

**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# **ACTION 2**

# **EXPLOITS™**



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**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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# INTRODUCTION

An action movie is first and foremost a showcase for the heroes' astonishing abilities. There might be calm before the storm, emotional interludes, and slice-of-life moments, but we're holding our breath for the stunts and pyrotechnics – for the *exploits*. Without high-speed car chases, fights of all descriptions, and races against the clock to disarm bombs, hack computers, crack safes, and so on, action movies would seem stupid. Often they *are* stupid, but excitement forgives a lot!

Consequently, *GURPS Action 2: Exploits* cuts to the thrills and ignores inconvenient realities. It's a collection of simple rules for resolving classic action situations without worrying much about minor details like human nature . . . or physics. If it's possible on the silver screen – and especially on the *blue* screen – that's good enough.

Players should be aware that the exploits described here are tailored to heroes created using *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*. While *Exploits* is by no means worthless on its own, it often invokes assumptions and concepts from *Heroes*. Think of it as a sequel! Since a major goal of *Exploits* is to show how to use the PCs' abilities, the important skills, advantages, and even *disadvantages* for each situation appear in **boldface**.

For the GM, *Exploits* is a guide to setting up action scenes to challenge the heroes. Its rules aren't the "official" *GURPS* take on anything except over-the-top action. Feel free to use them in a serious police procedural or a wilderness-of-mirrors spy campaign – but unless your cops can fire two guns while leaping through the air, and your spies can save the world and be back in time for tea, you might find these rules extreme.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every *GURPS* product since. During the *GURPS Third Edition* era, he compiled both *GURPS Compendium* volumes, developed *GURPS Lite*, wrote *GURPS Wizards* and *GURPS Undead*, and edited or revised over 20 other titles. With David Pulver, he produced the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*, in 2004. His latest creations include *GURPS Powers* (with Phil Masters), *GURPS Martial Arts* (with Peter Dell'Orto), and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1-4*. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec, with his wife, Bonnie. They have two cats, Banshee and Zephyra, and a noisy parrot, Circe.

*Every search for a hero must  
begin with something which  
every hero requires – a villain.*

*– Dr. Nekhorvich,  
Mission: Impossible II*

## About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: [info@sjgames.com](mailto:info@sjgames.com). Resources include:

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

# CHAPTER ONE

# CHALLENGES, NOT HEADACHES

Many feats described in *Exploits* use a few simple rules designed to make the game run more smoothly and encourage *teamwork*. Unlike a lot of other rules in *Action*, these ones aren't especially extreme and wouldn't be inappropriate for

other kinds of games. They would probably come in handy in any episodic *GURPS* campaign where heroes foil villains through skillful heroics.

## BASIC ABSTRACT DIFFICULTY

A simple-but-effective way to challenge the heroes is to use skill penalties. Many tasks in the *Basic Set* and *Exploits* recommend a wide variety of penalties to cover less-than-ideal conditions, exceptionally tough opposition, etc. Looking up and assessing these penalties can be *time-consuming*, however. When the team is poised to blow the vault door or raid the villain's mansion, it's boring and frustrating for things to grind to a halt while the GM consults rules and tallies modifiers.

As an alternative to detailed modifiers, the GM can set a single difficulty – the Basic Abstract Difficulty (BAD) – that covers *all* aspects of a particular phase of the adventure. This is simply a penalty from 0 to -10 that replaces detailed situational modifiers. The only other modifiers that apply are those that the PCs bring into the picture: bonuses for equipment, penalties for disadvantages, etc.

*Example:* The heroes are infiltrating a secret base. The GM feels it should be tough, so he assigns a BAD of -5. Rolls to climb walls, pick locks, disarm alarms, and so forth are thus at -5 *instead of* taking detailed modifiers for things like security-system quality and the compound being situated in an icy wasteland. If the squad brings fine equipment that gives +2 to skill, though, then *that* modifier still applies.

The GM can revert to detailed modifiers whenever he wants, such as for important special cases, random occurrences that aren't tied to the adventure, or events that would genuinely benefit from a dramatic pause. The goal of BAD is to estimate an adventure's challenge level and save time when details matter less than flow – not to supplant the GM's judgment.

### How BAD Is It?

The GM can pick whatever BAD “feels right.” When rating how challenging specific opposition is, though, he might opt to *calculate* it as follows: Rate the adversaries' basic point value as an Enemy (p. B135), divide by 4, and drop fractions.

*Example 1:* Early in an adventure, the heroes are tracking down a corrupt detective. An ordinary cop is a -5-point Enemy, for a BAD of -1. Rolls to gather evidence against him, search his home, and so forth are thus at -1, representing his connections and attention to security.

*Example 2:* Later, the team has to take on the rotten cop's entire department! That's a -20-point Enemy, so BAD is -5. This affects rolls to evade security at the station, talk a neutral NPC into helping out, and so on. It represents the fact that there are *lots of cops*, with good gear and significant social clout.

*My god! Do we really suck or  
this guy really that good?*

– Hertz, *Shoot 'Em Up*

### FROM BAD TO WORSE

As the above examples suggest, BAD need not remain fixed for the entire adventure. Part of the action-movie formula is that challenges mount as the plot unfolds: the closer the heroes get to the boss, the worse BAD gets.

The PCs can also worsen BAD without the bad guys' help! *Exploits* offers many rules for avoiding ill-advised violence, hiding corpses and evidence, and so forth. If the heroes ignore these and blast through the adventure, leaving a trail of blood and burning wrecks, then the GM may dial up BAD to reflect the authorities or *the team's own bosses* making their life harder.

However, BAD doesn't *always* get worse. If the crew scores a coup – e.g., steals files containing the names of the corrupt cops and the technical specs for the station's security system – then the next part of the adventure might be *easier*. This is a fitting reward for a clever plan or a timely critical success.

## BAD GUYS

The PCs will often meet their opponents in Quick Contests. Every +1 to their rivals' skill is +1 to the bad guys' margin of success – which has the same effect as giving the heroes -1, just like incrementing BAD by -1. Thus, when the squad faces henchmen (*not* mere mooks) directly, the GM may wish to increase the NPCs' skill *instead of* applying BAD to the heroes' skill.

At the GM's option, henchmen without character sheets have an *effective* skill of 10 + absolute value of BAD: 11 at -1, 12 at -2, and so on. As with all BAD things, this is abstract. Actual

skill, equipment quality, extra time, and anything else that might matter is all rolled into one handy number.

## BAD IDEAS

The GM *shouldn't* use BAD in combat (pp. 36-39) or chases (pp. 31-35). The goal of BAD is to abstract things like enemy planning, security systems, and social connections – not battlefield or road conditions, never mind the PCs' tactical options. It's fine to use BAD to rate a henchman's skills in one of these situations, however.

# COMPLEMENTARY SKILLS

In action stories, there's no such thing as too much talent. Whenever it makes sense, the GM may allow one skill to aid another. The assisting skill is the *complementary skill* while the skill actually needed for the task is the *master skill*.

To encourage teamwork, the person using the complementary skill *doesn't* have to be the one using the master skill, unless splitting up these rolls would make no sense, even in an action story. For instance, an infiltrator using Stealth to sneak through a door might benefit from a face man using Fast-Talk to distract guards. In that example, Fast-Talk would be complementary to Stealth.

To use a complementary skill, simply roll against it. The result gives a modifier to the master skill: +2 for critical

success, +1 for success, -1 for failure, or -2 for critical failure. This modifier is cumulative with others, such as equipment bonuses and BAD.

Unless explicitly noted, though, the complementary skill roll *isn't* subject to BAD. Its purpose is to empower the heroes to offset the bad guys' numbers and teamwork – which BAD abstracts – using their own. Thus, applying BAD twice would rarely be fair!

Many specific tasks in *Exploits* name complementary skills. Players are encouraged to suggest others. If the GM agrees, a master skill might sometimes be able to benefit from *several* complementary skills! A skill can never serve as complementary skill and master skill at the same time, however.

# TEAMWORK!

These next two rules apply to group efforts, when the entire team gets only a single success roll or other attempt at an action.

## GOT YOU COVERED

In a situation where everyone must look out for himself but some heroes lack a vital skill, skilled PCs can sometimes cover for unskilled ones. When making a single roll for the entire team, start with the group's best skill level, add a bonus equal to the number of people who *know* the skill (no defaults!), and subtract a penalty equal to group size. Most uses of **Soldier** work this way, making it possible for a military squad to "carry" a few civilians.

## PULLING YOUR WEIGHT

For things like **Forced Entry**, the GM must first decide how many sets of hands can contribute; e.g., two heroes could probably operate a small ram, while four could carry a stretcher. If combining ST for a ST roll or to cause damage (e.g., with that ram), use the *highest* ST plus 1/5 the total of the other ST scores (round up).



If working together to lift a weight, add together everybody's Basic Lift.

# CHAPTER TWO

# THE BASICS

Certain tasks kick off every action adventure, or come up repeatedly no matter what the crew is doing. Not all of these will apply in every campaign, however. For instance, vigilantes

only rarely bother with *The Job* (below), while only soldiers and SWAT men use *Formations* (p. 00) religiously.

## GETTING THE BALL ROLLING

An action adventure begins with the GM simply *giving* the heroes a motivation to undertake a mission, such as:

- *Orders*. Police or security officers are charged with an investigation or protection duty. Soldiers or spies get a target to strike. Organized criminals are assigned a “job” by their boss. Freelancers are hired.
- *Serendipity*. Lawmen witness a crime. Thieves get wind of something valuable to steal. Anyone might witness a random “interesting” event that draws them in.
- *Wrongs*. Enemies attack or cheat the heroes or their loved ones, making vengeance their primary motive.

This need not have anything to do with the GM’s plot! It might be an excuse to put the PCs in a situation where they can be pulled into the story’s *real* events. Once that happens, though, it’s time to give the players the opportunity to make plans and acquire needed gear for their characters.

### THE JOB

The GM should always have at least one adventure ready. He doesn’t have to expose it immediately, though! The heroes might have to work for it – although a squad with an employer can skip the first two options below and move right to a briefing.

*Finding a Client*: A freelance crew can advertise for work. Each week, *one* PC can use **Propaganda** to shill the team’s services. The GM rolls in secret. Success brings one of the adventures the GM has prepared. For each week without a bite, the GM should withhold \$500 of the usual \$2,000 in pocket money *and* make BAD a step worse on the eventual adventure. Clients who approach desperate men have unpleasant jobs in mind! Critical failure *also* finds a client, but one who doesn’t intend to or can’t afford to pay; the heroes will receive no replacement budget at the start of their next adventure.

*Opportunity Knocks*: Once a week, each PC can try *one* of **Current Affairs** (for want ads and other overtly legitimate opportunities), **Savoir-Faire** (any specialty, for general social contacts of the appropriate variety), or **Streetwise** (for decidedly unsavory offers). The GM rolls in secret. This works much like finding a client, but with an upside and a downside: Failure doesn’t signal desperation, so it doesn’t affect BAD, but critical failure finds a *dangerous* job or client that – in

addition to not paying – will lead the heroes into an ambush or a double-cross.

*Briefing*: Once a full-time squad has its orders, or freelancers find or are approached by a client, it’s time for a briefing. This might be a formal lecture at HQ, dinner with Don Formaggio, or three sentences gasped by a mysterious man dying in the heroes’ arms. This gives the crew their initial target – or at least a trail to follow. If the speaker is holding back information, a successful **Detect Lies** roll will reveal this. See *Social Engineering* (pp. 15-17) for ways to learn *what* isn’t being said and *Gathering Intelligence* (pp. 11-14) for all kinds of ways to spy on the boss.

*Digging*: If the crew settles on a freelance job that wouldn’t logically come with a briefing (no client involved, client vanished or died, etc.), they’ll *have* to use *Gathering Intelligence* (pp. 11-14) and/or *Social Engineering* (pp. 15-17) to get a clear picture of the job.

### ASSEMBLING KIT

Once the team has its initial goal, it’s time to acquire any gear they think they’ll need to achieve it. They might have to repeat this phase several times, whether to get the tools necessary to defeat new challenges or to replace lost items.

Acquiring gear is generally a matter of the team spending its starting or replacement budget as desired, perhaps reserving some for future expenses. However, there are a few special cases. Below, “item” means a single reusable article (rifle, vehicle, etc.) or a set of expendable ones (e.g., bullets or a box of grenades).

*Black Market*: Action plots often turn on the heroes – even legitimate cops and troops – requiring an item so “black” that they must go outside usual channels. The GM should *always* treat military gear this way for criminal or freelance PCs! Roll against the group’s best **Streetwise** skill, or that of an underworld **Contact**. The GM may apply BAD to this roll, or “appropriateness” penalties like those for Assistance Rolls. Any success finds the item, which comes out of the budget at its usual price. Failure is just that, and repeated attempts are impossible; the local market doesn’t *have* the goods. Critical failure means criminal PCs are ambushed by other crooks or the police, while legitimate operators face Rank loss or even dismissal.

*Gadgeteering:* A wire rat with **Quick Gadgeteer** can improve one electronic gadget worth up to \$200 by making a successful roll against the relevant **Electronics Repair** specialty. He can assemble more gear *during* the adventure, given time and parts, but this initial roll is a freebie. Any failure simply means he gets nothing.

*Requisitions:* Teams that work for agencies can try Assistance Rolls for gear, files, or even cash *before* the adventure starts in earnest. This is most likely to succeed with high **Rank**, **Smooth Operator**, and/or a complementary **Administration** roll. Remember that each attempt gives a cumulative -1 AR penalty *on* the adventure!

*Scrounging:* Each PC may try one **Scrounging** roll *per* adventure. Success means he finds one item of standard gear worth up to \$200 without depleting the budget. Critical success (*ordinary* success, with **Serendipity**) yields a more valuable item of the GM's choice – possibly even a cheap vehicle! Simply ignore failures, even critical ones.

## TARGETS AND LOCATIONS

Once the group has a job and is outfitted for it – and again whenever they deal with an intermediate phase of the adventure and discover that there's more to it than they thought – they'll need to decide who, what, and/or where their objective is.

If the squad received a detailed briefing, or was hired by someone with a specific plan in mind, that decision is already made. All they have to do is board the helicopter, start casing the bank, visit the location marked on the map, shoot the first victim on their list, or whatever.

However, a crew that received only a vague briefing or no briefing at all will need to take a stab at where to start. In movies, this often involves a montage during which the heroes pore over maps, make phone calls, and so on, followed by a brainstorming session to share ideas. Take note:

*If the adventure has a time limit, this is when the clock starts ticking!*

Each day, the squad makes a *single* roll at 8 or less to represent the day's efforts. If the enemy is working against them

even at this stage, apply BAD. However, each hero can attempt a complementary skill roll against *one* of the following for that day:

- **Area Knowledge**, if knowing *where* to look matters and the team has reason to suspect a general target area.
  - **Computer Operation** to find something online. Especially in recent movies, it's almost as if any target of interest will have a website!
  - **Current Affairs** to check the news.
  - **Research** to dig in records or books.
  - **Savoir-Faire** or **Streetwise** to “make a few phone calls.”
- Cinematic heroes *always* seem to have a few friends who can help.

Where a skill *might* be applicable, the decision is the GM's. The GM may also permit other skills – the goal is to involve the whole crew! Apply complementary skill modifiers for *everybody's* contribution and then make the daily roll.

Success suggests a valid starting location. Critical success turns up something a little closer to the adventure's final goal than the GM originally planned; if he had a series of challenges prepared, perhaps the heroes get to skip the first one.

Ordinary failure has no special downside other than advancing the calendar by a day – although if the group's goal is something like stopping terrorist bombers, rescuing a kidnapped child, or stealing a painting before the Renoir exhibit leaves town, even that could be costly! Critical failure means that trouble finds the heroes; e.g., police discover that they're planning a heist, or rival agents locate *them*. If the GM feels generous, dealing with this trouble might point the squad to their starting target, or at least leave behind someone to interrogate.

## TRAVEL

If the initial clues – or the briefing – point the team to a location that isn't where they are, and the squad's employer or client doesn't simply drop them off there, then *getting* to the first interesting location can be part of the heroes' adventures.

## Bullets, Beans, and Batteries

The GM decides whether action heroes must worry about ammo, batteries, and so forth. Movies use these things as dramatic devices. They never run out until the plot calls for it . . . and then even the best-prepared commando can do nothing to prevent it.

As a compromise, tally the cost of *five* full reloads – including speedloader or magazine cost, where applicable – for all of the team's guns. Subtract this from the squad's budget at the start of the adventure. Likewise, add the weight of five reloads to each hero's encumbrance. Then *ignore* detailed ammo tracking until one of the following happens:

- The squad is cut off, whether by cops surrounding the bank they're robbing or enemy soldiers surrounding them

in the jungle. At that point, everybody has five reloads left, and has to count bullets.

- A PC objects to the encumbrance and decides to ditch some ammo. From that point on, *he* has just the 0-4 reloads that he didn't drop.
- A PC is captured. He then has no ammo *or* weapons!

This never applies to explosives – rockets, grenades, sticks of dynamite, etc. – which should *always* be tracked.

For batteries, use the rules in **Action 1: Heroes**. Power lasts for a day. After that, every \$3 and 1 lb. of spare cells carried per team member gives one extra day of power. After *that*, nothing that requires power will work, except for basics such as digital watches.

*At the Wheel:* If the PCs control their own vehicle, the GM should assess whatever travel time he deems fair – and note that it's *unfair* not to leave the heroes sufficient time to complete their adventure, unless “showing up too late” is part of the story. The driver must roll against **Driving, Boating, Piloting, Submarine**, etc., as applicable. Optionally, one squad member can try to assist by making a complementary skill roll against a suitable **Area Knowledge** skill (for shortcuts), and he or someone else can also try a complementary roll against the relevant **Navigation** specialty (to plot an efficient route). Then the driver rolls. Every point of success on his roll knocks 5% off travel time, to a minimum of 50%; every point of failure adds 5%, with no upper limit.

*Back-Seat Drivers:* Travel aboard a vehicle controlled by an NPC works as above, except that a random NPC typically has skill 1d+9 (10-15). The PCs may be able to make complementary **Area Knowledge** and/or **Navigation** rolls to help. Aboard a large ship or sub, the team can opt to try a complementary **Seamanship** or **Submariner** roll instead – but this is subject to *Got You Covered* (p. 5), so it's wise only if *everybody* knows the ropes!

*Commercial Travel:* The heroes can do little to influence commercial air, bus, rail, or ship travel. The cost must come out of their budget if their boss or client isn't paying and the crew can't make the necessary Assistance Roll. The GM should spice up *long* trips with events aboard the vehicle (e.g., snakes on a plane).

*Hoofing It:* Military action movies make a big deal out of hiking, so when the squad actually has to *walk* where it's going, it's worth the trouble to set a distance in miles and work out travel time from the heroes' speed. Assume that speed in miles per hour is the group's *lowest* Move/2, adjusted as usual for terrain, weather, and roads (see p. B351). However, an inspiring leader can set the pace, carry his pals' gear, and harangue them about their socks. Make just one **Hiking** roll for the team, modified according to *Got You Covered* (p. 5). Success adds a flat 20% to hiking speed.

*Fragile:* Whenever the group travels with or ships *delicate* gear – notably electronics – roll against the team's best **Freight Handling** skill for the packing job. Failure means a broken item; critical failure means disaster befalls *all* the gear of one teammate. Roll randomly for both. Those who don't trust their partners can roll separately for their kit.

*Anything to Declare, Sir?* When the group travels with or ships *illegal* gear – mainly weapons – and there's a chance of inspection, roll as for fragile gear, but against **Smuggling**. Here, *any* failure means an encounter with unfriendly authorities. The PCs can make an Assistance Roll for bailout, attempt bribery (p. 15), or even fight or sneak away. However, in any situation but a critical success on an AR or a bribery roll, the gear is confiscated even if its owner walks. Spies can often requisition gear on arrival, but not all action heroes are spies.

## SQUAD SOP

When the crew finally arrives at the adventure's first “interesting” location, *tactical* concerns – such as who carries what, while partnered with whom – become important. Dealing with such matters is the focus of *most* of **Exploits**, but certain situations arise often enough that the players should decide in advance how the team tackles them.

*The SOP Rule:* If the players want to change any of the things discussed here – what communicators or lights they're using, who's on point, their degree of stealth, etc. – they *must* tell the GM! Otherwise, they're following whatever procedure they used last time. However, the kind GM may permit a group **Soldier** or **Tactics** roll, subject to *Got You Covered* (p. 5), and on a success let the players change plans retroactively because their *characters* would have known what to do.

## COMMUNICATIONS

No matter how fast and loose the GM plays with other gear, the players *must* declare what communicators they're carrying, if only so the GM knows who can contact whom, and whether the bad guys can eavesdrop.

*Like Attracts Like:* Normally, only like systems can communicate – phones (cell, land, or satellite) with other phones, radios with other radios, etc. – unless the group makes an Assistance Roll to set up a “patch” between systems (usually trivial – roll at +5). A wire rat can use **Quick Gadgeteer** to patch in the field; this requires a successful **Electronics Operation (Communications)** roll.

*Static:* If there's *any* doubt as to whether a message gets out – thanks to enemy action, sunspots, etc. – the player of the person sending the message should write down what he wants to say and hand the note to the GM, who will then secretly roll against the sender's **Electronics Operation (Communications)** skill. Success means the GM passes along the message. Failure means he says nothing. Critical failure means a dangerously garbled message. If bad guys are actively interfering using high-tech gear, apply BAD; ordinary failure gives them valuable information, while critical failure lets them introduce a *false* message!

*Please set phones to vibrate.*

*Tactical Networks:* If everybody is using a real-time communicator to stay in touch, and there's reason to suspect difficulty, roll as above but for the whole group, subject to *Got You Covered* (p. 5). Once the network “goes down” (any failure), it's traditional in the movies for it to *stay* down.

*Please Set Phones to “Vibrate”:* A common disaster in modern moves is the ringing cell phone or crackling radio that betrays the hero's presence. If any roll above critically fails, the GM may have the message not get through, as for a normal failure, *and* decide that the victim accidentally flipped a switch, unplugged his headset, etc. When he next tries **Camouflage, Shadowing**, or **Stealth**, an unwanted, unexpected call *automatically* gives him away!



## The Cell Phone Problem

One problem facing the GM of a TL8 action campaign is cheap, reliable, high-tech communicators – notably mobile phones. Plots that rely on isolation simply *fail* when the heroes can summon help or share clues by pushing a button. With clever planning, though, it's possible to work around this without straining willing suspension of disbelief.

*"Track His Cell!"* Cell phones are easily tracked; see *Bugs, Beacons, and Wires* (pp. 12-13). Against high-tech bad guys, carrying one is a serious liability. Letting the players know this can often solve the problem!

*Blackout:* No communicator works well through thick walls. Road tunnels and basements block ordinary cell phones. More than a thin layer of metal stops *any* radio –

as does a deliberately shielded room. Heavy electrical equipment can effectively *jam* communications.

*But Will It Blend?* Communicators are *fragile*. Dropping, soaking, or bashing one will do it in. And the GM can always let the player decide whether it's his PC or his PC's cell phone that stops an enemy bullet . . .

*The System Is Down:* Cell phones don't work without a network – in extremely poor countries, 1,000 miles from civilization, etc. Even in areas with coverage, a traveler's phone may be of the wrong type. Neither affects satellite phones, but cellular and satellite service alike can experience "accounting errors," especially if enemy hackers are at work!

*Dropping a Dime:* A hero might be without a phone or a radio for many reasons: dead battery, escaping prison, and so on. Finding a working payphone in the city is automatic when time doesn't matter – but in a hurry, make an **Urban Survival** roll once per minute of frantic searching until you succeed. A use of **Serendipity** always turns up a phone (or some sap whose phone you can commandeer), and can even put you next to a payphone just as someone tries to call *you!*

## FORMATIONS

The players should agree on formations for operations on foot: single-file through a door, a loose line in the jungle, and so on. Even a crew that operates entirely in built-up areas may do this, possibly specifying that certain team members are across the street, a block ahead, etc. In all cases, note who's in front ("on point"), which is likely to change depending on whether the squad is sneaking (where an assassin or an infiltrator is best) or kicking in doors (a job for a shooter!).

Similar guidelines apply when traveling in vehicles. Indicate who's in what vehicle, and seated where. If there's more than one vehicle, decide on a standard convoy order.

When it becomes important to know who can speak to whom, who can see by what light sources, whose weapons cover what arcs of fire, who's in front when trouble hits, and so on, the GM will use the current order.

## LIGHT

When moving at night, the squad will be blind unless they bring night-vision gear or light sources. Each player should specify his PC's usual light. Tactical lights on guns are hands-free and almost ubiquitous among action heroes. Other options force the wielder to operate one-handed.

Any light *eliminates* darkness penalties to combat and vision for anyone who can see what's in its radius or beam. With a directional beam, the light's wielder decides where the beam points. Some stats for common lights:

*Match or Lighter:* 1-yard radius.\*

*Glow Stick:* 2-yard radius.

*Hand Flare or Electric Lantern:* 5-yard radius.

*Mini Flashlight:* 5-yard beam 1 yard wide.

*Heavy Flashlight:* 10-yard beam 1 yard wide.

*Small Tactical Light:* 25-yard beam 1 yard wide.

*Large Tactical Light:* 100-yard beam 1 yard wide.

\* Blows out if the carrier attempts any DX-based roll (athletics, attack, defense, etc.), unless he can make a DX-4 roll. Relighting a lighter takes a second; a new match takes two seconds.

A backlit digital display – common on cell phones and GPS units – will light a 1 yard × 1 yard area in front of the user well enough to see at -3.

## SUBTLETY

Except in the craziest movies, action heroes don't scream and brandish guns *all* the time. Gangsters lurk in alleys, commandos stalk through undergrowth, detectives and spies keep their pistols under jackets, and so forth.

The GM should ask each player to describe his PC's "stealth mode," and note the relevant skills and equipment modifiers. This will prevent arguments like whether the shooter had his machine gun under a trench coat!

When the shoe is on the other foot and the bad guys are being sneaky, simply use the **boldface** skills for the opposition and have the *heroes* make the indicated detection rolls.

*Basic Stealth:* When moving through wilderness, deserted factories, secret bases, and so on, roll against **Stealth** to be sneaky. A successful uncontested roll is all that's needed not to stand out to casual observers. If there are sentries, however, you must *win* a Quick Contest against their Hearing if you're behind something (climbing shoes give you +1), the *better* of Hearing or Vision if you're merely in the shadows, or Electronics Operation (Sensors) if they're using radar or the like. You *can't* sneak with a light source . . . which is why cinematic assassins and infiltrators favor night-vision gear.

*Camouflage:* Staying put behind something is an effective form of stealth, but there must be *some* concealment in the area. If there is, anybody looking for you must *win* a Quick Contest of Vision or Observation skill vs. your **Camouflage** skill – and you get +1 to +3 for clothing with the camouflage feature, provided it matches the setting. For hidden gear, roll a similar Contest using the **Camouflage** skill of whoever deployed the camouflage.

