

MODERN AGE COMPANION



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COMPANION

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INTRODUCTION

The modern era contains an enormous number of campaign possibilities. In some of them, secret magical worlds lie across strange thresholds. Others feature cutting-edge technologies, superhuman abilities, and additional elements that expand human capabilities and ask questions about the consequences. Governments, corporations, and conspiracies influence events, forcing protagonists to deal with the fallout. *Modern AGE* attempts to cover as wide a range as possible, from the dawn of industrialization to the near future, but sometimes you'll want tools to help define your campaign's special features and genre. That's what this book—the *Modern AGE Companion*—is for.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We used to assume a book like this was something the Game Master peered at alone, implementing whatever they liked. Truth be told, these optional rules can inspire players as well, especially when they involve new character options. A campaign is a collaborative process. The GM makes the sort of campaign world their players want to explore, and through their characters, players transform the world. Conspiracies collapse. Rivals suffer defeat, plot revenge, or revel in their triumphs.

Use this book in the same spirit of collaboration. Game Masters, don't implement new rules players won't enjoy. Players, be nice to the GM—respect what they want to run. Everyone should keep an open mind. Don't assume a new option is one you have to stick with, unaltered, for all time. Beyond that, keep in mind the following advice.

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

If people are excited about a new rule, it's better to add it to the game than debate how it might change the game. *Modern AGE* has straightforward rules, and the effects of new options should make themselves felt relatively quickly. The last thing you want is to delay playing. It's all about the table, the dice, and the story. If elements end up presenting problems, don't be afraid to adjust them later.

USE THE CASUAL CHECK-IN

Obviously, you should always talk about serious problems in an honest, straightforward fashion, but that's different from a casual check-in, where everyone tries to talk about what

they liked or felt could be better in a balanced, friendly way. Use the results to decide what changes you'll make going forward. The GM shouldn't seek praise and should be open to suggestions. Players should be generous, providing ideas instead of simple nitpicks.

DEFEAT PARALYSIS WITH PURPOSE

Both this book and the *Modern AGE* core provide many, many options. It's easy to get stuck, both when designing a campaign and when making choices in the heat of the action. The solution is simple and may be too obvious: Do things for a reason. When you pick stunts, narrow choices down by how you want a character to express their luck and talents. When you peruse optional rules, do so with an eye toward what you want out of your campaign.

TRACK YOUR CHANGES

When you change rules or other options, make a note of what you did, when, and how. This produces a living document of your house rules that also explains why you wanted them. It helps you get to know your campaign, reconsider certain changes when the reasons no longer apply, or revive old ideas when they seem to fit a new situation.

EMBRACE INCONSISTENCY

Modern AGE isn't designed to simulate the physics, the sociology, or any other aspect of an imaginary world. It's supposed to produce danger, intrigue, and rewards for characters who throw themselves into the thick of it. It's perfectly fine to implement rules that make combat deadlier for part of the campaign, then swap them out for more forgiving rules when it's time to promote high adventure. Some players may be concerned they won't know what to expect if you make these changes, so keep them in the loop whenever you alter things.

USE THE RUCKSACK RULE

There's a probably inaccurate story about how militaries test new equipment: They add it to soldiers' gear and send them on maneuvers. If the troops drop the new equipment, it suggests it's more of a burden than a help. To apply this principle to the rules, make an honest effort to learn a system, and if, after that, you find yourself forgetting or skipping it, it's probably time to either abandon it or streamline it into something more manageable.

BRASS LIGHTNING: THE EXAMPLE CAMPAIGN

Throughout this book, you'll read references to the *Brass Lightning* campaign. We've used this device to demonstrate how you'd apply the various options in this book to a specific game world. *Brass Lightning* is a steampunk Western setting where magic exists and rivals struggle along the frontier (and must reckon with people for whom it isn't a frontier) using strange powers and stranger machines. There isn't anything more detailed for this setting—at least, not unless you want to invent those details yourself. Look at the examples, and ask yourself how you'd perform similar customization for your own campaign.

USING OTHER AGE SOURCEBOOKS

Green Ronin produces several books using the *Adventure Game Engine* (AGE): the core system that powers *Modern AGE*. Each game customizes the AGE system to fit its own genre and world, but the core system and the central roles of stunts, talents, and other elements remain relatively consistent. It isn't hard to convert rules you like from one AGE book to *Modern AGE* or vice versa, but in some cases, the same concepts have been adjusted to fit their native games. For instance, the vehicle rules in the *Fantasy AGE Companion* (this book's "cousin," designed for the *Fantasy AGE RPG*) differ slightly from those in the *Modern AGE* core. In addition, each book has options the others don't, from ways to administer stunts to new magic systems.

Keeping this in mind, converting elements from other AGE system books is relatively straightforward. So, if you'd like to import the intelligent animals called rhydan from *Blue Rose: The AGE Roleplaying Game of Romantic Fantasy*, go for it — and see the guidelines for converting fantasy peoples in this book, too. And, of course, you can bring elements from *Modern AGE* into any other AGE game.



WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK

The *Modern AGE Companion* has nine chapters of options to offer. Take what you need and play.

CHAPTER 1: CHARACTERS

CHAPTER 1: CHARACTERS provides numerous new options for characters. New backgrounds give you the option to play elves or aliens or people with a history bound to unusual forces. We also present guidelines for building brand-new backgrounds and professions, or creating characters without them, before talking about how to integrate characters with diverse capabilities into your game.

CHAPTER 2: TALENTS & SPECIALIZATIONS

CHAPTER 2: TALENTS & SPECIALIZATIONS provides new and expanded special abilities for characters, rewarding them for focus and perseverance. Learn about the fourth and fifth ranks of talents and the benefits of absolute mastery of a field, or consider new talents and specializations such as Demolitions or the Controller.

CHAPTER 3: RULES

CHAPTER 3: RULES adds action, exploration, and social rules. Develop a fighting style, shudder in horror at a fearsome encounter, or run a game without Health points. Expanded hazards, rules for duels — take what you want from this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: STUNTS

CHAPTER 4: STUNTS provides new ways to use the Adventure Game Engine's signature system. Use stunts to support specific environments and genres, or build your own with the help of a succinct table of adaptable general stunts.

CHAPTER 5: EXTRAORDINARY ABILITIES

CHAPTER 5: EXTRAORDINARY ABILITIES adds a new set of powers called enhancements to represent moderate superpowers and extraordinary items representing the gift of magic or unusual technologies.

CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL OPTIONS

CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL OPTIONS provides expanded rules for the rise, fall, and use of Relationships, so the people characters love and hate drive stories forward. This chapter also includes new rules for social networks, specialist NPCs called companions, and organizations.

CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY

CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY is for characters who like to make things and games where innovation is a powerful force. The rules give characters ways to slap together needed gear at a moment's notice or work on projects to produce truly impressive devices.

CHAPTER 8: THE MODERN CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER 8: THE MODERN CAMPAIGN starts off with systems for adjusting a campaign's dramatic rhythm, so that every triumph carries the seeds of a new challenge, and vice versa. Then we move to a system for world events — elections, wars, scandals, and more — to generate a dynamic campaign world.

CHAPTER 9: GENRES

CHAPTER 9: GENRES provides starting points for multiple campaigns based on a mixture of history and fiction. It includes suggestions for using *Modern AGE* to work within each genre, plot hooks, and sketches of notable NPCs.



CHARACTERS

The core *Modern AGE* book provides general rules for creating a character from the last two or three hundred years of real history or the histories of worlds that largely resemble our own. But what about settings where human-alien hybrids flee the machinations of government conspiracies or elves dwell in hidden kingdoms? This chapter covers those contingencies. It also looks at the nuts and bolts of the game's character creation system, so you can modify it as you wish.

CUSTOM CHARACTERS

The character creation steps and options presented in CHAPTER 1 of *Modern AGE* should cover most campaigns and settings. Still, some *Modern AGE* games will call for customization of the character creation options, and players may prefer to chart their own course through the character creation process. This section looks at how to customize *Modern AGE* character creation to suit your campaign and how to help players come up with their own character options.

CUSTOM BACKGROUNDS

The backgrounds in *Modern AGE* cover a wide range of possibilities. In some campaigns, there may be a need to widen or add to those options. In others, it might be preferable to narrow the range of possible backgrounds, either because certain ones

don't fit the concept of the game or to select for certain backgrounds that suit its overall style. The GM may place certain backgrounds off-limits, asking players to reroll when they come up (though remember that you don't have to roll for your background—it's just an option) or choose a different background. For example, in the *Brass Lightning* campaign, set in an alternate fantasy version of 1890s America, the GM decides the Corporate upper class background and the Suburban middle class background aren't suited to the setting and asks players not to take them. The GM leaves the Aristocratic upper class background in place, allowing for the possibility of foreign-born and nonhuman aristocrats, but upper class Americans primarily belong to the Cosmopolitan background.

CHANGING SOCIAL CLASS

Modern AGE backgrounds begin by determining what social class the character was born into—outsider, lower class, middle class, or upper class—then randomly determining or choosing a background based on that class. This does not have to be the case, however. Social class primarily offers a set of possible backgrounds and professions to choose from and influences starting Resources, since all the professions of that social class have similar Resources. *Modern AGE* Game Masters may want to modify how social class works in character creation in one of the following ways.

