders were “enlightened” college professors who took a long view. They believed they would have time, perhaps generations, to prepare for the cosmic alignment that would bring the spirit world into phase again with the Earth as they believed it was in ancient history. Unfortunately, they failed to indoctrinate their younger members sufficiently into this generational view.

The younger, more successful Ambassadors who now have jobs, power, and wealth have become impatient for the Ascension. They are now actively seeking and amassing occult knowledge and artifacts toward that end. In order to bring about the Ascension, they are willing to pay any cost, including human sacrifices, to obtain their own share in the resulting power shift.

BLACK SWAN INVESTIGATIONS

Not exactly wizard private eyes, this particular group of down-on-their-luck, living-hand-to-mouth investigators has more than its fair share of occult capability and occult scars. They believe themselves to be on the side of the angels, protecting their clients from direct danger by occult threats. They are a unique threat to the heroes, because they have a propensity to act first and ask questions later, and will probably muck up the heroes' own work in the process.

CHIEF AIM

In this order: Find and eliminate occult threats to clients. Accumulate occult power for Black Swan. Get paid. Their official company motto is: *We Believe You*. Their unofficial motto is: *Get It Done Right Now*.

MEMBERSHIP

There are fewer than half a dozen misfits who have accreted to the firm in recent years, including magi and other stranger powers. They have varying backgrounds and talents, but are all competent enough to distinguish fact from fiction, and to arrive at precisely the wrong time to get mixed up in the heroes' business.

MODUS OPERANDI

The company is led by a cowboy named Dalton Rogers. An ex-DEA field agent who learned his trade after the Cold War was over, Dalton was primarily engaged to put an end to the South American drug trade where he encountered *La Iglesia Murienda* repeatedly. After his dismissal from the DEA in disgrace, framed for illegal drug use in the line of duty by agents of *La Iglesia Murienda*, he put his life back together as an occult private eye and opened Black Swan.

Dalton and all of the people who work for or are partners in Black Swan have a very cavalier attitude toward their work, but nevertheless very much think of themselves as white knights in the shadows. They have demonstrated a willingness to acquire and use occult lore and power to close cases and protect clients. They have become jaded about the safety of bystanders and are willing to operate with an acceptable level of collateral damage so long as they get paid and can walk away from the incident themselves.

COLLECTORS

The Collectors are a loose-knit organization of the wealthy and powerful devoted to the acquisition of occult artifacts. They have met one another over the years and established a level of trust and camaraderie amongst themselves, as well as more than a few enemies that they have cheated, swindled, or simply beaten repeatedly at the game.

CHIEF AIM

Locate and acquire the arcane artifacts that will make the individual members' *Wishes Come True*. The desires of each Collector are unique, and that serves to keep the internal friction to a minimum.

MEMBERSHIP

People with arrogance, wealth, power, and access to acquire occult objects that any sane person who understood them would eschew. Business magnates, politicians, and old money families all belong.

MODUS OPERANDI

The group is committed to helping one another with information, access, and resources in so far as doing so will not put any individual at risk or subject to a significant cost. Working from a distance, doing research in dusty, forgotten libraries, many of which are not open to the public, the Collectors do their homework well and long before they act. They will sift minutiae and over-plan to the point that an observer might think that they'll never make their move on an object, but when they do "go operational," they do so with alarming precision and timing.

Each plan executed by the Collectors will be compartmentalized so that the people hired to do the dirty work will never know the full details, or more than one member of the group. Often the only assistance that Collectors provide one another is an alibi and a deniable cut out through which operational assets are hired to perform some part of the heist or acquisition. Because they have contacts and resources to burn, they can always afford the best help money can buy.

When presented with a high probability of failure during an acquisition, the Collectors will always cut and run as early as possible, and live to come back and try again another day in another way.

DRAGÃO AMERICANA

Based in São Paulo, there is an *Occult-Enabled Unit of Mercenaries* who will deploy their military and arcane might to support any enterprise their leaders deem to be profitable. The ranks of Dragão Americana (American Dragons) are drawn from criminals and militaries worldwide, not exclusively Brazilians. DA is rumored to recruit anyone with occult capacity who will fight for money, regardless of their background.

CHIEF AIM

Profit.

MEMBERSHIP

A platoon-strength unit of mercenaries who are all ex-military, ex-law enforcement, or ex-cons. They each must demonstrate an understanding of some aspect of the occult and a willingness to kill with it. They are typically recruited, rather than volunteering to join.

MODUS OPERANDI

When the Chinese government assumed control of Hong Kong in 1997, a number of known “criminals” fled the country. Assuming the name John Zhang Wei (the Chinese equivalent of John Smith), John took the occult talents with him to São Paulo that he had used to faithfully serve the British Empire as the Cantonese Dragon. Abandoned by Queen and Country, John returned to the only work he knows, only now working solely for profit rather than loyalty to the Crown.

John’s carefully selected recruits take on operations for South American governments and large corporations who don’t mind or perhaps prefer hiring a company with a dirty reputation. The DA perform wet work, intimidation, security for cartels and government officials, and just about anything else that pays the bills.

Several of the DA are rumored to be able to either summon dragons or assume the form of dragons, the rumors and news reports are unclear in large part because the Dragão Americana leave no survivors, even their clients or allies, if they have to “go active” with their occult capabilities. Hence their employers tend to hire them for operations that will be completely isolated from their own forces.

IGLESIA MURIENDA

La Iglesia Murienda is an underground cult devoted to the worship of Santa Muerte and little else. Its members are steeped in narcocultura and are amongst the most superstitious Latinos in the Americas.

Nuestra Señora de la Santa Muerte (Our Lady of the Holy Death) is a so-called folk saint, not sanctioned or canonized by the Holy Roman Church, Santa Muerte is believed to be a *Personification of Death*. She is represented as a female skeleton, often clad in a robe and armed with a scythe and a variety of other symbols. She is venerated in the hopes of protection in this life and the next for the worshiper, and death and disgrace to the worshiper's enemies.

CHIEF AIM

The church itself is far more organized than anyone outside it realizes. Its chief aim today is to *Grow The Ranks Of The Faithful* and spread the syncretic beliefs that make up the doctrine of La Iglesia Murienda toward the eventual *Overthrow Of The Holy Roman Church* and *Restoration Of La Raza* to its rightful place of power over all the Americas.

MEMBERSHIP

The tens of thousands of followers reported by the media vastly under-report the widespread adoption of the cult by huge swaths of various subcultures, including drug smugglers, gangsters, prostitutes, police, teenagers, and politicians. Anyone who feels disillusioned, disenfranchised, or discounted by mainstream society.

MODUS OPERANDI

La Iglesia generally tries to keep a low profile and to slowly develop general acceptance by the populace. Votive candles to Santa Muerte can be found in mainstream shops. Recently, however, some younger and more vocal, and impatient, priests have begun to establish public shrines and cathedrals to serve their faithful. These sites frequently draw the ire of communities throughout the Americas. When the church or its members are threatened, priests of La Iglesia are empowered to use death magic, dark rituals, and violence to protect their adherents in the name of Santa Muerte. Of course, in exchange for large donations, the priests of Nuestra Señora will gladly support even criminal endeavors.

NAKED TRUTH

There is a network of bloggers dedicated to uncovering all the occult occurrences and *Publicizing the Truth*. The group by and large are scandalmongers and glory hounds who are not above using nudity, porn, and other techniques common to yellow journalism to draw traffic and attention to their websites. They will not hesitate to shine the light of public scrutiny on the heroes in the form of pictures, video, or flash mobs organized with social media to show off their influence.

CHIEF AIM

The Naked Truth exists solely to serve the egos of internet personalities who feel *Marginalized and Underappreciated* by the “dinosaur media,” who they love to tweak and scoop, which will often lead them to prematurely publish often at the cost of endangering civilians. They are the paparazzi of the underground occult world.

MEMBERSHIP

Roughly 100 bloggers across the globe belong to the network and routinely contribute content to the website in exchange for a share of the ad revenue generated by the site based on the popularity of their contributions. Between website traffic and their mobile apps, the Naked Truth can account for tens of millions of pairs of eyeballs all over the planet, primarily teens and 20-somethings in developed nations, who are willing “sources” and aspiring contributors.

MODUS OPERANDI

Every blogger is a walking news crew and usually prefers to work solo, as the margins of the shared revenue stream are typically far too low for independent journalists to share or hire a support crew. Armed with smart phones, tablets, video cameras, and other wearable technology, they are always on the prowl for a story, the juicier the better.

Many of them are not above fabricating a story or engaging in illicit activity, like blackmail and seduction, to gain access to a story. The rewards from the website and other photo or video revenue rights accrue to the most aggressive and the most creative. Their readers and viewers have demonstrated that they don't care too much about the truth, so long as it's fresh, naked, and titillating.



● REC

Dorothy

MASTER THE FUNDAMENTALS

Be a jack-of-all-trades or the master of one.

“Success is neither magical nor mysterious.
Success is the natural consequence of consistently
applying the basic fundamentals.”

Jim Rohn

SKILLS EXPLAINED

There are a core set of capabilities that define the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual parameters of each character. For simplicity’s sake, these core capabilities are called skills. The default value for every skill is +0, unless it’s increased by a character’s origin, background, talent, or training, obeying the **skill pyramid**, of course.

The table from **Skills Defined** is duplicated here for the sake of your sanity.

SKILL RATINGS

Skills are rated on **The Ladder**, using either the adjective or the numerical value (or both, if you’re OCD). Use whichever method you’re comfortable with, or at least what the rest of the table prefers.

Skill	Actions	Defends Against
Athletics	  	Athletics, Brawn, Fighting, Shooting
Awareness	  	Crime, Stealth
Brawn	  	Athletics, Brawn
Crime	  	Crime, Investigation
Contacts	 	
Deception	  	Deception, Empathy, Finesse
Driving	  	Driving
Empathy	  	Deception, Finesse
Engineering	 	
Finesse	  	Deception, Finesse
Fighting	   	Athletics, Brawn, Fighting
Hacking	  	Hacking
Investigation	  	Crime, Investigation
Knowledge	 	
Lore	 	
Provocation	  	
Resources	 	
Sanity	 	Psychic Assault, Some Occult Spells
Shooting	  	
Stealth	  	Awareness, Investigation
Survival	 	
Will	  	Provocation, Some Occult Spells

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Skills are represented by a noun that covers a broad competency within a realm of endeavor or expertise. Skills can be gained through innate ability, years of training, or just months of playing around with a hobby. In Modernity, it's up to you how your character came by the skills that he has.

Skills at or above Good (+3) require backstory support and narrative justification based on character aspect.

A skill can only be used within the confines of its description for the actions that it's allowed to be used to take. Not all skills can be used to **Attack** or **Defend**, for example, without a stunt to grant the exception. Also, just because all skills can be used to **Overcome** or **Create Advantage** does not mean that they can all be used interchangeably. For example, **Hacking** cannot be used for forensic analysis at a physical crime scene the same way that **Investigation** can be. Vice versa, Investigation cannot be used for forensic analysis of a digital crime scene.

DEFINING NEW SKILLS

Skills in Modernity are carefully and intentionally balanced. Any new skill that a player wants to add should be carefully expressed in a single noun. It must not significantly overlap with an existing skill. The player must be able to explain what the skill *can't* do in a variety of situations, and it has to make sense in your game. The coordinator should absolutely veto any new skills that are overly broad or not clearly defined compared with existing skills. Adding more skills further dilutes the heroes' chances of having the right **skill pyramid**. . .