## Go-To Skills

When *action* is all that matters and the GM doesn't want to consult even the quick rules in *Exploits*, "When in doubt, roll and shout" is excellent advice (see p. B497). The players paid points for their PCs' skills, though, so it's fairest if the roll uses a skill. Some suggestions:

**Criminology:** The generic police skill. On a success, the GM might give a "free" clue, point out suspicious behavior, or otherwise do whatever it takes to get a stalled cops-and-robbers story moving.

**Observation:** The broad "notice stuff" skill. If the PCs are keeping an eye out for trouble, it's safe to assume that Observation will spot suspicious behavior and sneaking bad guys.

**Search:** The basic "look for stuff" skill. Use it whenever the players want to know if they find anything on a body or in a car, a room, or even an entire building.

**Soldier:** The general military skill. Reduce all boring tasks – like filling sandbags – to a Soldier roll. Also use it for routine patrols (apply *Got You Covered*, p. 5), with failure meaning a skirmish and critical failure meaning an *ambush*.

**Streetwise:** The consummate criminal skill. Success can take care of "gangster stuff" like finding fellow crooks, realizing that a gang war is about to break out, and making a bribe. *Failure* is a good excuse for a random chase or fight!

**Urban Survival:** The ultimate urban skill. Use it to locate Dumpsters for stashing corpses and scoring computer manuals; to find manholes, hydrants, payphones, etc.; and to know what areas are too rickety for walking or driving.

*Concealed Carry:* Roll just *once* against **Holdout** for all gear, at the modifier for the bulkiest item plus another -1 per item with a Holdout penalty (even -1) you try to hide at the same time. For guns, use Bulk, modified for holster type and quality; for body armor, use DR if rigid or DR/3 (round up) if flexible; and for other gear, use the listed modifier. Apply the +1 or +2 for undercover clothing, and/or +4 for a long coat, at the very end. This roll becomes a Quick Contest against Search for an

enemy actively looking for weapons, and you must *win* not to arouse suspicions.

*Man in the Crowd:* In a crowded urban situation – such as at a nightclub or on a city street – it's possible to hide in the multitude. Simply make a successful **Shadowing** roll not to stand out. If security personnel are watching the crowd, though, you must *win* a Quick Contest against them, and they may use the *better* of Vision, Observation, or *Per*-based Streetwise. Treat reaction bonuses for styled clothing as a *penalty* to your roll!

*Search the Trunk!* When driving around with suspicious items in a vehicle, roll once against **Smuggling** for everything, at a bonus equal to vehicle SM and with only *half* the usual Bulk or Holdout penalty, dropping fractions, for the bulkiest item. Thus, it's fairly easy to stash even a heavy sniper rifle (Bulk -7, halved to -3) in a car (SM +3). Treat this as a Quick Contest vs. Search if security personnel are actively checking vehicles – and then you must *win*.

*Silent Communication:* **Gesture** can stealthily communicate a *simple* concept – "two guards," "move in," etc. The player writes down his intended meaning, the GM rolls in secret, and success means the GM tells everyone the message. Failure, or an attempt to relate anything complex (e.g., "Ishida-san is here with six ninja"), means the GM says nothing. Critical failure means *he lies*. Communicators with headsets are also stealthy; see *Communications* (pp. 8-9) for rules.

*Tailing:* To follow someone, you must *win* a Quick Contest of **Shadowing** vs. Vision (or Observation, if higher). A tie or a loss by 5 or less means you lose him. A worse loss means you're seen – which often results in a chase (pp. 31-35)! Also use these rules when tailing someone in a vehicle, but your roll is against the *lower* of **Driving** or **Shadowing**, and you're at -2 if your quarry is on foot (he can duck into crowds and doorways – you can't!).

## STAYING ALERT

Counting heads, spotting obvious dangers like barbed-wire fences, and so on requires no special roll. For *interesting* details – e.g., the enemy has a machine gun or the fence is electrified – the GM rolls once against the crew's *best* **Observation** skill to see whether they notice. This becomes a Quick Contest vs. Stealth or Camouflage for hidden sentries; see *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10). *Security Systems* (pp. 21-22) and *Traps* (pp. 22-23) describe other important detection rules.



# CHAPTER THREE

# TRICKS OF THE TRADE

General procedure only goes so far. Each target or location that's important to the story should offer opportunities for different team members to show off their tradecraft. This section is organized so that it *roughly* follows the “four As” of the typical action plot:

1. *Assess*: Most groups start by gathering information (*Gathering Intelligence*, pp. 11-14) and asking questions (*Social Engineering*, pp. 15-17) about their next objective.
2. *Analyze*: The team uses the information gathered in the previous step to formulate a plan (*Planning*, p. 17).
3. *Act*: The squad puts the plan into action. This often involves raiding a secure area (*Getting In*, p. 18-23), taking

something (*Grabbing the Goods*, pp. 23-24), and/or destroying something (*Destruction*, pp. 24-25) – or preventing such outcomes (*Providing Security*, pp. 27-30).

4. *Avoid*: Covert operators hide the evidence (*Deception*, pp. 26-29) and leave the scene (*Getting Away*, p. 27) afterward.

These steps may occur in any order, though. Deception (4) is often critical to making a raid (3) or an interview (1) work. Gathering intelligence (1) usually requires a plan (2) based on earlier intelligence – and possibly a break-in (3) to grab secret files before making the *next* plan for the *next* action. And so on.

Complications arising at any stage can and probably *should* lead to *Ultra-Violence* (pp. 31-39).

## GATHERING INTELLIGENCE

The GM should create a list of critical facts or clues for each plot development, with notes on means by which the PCs can discover them. Any success roll that depends on that information – e.g., an **Interrogation** roll to confront a mook with enough proof that he cracks and reveals the next plot development, or an Assistance Roll to convince the Company to authorize armed intervention – might suffer an *overwhelming* penalty: BAD, double BAD, or worse. Each success at the fact-finding activities below or under *Social Engineering* (pp. 15-17) serves as a complementary skill roll whose bonus erodes the penalty. The heroes can *always* skip steps, but without enough particulars, it won't be easy to take things to the next level!

The GM should make most intelligence-gathering rolls in secret. He might decide that critical success – or even ordinary success, on a daring task – advances the plot *immediately*. On the other hand, critical failures traditionally mean *detection*: Bad guys attack or chase the heroes if they're present, or get a free chance to pass along disinformation to or glean valuable clues about snoops who are operating remotely.

For tips on roleplaying intelligence gathering, see *How to Game Fact-Finding* (p. 17).

### PHYSICAL SEARCHES

Searching for physical clues is the kind of hands-on information gathering that action heroes enjoy! Cops look for evidence, crooks toss apartments, security officers tear apart terrorist hideouts, soldiers search captured positions, and spies get into everything.

The GM decides what, if any, physical intelligence is in each area. If there are clues and the players are about to miss them, the GM should make a secret IQ roll for anyone with **Intuition**. Success gives the feeling that there's something important here – but *not* what it is!

*Your powers of observation  
continue to serve you well.*

*– V, V for Vendetta*

If the players decide to search an area, they must state what skills their PCs are using (see below for suggestions). The GM then rolls *secretly*. Those with **Serendipity** can opt to use it here; this will reveal one clue at random *if there are any*, but the use is “spent” regardless.

When examining abandoned facilities, corpses, lab samples, etc., there's little risk of interference; failure means a missed clue, while critical failure means a false lead. If the heroes used *Getting In* (pp. 18-23) to make a *covert* search, though, the GM may read critical failure as bad guys showing up, triggering a chase or combat!

*Corpses*: To determine any cause of death unobvious enough to rate as a clue, the roll is against **Diagnosis**, with **Surgery** as a complementary skill.

*Deduction:* At a crime scene, a success on **Criminology** will deduce enough about what the crooks were doing to reveal a clue; critical success might hint at the criminals' organization or identity. In a military or espionage situation, **Intelligence Analysis** can work the same way.

*Evidence Collection:* Collecting hair, prints, etc., requires an evidence collection kit and a **Forensics** roll. Failure means an important sample is missed. Critical failure means something contaminates the samples, which may give a false clue.

*Lab Forensics:* Analyzing collected samples for clues requires a forensics lab and a second **Forensics** roll. Any success finds both real clues present in good samples and false clues lurking in bad ones – but only a *critical* success distinguishes between them. Failure misses all clues. Critical failure reveals a false clue caused by contamination at the lab as well as any bad clues resulting from careless collection, but never real clues!

*Hardware:* If the investigators' quarry left behind explosives or weapons, a success against **Expert Skill (Military Science)** will deduce the intended use *if* that's something unusual like "attack an armored vehicle here downtown" and not just "hurt people." It can also deduce where military-grade hardware came from ("The Iraqis are arming these guys.").

*Hidden Items:* Finding something that has been deliberately concealed in a room or a vehicle, or on a corpse, requires a **Search** roll. Where the Holdout or Smuggling skill of the person who hid it is known, the searcher must *win* a Quick Contest against that skill; otherwise, just apply BAD to an uncontested roll.

*Trails:* A successful **Tracking** roll can discover how many people were present and where someone who left the area went, either of which *might* qualify as important.

## AUDIO SURVEILLANCE

Spying on conversations is a classic investigative tool. You don't need bugs (p. 13) or intercepts (p. 14) for this, although other technologies can be helpful. It's useful to bring along an audio recorder to capture the exchange. This can use its internal mike or any of the special mikes below.

*Listening:* Successful use of **Camouflage, Shadowing, or Stealth** (see *Subtlety*, pp. 9-10) will get you within 4 yards – close enough to try a **Hearing** roll at -2. Add -1 per doubling of distance past that. A shotgun mike divides effective distance by 8, which is especially useful because your target's Sense rolls in Quick Contests to notice you will suffer range penalties (p. B550).

*Contact Mike:* This item from the wire rat kit works from the far side of a door, wall, or window. To listen in, make an **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll at a penalty equal to barrier (DR + HP)/5, rounded down. Critical failure *breaks* the mike but doesn't give you away.

*Laser Mike:* If your target is behind a window, you can use this tool to listen in from up to 900 yards off. A successful **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll picks up the conversation. Failure means your angle is wrong and you can't listen in. Critical failure means you or the laser beam is *seen* – although if you're half a mile away, you'll at least have a head start.

*Pinhead Mike:* This widget from the wire rat kit demands a DX-based **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll to snake under doors and through ducts. Failure means it's stuck and lost; critical failure means it's detected.

*Spike Mike:* Another tool from the wire rat kit, this calls for a DX-based **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll to push *through* a wall. Failure breaks it; critical failure means detection.

*Stethoscope:* This common doctor's tool works identically to a contact mike (above), except that critical failure means your subject hears you scratching around!

## VISUAL SURVEILLANCE

You don't need a video bug (p. 13) to watch people, but high-tech gear helps.

*Watching:* Success at **Camouflage, Shadowing, or Stealth** (see *Subtlety*, pp. 9-10) lets you watch someone unnoticed. Make a **Vision** roll at standard range penalties (p. B550), but with +2 per level of Telescopic Vision of your optics; e.g., you have -10 to spy on people from 100 yards, but a spotting scope (Telescopic Vision 5) would cancel this. Your target has the same range penalty on rolls in the Quick Contest to notice *you* – but he, too, can use optics!

*Photography:* Using a digital camera or a camcorder for surveillance works just like watching, above. The roll is against **Vision**, as usual, if you're using the viewfinder as a scope, but against **Photography** if you want clear images for evidence or alteration. In either case, only the *camera's* Telescopic Vision matters. When taking pictures, roll once for the whole session, with any failure meaning inconclusive imagery and critical failure meaning someone spots you.

*Endoscope:* A surveillance endoscope lets you see under doors, through tiny holes in walls, etc. Make a successful DX-based **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll to do this. Failure means the scope gets stuck and broken; critical failure means it's detected.

*What Can I See?* When the heroes watch from afar or examine video, the GM should roll secretly against their highest **Observation** skill to decide whether they spotted useful clues. This includes things like seeing the boss enter his code sequence on a keypad lock. To "read" people – e.g., to deduce who the boss is or spot the unhappy mook who might be bribable – the roll is against **Body Language**. And within 7 yards, doubled per level of Telescopic Vision that optics provide, **Lip Reading** is possible to learn what's being said (e.g., passwords). Apply BAD to *all* such rolls: Good-quality mooks and henchmen shield keypads, don't salute incognito officers, huddle when speaking, etc.

## BUGS, BEACONS, AND WIRES

Planting *any* bug or beacon from the wire rat kit demands an **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll. The GM rolls secretly. Failure means it doesn't work; critical failure means it will be *found* and possibly used to deliver disinformation. Once the gizmo is in place, it transmits to its listed range without the wire rat needing to stick around and risk being seen.

*Concealing Bugs:* A device's small size is usually enough to evade detection, but you can always declare that you're hiding it. When those who might notice the gadget look for it, they must *win* a Quick Contest vs. your **Camouflage** skill if you hid it outdoors, **Smuggling** if you stashed it in a room or a vehicle, or **Holdout** if it's a "wire" carried by a person.

*Audio Bug:* This gizmo captures conversations as if your ear were at its location; use the rules for listening under *Audio Surveillance* (p. 12). The wire rat kit's transceiver receives the signal, which can be sent to an audio recorder or a computer for recording.

*Conventional Mike:* Any electronic microphone can be left in place and made to work like an audio bug by attaching a generic transmitter from the wire rat kit. Setting this up correctly requires a separate **Electronics Operation (Communications)** roll. Any failure means there's no signal.

*Keyboard Bug:* This captures computer input (e.g., passwords). It uses the computer's phone or Internet connection to transmit information to the spy's computer. Setting up the receiving computer calls for a **Computer Operation** roll, with any failure meaning no data is saved.

*Video Bug:* This miniature camera functions as a remote eyeball at its location; use the rules for watching under *Visual Surveillance* (p. 12). The wire rat kit's transceiver receives the

signal, which is usually recorded using a computer or a video recorder:

*Conventional Camera:* Any digital camera can be left in place and turned into a video bug by attaching a generic transmitter from the wire rat kit. This calls for an **Electronics Operation (Communications)** roll to set up properly, with failure meaning no feed.

*Tracking Beacon:* If using the audiovisual transceiver alone, you *must* drive around and make another **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll to triangulate the beacon's location. Most wire rats plug in a computer, which lets them visually track the target via GPS on a successful **Computer Operation** roll – all without leaving home.

*Cell Phone Beacon:* A wire rat with a cellular monitoring system can track a specific cell phone as if it were a GPS tracking beacon; this requires an **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll. Successfully hacking the phone company (see *Hacking*, below) makes this possible without monitoring gear!

## High-Tech Challenges

A realistic treatment of *technological* skullduggery would fill chapters and bore gamers who aren't playing hackers or wire rats. These guidelines are designed to make such exploits work like in the movies: fast, risky, and unrealistic.

### Hacking

To hack a computer system, the hacker needs a line in. In thrillers, systems are often conveniently online, allowing the hacker to use his Internet connection of choice. Top-secret systems are isolated, requiring a break-in (see *Getting In*, pp. 18-23) to either access the console or rig a link with an **Electronics Operation (Communications)** roll.

Hacking is a Quick Contest of skills: the hacker's **Computer Hacking** against the Expert Skill (Computer Security) of the target system's administrator. That individual typically has skill equal to 10 + absolute value of BAD. Meanwhile, the hacker suffers BAD as a penalty. Thus, a BAD of even -4 means even odds for a skill-18 hacker (14 vs. 14), while BAD -10 is almost insurmountable (8 vs. 20).

Fortunately, the hacker can claim numerous bonuses – all cumulative. Add his computer's Complexity: +3 for a typical system, but up to +8 if he makes an Assistance Roll to gain access to a supercomputer. Treat successes at planting keyboard bugs (above) or engaging in computer monitoring (p. 14), *Dumpster-Diving* (p. 14), and/or *Social Engineering* (pp. 15-17) as complementary skill rolls to weasel manuals and passwords. And both **Computer Programming** and **Expert Skill (Computer Security)** act as complementary skills if the hacker writes his own code.

Each attempt takes an hour; apply *Time Spent* (p. B346) penalties if working faster. The hacker must *win* to access the system. Loss by 5 or less permits repeated attempts at a cumulative -1. Greater loss means detection, bringing whatever consequences the plot requires: disinformation, virus, ninja . . .

Once "inside" a system, the hacker can use **Computer Operation** to steal or alter data (like identity databases), **Electronics Operation (Communications)** to spy on communications the system manages, **Electronics Operation (Security)** to neutralize computerized security, **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** to hijack computer-controlled cameras, etc.

### Code-Cracking

Action heroes frequently can't read a computer file or decipher a broadcast without cracking encryption. In real life, this is *slow* if not functionally impossible without a "key" (computer file, disk, microchip, etc.). This has led to two types of ciphers in movies:

*Breakable:* Typical of everyday computers and telephones. The code-cracker requires a computer and a day, and must roll against **Cryptography**. Ordinary computers aren't up to the challenge – roll at -2 per Complexity level below 5 (an Assistance Roll for facilities bypasses this). The hacker can work faster, taking *Time Spent* (p. B346) penalties.

*Unbreakable:* Plot devices, like top-secret government systems. To deal with these, suborn a key-holder using *Social Engineering* (pp. 15-17), or pilfer the key by *Getting In* (pp. 18-23) and *Grabbing the Goods* (pp. 23-24). *Hacking* (above) is an option for a digital key.

### Repurposing

Modifying gadgetry requires **Quick Gadgeteer** and follows the rules in *Action 1: Heroes*. Captured technology with security measures is subject to BAD. The +2 for a full-sized shop or the +4 for facilities available on an Assistance Roll can help a lot!

## INTERCEPTS

An *intercept* differs from a bug (pp. 12-13) in that nothing is planted in the surveillance area. The spy captures signals using a remote receiver or by splicing into a nearby phone line. To gain access to utility lines or loiter in an area without arousing suspicions, either be sneaky (*Subtlety*, pp. 9-10) or look like you belong there (*Impersonation*, p. 27). If you're several blocks away, anyone on the lookout will have standard range penalties (p. B550) in Quick Contests to spot you.

**Cellular Monitoring:** Intercepting cell-phone traffic requires a cellular monitoring system and a successful **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll. Failure costs 1d minutes but allows repeated attempts. Critical failure means the target hears something that draws attention to the intercept! There's no fixed range; being on the same cellular network is good enough.

**Computer Monitoring:** Indirectly reading a computer display in real time calls for a computer monitoring system and a successful **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll. Failure wastes 1d minutes. Critical failure reads the *wrong* machine – conceivably one hundreds of yards away! Thus, the GM always rolls in secret. Effective range is 100 yards in built-up areas, but 300+ yards in open areas (-1 per 100 yards past *that*).

**Radio Intercept:** Eavesdropping on ordinary radio signals requires a backpack-sized or larger radio and a successful **Electronics Operation (Communications)** roll. Failure uses the same rules as cellular monitoring. Range is that of your set (35 miles or more).

**Wiretap:** This requires a wire rat kit, access to exterior or building phone lines (or the phone company's central office), and an **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** roll. Failure uses the same rules as cellular monitoring. Range is irrelevant!

**Encryption:** Encryption doesn't affect intercepts but prevents real-time *deciphering*. Unless you find, build, or steal a matched receiver, you must record the signal and use *Code-Cracking* (p. 13).

## DUMPSTER-DIVING

Every hacker (and street person) knows that people discard the most amazing things. After locating a likely surveillance target (see *Targets and Locations*, p. 7), roll against **Urban Survival** to learn where its denizens pile their garbage, unless that's obvious. Use *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10) to avoid being seen and *Getting In* (pp. 18-23) to deal with fences, etc.

The GM then secretly rolls against the searcher's **Scrounging** skill, applying BAD to reflect the fact that challenging opponents often shred and burn discarded records. This generally serves as a complementary skill roll for a task like *Hacking* (p. 13); successes find useful intelligence (+1 or +2), while failures find confusingly incomplete info (-1 or -2). The

GM may also opt to describe specific items found on successes (e.g., someone's photo) or assess nasty consequence for failures (e.g., big rats or broken glass do 1 point of injury to a hand).

## FILES AND RECORDS

Formal records often hold the best information. You'll need legitimate access, a sneak peek via *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10) or *Social Engineering* (pp. 15-17), or a copy stolen through *Hacking* (p. 13) or *Grabbing the Goods* (pp. 23-24). Then roll as indicated.

**Research:** Searching blueprints, databases, files, maps, and so forth calls for 1d hours and a **Research** roll. This is subject to BAD when researching a secretive individual or group. Quality modifiers also apply. Ordinary public or online libraries and databases give no modifier. Large university and government archives, and big government and corporate databases, give +1. Make this +2 for famous libraries like the Bodleian or the New York Public, or +3 for the Library of Congress – secrets are often hidden there in the movies, so it *must* be true! Top secret NSA files and the like either give +4 or cancel BAD, whichever is better. As part of a plot, the GM may rule that a massive collection is poorly catalogued, which multiplies the time required by a factor found by looking up the quality bonus under *Time Spent* (p. B346); e.g., +2 means four times as long, or 4d hours.

**Forensic Accounting:** Take 3d hours and make an **Accounting** roll to audit ledgers, financial records, etc. Anything disclosed to the public is subject to BAD (rival actuaries can cook the books). Stolen *private* info isn't – BAD already affected the roll to grab it – but may be encrypted. If the adventure's objective is to obtain such information to prove a crime, success may convince the brass to authorize a raid or other action immediately.

**The Obvious:** A few bad guys are dumb enough to advertise. If so, a basic **Computer Operation** roll for websites or a **Current Affairs** roll for daily news will suffice – and BAD *doesn't* apply, because the whole point is that the enemy is incompetent! This takes 1d minutes.

**Quick Searches:** When locating a bomb, working from files that must be returned in a hurry, etc., the above times are too slow. Haste is possible using the penalties under *Time Spent* (p. B346), and it's often helpful to attempt a roll against **Cartography** for maps or blueprints, **Computer Operation** for hypertext or databases, or **Speed-Reading** for text or numbers. Halve the margin of success or failure, drop fractions, and add it to the haste penalty on your information-gathering roll. This can't give a net bonus. When skimming like this, critical success and success on the information-gathering roll work as usual, but the GM will treat any failure as a critical failure – and critical failures, as disasters ("You spill your latté into the computer.")

*My lawyers are going to have a field day with this. Entrapment, jurisdictional conflict . . .*

– Max, *Mission: Impossible* (1996)

# SOCIAL ENGINEERING

These tasks often work as complementary skill rolls that whittle away at penalties to rolls to precipitate major plot breakthroughs, much like the feats listed under *Gathering Intelligence* (pp. 11-14). They can also achieve important goals of their own; e.g., distracting or deceiving a guard. Either way, the GM rolls in secret when the objective is to obtain information.

There are two common ways to improve your odds with these activities.

## Bribery

In the movies, everybody has a price. The base bribe is a C-note (\$100), which gives +1 to one social engineering attempt against someone of average means. Bigger is better: \$500 buys +2, \$2,000 nets +3, and \$10,000 grants +4.

Multiply the bribes needed for these bonuses by the mark's Wealth factor: 1/5 for Poor, 1/2 for Struggling, 1 for Average, 2 for Comfortable, 5 for Wealthy, 20 for Very Wealthy, 100 for Filthy Rich, and then another  $\times 10$  per Multimillionaire level. Thus, +3 against a crime boss with Multimillionaire 1 costs \$2 million.

A bribe less than the amount required for +1 – or an inappropriate bribe – is *insulting*. Treat the ensuing social engineering attempt as a failure. Success against the applicable **Savoir-Faire** specialty (see *Fitting In*, p. 16) will warn you if you're about to do this. If you're sure that bribery is appropriate, tossing in something extra never hurts.

If the bribe is *illegal*, make a **Streetwise** roll. Failure means you lose the money but get no bonus. Critical failure means a chase, combat, robbery, or sting operation!

## Making an Impression

Numerous skills are complementary to social engineering attempts, including **Administration** when dealing with bureaucrats, **Carousing** at a club or a party, **Dancing** as a prelude to **Sex Appeal**, **Gambling** at a casino, and **Merchant** if money is changing hands. **Connoisseur** can aid both **Sex Appeal** and transactions, if the specialty would impress your mark. **Sex Appeal** itself can complement other skills. You can claim a bonus for several skills if they're all *applicable*.

## CONTACTS AND CONTACT GROUPS

**Contacts** and **Contact Groups** can provide information (only), much as if you went out and got it yourself. You must first succeed at an appearance roll for a connection the GM agrees would know something relevant. Then roll against your associate's social engineering skill *instead* of yours. This yields the usual results for that skill. Only bribes can help this roll.

## WORD ON THE STREET

If you have a lead, you can ask around casually to discover more. This uses a suitable **Current Affairs** specialty for legitimate info, or **Streetwise** for underworld tips. Either can benefit from bribery (at no Wealth multiplier) and/or a

complementary **Carousing** roll, which represent the expense and effort of informal socializing. Critical failure on the latter roll customarily means an impromptu barroom brawl!

## MANIPULATION

Slick heroes – especially face men – like to play mind games with people. Below, roll a Quick Contest of skill against the mark's Will. Mooks and henchmen alike have an *effective* Will of 10 + absolute value of BAD, reflecting their respect for (or fear of) their superiors. Victory acquires the information, distracts a mook, etc. To finagle active *aid* requires victory by 5+.

When these Contests act as complementary skill rolls, victory by 0-4 counts as a success (+1) and victory by 5+ counts as a critical success (+2). Any loss, however, gives a penalty equal to the margin of loss!

*Diplomacy:* **Diplomacy** can convince neutral (*not* hostile) NPCs to share information, or defuse a situation turned bad by failure at another roll. Victory by 5+ can gain minor aid from a neutral party – or negotiate the release of hostages. Bribery helps in situations where “peace offerings” or cash tips are apropos. **Administration** and **Streetwise** act as complementary skills when dealing with officials and crooks, respectively.

*Fast-Talk:* **Fast-Talk** can distract a guard while friends sneak past, or con some mook into letting you glimpse sensitive info. Victory by 5+ can convince a guard to admit *you*, or trick an NPC into *giving* you files, a key, etc. Bribery isn't effective – the whole point is that this doesn't look like a scam. **Administration** complements this roll vs. officious types, **Gambling** aids confidence scams, and **Sex Appeal** helps if the goal is distraction.

*Public Speaking:* **Public Speaking** can stir up a crowd of neutral folk enough that the noise and shoving screen suspicious activities. Roll against effective Will 12. The *full* margin of victory is the penalty to rolls to observe or follow the squad – and a victory by 5+ means an actual riot! Calming a riot also requires victory by 5+. Bribery works when causing trouble; just scatter enough cash to bribe everyone. Few skills complement these feats, but face men may employ **Carousing** or **Dancing** to help rouse partiers – or to turn a riot into less-violent activity.

*Savoir-Faire:* Each **Savoir-Faire** specialty works like **Diplomacy** when dealing with its target group, or like **Fast-Talk** if the goal is to convince someone that you belong to that group. **Savoir-Faire (High Society)** is almost the only way to talk one's way past an Indomitable butler or maître d', while **Savoir-Faire (Servant)** can induce the high-and-mighty to overlook you. Bribery is fine when posing as a higher-up and tipping a lower-down; otherwise, it *always* insults. See *Fitting In* (p. 16) for complementary skills.