LIMITED CLASS

In some campaigns, certain social classes may be excluded from character backgrounds. Limiting starting social class

FREE-FORM CHARACTER CREATION

Modern AGE's structure of social class, background, profession, and drive is intended to frame character creation in such a way that you have a pretty good sense of who the character is. However, all that matters from a strictly mechanical perspective is what game system options characters gain at each step. It's possible to do *Modern AGE* character creation completely free-form using a different series of steps:

- 1. CONCEPT:** This is essentially the same as **Step 1** in *Modern AGE*, except you can closely follow your concept and allow it to dictate your later decisions, rather than modifying or adapting it based on later steps.
- 2. ABILITIES:** This is the same as **Step 2** in *Modern AGE*. The free-form approach is best served by the **Buying Abilities** option, but you can use the default random roll and **Arranging Abilities** options as well. Whichever approach you use, you can increase one ability score of your choice by +1 at the end of the process.
- 3. FOCUSES:** Choose any three ability focuses for your character.
- 4. TALENTS:** Choose any three talents for your character. At the GM's discretion, you can select a talent twice, in which case you gain the Novice and Expert degrees of that talent. Remember, at character creation you're exempt from the normal prerequisites for talents, beyond having to take each degree in order.
- 5. IMPROVEMENTS:** Choose two of the following improvements: Health (+5 increase), Membership (rank 1), Resources (+2 increase), Relationship (Intensity 1), or Reputation (rank 1). If the GM allows it, you can replace one or both improvements with a perk (see **Background Perks**). The GM may also let you trade a -5 Health or -2 Resources reduction for one additional improvement.
- 6. RESOURCES:** You start with Resources 4, modified by your improvements and the Affluent talent.
- 7. SECONDARY TRAITS:** These are handled as per **Step 7** in *Modern AGE*, except you start with Health 15 + Constitution, modified by your improvements.
- 8. GOALS, TIES, AND RELATIONSHIPS:** These are done the same way as **Step 8** in *Modern AGE*.
- 9. NAME AND DESCRIPTION:** Follow the guidelines in **Step 9** in *Modern AGE*.

This produces characters mechanically equivalent to standard *Modern AGE* starting characters and gives greater player control over options. Players are also expected to come up with the necessary backstory to explain all the character's traits out of whole cloth, without the benefit of guidance from pre-generated social classes, backgrounds, or professions.

options can help emphasize your game's themes and special features. For example, if the GM plans to run a game about the aristocracy of a city or nation, all the heroes might be expected to be upper class, either born aristocrats or *nouveau riche* with the Corporate or Cosmopolitan backgrounds. Similarly, in a blue-collar-monster-hunters campaign, all the heroes might be lower class or possibly middle class.

NO CLASS

In some campaigns or settings, social class is almost entirely irrelevant. Either it truly does not exist, such as in an egalitarian fictional setting, or it effectively does not exist for the Player Characters, who come from a background where (for character creation purposes, at least) their social class by birth is irrelevant. They might have all been raised by a government organization or secret society, for example, replacing their previous origins with different standards of living, educational backgrounds, and opportunities.

BACKGROUND PERKS

In some cases, backgrounds may contain one or two minor perks beyond their standard benefits. These perks exist at the Game Master's discretion and should generally be balanced by providing similar benefits to other backgrounds so as not to make any particular background clearly advantageous. The most common background perks include the following.

LANGUAGES

Your background may include fluency with a language other than the commonly used language of the campaign setting your game uses. This is particularly suitable for backgrounds where the character is born in a foreign country (or foreign dimension) or might otherwise be bilingual, or for settings where different intelligent species have their own languages. For example, a fantasy Dwarf background might include fluency in whatever language dwarves speak in their culture, as well as the common human tongue. Generally, a background only includes fluency in one additional language. Further language abilities are covered by the Linguistics talent.

STUNTS

A background might grant access to a special or signature stunt, including one that qualifies as an extraordinary ability (see CHAPTER 5). This is usually a new stunt, designed with the oversight and permission of the Game Master, but it might be a favored stunt for the background: a standard stunt with a discount on the SP cost, usually -1 SP. For example, a Backwoods background in the *Brass Lightning* setting might have The Upper Hand as a favored stunt. Characters with that background might be able to perform an exploration stunt for 2 SP rather than the usual 3 when operating in the type of terrain the character lives in.

EXTRAORDINARY ABILITIES

Some backgrounds come with minor extraordinary abilities, typically things like sensory enhancements (the ability to see a short distance in the dark or to see in low light as if it were daylight), a small (+1 or +2) bonus to Speed, a +2 to Resources, or another equivalent of something from the improvements list for drive (see **Custom Drives** later in this chapter). These abilities tend to be always available, rather than reliant upon stunts, but also quite minor in nature.

CUSTOM BENEFITS TABLE

When creating a new background, the last step is to build a custom benefits table for the background. The **Default Benefits** table provides an example and a template you can follow: choose three abilities that are different from the background's standard ability bonus and a set of five ability focuses those with the background might gain. These should also be different from the choice of two focuses that are a standard part of the background. You can also substitute an improvement from the list for drives (see **Custom Drives** later in this chapter) for one of the entries on the table; most commonly this is a +2 Resources bonus in place of an ability focus for backgrounds that might have access to more resources.

BACKGROUND BENEFITS

- +1 to an ability score
- A choice of one of two ability focuses
- A choice of one of two talents
- A roll on a benefits table for the background for one additional benefit

DEFAULT BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Ability
3-4	Ability Focus
5	Ability Focus
6	Ability Focus
7-8	+1 Ability
9	Ability Focus
10-11	Ability Focus
12	+1 Ability

CUSTOM BACKGROUND TABLES

If you are adding to or changing backgrounds available in your *Modern AGE* game, you may want to create your own custom table for randomly rolling a background, like those given in **CHAPTER 1** of *Modern AGE*. The default is to assign a roughly equal chance of getting any given background, but you can weigh the chances differently if you want certain backgrounds to be more common than others. Note that this means those backgrounds are more common for Player Characters, not necessarily more common in the setting overall.

While character creation tables take the setting into account, their intended results are to produce suitable protagonists, who are, by definition, exceptional people. You should also decide if players are expected to roll their characters' backgrounds or if they may choose from the available options.

CUSTOM PROFESSIONS

As detailed in *Modern AGE*, profession defines what a character does, or at least did before the start of the campaign. Unlike backgrounds, professions tend to be things characters choose, although some find their way into their professions due to circumstance. Access to certain professions is also associated with character background, particularly social class.

PHYSICAL VS. NON-PHYSICAL PROFESSIONS

Professions in *Modern AGE* are defined as physical, skilled, and social. Physical professions gain a +5 bonus to Health, reflecting the rigors and risks of such work, but also a -2 to starting Resources based on the profession's focus on the physical taking time and attention away from acquiring and accumulating resources, at least initially. This essentially balances the addition of one improvement (+5 Health) with the removal of an equal improvement (-2 Resources). Game Masters adopting a more free-form style of character creation (see **Free-Form Character Creation** on the previous page) might want to change the modifiers for physical professions to simply the choice of a trade-off between improvements, allowing players to decide whether to take the bonus Health in exchange for reduced Resources or not.

OPTION: PROFESSIONS ABOVE YOUR CLASS

Modern AGE discusses the notion of taking a profession that is below your social class, but what about working your way into a profession that is *above* your class? Certainly, there are settings and characters where a rags-to-riches story is appropriate. If the Game Master wishes, players can avail themselves of the following option.

You can choose a profession from a list that is above your social class, but your starting Resources are reduced by 1 for each difference in class. So, for example, a lower-class character choosing an upper-class profession, like Expert or Executive, has a -2 to the character's starting resources (essentially canceling out the +2 Resources bonus for a non-physical profession). This reflects Resources the character had to spend to climb the social ladder, from student loans to expenditures of personal capital. The Game Master may also want to limit the number of social classes a character can advance in this way to only one or two, so an outsider cannot make the leap all the way to the upper class, at least not during character creation.

Even more so than a character with a profession below their social class (see **CHAPTER 1** of *Modern AGE*), characters with professions above their class may face certain prejudices for being social climbers or "getting above themselves"

depending on the setting and situation. For example, upper class interests may conspire against a politician with a lower class background.

CUSTOM PROFESSION TABLES

As with backgrounds, the Game Master may want to customize the profession tables for their campaign setting, eliminating inappropriate professions, adding new professions, or both, to better reflect the nature of the setting. For example, in the *Brass Lightning* campaign, the GM sees little use for the Pilot profession, aircraft being relatively rare, and suggests that the Politician profession is not particularly suitable for the campaign, asking players to re-roll or choose other middle class options for profession. The GM also notes the Technician, Professional, Scholar, and Expert professions might have some involvement with the “weird science” advancements of the setting, making sure appropriate options are given for them.

PROFESSION BENEFITS

- A choice of one of two specific ability focuses
- A choice of one of two specific talents
- A starting Health score of 20 + Constitution for a physical profession, 15 + Constitution for others
- A starting Resources score, modified by background and the Affluent talent, with a -2 modifier for physical professions

CUSTOM DRIVES

The last element of *Modern AGE* character creation is the choice of drive. While the game has a broad selection of drives, players might want to invent new ones for their characters. Game Masters can expand upon the drive list or allow for player-created drives so long as they fulfill the same criteria as the existing ones: providing both a quality and a downfall for roleplaying (and interaction with the optional Conviction system from *Modern AGE*) and a choice of one of two specific talents, along with the standard choice of an improvement.

QUALITY AND DOWNFALL

The key thing to keep in mind when creating a custom drive is that drive is the quality that *motivates* characters, leading them to get involved in the game’s story, and sometimes describes *how* they act as events unfold. Drives are different from goals, however, which are defined separately (as described in the **Goals** section of **CHAPTER 1** of *Modern AGE*). So, for example, “Become Fabulously Wealthy” is not a drive, but a goal. The same can be said for “Exact Vengeance on the Cabal That Destroyed My Family” or “Discover the Truth about the Lost City.” However, a character could have an Acquisitive drive, focused on gaining and building material success, with **growth** as their quality but **greed** as their downfall, similar to drives such as Achiever and Builder. Likewise, an Explorer drive might offer **curiosity** as its quality, but **foolhardiness** (a tendency to underestimate risk) as its downfall, like the Ecstatic or Protector drives in some ways.