ACTION FOCUS

Skills only come into play when the outcome of an action is uncertain. See **Get Rolling** for more mechanical details. Because each action is grounded on a single skill, they play a key role in determining the outcome of every type of scene in a game session.

A character will tend to focus on a few skills, and have excellent odds of successfully completing actions with those. He will either be average

or slightly above with regards to quite a few others, but mediocre across the rest of the universe of skills.

ASSUMPTIONS

Skills represent all of the specialized training and equipment necessary that are required for the action. Equipment that is made transparently available in this fashion to support a skill provides no additional benefit or bonus. If you want better gear, take a look in **The Toy Box**.

Characters are always presumed to have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to engage their skills. Any time this is not so, the character is either suffering a **compel** making the action impossible or an **invocation** making the action more difficult than usual.

Skills also always assume that the acting character is familiar with the concepts, tasks, and equipment that he is employing. Characters who take actions with unfamiliar things are at an obvious disadvantage, i.e. suffering a compel or invocation of some aspect that describes why the action in question involves unfamiliar skills, concepts, and equipment.

Typically compels of this nature will surface because the acting character cannot come up with plausible narrative permission for the action in question. See **Compelling Events** and **Compelling Decisions**.

FAMILIARITY

The character's origin and background will determine her familiarity with an assault rifle or with fire sticks. Make notes when compels are made for certain kinds of actions, because they should always apply, until she Overcomes her lack of familiarity, which may take days, weeks, months or years.

Because familiarity is such a fuzzy concept, it's entirely left to the player's and the coordinator's discretion whether the compel for unfamiliar or alien concepts or equipment should apply for any given action. Ultimately, the player and the coordinator (and possibly the table) will negotiate whether a character possesses familiarity necessary for a specific maneuver based on the character's origin and backstory. Just go with what makes sense.

DO YOUR OWN STUNTS

In the interests of keeping stunts all balanced to a standard cost of 1 refresh each, here are some templates you can use to make basic stunts, and guidelines for applying costs or prerequisites to more powerful stunts that might otherwise be unbalanced.

Beyond the enhancing, expanding, and exception stunts, other very specialized kinds of stunts are also described in **Enter The Occult** and **The Toy Box**.

THE BASELINE

Each stunt should have about the same level of impact on the game as using a fate point to invoke an aspect, i.e. similar to a +2 bonus to an action within a narrow scope or limited capacity. If your idea for a stunt is more powerful than that, consider decomposing it into a stack of stunts, giving it a serious set of limitations on its use, or adding a nontrivial cost to use it each time.

Balance Carefully!

When defining new stunts, it's easy to get excited and create a new stunt that is too powerful and unbalances the game. . . But you can easily fix that and make changes to bring it back within the guidelines and on par with other stunts at any time as soon as you realize that you've got a problem.

The advantage to a stunt over having a fate point is that it can usually be used repeatedly in a scene without requiring the expenditure of a fate point, or that it allows for breaking a rule in a way that spending a fate point might not, and stunts typically work even when the character doesn't have any fate points left.

NAMING STUNTS

Just as with aspects, the name of a stunt is important. Not only does a good name make it easier to use in a sentence when describing an action, it also provides additional flavor to the game. This is doubly true with occult spells and powers, which are, at their dark hearts, just another kind of stunt.

Think carefully about how you will use the name of your stunt in the course of play. And, of course, you can always change it later at the appropriate **milestone**.

ENHANCING A SKILL

These stunts are the bread butter for most characters. They either offset a weaker skill rating in some way or they make a powerful skill even more amazing. Skill-enhancing stunts follow this formula:

Stunt Name: I get a +2 bonus with [skill name] to [action type] when [limiting circumstances apply].

For example, a stunt that Grant Andersen has is:

Badass Biker: I get a +2 bonus with Provocation to Overcome when intimidating others while dressed my traditional biker attire, such as denim and leather and chains.

EXPANDING A SKILL

Another typical stunt template is to add an action or broaden the applicability of a skill to actions. Expanding stunts follow one of the formulae:

Stunt name: I can [action type] with [skill name] when [limiting circumstances apply].

Or:

Stunt Name: I can use [skill name] instead of [skill name] to [action type] when [limiting circumstances apply].

For example, Roberto Moreno has this stunt:

Terrifying Werewolf Howl: Once per scene while in my totem form, I can make a mental Attack with Provocation against Sanity to all targets that can hear me. Lupine changelings are immune. [Requires **Changeling Symbiosis**.]

For example, Grace Xú has this stunt:

Scary Little Woman: I can use Finesse instead of Provocation to Overcome when intimidating others who know my reputation.

CREATING AN EXCEPTION

Nearly every rule in Modernity can have an exception, so long as the exception meets the baseline test above for purposes of balance. Exceptions are not allowed to create “I Win!” cards for heroes to play, rather they are intended to provide narrative flexibility within the rules framework to imagine the sort of characters that make your game both interesting and challenging.

Exception stunts follow this formula:

Stunt Name: [pick one: once per scene, once per session, or other significantly limiting circumstances] I am able to do something that is normally prohibited by the rules.

For example, Roberto gets the following stunt after he’s bitten:

Lupine Changeling: When I am compelled by my changeling aspect or when I invoke it myself to force the transformation, I spend 1 full exchange of a conflict to replace my normal skills with the alternative skills for my wolf totem and morph into my totem form, or to morph back. [Changeling aspect: ***Love at First Bite***. The wolf totem changeling spirit has the peak skill Awareness, followed by Athletics and Fighting.]

Roberto’s **Lupine Changeling** stunt is a lot more complicated than that, though, and has other requirements that are explained in the section about **Changeling Magic**.

Grant has the following exception stunts:

Itchy Trigger Finger: Once per session I can choose to go first in a tactical confrontation.

And:

Rage Control Issues: When I suffer a physical consequence, I can invoke each new consequence once for free on my next Attack during this scene.

STACKING STUNTS

Some stunts are more powerful or expand upon another stunt's capability. Rather than make these stunts more individually expensive, they are stacked together with other prerequisite stunts. The more powerful the stunt, the higher up the stack it goes. Some stacks will be higher than others. Stacks of stunts are common for occult spells and powers, and for different kinds of extras. See **Enter The Occult** and **The Toy Box**. For example, a pair of stunts that Shannon O'Malley, *The Celtic Oracle*, has are:

Rational Magic: I may Create Advantage with Lore to create an ephemeral occult connection with another being through touching the recipient, possessing its personal items, etc.

Intuitive Magi: I get a +2 bonus with Empathy to Create Advantage for occult connections. [Requires **Rational Magic**.]

Both of these stunts are further explained, along with much other occult madness, in **Rational Magic**.

ATHLETICS

The skill that covers the most examples of physical prowess across the board is Athletics, including agility, dexterity, and general flexibility. The level of ability that you possess could be due to rigorous training, occult infusion, or genetic modification. Regardless of how you came by the ability, this is your go-to physical skill for most things that aren't main strength or raw endurance (that's Brawn).

IN ACTION

In tactical conflicts, Athletics represents your defensive capability for avoiding Attacks by both Fighting and Shooting (like gunfire). While a Fighting Attack can also Defend against with the Fighting skill, a ranged Attack using Shooting can only be avoided using Athletics. In this case, Athletics is not being used to dodge bullets *per se*, but instead to represent your ability to make yourself difficult to hit by moving quickly and anticipating where the enemy is aiming, and not being there when the shot is taken.

Athletics also comes into play during tactical conflicts when you are trying to move more than 1 zone in an exchange without penalty.

Athletics also covers any physical endeavor or track and field-type activity that is not brute strength or endurance (which are Brawn). Running, jumping, climbing, swimming, acrobatics, etc., are all Athletics endeavors. Athletics is a must for any action-oriented character.

OVERCOME



Any time you Overcome an obstacle that requires movement, you're going to use Athletics. Races and chases on foot are Athletics. If there's a gym activity or Olympic event for it (except for lifting or moving big, heavy things), it's Athletics.

ATTACK



Athletics is not an Attack skill and won't normally be used to do stress against another character directly.

DEFEND



This is the bread and butter for Athletics. It's your go-to defensive skill for physical and tactical conflicts. Dodge!

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Whether you're climbing to gain a *Higher Vantage Point*, or rolling into a better *Flanking Position*, or jumping to a *Surprising Angle*, you're using Athletics to create an advantage over your enemies.

STUNTS

These are examples of Athletics stunts to consider.

Quick on My Feet: When there are no situation aspects impeding movement, I can move two zones during a tactical conflict without making an Overcome action.

Envy of He-Man: I can use Athletics instead of Shooting to Attack when I am throwing a heavy melee weapon designed for throwing, such as a bola, a javelin, or a spear, at a target no more than 1 zone away. Of course, I can only carry a very limited number of such weapons (usually just 1!) and I will gain the aspect *Unarmed* until I recover my weapon.

Hardcore Parkour: I get a +2 bonus with Athletics to Overcome when I am in a chase across rooftops or any similarly precarious environment.

Dazing Counter: When I succeed with style on a Defend action against an opponent's Fighting Attack, I am able to counter with a strike of my own, imposing the *Dazed* situation aspect onto my attacker with one free invocation instead of a boost.

Like a Cat: when I am trying to avoid injury due to falling, I get a +2 bonus with Athletics to Overcome and I always land on my feet. Don't try this at home, folks!

AWARENESS

You have an innate level of perception of your surroundings and powers of basic observation beyond the norm. Awareness is your ability to notice things, useful things, details that matter to life and death. Awareness is more general than Investigation, which is focused more specifically on detailed observation. Awareness covers all your senses broadly.

IN ACTION

In tactical conflicts, Awareness first and foremost measures your ability to recognize and react proactively to threats. With a higher Awareness, you have a higher likelihood of going first in such conflicts.

Awareness is also used to do rapid sensory processing and quickly respond to changes in the environment, like sensing an imminent ambush, catching a glimpse of some pertinent feature about a suspect that will aid in tracking him down late, or spotting something hidden and well-camouflaged in the distance. Any sort of snap perception or holistic sense of the gestalt of a scene is Awareness.

Coordinators: Do not use Awareness actions willy-nilly. Unless the outcome of an action really is uncertain *and* both success and failure are interesting, either compel or just narrate the details. Rolling for the sake of rolling or because you didn't plan is lame.

OVERCOME



Awareness is most often used to Overcome obstacles reactively, such as detecting and avoiding or averting an ambush. Hearing and identifying a faint sound that gives a clue. Balance Awareness carefully so that it doesn't overshadow Investigation. They cannot be used interchangeably.

ATTACK



If there's one thing you really can't do with Awareness, that's make Attacks against other characters that deal stress.

DEFEND



One skill that Awareness Defends well against is Stealth. Detecting sneaky people is one good defense against them.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



You can Create Advantage with Awareness for anything at a distance or that is large in scope through direct observation, such as finding an *Efficient Climbing Route* up the side of the mountain, spotting a *Path Through the Crowd*, or anything about big or moving objects. To notice minutiae and details, especially in a forensic sense, requires Investigation. To discern what is going on inside the mind of another character, including emotional state, requires Empathy.

STUNTS

These are examples of Awareness stunts to consider.

Sentinel: When I have time to concentrate carefully (i.e. not in hand-to-hand combat), I can use Awareness to Overcome at distances and in ways beyond the abilities of a normal human, such as reading license plates from blocks away or eavesdropping on a single conversation in a noisy restaurant.

Trained Observer: When I am able to observe another character's microexpressions and body language, I am able to use Awareness instead of Empathy as an Overcome action to determine the veracity of statements and a character's emotional reactions.