*Sex Appeal:* **Sex Appeal** can distract, convince the doorman at the club to let you in, etc. Victory by 5+ can convince someone to leave his post to appreciate your charms up close, set up a **Pickpocket** attempt, or even get clothes on the floor for the investigator to search or the wire rat to bug. Bribery insults unless your target is a “pro” who *expects* to be paid for the encounter: **Carousing**, **Connoisseur**, **Dancing**, and **Gambling** all have cinematic precedent as complementary skills.

## INTERVIEWS

Interviewing a *friendly* or *neutral* individual to learn what he knows is an uncontested **Interrogation** roll. This isn't a hostile attempt to squeeze out information – the roll is to channel the discussion productively. If bad guys reached the interviewee first and made threats, BAD applies (the GM can instead treat this as a Quick Contest against the thug's Intimidation skill, if known). A **Psychology** roll is complementary; success also reveals whether the subject was menaced. In the movies, bribery helps, too, but peeling off \$100 bills will insult most honest citizens – buy a meal or bring a gift instead.

## MAKING THEM TALK

A *hostile* individual won't volunteer information when asked. He must be put on the spot. The GM rolls for interrogations and shakedowns in secret, keeping any resulting complementary skill modifier to himself. Bribery (of GM or NPC) is rarely useful!

*Interrogation:* Respectable interrogators isolate the subject, make him uncomfortable, and maintain the pressure until he cracks. Handle the *session* – not each question – as a Quick Contest: **Interrogation**, penalized by BAD, against Will (or unmodified skill vs. effective Will figured from BAD, for NPCs without character sheets). If this is a generic information-gathering attempt early in an adventure, BAD should be low (0 to -3) and the outcome gives a complementary skill modifier for later feats: loss by 5+ counts as critical failure (-2); loss by 1-4, as failure (-1); victory by 0-4, as success (+1); and victory by 5+, as critical success (+2). If the interrogation is the gateway to the story's next chapter, BAD should be high (-4 to -10) – possibly doubled, for high-ranking henchmen – so that overcoming it practically demands complementary skill bonuses for previously gathered information. Victory, however, reveals a major new plot development.

*Good Cop, Bad Cop:* Two interrogators – one antagonistic, one sympathetic – can cooperate. Each must roll against **Acting** or **Psychology**. Both rolls are complementary skill rolls.

*Polygraph:* Security agents may be called upon to give a *polygraph* or “lie detector” test as part of interrogation. Their employer provides the equipment; make an Assistance Roll if it's needed but absent. The GM rolls a secret Quick Contest of the operator's **Electronics Operation (Security)** vs. the subject's Will. Treat the *full* margin of victory or loss as a bonus or penalty to **Interrogation**. The interrogator need not be the operator.

*Truth Serum:* While **Action 1: Heroes** lists a price for “truth serum,” anybody but a secret agent will likely have to improvise; this requires a **Pharmacy** roll (defaults to IQ-6) and access to a dispensary. Administration calls for a **Physician** roll (defaults to IQ-7). The serum works in about 30 seconds, sapping 1d FP from the subject and forcing a HT-1 roll, with failure meaning he has -2 to Will during the interrogation. Interrogators without suitable skills can roll at default, but failure on either skill roll above renders the subject unconscious before he can talk (or worse, in reality – but this is an *action movie*).

*Shakedown:* The streets handle things differently. Throw your mark against the wall, stick a gun in his mouth, and tell him to talk. Handle this as interrogation, except that the operative skill is **Intimidation** and critical failure on the roll means a violent response. If you have the upper hand when things go bad, your only option is “waste him,” which is messy and means you'll *never* learn what he knew (if this was crucial, the GM may assess a -2 complementary skill modifier).

*Torture:* Some movie “heroes” use this villainous method. Cinematic consensus seems to be that torture makes people talk, but they might say anything! Torture can give up to +6 to **Interrogation** – assume that **Knife, Surgery, Wrestling**, and quite a few other skills are complementary, and cap the total bonus at +6. Details of how each skill works are left to the imagination.

*Liar, Liar:* Unlike most complementary skill penalties, those resulting from botched interrogation can be *erased*. After grilling someone, any member of the crew can ask to try **Detect Lies**. The GM will roll a secret Quick Contest against the best of the subject's IQ, Acting, or Fast-Talk (if unknown, use 10 + absolute value of BAD). Victory erases any penalty.

## Fitting In

Action movies aren't known for their realistic treatment of human interaction, but generally, cops get along with fellow cops, soldiers with other soldiers, and so on. This can affect social engineering.

*Cop Land:* The **Savoir-Faire** skill for dealing with police and security officers is **Savoir-Faire (Police)**. This can act as a complementary skill for any social feat for which it isn't already the master skill – but **Law (Police)** complements social engineering when you're a cop dealing with a judge or a DA.

*Corps and Cubes:* **Administration** is the universal complementary skill in a corporate environment – but use **Merchant** around sales and marketing staff.

*High and Tight:* The **Savoir-Faire** specialty for military settings is **Savoir-Faire (Military)**. When that isn't the

master skill, it can complement social engineering attempts with other skills.

*Scumbags:* When dealing with *organized* crime, **Savoir-Faire (Mafia)** serves as the master skill when a social engineering task requires **Savoir-Faire**, and as a complementary skill otherwise. When dealing with *street* crooks, **Streetwise** replaces **Savoir-Faire** as a master or complementary skill, and **Intimidation** is the complementary skill whenever **Streetwise** isn't.

*The Big Desk:* As a master skill, use **Savoir-Faire (High Society)** on “generic rich folk,” crime lords encountered in polite settings, and anybody whose job brings Status 2+ – including executives, civic officials, and Rank 5+ military or police officers met socially. However, only use it as a complementary skill if the target isn't of a type who would be susceptible to the other skills above.



A tie has no effect. Loss casts doubt on the truth or confirms a lie: Adjust the modifier by -1!

*Brainwashing:* Action heroes rarely do this – it’s villainous and takes too long – but brainwashed NPCs are common. Some are hostile when they shouldn’t be, others follow the bad guys’ cause (BAD applies to the team’s social engineering rolls), and still others simply can’t recall something vital. It’s possible to “break” such conditioning with the **Brainwashing** skill. This is a Quick Contest against the brainwasher’s skill. Each attempt takes a day. The deprogrammer can keep trying until he succeeds, but if he ever critically fails, the subject has a cinematic seizure and won’t be useful any more.

## How to Game Fact-Finding

The reason for asking questions, bugging phones, and stealing data might be to accumulate enough complementary skill bonuses to act successfully, but that doesn’t mean the GM should drone, “You got a success at Dumpster-diving, so take +1 on Computer Hacking. You win – you’re in. Now try Computer Operation to steal data. Critical success! The team gets another +2 for clues.”

That’s boring, *boring*, **boring**.

The players should describe their efforts dramatically. The GM can encourage this with a small skill bonus or even an extra character point. Then the GM ought to present the results movie-style, using really bad rolls (or *plans*) as excuses for chases and fights!

# PLANNING

So far, everything has been about *discovery* – where the terrorists hid the bomb, how tough the casino vault is, etc. These activities (and any associated violence!) occupy half or more of some action movies. As explained under *Gathering Intelligence* (pp. 11-14) and amplified in *Social Engineering* (pp. 15-17), the goal is to score enough complementary skill bonuses – let’s call the sum the Accumulated Complementary Total (ACT) – to offset the huge penalty on rolls to initiate the adventure’s next act. This penalty might be BAD, 2x BAD, or worse.

The pivotal skill roll can vary. There might be several cycles of fact-finding followed by different rolls, each involving progressively higher BAD offset by more ACT.

## THE BIG PICTURE

To grasp the situation well enough even to *try* to plan the mission, job, or operation, one team member must use **Intelligence Analysis** or its default (IQ-6). Lawmen out to foil crooks can opt to try **Criminology**. This *secret* roll – made by the GM – is subject to ACT and BAD or some multiple, as discussed above.

Success puts together the puzzle and reveals what the group needs to do next; critical success gives +2 to the planning roll (below). Any failure means the squad doesn’t even know where to go, and must score another +1 to ACT before making a repeated attempt. Critical failure means they discover this by reaching a bogus conclusion that leads to a worthless plan and a pointless fight!

## PERMISSION TO ACT

Lawmen, soldiers, and even spies have rules. The GM may require an Assistance Roll – either as well as the skill roll above (if the boss expects a complete analysis) or *instead of* it (if the brass prefer to assess the evidence themselves) – at exactly the same modifiers. Success lets the PCs move on to planning. Failure means they need another +1 to ACT to retry. They *can* act anyway – cinematic mavericks *always* act – but they’ll face automatic failure on any future AR for the mission, Rank loss, or termination . . .

## THE MISSION PLAN

Action-movie planning ranges from “Synchronize watches!” to an entire montage of equipping, mapping, rehearsing, etc. It’s only possible if the “big picture” roll succeeded or critically failed – and on a critical failure, the planning roll is meaningless, as the only possible outcome is random ultra-violence!

To make a plan, one party member should roll against a suitable skill: **Architecture** if infiltrating a building, **Leadership** or **Strategy** if commanding an NPC force, **Streetwise** if hitting a rival gang, **Tactics** if the group will be fighting, etc. Details are up to the GM, who should keep an open mind.

*Modifiers:* ACT and BAD modifiers that applied to the “big picture” roll; +2 if that roll critically succeeded; complementary skill bonuses for any *applicable* planning skill above that isn’t the master skill; complementary skill bonus for **Cartography** (in the movies, fancy 3D maps make *any* mission better!).

Read the planning roll as a complementary skill roll. The GM will apply the modifier directly to the BAD of the part of the adventure covered by the plan; e.g., if the mission had BAD -5, critical failure would mean a disastrous plan that makes BAD -7! Leave the plan itself abstract; whatever heroic tasks the PCs perform on the mission are “part of the plan.”

## THE TRAINING SEQUENCE

Grand plans in action movies often involve heroes (especially commandos) quickly teaching NPC cannon fodder how to impersonate bad guys, fight back against evil drug lords, and so on. This is rarely shown in detail; instead, there’s a montage that ends when the training does.

Each PC who wants to teach a skill must have that skill and make a **Teaching** roll, at -9 for a day, -7 for a weekend, 0 for a week, or +2 for a month. Any success temporarily grants his students the equivalent of 1 point in the skill, which they can use to help out on the upcoming mission (only). Any failure means the students learn nothing. Multiple heroes can teach the same cannon fodder different skills at the same time.

# GETTING IN

Getting into – or *out* of – a secure location can accompany the tasks under *Gathering Intelligence* (pp. 11-14), be the highlight of a raid or a heist (see *Grabbing the Goods*, pp. 23-24), or be a goal in itself (as in a prison break). In all cases, a hero with **Danger Sense** gets a secret **Perception** roll before being eaten by guard dogs, fried by an electric fence, etc. Success warns him that he'll be in danger if he continues – but *not* what the danger is!

## SURVEILLANCE AND PATROLS

The top threat to would-be sneaks trying to enter a secure area isn't alarms or deadly exotica like mines – it's being spotted. In the movies, tripping an alarm just gets the bad guys looking for you; being seen means they've *found* you. If the crew can't silence them in *one second* of violence, a chase or a fight ensues, making further stealth impossible!

To evade detection by patrols, roll the Quick Contests under *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10). Remember that BAD rates the enemy leader's *effective* skill (e.g., BAD -4 is effective skill 10 + 4 = 14), accounting for night-vision gear, patrol density, etc. Having a good plan for dealing with this mitigates BAD (see *The Mission Plan*, p. 17) – and once on-site, the squad can use **Observation** as a complementary skill, noting the patrol schedule and thus eroding BAD even further for this one application.

*Cameras:* Security cameras may cover every corner and have lights or night vision, but there are rarely enough guards to watch all those screens. Keeping to the shadows or darting past while the cameras are panned away is a standard **Stealth** attempt, except that the guards use the better of Vision or Electronics Operation (Security). If a hacker has already overcome BAD to hack into and control *networked* cameras (see *Hacking*, p. 13), ignore BAD and the Quick Contest, and make a simple **Stealth** roll to walk into any area that's watched by cameras alone. Any failure means being seen.

*Guard Animals:* If guard animals are present (GM decides), these account for -2 of BAD for patrol and surveillance purposes. Dealing with the beasts can partly erase this: **Animal Handling** becomes a complementary skill for the sole purpose of the rolls under *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10). If the animals *lack handlers*, any success on **Animal Handling** allows an unmodified, uncontested **Stealth** roll to walk past (the animals are distracted, bribed with food, etc.), while failure means the usual Contest takes place – and critical failure means the animals attack and any guards notice the commotion!

## INSERTION

Isolation is such an effective security measure that the first part of getting in is likely to be getting on-site! If an "interesting" location is accessible using a large vehicle with a single controller, or on foot, use *Travel* (pp. 7-8). The rules below are for when each hero must operate – or at least wear – his own insertion equipment.

To make this a *team* effort instead of leaving the hacker and face man behind on dives and jumps, use *Got You Covered* (p. 5) when the team attempts such an insertion. This is

unrealistic but true to cinema: The gruff ex-Ranger makes sure that his geeky sidekick arrives in one piece.

For all insertions, even those on foot, *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10) is often needed!

*Parachutes:* Make a **Parachuting** roll to jump out of a perfectly good airplane. Any failure means the *least-skilled* squad member experiences a disaster. Consider trained skill and defaults (DX-4) – and on a tie, there's a collision that affects everybody at that skill level. Failure costs 1d HP of general bruising. Critical failure, or ordinary failure if the victim had an overloaded chute, means a fall from the full jump height; see *Falls* (p. 19). (A jump from below a chute's minimum jump height counts as a critical failure for *everybody* dumb enough to try.) It takes 2 seconds to get out of the harness after landing.



*Gliders:* Use **Piloting (Glider)** for hang-glider infiltration. This works like parachute insertion, except that critical failure means the least-skilled aviator *falls out of his glider* in the course of taking damage. The craft crashes dramatically, preventing any attempt at stealth.

*Boats:* The operative skill for inflatable boats ("Zodiacs") and speedboats is **Boating (Powerboat)**. On a failure, roll 1d: 1-3 means subtlety is impossible; 4-6 indicates that somebody's gear (choose randomly) falls overboard and is lost. Critical failure sends the least-skilled *person* overboard (determine this as for parachuting); this foils stealth, costs him his gear, and requires him to roll against **Swimming** to avoid losing 1 FP (1d FP on a critical failure).

*Divers:* The **Scuba** skill covers insertions using scuba gear or dive torpedoes. Any failure means the squad loses the element of surprise; the bad guys hear motors or spot bubbles. Critical failure also means the least-skilled diver suffers an accident involving propellers or Big Fish; the victim may try a **Swimming** roll as a "saving throw," with success meaning a mere 1 HP of injury but failure costing 1d HP.

## CLIMBING

Climbing is one of the infiltrator's top methods for breaking into secure installations. Many valuable objectives are protected chiefly by being 40 stories up a steel-and-glass tower. When the lower floors are rotten with sensors and guards, a line tossed from the next roof over is often the simplest solution!

Except for the roll to toss a line, these rolls take a penalty equal to encumbrance, and a critical failure means a fall (see *Falls*, boxed text).

**Tossing Lines:** Throwing a grapnel to snag a parapet, flagstaff, or other anchor within ST×2 yards requires a **Throwing** roll. Ranged combat penalties *don't* apply, unless doing this in combat. Failure just means you must try again. Critical failure alerts the bad guys by smashing a window, pulling down the flagpole, etc.

**Balancing:** Roll **Acrobatics** to traverse something *narrow*, at -2 if it's taut or rigid (a ledge) or -5 if it's slack (an ordinary rope). A pole helps balance – add +2 for a 6' pole, +3 for a 10' pole. Failure means a fall, but allows a DX roll to catch something and try a pull-up (see below) to get back on. Critical failure (or failure on a DX roll to catch yourself) means a fall from the height of the crossing. Heroes with **Perfect Balance** don't *have* to roll!

**Climbing:** Assume that most climbs require *one Climbing* roll per story at -3 (or *no* penalty with suction cups) if scaling the side of a building, or one roll per 10 stories at only -2 (which can be offset by quality bonuses for climbing gear) for a rope straight up. Failure and critical failure work as for balancing.

**Leg Up:** A friend can boost you to reach a high area. He makes a ST roll while you roll **Acrobatics** at -2. If you both succeed, you can reach anything up to the sum of your heights and try a pull-up to get *yourself* up there. Failure by either of you lets you retry, but your partner must pay 1 FP per repeated attempt. On any critical failure, you collapse in a pile and each take 1d-3 HP of injury (DR *doesn't* protect).

**Rappelling:** You can drop at 12 feet (about a story) *per second* with a climbing kit or a rappelling kit. The whole trip requires just *one Climbing* roll at -1, which can be offset by equipment quality bonuses. Failure means your gear fouls and you get *stuck* halfway down; options are to climb back up the rope, wait for help, or sever the line and fall. Critical failure means a *fall* from halfway down.

**Swinging:** If you can affix a line to an overhead anchor (toss a grapnel, climb up and tie a rope to a flagpole, etc.), you can swing across a gap. The rope's *effective* length is the smaller of its true length and the distance from anchor to ground. You can swing a distance of up to 3/4 of that length from a vertical rope, or 1.5 times that length if it starts 45° off-vertical. Make an **Acrobatics** roll at the range penalty for that distance (p. B550). Failure allows you to retry. Critical failure means a fall from your current height.

## PARKOUR

Agile action heroes – especially assassins and infiltrators – often use athletics instead of ropes to access difficult areas. Many of these tricks are also valuable in chases (pp. 31-35). *All* of the rolls below take a penalty equal to encumbrance. Where failure indicates a fall, see *Falls* (boxed text, above).

**Diving:** An **Acrobatics** roll at -4 lets you dive through a narrow opening – past the blades of a giant ventilation fan, under

## Falls

Failure at many feats under *Insertion* (p. 18), *Climbing* (pp. 18-19), and *Parkour* (below) results in a big helping of crushing damage. Ignore the math on p. B431 and use the table below. Roll 12d for falls from above 100 yards – they're "terminal" in several senses!

Distance	Damage	Distance	Damage	Distance	Damage
1 yard	1d	15 yards	3d+2	45 yards	6d
2 yards	1d+1	20 yards	4d	50 yards	6d+2
3 yards	1d+2	25 yards	4d+2	60 yards	7d
4 yards	2d-1	30 yards	5d	70 yards	7d+2
5 yards	2d	35 yards	5d+2	80 yards	8d+1
10 yards	3d	40 yards	6d-1	100 yards	9d+1

a closing garage door, between red-hot pipes, etc. Failure means you end up stuck halfway through, which may hurt! Critical failure adds 1d-3 HP of injury (DR *doesn't* protect).

**Jumping:** If an obstacle is small enough for anyone to hurdle, any action hero can do so with a simple DX roll. If it's *wide*, it calls for someone with the **Jumping** skill, who can run and jump up to skill/2 yards. In either case, success gets you across in one piece. Failure allows a DX roll to catch the far side (no consolation if jumping subway tracks when the train is coming!) and try a pull-up. Critical failure – or failure on the last-ditch DX roll – means you end up in or on whatever you were leaping over. If that's a sheer drop, you take falling damage!

**Pull-Up:** Make a ST-based **Climbing** roll to pull yourself up onto anything you can reach: your height plus 1.5'. On a failure, you hang there and may retry, paying 1 FP per repeated attempt. Critical failure means a strained arm (crippled for 30 minutes) and a fall – *bad*, if you're trying to recover from another failed stunt.

**Running Climb:** If two obstacles are within a couple of yards, you can run at one and kick off back and forth between them to gain additional height before a pull-up. Use the better of **Acrobatics** or **Jumping**, at -4 to gain Basic Move/4 yards or -6 to gain Basic Move/2 yards (round *up*). Failure means a fall from that height; critical failure means maximum falling damage!

**Skidding:** To cross an oil-slicked garage or similar, make a DX or DX-based **Skiing** roll at the combat penalty for bad footing – usually -2. You may kneel or go prone as a free action. Success lets you zip along at full Move the first second, halved (round down) per second afterward until Move is less than 1, which means you stop. Failure means you fall over if standing, or stop cold otherwise. Critical failure adds 1d-3 HP of injury (DR *doesn't* protect). If you dove or fell on something seriously slippery, roll DX-4 to stand up again!

**Sliding:** Roll against DX or **Acrobatics** – at -2 if seated or -8 if standing – to "surf" down the metal divider between escalators, a sloped awning, or anything similar. If you have a personal conveyance designed for zipping down slopes (skateboard, skis, etc.), you may roll against its operation skill instead, and the modifier is only -2 (the surface is less-than-ideal). In all cases, you travel at Move 5 and can go until you reach the bottom, but you must roll every turn. Failure means you slip off to one side; if there's a safe place to land, you end up standing there. Critical failure – or any failure when there's a vertical drop to either side – means you *fall*.

*Spinning:* You can spin to face *any* direction at the end of a full-out run by making an **Acrobatics** or *DX*-based **Running** roll at -2. Failure means you end up facing a *random* direction; roll 1d. Critical failure means you fall over. To spin after diving, skidding, or sliding, make the usual roll for that stunt instead, but at an extra -2.

*Squeezing:* Roll against **Escape** to wiggle through a narrow crack, like a door pushed open with a security chain in place. Success gets you to the other side. Failure means you *won't* fit, and can't retry. Critical failure means you're stuck and must be rescued.

## FENCES

Nearly all secure installations have fences. Aerial insertion is rarely a practical way around these – the area *inside* most fences is watched (see *Surveillance and Patrols*, p. 18), and a parachute or a glider *will* be seen. Usually, heroes must deal with a fence more directly.

To circumvent a fence, go *over* or *through* it (any fence lousy enough to go *under* is background color, not a serious obstacle). Attempting either gives any guards one extra chance to spot the intruders, who must *win* a Quick Contest of **Stealth** vs. the sentries' Vision to remain undetected.

*Climbing Fences:* Clambering over a fence calls for a **Climbing** roll. Apply BAD to skill to reflect tall or outward-sloping fences. Failure means just that, but each repeated attempt gives any guards another chance to spot you. Critical failure means you fall off: 1d-3 HP of injury (DR *doesn't* protect) and somebody notices you for sure!

*Cutting Fences:* Bolt cutters can make short work of a fence; there's little chance of failure. Quality fences take longer to cut, though. Time in minutes is the absolute value of BAD, minimum one minute. Success with **Forced Entry** halves this time; any failure doesn't. Don't apply BAD to this roll – it's already accounted for. Reroll **Stealth** every two *full* minutes.

### Types of Fences

Security fences may have one or more special features:

*Razor Wire:* Make an additional *DX* or **Escape** roll, applying BAD. Failure means the barbs inflict 1d-3 cutting damage and snag you. You must then break free from ST 8 to get across. Each failure means another 1d-3 and an additional opportunity for the guards to spot you (or hear you cursing). To avoid these effects, toss something over it or cut it with bolt cutters!

*Electric:* Each attempt to climb the fence inflicts 3d burning damage. This is a good reason not to fail and have to retry – and to avoid getting snagged on razor wire. Bolt cutters have insulated handles but *require* a **Forced Entry** roll here (still halving time); failure means 3d damage, while critical failure causes 6d. To *disarm* the fence, roll vs. **Electrician**, applying BAD; you *must* have a tool kit. Failure means it's still live, critical failure also does 3d damage, and repeated attempts give the guards additional chances to see you.

*Smart:* The fence has sensors that detect and locate attempts to cut or climb it. To neutralize a section, roll vs.



**Electronics Operation (Security)**, applying BAD; you *must* have electronic lockpicks. Any failure means you're busted, exactly as if you had set off a security system (pp. 21-22)!

## LOCKS

Once an intruder is past any fences and has eluded any guards, he can silently defeat most doors by picking locks. The locks below come in many security grades. The GM can use BAD or assign a given lock any modifier from +5 (cheap door-knob lock) to -10 (fancy multi-key lock on a nuclear sub).

*Mechanical Locks:* Picking a standard lock requires a **Lock-picking** roll, at -5 with a multi-tool or similar gadget, no modifier for proper picks, or +1 or +2 for good or fine tools. The GM decides whether the lock requires a key from one side or both – a major concern when the infiltrator goes in the back way and wants to let the crew in, or when he breaks a window and reaches for the lock (see *Glass*, p. 21). Failure allows repeated attempts at a cumulative -1. Critical failure snaps off the pick in the lock; the tools used give -1 from now on *and* the team must resort to force to open the door.

*Electronic Locks:* These use numeric keypads or key cards. The infiltrator must have electronic lockpicks or Electronics Repair (Security) tools, but rolls against **Lockpicking** – not Electronics Repair. Failure allows repeated attempts at a cumulative -1. Critical failure short-circuits the tools *permanently*. Cutting power (see *Sabotage*, p. 25) will open most civilian systems but cause those on prisons, secret bases, etc., to clamp shut, at which point force is the only option.

*Biometric Locks:* These require biometric input such as fingerprints, retinal scans, or voiceprints. If you can gain access to one *and* have electronic lockpicks, you can bypass it with an **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll. Failure and critical failure work as for standard electronic locks. A bypass *isn't possible* if, as is common, guards are watching the costly machine! Secret agents with access to a legitimate user or a database can try an Assistance Roll to requisition special gloves for fingerprints, contact lenses for retina prints, and so on; these give an automatic, unsuspecting success. Anybody can attempt **Electronics Operation (Media)** to engineer a voice recording (obtained through bugs or intercepts) for voiceprints; the GM rolls secretly, with any success meaning the lock opens and any failure meaning it doesn't.

## DOORS

Soldiers, SWAT teams, and thugs don't fiddle with locks – they *remove* obstacles! These tasks automatically negate **Stealth** except where noted; everyone in the area gets an uncontested Hearing roll to detect each attempt. The GM decides whether anyone is present. The squad can attempt *Audio Surveillance* (p. 12) or *Visual Surveillance* (p. 12) to learn this before waiting on the door.

*Bashing:* You can destroy the *door itself* with a fire axe, go-bar, ram, etc. Forget attack rolls! Just roll the listed damage or that of the equivalent melee weapon (see tool's stats). Add +2, or +1 per die, for All-Out Attack (Strong) – and *another* +1 per die with **Forced Entry** at DX+1, or +2 per die at DX+2. The GM subtracts DR, multiplies by 1.5 if using a cutting attack, and reduces the target's HP until it reaches 0 and allows entry.

**Blasting:** Use the rules for *Blowing Stuff Up* (pp. 24-25). Explosives just sitting there roll damage as usual. Explosives packed in contact with the door inflict *maximum* damage. Subtract DR and apply penetrating damage to HP. At 0 HP, the door is mangled to the point where an unmodified **Forced Entry** roll can pry it open; at -HP, it's annihilated!

**Forcing:** A less-extreme option is to apply force to overpower the door's attachments, rather than destroy the entire door. Roll a Quick Contest: **ST** against the lock or hinge's HP. Add +2 to ST for a crowbar, fire axe, or go-bar, and +1 for **Forced Entry** at DX+1 or +2 at DX+2 – or alternatively, use a *vehicle's* ST to pull or push the door – but also apply a ST penalty equal to the hardware's DR. You must *win* to open the door. Repeated attempts have a cumulative -1 and cost 1 FP apiece (except with a vehicle!). For a *chained* door, victory busts the lock; you can then roll again to overcome the chain's DR and HP, sever the now-exposed chain, or squeeze in (see *Parkour*, pp. 19-20).