TALENTS

The choice of talents associated with the new drive should be thematically appropriate. An Acquisitive drive is not going to provide a character with talents like Dual Weapon Style or Overwhelm, but Affluent or Burglary are certainly possibilities. An Explorer drive might offer talents like Improvisation, Observation, or Scouting, but probably would not offer Maker, Misdirection, or Tactical Awareness. While the drives in *Modern AGE* offer a choice of one of two talents, it is up to the GM to decide if players need to define two options for a custom drive, since they are only going to choose one for their character. It’s usually a good idea, in case you want to use the custom drive again for another character in a different game.

IMPROVEMENTS

Lastly, drives in *Modern AGE* offer a choice of one of three improvements from the master list of five given in the Drive Benefits list. Again, it is up to the GM to decide whether it is necessary to narrow the list down to three for the new drive, since the player is only going to pick one, but it’s a good idea if you intend to use the drive again. As with talents, the improvements offered by the drive should make sense, given its style. A Dreamy and Contemplative drive isn’t likely to offer an improvement to Health, and a Selfless drive probably won’t offer a bonus to Resources. Players should work with the GM to ensure their choice of improvements is suitable.

DRIVE BENEFITS

- A choice of one of two specific talents
- A choice of one of three of the following improvements: Health (+5 increase), Membership (rank 1), Resources (+2 increase), Relationship (Intensity 1), or Reputation (rank 1)

NEW FOCUSES

While the ability focuses described in **CHAPTER 3** of *Modern AGE* cover a great deal of ground, there may be instances where a setting, series, or character concept calls for new focuses that are not defined in the core rules. The existing focuses in the game have been designed to differentiate characters from one another, making them competent in their chosen fields without being overly specialized, and new ability focuses should reflect these general design goals. When considering adding a new focus to your *Modern AGE* game, take the following questions into account.

DOES AN EXISTING FOCUS FILL THE NEED?

First and foremost, look over the focuses in **CHAPTER 3** of *Modern AGE*. Does one or more of them do what you intend the new focus to do? If so, you should be able to make use of the existing focus. If your concept for the new focus does what multiple existing focuses do, then it may be too broad of a concept. For example, let’s say you come up with the idea of a Con Artist Communication focus. Looking at the existing focuses, we see there’s Bargaining, Deception, Disguise, Gambling, and Seduction, all of which play some

role in the work of a con artist. It sounds like that focus is better considered a profession, with a choice of some of those focuses or possibly a talent that provides bonuses to those focuses, along with other abilities. Likewise, an Athletics focus that applied a bonus to tests involving running, jumping, swimming, and so forth would subsume several different Constitution and Strength focuses and would be better handled as a background or profession.

IS THERE A SIMILAR FOCUS TO USE AS A MODEL?

If none of the existing focuses fit the need, is there one that is similar to the new focus you have in mind that you can use as a model off of which to base the new focus? For example, imagine you're working up a setting where arcane extraordinary powers are common and there are some experts in the field of Arcana. There is no Arcana focus for Intelligence, but other knowledge focuses, particularly Occultism, are similar. You decide that Occultism in this setting is divided into Arcana, knowledge of arcane abilities and how they work, and Occultism, which is knowledge of esoteric, mystical beliefs and practices, which in this setting sometimes mask arcane abilities as "magic" or "the supernatural."

IS THE NEW FOCUS USEFUL FOR TESTS?

A focus provides a bonus on ability tests related to that focus. Is there such a test? If not, then the focus doesn't really serve a purpose. For example, you might have a Memory focus for Willpower reflecting a character's ability to recall specific information, but only if there are occasions when the GM asks players to roll to see if their characters can remember something. Otherwise, memory and recalling information tend to be the purview of knowledge focuses. Likewise, a Sleeping focus for Constitution doesn't serve a purpose unless there's ever a Constitution test to measure the quality or effectiveness of a character's sleep. Of course, in a campaign involving exploration of the dream world, where the ability to achieve different levels of sleep is vitally important and the subject of ability tests, this could be a viable focus.

DOES THE FOCUS DO ANYTHING OTHER THAN PROVIDE A TEST BONUS?

If your conception of the new focus does anything other than give the character the usual focus bonus with ability tests related to that focus, you may be thinking of a new talent or specialization rather than a focus. Of course, it's possible for a new focus to work in conjunction with a new talent, specialization, or extraordinary power that calls for particular tests, just as there are ability focuses associated with arcane and psychic talents in CHAPTER 6 of *Modern AGE*.

WHEN IS THE FOCUS AVAILABLE TO CHARACTERS?

Some new focuses are common enough in a setting for new characters to start with that focus at character creation. In this case, you may want to look at the **Custom Character Creation** section of this book for ideas on modifying the existing backgrounds, professions, and such to account for the existence of new focuses. If the new focus is relatively rare or secretive, however, it may only be available after 1st level and possibly only to characters who find instructions

or someone to teach the focus. This is particularly the case for secretive knowledge focuses or ones associated with certain extraordinary powers in certain settings.

COMMON TYPES OF NEW FOCUSES

The most common types of new focuses that crop up for *Modern AGE* games are new or specialized areas of knowledge, various hobbies or trivia not covered by the existing focus list, and focuses related to special or extraordinary equipment or abilities.

KNOWLEDGE

New knowledge focuses tend to deal with bodies or areas of knowledge not specifically covered in the *Modern AGE* focus list. Before allowing a new knowledge focus, double-check to make sure the information is not already covered by an existing focus, as the knowledge focuses in *AGE* tend to be broad. For example, meteorology (the science of weather) falls under the Earth Sciences focus, as do climatology, geology, hydrology, and oceanography. Geography, on the other hand, falls under the Cartography focus, dealing with maps. While knowledge of political activities falls under Current Events, political science is a potential new focus; the same can be said for some of the other social sciences, like economics or sociology.

HOBBIES AND TRIVIA

Hobbies and trivia encompass knowledge of esoteric subjects, ranging from comic books and science fiction to Civil War reenactments, as well as active hobbyist skills like knitting, cooking, beer making, and so forth. As with knowledge focuses, many hobbies are already covered by existing focuses, particularly Art and Crafting. Likewise, while many trained sword wielders in the modern world are hobbyists, they still use the Light Blades and Heavy Blades focuses. The same is true of both amateur and professional athletes, who may have the appropriate Constitution or Strength focuses associated with their sport. It's up to the GM to decide whether a general focus for Sports or a separate focus for individual sports like Baseball, Football (American or international), or the like is needed. Usually, this fails to pass the "Is the new focus useful for tests?" guideline. If the rare case occurs where a "Sports Trivia" bonus to a test would be appropriate for a known athlete or sports fanatic, just grant the player a one-time bonus.

SPECIAL ABILITIES OR EQUIPMENT

Lastly, new focuses often relate to unusual abilities or technologies available in the setting that do not appear elsewhere and thus are not considered in the *Modern AGE* focus lists. The **Extraordinary Abilities** chapter of *Modern AGE* already accounts for some of these, noting there is a separate focus for each extraordinary ability talent. Likewise, if your setting features directed energy weapons, there might be an Accuracy (Blasters) focus, perhaps even in Light and Heavy

forms, drawing the same distinctions as melee weapons and firearms. There might also be an Accuracy (Weird Science) or (Gadgets) focus in a setting where such things are common or a general Accuracy (Arcane) focus for things like directed magical attacks, magic wands, and so forth.

USING FOCUSES WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

One way of making greater use of existing focuses is occasionally allowing a focus to apply to appropriate tests with a different ability, extending its usefulness and covering some minor gaps in the focus lists. A common example is applying non-Intelligence focuses to Intelligence tests where knowledge or experience with the focus would make sense. For example, a character with a firearms focus like Longarms or Pistols could apply the focus bonus to an Intelligence test to know something about firearms, since the character clearly has training and experience. Likewise, a character with the Dexterity (Sailing) focus might well apply the bonus to an Intelligence test to know things about boats, sailing, or even obscure bits of nautical lore.

The general guideline with this approach to focuses is that applying a focus to a different ability should generally not replace the function of another focus. So, for example, while a character with Dexterity (Driving) might know things about the make, model, and history of cars, which would be helpful for an Intelligence (Driving) test, a bonus for fixing cars is covered by the Intelligence (Tinkering) focus,

and designing and building cars are part of Intelligence (Engineering), so the character with the Driving focus does not necessarily have a bonus in those areas. That said, the Driving focus might apply its bonus to something like a Perception test to notice something wrong with a car, like detecting sabotage or a mundane breakdown, even if the character doesn't necessarily have a bonus to fix it.

FANTASTICAL BACKGROUNDS

In *Modern AGE*, the default backgrounds are broad types of character origins, separated into four social class categories. This section presents additional options for backgrounds, narrowing the focus to fit games with fantasy, paranormal, or science fiction elements. It also presents backgrounds more akin to the "races" in other AGE games, such as *Fantasy AGE*, which represent a culture or fundamental nature rather than a broad set of circumstances in a character's upbringing.

ORIGIN BACKGROUNDS

For convenience, this section includes the Social Class table and updated versions of the derivative background tables from *Modern AGE*, with the new origin backgrounds added. It may be that not all new backgrounds are appropriate for your game's setting, since some are geared toward fantasy games and others are more science fiction-based. If your game doesn't feature any ghosts or psychics, for instance, you won't want to include the Paranormal background. You can mix and match the social class-based background tables from this book and the core book as necessary to include only the setting elements that work for your game.

You can also replace a default background with a new one instead, if you like. For instance, in your game's setting, people with ready access to magic might serve as a ruling class. If so, you can simply replace the Aristocratic background with the Legacy one and roll as normal.

As with any background, feel free to flesh these out with more details about your character's early life in the context of the background. For example, a protagonist with the Thrall background might have been possessed by a malevolent spirit. What did the spirit want, and why did it choose your character as its vessel? How did the protagonist escape its clutches? Is it still out there, waiting for an opportunity for revenge, or did your character destroy it?