Good Team Player: During the first exchange of a tactical conflict, I am able to use an ally's Awareness to determine my initiative, every exchange after that reverts to my own natural Awareness for determining initiative.

Cannot be Surprised: I get a +2 bonus with Awareness to Defend when I or my allies are physically threatened with an ambush or are being stalked by an enemy.

Nose for the Truth: Once per session, I am able to use Awareness instead of Investigation to Create Advantage when searching a scene for evidence or clues.

BRAWN

What Athletics doesn't cover is manhandled by Brawn, including raw physical strength, endurance, and level of fitness. Whether you gained your power through rigorous training, arcane means, or being blessed with "good genes," Brawn represents your ability to apply physical force and endure pain. Regardless of how you came by the ability, this is your physical skill for strength and stamina.

IN ACTION

In tactical conflicts, Brawn represents your ability to move people around the battlefield against their will, and to absorb the punishment others dish out to you and keep functioning. Brawn is a must for any highly-durable character.

Higher levels of Brawn increase the number of physical stress boxes available to you. Brawn of 1 or 2 gives you one additional stress box. Brawn of 3 or 4 gives you two additional stress boxes. Brawn of 5 or higher gives you two additional stress boxes *and* an additional mild consequence slot that can only absorb physical consequences.

Brawn also represents any physical endeavor or track and field-type activity that requires brute strength and/or endurance, such as the javelin throw (for distance, not attacking—which is Shooting), shot put, discus throw, or running a marathon. On the other hand, running, jumping, climbing, swimming, acrobatics, etc., are all Athletics endeavors.

OVERCOME



Any time you Overcome an obstacle that requires pushing, shoving, knocking down, or lifting up, you're applying Brawn. If there's a gym activity or Olympic event for it involving lifting or moving big, heavy things or going the distance, it's all Brawn all the time.

ATTACK



Brawn is not an Attack skill and won't be used to deliver stress directly, but if you shove an impossibly huge boulder or truck careening down the hill, that's going to leave a mark on somebody when it slams into whatever it was you were aiming for, but it won't be Brawn that delivers the damage.

DEFEND



Brawn is only useful to Defend against being moved against your will. Where Athletics would be useful for getting out of the way, Brawn allows you to dig your heels in and yell, “You shall not pass!”

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Brawn can be used to Create Advantage over opponents in physical combat by *Locking Him Down*, putting them *In a Corner*, or preventing them from moving by *Blocking the Way*. Brawn is also helpful when lifting or carrying, but more often than not those will be Overcome actions, not a Create Advantage action.

STUNTS

These are examples of Brawn stunts to consider.

On the Brute Squad: I get a +2 bonus with Brawn to Create Advantage when I am wrestling or grappling with an enemy or group of enemies.

Can Block Anything: I am able to Defend against physical Attacks using Brawn, but I always take 1 shift of stress on any tie.

Bullet Sponge: I may spend a fate point to Defend one ally in the same zone (replacing their Defend action with my own) against an Attack using Brawn, but I always take at least 1 shift of stress except on success with style.

I Don't Have Time to Bleed: Once per session, I can use Brawn to make a recovery action for a physical consequence. If successful, I reduce the severity of the physical consequence by one level. A severe consequence becomes a moderate consequence. A moderate consequence becomes mild. This effectively eliminates a mild consequence altogether. This stunt does not apply to extreme consequences.

CRIME

Your aptitude for larceny, breaking-and-entering, or perhaps (more politely and professionally speaking) “intrusion” is measured by Crime. You are a master of the art of getting in, getting the goods, getting out, and all without getting caught. Other related crimes like theft, robbery, and extortion are also the demesne of Crime. Of course, crimes like murder or assault and battery will be Shooting or Fighting. Police and security specialists also have to have a measure of talent for or training in this skill in order to be good at their job preventing the thieves, pickpockets, and safecrackers from doing theirs.

IN ACTION

In tactical conflicts, Crime rarely comes up, unless you’re picking a lock under fire or trying to find a way to escape the conflict entirely. Let’s face it, if you’re in a fight in the first place, you’ve likely already failed at your attempted Crime.

Crime provides familiarity with whatever tools and technologies that your aspects and your backstory give you narrative permission to. A safecracker who just got out of the big house after thirty years will probably *not* be familiar with the latest high tech security gadgets and gizmos that the rich and fancy deploy to protect their valuables.

Be aware of where the lines blur between Crime and other related skills, such as Engineering (to safely manipulate the electrical components), Hacking (to reprogram the security system), Investigation (to avoid leaving forensic evidence behind), or Stealth (to sneak into and back out of a target location). The other skill will trump Crime.

OVERCOME



Locks need to be picked. Safes need to be cracked. High value loot has to be prioritized over low value junk. All of these are Overcome actions involving Crime. If done well, nobody will ever know. . . Until it’s too late.

ATTACK



Attacking others is rarely something that a successful (i.e. not incarcerated) criminal would ever do. Crime is unlikely to be involved in an Attack, but often leads to them anyway.

DEFEND



Like Attack, Crime is not really a conflict skill, hence it won't be used to Defend any more than it will be used to Attack.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Although Crime is more of an Overcome skill, there are times when it makes perfect sense to use it to Create Advantage. Particularly when planning a caper of some kind, not even necessarily a heist, Crime can always provide *Valuable Insight* into the planning process of a con or a prison break. Casing the joint is a classic way to employ your mad Crime skills. Similarly, an investigator with Crime experience might be able to determine how a particular crime was committed, or at least gather information that traditional Investigation techniques might miss.

STUNTS

These are examples of Crime stunts to consider.

Always a Way Out: I get a +2 bonus with Crime to Create Advantage when I am trying to escape from a location, not just the scene of a crime.

Security Specialist: I may Defend against any Overcome actions using Crime with my own Crime skill against any security measures that I personally designed or installed, even when I am not physically present.

In the Business: I am able to use Crime instead of Contacts to locate or deal with people when other burglars, fences for stolen goods, etc., are involved.

Accomplished Cutpurse: I get a +2 bonus with Crime to Overcome when I am taking something out of or putting something into a mark's pocket without detection.

CONTACTS

Part psychology, part marketing, part **How to Win Friends and Influence People**, the skill for dealing with people in the abstract or in the aggregate is Contacts, regardless of how you do it. With a high rank in Contacts, you might literally have friends everywhere, have a large number of connections who owe you favors, belong to an ancient secret society, or simply know where all the bodies are buried and which closets contain skeletons. It doesn't matter why (that's up to you, your aspects, and your backstory), but there are people who are ready, willing, and able to help you.

IN ACTION

The skill Contacts may almost never come up in battle, but the friends and allies that Contacts makes available often will be there for you in a pinch. Although it's a rare connection who is willing to take a bullet for you. . .

Contacts are people who know things, people who have access to things, and people who can do things, all on your behalf simply because you reach out to them in some way. Whether it's learning the secret reason that the chief of police is covering up a string of grisly murders or a cousin who can help you get a car and get out of town when the police come for you, Contacts will help you get that done.

Remember that Contacts doesn't represent the art of persuasion (that's Finesse), intimidation (that's Provocation), lying (that's Deception), reading people (that's Empathy), or paying people off (that's probably Resources), Contacts can represent human (or inhuman) members of your network that you gained through those other skills.

OVERCOME



Finding things, people, or information through the use of your network is one possible way to use Contacts to Overcome an obstacle. Creating a flash mob to overwhelm the security team as a distraction might be another. Getting your father's friend's uncle's mistress to lean on the judge and have those charges dismissed with prejudice might be yet another. Get creative. Anything you can imagine friends and family doing on your behalf is Contacts at work.

ATTACK



Unless the coordinator sets up a special kind of conflict involving social or other media, Contacts are unlikely to be used to Attack, even on a reality TV show.

DEFEND



If Contacts can be used to Attack in a conflict, it's highly likely that Contacts would be used to Defend against them. Otherwise? Not so much.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Most frequently, Contacts will be used to Create Advantage for use by other skills. Contacts tell you their *Darkest Secrets* or the *Target Location* that enable you to take other actions. Use Contacts to direct the story along the lines that you want it to go, whether gathering information or discovering it.

STUNTS

These are examples of Contacts stunts to consider. See also **Allies**.

Ear to the Ground: I may use Contacts instead of Awareness or Empathy during the first exchange in a conflict that a member of my network may have reasonably given me some advance warning of.

Rumormonger: I get a +2 bonus with Contacts to Create Advantage when spreading a story about someone else, regardless of its veracity.

Weight of Reputation: I am able to use Contacts instead of Provocation to Create Advantage or Overcome when the opposition is well aware of who and what I am. [When this stunt is taken, one of the hero's aspects must be specified as the reputation aspect that gives narrative permission for a reputation this powerful. The specified reputation aspect may not be invoked for any actions involving this stunt.]

DECEPTION

If there were any truth to the kindergarten jingle, your pants would definitely be on fire. You are a master of deception, whether you choose for that to be a personal mastery of microexpressions and the art of the bluff, a tongue so silver that lycanthropes give you a wide berth, or the ability to publish libel so believable the victims themselves would be afraid to sue. However your ability to deceive manifests itself, you know very well how to misdirect, lie, and cheat.

IN ACTION

Although it's said that the art of war is the art of deception, it's unlikely that Deception as a skill will manifest itself in direct combat. Deception could be used to tilt the outcome of a fight by sowing disinformation through counterintelligence to the enemy in advance.

Although the actual stealing is the province of Crime, the lying and cheating that lead up to the stealing are the province of Deception. Whether you are hiding the pea under one of three shells or putting on a convincing performance to match your disguise as a member of the senator's security detail, Deception is your go-to skill to pull it off.

Remember that Deception doesn't represent the art of persuasion (that's Finesse), intimidation (that's Provocation), who or how many people you know (that's Contacts), reading people (that's Empathy), or paying people off (that's probably Resources), Deception represents your ability to convince others that what is false is true and what is true is obviously false. All for a good reason, of course!

OVERCOME



Deception is the skill that allows your disguise, elaborate or slapdash, to fool someone. A quick bluff to get past some nameless denizens who aren't really paying that close attention to the cameras might be a single Overcome action opposed by static opposition. An in-person interview with a named villain might be a multi-part contest opposed by Empathy. A deep cover assignment inside a ruthless cult might require a huge number of Deception actions on an ongoing basis simply to keep your cover intact.

ATTACK



Although Deception will eventually ruin a lot of relationships and do a lot of harm in a lot of ways, it's highly unlikely for Deception to actually be used to Attack.

DEFEND



Although Deception is the skill you might use to oppose others' attempts to discern your true feelings with Empathy or your true motives with Investigation, it won't be used to Defend you against mental or physical harm in any way.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Use Deception to feint and get your opponent *Off-Balance*, to dream up a quick *Cover Story*, or Create Advantage to produce a *False Identity*. You could be such a *Charming Conversationalist* that the mark might later reveal an important detail when you invoke it on a subsequent Empathy action. Deception and Empathy go hand in hand.

STUNTS

These are examples of Deception stunts to consider.

I Keep my Stories Straight: I get a +2 bonus with Deception to Create Advantage when used against a mark who has already believed one of my lies during this session.

Master of Gaslighting: I am able to use Deception instead of Provocation to Attack when making up clever, believable lies during an emotional conflict.

Man of Many Faces: after spending a fate point, I am able to use Deception instead of other skills to Create Advantage or Overcome when dealing with people or organizations that I have dealt with previously when I was under cover.