**Prying:** To pry apart a security grille or a prison door, use the rules for forcing.

**Severing:** Exposed chains, grilles, hasps, and padlocks can be cut rather than bashed, blasted, forced, or pried. Handle this like bashing with a cutting tool, with one exception: Bolt cutters and files (*not* hacksaws, torches, etc.) allow **Stealth**; roll against the *lower* of **Forced Entry** or **Stealth** to be sneaky.

### Attached Hardware DR and HP

Unexposed chains, hasps, hinges, and locks can only be *forced*; exposed ones can also be *bashed*, *blasted*, or *severed*. You can use a drill or thermite to expose armored locks or hinges enough to blast them. For a drill, roll vs. **Forced Entry**; failure means you're heard, and critical failure also breaks the drill. Thermite uses **Explosives (any)**, **Machinist**, or **Mechanic (any)**; failure means an obvious fire or fire alarm, and critical failure also inflicts 3d burning damage on the user!

#### Hardware

Construction	DR	HP	Examples
Weak	3	6	Bedroom door.
Standard	6	11	Suburban front door.
Tough	11	22	Commercial security door.
Extra-Tough	22	44	Institutional security door.

### Door and Gate DR and HP

The door itself can always be *bashed* or *blasted*. Wood/plastic doors have ablative DR (p. B46); other doors don't.

Door Construction	Wood/ Plastic		Metal- Faced		Metal	
	DR	HP	DR	HP	DR	HP
Household Interior	1	18	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Household Exterior	1	23	4	23	4	28
Security	2	29	30	29	30	47
Blast	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	70*	60*

\* At minimum!

### Grille and Bar DR and HP

Security grilles, prison bars, and so on can be *bashed*, *blasted*, or *severed*. Cheap ones lack reinforcing cross-members, and can be *prided*. The stats below are *per bar*; defeating

## Barrier BAD-ness

While BAD affects many tasks, the rules for doors and glass ignore it. This is because visual style trumps common sense in action cinema. *Of course* a BAD 0 machine shop has big, chunky things with piles of HP, and *of course* that BAD -10 secret lab has delicate glass walls. Remember that guard, lock, and security system quality depends on BAD, though. Tackling even the flimsiest door in a clumsy or noisy way is *far* riskier when BAD is severe!

one bar lets a Skinny person pass, two lets most people squeeze by, and three admits Fat or Very Fat individuals. Add an extra bar for heroes with more than Light encumbrance!

#### Grille Construction

	DR	HP
Ornamental (wire, soft iron, etc.)	3	6
Home or Cheap Commercial Security	6	11
Commercial Security, Biker Fortress	11	22
Teller's Cage (bank, Vegas, etc.)	17	33
Prison Cell or Heavy Teller's Cage	22	44

## GLASS

If a locked door has a small window in or next to it, you can cut or smash the glass, reach in, and simply unlatch the lock – unless the lock has keyholes on *both* sides (GM's decision). A large window is as good as a door. And sometimes, valuable art or a secret prototype is in a glass case.

Glass is often rigged with security sensors (p. 22), which are their own problem.

**Regular Glass:** In the movies, ordinary glass always breaks conveniently. Hit it with **Brawling**, shoot it with **Guns**, or make a **Forced Entry** roll (at +1 for a crowbar, fire axe, go-bar, etc.). Success breaks the glass. Failure lets you retry – although each attempt gives nearby enemies a Hearing roll to notice! Critical failure means you are heard *and* take 1d cutting damage unless your implement of destruction was ranged.

**Security Glass:** Other glass seems to be nearly indestructible. The hero throws a few heavy objects at it, watches them bounce off, and then tries something else (probably a big gun). Treat such panes as interior, exterior, or even security doors, and follow the standard rules for defeating doors.

**Glass-Cutting:** An infiltrator with a circle cutter can try a **Forced Entry** roll at -6 to cut a perfect circle out of any glass. Success bypasses the window *silently* – no Hearing rolls for guards. Failure by 6 or less breaks the window noisily. Greater failure means the window is intact, a horrible scratching noise alerts guards, and the cutter is *dulled* and of no further use on this job.

## SECURITY SYSTEMS

High-value targets are inevitably behind high-tech security systems. Triggering any such system notifies guards or authorities, bringing thugs, rent-a-cops, police, or troops. It may also sound sirens, activate floodlights, lock doors, drop grilles, or arm dangerous traps – see *Locks* (p. 20), *Doors* (pp. 20-21), and *Traps* (pp. 22-23).

**Detection:** Spotting a security sensor requires a Vision-5, **Observation**, or *Per*-based **Traps** roll, with **Acute Vision** bonuses and darkness penalties. Action heroes are always on the alert – the GM rolls secretly against the team’s *best* skill (separately for each group, when split up) to see if they notice each device before triggering it. This roll is subject to BAD if the sensor is concealed (but it’s often left visible as a deterrent), and at -5 when fleeing or rushed. Discovery may also require special equipment; e.g., night-vision gear to see infrared laser beams. Any failure means setting off the alarm. Don’t bother rolling if earlier information-gathering efforts or the team’s bosses provided a schematic showing where everything is . . . provided the info is accurate, of course.

**Disarming:** Disabling a mechanical device or a simple electric circuit calls for a **Traps** roll. Eliminating an electronic system requires an **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll if the controls are accessible. If all that’s available is a sensor housing, the burglar needs electronic lockpicks or Electronics Repair (Security) tools, must roll against **Electronics Repair (Security)** to crack the housing, and then has to make an **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll – and this bypasses the local sensor, not the whole system. Apply BAD to all of these tasks. The GM rolls secretly. Failure triggers the alarm, but the infiltrator will be aware of his mistake; critical failure looks like success until it’s too late!

**.50-caliber Remote Control:** Silver-screen heroes routinely wreck security hardware – often with gunfire. This should work in action games! However, sensors are tiny (SM -10 or below) and/or tough (DR 12+), calling for a skilled assassin or shooter with a good weapon.

**Pull the Plug:** Cutting the power (see *Sabotage*, p. 25) might work, if the target relies on outside power (GM’s decision).

**Disarm Security Network? (Y/N):** A viable alternative when facing a computerized system is *Hacking* (p. 13).

**Rearming:** By making the roll to disarm again, it’s possible to reactivate a disarmed system (not a *destroyed* one!) after the squad has passed.

## Sensor Types

Security systems in thrillers often use several distinct technologies. These *shouldn’t* be left abstract – movies lovingly depict the heroes’ clever workarounds for each one. A simple **Electronics Operation (Security)**, **Electronics Repair (Security)**, or **Traps** roll will identify any hardware found on-site or in a schematic.

**Laser Beams:** A screen of lasers, either infrared (invisible to the naked eye but *not* to night-vision gear) or visible-light (which can be revealed by dust or aerosol spray). The trigger is breaking a beam. Switching off the lasers requires access to controls, cutting power, or hacking. Limber heroes can instead avoid them – *if* they can see them (or memorize their location with **Eidetic Memory**). Roll against the *lower* of **Acrobatics** or **Stealth** to cross a protected area, applying BAD to reflect extra-dense or moving beams. Any failure sets off the alarm!

**Motion Detectors:** “Microwave fences” and ultrasonic sensors can detect movement over large areas. Like lasers, these can be shut off or avoided, if known about. To sneak past, *win* a Quick Contest of **Stealth** vs. the Electronics Operation (Security) skill of the guards or monitoring computers, which of course increases with BAD. While doing so, walking speed can’t exceed Move 1/2.

**Proximity Sensors:** These can be rigged to a single item (e.g., a painting) or deployed over an area as an invisible “fence,” detecting physical contact or human presence within 5 yards, respectively. To defeat these, switch them off at the console, cut power, or hack the system – local detection and disarming *won’t* work, and simple stealth is ineffective. Alternatively, learn where they are and *avoid* them.

**Seismic Detectors:** Buried vibration sensors are impossible to see and impractical to tamper with – mostly, you have to know they’re there. If you do, a simple **Stealth** roll, modified for BAD, lets you cross the protected zone at Move 1 without being detected.

**Switches:** Fences (p. 20), locks (p. 20), doors (pp. 20-21), glass (p. 21), traps (below), the housing of fancier sensors, and even ordinary floors may be hooked into a security grid via pressure or anti-tamper switches. These are triggered by any attempt to cut the fence, pick the lock, force the door, etc. – disarm them first! Use the standard security-systems rules. One special consideration is that switches may be *wireless* and susceptible to a jammer.

## TRAPS

Harmful traps are forbidden in most places. Action movies aren’t one of those places. The GM should make the detection rolls noted here in secret, using the squad’s *best* skill. Avoiding a known device in the open is automatic. One that covers an entrance or other chokepoint must be neutralized, however.

## Safecracking

Use the rules under *Locks* (p. 20) to open safe and vault locks, with these changes:

- Base time per attempt is an *hour*, not a minute.
- Basic equipment for defeating mechanical locks is a stethoscope (not lockpicks). Any bonuses come from its quality. A search endoscope gives an extra +2, but requires drilling through DR first. Electronic locks require the usual gear.
- Such locks are always high-security (-5 to -10), regardless of BAD, and there may be *several*.

Alternatively, wreck the thing using the rules under *Doors* (pp. 20-21). Note that a safe or vault’s DR always protects its lock, too. Some typical DR and HP values:

Container	DR	HP
Document Safe	20	19
Business Safe*	120	73
Local Bank Vault*	400	127
Major Bank Vault*	800	345



\* Often rigged with alarms that must be dealt with first; see *Security Systems* (pp. 21-22).

*Contact Poisons:* Chemicals that kill on contact are popular with cinematic assassins. Spotting them requires a *Per*-based **Chemistry** or **Poisons** roll. **Acute Vision** adds if the toxin is visible; otherwise, **Acute Taste and Smell** helps to sniff it out. These rolls often have penalties! Make a **Hazardous Materials** roll to remove the stuff; any failure means it splatters on *someone*. Victims could suffer anything from a flat 4d toxic damage to the nasty effects noted for nerve gas on p. B439.

*Explosive Booby Traps and Mines:* Make a *Per*-based **Traps** or **Explosives (EOD)** roll to notice these; a **Soldier** roll at -5 will do in a pinch. *Disarming* such a trap requires a standard *IQ*-based **Explosives (EOD)** roll – and anti-tamper devices give a penalty equal to BAD. Failure to detect or disarm such a trap means getting blown up! Traps rigged from grenades and explosives inflict standard damage for those things; mines deliver hurt in the 6d×2 [4d] cr ex range. See *Explosions* (pp. B414-415).

*Remote-Controlled Weapons:* Secret agents run into these all the time. Real systems are mounted high up (e.g., on a

tower) to maximize coverage, and work only if a security system has alerted the human operators. Cinematic ones could lurk anywhere and operate under computer control. They're detected like other security systems, but "defeating" them involves not being seen (roll vs. **Stealth**, applying BAD) or destroying them (SM -2, DR 35, HP 8). A remote weapon's effective skill is 10 + absolute value of BAD. It does the usual damage for that kind of gun.

*Tripwire Weapons:* Make a *Per*-based **Traps** roll to find these, using BAD to reflect thin wires, clever placement, etc. Treat a known trap as a mechanical security system that can be disarmed with **Traps** – or with **Armoury**, if the weapon itself is in reach. Failure to detect and disarm the trap means being shot for the gun's usual damage. A *trip flare* is basically a signal flare rigged this way, intended to alert sentries; defeating one requires a **Soldier** roll or an **Explosives (EOD or Fireworks)** roll at +4.

## GRABBING THE GOODS

For burglaries, snatching the goods is automatic . . . after climbing the walls, cutting the fences, eluding the dog patrols, avoiding the mines, picking the locks, deactivating the motion sensors, and cracking the safe. Even so, there can be complications. And not every snatch-and-grab job involves a break-in to grab a portable, inanimate objective.

### FINDING THE MACGUFFIN

The Renoir, incriminating evidence, or whatever doesn't have to be sitting out in the open. If it isn't, use the applicable rules under *Physical Searches* (pp. 11-12). Apply BAD if the object was hidden deliberately. Each such task attempted in a place where you're not supposed to be also requires a **Stealth** roll to avoid alerting guards, if any.

### GRAND THEFT AUTO

Stealing a vehicle isn't as complex as breaking into a secret base or a bank. However, snatching a vehicle – such as a prototype tank or a crime lord's yacht loaded with heroin – may be the main objective of a raid. And *any* convenient ride will suffice when fleeing a clandestine op!

*Breaking In:* Getting into a vehicle calls for the **Forced Entry** and **Lockpicking** rolls explained under *Locks* (p. 20), *Doors* (pp. 20-21), and *Glass* (p. 21); BAD won't apply unless your target is a top-secret combat vehicle, spy car, etc. Disarming an alarm requires tools and a roll against **Electronics Repair (Security)** or suitable **Mechanic** skill – and BAD *does* apply if the vehicle belongs to canny bad guys rather than to some unlucky citizen. Disabling a vehicle-tracking system calls for tools and an **Electronics Repair (Security)** roll. Failures on rolls for security devices sound an alarm and/or alert the owner.

*Hotwiring:* Unlocking a key ignition to start a vehicle requires a second **Lockpicking** attempt, as difficult as the one to break in. Starting a vehicle by directly tampering with its

innards requires an *IQ*-based roll against the relevant vehicle-operation skill (**Driving, Piloting**, etc.) or **Mechanic** specialty; BAD applies for fighting and spy vehicles, and a failure is liable to shut down the vehicle for good – or trigger *interesting* defenses.

### LIFTS AND PULLS

Some thefts happen in plain sight. These might be goals in their own right, an early step of a larger operation (e.g., getting a needed key or ID card), or a closing element in a complex plan like breaking in, posing as a guard, and pickpocketing the boss' PDA.

In all cases, don't apply BAD to the skill roll – the challenge comes from the victim or observer's skills. If these aren't known, assume 10, but add the absolute value of BAD for genuine bad guys. Distractions are *very* useful; any flamboyant skill (**Fast-Talk, Sex Appeal**, etc.) counts as complementary and gives twice the usual bonus for success.

*Lift:* To snatch something off a desk, out of a rubbish bin, or similar as you casually walk past, you must *win* a Quick Contest of **Filch** vs. the better of any watcher's **Vision** or **Observation** skill. A tie or a loss alerts the observer, whose reaction depends on his motives – a chase or combat is likely. Use the same rules when subtly *dropping* an item for someone else.

*Pull:* To grab something off someone you bump into, you must *win* a Quick Contest of **Pickpocket** vs. the better of his **Perception** or **Streetwise** skill, or an alert third party's **Observation** skill. A tie or a loss means you're made; the victim may grab you, an observer may alert the victim, etc. Use the same rules when *planting* something on someone.

*Switcharoo:* If you've already succeeded at a **Holdout** attempt (see *Subtlety*, pp. 9-10) to stash something small, you can swap it for another item of similar size and appearance. Roll as for a lift, but use **Sleight of Hand**. This also works for obvious-but-innocuous items, like briefcases.

## LIVE CAPTURE

In principle, grabbing a person is like any other theft – that is, until you run into real, live people. If you can reach your mark by using *Getting In* (pp. 18-23) to bypass his security and *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10) to get close, you can try to subdue him without combat. This doesn't always work, and there are other options.

*Binding:* If the target is pinned, asleep, or unconscious, handcuff or tie him. The GM will make a secret **Knot-Tying** roll for you if you use rope; any failure means the victim may be able to escape. Alternatively, you can grapple him, or trick him into lowering his guard by winning a Quick Contest of **Fast-Talk** against his IQ, and then cuff him in one slick move by *winning* a Quick Contest of **Judo** or **Wrestling** against the *higher* of his DX or best grappling skill. If any of this fails, things will get noisy!

*Subdual:* You can grab or knock out your victim. A *successful* stun-gun attack, or a grapple using **Judo** or **Wrestling**, is quiet enough not to draw attention; clubs, fists, and Tasers, or failed or repeated “stealthy” attacks, aren't. Any sentries nearby get Hearing rolls to catch on. A grappled or stunned victim can be drugged; this requires a **Physician** roll to do safely and effectively. The GM rolls secretly; failure means the victim wakes up at an inconvenient time, and critical failure indicates an overdose (see *Overdose, Poisoning, and Venom*, p. 41).

*Threats:* If you suddenly appear, armed, inside your victim's security, you can roll a Quick Contest of **Intimidation** vs. his Will to convince him to come quietly. Victory means he does. A tie means he refuses to budge – the jig isn't up yet, but you're probably going to have to resort to something noisy. Loss means he shouts for help and the jig *is* up, if there's anybody around to hear.

# DESTRUCTION

Not every mission is a raid to arrest bad guys, steal diamonds, or spy on enemies. The ultimate goal might be to eliminate a threat or deny a valuable resource to the foe. This is a common objective of realistic military operations and cinematic police and espionage assignments.

A blaze or an explosion is also an effective distraction. Any act of destruction might justify erasing -1 or -2 from BAD for *all* later feats that would logically be easier if most of the mooks are busy stomping out flames or freaking out over a blast. This won't affect lockpicking, computer hacking, or other tasks that don't interact with mooks.

Remember that property damage is an action-movie tradition. There doesn't *have* to be a good reason for it!

## ARSON

*Anybody* can set a fire, but to destroy evidence, distract bad guys, or render the target unsalvageable, make an **Explosives (Demolition or Fireworks)** roll (defaults to IQ-5). Roll at -4 if you have only ordinary combustibles; no modifier for a genuine accelerant, like gasoline (at least a gallon); and +4 for thermite, ethylene oxide, and similar scary substances remembered from the movies. Apply BAD if the target has a fire-suppression system or is designed to resist fires (e.g., military fuel dump) – such measures should be comparable in quality to the target's other security. Failure means the fire doesn't do the trick; repeated attempts are possible if you're willing to hang around, watch the fire burn out, and restart it while mooks are trying to extinguish it. Critical failure means *you* catch fire: 3d HP of injury before you douse the flames.

## BLOWING STUFF UP

Explosives are the *fastest* way to demolish things. It takes about  $(DR + HP)/3$  dice of damage to render something useless until repaired, or  $(DR + 2 \times HP)/3$  dice to obliterate it forever (drop fractions). For security barriers, find DR and HP under *Doors* (pp. 20-21); for vehicles, consult the *Vehicle Table* (see *Action 1: Heroes*, p. 34)

*Example:* A blast door with DR 70, HP 60 calls for  $(70 + 60)/3 = 130/3 = 43d$  to blow open, or  $(70 + 2 \times 60)/3 = 190/3 = 63d$  to blow away.

To convert dice to a number of standard explosive charges from **Heroes**, estimate the nearest whole multiple of 9 for dynamite (9d+1) or 15 for plastique (5d×3), and multiply this by itself.

*Example:* 43d is *about*  $5 \times 9$  or  $3 \times 15$ , so it takes  $5 \times 5 = 25$  dynamite sticks or  $3 \times 3 = 9$  plastique blocks to open a blast door.

If the GM prefers exact math, he's advised to do it in advance – not during play – for anything the heroes have to demolish. He shouldn't require skill rolls to learn how many charges are needed, but simple *tell* the player of any PC who has **Engineer (Combat)** or **Explosives (Demolition)**.

Other considerations:

*Explosives Disasters:* Explosives are deadly, but in the movies, clumsy demo men mostly just singe their eyebrows and dignity. When failure on the tasks below spells an “explosives disaster,” use the Cinematic Explosions rule (see *Cinematic Combat Rules*, p. 38) for the demo man, any assistants, and those covering them.

*Preparing and Using Explosives:* Anybody can place charges previously rigged with blasting caps or a timer, or push the button on an exploder or a remote. To prepare these things for use calls for an **Explosives (Demolition)** roll. The GM rolls in secret. Failure means no kaboom; critical failure means an explosives disaster.

*Home-Cooked Explosives:* At the GM's option, it may suit the plot for ingredients to blow things up to be sitting around. Make a **Scrounging** roll (or use **Serendipity**) to find them. Roll against **Chemistry** to formulate explosives. This takes 12 hours, but heroes can invoke *Time Spent* (p. B346) – even chemistry works faster on film! Any success fabricates enough explosives to do the job. Failure wastes the materials. Critical failures are explosives disasters.



*Tamping:* A demo man with tools can roll against **Explosives (Demolition)** to tamp his charges carefully. Success halves the number of charges needed, rounding up; e.g., merely 13 sticks o' dynamite or 5 blocks of plastique for that darned blast door. Failure means the explosion doesn't do its job. Try again! Critical failure means an explosives disaster. Tamping calls for drilling and pounding on things. It's *never* fast or stealthy – save it for when you have all night in a deserted area.

*The trick to selling an assassination attempt is to use a lot more fire power . . . and an explosion or two doesn't hurt.*

– Michael Westen,  
**Burn Notice**

*Strategic Placement:* Alternatively, the demo man can roll against **Architecture** for a building, **Engineer (Combat)** for a fortification, or **Mechanic** for a vehicle to place his charges so that they blow key structural elements. Success and failure on this roll work as for tamping, but the surrounding circumstances differ in several ways. On the upside, strategic placement can be quick and stealthy – just slap the charges down on the critical hardware. The downside is that this isn't possible from *outside*, and indeed requires full access to vital areas: a building's basement, a vehicle's interior, etc. You can't use both tamping *and* strategic placement; choose one or the other.

*Artillery:* If heavy weapons are available, standard attack rolls against the appropriate **Artillery** or **Gunner** skill can be used to blow away an obstacle. To rig explosive shells as demolition charges, roll against **Armoury (Heavy Weapons)** – any failure means an explosives disaster – and then use these like any other charges. To work out how many shells you need, divide dice required by the weapon's damage dice instead of 9 or 15 for dynamite or plastique.

*Buildings:* Bridges, buildings, shore batteries, and other large structures require more explosives than a squad can carry. The heroes must instead neutralize security and rig explosives found on-site, or make an Assistance Roll to request delivery of *lots* of explosives. Make an **Explosives (Demolition)** roll for the fuse. Alternatively, the GM can pick an arbitrary number of charges needed to blow the target and require several strategic placement rolls as the crew moves through the area, dealing with mooks and security measures.

## SABOTAGE

It's sometimes important to disable complex systems *without* flames and explosions – really! The general rule is that someone with the necessary tools (-5 without) and skills to *fix* something can also *break* it. Failure merely gives enemies another chance to notice; check **Stealth** as usual. Critical failure also breaks the tools and may endanger the saboteur. See below for examples.

In all cases, if the goal is not to disable the item but to have it function as a trap (e.g., an elevator that plunges down the shaft when ridden, or brakes that fail at high speed), apply another -2. A complementary **Traps** roll can help offset this.

*Big Machines:* For general machinery like compressors and elevators, someone with **Machinist** and suitable tools can disable the mechanism with a skill roll. Only use BAD if the target is something like a *secure, private* elevator. Critical failure causes a horrible accident that deals the saboteur at least 3d damage; e.g., falling into a hammer mill.

*Computers:* Use **Electronics Repair (Computers)** to ruin hardware or **Computer Hacking** to sabotage software. Only roll for *subtle* damage – anybody can rip out a hard drive.

*Cutting Power:* To shut down electric fences, electrical alarms, electronic locks, and so on by cutting mains access requires an **Electrician** roll. Critical failure results in a shock: 3d burning. Possible complications are **Area Knowledge** rolls to find the right junction, **Climbing** rolls to reach it, and BAD on any of these rolls if the enemy took pains to isolate the power supply.

*Vehicles:* Use the appropriate **Mechanic** specialty. Only apply BAD for spy cars, jet fighters, and other high-value rides.

*Weapons:* Use the relevant **Armoury** specialty. For heavy weapons (e.g., artillery and tank guns) BAD often applies – access is monitored, the hardware is robust, and good-quality weaponry is tamper-resistant. Critical failure discharges one shot or explodes it in the breech, injuring the saboteur.

## SETTING TRAPS

Assassins and commandos, especially, like to leave surprises for mooks. The player should describe the desired effects of the trap, and what gear or found items he intends to build it from. The GM then makes a secret **Traps** roll. Success means a functional trap. Failure means a dud. Critical failure means the trap affects the would-be trapper!

Some special considerations:

*Concealing Traps:* Untrained victims are unlikely to spot a trap, but you can hide it from canner foes – just declare that you're hiding it. Seekers must *win* a Quick Contest of their detection skill vs. your **Camouflage** skill for an outdoor trap, or **Smuggling** for an indoor or vehicular one.

*Explosives and Incendiaries:* These things require the standard rolls to prepare before you can use them as traps; see *Blowing Stuff Up* (pp. 24-25). For bombs triggered by turning on a machine, **Electronics Repair** or **Mechanic** for the machine is complementary to the **Traps** roll but not required.

*Flares and Grenades:* A signal flare can be set to fire when someone trips a wire – a useful warning! Grenades can be rigged to blow when tripped; in movies, they explode without delay. Either is a simple, common trap: **Traps** is at +4, and **Soldier** will suffice.

*Sabotaged Machinery:* Cars, elevators, and so on can be turned into traps by making a sabotage roll at -2. **Traps** skill is complementary but not required. See *Sabotage* (above).

*Zap!* Treat wiring a metallic object to electrical lines as sabotage. Roll **Electrician** at -2; **Traps** is complementary, as usual. Anybody who touches the wired object takes 3d burning damage – or 6d, for industrial mains.

# DECEPTION

Obscuring the truth about a deed, an object, or a person might be preparation for a job (often alongside *Social Engineering*, pp. 15-17), the whole point of an operation, or an aspect of the cleanup after clandestine criminal, espionage, or military activity.

## CLEANING

The most important kind of deception on an actual operation is cleaning up behind the squad. These tasks are the cleaner's department.

*Disposing of Corpses:* Corpses can be burned using **Arson** (p. 24); carried off-site and surreptitiously buried or tossed in the river with a **Stealth** roll; dissolved in acid (perhaps conveniently available due to **Serendipity**) with a **Chemistry** roll; fed to pigs or dogs, if you have access to them, with a suitable **Animal Handling** roll; handed over to criminal **Contacts**; or stashed using **Camouflage** outdoors or **Smuggling** indoors. Failure means that something linking corpse and killer remains. Critical failure means being caught in the act!

*I Don't Do Windows:* **Housekeeping**, of all skills, is most valuable. It covers getting stains out, picking up clutter, and removing smudges – like bloodstains, spent cartridges, and fingerprints! If the squad is undetected, these are free actions; the cleaner works as the group moves. If they did something noisy, though, they'll have to use **Stealth** to hide if anybody comes to check out the scene while they're cleaning it – and if there was any bloodshed, industrial cleanser is *required*. Afterward, rivals who try *Physical Searches* (pp. 11-12) must *win* a Quick Contest vs. the cleaner's **Housekeeping** to find useful clues.

*Planting False Evidence:* To leave a *false* clue requires suitable materials (cartridges, blood, whatever) and the **Forensics** skill. When rivals use *Physical Searches* (pp. 11-12) to seek clues, the Forensics roll to analyze evidence becomes a Quick Contest. The other party must *win* or be deceived. See *Lifts and Pulls* (p. 23) to learn how to leave evidence on people or in plain sight.