EXTRAORDINARY ORIGINS

Some of the backgrounds included here suggest potential access to extraordinary abilities, such as psychic powers for someone with the Paranormal background. Where applicable, the background descriptions include optional extraordinary talents a player can choose from if the GM allows it.

FANTASTICAL BACKGROUNDS			
1D6 ROLL		SOCIAL CLASS	
1		Outsider	
2-3		Lower Class	
4-5		Middle Class	
6		Upper Class	

OUTSIDER		MIDDLE CLASS	
1D6	BACKGROUND	1D6	BACKGROUND
1	Anomaly	1	Academic
2	Bohemian	2	Paranormal
3	Exile	3	Suburban
4	Outlander	4	Tagalong
5	Outcast	5	Trade
6	(Roll again)	6	(Roll again)

LOWER CLASS		UPPER CLASS	
1D6	BACKGROUND	1D6	BACKGROUND
1	Laborer	1	Aristocratic
2	Military	2	Corporate
3	Scavenger	3	Cosmopolitan
4	Thrall	4	Jacked In
5	Urban	5	Legacy
6	(Roll again)	6	(Roll again)

ANOMALY

OUTSIDER

You grew up different, somehow. You're a genetic mutant or a clone. You have alien blood or a mysterious destiny. You



were exposed to strange radiation or ancient magic as a child, and it changed you. Whatever the case, you don't fit in, and someone is always out to see what makes you tick. Everyone wants a piece of you, and you deal with constant attention whether you want it or not. Note that while the outsider social class is linked to this background to represent characters raised apart from society due to their unusual nature, characters who don't grow up under those circumstances might belong to any class.

ABILITY: +1 Willpower
FOCUS: Communication (Persuasion) or Dexterity (Stealth)
TALENT: Living on the Fringe or Tactical Awareness;
Optional: any power talent

ANOMALY BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Dexterity
3-4	FOCUS: Constitution (Running)
5	FOCUS: Communication (Bargaining)
6	FOCUS: Perception (Hearing)
7-8	+1 Communication
9	FOCUS: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
10-11	FOCUS: Communication (Disguise)
12	+1 Perception

JACKED IN

UPPER

You've woken up to the real world, the one most people never see. Maybe your parents were cyberwarrior freedom fighters, or you fell in early with a hacker collective and learned all the tricks. You can crack systems with the best of them, but more than that, you're onto the secret power behind the Man or the secret world behind the curtain. Using your abilities for personal gain, you want for nothing now. Knowing how the system works, you consider yourself above the law.

ABILITY: +1 Intelligence
FOCUS: Communication (Investigation) or Intelligence (Computers or Security)
TALENT: Affluent or Hacker

JACKED IN BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Accuracy
3-4	FOCUS: Intelligence (Cryptography)
5	FOCUS: Intelligence (Current Affairs)
6	FOCUS: Perception (Seeing)
7-8	+1 Perception
9	FOCUS: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
10-11	FOCUS: Dexterity (Sabotage)
12	+1 Willpower

LEGACY**UPPER**

You're heir to a long line of powerful sorcerers, gothic princesses, or rich inventors. Fantastical magic, a creepy mystical inheritance, or the latest cutting-edge technologies defined your early life. You might have a backup clone in cryonic stasis for uploading your brain into when you die or an amulet that commands demons as a family heirloom. You're expected to follow in the footsteps of greatness and unspeakable wonder, regardless of what you want. The default upper class grouping assumes a classic version of this background, with its Gothic mansions and other sanctums, but your campaign may assign characters a different default class instead.

ABILITY: +1 Communication
FOCUS: Communication (Leadership) or Intelligence (History or Occultism)
TALENT: Affluent or Theory and Practice; *Optional:* any arcane power talent

LEGACY BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Accuracy
3-4	FOCUS: Intelligence (Occultism or Research)
5	FOCUS: Intelligence (Astronomy)
6	FOCUS: Strength (Intimidation)
7-8	+1 Intelligence
9	FOCUS: Intelligence (Evaluation)
10-11	FOCUS: Dexterity (Piloting)
12	+1 Dexterity

PARANORMAL**MIDDLE**

You grew up in an environment where the strange was normal. Ghosts, spirits, psychics, and the otherworldly were fixtures in your early life, whether because your parents were mediums, you could see things no one else could, or your childhood home was haunted. You might not have any powers yourself, but nothing fazes you, and you're a natural at bridging the mundane and the mystic.

ABILITY: +1 Communication
FOCUS: Intelligence (Occultism) or Willpower (Courage)
TALENT: Knowledge or Observation; *Optional:* any psychic power talent

PARANORMAL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Intelligence
3-4	FOCUS: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
5	FOCUS: Communication (Investigation)
6	FOCUS: Dexterity (Initiative)
7-8	+1 Willpower
9	FOCUS: Intelligence (Theology)
10-11	FOCUS: Communication (Bargaining)
12	+1 Perception

OUTLANDER**OUTSIDER**

You're really not from around here. You're a fish out of water in this country, world, or era, with origins in a parallel universe, the past, the future, or another dimension. It may or may not have been your choice to leave your home, but now you're stuck here, and you must make the best of it. You've learned to adapt to local custom, to be a quick study of the behaviors of others, and to bluff and dissemble your way through unfamiliar situations.

ABILITY: +1 Perception
FOCUS: Communication (Deception) or Dexterity (Initiative)
TALENT: Linguistics or Observation

OUTLANDER BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Intelligence
3-4	FOCUS: Communication (Investigation)
5	FOCUS: Perception (Empathy)
6	FOCUS: Intelligence (Research)
7-8	+1 Willpower
9	FOCUS: Willpower (Self-Discipline)
10-11	FOCUS: Willpower (Courage)
12	+1 Dexterity

SCAVENGER**LOWER**

You grew up scrounging a living from other people's abandoned technology. Maybe you lived on a derelict undersea power station, just trying to keep life support running, or a backwater island where scrap went to die, and nobody cared what happened to you. Maybe a bandit lord or luckless mechanic raised you, filching bits of salvage for coin. You're resourceful and shrewd. Your relationships with people from other backgrounds range from the gratitude of people who use what you've rebuilt to conflict with well-off merchants who buy recycled materials from you.

ABILITY: +1 Dexterity
FOCUS: Intelligence (Tinkering) or Perception (Searching)
TALENT: Burglary or Living on the Fringe

SCAVENGER BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Constitution
3-4	FOCUS: Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)
5	FOCUS: Dexterity (Crafting)
6	FOCUS: Intelligence (Engineering)
7-8	+1 Intelligence
9	FOCUS: Strength (Machining)
10-11	FOCUS: Communication (Bargaining)
12	+1 Perception

TAGALONG

MIDDLE

Whoever raised you lived a lifestyle of travel and adventure, with the means to voyage far and wide. Perhaps you grew up on an airship, touring the world with a bird's-eye view, or perhaps your guardian was an officer in an organization dedicated to defending Earth from alien menaces, establishing international bases, and protecting human interests. You consider yourself worldly, but you also know how to improvise and rough it when you must. While the default background is middle class, a tagalong's social status varies depending on the people they meet and places they go.

ABILITY: +1 Constitution

FOCUS: Intelligence (Navigation) or Dexterity (Piloting)

TALENT: Contacts or Improvisation

TAGALONG BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Communication
3-4	FOCUS: Constitution (Stamina)
5	FOCUS: Intelligence (Cartography)
6	FOCUS: Dexterity (Driving)
7-8	+1 Perception
9	FOCUS: Intelligence (Tinkering)
10-11	FOCUS: Communication (Etiquette)
12	+1 Intelligence

THRALL

LOWER

You spent a long time—too long—in thrall to some powerful being or malevolent force. This background represents being in the service of such a power, not a mundane person or organization. You might have received subconscious commands in your dreams, been part of a hive mind, or labored under a curse. Unless you make some arrangement with the GM to the contrary, you're now free of that oppression. Now, you're determined never to let anyone subjugate you, your people, or your friends again.

ABILITY: +1 Willpower

FOCUS: Dexterity (Sabotage) or Willpower (Faith)

TALENT: Protect or Self-Defense Style

THRALL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Constitution
3-4	FOCUS: Strength (Intimidation)
5	FOCUS: Communication (Persuasion)
6	FOCUS: Intelligence (Occultism)
7-8	+1 Fighting
9	FOCUS: Communication (Leadership)
10-11	FOCUS: Willpower (Courage)
12	+1 Accuracy

PEOPLES

While origin backgrounds are about the circumstances of a hero's early life, people backgrounds are about the hero's ancestry, nature, and cultural upbringing. Choosing a people background instead of an origin background for your character grants the same kinds of bonuses and abilities, but they mean slightly different things. The core benefits are inherited, meaning they're about the protagonist's fundamental nature or descent, and the benefits in the table are cultural, meaning they're about the people's distinct customs and way of life. Culture can differ wildly based on region, social class, and other factors, but for purposes of character creation, we distill these differences into a set of basic commonalities.

Unlike origin backgrounds, a background based on a people doesn't fall under one of the four social classes. Being an AI or an elf has nothing inherently to do with someone's place in society. If you decide to give your character a people background instead of an origin—provided your GM allows that—simply choose the background you want rather than rolling on a table. It's unlikely (but certainly possible!) that the setting and genre of your game allow all seven of the following peoples, so check with your GM to see which are available.

You can use these peoples as examples to create your own, with GM permission, if the setting allows it. For instance, the AI presented here is somewhat generic because by default, to avoid making too many assumptions about them in your campaign. However, in a setting where various android models exist, you may wish to make them available as separate peoples.