DRIVING

Ground vehicles are all but ubiquitous in the modern world, from the fancy first world cars to the hand-me-downs still operating in the third world. Driving is the skill you require to navigate the world and coax more performance out of a vehicle above its safe operating parameters.

IN ACTION

In chases and in tactical conflicts involving vehicles, Driving will be used to Attack by ramming targets and to Defend by avoid such collisions. Most uses of Driving, though, will be far less combative, despite what your morning commute feels like. Successfully finding your way across an unfamiliar town (without the benefit of an automated navigation system that gives turn-by-turn directions), even navigating without using a vehicle, is a function of Driving.

The fundamentals of driving apply regardless of the kind of wheeled transportation in play. Different types of vehicles such as motorcycles, small watercraft, and hovercraft present a higher level of difficulty unless the character possesses a stunt that mitigates the additional challenge. Radically different forms of transportation, such as aircraft, simply cannot be “driven” without a stunt or aspect to enable their safe operation. That third dimension can be a real challenge to master.

The supporting skills for Driving are Engineering and Resources. You use Engineering to repair a vehicle abused past its limits, and Resources to acquire the requisite vehicle for the operation or enhance it.

OVERCOME



Driving is the equivalent of Athletics when you're in a car. Any sort of control maneuver or performance contest will be the province of Driving. Get there faster and safer!

ATTACK



As noted above, Driving would be the appropriate Attack skill whenever vehicles are involved in combat to ram a target. For targets of equal mass and durability, equal damage will be done to the attacker as are received by the defender. And even large cars are damaged by pedestrians and the like.

DEFEND



When you are in command of a vehicle, any Defend action that you take to avoid impact will be using your Driving skill.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



In order to gain a better position in a conflict or navigate more rapidly over rough or complex terrain, Driving is your ticket for creating advantages like *On Your Six* or *Convenient Shortcut* either in a contest or to support an Overcome action.

STUNTS

These are examples of Driving stunts to consider.

Hard to Shake: I get a +2 bonus with Driving to Create Advantage when pursuing an opponent during a chase.

Pedal to the Metal: I win ties using Driving during contests when I can coax better performance out of my vehicle.

Ramming Speed: when ramming another vehicle with my own, I am able to ignore 2 shifts of damage that would normally occur to my vehicle due to the ram.

I Never Get Lost: I get a +2 bonus with Driving to Overcome or Create Advantage when navigating during an outdoor challenge or contest.

Small Aircraft Pilot: I am able to use Driving to control a single-engine aircraft.

Large Aircraft Pilot: I am able to use Driving to control a multi-engine aircraft. [Requires **Small Aircraft Pilot.**]

Helicopter Pilot: I am able to use Driving to control a rotary-wing aircraft.

EMPATHY

You are more socially perceptive than most. Whether it manifests as a simple awareness of others' emotional auras, or a more analytical and in-depth psychological profiling, Empathy is what gives you the ability to feel how other beings feel. Obviously this is easier with humans than other, less familiar species, but Empathy is the interpersonal equivalent of Awareness for social interactions, behavioral analysis, and other related social sciences. Empathy also represents your natural disinclination toward unwarranted violence against others. See **In Cold Blood**.

IN ACTION

In non-tactical confrontations, Empathy is most likely to be the skill used to determine initiative in social conflicts. Empathy is your Defend against attempts by others to use Finesse or Deception against you.

Empathy will most often be used to discover aspects about others to support another skill, like Finesse, Provocation, or Deception. Applying complex techniques like theory of mind to deduce what another's motivation or response to stimuli will be could be your approach. Alternatively, natural empath's simply intuit another's emotional state based on nonverbal cues, past knowledge, and perhaps occult insight.

Remember that Empathy doesn't represent the art of persuasion (that's Finesse), intimidation (that's Provocation), who or how many people you know (that's Contacts), lying to people (that's Deception), or paying people off (that's probably Resources), Empathy represents your ability to discern what's going on inside someone else's mind, or possibly what might go on in his mind under a specific set of circumstances that you have imagined.

OVERCOME



Most commonly, Empathy will be used to Overcome others' mental consequences in recovery actions. If another kind of Overcome action is indicated, it's most likely a reactive opportunity to catch an expression, a change in attitude, or intent. However, I don't recommend using Empathy this way unless both success and failure are interesting. Consider a compel of some sort to get the desired result instead.

ATTACK



Although Empathy can be used to discern where and how someone else is vulnerable, there really isn't a way to use Empathy to make an Attack, the occult aside, of course.

DEFEND



Empathy is used often to resist others' actions. However, it's not a skill that is typically used for Defend actions, except perhaps in an occult capacity or enabled by some stunts.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Use Empathy to judge where an interviewee might have a *Soft Spot*, to discover *Holes in Her Story* if someone is lying to you, or to define *Common Interests* with someone. You could be such a *Charming Conversationalist* that the mark might later reveal an important detail when you invoke it on a subsequent Deception action. Empathy and Deception go hand in hand.

STUNTS

These are examples of Empathy stunts to consider.

Ear for the Truth: I get a +2 bonus with Empathy to Defend when someone is engaged in Deception as an Overcome or Create Advantage action under my observation.

Nose for Trouble: I am able to use Empathy instead of Awareness to determine initiative when I have enough time to observe the participants before the fight starts.

Accomplished Therapist: I am able to reduce a mental consequence by one level of severity when I succeed at an Empathy recovery action for someone else. Minor consequences resolve immediately, moderate become mild and recover at the end of the next scene, and severe become moderate, etc. This stunt has no effect on extreme consequences.

ENGINEERING

Technology is another ubiquitous aspect of our world, even less developed nations have a level of technology that would seem magical only a hundred years ago. Whether you are capable of repairing automobiles or doing rocket surgery, Engineering is your skill. What specific technologies you're a master of is simply a function of your background, your aspects, and your stunts.

IN ACTION

Engineering covers all the disciplines you might study in college: civil, mechanical, electrical, chemical, nuclear, whatever. (Except for the information sciences, that's the province of Hacking.) With the possible exception of Lore, of all the skills in Modernity, Engineering might seem to be the broadest. It's up to you and the rest of the table to make sure you only apply it to things that it makes sense for your character to have knowledge or mastery of. Like Driving, some uses of Engineering may be unlocked through stunts.

Engineering covers the applied sciences, regardless of the individual discipline because the fundamentals are all the same. Rather than take a discipline-specific approach, Modernity takes a general view and allows for stunts that specialize in a particular discipline. However, there may be occasions where a stunt might be required in lieu of some other form of required narrative permission.

OVERCOME



Engineering is often used to Overcome challenges, but not as frequently as other related technical skills, like Crime and Hacking. Engineering can be used to repair things, design things, build things, and the like.

ATTACK



Though Engineering can create many warlike things, it's not an Attack skill in any way.

DEFEND



Likewise, Engineering is not a defensive skill, except perhaps when opposing others' Engineering actions or, perhaps, defending a design or an academic thesis.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Engineering will be most often used to Create Advantage that will support other actions. This could be cobbling together a piece of equipment, a chemical compound, or a drug. Pharmacy is just a fancy word for well-regulated chemical engineering, folks. Engineering can also be used to assess the designs of others and provide vital insight when the time comes for action. See **Operational Considerations** and **The Toy Box** for broader uses of Engineering.

STUNTS

These are examples of Engineering stunts to consider.

Make do with Anything: I always have the necessary tools (without spending a fate point to declare a fact) to make an Overcome or Create Advantage action when using Engineering, even in extreme situations where tools would normally be unavailable. (Also called **I am MacGyver.**)

Better than New: Whenever I succeed with style on an Overcome action with Engineering to repair a piece of equipment, I am able to declare a new situation aspect with a free invocation to reflect the improvements I made along with the repairs. (Also called **Mechanical Overachiever.**)

Chemical Weapons Superfreak: I get a +2 bonus with Engineering to Overcome or Create Advantage whenever dealing with chemical weapons. (When things could possibly go wrong, I am compelled to ask: "Glass or plastic?" Note: Things can always go wrong when chemical weapons are involved.)

Demolition Man: I get a +2 bonus with Engineering to Create Advantage or Overcome when using explosives to plan or execute a structural demolition.

FIGHTING

Close quarters combat, armed, unarmed, whatever, you have a talent for up-close-and-personal violence. You know how to hit where it hurts, and when you put the hurt on somebody, they go down and stay down. Whether you brought a knife to a gunfight, or a gun to a brawl or a riot, as a Fighting aficionado, you're right at home.

IN ACTION

The weapons you're familiar with depends entirely upon the narrative permission you are given by your aspects, your background, table consensus, and the coordinator's veto. If you are a knife fighter who grew up on the barrio, like Roberto, it makes sense for you to be able to employ edged weapons. If it doesn't make sense for you to know more than which end of a katana to hold, by all means, don't.

Fighting covers the safe handling and operation of any weapons you're familiar with. Fighting can also be used to assess weapons' functional state, judge their market value, or glean pertinent facts about their history or construction as a limited form of Knowledge. Fighting covers more than just the deployment of sharp edges, pointy bits, and blunt impact from weapons or your feet, fists, knees, and elbows.

OVERCOME



Other than an armed or unarmed kata competition or perhaps demonstrating one's capability to a prospective employer, Fighting is unlikely to be used to Overcome challenges or win contests. Keep an open mind and perhaps you'll think of a few in the stress of the moment, though. Anything is possible.

ATTACK



This is the meat and potatoes of Fighting in a tactical conflict. With most weapons, you can make an Attack only against targets in the same zone with you. See **The Toy Box** for descriptions of typical types of weapons.

DEFEND



Fighting (or Athletics) can be used to Defend against other Fighting Attacks (but not ranged Attacks with Shooting) or interfere with other actions, depending on your narration.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Creating advantages is a handy use of Fighting, whether it's for *Recklessly Charging* your opponent, supporting a Provocation action with a supporting aspect like *Scary Weapon Display*, or covering an ally's position with *I've Got Your Back*.

STUNTS

These are examples of Fighting stunts to consider.

My Cold, Dead Fingers: I receive a +2 bonus to use Fighting to Defend against actions to disarm me.

Heavy Hitter: When I succeed with style on a Fighting Attack, I may choose to reduce the result by one to gain a full situation aspect with a free invocation instead of a boost.

Backup Weapon: whenever a Disarmed or similar situation aspect is imposed on me, I can spend a fate point to declare that I have a backup weapon and negate the imposed aspect. Instead of a situation aspect, my opponent gets a boost, representing the momentary distraction I suffer having to draw my backup.

Trained MMA Fighter: I get a +2 bonus with Fighting to Attack whenever engaged in single combat while empty-handed.

College Football Star: I get a +2 bonus with Fighting to Attack when I have a running start (i.e. begin the Attack from inside another adjacent or farther zone).

Jiu-Jitsu Maven: I get a +2 bonus with Fighting to Defend whenever I am in hand-to-hand combat.

FINESSE

Finesse is the fine art of persuasion, motivation, and encouragement. Whether you use this ability to lead by example, to incite action, or to calm a situation, you have a knack for eliciting positive emotions in the other people around you. If your approach is emotionally uplifting, moving, or seductive, it's probably Finesse.

IN ACTION

In non-tactical confrontations, Finesse is the skill you would use to make people feel like doing what you want them to do. It could be your natural charm, or something more. . . naughty. When making friends or engaging in seduction, Finesse is the tool of the trade for diplomats, spies, and shameless flirts everywhere.

The motivation is not what makes it Finesse, but the approach taken. Quite often Finesse is used to get results by making the finessed think it was their idea in the first place. Finesse is the social skill of smooth operators and smoother talkers.