## COVER-UPS

"Clandestine" doesn't always mean "subtle." When 23 suspected terrorists turn up dead or the Mona Lisa goes missing, it's hard to keep it secret for long. But a cover-up can divert suspicion.

Orchestrating a cover-up requires extensive media access – usually via an Assistance Roll – and a **Propaganda** roll. Apply BAD to reflect counter-propaganda; this is nearly always -10 against a sovereign state or a national agency. **Electronics Operation (Media)** (for doctored media), **Public Speaking** (for speeches), and **Writing** (for speechwriting and written articles) are all complementary. This is collectively a long action that takes days or *weeks*, as suits the plot.

If those doing the cover-up or their agents are trying to convince the world that they didn't commit the clandestine act of which they're accused, success casts enough doubt that enemy fact-finding efforts are at -2, or -4 on a critical success. Failure has no effect. Critical failure spills the beans; PCs will face Rank loss or termination.

Those working for *victims* of high-profile skullduggery can also spin what they know, where they're looking, whom they suspect, etc. Success or critical success here erases -2 or -4, respectively, of the BAD that investigators face on the case, as the opposition won't be as wary. Failure has no effect. Critical failure gives the investigators an *extra* -4!

## FAKE ID

False identity is incredibly useful to infiltrators and social engineers. It eliminates the need to use **Fast-Talk**, **Stealth**, and so on to sneak into secure areas. Just show your pass and walk in!

There are *two* steps to establishing a false identity. Both are subject to the BAD one would face trying to infiltrate the locale or organization involved. The GM always rolls secretly. Any failure means the identity token won't pass, which may get you detained temporarily. Any critical failure means it will provoke arrest, attack, or another serious response.

*Faking Tokens:* Creating fake cards or badges requires a counterfeiting/forgery kit *and* a computer – although when faking old or low-security tokens, or altering purloined ones, the contents of a typical office desk will do, albeit at -5 to skill. These tasks call for a **Forgery** roll. Certain tokens *can't* be faked without special materials, which must be procured through an Assistance Roll, social engineering, or burglary.

*Validating Tokens:* To ensure that the token corresponds to a real person on the right lists, databases, etc., use *Falsifying Records* (below) for physical records and *Hacking* (p. 13) for digital ones.

## FALSIFYING RECORDS

Fake records are useful whenever the opposition is relying on reports, tapes, and so forth instead of direct observation. The GM rolls secretly for these tasks. Success yields a convincing sham. Failure means the attempt is obvious. Critical failure also gives the opposition a clue about the forger!

These tasks *aren't* subject to BAD. That modifier does affect any social engineering or theft needed to gain access to the records or sneak in with fakes, though. Somebody *will* have to do this – doctored surveillance tapes aren't useful unless they're where the real ones should be.

*Electrons:* Doctoring electronic media calls for a digital recorder, a computer, and an **Electronics Operation (Media)** roll. Success can *completely* fool anyone relying solely on surveillance systems, or produce "disturbing evidence" that lets the skill roll count as complementary to a social engineering attempt.

*Paper:* Altering documents requires a counterfeiting/forgery kit, a computer, and a **Forgery** roll – or a **Counterfeiting** roll, for bonds, stocks, etc. In some cases the roll is against the *lower* of the above skill or another: **Accounting** for ledgers, **Administration** for other complex forms, or **Law (Police)** for crime-scene reports. Possible benefits of success include membership in an organization, drawing police suspicion, and *averting* police suspicion.

## FOOLING POLYGRAPHS

There are tricks for this – and these seem to work in action movies! When subjected to a polygraph test (see *Making Them Talk*, pp. 16-17), you may substitute a *HT*-based **Fast-Talk** roll for Will in the Quick Contest. This doesn't represent talking, but your ability to control involuntary responses that accompany lying; **Smooth Operator** helps but **Voice** doesn't. If you have **Compulsive Lying**, your interrogators *automatically* suffer -5 to machine-aided Interrogation. If you're **Unfazeable**, you simply win!

## IMPERSONATION

Impersonation can be as potent as false ID (p. 26) for bypassing security. These tasks can also complement social engineering; e.g., a spy posing as a cop to interview people. The rolls below *don't* suffer BAD, but most become Quick Contests against an effective Perception or Observation skill of 10 + absolute value of BAD when attempting to deceive guards, infiltrate organized crime, etc.

*Hiding Your Face:* Looking like nobody in particular, but *not* yourself, can keep you from being recognized when the heat is on – or on a surveillance tape. Roll vs. **Disguise**, at +1 with a disguise kit. This becomes a Quick Contest if the observer knows what you look like. Success (victory) means you aren't recognizable: -2 to investigations of deeds you perform while disguised.

*Generic Impersonation:* To pose as a general class of person, all you absolutely *need* is the ability to come up with convincing lies; roll against **Fast-Talk**. To impersonate a uniformed

individual – chef, cop, etc. – you need only the uniform, although you must use **Fast-Talk** if spoken to, or **Acting** or a suitable **Savoir-Faire** specialty (see *Fitting In*, p. 16) to walk through a high-security checkpoint, crowded locker room full of your supposed peers, or other risky area without slipping up. Such attempts become Quick Contests when actively watched or directly challenged. Success (victory) lets you go wherever someone you look like could go, and attempt the things they normally do.

*Specific Impersonation:* To pose as someone specific, roll vs. the *lower* of **Disguise** or **Acting**, at -5 if you have no disguise kit. This becomes a Quick Contest when dealing with anyone who knows that person. Success (victory) lets you live that person's life – to a point. If you must give a password you don't know, strip naked, etc., roll again at -5 to fabricate a convincing ruse!

## PSY-OPS

Psychological warfare is mostly *too* cerebral for action games, but some movie heroes exploit doubt as a weapon, so the players may wish to do the same. Roll a Quick Contest against the mooks' Will. Use **Brainwashing** to give a prisoner erroneous ideas about the squad to carry back to his mates when released; **Propaganda** when delivering confusing radio broadcasts, text messages, or what have you; and **Psychology** to use voices, timing, and so on to mislead the enemy about team strength and tactics. Victory by 0-4 erodes BAD by -1 when dealing with *those* mooks; victory by 5+ removes -2. Loss stiffens their resolve: Add -1 to BAD – or -2 for loss by 5+.

# GETTING AWAY

There are several ways to leave the scene of clandestine activity. You can, of course, kick out the doors, burn rubber, and generally make a noisy getaway. This nearly always means a chase (pp. 31-35)! Alternatively, try one or more of the following tricks.

*Sneak Out:* Apply the rules under *Getting In* (pp. 18-23) to get around anything blocking your exit – but don't roll for locks, alarms, and so on that you've already defeated. If you make all the necessary rolls, congratulations! You're back in the outside world.

*Blend In:* After sneaking out – or *before* sneaking out, if you wait for a shift change, you're raiding the back room of a gangland nightclub, there's a convoy of trucks leaving the secret base, etc. – you can blend in and get lost. Roll against **Dancing** at the crowded club, **Driving** in a captured vehicle,

**Savoir-Faire (High Society)** if slipping down to the ambassador's ball after stealing his files, and **Shadowing** for other throngs. Use **Stealth** to stow away on a mook's vehicle. In all cases, apply BAD if guards are keeping watch. Success means a clean escape. Failure . . . doesn't.

*Smuggling:* If you've *taken* something, also roll for **Holdout** when trying to blend in on foot. Typical items (and skill modifiers) are microchips and thumb drives (+4); letters (+2); films (+1); audio cassettes, floppy disks, and optical disks (0); and file folders and data tapes (-1). To move large items (nukes, statues, etc.) that can't be carried without a vehicle, use **Smuggling** instead – but first roll vs. **Freight Handling** to load your cargo *quickly*, with failure meaning you're noticed! See *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10) for more on **Holdout** and **Smuggling**.

# PROVIDING SECURITY

Any squad – especially cops, security men, and soldiers – may be *providing* security instead of breaching it. To handle this, look up the rules for what the *bad guys* are trying to do, have them use the **boldface** skills normally meant for PCs, and have the team use whatever skills oppose these. Turn any

uncontested roll that requires BAD when heroes make it into a Quick Contest against the group's relevant skill. If the skill isn't obvious, use the most fitting skill under *Go-To Skills* (p. 10). Particular examples appear below.

## WATCHES

The most basic security task is keeping watch. This can arise even when the squad isn't on security duty; e.g., when camped in hostile territory. Whenever the crew posts sentries or guards, the players must state who's watching and in what order. Only the skills of those on watch affect rolls made during that watch.

Regardless of whether there's *actually* a threat, the GM should roll secretly against the best **Perception** or **Observation** score for each watch. Modifiers for darkness, fog, and so forth apply unless the sentries have suitable gear (e.g., night-vision goggles). If there's something there, success – or victory, against foes using Stealth – locates it *and* prevents surprise. Otherwise, the squad is mentally stunned when trouble hits: Everyone must make one IQ roll per turn, at +1 per turn after the first and +6 for Combat Reflexes, and can only react on the turn after succeeding.

*Alarms and Flares:* If the bad guys trigger an alarm (see *Security Systems*, pp. 21-22), a boisterous trap (see *Traps*, pp. 22-23), or similar, everybody is *automatically* alerted! They must still roll as explained above – or, if they prefer another method, as noted for that task – to *locate* the threat.

*Camouflaged Positions:* Hidden guards are a weaker deterrent to casual trouble but more likely to get the jump on the determined kind. Roll a Quick Contest: the enemy's Vision vs. the squad's **Camouflage**, using *Got You Covered* (p. 5). Victory means the team gets a second chance to detect the enemy if they fail the first time. The bad guys walk *right past* the guards without seeing them!

*Cool Commando Stuff:* In the movies, being a highly trained soldier helps at this sort of thing. Roll a Quick Contest between the two sides. Either can choose to use **Soldier**, modified for *Got You Covered* (p. 5), or its best **Tactics**. The victor gets +1 to all rolls above (to spot or not be spotted, and to recover); victory by 5+ gives +2.

## BODYGUARD DUTY

Realistic bodyguards watch for trouble and *avoid* dangerous places. So do cinematic ones – in theory. In practice, the focus is more on looking mean in shades, black suit, and earpiece, and shooting bad guys. Ventilating scumbags before they get a shot off is still an art, though!

These tasks are about hands-on protection of the client, but all of *Providing Security* (pp. 27-30) is a bodyguard's job.

*Spotting Trouble:* Spotting somebody acting suspiciously – or a rooftop sniper – takes an **Observation** roll. Range penalties (p. B550) apply, plus an extra -2 to notice anyone *higher* than you. If the suspect is using Camouflage, Shadowing, or Stealth, this becomes a Quick Contest; see *Subtlety* (pp. 9-10). The GM rolls secretly. To notice somebody who's about to draw a weapon, signaling an accomplice, etc., use **Body Language** instead. Any success (victory) lets you out-react the attackers. You can't see bombs in a trash cans and the like – that's why you sweep areas in advance – but **Danger Sense** can help.

*The Tackle:* If your client is stunned, wounded, or otherwise unable to react, you can bear him to the ground, behind a car door, etc. This calls for a **DX**, **Judo**, or **Wrestling** roll, and takes a turn. Success means you're both on the ground, in the car, behind cover, etc., with you (and your armor!) between

your client and the shooter. Failure leaves you both standing in the open. Critical failure means you *fall down*, leaving the client standing!

*Get Down, Sir!* You can opt to ask your client to get to cover on his own, so you can use your turn to shoot back, rescue someone else, etc. Make a **Savoir-Faire (Servant)** roll to get him moving. (The GM may waive this for *tough* clients, like police chiefs.) Success means he listens. Failure means he hesitates for a turn. Critical failure means he does something *rash*; e.g., takes out a gun you didn't know about and returns fire!

*Bodyguard Tactics:* When assassins strike a *prepared* bodyguard squad, good tactics can turn the tables. Roll a Quick Contest of **Tactics** between attackers and guards; *both* sides use *Got You Covered* (p. 5). The winning side gets +1 to rolls to dodge, hide, and take cover in the event that a shootout occurs; victory by 5+ gives +2.

## BOMB DISPOSAL

"Explosive ordnance disposal" (EOD) involves several tasks. Repeated attempts are allowed – right up until the bomb explodes. Mad bombers *love* timers!

Some tasks are Quick Contest against the bomber because conflict is *dramatic*. If the GM prefers, he can make these simple success rolls. In that case (only), BAD applies.

The quality of the EOD man's Explosives (EOD) tool kit modifies *all* of these rolls. Improvised tools – e.g., multi-tool and chewing gum – give -5, but are common in action movies. Thus, the GM should try to avoid *excessive* penalties from other sources.

*Finding Bombs:* Make a **Search** roll to find a bomb. You must *win* a Quick Contest against the bomber's Camouflage or Smuggling skill to locate a concealed device. On a successful **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll, a metal detector gives you +1 *and* bypasses concealment, making the attempt an uncontested **Search** roll again. A search endoscope gives +3 on a visual search, while a stethoscope gives +1 if the device makes noise. If a bomb is suspected (e.g., the mad bomber *says* it's there!), **Architecture** and **Mechanic** are complementary when searching buildings and vehicles, respectively. All bonuses are cumulative. The GM rolls in secret, and each attempt burns a minute.

*Defusing Bombs:* To disarm a bomb, *win* a Quick Contest of **Explosives (EOD)** against the Explosives skill used to set it. Tricky devices with anti-tamper precautions and multiple triggers give penalties – typically -1 per feature. Defusing takes around 5 minutes in the movies, but the EOD man must often work faster. Apply *Time Spent* (p. B346), meaning that with 30 or fewer seconds left on the timer, the roll is at -10 and no repeated attempt is possible! Regardless of the Contest outcome, only a critical failure *detonates* the bomb, and then the Cinematic Explosions rule applies; see *Cinematic Combat Rules* (p. 38).

*Dirty Tricks:* A bomb with "trap" triggers simply gives a penalty to the roll to defuse it. However, if the bomb is physically protected by a trap – like razor blades in hard-to-see places or a transmitter that warns the villain that somebody is handling his bomb – this calls for a separate *Per*-based **Traps** roll to detect and then a separate **Traps** roll to disarm. This takes an extra minute! Repeated attempts are possible if failure doesn't set off the bomb or otherwise incapacitate the EOD man.

## WMD

Terrorists, dictators, and mad scientists sometimes flaunt *weapons of mass destruction* (WMD). These rules treat WMD as plot devices – heroes inevitably disarm them in time or witness them destroying a visible-but-isolated locale for dramatic effect. Thus, abstract penalties for haste replace an explicit time scale and *Time Spent* (p. B346).

*Know Thy Enemy:* Having insufficient details about WMD gives -2 to rolls to *detect* or *disarm* them. A successful **Expert Skill (Military Science)** roll cancels this. To avoid -2 on *cleanup* rolls for biological or chemical weapons, success at **Expert Skill (Epidemiology)** or **Chemistry**, respectively, is needed.

*Detection:* Sweeps for WMD involve Geiger counters, chemical detectors, etc. Roll against **Electronics Operation (Security)** to locate the WMD. Failures allow repeated attempts – but if the device is armed and counting down, each failure gives -1 for haste on rolls to disarm. Critical failure makes the penalty -1d.

*Protective Gear:* Anyone tampering with WMD or entering an area where one was triggered needs protective equipment: an NBC suit and a gas mask, or even a “space-suit” with supplied air (use scuba gear stats). Roll against **NBC Suit** to employ such protection. Failure means a scare – something that forces the user to bail out (wasting time: another -1 to disarm) or accept exposure. Critical failure means exposure!

*Disarming:* Defusing WMD uses *Bomb Disposal* (p. 28) with skills other than **Explosives (EOD)**. For an explosive device that scatters pathogens, poison, or radioactive materials, use the lower of **Explosives (EOD)** and the appropriate **Hazardous Materials** specialty. For a sprayer or a pump, roll against the lower of **Armoury (Heavy Weapons)** and the relevant **Hazardous Materials** skill. A nuclear explosive calls for **Explosives (Nuclear Ordnance Disposal)**. Apply any accumulated haste modifiers. Failures allow repeated attempts at a cumulative -1 for haste. On a critical failure, roll again; anything but a second critical failure counts as ordinary failure. A second critical failure really does mean The End – a good time for *Buying Success* (p. B347).

*Cleanup:* Disposing of dismantled WMD or cleaning a site where WMD were used calls for a suitable **Hazardous Materials** roll. Failure leaves behind nasty stuff. Critical failure means exposure!

*Effects of Exposure:* Realistically, exposure *kills* – WMD aren’t weapons of mass inconvenience – but slaying heroes isn’t fun. Exposed PCs instead get a “mild case,” and lurch around with 1 FP and 1 HP left (use current FP or HP, if worse), and -5 to all success rolls. Recovery isn’t possible until a cure arrives; see *Medic!* (pp. 40-41). The GM may assess other effects.

## CHECKPOINT SECURITY

The most common real-world security tasks involve guarding entryways, airport and border checkpoints, and so on, observing who and what tries to pass through. For general crowd-watching, use the rules for spotting trouble under *Bodyguard Duty* (p. 28). Some other important cases:

*Dogs:* Hollywood depicts dogs as expert bomb and drug detectors. A dog handler can find such contraband by *winning* a Quick Contest of **Animal Handling** vs. Holdout or Smuggling. **Animal Handling** rolls can also direct dogs to track or attack a specific bad guy. Repeated attempts are allowed, but each failure gives the enemy one more turn to shoot, run, etc. Critical failure means the dogs *freak out*, attacking bystanders, raiding a hotdog stand and wolfing down the spoils, etc.

*Identity Verification:* Whenever somebody who isn’t supposed to be somewhere tries to sneak past, the GM should roll a Quick Contest of the squad’s *highest* **Perception** or **Observation** against the bad guy’s operative skill: Acting, Disguise, or Fast-Talk if he’s trying *Impersonation* (p. 27), Forgery if he’s passing false ID, etc. Victory spots the ploy. Checking faces, prints, and so on against computer records requires a simple **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll; success finds people who aren’t in the database (or who are flagged as *trouble*). Roll once per watch – not per person.

*Pat-Downs:* Searching people for hidden items is a Quick Contest of **Search** against Holdout. The searcher gets +1 per minute of searching, to a maximum of +5 after five minutes

(a full body-cavity search). With a metal detector, an **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll gives another +1 (handheld model) to +3 (stationary installation) and eliminates Holdout bonuses for special clothing. Fancy millimeter-wave radar gives +3, negates clothing bonuses, and provides some idea of *what* was detected.

*Searches:* Looking through luggage or vehicles works much like a pat-down, except that the Quick Contest is **Search** vs. Smuggling, and metal detectors aren’t useful on vehicles, which are mostly metal. Large X-ray machines, if available, give +3 to screen packages and baggage on a successful **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll; the latest, greatest CT scanners give +4. Chemical sensors find bombs and drugs on a successful **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll.

## ELECTRONIC SECURITY

When the heroes operate high-tech security gear to thwart spies and hackers, use the master rule for security tasks: The bad guys employ the **boldface** skills listed for their deeds, while the PCs roll against the skills that oppose these. Some special cases:

*Area Surveillance:* Manning a security console requires **Electronics Operation (Security)** for cameras, alarms, etc., and **Electronics Operation (Sensors)** for things like radar or anti-diver sonar. These normally oppose Stealth attempts to avoid detection, but contest enemy Electronics Operation rolls when dealing with jammers.

*Computer Security:* Use *Hacking* (p. 13), but now the shoe is on the other foot and the squad rolls against **Expert Skill (Computer Security)**. To boot out a hacker who's *already* "in," roll a Quick Contest of **Computer Hacking** each time he tries something (alter data, intercept communications, etc.). Victory kicks him out. Any other result lets him act unmolested; you can't retry until he attempts something else. This isn't realistic – it's simply how hacker movies work!

*Countersurveillance:* Attempts to use high-tech gizmos to look for people trying to watch *you* with high-tech gear are treated as a *single* Quick Contest. Anybody using simple optics or microphones rolls against **Observation**, while people with gear that calls for **Electronics Operation (Surveillance)** employ that. Each side uses its highest skill and best equipment bonus. Ignore range penalties; they're the same for everybody. The winners detect the losers first, giving them time to perform one complex task before being noticed themselves: "ready weapons and shoot," "alert everyone about the enemy's location," etc. Victory by 5+ means *not* being noticed – the winners could stalk right up to their opponents' position without the enemy catching on.

*Electronic Counter-Countermeasures:* If the bad guys are jamming communications, see *Communications* (pp. 8-9). When *both* sides have potent transmitters and are locked in an electronic duel, roll a Quick Contest of **Electronics Operation (Communications)** instead. The winner may choose either to control the channel (enemy intercepts simply fail) or to play along and inject false messages.

*Finding a Bug:* To sweep for beacons, bugs, or similar devices, tell the GM, who rolls secretly. A gizmo in plain sight requires a roll against **Vision** or **Observation**, whichever is higher, modified by SM. For a hidden gadget, this becomes a Quick Contest of **Search** against your rival's Camouflage, Holdout, or Smuggling, and you *still* take SM penalties. With a bug detector, you merely have to win a Quick Contest of **Electronics Operation (Security)** against your opponent's Electronics Operation (Surveillance); none of the rest matters. In all cases, claim the maximum +5 under *Time Spent* (p. B346) when you have no time limit. If you find a bug, it's up to you whether you disable it, plant it somewhere else, or pass along false information.

## Security Tools

Heroes on security detail frequently operate expensive tools owned by their employer. This is usually a plot device or the result of an Assistance Roll. Below are stats for times when the team must buy or carry such gear.

These gadgets make great challenges when the *heroes* are the infiltrators! For NPC operators, assume that equipment effects are abstracted into effective skill of 10 + absolute value of BAD. Alternatively, *ignore* BAD, assign skill levels, and have the NPCs operate the gear as described.

Devices that use "external power" can be thwarted by cutting the power; see *Sabotage* (p. 25).

*Countersniper System:* This black box uses sensitive microphones to detect speeding bullets. It can pinpoint a gunman's exact location instantly! If the sniper employs a silencer, detection isn't automatic; roll against 10, adjusted for the silencer's Hearing penalty. Runs for 10 hours. \$10,000, 30 lbs.

*CT Scanner:* A state-of-the-art package-screening system. It gives +4 to **Search** – +6 vs. explosives – on a successful **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll. See *Checkpoint Security* (p. 29). External power: \$2,000,000, 6 tons.

*Electromagnetic Car Stopper:* Hidden under pavement in a high-security area, this installation attacks automobile electronics with an electromagnetic pulse. Roll HT-8 for the vehicle. Failure means it's knocked out for seconds equal to margin of failure. External power: \$10,000.

*Hydrophone:* A sensitive underwater microphone for coastal security. Make an **Electronics Operation (Sensors)** roll to discover divers, mini subs, etc. It *automatically* detects ultrasonic communicators! External power: \$5,000, 200 lbs.

*Millimeter-Wave Camera:* This gizmo can "see" through light cover: clothing, foliage, etc. A successful **Electronics**

**Operation (Security)** roll gives +4 to **Search** against targets within 10 yards. See *Checkpoint Security* (p. 29). External power: \$100,000, 50 lbs.

*Polygraph:* A "lie detector" consists of several sensors worn by the subject, plugged into a box that must be connected to a Complexity 3+ computer. Operation requires an **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll, giving a variable modifier to **Interrogation** rolls; see *Making Them Talk* (pp. 16-17). Runs for 8 hours. \$1,500, 1 lb.

*Portal Metal Detector:* On a successful **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll, this doorframe-like machine gives +3 to **Search** against anyone walking through it. See *Checkpoint Security* (p. 29). External power: \$5,000, 50 lbs.

*Radio Direction Finder:* A large scanner for intercepting and pinpointing radio signals. To locate a specific radio within 200 miles, even a tactical headset, the user must *win* a Quick Contest of **Electronics Operation (Communications)** with the transmitter's operator. External power: \$75,000, 100 lbs.

*Shielded Room:* This metal-lined room has soundproofing, anti-surveillance glass, filtered outlets, etc. It gives -5 to electronic intelligence-gathering attempts of any kind. Cost is \$50 per square foot of walls, ceilings, and floors.

*Tactical Radar:* A tripod-mounted radar that can spot moving targets within 6 miles and classify them ("animal," "man," etc.) within 1,000 yards, even in fog or darkness. This requires an **Electronics Operation (Sensors)** roll, becoming a Quick Contest vs. Stealth against alerted intruders. External power: \$50,000, 15 lbs.

*X-Ray Machine:* This package-screening device gives +3 to **Search** – +4 vs. metallic items – on a successful **Electronics Operation (Security)** roll. See *Checkpoint Security* (p. 29). External power: \$50,000, 1,000 lbs.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# ULTRA-VIOLENCE

So far, we've presented many ways to handle indirect and unopposed violence done by heroes to bad guys or vice versa: smashing doors, blowing things up, etc. However, violent contests are the soul of action cinema. Every previous rule sets the scene for this, offering opportunities to bring on the throbbing soundtrack and bone-crunching sound effects. This sort of violence takes two main forms: *chases* and *combat*.

## FIGHT OR FLIGHT

When heroes and bad guys meet on bad terms, what happens next depends on who wants to do what:

- If both parties wish to back down or flee, there's no encounter: Wimps . . .

- If one party wants to get away, ask the other if they wish to pursue. If so, there's a chase. If not, there's no chase – but there might be combat if the party that isn't leaving the scene chooses to shoot at their fleeing rivals!

- If neither party wants to leave, direct interaction occurs: combat, interrogation, robbery, etc.

Chases and combat aren't exclusive! The chase rules support combat during a chase, and the GM is free to end a chase if both sides decide to stop running and start shooting. Similarly, if somebody bolts from a fight, the GM can switch over to the chase rules.

## CHASES

A chase occurs when heroes and bad guys meet and one side wants to leave – to fetch help, not get killed, whatever. On level ground without cover, assume that the faster party flees or overtakes the slower one. The system that follows is for footraces across rooftops, car chases in dense traffic, etc., where speed *doesn't* guarantee victory. This should be *most* chases in an *Action* campaign!

Remember: BAD never modifies rolls made in chases, although it can determine NPC skill; see *BAD Ideas* (p. 5).

## QUARRY AND PURSUER

These rules assume two parties (but see *Multi-Party Chases*, p. 34). The person or vehicle trying to flee is the *quarry*. The one chasing is the *pursuer*.

## ROUNDS

Chases take place in abstract *rounds*. A round is "time enough for both sides to try something cool." It has no specific duration – because in action cinema, camera effects and editing bend time. Use these guidelines to measure "chase time" against outside time:

- Each round allows an ally or an enemy who *isn't* involved in the chase to perform one task that takes at most a minute. For instance, a crew could lead guards on a three-round chase while their infiltrator (1) picks a lock, (2) negotiates laser beams, and (3) finds a hidden safe. He couldn't *crack* a safe – that takes an hour! This allows more to happen during an action scene than the second-by-second combat rules in the *Basic Set* permit.