The peoples presented here are appropriate for a mix of science fiction, modern fantasy, and paranormal settings. However, nothing stops a GM from including all seven in the same game or adapting a science fiction background to a fantasy setting, or vice versa, by simply tweaking some details. For instance, the Artificial Intelligence background could just as easily represent a clockwork person or other animated creation; just modify the necessary story elements and replace focuses like Intelligence (Computers) with more appropriate ones. Since you might have to customize these backgrounds for your campaign, you should be aware that descriptions of prevalent cultural norms and attitudes are as subject to change as anything else. In fact, a short description can't do justice to the full range of traditions and personalities present. Descriptions are starting points, not restrictions.

Note that if one player chooses a people background, it's best if they all do; people backgrounds include extra advantages that origins don't have, such as Dark Sight or Underdog.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

An artificial intelligence, or AI, is a fully sapient technological person with a physical body, whom organic hands built or created. Some AIs don't have mobile bodies, but this background assumes a character who does. An AI hero might be an android, a clockwork person, a cyborg, a solid hologram, a humanoid collection of nanomachines, or some other wondrous feat of engineering. An AI hero typically has a

strong relationship with their primary creator, even if a corporation built them as part of an assembly line. Some AIs were once organic but had their consciousness or brains transferred to mechanical bodies. Others were built from scratch; they achieved sapience through their own efforts or were designed that way.

Organic people sometimes view AIs as immortal, but they aren't—their bodies require maintenance, and eventually they shut down entirely unless they go to great lengths to repeat (or upgrade) the original process that created them. Organic people also sometimes view AIs with distrust, ascribing all manner of sinister plans to them, but this is purely a knee-jerk reaction born from fear. An artificial intelligence has the same free will as anyone else.

An AI is sturdy, fast, and strong and can process information at dizzying speeds. The subtleties of social interactions elude them, though, and while they do experience true emotions, they also think like a machine—they're detail oriented and goal focused and tend to appreciate function over form. AIs don't often have cultures of their own, as unique creations or those purpose-built for a job, so they adopt their parent cultures and train for specific fields of expertise. Some cyborg communities thrive in wealthy cities or isolated communes, and these emphasize self-improvement and philosophical debate.



AI INHERITED BENEFITS

ABILITY: +1 Intelligence

FOCUS: Intelligence (Computers) or Strength (Might);

Optional: the Digital Arcana power talent

ADVANTAGES: Information Processor: actions you take to research something or otherwise absorb information in narrative time take half the usual time. Your Speed is 12 + Dexterity. You can speak and read your creator's native language plus any one additional language.

TALENT: Hacker or Pinpoint Attack

AI CULTURAL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Strength
3-4	FOCUS: Dexterity (Running)
5	FOCUS: Strength (Jumping)
6	FOCUS: Fighting (Grappling)
7-8	+1 Constitution
9	FOCUS: Intelligence (Cryptography)
10-11	FOCUS: Intelligence (Research)
12	+1 Dexterity

DWARF

Dwarves are stalwart, assertive, and long-lived. They make steadfast allies and daunting enemies. They organize in familial clans, making inheritance a primary concern for their cultures, and they prize skills that lend themselves to stability and permanence. Many schools with dwarven founders teach constructive trades like engineering, manufacturing, mechanics, and architecture; more scholarly or civically minded dwarves often become historians, archivists, museum curators, lawyers, or journalists. Many dwarves join the military as well, finding disciplined outlets for their bravery. Dwarves hold grudges for a long time, partially because their memories are superb and partially because clan feuds are a time-honored tradition that spills over into daily life. Even though dwarves usually don't take insults lying down, they are nonetheless inclined toward patience and taking the long view. They excel at fields that require years to perfect, but sometimes prefer tried and true methods to the latest technology.

In classic fantasy manifestations, dwarves stand between four and five feet tall, with sturdy, brawny builds. Note, however, that medical dwarfism is related to these fantasy people only by virtue of etymology. In older Norse sources, dwarves are not said to be any particular height. Dwarves are well-known for their beards. Their hair grows remarkably quickly compared to other peoples', so their cultures embrace beard fashion as an art; the most famous hairstylists in the world are dwarves.

Dwarves have a penchant for vehicles, machinery, and ordnance. They make the best enchanted guns and the sturdiest airships. Dwarves value well-made things, and display wealth in the form of the finest works of artisanship—better a perfectly-cut crystal than a dozen average rubies. They're rarely found in upper-class professions; even rich dwarves consider it gauche to lord it over other people by having

MODERN AGE PEOPLES AND FANTASY AGE RACES

Some of the peoples of *Modern AGE* are adaptations of the races in *Fantasy AGE*; you can use those given here as a template for adapting others, like gnomes and halflings.

However, in *Fantasy AGE*, players roll *twice* on their character's racial benefits table; in *Modern AGE*, they normally only roll once for their background's benefits.

If the GM would like the peoples in this book to work more like the races from *Fantasy AGE*, they may allow players to roll twice for backgrounds: once on an origin's table and once on a cultural table, twice on a single cultural table, or once on one cultural table and once on another, depending on the character's circumstances and the player's preferences. Be aware that this represents a slight increase in power for starting characters from the usual *Modern AGE* experience, on top of the small advantages peoples already gain.

high-rise corner offices (and they don't like heights, anyway). Urban areas are famous for their dwarven biker gangs—some are criminal gangs, but others ride for charity, vigilante justice, or just to show off their sweet custom mods.

DWARF INHERITED BENEFITS

ABILITY: +1 Constitution

FOCUS: Intelligence (History or Law) or Willpower (Courage)

ADVANTAGES: Dark Sight: you can see up to 20 yards in darkness without a light source. Your Speed is 8 + Dexterity. You can speak and read Dwarven and a common local language.

TALENT: Expertise or Maker

DWARF CULTURAL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Strength
3-4	FOCUS: Strength (Machining)
5	FOCUS: Intelligence (Tinkering)
6	FOCUS: Dexterity (Piloting)
7-8	+1 Willpower
9	FOCUS: Intelligence (Engineering)
10-11	FOCUS: Accuracy (Assault Rifles)
12	+1 Accuracy

ELF

Elves may appear highly empathetic, commanding, or arrogant, even when they don't wish to make any particular impression. They're given to grace, athleticism, and philosophical leanings. Their cultures emphasize harmony and enlightenment, sometimes to the point of discriminating against so-called "discordant" members of their culture. Elves eschewed urban living for centuries, preferring stone to streets and trees to trains. Eventually, though, their love of travel and discovery overcame their wish for privacy, and the world's wildernesses grew smaller and harder to find every day. The elves embraced the city, with its glitz and glitter, and their affinity for creative works spawned an artistic revolution once they did. They gravitate toward industries like fashion, beauty, and entertainment among the upper classes, while others become renowned street artists, mystics for

hire, subversive authors, counterculture icons, or world-class chefs. Elves tend to assume their ways, refined by long lives and ancient traditions, are superior, and may display confusion or frustration when outsiders don't agree.

Elves live longer than many peoples. In classic fantasy campaigns, they stand between five and six feet tall, with slim and wiry builds. In source mythology, elves often have traits tale-tellers associate with beauty, nobility, and magic, though this may be a function of their signature charisma, not physical reality, as elves vary in appearances as much as mundane humans. Their cultures value elders for their wisdom and accumulated years of skills and knowledge. Teachers and mentors occupy a revered place in elven society, as do explorers and scholars in fields such as anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, and astronomy.

Elves believe in self-development. The product of a skill is less important than the skill itself, and how it transforms the one who masters it. Thus, many elves cultivate physical disciplines such as dance and martial arts. Despite their reputation for being diplomats and socialites, skilled elven fighters are a force of daring and prowess. Their sharp eyes and quick reflexes lend themselves well to precision weapons, such as bows or pistols, and hand-to-hand combat.

ELF INHERITED BENEFITS

ABILITY: +1 Dexterity

FOCUS: Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Perception (Seeing)

ADVANTAGES: Dark Sight: you can see up to 20 yards in darkness without a light source. Your Speed is 12 + Dexterity. You can speak and read Elven and any common language.

TALENT: Freerunning or Intrigue

ELF CULTURAL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Fighting
3-4	FOCUS: Communication (Performing)
5	FOCUS: Intelligence (Navigation)
6	FOCUS: Intelligence (Art)
7-8	+1 Communication
9	FOCUS: Communication (Etiquette)
10-11	FOCUS: Perception (Empathy)
12	+1 Perception

HUMAN

Normally, *Modern AGE* assumes the default protagonists are humans, so this background is unnecessary. In a setting where other peoples are common, use it for human characters to contrast the others. Anyone from Earth might consider themselves “human,” even if they happen to be an elf, but this background represents real-world-style human beings.

Humans are the most far-flung people and thrive as underdogs better than anyone. Elves like to visit remote corners of the world, but only humans are brave and foolhardy enough to live there. They’re resourceful and bold, ready to adjust to new circumstances and hardships. Cities abound with them in every social class and industry, but it’s usually humans who found isolated places in harsh environments with fierce predators besetting them on every side. Because of this adaptability, humans are prone to letting problems persist, including war. They’re not naturally aggressive, but they band together easily and throw themselves fully into causes. It’s great for fighting rebellions and building a brighter world, but it breeds messy conflict when there’s no obvious tyrant to overthrow.

Humans vary in physical size and build, ranging from five to six feet tall, with some outliers in both directions. Their life spans are comparatively short, but their willingness to face down peril and misery to forge something better makes them a force to reckon with.

Humanity is capable of radical heights of compassion and depths of cruelty, sometimes in the same individual. Humans learn more quickly and can change their stripes more readily than most, making diplomacy with them unpredictable but never impossible. However, a human with strong opinions can defend them as solidly as any dwarf.

HUMAN INHERITED BENEFITS

ABILITY: +1 Willpower

FOCUS: Dexterity (Initiative) or Intelligence (Current Affairs)

ADVANTAGES: Underdog: reduce all penalties for adverse circumstances by 1. Your Speed is 10 + Dexterity. You can speak and read any two common local languages.