Remember that Finesse doesn't represent the ability to read others (that's Empathy), intimidation (that's Provocation), who or how many people you know (that's Contacts), lying to people (that's Deception), or paying people off (that's probably Resources), Finesse represents your skill with moving people in an emotionally positive manner.

OVERCOME



For Finesse, Overcome actions are the sweet spot. Rallying the troops. Giving a motivational speech. Writing a powerful story. Convincing someone to trust you. Persuading the boss to give you the day off, or a pay raise. Smoothing over ruffled feathers. Making peace between the Hatfields and the McCoys. These are all examples of Finesse at work.

ATTACK



If an Attack is being made, Finesse has utterly failed. It's unlikely to be used for this purpose.

DEFEND



Finesse isn't really a defensive skill, but anytime you are providing opposition to someone else's social Attack by using your positive reputation or positive emotions, that's Finesse.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Use Finesse to create a *Good Vibration* when establishing rapport with someone, to persuade someone to *Believe In Me*, or to *Lead From The Front*. You could be such a *Charming Conversationalist* that the mark might later reveal an important detail when you invoke it on a subsequent Deception action. Finesse and Deception go hand in hand.

STUNTS

These are examples of Finesse stunts to consider.

Always Put my Best Foot Forward: once per scene, I may upgrade a boost created with Finesse into a full situation aspect with a free invocation.

Demagogue: I get a +2 bonus with Finesse to Overcome or Create Advantage whenever giving an inspiring speech or motivational talk before an audience (not a one-on-one or small group conversation).

Ms. Popularity: I am able to use Finesse instead of Contacts to Overcome or Create Advantage when I am in an area or dealing with an organization in which I am popular and well-liked. Popularity may be established by spending a fate point or by prior narrative justification, such as backstory details. (Also known as **Mr. Popularity.**)

HACKING

Information is power. Power tends to corrupt. You know how to control the information grid. Does that make you evil? Whether you came by your technical facility with computers through hard work and hacking your way to the top, or some other more banal educational means, you have mastered the art of bending computers and networks to your will.

IN ACTION

Hacking is more than just cracking passwords and trespassing on others' private computer networks. In its purest form, Hacking is not a criminal activity: It's a fascination with systems and a desire (compulsion?) to decompose them into their various parts and understand what makes them tick. Old school hackers didn't break into Department of Defense computer networks to prove a point, commit virtual vandalism, or make a political statement: They did it just to see if they could.

Beyond the obvious criminal possibilities, Hacking is also your go-to skill for digital sleuthing. If you're collecting data on the information superhighway, you're using Hacking. If you're collating databases that you have legitimate access to, you're Hacking. If you're helping your mother with her computer problems, you're Hacking. Also, if you're breaking into a system that you're not supposed to have access to, you're technically "cracking," but for simplicity's sake, we'll agree to say that you're Hacking there, too.

OVERCOME



Hacking is often used to Overcome challenges about as frequently as other related technical skills, like Crime, and perhaps more often than Engineering. Hacking can also be used to repair computers and other digital things.

ATTACK



In a purely computer-based conflict, Hacking could be used to Attack the health and well-being of another computer system or network.

DEFEND



In a purely digital domain, Hacking is the security skill of choice to Defend against others' Hacking actions.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Hacking can be used to find out the *Juicy Details* about someone's torrid affair through social media, or find the *Inside Scoop* about the reasons behind a public figure's online trading activity, or the *Sordid Truth* about the prurient interests a mark really wants to keep secret. Hacking could also be used to *Cover My Tracks* as a way to prevent someone from figuring out who was in the system.

STUNTS

These are examples of Hacking stunts to consider.

I Can Multi-Task Like You Breathe, I get a +2 bonus with Hacking to Attack or Defend when engaged in a purely information systems-based conflict.

My Crime is Curiosity: I can spend a fate point to use Hacking instead of Provocation, Finesse, or Empathy for one scene to Overcome or Create Advantage to reflect the fact that I have previously researched the victim digitally.

Hack the Planet: Whenever creating a boost with Hacking to Create Advantage an aspect in preparation to invade a hostile network, I am able to declare a new situation aspect with a free invocation to reflect the fact that I have back doors into everything.

i pwn n00bz: Whenever I succeed with style on a Defend action with Hacking, I am able to declare a new situation aspect with a free invocation to reflect the fact that nobody gets away with attacking me.

Orwell was Right: Whenever someone else is doing online research about me, I am able to Defend with Hacking as active opposition even if I am offline because of the defensive systems that I have put in place to safeguard my anonymity.

INVESTIGATION

Sooner or later, everybody wants to know a secret. The advantage you have is that you know how to spot clues as easy as lying. Whether you have forensic snap, the ability to do old school research, or an unparalleled attention to detail, Sherlock Holmes would call you a kindred spirit. Among other things, you shameless snoop!

IN ACTION

Investigation and Awareness are similar skills. The primary differentiator is whether the means to the end are primarily sensory and reactive (Awareness) or due to the application of analytical ability and careful study (Investigation). The province of private eyes and security specialists (after the Crime has happened) is Investigation.

Investigation is the skill that includes much of the field craft of secret agents, law enforcement officers, and spies. When surveilling or tailing a mark, Investigation is the skill of choice. Investigation is the key to simply knowing what to do to avoid detection or how to avoid suspicion.

When searching for secret passages or hidden things, Investigation and Crime may seem to overlap. It all comes down to a matter of intent and approach. The same could be said of Stealth and Investigation for avoiding detection, such as slipping a tail. Another potential for overlap might be in hunting wild game, where Survival and Investigation both make some sense for tracking purposes. First describe what you're trying to do and how you're trying to do it, then which skill applies should become clear.

OVERCOME



Investigation can be used to Overcome challenges and locate clues. Investigation can be used to verify an alibi or other kinds of shoe-leather detective work. Eavesdropping on a conversation between two people who don't want to be overheard is a classic contest between practitioners of the Investigation skill and the victims' Awareness.

ATTACK



Attacking is not the province of Investigation. It's much more likely that Investigation will happen later at the scene of the Attack, long after the blood has begun to cool.

DEFEND



Investigation is used to Defend against detection by others employing Investigation, for example.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Use Investigation to create a *False Identity* when establishing a cover, to find an *Important Clue*, or to locate the *Secret Lair*.

Investigate is often used to Create Advantage for subsequent social actions using Finesse, Provocation, and Deception.

STUNTS

These are examples of Investigation stunts to consider.

Attention to Detail: I get a +2 bonus with Investigation to Create Advantage when I am able to take my time doing research or forensic analysis (i.e. outside of a conflict).

Don't Lie to Me: I can use Investigation instead of Empathy to Defend when others are using Deception to Create Advantage against me.

Shameless Voyeur: I get a +2 bonus with Investigation to Create Advantage when engaged in surveillance from a distance.

Accomplished Eavesdropper: When I succeed at an Investigate action to eavesdrop on a conversation, I create one aspect (but no free invocation) reflecting additional information that I glean.

Hyperthymesia: I may use Investigation in order to Create Advantage when I have previously succeeded at a Create Advantage action with Investigation at the scene that I am attempting to recall.

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is power. And you know that overused quote about power and corruption by Lord Acton could be used to indict Abraham Lincoln's constitutional abuses during the War of Northern Aggression (also known as the American Civil War) as thoroughly as it could the excesses of any Caesar. You know that information is insufficient. Understanding is required in order to turn information into Knowledge. Also, you were probably a teacher's pet in school and bullied by students who focused more on Athletics than academics.

IN ACTION

Knowledge is not mere memory of facts *per se*, but also the ability to derive useful, actionable conclusions from them. Because those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, am I right?

While Knowledge is not a tactical discipline, it can provide useful insight for current conflicts based on historical battles. While Knowledge is not a social discipline, it can provide appropriate context based on the study of human nature as to which approach is most likely to succeed in swaying the largest audience.

Knowledge is more than mere ivory tower trivia. It's the application of logic and academic principles to research and study a specific subject. That said, wherever Knowledge overlaps another skill, like Investigation or **Lore**, the other skill should probably hold sway.

OVERCOME



Knowledge should rarely be used as an Overcome action, unless knowing and not knowing the answer or solution to the puzzle are equally interesting.

ATTACK



Everyone knows that the only fight you can win is the one you avoid, right? Except in Trivial Pursuit®.

DEFEND



It's also equally unlikely that Knowledge will be used directly to Defend, except in Trivial Pursuit.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Knowledge can be used to recall a *Pertinent Fact* when writing a letter to the editor, to produce an impressive *Scholarly Analysis*, or to locate the *Lost Tome* in a vast library. Knowledge is often used to Create Advantage for social skills to use later, like Finesse, Provocation, and Deception, or even Investigation and Crime.

STUNTS

These are examples of Knowledge stunts to consider.

I've Read About That!: I can spend a fate point to use Knowledge instead of another skill to Overcome or Create Advantage when I can provide narrative justification for knowing more.

I Have a Doctorate in That: I get a +2 bonus with Knowledge to Overcome or Create Advantage in the subject area of my PhD.

I Laugh at Ad Hominem Attacks: I can use Knowledge instead of Will to Defend when attacked with Provocation if I am able to articulate how my Vulcan-like mental powers of reason and intellect enable me to shield my emotions.

Trivia Nerd: once per session, I can Create Advantage for free to establish an aspect representing an obscure fact that can be used during the session to support an action with another skill.

I Wrote the Book on That: once per scene, I can use Knowledge instead of another skill to Overcome or Create Advantage in the subject area of my PhD. [Requires **I Have a Doctorate in That**.]

Wisdom of the Ages: I can use Knowledge instead of Empathy to Defend or Overcome when I can describe another similar situation that I already know about.

LORE

You know things that would drive other humans insane. Witches of the Dark Coven come to consult you for guidance and ritual. You possess more than a passing familiarity with the arts arcane. Regardless of how you came by your power, be it hard won, wrested from a demon in an occult struggle, learned at the knee of an elder wizard, or born in your blood, you have the ability to wield eldritch forces of creation and magic to do what you will with them.

IN ACTION

Lore is a highly specialized form of Knowledge, but that is where their similarity ends. There is no overlap between the two skills in practice. Lore is the practical application of the impractical.

Unlike any other skill in Modernity except Sanity, you must have an aspect that provides narrative justification to possess or use any rank in Lore whatsoever.

Your Lore aspect must explain the type of magic and the occult tradition that you follow. This may be a simple religious tradition to support your practice of theurgy, or a dark voodoo-like spin off in the cult of **Santa Muerte**. It could be an ancient druidic or shamanistic practice that empowers your command of the power of the stars and of nature, like **Rational Magic**. Your occult power may be more immediate and focused like that of a lycanthrope as in **Changeling Magic**. See **Enter the Occult** for more examples of the different kinds of Lore.

Lore is the only means by which valid and accurate information about the occult can be obtained. Knowledge or Investigation will only turn up myth, legend, and conjecture.

OVERCOME



Lore can be used to Overcome arcane puzzles or to recall important information, but using Lore as a trivia-bound gateway for knowledge is boring. Unless both success and failure for the Overcome action are equally interesting in your story, simply allow the players to obtain it.

ATTACK



Lore cannot normally be used to Attack without a stunt to give narrative permission to the magic and describe its rules.