## Range Band Table

Distance, too, is abstract in a chase. It uses five *range bands*:

Range Band	Starting Range*	Range Penalty*	Description*
Close	0-5 yards	0 to -2	Can touch rival, at least some of the time.
Short	6-20 yards	-3 to -6	Can talk to enemy, or toss things at him.
Medium	21-100 yards	-7 to -10	Can only shout at rival; need a gun to attack him.
Long	101-500 yards	-11 to -14	Opponent is out of earshot, at scoped rifle range.
Extreme	501+ yards	-15 or worse	Rival difficult or impossible to see <i>or</i> shoot.

\* Use distances in yards, range penalties, and descriptions only to settle the chase's *starting* range band; e.g., if spotted doing computer monitoring at 100 yards, the chase begins at Medium range. If the exact range is unknown, use the text description to assign starting range based on what initiated the chase; e.g., pickpocketing requires a touch, so chasing a pickpocket starts at Close range.

- If the chase diverts the heroes from a time-critical task (e.g., disarming a bomb) or is necessary to attempt such a task (e.g., the bomb is hidden on a truck that the team has to chase down), assume that after the chase, the task suffers a generic haste penalty of -1d, no matter how long the chase runs.

## CHASE SEQUENCE

Each round, follow this sequence:

1. Quarry chooses a *chase maneuver* (below).
2. Pursuer chooses a chase maneuver.
3. Pursuer resolves any attacks or skill rolls for his maneuver.
4. Quarry resolves any attacks or skill rolls for his maneuver.
5. If neither side wipes out badly or is too damaged to continue, roll a Quick Contest of *Chase Rolls* (p. 34).
6. Adjust the range band for the Contest outcome and start the next round.

## CHASE MANEUVERS

Each side must select one chase maneuver per round. The quarry picks and declares his maneuver. Then the pursuer chooses *his* maneuver in response. In poor visibility, the GM may have both decide blindly.

Each maneuver indicates who can use it, and has one to three notes:

*Conditions:* Special conditions required to enable the maneuver. “Suitable scenery or Lucky Break” indicates a maneuver that only works if the surroundings support it. If the GM didn’t describe the scene that way – e.g., you want a ramp on a city street – you can either invoke **Serendipity** or spend a character point (a variation on *Player Guidance*, p. B347) for a Lucky Break that allows the maneuver. Describe it! (“As luck would have it, a City Works crew left some planks over a sewer pipe.”)

*Actions:* Attacks or success rolls to resolve *before* making Chase Rolls.

*Chase Rolls:* Modifier to your Chase Roll – and occasionally your rival’s – for this round, along with any special Chase Roll results. Some maneuvers are “static”; see *Static Maneuvers* (pp. 34-35).

### Attack

**Pursuer or Quarry**

Stop and make a careful *ranged* attack.

*Actions:* Everyone on your side with a ranged weapon may roll an attack, adding his weapon Acc; see *Attacks* (p. 35).

*Chase Rolls:* Static maneuver.

### Disembark/Embark

**Pursuer or Quarry**

Leave or enter a vehicle. Leaving is valuable when pursued by a faster vehicle and there’s a nearby building to dash into. If your pursuer doesn’t pick Disembark/Embark, too, then you can perform a Mobility Escape (pp. 32-33) next round.

Entering lets you take control of the boarded vehicle *next* round. This is nice when being chased on foot and you find a car!

When you change modes of transportation this way, use the skills and stats for your new mode next round.

*Conditions:* Must be in a vehicle to leave one, or have access to a vehicle to board one; the latter requires suitable scenery or Lucky Break.

*Actions:* Make a vehicle control roll to start a vehicle (or *hotwire* it, p. 23); if you fail, you can try this maneuver again next round. Passengers can attack with ranged weapons; see *Attacks* (p. 35).

*Chase Rolls:* Static maneuver.

### Emergency Action

**Pursuer or Quarry**

Regain control after a wipeout.

*Conditions:* If you experienced a close call last round, you *must* do this (or Stop); otherwise, you can’t choose this maneuver. See *Wipeouts* (p. 35).

*Chase Rolls:* -5.

### Force

**Pursuer or Quarry**

Attempt to force an enemy vehicle off the road.

*Conditions:* Round starts at Close range *and* you’re in a vehicle that could strike your rival’s (no boats forcing motorbikes off the road!).

*Actions:* Roll against vehicle operation skill to hit. Target may attempt a vehicular dodge. If you hit, your target must make a vehicle control roll at -1/+1 per 5 full points by which your vehicle’s ST is higher/lower than his vehicle’s ST; e.g., if you have a HMMWV (ST 72) and he’s in a sports car (ST 57), he rolls at -3. Failure sends him to *Wipeouts* (p. 35). Passengers can attack with ranged weapons; see *Attacks* (p. 35).

*Chase Rolls:* -2.

### Hide

**Quarry**

Attempt to duck out of sight of pursuer in a cluttered area – dash through a door and hide next to it, make several tight turns in a maze of alleyways, etc.

*Conditions:* Round starts at Medium range or greater; suitable scenery or Lucky Break.

*Chase Rolls:* -10 at Medium range, -5 at Long range, or +0 at Extreme Range. On foot, you must make your Chase Roll against **Stealth**. If you win the Quick Contest of Chase Rolls, then your foe shoots right past! You may opt *either* to escape, ending the chase, *or* to pull out behind your rival at Close, Short, or Medium range, making you the pursuer next round. If you *don’t* win, your pursuer is automatically at Close range!

### Mobility Escape

**Quarry**

Escape pursuit by going where your pursuer cannot; e.g., evade a car by taking a boat out to sea or a motorbike down a narrow alley.

*Conditions:* Either a *mismatched* chase (e.g., air vs. land vehicle) *or* suitable scenery or Lucky Break. A Lucky Break can enable a Mobility Escape even if your opponent is equally mobile; e.g., in a foot chase, you could board the subway and flee your pursuer.



*Chase Rolls:* If your pursuer truly can't follow you, his maneuver is treated as static even if it otherwise wouldn't be, on this and all future rounds. He can, however, use his own Lucky Break to prevent this (e.g., board that subway himself) if he doesn't select a static maneuver.

## Mobility Pursuit

### Pursuer

Cut off your quarry by taking a route that he cannot; e.g., fly over some buildings in a helicopter to thwart a motorcyclist.

*Conditions:* Either a *mismatched* chase or suitable scenery or Lucky Break. A Lucky Break can allow this even when both parties are traveling the same way – e.g., you catch a ride on a conveyor belt to cheat in a foot chase.

*Chase Rolls:* +5. If you win, you *must* use any range shift to reduce range.

## Move

### Pursuer or Quarry

Chase or flee your rival using sheer skill and speed. This is the “default” maneuver: no conditions apply, there are no Chase Roll modifiers, and nobody attacks (take Move and Attack for that).

## Move and Attack

### Pursuer or Quarry

Attack your rival while continuing flight or pursuit.

*Actions:* Everyone on your side with a ranged weapon may roll an attack, but only heroes with **Gunslinger** add Acc; see *Attacks* (p. 35). At Close range, *melee* attacks are possible; if anyone successfully grapples, the chase ends immediately.

*Chase Rolls:* -2 for pedestrians, or for a vehicle operator who attacks while driving.

## Ram

### Pursuer

Attempt to collide with or run down your quarry.

*Conditions:* Round starts at Close range *and* you're in a vehicle that could strike your rival.

*Actions:* Roll against vehicle operation skill to hit. The target may attempt to dodge. If you hit, don't fuss with the **Basic Set** collision rules. Instead, each of you rolls thrust damage for your vehicle's ST, subtracts the target vehicle's DR, and applies injury to vehicular HP. A pedestrian uses *his* ST and HP if run over. If your quarry did a Reverse this round, *double* damage for both of you! (People inside a vehicle involved in a Ram take a nominal 1 HP of general bruising – that's the movies for you.) Anyone operating a vehicle involved in a Ram must make an unmodified vehicle control roll; on a failure, see *Wipeouts* (p. 35). Passengers can attack with ranged weapons; see *Attacks* (p. 35).

*Chase Rolls:* -2.

## Reverse

### Quarry

Turn sharply and come back at your pursuer!

*Chase Rolls:* -10. On foot, you can opt to make your Chase Roll against **Acrobatics**. In all cases, regardless of the Quick

Contest of Chase Rolls, failing your roll sends you to *Wipeouts* (p. 35). If you win *and* don't wipe out, you're the pursuer next round! Win or lose, range automatically becomes Close.

## Stop

### Pursuer or Quarry

Stop dead, ending the chase.

*Actions:* If you're the pursuer, let your quarry escape. If you're the quarry, stop the chase and start combat or other interaction.

*Chase Rolls:* Don't roll – the chase is over.

## Stunt

### Pursuer or Quarry

Do something *risky* to outmaneuver your rival: jump a ramp, drive against traffic, etc. Describe it!

*Actions:* Roll against the skill you're using for the chase, at any even penalty you like (-2, -4, etc.). Driving the wrong way in traffic is -10 or worse! On foot, you must choose a move from *Climbing* (pp. 18-19) or *Parkour* (pp. 19-20); minimum penalty is the one listed for that feat, and your Stunt roll is against **Acrobatics**, **Climbing**, or **Jumping**. In all cases, failure sends you to *Wipeouts* (p. 35) while success gives the bonus below.

*Chase Rolls:* +1 to your Chase Roll per -2 on your Stunt roll.

## Passenger Actions

A vehicle's operator chooses its maneuver, possibly after consulting with his crew. Each passenger aboard can take *one* of these actions during the round:

*Attack:* If the vehicle operator took a suitable maneuver, a passenger can attack; see *Attacks* (p. 35).

*Board:* If the round starts at Close range, a passenger can try to board an enemy vehicle! Roll a Quick Contest of **Acrobatics** or **Jumping** vs. the opposing driver's vehicle skill. Each contestant adds his vehicle's speed bonus. If the passenger wins, he leaps aboard the enemy vehicle and can continue to attack those on board as if at Close range – a distraction that gives the enemy driver -2 to Chase Rolls. If he ties, or loses by 1-4, he stays on his own vehicle. If he loses by 5+, he falls out, is run over as if the target vehicle had done a Ram on him (or falls, if he jumped from an aircraft), and is out of the chase.

*Seize Control:* If a vehicle's operator is down due to injury, a passenger can take over the controls to continue the chase. He must take Emergency Action next round (instead of Stop); after that, he can participate normally. He can also try this after boarding a hostile vehicle. If the driver, or a passenger who wishes to seize control from a subdued driver, opposes him, roll a Quick Contest of **DX**, **Judo**, or **Wrestling** each round. The winner controls the vehicle, but at -5 due to the ongoing struggle.

*Other Tasks:* A passenger can try any noncombat task possible for someone outside the chase: disarm a bomb, treat an injured ally, etc. This is at -2 if the vehicle delivers or receives a Force or a Ram, or -5 if the driver tries Emergency Action, Reverse, Stunt, or Stunt Escape.

## Stunt Escape

### Quarry

Escape pursuit with a flashy move; e.g., drop from an overpass onto a truck during a foot chase, or take a car down an alleyway on two wheels.

*Conditions:* Suitable scenery or Lucky Break.

*Actions:* Execute a Stunt exactly as usual, but declare that you're using the scenery or Lucky Break specifically to *escape*.

## Multi-Party Chases

The chase rules are one-on-one to keep things simple and fun; involving several participants per side leads to a hairy tactical combat. But movies feature swarms of motorbikes, security convoys battling multiple terrorist Jeeps, etc.

To handle this, run things *exactly* like a one-on-one chase and have only each side's leader – chosen by the GM for NPCs, elected by the players for PCs – select maneuvers and make Chase Rolls. His results in the Contest affect his entire side.

If a side chooses Force or Ram, each attacker must select one target, and may opt not to attack anyone. If a side chooses a maneuver that allows attacks, each person must target a specific enemy. Passengers who try to board enemy vehicles must pick particular destinations.

Each participant makes his own *control* rolls if he makes or receives a Ram, or suffers a Force. He also makes his own Stunt rolls at the penalty his leader chose. All damage he receives is his alone. If any of this spells a wipeout, only *he* wipes out; allies aren't affected. If the leader is out of the chase, that side must pick a new one!

Mobility Escape and Mobility Pursuit are especially tricky with mixed groups (e.g., helicopter, boat, and submarine). The least-painful approach is to say that equally mobile parties break off on their own chase, while the rest are left behind in the original, and both advance at the same pace.

### Three-Way Chases

It's also possible for one party to pursue another, who's pursuing a third. This gets messy, too, but the GM can fudge it as two largely unrelated chases: one between the front and middle participants, and another between the middle and rear ones.

Each round, the front participant picks a quarry maneuver and the rear one selects a pursuer maneuver. The middleman must *either* favor escape and select a quarry maneuver *or* emphasize pursuit and pick a pursuer maneuver. If he opts for pursuit, treat his maneuver with respect to his pursuer as Move. If he prefers escape, his maneuver with respect to his quarry is Move.

Roll the two chases separately, with only the modifiers for that chase and any generic ones (e.g., for injury). The results for the front and rear participants are obvious. For the middleman, *both* apply. Where they conflict, use the worst. The GM decides what's "worst" (and will have to make *many* similar judgment calls!).

*Chase Rolls:* +1 to your Chase Roll per -2 on your Stunt roll. If your pursuer responds with Stunt at the same penalty or worse, he receives his Stunt bonus; if he has superior mobility and responds with Mobility Pursuit, he gets +5. Either way, the Quick Contest of Chase Rolls proceeds normally. If he picks any other maneuver, however, treat it as static even if it normally isn't, on this and all future rounds.

## CHASE ROLLS

After all subsidiary rolls, attacks, defenses, damage, and wipeouts are resolved, each party rolls against the skill governing his mode of travel: **Bicycling, Boating, Driving, Piloting, Riding, Running, Skiing, Submarine, Swimming**, etc. This roll is always *DX*-based. Pedestrians without **Running** can use *DX*. For vehicles, only the operator's skill matters. Opposing skills need not match – you *can* chase a bicycle with a helicopter or a speedboat by driving alongside a canal.

Chase maneuvers, driver injury, or distraction *might* modify Chase Rolls, but these modifiers nearly always apply:

*Complementary Skills:* You may roll against *either* **Area Knowledge** for the location of the chase (to exploit shortcuts, scenery, etc.) *or* **Urban Survival** if you're in a built-up area (to predict dangers and traffic). You never *have* to roll, but if you do, you get the usual bonus or penalty. Use the *best* skill of those aboard a vehicle.

*Handling:* Those operating vehicles add their vehicle's Handling stat.

*Higher Purpose (Deliver the Package):* When you're trying to deliver goods or a person safely, this advantage gives +1.

*Speed Bonus:* Except during a static maneuver (see below), each side gets a bonus based on Top Speed. Use the "Size" column of the table on p. B550: +2 for a Move 5 man, +3 for a speedy Move 6-7 person, +4 for a vehicle capable of 20 mph, +5 for 30 mph, +6 for 40 mph, +7 for 60 mph, +8 for 100 mph, +9 for 140 mph, +10 for 200 mph, and so on. For in-between values, use the *lower* bonus.

Chase Rolls meet in a Quick Contest. The outcome sets the range band at the start of the *next* round:

*Victory by 0-4:* No change.

*Victory by 5-9:* Winner may shift range band by *one* step in either direction.

*Victory by 10+:* Winner may shift range band by *two* steps either way.

Thus, fast vehicles will quickly elude or overtake slower ones, or pedestrians, but this isn't *automatic*. Skilled heroes can often trump faster but less-canny rivals.

### Escape

If the quarry can shift range beyond Extreme, he *escapes*, ending the chase!

### Static Maneuvers

Stopping for any reason is a *static* maneuver. Attack and Disembark/Embark are always static. *Any* maneuver is static if your rival succeeds at Mobility Escape or Stunt Escape – and once he does, all your future maneuvers are static, too, regardless of what maneuver he takes, unless you can change mobility or pull a Stunt to keep up.

A static maneuver means you get no speed bonus on your Chase Roll. If your rival picks a non-static maneuver, he gets an extra range shift no matter who wins the Contest – that is, three if he wins by 10+, two if he wins by 5-9, or one otherwise. If you *both* perform static maneuvers, range doesn't change that round.

## ATTACKS

Only Attack, Disembark/Embark, Force, Move and Attack, and Ram allow attacks. During other maneuvers, either your target isn't in sight or your movement is too wild to allow a shot.

If your maneuver allows an attack, you get *one* attack roll. This reflects the best shot that presented itself during the round. In games that don't track ammo, everybody might still be blazing away the whole time – just like in the movies! Modifiers:

*Movement:* During an Disembark/Embark, Force, Move and Attack, or Ram, a pedestrian or a vehicle operator suffers the *worst* of -2 or his weapon's Bulk with ranged attacks. Passengers aboard a vehicle have only -1.

*Range:* 0 if the round started at Close range, -3 at Short range, -7 at Medium range, -11 at Long range, or -15 at Extreme range.

*Target:* Vehicle SM if shooting a vehicle; no modifier if shooting a pedestrian or an exposed rider; -3 if shooting at a vehicle's vital areas, such as engines or wheels, or through windows at a vehicle's crew.

*Gunslingers:* Heroes with **Gunslinger** can shoot during any maneuver but Hide! They only suffer range and target penalties. During Disembark/Embark, Force, Move and Attack, or Ram, they add weapon Acc. During Attack, they add Acc+1.

## DEFENSES

The operator of a vehicle targeted by Force, Ram, or a weapon attack can defend with a *vehicular dodge* at (control skill/2) + Handling, rounded down. Always add **Enhanced Dodge (Vehicular)** to this roll!

A rider, passenger, or pedestrian can try to dodge any attack on him. Against a melee attack made during a Move and Attack at Close range, he can opt to parry. Either is at -2 when seated.

## DAMAGE

One way to win a chase is to damage your rival to the point where he can't continue.

*Damage to People:* A vehicle operator who's injured has the usual -1 to -4 for shock, or -4 if stunned, on his *next* Chase Roll. If a human falls unconscious or dies, though, he can no longer

act; if he's the sole pedestrian or vehicle operator on his side, he loses the chase and must go to *Wipeouts* (below).

*Vehicular Damage:* A vehicle at 0 or fewer HP must make the HT rolls indicated on pp. B483-484, reading "second" as "round." A vehicle that suffers HP/3, rounded *up*, to vital areas (deliberately left abstract here!) must roll as if at 0 HP or its true injury level, whichever is worse. Failure takes the vehicle out of the chase and sends it to *Wipeouts* (below).

## WIPEOUTS

*Wipeouts* are crashes, skids, trips, etc. There are two sorts:

*Close Call:* If the target of a Force, either side in a Ram, or someone who botches a Reverse, Stunt, or Stunt Escape fails the relevant roll by his vehicle's Stability Rating (SR) or less – or gets a regular failure, on foot – he just has a scare. He participates in the Quick Contest of Chase Rolls as usual *this* round. *Next* round, he must select Emergency Action or Stop, or suffer a wreck. His opponent will know this!

*Wreck:* Failure by more than SR on the above rolls – critical failure, on foot – spells disaster. So does not following a close call with Emergency Action or Stop. And so does incapacitating a vehicle operator with nobody to take over, or taking out a vehicle or a pedestrian. If any of that happens, *that* pedestrian or vehicle performs an instant Stop and is out of the chase. Worse, that participant collides with something, taking thrust damage for his or its ST, adding speed bonus per die. Anyone in a vehicle during a wreck suffers only 1d plus speed bonus as *injury*. So if an HMMWV with ST 72 (thrust 8d) and Move 33 (speed bonus +7) crashes, it takes 8d+56 and those aboard lose 1d+7 HP.

## Collateral Damage

Foot, plane, and boat chases mostly involve only interested parties. But what would a cinematic *car* chase be without parked vehicles, property, and citizens getting splashed everywhere?

On crowded streets, each wipeout of any kind causes a random accident. If the *quarry* causes an accident, his pursuer has -(1d-1) – that's 0 to -5 – on his next Chase Roll, due to the chaos.

The downside is that property is trashed and people are injured (but rarely killed, at least in tamer movies). Accidents give heroes who answer to legitimate bosses a penalty to Assistance Rolls for the remainder of the adventure, while freelancers get extra BAD to reflect the fact that the authorities will be seeking them. Either is -1 for one accident, -2 for two, -3 for four, and another -1 per doubling. If a face man jumps out *immediately* to bribe or sweet-talk victims, or a medic stays behind to treat them, the GM shouldn't count *that* accident.

*Stop the car? This is a car chase! I went to considerable expense to set this up. We can't just stop!*

*– Raymond Blossom, Playing God*

# COMBAT

Once you've chased down the bad guys, it's time to shoot and beat them. The **Basic Set** combat rules will do for most purposes, but some shortcuts can make for smoother battles . . . and a few new options especially suit action gaming.

## SHOOTING MADE EASY

Gunplay works best when everybody can roll and shout. Flatly ignoring modifiers to simplify shootouts is unfair, though – skill should count, and offsetting penalties is the whole point of high skill. The key is to avoid *unnecessary* modifiers while keeping fun ones.

In general, keep modifiers for cover (-2 in most cases where you can see the target), darkness (-1 to -9), gear (like the targeting lasers and scopes in **Action 1: Heroes**), hit location (pp. B398-400), maneuvers (particularly Aim, All-Out Attack, and Move and Attack), and size (SM). Remember to add Acc or ignore Bulk for heroes with **Gunslinger**. And use the simplified rules below.

### Simplified Range

The *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) is dandy for surveillance and observation, but clunky in a raging battle, especially when not using a map. Instead, use the range bands defined for chases; see *Range Band Table* (p. 31) and *Attacks* (p. 35). To quickly set an encounter's range, use Close (no range penalty, but Bulk applies if either side is punching or grappling) in a *melee*, Short (-3) for a *pistol* shootout, Medium (-7) for a *shotgun* or *SMG* fight, Long (-11) for a *rifle* engagement, and Extreme (-15) for *sniping*.

### Simplified Rapid Fire

A gunman whose firearm has RoF 2+ can fire multiple shots. If he has several targets, he can opt to divide his shots among them. Decide on the number of bullets allocated to each target, assess standard ranged combat modifiers for each target, and then apply the following in each case:

*Number of Shots at Target:* 0 for 2-4 shots, +1 for 5-8 shots, +2 for 9-12 shots, +3 for 13-16 shots, +4 for 17-24 shots, +5 for 25-49 shots, or +6 for 50-99 shots.

*Total Number of Targets:* If the weapon has RoF 2-4, there's -6 on all attacks when shooting two targets, -12 when shooting three, or -18 when shooting four; *halve* these penalties for heroes with **Gunslinger**. If the weapon has RoF 5+ (it's full-automatic), there's no special penalty – and simply ignore realistic concerns like arcs of fire and shots lost between targets!

*Shotguns:* A RoF 2x9 shotgun can blast 18 pellets at one target (+4 for number of pellets), or 9 at each of two (each attack has +2 for number of pellets but -6 for two targets).

A RoF 3x9 shotgun can fire 27 pellets at one target (+5 for number of pellets), 9 at one and 18 at another (+2 and +4 for number of pellets, but -6 for two targets), or 9 at each of three (+2 for number of pellets but -12 for three targets).

*Resolving Hits:* Next, roll to hit each target. Success means that target is hit by one bullet (or pellet), plus one extra bullet

per *full* multiple of weapon Rcl by which the roll was made, to a maximum of the number of bullets fired at that target. *Double* Rcl for a RoF 5+ weapon sprayed across multiple targets.

*Example:* Success by 4 with a Rcl 2 pistol means three hits: one for success and two for making the roll by twice Rcl. If spraying a RoF 5+ SMG at several targets, Rcl 2 would be treated as Rcl 4, and success by 4 would only be enough for one extra hit (two in all).

*Damage:* For 1-3 hits, roll damage normally. For 4+ hits, it's quicker not to roll. Use *average* damage for the weapon (3.5 per die, plus any modifier), subtract DR, multiply by number of hits, and drop fractions. To save time, note average damage for RoF 4+ guns on character sheets!

*Example:* Shotgun pellets do 1d+1 and average 3.5 + 1 = 4.5 points, so DR 2 would leave 4.5 - 2 = 2.5 points, and 9 pellets would inflict 9 × 2.5 = 22.5 points, which would round to 22.

### Shooting Two Guns

Shooting two one-handed guns uses the same rules as shooting one gun. Treat each hand as attacking separately.

While shooting two guns, all attacks have an *extra* -4 unless the shooter improves the **Dual-Weapon Attack** technique. To buy off the whole -4 costs 5 points, so the GM may treat this technique as an all-or-nothing 5-point *advantage* for each **Guns** skill.

Off-hand attacks have a *further* -4. A shooter can eliminate this by buying either the **Off-Hand Weapon Training** perk for his **Guns** skill or full **Ambidexterity**.

### Leading the Target

Dodges against gunfire represent the effect of target movement on the shooter's aim. This keeps action heroes alive but is annoying when shooting mooks. High-skill heroes can mitigate this by predicting their mark's movement and placing shots *just so*. Apply all other ranged combat modifiers to skill first. If effective skill is 12+, the shooter can give his target -1 to Dodge per -2 he accepts on the shot. He cannot reduce effective skill below 10 this way.

## CRACKING SKULLS

Melee lacks multiple shots, range penalties, and so on, which makes it simple enough to use the **Basic Set** as written. But a few classic unarmed moves aren't covered there:

*Guns as Melee Weapons:* Roll against **Brawling** or **DX** to slug someone with a pistol or an SMG – or against **Guns**, with the **Pistol-Fist** perk. Damage is thrust-1 crushing, plus the absolute value of Bulk; e.g., a pistol with Bulk -2 does thr+1 crushing. Striking end-on with the butt of a longer weapon uses **Spear** or **Staff** (default DX-5) and inflicts thr+2 crushing. Holding such a long arm by the barrel and swinging it like a baseball bat requires **Two-Handed Axe/Mace** (default DX-5) and does sw+3 crushing. Pistols and SMGs have Reach C; longer weapons, Reach 1.

*Shoving People into Stuff:* To hold somebody's face to a table saw, force his head into a rolling mill, etc., grapple him as usual. If he fails to break free, then on later turns, roll a Quick Contest. Each of you uses the *highest* of **ST**, **DX**, **Judo**, **Sumo Wrestling**, or **Wrestling**. If you win, he goes where you want him to go (for simplicity's sake, assume that big machines do 3d damage). If *he* wins, he gets his margin of victory as a bonus to break free on his next turn. A tie means nothing happens.

*Shoving Stuff into People:* To shove or kick an object into somebody on its far side, roll a standard **Boxing**, **Brawling**, or **Karate** punch or kick at an extra -4. Your foe may defend normally. Such a punch or kick does its usual damage, at +1 if the object is big and hard, like a car door or a frozen steer.

*Smashing People into Walls:* If you've grappled somebody, you can hold onto him and ram him into a wall, car door, or other hard object within a yard. This *isn't* a fancy **Judo** throw! To do this, roll against **DX**, **Brawling**, **Sumo Wrestling**, or **Wrestling**. You can even target specific body parts; apply standard hit location penalties. Your opponent may either dodge or parry with a free hand. If you succeed, you inflict thrust+1 crushing, plus any skill bonus (treat ST bonuses for **Sumo Wrestling** or **Wrestling** as damage bonuses).