TALENT: Contacts or Improvisation

HUMAN CULTURAL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Intelligence
3–4	FOCUS: Communication (Persuasion)
5	FOCUS: Intelligence (Tactics)
6	FOCUS: Constitution (Stamina)
7–8	+1 Fighting
9	FOCUS: Constitution (Tolerance)
10–11	FOCUS: Willpower (Courage)
12	+1 Accuracy

ORC

Orcs are a proud, strong people. They have a reputation for being meatheads and troublemakers, but they don’t provoke conflict without cause. Most grew up under a leader who

proved themselves capable by defeating all rivals in a fight, a battle of wits, a mystical challenge, a game, or a sports competition, or who simply used a campaign to win the hearts of the people through heroic deeds. In orc communities, members have each other’s backs, but each community is expected to be self-sufficient. A community that fails deserves whatever befalls it. Those who forsake their people are left to hack it alone. Many orc societies run athletic clubs, schools, or mercenary companies, though others are less cohesive and may simply get together for a party once a week.

Loyalty, dignity, and pride are paramount in orc cultures. They take a dim view of traitors, deceivers, and career politicians. Many approve of violent retribution because it’s honest. In battle, enemies show their true motives and abilities. They see weakness as a vice, though strength needn’t be in body; a scholarly orc with a backbone of steel commands just as much respect as a peerless soldier. Orcs are blunt and straightforward, eschewing social niceties as meaningless platitudes meant to soothe egos.

In classic fantasy sources, orcs are sturdy and muscular, ranging from five to seven feet tall with broad builds, robust features, and sharp teeth. Orcs are mostly a contemporary fantasy phenomenon, but draw inspiration from earlier legends of hidden, monstrous folk. To demonstrate their strength and bravery, many orcs join the military, law enforcement, sports teams, and other professions. Less athletically inclined orcs make good tacticians, detectives, and project managers—they do well at any job that rewards straightforwardness and determination.

ORC INHERITED BENEFITS

ABILITY: +1 Strength

FOCUS: Communication (Leadership) or Strength (Might)

ADVANTAGES: Dark Sight: you can see up to 20 yards in darkness without a light source. Your Speed is 10 + Dexterity. You can speak and read Orcish and a common local language.

TALENT: Command or Overwhelm

ORC CULTURAL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Constitution
3–4	FOCUS: Strength (Intimidation)
5	FOCUS: Constitution (Stamina)
6	FOCUS: Perception (Smelling)
7–8	+1 Fighting
9	FOCUS: Constitution (Running)
10–11	FOCUS: Fighting (Brawling)
12	+1 Willpower

SHAPESHIFTER

Shapeshifters may come from another planet or have mystical origins, such as a blessing or curse. Some shifters only have two forms, a humanoid one and something else. Others are more fluid and can take any shape, and still others are always humanoid but can rearrange their features. Shapeshifter cultures are insular and reactive, defaulting to espionage,

PLAYING A SHAPESHIFTER

The Shapeshifter background encompasses several different potential kinds of character concepts, from the lycanthrope to the alien who can perfectly infiltrate other worlds to the sapient blob that can assume any form. If the GM wants a less obviously fantastical setting, they can default to the subtler side of the Shapeshifter talent, which represents smaller changes to individual features to simply aid disguise. Otherwise, the player may choose either the subtle or extra form benefit at each degree of the talent.

If a shapeshifter character does have access to additional shapes, the GM should treat them like any other character whose background allows some narrative edge in specific circumstances or provides justification to take arcane or psychic talents. Turning into a bird may occasionally allow them to take certain kinds of actions in ways a non-flying character can't, but it doesn't bypass the need to make rolls to accomplish important things.

observation, and cryptic plots when they interact with other realms or peoples. This is partially because of their innate ability to blend in and partially a survival mechanism against the mistrust they garner from others, deserved or not.

Shapeshifters explore questions of identity and juggle complicated relationships; they have a knack for knowing what makes people tick. They play roles ranging from secret police to peerless actors and performers to guerilla combatants. Shifter mercenaries, spies, and assassins are common. When they go to war as a people, they wage shadow battles of paranoia and infiltration, trying to take down the enemy from within before it learns their vulnerabilities. Some shapeshifters eschew conflict and intrigue, though, preferring to study living things and their environments. They often become scientists, counselors, anthropologists, and physicians.

Shapeshifters have one natural form they default to when they're asleep or in a neutral state. It's usually humanoid, but some shifters exist naturally as fluids or unusual beasts. Some may not have "true" faces, existing as blank slates until they choose to look like someone specific. Those whose talents lie on the subtler end of the spectrum don't have alternate forms at all, simply excelling at disguise and deception beyond others' ability to match.

SHAPESHIFTER INHERITED BENEFITS

ABILITY: +1 Communication

FOCUS: Communication (Disguise) or Perception (Empathy)

ADVANTAGES: Camouflage: you can always make tests to conceal yourself without penalty even if there's nowhere to hide. Your Speed is 10 + Dexterity. You can speak and read Shiftertongue and any one additional language. You may take or improve the Shapeshifting talent (see sidebar) as you advance, even if you don't select it at character creation.

TALENT: Intrigue or Shapeshifting (see sidebar); *Optional:* the Empathy psychic power talent

TALENT: SHAPESHIFTING

REQUIREMENT: Shapeshifter background

You can change your physical form, either drastically or subtly. This talent has Subtle and Extra Form paths. You progress in each separately, with the previous degree required to get the next one in the same path. The Game Master determines whether you can take one or both paths.

NOVICE, SUBTLE: You can shift your features to more closely resemble someone else. When disguising yourself as someone specific you've seen in person or in a clear photograph recently, you can re-roll any dice with a result of 1 or 2 when making **COMMUNICATION (DISGUISE)** tests. Additionally, you can use that person's Membership and Reputation benefits as though they were your own (but, of course, you can't use your own at the same time). If you do, that character loses access to those benefits for the rest of the game session.

NOVICE, EXTRA FORM: You have one additional form besides your default one. While you're in this form, all stunts that align particularly well with the form cost one fewer SP than usual, but those that don't cost one SP more. The GM is the final arbiter of which stunts are which.

EXPERT, SUBTLE: Once you've successfully disguised yourself as someone specific, for the rest of that scene you can perform the It Wasn't Me stunt for 2 SP instead of 4 when you implicate the person you look like, and attempts to investigate the truth suffer a -3 instead of a -2.

EXPERT, EXTRA FORM: This has the same guidelines as Novice, Extra Form, but you now have one more additional form than you had already.

MASTER, SUBTLE: While you're disguised as someone specific, you gain access to the following unique stunt: for 2 SP, if your test shifted a character's attitude toward the person you're pretending to be, shift it by an additional degree in the same direction. Additionally, whenever you use another character's Membership or Reputation benefits instead of your own, increase all bonuses and inflicted penalties from them by 1.

MASTER, EXTRA FORM: This has the same guidelines as Expert, Extra Form, but you now have one more additional form than you had already.

SHAPESHIFTER CULTURAL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL

BENEFIT

2

+1 Intelligence

3-4

FOCUS: Communication (Deception)

5

FOCUS: Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)

6

FOCUS: Fighting (Light Blades)

7-8

+1 Dexterity

9

FOCUS: Intelligence (Biology or Medicine)

10-11

FOCUS: Dexterity (Stealth)

12

+1 Perception

SPIRIT-BLOOD

“Spirit” is a catchall term for various otherworldly beings: ghosts, faeries, demons, animistic phenomena, extradimensional visitors composed of energy or dark matter, and stranger things. A spirit-blood is anyone who is half-spirit. Perhaps one of their parents was one, they were infused with unearthly essence or stolen away to another realm as an infant, they suffered a botched possession that changed them, or they experienced a unique transformation. Spirit-bloods come from another people originally, but they’re so changed as to be unrecognizable.

Spirit-bloods don’t have their own cultures. Some live in defiance of any culture that would have them; others desperately try to fit in, a herculean task for those who stand out so easily. All spirit-bloods have uncanny intuition—even those who don’t inherit fantastic abilities have absurd luck, preternatural instincts, and a nose for trouble. Many hire themselves out as fortune-tellers or ghost hunters, and rarely does a spirit-blood lead a quiet life. Adventure finds them, whether they seek it or not. Perhaps their unearthly parent returns to pass on some bizarre bequest, task them with solving a mysterious puzzle, or reclaim them and take them away. Perhaps they manifest uncontrollable gifts and must find a teacher before disaster strikes. Perhaps they’re the unknowing epicenter of a cosmic disturbance.

Spirit-bloods learn that making lots of friends helps them survive. They gather bands of misfits and unlikely companions, connecting easily across aisles of hostility and planes of existence. Those who embrace the spotlight make

waves as daring ship captains, flashy rock stars, and other bombastic public figures who trail admirers, paparazzi, and resentful rivals. Those who try to lead more subtle lives attract the fascination and suspicion of government agencies, mystical investigators, and the power hungry.

SPIRIT-BLOOD INHERITED BENEFITS

ABILITY: +1 Perception

FOCUS: Intelligence (Physics or Occultism) or Communication (Investigation)

ADVANTAGES: Danger Sense: you may take a minor action during the first round of combat even when surprised. Your Speed is 10 + Dexterity. You can speak and read one occult or otherworldly language, plus one common local language.

TALENT: Attractive or Quick Reflexes; *Optional:* the Extrasensory Perception power talent

SPIRIT-BLOOD CULTURAL BENEFITS

2D6 ROLL	BENEFIT
2	+1 Dexterity
3–4	FOCUS: Dexterity (Initiative)
5	FOCUS: Communication (Persuasion)
6	FOCUS: Perception (Searching)
7–8	+1 Communication
9	FOCUS: Communication (Seduction)
10–11	FOCUS: Communication (Gambling)
12	+1 Intelligence

COMPLEX INHERITANCES

Backgrounds aren’t mutually exclusive. A character could be of mixed heritage, such as half-elf and half-human. They could be a shapeshifter brought up by a dwarven clan or an anomaly raised among Earth’s orcs. Their people background doesn’t have any reliance or bearing on their social class, so adding an origin background in addition might make sense. To facilitate cases like these, the GM may allow players to choose multiple backgrounds: one people and one origin, two peoples, or even two peoples and one origin. In situations like this, you can combine background benefits as follows.