DEFEND



Lore is not typically used to oppose an occult Attack, although it can be used to oppose magically-based Create Advantage actions that you are aware of through the application of appropriate ritual, supplication, or poultice.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Lore can be used to recall a *Pertinent Fact* when dealing with an arcane phenomena, to impress others with *Occult Bravado* if they believe you capable of magic, or to identify true pieces of *Dark Knowledge* when confronted with it. Lore is not often used to Create Advantage for social actions using Finesse, Provocation, and Deception, or subsequent Investigation actions, but it's possible when you know the right spells for the job! Lore is most often used to Create Advantage to power occult spells.

STUNTS

These are examples of Lore stunts to consider. See **Enter the Occult** and **other Modernity briefing books** for a much more detailed description of magic stunts, spells, and powers.

Intuitive Magi: I get a +2 bonus with Empathy to Create Advantage for occult connections. [Requires **Rational Magic.**]

Student of the Dark Arts: I get a +2 bonus with Lore to Create Advantage when identifying specific spells, rituals, or effects related to dark or evil magic.

Student of Occult Lore: I get a +2 bonus with Lore to Create Advantage when I first encounter an occult phenomena during an operation to recall more about it.

Demonologist: I get a +2 bonus with Lore to Create Advantage related to information of or about **demons.**

PROVOCATION

Provocation is exactly what it sounds like: offensive, frightening, hurtful, and angry. You have a distinct knack for pissing people off. It could be an all-the-time, chip-on-your-shoulder kind of thing, or a special ability to intimidate others on demand. Whichever it is, any time you want to engender a negative emotion in someone else (or groups of someones else), Provocation is your skill of choice.

IN ACTION

In non-tactical confrontations, Provocation is the skill you use to hurt people, to make them sad/upset/angry/etc., and make them sorry that they ever went toe to toe with you. Verbally. This is the skill for bullies, muggers, and anyone involved in a mudslinging political campaign.

It doesn't matter why or how you are provoking others. Everyone responds to different kinds of negative stimuli. You just have a gift for pushing peoples' buttons once you figure out what those buttons actually are. (Contrary to popular opinion, bullies require an above average Empathy in order to figure out what others' weaknesses and triggers are to take advantage of them.)

Remember that Provocation doesn't represent the ability to read others (that's Empathy), persuasion (that's Finesse), who or how many people you know (that's Contacts), lying to people (that's Deception), or paying people off (that's probably Resources), Provocation represents your skill with moving people in an emotionally negative manner.

OVERCOME



Overcome actions can be one sweet spot for Provocation. If an Overcome action is indicated, it's most likely to drive someone else to action in an emotionally hostile fashion. Drill instructors are famous for "motivating" their troops in this fashion, as are various kinds of toxic bosses. But, people would probably quit doing it if it didn't work so well.

ATTACK



Provocation is your mental Attack skill. You generally have to know something about your victim for this to work, though. Simply yelling insults only works with the simplest, most ignorant of opponents. Sticks and stones and all that.

DEFEND



Knowing how to smack the Provocation down on others doesn't generally make you any better at resisting it when the favor is returned to you. Look to Will as your mental Defend skill instead.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Use Provocation to make others *Enraged*, *Shocked*, or *Hesitant*. Depending upon how scary you can be, your intimidation actions could make someone *Afraid*. Your victim will Defend against your Provocation with Will.

STUNTS

These are examples of Provocation stunts to consider.

Armor of Fear: I can use Provocation to Defend against Fighting Attacks, but only until the first time I am dealt stress in a conflict. Once someone shows my enemies that I am only human, they will no longer hesitate to Attack.

Aggro Magnet: Whenever I Create Advantage with Provocation against an enemy, I can use one of my free invocations to become the target of that enemy's next relevant action, drawing their attention away from my allies.

A Scary Kind of Guy: I am able to use Provocation instead of Empathy to Create Advantage against Will when I am bullying a victim into revealing their aspects to me.

RESOURCES

Money can be a superpower, but it's not the only way to gain access to things. Resources as a skill is all about getting a hold of stuff like **specialized equipment and vehicles, guns and ammo**, and just about **anything money can buy**. Resources represents more than **liquid assets** because it's a renewable resource (pun intended). The Resources skill is an abstraction of wealth or access to the byproducts of wealth to eliminate the need for strict cash accounting. The full use of Resources is covered in **Operational Considerations** with many examples of things that Resources can buy in **The Toy Box**.

IN ACTION

Like Contacts, Resources will almost never come up directly in combat, although the items made available by suitable application of Resources will often turn the tide of the battle.

Resources could represent your material wealth, investments, bank accounts, trust funds, etc. If *Independently Wealthy* is one of your character aspects, then it probably makes sense for Resources to represent your direct purchasing power. Tables containing one or more fans of **the shopping montage scene** will usually have at least one character with lots of Resources.

Often Resources are a representation of your ability to scrounge up what you needs in the heat of the moment. Or perhaps, when combined with a high Contacts rank, it could represent friends and relatives who happen to be wealthy or have access to a large amount of Resources that they are will to put at your disposal. Feel free to be creative in how you describe the manner in which your Resources manifest themselves.

OVERCOME



The most common maneuvers that you will see Resources used for is to buy things, bribe officials, and impress girls (or boys) with your car or your bling. An auction or a bidding war is another classic use of Resources. Some people buy paintings, others buy information, entire companies, or even elections and whole countries.

ATTACK



Resources is not an Attack skill. It could be used to buy a **cruise missile**, but targeting and launching it would require other skills.

DEFEND



Resources buy defenses, like armor and bullet sponges (minions), but is never used to Defend directly.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Resources will be used most frequently to Create Advantage aspects for use by other skills. Resources can buy you *Cop-Killer Bullets*, a *Sexy Sports Car*, and possibly the *Police Chief's Password* to access a restricted database.

STUNTS

These are examples of Resources stunts to consider.

Money Talks: I may use Resources instead of Finesse when I am in any situation where ostentatious displays of material wealth might aid my cause.

Savvy Investor: Once per session, I get an additional free invoke when I Create Advantage with Resources.

Trust Fund Baby: Twice per session, I can create a boost representing a windfall or influx of cash for use with Resources.

Power Shopper: I get a +2 bonus with Resources to Overcome or Create Advantage when I have sufficient time to do comparison shopping online and offline.

In the Country Club: I can use Resources instead of Contacts when I am gathering information that my wealthy and powerful friends would have access to.

Known Black Market Buyer: when I succeed with style, I get an additional free invoke on any aspect I create with Resources when I am buying illegal goods.

SANITY

Sanity is a measure of how well you tolerate the reality-breaking stimuli that you will face in Modernity. There are **things** that make the mind recoil in horror, cause mere mortals to retreat into catatonia, and leave most of us **gibbering** in our witching hour nightmares.

IN ACTION

Whether you came by your resistance to insanity naturally or have developed a tolerance for eldritch horror the hard way, Sanity is an almost purely defensive skill. Sanity differs from Will in that even the most self-possessed, willful character may be weaker and more susceptible to evidence that reality is merely an illusion.

Unlike any other skill in Modernity except **Lore**, you must have an aspect which provides narrative justification to possess *any* rank above Mediocre (+0) in Sanity whatsoever.

At the everyman **power level**, heroes *must* start with an initial Sanity rating of Mediocre (+0). For every mensch, Sanity then may only be increased through gameplay and the acquisition of new skill points or the retraining of skill points to reflect experience with the occult that the hero now possesses.

Sanity will be challenged whenever you are exposed to the inexplicable or the horrific for the first time in a session. See **Sanity Check** for additional details.

OVERCOME



When Sanity is not being used to Defend, it will almost always be used in a challenge or a contest to Overcome static or active opposition. *Things That Should Not Be* simply have to be survived to be believed.

ATTACK



Sanity is not an offensive skill under most circumstances without a stunt or an extra to enable the Attack, usually at the cost of mental stress.

DEFEND



Sanity will almost always be used to Defend against occult onslaught when it's not being used to Overcome the horror of being exposed to unbelievable things.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Sanity simply can't be used to Create Advantage under normal circumstances. Try avoiding usual circumstances, if you can.

STUNTS

These are examples of Sanity stunts to consider. See **Enter the Occult** and **Occult Things** for a detailed description of the occult and their relationship to Sanity.

Beacon of Hope: Once per session, I provide a +2 bonus to Sanity to Overcome and Defend against mental stress when confronted with an occult stressor for one other character that is not me that I can communicate with.

Hardened to That: I get a +2 bonus to Overcome and Defend to avoid mental stress when confronted with a familiar aspect of the occult or other stressor that I have already experienced in this operation. [At the everyman **power level**, requires surviving the character's first operation involving occult exposure. At other power levels, it requires an aspect for narrative justification.]

Occult Veteran: I can apply the benefit of **Hardened to That** to any stressor or form of the occult when confronted with a familiar aspect of the occult or other stressor that I have already experienced in my life. [Requires **Hardened to That**. At the everyman **power level**, it requires surviving three operations involving occult exposure.]

I Know the Truth of Things: I can Create Advantage with Sanity when I spend a scene mentally preparing myself and my allies in order to insulate us from a specific kind of occult stressor. [Requires **Occult Veteran**. At the everyman **power level**, it requires surviving five operations involving occult exposure.]

SHOOTING

Shooting is your ability to aim at and hit a target at a distance, whether it zipped when it moved, bopped when it stopped, or whirred when it stood still. Any time you pick up a rock, a slingshot, a bow and arrow, or a .50-caliber sniper rifle, Shooting is the skill that you will use to determine whether you hit your target or not.

IN ACTION

The weapons and weapon systems that you are familiar with is entirely based on narrative permission given by your character aspects, your background, table consensus, and the coordinator's veto. If it makes sense for an ex-Marine, like Grant, to be able to manipulate and fire a fully automatic submachine gun (probably), then proceed. If it doesn't make sense for the same character to know which end of a Yagua hunting blowgun to put his lips to, by all means, disallow the action, probably with a **self-compel** of some kind.

If you are familiar with a given weapon or weapon system, Shooting covers the safe operation thereof and could also be used to assess its functional state, judge its market value, or possess pertinent facts about its history or construction. Shooting covers more than just the deployment of projectiles from a weapon.

OVERCOME



Other than a shooting contest or demonstrating your capability to a prospective employer, Shooting is unlikely to be used to Overcome challenges. Keep an open mind and perhaps you'll think of a few under the stress of the moment, though. Anything is possible.

ATTACK



This is the bread and butter of Shooting in a tactical conflict. Athletics is typically the only skill that can Defend against a ranged Attack. With most weapons (it depends), you can make an Attack on a target up to 2 zones away without too much difficulty. See **In the Zone** and **Guns & Ammo** for a discussion of typical ranges for different types of weapons and weapon systems.

DEFEND



Shooting does not normally come into play for defensive purposes without a stunt to give the shooter the option. Use Fighting to Defend against being *Disarmed*. Create Advantage is really the place where Shooting can provide defensive assistance to one's allies.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Creating advantages is a crucial use of Shooting, whether it's for aiming carefully to line up the shot with an aspect like *Right Between the Eyes*, supporting a Provocation action with a supporting aspect like *Dead to Rights*, or support an ally's position with *Covering Fire*.

STUNTS

These are examples of Shooting stunts to consider.

Quick on the Draw: When shooting quickly would be to my advantage in a tactical conflict, I can use Shooting instead of Awareness to determine my initiative.

I Can Call My Shots: I can spend a fate point before I Attack a target with Shooting in order to describe a situation aspect of my choosing (without a free invocation) that will apply to the target if I hit, such as *Kneecapped* or *Shot in the Hand*, in addition to delivering stress normally.

Uncanny Shooting: Once per conflict, I am able to stack an additional invocation on top of an advantage that I create with Shooting, like *In My Sights*, to represent my natural ability to hit what I aim at.