## FLASHY FIGHTING

In a real fight, it's wise to take cover, move cautiously, and not over-commit. Not in the movies! Your *first* dodge after any of the following stunts counts as your Acrobatic Dodge (p. B375) for the turn, regardless of whether you actually used **Acrobatics**, giving +2 to Dodge if the trick succeeded but -2 if it failed.

*Acrobatic Evade:* You may substitute **Acrobatics** for DX when evading (p. B368) on a *Move* maneuver, tumbling between your foe's legs, rolling over his shoulder, etc.

*Acrobatic Guard:* You can declare that you're acrobatically avoiding *one* opponent and doing nothing else. Roll a Quick Contest of **Acrobatics** vs. his best melee skill. If you *win*, he'll have a penalty equal to your margin of victory on his roll to hit you with *melee* attacks on his next turn. Otherwise, you waste your turn. Regardless, you still get your usual active defenses.

*Acrobatic Stand:* If you're lying down, you can jump to your feet using one Change Posture maneuver instead of two by making an **Acrobatics** roll at -6 plus encumbrance penalties. Failure means you end up sitting; critical failure means you fall face-down!

*Athletics in Combat:* The feats under *Parkour* (pp. 19-20) and even *Climbing* (pp. 18-19) can be part of any *Move* or *Move and Attack* maneuver, if scenery permits (you can use **Serendipity** or spend a character point to ensure this, just as in a chase). During a *Move* and *Attack*, they count as the "Move" portion, and both your attack roll *and* the roll for the stunt take an *extra* -2. Heroes with **Gunslinger** ignore this -2 on firearms attacks!

*Tumbling:* During a *Move* maneuver, you may try to cartwheel or roll at full *Move*. Make an unmodified **Acrobatics** roll. Success means that anyone who tries to shoot you has an extra -2. Failure means you travel half your *Move* but enjoy no special benefits. Critical failure means you *fall down* and go nowhere!

## SNEAKY FIGHTING

Assassins, especially, often prefer to be *less* flashy in combat. Below are several rules that emulate the way stealth works on film – which has little to do with reality.

*Death from the Shadows:* When combat starts, anyone may try a **Stealth** roll to duck behind cover or into shadows.

*Modifiers:* A basic -5; encumbrance penalties; +5 if team is ambushing, no modifier in a stand-up fight, or -5 if squad is ambushed; and -5 if there's *no* cover or shadow.

Success lets him attack his *nearest* foe (GM chooses) from behind; critical success lets him get at *any* enemy. Treat range as Close. The victim gets no defense. Attacking reveals the attacker's presence for the rest of the battle (but see *Disappearing*, below).

A use of **Serendipity** or a character point can find cover anywhere (no -5) or let the sneak choose his victim.

*Disappearing:* A really stealthy hero can vanish *during* combat! He must take a *Move* maneuver to reach concealment – if only briefly. Then he attempts the **Stealth** roll above, but at a basic -10 and without ambush modifiers. Failure means he's spotted and still in the fight. Success lets him escape and "vanish" for as many turns as he likes. If he reappears, he can be up to *Move* yards away per turn of absence, in any location he could reach by running – or via *Parkour* (pp. 19-20) or *Climbing* (pp. 18-19), if he makes all the rolls.

*Hidden Weapons:* To conceal a weapon for surprise use, roll **Holdout**. Add the Bulk penalty of a gun or the Holdout penalty of a melee weapon, along with any modifier for your holster. Success means the *first* strike with that weapon will be hard to see coming: -2 to target's defense. Ensuing attacks won't surprise anyone.

*Playing Dead:* This is a free action at any time: Fall down, drop your weapon, and stop moving. Whenever the GM thinks an enemy may decide to make sure you're dead, he'll roll a secret Quick Contest: **Acting** vs. the *higher* of the enemy's IQ or Perception. You're at +1 at half HP, +2 at 0 HP, +3 at -HP, +4 at -3xHP, and +5 at -4xHP. If you *win*, you're overlooked.

*Sniping:* A sniper can help allies in combat by taking shots at his regular spot in the combat sequence. If he succeeded at **Stealth**, his first victim gets no defense. Then roll a new Quick Contest of **Stealth** vs. the enemy side's best Perception. Victory means the gunman isn't seen and his *next* shot allows no defense. And so on. If he loses a Contest, he's spotted – but if he has an elevated position, Dodge is at -2 against his shots. Another advantage of elevation is that people *don't* get in his way unless they're in close combat with his mark, and even that gives only -2.

## EXTRA EFFORT RULES

*Extra Effort in Combat* (p. B357) truly fits action battles. Each of the following uses costs 1 FP. A hero may try as many as he wishes on a given turn, if he has enough FP.

*You want me to be half monk,  
half hitman.*

– James Bond,  
*Casino Royale* (2006)

*Feverish Defense:* Get +2 to a single active defense roll.

*Heroic Charge:* Move any distance up to full Move in order to attack, ignoring the usual Bulk penalty and other bad effects of a Move and Attack maneuver. Heroes with **Gunslinger** can *already* ignore Bulk when they run and gun, so this option lets them to add Acc (half Acc, for long arms) just as if they were making an Attack maneuver!

*Multi-Task:* Take a turn in combat while simultaneously doing a simple noncombat task (dousing lights, starting car, etc.) – or even a *complex* task, if it's performed as an "instant" action at -10 to skill, as described in *Time Spent* (p. B346).

*Near Thing:* Undo the effects of a failed DX roll to stay standing, avert a fall when climbing in combat, or catch a weapon dropped due to a critical miss (*not* enemy action).

*Rapid Reload:* Reload instantly and without error – even between shots!

*Second Wind:* Each FP spent *heals* 1 HP! This isn't as effective as Flesh Wounds (p. B417 and below), but it doesn't cost character points.

*Shake It Off:* Undo the effects of a single failed HT roll to avoid knockdown or unconsciousness. The hero feels woozy (the lost FP), but stays standing.

## CINEMATIC COMBAT RULES

Action movies are all about fighting, so some players will insist on piles of optional rules – including those from *Tactical Combat* (pp. B384-392), **GURPS High-Tech**, and **GURPS Martial Arts**. That's fine! But the GM may also wish to implement a few rules from p. B417 to simplify combat:

*Bulletproof Nudity:* In addition to its usual benefits, this rule gives heroes +1 to break free when naked or in skin-tight clothing, increasing to +2 if sweaty (at least 1 FP lost to exertion) or +3 if oiled (don't ask).

*Cannon Fodder:* A more shaded version of this rule suits the action-movie bad-guy hierarchy. Bad guys *do* defend. However, mooks are defeated if injured at all – even a 1-HP gut punch will do. Henchmen are overcome at 0 HP or below. Bosses always fight to negative HP and try repeated HT rolls. Exchange the henchman and boss rules when the boss' scary bodyguard is intended as the big combat challenge while the boss is a wimp. Defeated baddies who aren't killed or knocked out cover, play dead, flee, or surrender.

*Cinematic Explosions:* Use this rule for *all* explosions – not just those in combat, but also disasters when setting or defusing explosives. If the GM prefers grittier action, and wants something between "minor knockback damage" and "everybody dies," he can give victims a **Dodge** roll at +3, to dive for cover; **Enhanced Dodge (Dive for Cover)** helps. Only critical success results in knockback alone, as on p. B417. Success adds 1d cutting damage from fragments. Failure means the explosion does its usual damage, but can at worst reduce the victim to 0 HP – or to -HP, on a critical failure. Failures while working on explosives directly count as critical failures.

*Cinematic Knockback:* Heroes can use this rule to shove around *objects*, too. Any hit with a gun can push a lever or similar. Beefier objects, like oil drums, call for at least 8 points of damage.

*Flesh Wounds:* Heroes who spend a character point to reduce an injury to 1 HP *can* also invoke Second Wind (above), spend 1 FP, and walk away complete unscathed.

*Infinite Ammunition:* See *Bullets, Beans, and Batteries* (p. 7) for a toned-down version of this rule.

*Melee Etiquette:* A *group* of heroes should face an equal number of mooks in melee. When the heroes drop one, another immediately steps in, until there are no more mooks left.

*TV Action Violence:* Treat this as an extra-effort option whenever the distinction matters.

*Violent conflict is the soul of action cinema.*

## New Cinematic Combat Rules

You can never have too many cinematic options!

*Dumb Mooks:* Heroes can try all manner of complex moves to show off, but having mooks do this doubles the time needed to play out a battle. Therefore, mooks simply stand out in the open and shoot at full RoF in gunfights, and avoid fancy options such as Deceptive Attack, Dual-Weapon Attack, Feint, Rapid Strike, and combat techniques in melee. Bosses and henchmen, however, can try anything the heroes could try.

*Fast Reloads:* Reloading takes the usual amount of time *if the enemy can see you*. If you're already behind concealment, reloading any gun takes one Ready maneuver. If you take a Move maneuver to reach concealment, you can either Ready next turn or make a Fast-Draw (Ammo) roll at the end of your movement and start next turn with a loaded weapon.

*Flawless Firearms:* Guns don't require maintenance, have Malfunction numbers, jam or overheat, suffer when thrown or used to pummel people, or endanger the heroes with hot brass or deadly backblast. They just work! However, a hero can spend 2 character points to inflict such an outcome on a mook who *fails* an attack roll to hit him or his vehicle: the mook's gun jams, his LAW's backblast takes out a carload of other mooks, etc.

*Gun Control Law:* If the heroes don't have firearms, mooks won't use guns except to *threaten* them. When the thugs *attack*, they'll use bare hands or melee weapons. "Name" adversaries – a crack sniper hired to kill the team, the boss' bodyguard, etc. – may use firearms, but won't defend against attacks intended to disarm them. The GM can apply this on a PC-by-PC basis, so that heroes who choose melee meet only bad guys with melee weapons, while the crew's gunmen are valid targets for mooks with guns. If the heroes shoot a mook who isn't using a gun, this rule no longer applies.

*Mook Marksmanship:* If the *Gun Control Law* is broken, the bad guys won't hit with their first shot (or *shots*, if using rapid fire). Nearby props get trashed instead. The GM may extend this protection for multiple turns if all the PCs are using *Flashy Fighting* (p. 37) to escape rather than to fight back.

*Super-Silencers:* Real silencers turn a deafening bang into a merely loud one that still gives a substantial bonus to Hearing rolls. In the movies, even the heaviest rifle makes a muffled cough when silenced. There's *no noise at all* unless you have a line of sight. In that case, make a basic Hearing roll with the penalty listed for a silencer.

*Unarmed Etiquette:* Melee weapons *can't* parry unarmed attacks. This applies to PCs and NPCs alike. Against unarmed foes, it may be necessary to drop weapons to survive – a weapon in either hand leaves only dodges against kicks and punches!

## BANTER

Action heroes never shut up in combat – an actor has to earn his pay, after all. But it sometimes serves a purpose. Below, **Psychology** works like an Influence skill, because in the movies, skilled police psychologists and negotiators are good at this stuff!

*Drawing Aggression:* You can use **Fast-Talk** or **Psychology** to unleash taunts and jibes calculated to draw an opponent's aggression. Take a Concentrate maneuver and roll a Quick Contest of skill against the *higher* of the enemy's IQ or Will. If you *win*, that foe comes after you, changing targets if necessary. A tie does nothing. If you lose, he targets a hurt or otherwise vulnerable team member just to spite you! Win, lose, or tie, if you roll a critical success, your mark *also* makes an All-Out Attack on his next turn.

*Uttering Threats:* You can try **Intimidation** or **Psychology** to discourage an enemy, provided that he's neither Indomitable nor Unfazeable. This works at -5 once combat has begun – but a gun gives you a bonus equal to the absolute value of its Bulk (e.g., +4 for a .50AE hand-cannon), and you get +1 if you light up your rival with a targeting laser. Then roll as for drawing aggression. Victory by 5 or more means he flees the fight. If you win by 1-4, your opponent hesitates, taking that many All-Out Defense maneuvers, but doesn't leave. If you tie or lose, he comes after you! This trick only works while the team allows enemies to run away unscathed. Shooting one in the back dooms this option to failure for the rest of the encounter.

## USING YOUR HEAD

The wounded partner in the finale of a buddy movie, or the leader of a squad in a war movie, is always ready with advice for his allies. There are several options here, all of which require at least one Do Nothing maneuver. All overlook the fact that this person is actually doing *something*. This lets bullet-riddled heroes contribute even when trying not to pass out!

*Analysis:* You can take a turn and ask the GM to roll **Tactics** for you. Success means he'll reveal the enemy's broad plan – if there is one – beyond "They're trying to kill us!" For instance, "They're guarding that chopper," "They're maneuvering us away from that control panel," or "They're stalling until the bomb goes off." Failure means he *lies*.

*Encouragement:* A successful **Leadership** roll removes -1 in disadvantage penalties claimed under the Ham Clause (see **Action 1: Heroes**) by anyone on your side. Critical success negates up to -2. These effects last until your next turn, but you can roll and shout for as many turns as you like. Failure, or several people trying this at once, gives *no* benefit (but no penalty).

*Spotting:* You can observe a target for a friend. Choose *one* companion to aid. On his turn, he can listen to your shouts – or ignore you! If he listens, roll against **Observation** and treat it as a complementary skill roll for his attack rolls this turn. Reroll each turn. If multiple people try to advise him, *he* chooses whose advice to take, and only that person may roll.

## STANDOFFS

Action-movie fights often start with a standoff. In a standoff between two gunmen *in combat*, resolve the situation using

the turn sequence (p. B363). The faster gunman takes his turn first, shooting if his weapon is ready or he can Fast-Draw it, or taking a Ready maneuver otherwise. Then the slower gun-fighter acts. And so on.

If combat *hasn't* started, use these rules:

1. *Neither fighter has a ready weapon.*

- *One knows Fast-Draw, the other doesn't.* The shootist with **Fast-Draw** rolls against skill. Success lets him shoot first. Failure means the situation unfolds as a standoff between fighters who don't know **Fast-Draw**. Critical failure means he drops his gun or shoots himself, and his foe fires first!

- *Both or neither knows Fast-Draw.* Roll a Quick Contest. Use **Fast-Draw** if both gunmen have it, **Guns** if neither does (or if one does, but failed; see above). Regardless of the skill used, apply all Fast-Draw modifiers. Give -1 to the shootist with the *worst* Bulk and +4 to anyone who already had his hand on his gun. The winner fires first. In a tie, they shoot simultaneously!

2. *One fighter has a ready weapon.*

- *His opponent knows Fast-Draw.* Roll a Quick Contest. The ready gunman uses **Guns**, at +1 if he has **Combat Reflexes**. The unready one uses **Fast-Draw**, modified as for a Quick Contest of **Fast-Draw** (above), but with an extra -10! The winner shoots first. In a tie, the ready shooter fires first.

- *His opponent lacks Fast-Draw.* The ready gunman shoots first.

Action movies make a big deal out of the hero winning the draw under grossly unequal terms. This is one place where lots of modifiers are justified!

*Optional Modifiers:* -4 if grappled; -4 for the off hand; -4 if crawling or lying down, -2 if crouching, kneeling, or sitting, or hanging upside down; -1 from a shoulder or concealment holster, or -2 if the weapon is in a pocket.

## SPECIAL COMBAT SITUATIONS

*Death on Wheels (Skis, Fins, etc.):* When fighting while parachuting, skiing, diving, etc., use the *lower* of your actual combat skill and your *DX*-based level with the relevant mobility skill: **Parachuting**, **Scuba**, **Skiing**, etc. In addition, if you're skiing faster than you could run, or parachuting, your only option when attacking is Move and Attack. This gives gunmen a penalty: the worse of -2 or their weapon's Bulk. Those with **Gunslinger** always roll against **Guns** and never take penalties for Move and Attack.

*Flipping a Weapon to Your Hand:* Normally, readying a weapon from the ground takes *two* Ready maneuvers. You can try a showy Ready maneuver that lets you flip the weapon to your hand while standing. Roll against **DX** or **Fast-Draw** at -5. Failure means you don't grasp the weapon and waste your turn clutching at air. Critical failure means you knock the weapon 1d yards away in a random direction.

*Underwater Shooting:* Realistically, it's unwise to shoot a firearm underwater, and mostly ineffective. In the movies, it seems to work reasonably well *if both parties are in the water*. The bullets move slowly, leaving cool trails that give the target +1 to Dodge, but do full damage. However, when shooting *into* water, bullets rarely do much – treat hits as misses and critical hits as regular hits.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

The heroes *should* eventually prevail – the genre requires it – but victory need not be painless. Rallying from near-defeat to save the day is a time-honored tradition. And those

in an *Action* campaign, unlike loner movie heroes, work with a whole team of professionals whose skills can make short work of misfortune.

## MEDIC!

Most disasters involve getting beaten, stabbed, shot, and blown up. This is where the medic earns his pay.

To simulate the way cinematic medics can patch up allies even as the bullets fly, rolls for treatment can invoke *Time Spent* (p. B346) to allow “instant” use at -10. Don’t forget that all medical tasks in action scenes get +1 for **Higher Purpose** (“**Medic!**”).

In all cases, the medic must have the necessary medical gear – and nothing else – in hand, and be able to touch the patient. When attempting instant use, he still has to take a Concentrate maneuver. (Thus, it takes a second, which is still “instant” next to minutes or hours!) Repeated attempts *aren’t* allowed, except as noted.

*First Aid:* In a TL8 action setting, first aid takes 10 minutes and requires a successful **First Aid** or **Physician** roll. There’s no modifier with a first aid kit, but a crash kit gives +2. Success heals 1d HP; critical success restores 6 HP. Failure has no benefit; critical failure costs 2 HP.

*Mortal Wounds:* Lethal injuries that would kill anyone else seem to cause at worst a mortal wound to an action hero. When a PC rolls against HT to avoid death, he may add **Hard to Kill** if he has it, and only failure against *modified* HT means collapse (normally, if **Hard to Kill** makes the difference, the victim collapses). Moreover, any failure by any amount – even critical failure – merely indicates a mortal wound (p. B423). This obeys the usual rules. To stabilize the victim, a medic can take an hour and roll vs. **Surgery**.

*Modifiers:* -5 if all he has is a crash kit, but no modifier for a proper surgical kit; -2 at -3×HP or worse or -4 at -4×HP or worse; -2, cumulative, per repeated attempt; -5 if the victim failed his original HT roll by more than 2 (that is, his mortal wound would have killed a random NPC).

Success saves the patient’s life and lets him start healing naturally – he never loses HT or acquires disadvantages. Failures allow repeated attempts, at the penalty above. If the patient dies, try resuscitation.

*Resuscitation:* Cinematic medics can revive almost anybody the plot requires to live. When someone *important* – PC or major NPC – dies for *any* reason, a medic can pound on his chest, inject adrenaline, and otherwise go nuts. This takes a minute and requires a **First Aid** or **Physician** roll. A defibrillator gives +3. (In reality, someone who has bled dry *won’t* benefit from a zap – but this *isn’t* reality!) Success lets stabilization attempts resume.

*Bleeding:* Ignore *Bleeding* (p. B420) in an action game. People bleed – lots – and talk about how bad it is, but that’s the director showing you how bad they’re hurt, not its own problem. If the GM feels that bleeding is vital to a scene, one minute and a **First Aid** or **Physician** roll will solve the problem.

## OUTBREAK!

An important medic role in some action stories is identifying and treating dire plagues engineered by terrorists and mad scientists. As depicted on the silver screen, this requires four rolls:

- **Diagnosis** to deduce that the victims don’t have some common ailment.
- **Expert Skill (Epidemiology)** to identify the disease.
- **Pharmacy** to concoct a stopgap treatment to keep the patients alive.
- **Physician** to administer the treatment.

These rolls take 1d hours each and must be made in order. Penalties frequently apply. Success is needed to advance to the next step, but repeated attempts are allowed. Each failure means dead NPCs.

Once all four rolls have succeeded, the survivors will remain stable until the real cure comes. This is researched “on screen” in disaster movies, but rarely in action films. The heroes might have to make an Assistance Roll to *request* a cure, though!

Heroes must roll against **Hazardous Materials (Biological)** to transport samples to scientists working on the cure, and **NBC Suit** when around victims. Any failure means exposure.

Exposed PCs and stable-but-uncured NPCs are alive but in bad shape. See *WMD* (p. 29) for suggested effects.



## OVERDOSE, POISONING, AND VENOM

Cinematic poison should inflict 1d to 6d fatigue or toxic damage and then get out of the picture. However, some plots call for someone – like a vital witness – to be slowly dying of poison. Things then work much as for disease, but with fewer steps:

- **Diagnosis** to determine that it *is* poisoning, and not flu, sunstroke, etc.
- **Poisons** to identify the specific poison.

- **Physician** to administer the treatment, at +4 with the correct antitoxin kit.

These rolls take a minute apiece and must be attempted in order. Success is required to start the next step, but repeated attempts are allowed. Each failure means *more* damage – another 1d to 6d, depending on deadliness.

Penalties often apply. Several skills are complementary here, though: **Chemistry** for industrial chemicals, **Expert Skill (Military Science)** for weapons, **Naturalist** for animal venom or toxic plants, **Pharmacy** for medical drugs, and **Streetwise** for street drugs. The team can try *all* of these. Modifiers are cumulative for all skills that apply.

## REPAIRS

Sometimes, it's a machine – not a teammate – that needs fixing. This requires a tool kit matched to the relevant repair skill. A shop gives +2; a portable kit, no modifier; a mini kit, -2; and a pocket multi-tool, -5.

*Ignore* item HP except when vehicles are being banged up in chases. Just assume that cinematic hardware has three states (and convert vehicle HP to the appropriate one after a chase):

**Functional** – The item is above 0 HP and operating. No need for repairs!

**Broken** – The item has 0 or fewer HP, but is above -HP; has missing parts; *or* is simply “ancient,” “short-circuited,” “wet,” etc. To jury-rig it, the repairman must roll against a suitable specialty of **Armoury** for weapons, **Electronics Repair** for electronics, or **Mechanic** for vehicles – or use **Electrician** for power tools or ordinary appliances, or **Machinist** for hand tools. This takes the lower of 30 minutes *or* the time left until the next action scene, but **Quick Gadgeteer** allows *instant* repairs by rolling at -10. *Any* damage will re-break a jury-rigged item. Repairs carried out between adventures are real, permanent repairs.

## It's Better to Be Lucky

Action heroes are *destined* to win. This fate is often termed “script immunity”: Victory is ultimately assured because the script says so. Scripting isn't fun in an RPG, but “lucky breaks” can provide the benefits of script immunity without the script. There are many ways to engineer such situations.

### Lucky Advantages

Every template in **Action 1: Heroes** includes **Luck**, and offers **Daredevil** and **Serendipity**. Each can pull the heroes' fat out of the fire, but in different ways.

**Daredevil**: This only works during physical risk-taking. Given how skilled most action heroes are at such deeds, +1 to skill rarely saves the day; the true benefit is the ability to reroll critical failures. However, not all unfortunate outcomes are critical failures! Optionally, when a *single roll* by anyone – damage, critical hit result, etc. – would *kill* the hero, the GM can backtrack to the fatal roll and reroll it, even if it isn't the daredevil's success roll.

**Luck**: This general-purpose lifesaver is easy to “use up” in an action scene. The GM may opt to let a PC who's between uses “push his luck.” This gives an immediate extra use without resetting the clock. The catch is that the hero now has one episode of **Unluckiness** (p. B160) coming, and can't invoke **Luck** again – regularly *or* by pushing it – until this hoses him!

**Serendipity**: In addition to lucking into clues, convenient scenery, items, etc., a hero with this trait can invoke it as a safety net when things go pear-shaped. He doesn't reroll. Instead, he receives a fortuitous opportunity to make a *different* roll to avoid disaster. For instance, if critical failure at Forced Entry brings guards, **Serendipity** might let the burglar duck behind a hitherto unnoticed curtain, allowing a “saving throw” against Stealth.

### Buying Lucky Breaks

The GM should always allow *Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347). He controls how often it's possible through the number of points he awards! Some advice:

**Buying Success**: The **Basic Set** recommends forbidding purchase of critical successes in combat, but it suits the genre to permit them against *mooks* (not henchmen or bosses). *Flawless Firearms* (p. 38) even lets a hero spend 2 points to “curse” a bumbling mook!

**Player Guidance**: It's unfair to take 2 points from a PC to “set the scene” if – to capitalize on the situation – he must attempt a success roll that could fail and waste his points. Therefore, when the player specifies an adjustment to the world that merely lets him *try* something, it costs only 1 point.

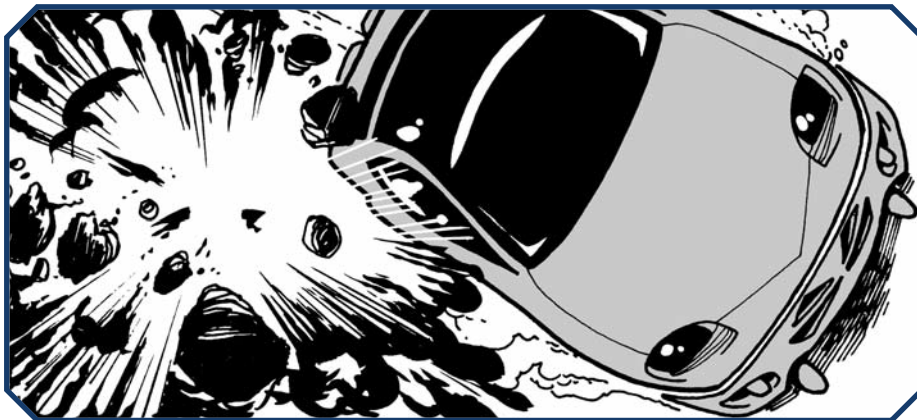
**Destroyed** – The item is at -HP or worse. It's dead, Jim. You *can't* fix it!

Two special repairs often feature in action stories:

*Get the Lights On!* Restoring power to a building or a large vehicle requires suitable tools and an **Electrician** roll. Critical failure means a shock: 3d burning. Much as when cutting the power (p. 25), **Area Knowledge** or **Climbing** may be needed to find hookups or shinny up power polls, respectively.

*MacGyver the MacGuffin:* Some plots call for a broken device to be irreparable sans some replacement part. Getting the needed materials requires either a **Scrounging** roll at -5 in a place with lots of junk, or an Assistance Roll for facilities. Then roll against **Machinist** for a weapon or a vehicle, or the correct **Electronics Repair** specialty for electronics; time is as for repairs. The GM rolls

secretly. Success assembles the part, failure wastes materials (roll again for those before a repeated attempt is possible), and critical failure creates a faulty part that will *destroy* the target machine if installed. With the part in hand, repairs proceed as usual; the GM will make a secret *Per*-based repair skill roll for the repairman to see if he notices a faulty part in time.



## CAPTURED!

A final common setback in action stories is capture. This is usually the result of being knocked out in a chase or a fight, so it won't come up very often – PCs can invoke *Flesh Wounds* (p. 38), *Second Wind* (p. 38), and *Shake It Off* (p. 38) to avoid it. Still, heroes might come along at gunpoint when these options aren't enough, a hostage will die if they don't, they're tricked, or they need a cunning way to enter the Secret Base!

## ESCAPING RESTRAINTS

The first thing heroes need to do to escape is break free of cuffs, ropes, etc.