To play a character with a mixed background, take the inherited benefits of one people and roll on the **Cultural Benefits** table of another people the character draws their ancestry from. Similarly, a character of one people who was raised in the culture of another receives the inherited benefits from the people of their birth, then rolls on their adopted people’s cultural table.

A character with one or two people backgrounds *and* an origin may mix and match the basic/inherited people and origin benefits as their player sees fit. For example, they may choose their origin’s ability and focus but their people’s advantages and talent. Then, they choose whether to roll on the origin’s benefits table or the appropriate cultural one. With GM permission, they may even create a new table by combining some lines from one and some from the other, and roll on that instead.



CHARACTER CONDITIONS & CHALLENGES

Everyone faces various challenges in life, and *Modern AGE* characters only differ in that their challenges tend to be more dramatic and heroic. Still, players may wish to portray characters who face challenges arising from exceptional physical, psychological, or cognitive factors or challenges imposed by discrimination and other social factors. For instance, one of your players may wish to play a version of themselves swept into a fantastic conspiracy and decide the version of themselves on paper is legally blind, just as they are. In *Modern AGE*, we don't define these characters as "having disadvantages." Instead, their personal and social conditions produce challenges other characters don't necessarily have to face. The following section describes these conditions and challenges and how to represent them in the game.

NOTABLE CONDITIONS

Humanity's vast diversity is only amplified by the dramatic realities of a campaign. The personal and social conditions below barely scratch the surface of these possibilities. The following section also discusses possible challenges and other factors that might arise during the campaign. Characters may possess multiple conditions or conditions that cross over into multiple areas. For example, physical dependency on a drug may have physical, cognitive/sensory, psychological, and social factors.

PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

Characters may possess differences in their physical capabilities beyond those defined by ability scores. These might affect mobility, some subset of the coordination defined by ability scores like Dexterity, or a perceptual capability such as vision or hearing. Some conditions such as chronic pain, which ebbs and flows, may not always be present.

Instead of imposing a set of strict modifiers based on a vast range of conditions, players should define the condition in ordinary language and suggest TN modifiers and other game effects when the situation arises. The player, not the GM, decides these, but consults with the GM when necessary.

COGNITIVE & SENSORY CONDITIONS

Like physical conditions, cognitive and sensory conditions represent differences in ability that are more specific than what ability scores define. A character might find loud noises and bright lights disturbing due to sensory processing differences or might have moderate to profound difficulty verbally communicating due to neurological differences. These factors might constantly manifest themselves or may rise and fall in intensity depending on the situation.

Once again, it's preferable to note these conditions in everyday language and for the player to suggest their effects on game mechanics when they would trigger a challenge.

CONDITIONS & ADVANTAGES

People don't just passively deal with their differences. They form communities and develop special forms of knowledge. For example, characters with chronic illnesses may keep abreast of the latest research about them and develop a network of contacts among other people with the same illness, medical professionals, and activists. Marginalized groups gather to celebrate what they have in common and deal with issues that particularly concern them.

In *Modern AGE*, your character's conditions may help guide focuses, Relationships, and more and open the door to Memberships and social rewards. Note, however, that everyone has a distinct, individual relationship with such things. For example, not everyone who identifies as having a given disability participates in the same communities or learns the same things. Different individuals also use different terms to define themselves and their circumstances.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

Psychological conditions include differences in how characters feel and behave and what they might believe. These conditions don't always significantly affect how characters present themselves. They may respond to medication and the immediate situation in dramatic ways. For example, a character who deals with depression may swing through symptomatic periods, affecting their mood and ability to get things done, and times of great enthusiasm and productivity.

Psychological conditions lead to challenges based on the character's current mental state and events during the game. Some characters might be affected by very specific situations due to a phobia or past trauma, for instance. Again, note these in ordinary language. The player decides when and if they're relevant to the situation at hand and works out any effects with the GM.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Social conditions involve characters who contend with prejudice beyond the effects of their background (which defines social class), their ties and relationships, and their ability scores. All conditions have social factors, but some conditions provoke challenges solely due to prevailing biases. Gender and its expression, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion, and cultural affiliations are all social conditions. While some are inherent and others a matter of choice or upbringing, their primary effects are usually social.

Whenever a condition leads to a social challenge, remember that this isn't something based on what the character is able to do, but the prejudices imposed upon them. For the most part, the GM doesn't raise the possibility of prejudice against the character. Instead, the player points out situations during the game or works out what is or isn't appropriate ahead of time with the GM and other players. These should be considered choices the player makes and should not be arbitrarily imposed by the GM, even for purposes of realism. Some

If you play a character whose personal and social conditions place them in groups who are often discriminated against in the real world, you should learn about the lives of real people in the same situations and be sensitive to the issues that surround their lives. This isn't just an abstract ethical consideration because these groups aren't abstract entities, but include the very people you'll be playing with, as well as people they're connected to through friendship, family, love, and work.

This goes hand in hand with the rule that how and when conditions have a game effect is in the player's hands. The player should be informed and considerate. Beyond this, the player can always portray their conditions without having to invoke particular game systems.

players may prefer not to deal with social prejudices. If they are used in the game, they may be represented with shifts in attitude, as defined under **Impressions and Attitudes** in CHAPTER 2 of *Modern AGE*.

INSTANT AWARDS FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHALLENGES

If these conditions lead to intensified and new challenges that are notable enough to require representation outside the usual scope of the game, apply the rules for Instant Awards and Exceptional Challenges in CHAPTER 10 of *Modern AGE*. Characters with personal exceptionalities or who experience social disadvantages may encounter challenges other characters do not. If so, the player should receive an instant experience award in recognition of the effort, with the award based on both the difficulty of the challenge and how well the player rose to meet it.

While it is possible to restrict instant rewards to characters with exceptional challenges and use session-based XP awards for the rest, the most integrated approach applies instant XP awards to all characters. This defines challenges by the tension, emotional resonance, and risk they bring, not who is facing them. Exceptional challenges are simply those available to specific characters by virtue of their specific conditions.

In most cases, the player requests the challenge when a relevant situation comes up. The player and GM discuss the appropriate challenge and reward (see **Challenges and Reward Levels**) and run things accordingly.

CHALLENGES AND REWARD LEVELS

Because challenges are rewarded when they appear, they're self-balancing. In a game session filled with physical action, a character in a wheelchair may encounter more challenges, worth greater instant rewards, than a character who uses a cane. Note the following guidelines:

- **MINOR CHALLENGE:** A minor challenge is one where a test's target number is elevated by 2 or 3 compared to other characters' TNs, the character must attempt an Easy or Routine test other characters don't have to face, or the character must deal with some minor preparation

or inconvenience that occupies no more than a round or two of action time. Overcoming a minor challenge earns 10 XP, equivalent to a "Nice" award from CHAPTER 10 of *Modern AGE*.

- **MODERATE CHALLENGE:** A moderate challenge is one that increases a test's target number by 4 or 5, imposes an Average or Challenging test that wouldn't normally be required, or demands several minutes of preparation. Prevailing over the challenge is worth a 25 XP award, equivalent to a "Great" award from CHAPTER 10 of *Modern AGE*.
- **MAJOR CHALLENGE:** In a major challenge, a character deals with a target number that is 6 or more higher than normal or perhaps must find an alternate solution when they cannot perform a task in the most straightforward way at all. An additional Hard or more challenging test might be required, or preparation which is costly in time or Resources. When overcome, major challenges award 50 XP, equivalent to an "Awesome" award from CHAPTER 10 of *Modern AGE*.

Within these guidelines, you may adjust the award 5 XP up or down depending on the challenge's specific difficulty.

EXAMPLE

Sean is a character in a time-travel campaign, where portals to different eras are hidden across the world. They've stepped through a portal into a postapocalyptic possible future. Seeking supplies to sustain them on their trip to the next portal, they and their companions enter a theocratic town that strictly divides resources based on binary genders. Only men can buy guns, and only women can buy food – and they charge high prices for both. Sean is genderqueer and the best negotiator among the protagonists. Sean refuses to compromise their identity by pretending to be a man or woman and, with signature wit, suggests to the merchants that the whole arrangement is a scam designed to keep the people from uniting against the government. This is a Moderate challenge, since it imposes a new Challenging (TN 13) Communication test. Sean's player earns a Great (25 XP) experience award, buys guns and food, and incites a small revolution. If the game uses instant awards for everyone, this is in addition to any other awards characters might receive during the session.



TALENTS & SPECIALIZATIONS

After focuses, talents further define a character's abilities, expanding them as they improve in level. A Specialization fuses a talent to a social role or category of expertise that has weight in the campaign. In this chapter, you'll not only find new talents and specializations, but ways to expand the ones found in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*.

TALENTS

Talents arise from a combination of natural ability, specific training, and experience. The exact mixture of these elements varies from one character to the next. Talents never develop in a vacuum, however. They evolve in response to social conditions and personal challenges. This means a character who has developed a talent to a high degree has a social role in the campaign. They may attract students hoping to learn from a bona fide expert. They might be forced to hide the true extent of their abilities in case others see them as characteristics of a troublemaker, or something to exploit through blackmail and other forms of extortion.

AFTER MASTERY

The Novice, Expert, and Master degrees indicate how competent a character is within the talent's scope, but some protagonists break boundaries and reach heights others can only dream about. These new heights are the fourth and fifth degrees in talent progression: Grandmaster and Apex.