Hyperkinesis: I get a +2 bonus with Shooting to Attack when I am physically throwing or shooting a weapon at a target in the same zone with me.

STEALTH

The skill that encompasses sneaking, hiding, and otherwise evading detection is Stealth. Whenever you are attempting to keep something physical or in motion a secret, you're engaged in Stealth. Being quiet. Being still. Being camouflaged. Being unremarkable and unnoticed. These are all Stealth. Burglar, spy, or sniper, you need Stealth.

IN ACTION

Whether in challenges, contests, or conflicts, Stealth reflects your ability to avoid detection by your enemies, sneak past the guards, or hide the evidence somewhere that nobody will ever find it. Stealth actions can be defended against with Awareness, Investigation, or another skill that seems reasonable based on the narration. Bear in mind that Stealth doesn't really work all that well once someone has already detected your presence.

The kinds of Stealth tactics that you're familiar with is a function of your character aspects and backstory. Think about how you came by your training or natural talent for avoiding notice. Does your Stealth skill only apply when you're out in the woods, like Daddy taught you when you learned to hunt? Does your Stealth only come into its own when you're in an urban environment? Do you have the ability to hide in plain sight by becoming seemingly insignificant?

As with other skills, Stealth may come into play with different forms of magic as the operative skill to apply spells of various sorts, or cast them without detection by others. See **Enter the Occult** for more details on magical Stealth.

OVERCOME



Any time you're sneaking, you're trying to Overcome someone else's ability to perceive you or traces of you. If it seems physically sneaky, it's Stealth. If it's verbally or interpersonally sneaky, it's Deception.

ATTACK



Stealth will often be used to prepare an ambush, but it's not normally used for direct Attack purposes.

DEFEND



If you're hiding, Stealth is obviously your defense against detection. For simplicity's sake, the coordinator may also model the challenge or contest as an Overcome action.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



This is where the assassin and the ambusher get the most mileage out of Stealth. You create the advantage *Well-Hidden* or something similar to prepare the ambush.

You would also use Stealth to make yourself *Hard to Pin Down* when fighting in a dark alley. Think laterally for ways to avoid being seen, heard, or smelled so that you can leverage Stealth to your advantage.

STUNTS

These are examples of Stealth stunts to consider.

Just a Face in the Crowd: when there are no situation aspects impeding movement, I get a +2 bonus with Stealth to Overcome or Defend when I am trying to blend into a moderately large crowd. If there aren't enough people around, this won't work.

One with the Shadows: I can use Stealth instead of Athletics to Defend against Shooting when I am in darkness or shadow and my attacker is at least 1 zone away.

Backstab: I can use Stealth instead of Fighting to make a physical Attack when my target isn't already aware of my presence.

Sneak Attack: I can use Stealth instead of Shooting to Attack when my target isn't already aware of my presence.

SURVIVAL

Where most people fear the dehydration, exposure, and dangerous animals that lurk in the great outdoors, you revel in the challenges of Survival. Hunting, trapping, starting fires, finding water, gathering food, and building shelter are all part of your basic DNA. If you would come in out of the wild once in a while, you might realize they could make a reality TV show about you.

IN ACTION

Survival represents the knowledge, skills, and abilities you need to make it on your own without the comforts and support of civilization. There are a broad range of hostile environments that challenge humans just by their very nature. Which types of environments you are adept at Survival in is a function of your character aspects and your background.

Survival has synergy with most other skills. For example, Survival and Driving are connected around the art and science of navigation. Survival could be used to **Create Advantage** because you know how to navigate by the stars, and Driving would be used to do the actual navigation. Survival experience could be used Create Advantage an aspect to facilitate a rescue from quicksand or another type of natural trap, and then using Athletics to deploy that experience to greatest effect. Use Survival as a limited form of Knowledge about animals to make your Investigation skill more effective at tracking.

The possibilities of using Survival to empower other skills, and in many cases Overcome challenges outright, are limitless. See **Survival of the Fit** for more ideas.

OVERCOME



Survival is in its element with Overcome challenges (not so much contests, but that could be arranged). Finding water in the desert, identifying edible plants, and setting snares for animals are all are examples of Overcome actions for Survival.

ATTACK



It's not within the purview of Survival to make Attacks, although many uses of Survival will lead up to making Attacks for hunting purposes, etc.

DEFEND



It's tough to imagine a defensive use of Survival, until you imagine the contest as one of the **three plot archetypes**: Man vs. Nature. If nature is on the Attack, man must Defend.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



When not being used to Overcome challenges, Survival is ready, willing, and able to Create Advantage. You can find *Enough Water* or gather *Bushels of Berries*. It's well within your skills to determine the *Right Direction* or *True North* when you know how to read the sun, moon, and stars. Think laterally for ways to leverage Survival to your advantage.

STUNTS

These are examples of Stealth stunts to consider.

Daddy Taught Me to Hunt: I get a +2 bonus with Survival to Create Advantage when preparing to track a target outdoors with Investigation or to analyze an animal trace for information.

Cold Weather Training: when I am in an arctic or other cold environment, I get a +2 bonus with Survival to Overcome or Defend against natural challenges.

SERE Training: I can spend a fate point to use Survival instead of another skill in this scene to Overcome or Create Advantage with the Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape techniques I learned in the military.

Live Off the Land: I get an additional free invocation whenever I succeed with style at Survival to locate or provide food, including primitive food production techniques like permaculture.

Affinity for Animals: when interacting with a single specific family of animals (*canidae*, *felidae*, *ursidae*, etc.), I can use Survival instead of Empathy to Overcome or Create Advantage when involved in a non-violent situation.

WILL

Will is the strength of your personality. Through the **occult**, it can also be the force that you can impose upon others, that you can exert on the universe around you, and the level of your personal self-control. In essence, Will is your level of mental and emotional durability. Think of Will as your mental fortitude where Brawn is your physical fortitude.

IN ACTION

For most, Will is an almost purely defensive skill. Will differs from Sanity in that even the most self-possessed, willful character may be weaker and more susceptible to evidence that reality is merely an illusion. A high Will gives you the ability to resist Finesse, Deception, and Provocation, but not voices whispering terrible truths in your ear.

Will represents your ability to stick to your guns, metaphorically speaking. Whenever you are resisting the attempt of a mundane influence to manipulate you in an emotional conflict, Will is your defensive skill, and a representation of your self-discipline.

Higher levels of Will increase the number of mental stress boxes available to the character. Will of 1 or 2 gives one additional stress box. Will of 3 or 4 gives two additional stress boxes. Will of 5 or higher gives two additional stress boxes *and* an additional mild consequence slot that can absorb mental consequences.

Along with Empathy, Lore, and Sanity, Will is heavily involved in the occult, not to resist it (that's Sanity), but to power it or to control it. You may have an enormous Will, but a fragile Sanity. See **Enter the Occult** for a description of the kinds of magic that depend upon Will.

OVERCOME



Will is typically only used to Overcome barriers like an aversion to action or societal norms and taboos. Will is also engaged for tasks that require perseverance and mental effort, such as puzzles, riddles, deciphering software code or encryption, and other mentally absorbing tasks as part of a larger multi-part challenge. In the occult realm, contests of Will are more common than in the mundane waiting-game sense.

ATTACK



Without a stunt to power its use in this manner, Will is not really an offensive skill.

DEFEND



Will is primarily a defensive skill, and will be used to resist mental Attacks of both the mundane and the arcane. When your Sanity is not challenged by a reality-breaking phenomena, use Will to Defend.

CREATE ADVANTAGE



Under normal circumstances, Will can be used to mentally prepare yourself with *Intense Focus* or *Steel Resolve*. With the occult at your beck and call, of course, many other options for creating advantages are available for yourself and against others.

STUNTS

These are examples of Will stunts to consider. See **Enter the Occult** and **other Modernity briefing books** for a detailed description of the occult and its relationship to Will.

Strength of Determination: I can use Will instead of Brawn to Overcome any challenges involving pure physical strength.

Indomitable Mien: I get a +2 bonus to Defend against any Provocation specifically using intimidation and fear against me.

Hard-boiled: I can choose to ignore a mild or moderate consequence for the duration of a scene. It's as if the consequence doesn't exist: it cannot be compelled or invoked. At the end of the scene, the consequence becomes one level worse: mild becomes moderate, and moderate becomes severe, etc. If the next slot is full, promote the consequence to the next highest available slot. If I have no available consequence slots to upgrade a consequence to, I may not use **Hard-boiled**.

FURTHER INVESTIGATION

There are more things in Heaven and earth. . .

“I have stolen ideas from every book I have ever read.”

Philip Pullman

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

This chapter is a short list of possible inspirations for you and your game. Many of them are sources that Modernity has been drawn from or inspired by in some part. Nothing is created in a vacuum or without some imprint of all the wonderful things that have gone before.

“If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Sir Isaac Newton

STRANGER THAN FICTION

Nonfiction and real world news sources are often the most terrifying. Turn on your least favorite news channel and just imagine what the real cause of the tragedies portrayed might be. Find two or more seemingly unrelated stories and mash them together for terrifying effect.

- *Blown for Good* by Marc Headley <http://x.co/blown4good>
- *Buried Secrets* by Edward Humes <http://x.co/buriedscrt>

- *Deliver Us from Evil* by Ralph Sarchie <http://x.co/deliverus>
- *The Demonologist* by Gerald Brittle <http://x.co/demonolog>
- *The Embrace: A True Vampire Story* by Aphrodite Jones <http://x.co/theembrace>
- *Girl Trouble* by Christopher McDougall <http://x.co/girltroubl>
- *Growing Up Psychic* by Chip Coffey <http://x.co/growingupp>
- *Helter Skelter* by Curt Gentry <http://x.co/heltersklt>
- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell <http://x.co/herofaces>
- *Lone Survivor* by Marcus Luttrell <http://x.co/lonesurvvr>
- *Mindhunter* by John E. Douglas <http://x.co/mindhunter>
- *My Story* by Elizabeth Smart <http://x.co/elizsmart>
- *My Billion Year Contract* by Nancy Many <http://x.co/billionyrc>
- *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace* by Dave Grossman <http://x.co/oncombat>
- *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* by Dave Grossman <http://x.co/onkilling>
- *On Writing* by Stephen King <http://x.co/onwriting>
- *The Serial Killer Files* by Harold Schechter <http://x.co/serialkill>
- *Serial Killers* by Peter Vronsky <http://x.co/serialklrs>
- *Stolen Innocence* by Elissa Wall <http://x.co/stoleninno>
- *The Stranger Beside Me* by Ann Rule <http://x.co/strangerbe>
- *Supernatural Horror In Literature* by Howard Phillips Lovecraft <http://x.co/supernatur>
- “*Torchered*” *Minds* by Ed Nordskog <http://x.co/torchered>
- *Trafficked* by Sibel Hodge <http://x.co/trafficked>

MOVIES

There is nothing for getting you in the Modernity mood like a movie. There are too many to list, but this is a broad cross section of types. Some are sillier or older than others, but they all have something unique to offer that you can adapt to your game.