*Behind the Back:* Hands are usually tied or cuffed behind the back. This means you can't use your arms and are at -1 to DX otherwise. You can use your fingertips back there, but you're working blind: -10! Success at **Acrobatics** or **Escape** lets you slip your arms around to the front, unless you're tied to a chair or similar; note that this is *obvious*. Once your hands are in front, you're at only -1 with fine manual tasks and no penalty at all in general, but must always use *both* hands together.

*Bonds:* Actually *escaping* from ropes is a Quick Contest of **Escape** vs. your captor's Knot-Tying skill (often default: DX-4).

*Cuffs:* Escaping from handcuffs requires an **Escape** roll at -5.

*Flex Cuffs:* These require an **Escape** roll at only -1.

*Straitjacket:* This *prevents* you from using arms or hands! You can only lumber around at -1 to DX. **Escape** is at -10.

*Exotic Restraints:* Secret labs, asylums, and the like may have separate leather belts or metal clamps for each limb, even the head. These sorts of things are only limited by the bad guys' imagination. Apply BAD to **Escape**.

*Now You Made Me Angry!* You *can* try sheer strength to escape. Simply substitute ST for Escape. Success causes the restraint to fail. Succeed or fail, though, you take thrust-3 cutting damage – minimum 1 point – to *both* arms if your wrists were bound or cuffed, or thrust-1 fatigue damage if you were bodily tied or straitjacketed.

*Repeated Attempts:* Failures allow repeated attempts, but at a cumulative -1. Critical failures mean you're so tangled up that you can't escape. Hope you have friends!

## ESCAPING PRISONS

Escaping from a locked room – be it a meat locker or a prison cell – is a matter of defeating locks, doors, etc. Use the rules under *Getting In* (pp. 18-23), plus the following:

*Got a Light?* Heroes love to trick guards into opening doors, looking the wrong way, etc. Many skills *might* work: **Acting** to fake a heart attack, **Sex-Appeal** to talk a guard into opening the door to “chat,” **Stealth** to hide so the guards think you've escaped, etc. Allies can make complementary rolls; e.g., **Acting** could complement a **Fast-Talk** roll about that “heart attack.” Roll a Quick Contest: skill vs. the guards' effective Will of 10 + absolute value of BAD (this reflects their training). Victory creates an opportunity to ambush the guards in hand-to-hand combat.

*No Tools:* Defeating locks and hinges requires tools. **Gizmos** can reveal hidden tools. **Scrounging**, modified by BAD – or using **Serendipity** – can turn up an *improvised* tool that allows use of the relevant burglary skill at -5.

*Where's the Keyhole?* **Lockpicking** might work – but if you're in a padlocked meat locker or a modern prison, there's no lock accessible! If you find or improvise a tool, be sure it's one that can attack bars or hinges (see *Doors*, pp. 20-21).

# CHAPTER SIX

# DIRECTING THE ACTION

Every rule so far has been directed at GM and players alike. This is because while the GM keeps *plot* secrets and rolls dice secretly, the players should always know what their odds are. The ultimate outcome of an action story is *predictable*, after all: The heroes will win, like in the movies. This is a key difference between action gaming and genres such as

fantasy and horror, where challenges are often confusing, weird, and unknowable.

Still, a few considerations *matter* more to GMs than to players – mainly those related to campaign planning. Players are welcome to keep reading, but what follows has little to do with heroic skill use.

## CAMPAIGN TYPES

**Action 1: Heroes** mentions nine campaign types and recommends a good mix of PCs for each. Just as important, though, are the tasks that the GM sets. Anything in **Exploits** could show up in any kind of game, but some challenges are *especially* appropriate.

**Brotherhood in Blue:** A cinematic police squad is a well-oiled machine (*Teamwork!*, p. 5) with top-notch tactics (*Squad SOP*, pp. 8-10) and training (*Providing Security*, pp. 27-30). Adventures open with clue-seeking (*Gathering Intelligence*, pp. 11-14) and interrogation (*Making Them Talk*, pp. 16-17). This soon segues into *Chases* (pp. 31-35) and *Combat* (pp. 36-39), frequently initiated by an attempt to breach a criminal hideout (*Doors*, pp. 20-21) to make an arrest (*Live Capture*, p. 24). An urban flavor is likely, typified by feats like those under *Word on the Street* (p. 15), *Parkour* (pp. 19-20), and *Grand Theft Auto* (p. 23).

**Caper:** The crew must first locate “work” (*The Job*, p. 6) and learn everything about it (*Targets and Locations*, p. 7). *Planning* (p. 17) is mandatory, often in several stages involving *Gathering Intelligence* (pp. 11-14), *Social Engineering* (pp. 15-17), *Lifts and Pulls* (p. 23), and *Deception* (pp. 26-28). Then the focus moves to *Getting In* (pp. 18-23) and *Safecracking* (p. 22) – usually with digital mayhem (*High-Tech Challenges*, p. 13) running in parallel. A successful caper ends with *Getting Away* (p. 27); a close call, with *Chases* (pp. 31-35) and *Combat* (pp. 36-39); and a fiasco, in arrest (*Captured!*, p. 42).

**Commandos:** Cinematic special operators always pull together, making extensive use of *Complementary Skills* (p. 5), *Teamwork!* (p. 5), *Squad SOP* (pp. 8-10), *Planning* (p. 17), and *Watches* (p. 28). Missions involve getting in (*Insertion*, p. 18), performing a task, and exfiltrating (*Getting Away*, p. 27). The classic goal is to demolish something (*Blowing Stuff Up*, pp. 24-25). Shooting (*Combat*, pp. 36-39), evasion (*Surveillance and Patrols*, p. 18), nasty surprises (*Setting Traps*, p. 25), and mind games (*Psy-Ops*, p. 27) are de rigueur – as are avoiding traps

(*Traps*, pp. 22-23), patching injuries (*Medic!*, pp. 40-41), and jury-rigging gear (*Repairs*, pp. 41-42).

**Mercs:** Mercenaries operate much like commandos, but must dedicate time to finding work (*The Job*, p. 6) and acquiring military hardware (*Assembling Kit*, pp. 6-7). Those in action movies and TV series are less subtle than elite troops – their adventures consist of wall-to-wall *Destruction* (pp. 24-25), *Chases* (pp. 31-35), and *Combat* (pp. 36-39). Mercs rarely enjoy the sort of official backing that enables Assistance Rolls, so they must finagle outside assistance through smooth talking (*Social Engineering*, pp. 15-17) and outright ruses (*Deception*, pp. 26-28), and patch up injured personnel (*Medic!*, pp. 40-41) and damaged equipment (*Repairs*, pp. 41-42) themselves.

**Spy vs. Spy:** Secret agents visit exotic hotspots (*Travel*, pp. 7-8), deliver wit and charm (*Social Engineering*, pp. 15-17), and drive sporty cars (*Chases*, pp. 31-35). They also engage in actual espionage (*Gathering Intelligence*, pp. 11-14), often mixed with technological intrigue (*High-Tech Challenges*, p. 13) and risky infiltration (*Getting In*, pp. 18-23). *Deception* (pp. 26-28) is common during and after operations, and ideally ends in a daring exit (*Getting Away*, p. 27). Failure means the heroes are detained until the enemy reveals his plan; then they escape (*Captured!*, p. 42). If the PCs are counterspies, see *Providing Security* (pp. 27-30).

**Task Force:** The tasks important to each member of a multi-agency team will depend on individual capabilities. For instance, a black-ops team could include an FBI Special Agent, a Green Beret, and a CIA officer, and these heroes might tackle challenges typical of Brotherhood in Blue, Commandos, and Spy vs. Spy campaigns, respectively. Regular use of *Complementary Skills* (p. 5), *Teamwork!* (p. 5), *Squad SOP* (pp. 8-10), and *Planning* (p. 17) can engage the entire group despite radical differences in training. And of course everybody can participate in *Chases* (pp. 31-35) and *Combat* (pp. 36-39), so these should be common.

## Ten Rules to Use Sparingly

A few rules slow game play, render PCs less-than-heroic, or simply clash with “action realism.” The GM should use these only when they’re truly needed. This will make them suitably dramatic when they *do* come up!

**10. Tactical Combat** (pp. B384-392): Keep distances and positions abstract in combat. This makes it possible to fudge action scenes: heroes can reach cover when necessary, bad guys can escape when the plot requires it, etc. Save maps for situations like martial-arts duels between heroes and scary henchmen.

**9. Regular Contests** (p. B349): Rolling over and over until somebody fails gets boring. Save this technique for climactic struggles where each Contest the hero rolls buys his associates time to rescue another hostage, plant another explosive charge, etc.

**8. Fatigue** (pp. B426-427): Extra effort costs FP, and poison or failure at some tasks can inflict fatigue damage, but docking FP for hiking, staying up late, and so on is needless bookkeeping. Ignore it except when the heroes’ endurance is what makes the scene dramatic.

**7. Fright Checks** (p. B360): These should occur rarely, and only for *nasty* stuff like flayed corpses – never for the supernatural. Then make the penalties severe enough that only the cleaner with **Unfazeable** is likely to be functional, giving him the spotlight at a dramatic juncture.

**6. Tech Level** (pp. B22-23, B168, B511-514): **Action** assumes the mix of TL6-8 hardware seen in movies, and

that the heroes’ skills are tailored to match. Only assess TL penalties when the MacGuffin is a cutting-edge gadget. Then give the heroes from -1 to -5 to operate it.

**5. Improvement Through Study** (pp. B292-294) and *Time Use Sheets* (p. B499): Filling out forms between adventures is *boring*. If the heroes must learn new tricks between adventures, just give the players some extra points to spend on pre-approved skills.

**4. Control Rating** (p. B506) and *Legality* (pp. B267, B507): Action heroes don’t worry about licenses and permits for gear. Save CR and LC for times when the *players* show so little regard for life and the law that the campaign is drifting from heroic to horrific. Then use these rules to justify a crackdown by the PCs’ bosses or the authorities.

**3. Cost of Living** (pp. B265-266) and *Economics* (pp. B514-519): The budget system in **Action 1: Heroes** replaces these rules. Such details add nothing to an action game.

**2. Crippling Injury** (pp. B420-423): The heroes can maim foes, but don’t return the favor. Few things wreck an action campaign more surely than a blind shooter or a one-legged infiltrator.

**1. Magic** (pp. B234-253), *Psionics* (pp. B254-257), and *Other Planes of Existence* (pp. B519-522): Action gaming is set in the real world. There’s no place for the paranormal. If you *must* involve such things, warn your players ahead of time.

*Troubleshooters*: Private “men in black” are usually hired to conduct investigations (*Gathering Intelligence*, pp. 11-14) and provide protection (*Providing Security*, pp. 27-30). They might have a full-time employer or pick up a new contract at the start of each adventure (*The Job*, p. 6). The players decide just how far they’re willing to go for cash! Driving (*Chases*, pp. 31-35) and shooting (*Combat*, pp. 36-39) are routine occurrences during cinematic bodyguard duty – and some clients expect hirelings to do whatever it takes to steal back their property (*Getting In*, pp. 18-23) or cover up their criminal indiscretions (*Deception*, pp. 26-28).

*Vigilante Justice*: This campaign only loosely follows the structure recommended by **Exploits**. Cinematic vigilantes traditionally patrol the streets (*Targets and Locations*, p. 7) looking for trouble, and then skip directly to *Chases* (pp. 31-35), *Combat* (pp. 36-39), and acts of *Destruction* (pp. 24-25) when they find it. *Word on the Street* (p. 15), *Parkour* (pp. 19-20), and

*Grand Theft Auto* (p. 23) all feature regularly in urban settings. “Intelligence gathering” rarely goes beyond snatching some dirtbag (*Live Capture*, p. 24) and convincing him to squeal (*Making Them Talk*, pp. 16-17), while “subtlety” only matters after the fact (*Cleaning*, p. 26).

*War Against Terror*: Missions involve finding terrorists (*Gathering Intelligence*, pp. 11-14), neutralizing them (*Combat*, pp. 36-39), and protecting citizens (*Providing Security*, pp. 27-30). Some terrorists have *WMD* (p. 29) – often horrible biological weapons (*Outbreak!*, p. 40). If these are in play, the heroes may dispense with niceties and capture enemies (*Live Capture*, p. 24), forcibly extract clues (*Making Them Talk*, pp. 16-17), and then bury the bodies (*Cleaning*, p. 26) and the operation (*Cover-Ups*, p. 26). To heighten the contrast between genuine bad guys and good-but-tough guys, movies often play up the latter’s need for *Permission to Act* (p. 17).

## ASSISTANCE ROLLS IN ACTION

The GM should let the PCs try an Assistance Roll (AR) whenever they wish, *if* they can call home base. Since the AR isn’t especially high for a group of Rank 0-4 heroes, and as there are penalties for repeated attempts and inappropriate requests, overuse or abuse is difficult. Some notes:

*Aerial Surveillance*: Success here counts as a successful complementary skill roll for *Targets and Locations* (p. 7), and as success at any kind of *Visual Surveillance* (p. 12) that would make sense from an aircraft.

*Bailout*: The PCs can try this anytime their deeds get them into legal trouble – notably when caught smuggling

(*Travel*, pp. 7-8) – and as a valid alternative to escape (*Captured!*, p. 42) when being held by legitimate authorities.

**Cash:** This can be requested as part of *Assembling Kit* (pp. 6-7). For the purposes of *Bribery* (p. 15) of an NPC who doesn't demand actual cash, success can arrange string-pulling that counts as 10 times the usual amount the heroes could request (exactly as if acquiring cash for show).

**Cover-Up** (p. 26): This is a *single AR*, even when it logically involves a combination of bailouts, disappearances, false ID, and technical means.

**Facilities:** This AR can request supercomputers that give major benefits for *Hacking* (p. 13) and *Code-Cracking* (p. 13); machine shops good for +4 to *Repurposing* (p. 13) and *Repairs* (pp. 41-42); and even the resources needed to cure plagues (*Outbreak!*, p. 40).

**False ID:** Success here bypasses the need for the tasks under *Fake ID* (p. 26).

**Files and Records Search:** These forms of assistance can substitute for success at the tasks under *Files and Records* (p. 14) in situations where the PCs' employer would have access to the files or records.

**Fire Support:** The heroes can use this as an alternative to *Destruction* (pp. 24-25) against inanimate targets, after sneaking close enough to call in fire. Alternatively, they can blast one group of NPCs; assume that artillery is 100% lethal against mooks, simplifying the problem to any henchmen or

boss present. Either use requires a **Forward Observer** roll to be effective.

**Forensics:** This can call in the professionals and grant benefits identical to success at the **Forensics** skill rolls under *Physical Searches* (pp. 11-12).

**Insertion/Extraction:** Success here can bypass a roll for *Insertion* (p. 18) or *Getting Away* (p. 27) by arranging for an NPC pilot to show up in a helicopter, VTOL aircraft, mini-sub, or similar costly vehicle.

**Medevac:** Success here can acquire a cure for a PC who's incapacitated by *WMD* (p. 29) or call in a medic who can perform the tasks under *Medic!* (pp. 40-41) – if the victim can hang on for long enough!

**Replacement Gear:** Heroes can request gear as part of *Assembling Kit* (pp. 6-7) at the start of an adventure. If the mission requires it, "standard issue" might include explosives (*Blowing Stuff Up*, pp. 24-25), gee-whiz gadgetry like retina-print contact lenses (*Locks*, p. 20), polygraphs (*Making Them Talk*, pp. 16-17), etc.

**Technical Means:** Success at this AR counts as success at just about anything under *Gathering Intelligence* (pp. 11-14), or can secure a patch between communications networks (*Communications*, pp. 8-9).

**Transportation:** This sets up commercial travel for the PCs or for fragile or illicit gear. Roll twice for both. See *Travel* (pp. 7-8) for further details.

## DUTY IN ACTION

A hero with a **Duty** should be affected by it, but because most adventures happen "on duty," this tends to get lost in the action. To keep things interesting, secretly roll for each PC at the adventure's start. If the dice indicate the **Duty** comes up, take the player of that PC aside and give him an *extra* responsibility. This need not be negative! Plenty of good things still require an added degree of accountability.

Here are some examples:

- Carry, look after, and use costly special gear – or risky *experimental* gear (especially in a secret-agent campaign!).
- Go out of the way to secure an item or a clue related to a *future* adventure.

- Go out of the way to take out a subsidiary target via assassination, demolition, etc.
- Serve as a bodyguard for a fragile NPC expert, member of the boss' family, etc.
- Stay close to another PC who previously used unauthorized gear, didn't fulfill his Duty, or otherwise attracted the chief's attention.

Failure at this task means being dealt out of the replacement budget at the start of the next adventure, -2 to Assistance Rolls on that adventure, or even losing a level of Rank!

## ENEMIES

The GM should bear in mind the basic rule of action-movie bad guys: They're *targets*. The boss might be a clever recurring villain, but it's unwise to lavish too much attention on mooks and henchmen. Below are suggestions for quickly assessing NPC stats.

When it comes to equipping NPCs, the GM should remember that guns kill people. A mook horde with skill 10 is liable to *slaughter* the PCs if given full-automatic weapons and concussion grenades, while an assassin henchman with skill 20 can only accomplish so much with a knife. Unless the heroes have heavy body armor, then, casual encounters should either involve primarily melee weapons and handguns, or use

Bulletproof Nudity, Cinematic Explosions, Flesh Wounds, Gun Control Law, Mook Marksmanship, and TV Action Violence; see *Cinematic Combat Rules* (p. 38).

## MOOKS

Mooks don't need complete character sheets. Most look like this:

**ST 10; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10.

Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.

SM 0; 5'3"-6'1"; 115-175 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** No advantages unless the adventure calls for something like tough mooks with High Pain Threshold. Disadvantages typically consist of Duty plus some mental problems, like Bully.

**Skills:** One to three scenario-relevant skills at level 10-15 (roll 1d+9, if variety matters); e.g., Brawling-12, Driving (Automobile)-10, and Guns (Pistol)-14.

Unusual mooks can have out-of-the-ordinary scores – perhaps menacing thugs might roll 1d+10 for ST, while pencil-necked technicians have ST 9 but IQ 11-12. Details other than combat skill levels rarely matter; notably, HP and HT aren't relevant when using the Cannon Fodder rule (p. 38).

## HENCHMEN

There are two types of henchmen:

**Mook Leaders:** Build patrol leaders and other senior mooks like their underlings, but with +1 or +2 to attributes and skills. For *noncombat* skills, follow the advice under *BAD Guys* (p. 5) and make minimum *effective* skill 10 + absolute value of BAD.

If this raises skill, the difference comes from situational bonuses for knowing the territory, possessing good gear, and so on, and won't apply if the henchman is taken prisoner, encountered at home, etc.

**Named Henchmen:** Build crack hit men, sub-bosses, and other major threats just like PCs, using templates from **Action 1: Heroes**. In a hurry, simply print out the template and take a Hi-Liter to the desired choices!

Heroes may also face "special" opponents that are more than mooks but not henchmen in the above sense. Trained dogs are classic, but unhinged bosses might favor *other* guard beasts (e.g., sharks), and high-tech thrillers occasionally verge on sci-fi, featuring security robots, mooks in prototype battle-suits, sharks *with lasers*, etc. See *Other Enemies* (box).

## BOSSSES

Bosses are worth designing as individuals. They can range from 50-point wimps – no doubt with scary henchmen as bodyguards – to challenging opponents built on templates from **Action 1: Heroes** with an extra 50-100 points!

## Other Enemies

Not all enemies are human! Some cinematic villains employ *other* guards.

### Dogs

Bad guys with Animal Handling (Dogs) can set the hounds on heroes. These stats describe a monstrous guard dog. Dogs sometimes improve effective NPC skill, too; see *Surveillance and Patrols* (p. 18).

<b>ST:</b> 9	<b>HP:</b> 9	<b>Speed:</b> 6.00
<b>DX:</b> 12	<b>Will:</b> 10	<b>Move:</b> 10
<b>IQ:</b> 4	<b>Per:</b> 12	<b>Weight:</b> 90 lbs.
<b>HT:</b> 12	<b>FP:</b> 12	<b>SM:</b> 0
<b>Dodge:</b> 9	<b>Parry:</b> N/A	<b>DR:</b> 0

**Bite (14):** 1d-2 cutting.

**Traits:** Chummy; Discriminatory Smell; Domestic Animal; Quadruped; Sharp Teeth.

**Skills:** Brawling-14; Tracking-13.

**Notes:** Tracking dogs have Tracking-15. Police dogs have Wrestling-14 (+2 to effective ST for grabbing gun hands).

### Robots

Real armed robots are remotely controlled. Movie denizens are autonomous! This one resembles a tiny tank. It's dumb, a lousy shot, and coldly persistent.

<b>ST:</b> 26	<b>HP:</b> 26	<b>Speed:</b> 5.00
<b>DX:</b> 8	<b>Will:</b> 6	<b>Move:</b> 10
<b>IQ:</b> 6	<b>Per:</b> 12	<b>Weight:</b> 300 lbs.
<b>HT:</b> 12	<b>FP:</b> N/A	<b>SM:</b> 0
<b>Dodge:</b> 8	<b>Parry:</b> N/A	<b>DR:</b> 8-25

**Gun (8):** Per firearm.

**Traits:** Accessories (Computer, plus Bullhorn, Siren, and/or Spotlight); AI; Automaton; Doesn't Breathe; Electrical; Indomitable; Infravision; Machine; No Legs (Tracked); No Manipulators; No Sense of Smell/Taste; Parabolic Hearing 2; Telecommunication (Radio); Telescopic Vision 2; Weapon Mount; Unfazeable.

**Skills:** Guns-8.

**Notes:** Capabilities vary from DR 8 and a shotgun to DR 25 and a machine gun.

## AFTER ACTION

An **Action** campaign should focus on, well, *action*. But action heroes often tidy up loose ends before the credits roll – especially if there's a sequel! Since campaigns tend to be episodic, with *many* sequels, the GM might want to lend some thought to this.

In general, after-action activity should be brief and to-the-point – in game terms, a few lines of banter and a skill roll. Some example rolls:

- **Cartography** to create a map of the area where the action took place.

- **Law (Police)** to ensure that evidence or an arrest is admissible – with a penalty of *at least* -1 per gross violation of rights, unnecessary death, or similar deed perpetrated by the PCs.

- Suitable **Savoir-Faire** skill (see *Fitting In*, p. 16) to convince the boss all went well.

- **Streetwise** to sell stolen goods after a heist.
- **Writing** for a report (intelligence, military, or police).

The GM can have one teammate roll for everybody, or have each PC make his own roll – possibly against different skills. Effects are entirely up to the GM, but here are a few suggestions:

**Critical Success** – Next adventure, the crew gets double its usual replacement budget. Alternatively, if they belong to an organization with Rank and that allows Assistance Rolls, roll 1d: 1-5 means +2 to all AR next adventure; 6 means promotion (+1 Rank for free).

**Success** – No special effect.

**Failure** – Next adventure, the team gets half its usual replacement budget. Alternatively, if they belong to an organization with Rank and that allows AR, they get -2 to all AR next adventure.

**Critical Failure** – Next adventure, the squad gets *no* replacement budget. Alternatively, if they belong to an organization with Rank and that allows AR, roll 1d: 1-5 means no AR are allowed next adventure; 6 means demotion (-1 Rank), and Rank 0 personnel are *dismissed*, starting a freelance maverick campaign!

## Making Everybody Useful

Movie heroes are generalists by necessity: Most are loners. The templates in **Action 1: Heroes** assume a campaign with four or more PCs, however; and so portray specialists in order to guarantee everybody spotlight time. To make this work, each adventure must offer *every* hero chances to shine.

If the squad includes a specialist, the GM should include events that demand his unique skills. If the team lacks such a member, the GM can gloss over those moments rather than annoy the players with situations that the PCs can't handle. No action movie would have an all-shooter squad foiled by a lock for want of an infiltrator – they'd shoot the lock or find a key nearby, or their overconfident foes simply wouldn't lock the door!

Some suggestions:

**Assassin:** The assassin needs targets – preferably Bad People who *deserve* killing. To show off his knack for stalking, this prey should be too well-protected for demo men or shooters to hit. It's fine to dim his spotlight in pitched battles, as long as this lets him strike from surprise. Because he's stealthy and nimble, he's the ideal backup infiltrator when he has no enemies to waste.

**Cleaner:** A cleaner has several specialty skills that let him alter evidence, so be sure to enforce the ramifications of failing to clean up. If leaving clues might be the crew's undoing, the cleaner's art will be in regular demand! His other gift is uncanny calm; at least once per adventure, give him the opportunity to defeat a polygraph, disregard horrors that stun teammates, etc.

**Demolition Man:** Cinematic demo men try to solve *every* problem via judicious use of explosives! Subtler allies may object, so other challenges are welcome – notably using technical skills to defeat bombs, locks, and traps, and to repair weapons and vehicles. Every adventure needs *some* fireworks, though, from a distracting squib to a blown bridge.

**Face Man:** When there's significant PC-NPC interaction, the face man needs no help – he'll dominate the spotlight. Action campaigns often have the opposite problem, though, so have a few NPCs talk rather than attack! Don't relegate the face man to information gathering, either; he should get to talk his way past or distract bad guys in the field.

**Hacker:** Integrate the hacker into physical exploits by taking Hollywood's lead: Put the world online and let the

hacker be the group's eyes and ears, deactivate security for the infiltrator, validate the cleaner's false credentials on the fly, switch traffic lights for the wheel man, etc. Since he's sitting alone in his sanctum, it's traditional for him to need rescuing on occasion!

**Infiltrator:** Many obstacles demand the infiltrator's skills; he'll have lots to do. When stealth is lost, his agility lets him more than account for himself in a chase or a fight. The challenge is to balance his loner tendencies against being a team player. Make it clear that he needs his teammates: the wire rat to kill high-tech security, the shooter to cover his back, etc.

**Investigator:** The investigator can monopolize a game with a lot of intelligence gathering. A more common issue, though, is the GM dispensing free clues and making him redundant. Don't! Also ensure that he can act in later phases of the adventure: spotting for the assassin, using his prodigious perception and intuition to pick courses of action, and so on.

**Medic:** A medic can feel like a fifth wheel until an ally has no FP or character points left for damage-mitigating cinematic rules, and croaks "Medic!" Then he's God. So have the mission tap his other skills. He's the only hero likely to be able to conduct an autopsy, deal with many varieties of WMD, sedate a prisoner, or administer truth serum.

**Shooter:** All action plots ultimately come down to gunplay. The challenge is to come up with ways to make the shooter matter the rest of the time. Fortunately, his skills and agility let him back up the assassin, infiltrator, and wheel man with aplomb, and crack marksmanship can deal with that camera the wire rat *can't* get at.

**Wheel Man:** A wheel man is only as far from the spotlight as the next chase. Extended action sequences often unfold indoors, though, far from the nearest ride. Remember the wheel man's knack for maps and directions in situations like this – and note that a trained mechanic, freight handler, or smuggler is valuable when the goal is sabotage or theft.

**Wire Rat:** The high-tech gizmos found in modern action stories shouldn't "just work." Give the wire rat opportunities to use and abuse electronics skillfully, and plenty of chances to repair or repurpose gear. The wire rat need not be a geek back at HQ, either – he might walk in front, sweeping the team's path for digital dangers.

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