- *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963) <http://x.co/thebirds>
- *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick, 1999) <http://x.co/blairwitch>
- *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2013) <http://x.co/cloverfld>
- *The Crow* (Alex Proyas, 1994) <http://x.co/thecrow>
- *From Dusk Till Dawn* (Robert Rodriguez, 1996) <http://x.co/dusk2dawn>
- *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) <http://x.co/exorcist>
- *Flatliners* (Joel Schumacher, 1990) <http://x.co/flatliners>
- *The Frighteners* (Peter Jackson, 1996) <http://x.co/frightener>
- *The Ghost and the Darkness* (Stephen Hopkins, 1996) <http://x.co/ghostdark>
- *Ghostbusters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984) <http://x.co/ghostbustr>
- *The Howling* (Joe Dante, 1981) <http://x.co/howling>
- *The Last Boy Scout* (Tony Scott, 1991) <http://x.co/boyscout>
- *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2001) <http://x.co/memento>
- *Mercury Rising* (Harold Becker, 1998) <http://x.co/mercuryiris>
- *In the Mouth of Madness* (John Carpenter, 1995) <http://x.co/mouthofmad>
- *Near Dark* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1987) <http://x.co/neardark>
- *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) <http://x.co/nightdead>
- *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984) <http://x.co/elmstreet>
- *Nomads* (John McTiernan, 1986) <http://x.co/nomadsvide>
- *The Others* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001) <http://x.co/theothers>

- *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) <http://x.co/rosemarys>
- *The Ruins* (Carter Smith, 2008) <http://x.co/theruins>
- *Seven* (David Fincher, 2010) <http://x.co/se7enmovie>
- *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) <http://x.co/silencelam>
- *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999) <http://x.co/sixthsense>
- *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) <http://x.co/wickerman>

NOVELS & SHORT FICTION

Some of the best, most enduring examples of horror in fiction are novels and short stories. If it doesn't make you carefully lock your doors and check under the bed and in the closet, it's probably not Modernity.

- *Alien Intelligence* by Dennis Detwiller et al <http://x.co/alienintel>
- *All Our Yesterdays* by Cristin Terrill <http://x.co/yesterdays>
- *Beyond the Gates of Dream* by Lin Carter <http://x.co/gatesdream>
- *Burning Water* by Mercedes Lackey <http://x.co/burnwater>
- *Can Such Things Be?* by Ambrose Bierce <http://x.co/suchthings>
- *Cold Print* by Ramsey Campbell <http://x.co/coldprint>
- *Complete H.P. Lovecraft* (Orintage, 2014) <http://x.co/lovecraft>
- *Complete Edgar Allan Poe* (Mantovani, 2011) <http://x.co/edgarallan>
- *Dark Theatres* by Dennis Detwiller et al <http://x.co/darktheatr>
- *Denied to the Enemy* by Dennis Detwiller <http://x.co/deniedenem>
- *Doctor Sleep* by Stephen King <http://x.co/drsleep>
- *The Doll* by J.C. Martin <http://x.co/thedoll>
- *The Dragon Factory* by Jonathan Maberry <http://x.co/dragonfact>
- *Dreamlander* by K.M. Weiland <http://x.co/dreamlandr>
- *The Dresden Files Collection 1-6* by Jim Butcher <http://x.co/dresden1>

- *The Dresden Files Collection 7-12* by Jim Butcher <http://x.co/dresden2>
- *Into the Out Of* by Alan Dean Foster <http://x.co/intotheout>
- *Mad Moon of Dreams* by Brian Lumley <http://x.co/madmoon>
- *Nameless Cults* by Robert E. Howard <http://x.co/nameless>
- *No Tomorrow* by Alia Reed et al <http://x.co/notomorrow>
- *One Second After* by William R. Forstchen <http://x.co/onesecond>
- *Shadow Ops: Control Point* by Myke Cole <http://x.co/shadowops>
- *Strange Authorities* by John Scott Tynes <http://x.co/strangeaut>
- *The Taking* by Dean Koontz <http://x.co/taking>
- *Pines* by Blake Crouch <http://x.co/pinesbook>
- *The Shining* by Stephen King <http://x.co/shining>
- *Through a Glass, Darkly* by Dennis Detwiler <http://x.co/darkly>
- *Trio of Sorcery* by Mercedes Lackey <http://x.co/triosorcer>
- *What the Night Knows* by Dean Koontz <http://x.co/nightknows>
- *Zombie Apocalypse Survival Guide* by Keith Cox <http://x.co/zombieapoc>

MUSIC

Some ambient music that might enhance the function of your adrenal glands during your Modernity game. We also have **our own**.

- *The 13th Hour* by Midnight Syndicate <http://x.co/13thhour>
- *Extended* by Solar Fields <http://x.co/extended>
- *The Gates of Delirium* by Midnight Syndicate <http://x.co/gatesdelir>
- *Hitman: Blood Money Soundtrack* by Jesper Kyd <http://x.co/hitmanblm>
- *Mythos* by Mythos <http://x.co/mythosmk>
- *Phaedra Revisited* by Tangerine Dream <http://x.co/phaedrarev>

ONLINE ASSETS

A few things you can find lying about **on the web**.

- *Delta Green Discussion List* <http://x.co/dglist>
- *Elements of Aversion* by Elizabeth Barrette <http://x.co/aversion>
- *Fate Yahoo Group* <http://x.co/fatelist>
- *Fate Google+* <http://x.co/fateplus>
- *Supernatural Horror in Literature* <http://x.co/supernat>

TABLETOP GAMES

Modernity is only the most recent horror and urban fantasy option. Many others games are full of amazing inspiration for you.

- *Call of Cthulhu* by Sandy Petersen et al <http://x.co/callcthulh>
- *Collectanea Creaturae (Fate)* by Travs S. Casey et al <http://x.co/creatura>
- *Delta Green* by Dennis Detwiler et al <http://x.co/deltagreen>
- *Dark Conspiracy* by Lester Smith <http://x.co/darkconsp>
- *Fate Core* by Leonard Balsera et al <http://x.co/fatecore>
- *Fate System Toolkit* by Robert Donoghue et al <http://x.co/fatetools>
- *Worlds in Shadow* by John Rogers et al <http://x.co/fateshadow>
- *Fear Itself* by Robin D. Laws <http://x.co/fearitself>
- *GURPS Horror* by Kenneth Hite <http://x.co/gurpshorr>
- *Hunter: The Vigil* by Chuck Wendig et al <http://x.co/huntermvigil>
- *Millennium's End* by Charles Ryan et al <http://x.co/millend>
- *XDM X-Treme Dungeon Mastery* <http://x.co/xdmastery>
- Many Fate-based horror inspirations <http://x.co/fatehorror>

TELEVISION

There are a lot of great conspiracy and operation patterns to be observed in episodic TV that can be adapted to your Modernity game.

- *Alphas* (2011-2012) <http://x.co/alphas>
- *Believe* (2014-present) <http://x.co/believetv>
- *Criminal Minds* (2005-present) <http://x.co/criminalmi>
- *Dollhouse* (2009-2010) <http://x.co/dollhouset>
- *Fringe* (2008-present) <http://x.co/fringetv>
- *The Following* (2013-present) <http://x.co/tfollowing>
- *Intelligence* (2014-present) <http://x.co/intellignc>
- *Nikita* (2010-2013) <http://x.co/nikita>
- *Perception* (2012-present) <http://x.co/perceptiv>
- *Person Of Interest* (2011-present) <http://x.co/personofin>
- *Supernatural* (2005-present) <http://x.co/supernatr1>
- *Torchwood* (2006-2011) <http://x.co/torchwood>
- *Warehouse 13* (2009-2014) <http://x.co/warehous13>
- *The X-Files* (1993-2002) <http://x.co/thexfiles>

VIDEO GAMES

A few of the many video games that inspire fear and hope.

- *Alan Wake* <http://x.co/awakegame>
- *Cognition* <http://x.co/cognitiong>
- *F.3.A.R.* <http://x.co/feargame>
- *Max Payne 3* <http://x.co/maxpayne3g>
- *Murdered: Soul Suspect* <http://x.co/murdered>
- *Watch_Dogs* <http://x.co/watchdogsg>



CLASSIFIED





KNOWN DEVIANCE

Yes, there are a few little differences.

“Deviance is in the eye of the beholder.”

Anonymous

Veterans of other Fate-based games will already have noticed that I’ve changed some things. For those of you keeping score, here is the list of things that are different about Modernity as compared with Fate Core.

- The **coordinator** in Modernity is what Fate calls the GM.
- Modernity calls **heroes** what Fate refers to as player characters.
- Wherever you see NPCs or non-player characters in Fate, you can translate that to be **denizen** in Modernity.
- Denizens are classified by **threat level** in Modernity instead of Fate’s nameless (average/fair/good), supporting, and main NPCs.
- Fate talks about **the table**, but I’ve made it a first class entity of all its own and emphasized its preeminence.
- An **operation** in Modernity is what Fate calls a scenario.
- What is a **conspiracy** in Modernity would be an arc in Fate Core.
- What is a **moment** in Modernity for a challenge, contest, or conflict is a turn in a Fate conflict. Also, **initiative** is more random.
- A **Momentous Milestone** in Modernity is a Fate major milestone.
- The **Head First** hero creation model is a codification of a free-form character creation style described in Fate Core.
- The purpose of the phases in the **Phase Trio** were tweaked to serve Modernity better.

- **Power levels** are given specific names for comparison purposes in Modernity to support future products.
- The 1-refresh cost baseline for **all stunts** is unique to Modernity to simplify stunt definition, balance comparisons, and calculation of power level.
- The three different **pools of fate points** were given specific names in order to make talking about them simpler.
- I added two new levels at the top and two new levels at the bottom of **The Ladder** largely as semantic sugar.
- **Phone It In** a.k.a. taking zero was specifically named and called out as an option that is described generically in Fate Core.
- The skills list is obviously different in Modernity. See the table below for a cross reference.
- All of the **occult** mechanics are unique to Modernity.
- Everything in **The Toy Box** is a unique extrapolation of the concept of extras in Fate Core.

Skills: Modernity vs. Fate Core	
Athletics Athletics	Hacking —
Awareness Notice	Investigation Investigate
Brawn Physique	Knowledge Lore
Crime Burglary	Lore —
Contacts Contacts	Provocation Provoke
Deception Deceive	Resources Resources
Driving Drive	Sanity —
Empathy Empathy	Shooting Shoot
Engineering Crafting	Stealth Stealth
Finesse Rapport	Survival —
Fighting Fight	Will Will

DETAILED ANALYSIS

In case you're being hunted by something specific.

“Get busy living, or get busy dying.”

Stephen King

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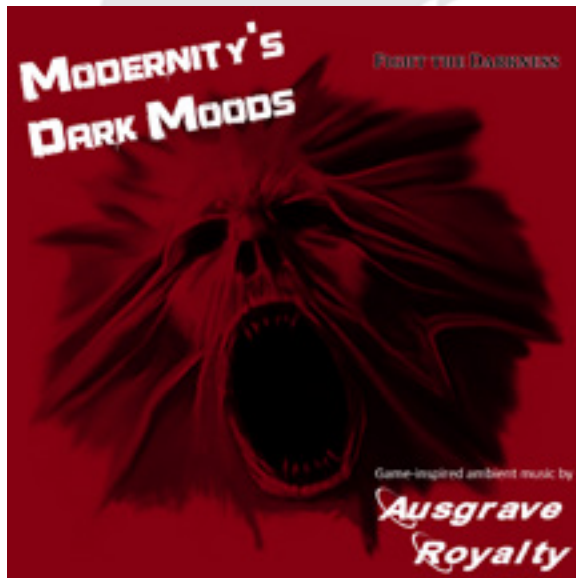


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“Playing fields don’t have to be level,
they just have to have a windmill.”

Unknown



Ambient music inspired by Modernity

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Who are the Guardians? Where did they come from? Why do they do what they do to protect us? [March 2016] <http://x.co/protectsrv>