- At the **Grandmaster** degree, a character has not only learned all there is to learn in their field, but has explored new ground within it, inventing new techniques. The character may also change the world by introducing new knowledge into academic circles, devising a new combat paradigm, or developing a new, hyperefficient programming language. At the Grandmaster degree, the talent likely becomes one of the character's defining traits to both peers and the public at large.
- The **Apex** degree places the character at the absolute upper limit of the talent. None are as skilled as Apex practitioners. Unless they take measures to hide their identities and exploits, Apex-degree characters become the talk of their professional circles, and others begin to use them as benchmarks for skill and quality. Only one or two people in the world possess the Apex degree in a talent at any time. These people are most likely one Player Character and one major Non-Player Character.

Characters with Grandmaster and Apex talents are in great demand as teachers and problem solvers. Public figures with such talents get requests for their services from the unlikely sources. If anyone finds even anonymous evidence of their work, social networks eventually carry the information to someone who will seek out such characters. In these respects, a Grandmaster's influence is limited to the general region where they live, while an Apex character will be sought by people from all over the world. Protagonists may be the objects of these searches or might be employed to find someone so skilled. Of course, not everyone seeking out a holder of these degrees wants training or services. When one

NEW DEGREES FOR OLD TALENTS

Most benefits of Grandmaster degrees build up from the benefits in previous degrees, filling in gaps or providing extensions to those benefits.

The benefits of the Apex degree should reflect a character's unparalleled expertise. Apex benefits generally make actions that are normally costly, difficult, or lengthy into trivial efforts.

Use your judgment when coming up with new degrees for existing talents. Depending on the scope of any given talent, a benefit can be suitable for either the Grandmaster or the Apex degree.

Common benefits of Grandmaster and Apex degrees include the following:

- If you had to choose between options in a previous degree, you gain all the options you didn't choose.
- Numerical benefits may increase by 1 or 2 points.
- If a previous benefit provided a re-roll, you can now roll twice and keep the best of the two results.
- The cost of certain stunts is further reduced, usually to just 1 SP.
- Automatic success in a test is provided if certain conditions are met (like a TN being equal to or lower than your level).
- The number of attitude shifts in a detailed social test is increased.
- The time required for tests is reduced.
- An additional amount of SP is provided on a double roll, or you may even gain free SP on a simple successful test.

person attains the Apex degree in a fighting style, the only other Apex holder in the same style may seek them out for a duel. Alternately, a jealous individual may play Salieri to a more talented Mozart, wishing to destroy that which they cannot attain. New Reputation honorifics, Memberships, and Relationships may flower from attaining the pinnacle of skill.

EXISTING TALENTS

Any talent can reach the Grandmaster and Apex degrees. This book only includes additional degrees for three existing talents: Intrigue, Knowledge, and Tactical Awareness. Use them as examples, along with the guidelines described in the sidebar above, to expand other talents to Apex and Grandmaster degrees in ways that would be relevant to your campaign.

INTRIGUE

You are a master of secrets.

GRANDMASTER: You have mastered all kinds of social interactions. The benefits of the Novice and Expert degrees now apply to all Etiquette, Deception, and Seduction tests.

APEX: A word from you can move empires. The Cast Out and Oozing Confidence stunts only cost 1 SP each for you. You can spend additional SP when you use these stunts to target one additional person for each extra SP spent.

KNOWLEDGE

You have an inquisitive mind and absorb facts easily.

GRANDMASTER: Your stores of knowledge are greatly expanded. Choose a number of knowledge focuses equal to your Intelligence. These focuses cannot be the same as the ones you chose when you gained the Master degree. If you didn't have one of the chosen focuses, you learn it now. If you already had one of your chosen focuses, you can re-roll a failed test with it. When you make a test using one of the focuses you chose at the Master and Grandmaster degrees, you can roll twice and keep the better of the two rolls.

APEX: You are the undisputed authority in your field. If the TN of a test with a knowledge focus you know is equal to or lower than half your level + your Intelligence, you automatically succeed and roll the Stunt Die to instantly gain SP.

TACTICAL AWARENESS

You move in combat calmly and expertly.

GRANDMASTER: Your complete sense of the battlefield makes it impossible to ambush you. When you make an opposed test to detect hidden enemies, if the Dexterity (Stealth) result of your enemies is equal to or lower than half your level + your Perception, you automatically succeed and roll the Stunt Die to immediately gain SP. Otherwise, you make a normal Perception test, but you gain a bonus equal to your Intelligence. Also, if you spend a minor action, any of your allies who can hear you are aware of any enemy who failed the opposed test against you.

APEX: Your allies and enemies are exactly where you want them. If you take a minor action to give instructions, a number of allies equal to your Perception gain the benefit of the Novice degree on their next turn. Alternatively, when you move on your turn as a minor action, you can make a Communication (Deception), Dexterity (Acrobatics), or Intelligence (Tactics) test, opposed by a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test by any enemy who can see you. Enemies who fail this test move half their Speed during your turn; you choose the direction and final position of each of these movements.

NEW TALENTS

The talents in this book provide options not covered by the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*. New talents include Grandmaster and Apex degrees, providing further inspiration if you wish to expand talents from the core rules.

CLOSE-QUARTERS FIREARM STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Accuracy (SMGs) or Accuracy (Shotguns) focus

Your training in close-quarters battle gives you an edge with SMGs and shotguns.



NOVICE: Movement in a fire fight is second nature to you. When you use the Skirmish stunt while using an SMG or a shotgun, add 1 yard per SP to the distance you can move or that you move your target.

EXPERT: You know how to get out of both the frying pan and the fire. When rolling doubles on an attack roll or test involving an SMG or shotgun, you gain an additional 2 SP, but you can only spend these bonus SP on the Duck and Weave or Take Cover stunts. If you have enough SP, you can use both stunts at the same time.

MASTER: You leverage your weapon's characteristics when shooting at multiple targets. When you use the Strafe, Suppressive Fire, and Spray and Pray stunts with an SMG, you can exclude allies from the stunts' effects. Additionally, you can use the Strafe, Suppressive Fire, and Spray and Pray stunts with a shotgun against targets standing at half the shotgun's range and up to its maximum range, but you cannot exclude allies as with an SMG.

GRANDMASTER: You move around the fire zone with peerless skill. When you use the Skirmish stunt, you gain a bonus to Defense equal to the SP you spent on Skirmish -1, up to a +3 bonus to Defense. Also, you can now spend the bonus SP gained from the Expert degree in any stunt that allows you to attack additional targets (such as Lightning Attack, Strafe, etc.), in addition to Duck and Weave and Take Cover.

APEX: You can make masterful use of cover thanks to how your weapon works. When using an SMG or a shotgun, the armor bonus from cover is increased by +1, and the penalty

that cover imposes to your ranged attacks is reduced by 1. Also, you can use the Take Cover action to reach total cover, and you can make attacks with an SMG or a shotgun while behind total cover with a -3 penalty, provided there is an opening next to you through which you can fire.

DEMOLITIONS TRAINING

REQUIREMENTS: Dexterity (Sabotage) or Intelligence (Explosives) focus

You know how to place or aim explosives to their best effect.

NOVICE: Your accuracy with explosives makes them more effective. You may add the Stunt Die result of the attack roll with any grenade or the Intelligence (Explosives) test for other explosives as a bonus to damage. This bonus only applies to the initial damage for fuel ignitions (see CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY).

EXPERT: You can recognize the stress points and weaknesses in armored targets and structures. The damage you deal with grenades and missiles against targets with an impact or ballistic Armor Rating increases by +3. If the target is a vehicle, the damage increases by 1d6 instead (+1 hazard category). If the target is a building, fixed structure, or very large vehicle such as a cruise ship or transport plane, the damage increases by 2d6 instead (+2 hazard categories). If using Anti-Vehicle stunts to damage your target, you gain +1 SP against typical vehicles or +2 SP against very large vehicles.

MASTER: You can recognize where an explosion will make the most damage. When you use a grenade or missile, add your

Dexterity in yards to the radius of the explosion (grenades have a 2-yard radius). You can add twice your Intelligence to the blast radius of a large-scale explosive.

GRANDMASTER: Your familiarity with explosions helps you predict their effects. When you deal damage with any explosive, choose one of the damage dice before rolling damage; that die becomes a Stunt Die. The SP gained from the damage Stunt Die is added to any SP you may have gained from rolling doubles on the attack or test. You can use your total SP to make the explosion create a hazard of the same category as the explosion or lower (see CHAPTER 3: RULES and CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY for guidelines about the damage and effects of hazards). Creating a hazard costs 3 SP, +1 SP for each additional hazard effect. You can also mimic non-combat stunts within reason (such as the Cover Your Tracks infiltration stunt or the A Stitch in Time exploration stunt).

APEX: Your experience removes the factor of chance from your explosions. Rather than rolling the bonus damage granted by the Expert degree, you can decide the result up to its maximum (0 to 6 against vehicles and 0 to 12 against structures). This also applies to the die considered a Stunt Die by the Grandmaster degree. Also, the maximum radius of an explosion with a grenade or explosive is increased by both your Dexterity and Intelligence in yards (ignore a negative score), and you can decide the exact blast radius before making the attack or test.

GREASE MONKEY

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence (Engineering) or Intelligence (Tinkering) focus

You have a way with machines, even those that emulate sentience.

NOVICE: You don't need to read the manual. When encountering a new machine for the first time, you can make a TN 11 Intelligence (Engineering) or Intelligence (Tinkering) test as a major action. If successful, you can operate the machine even if using it requires a focus you don't have, and you can ignore the Complicated quality (see CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY).

EXPERT: Vehicles have everything to gain by having you as a part of their crew. If a vehicle you're in is the target of an attack that uses an Anti-Vehicle stunt, you can make an Intelligence (Engineering) test with a TN equal to the attack roll. If you succeed, the vehicle gains a Hull rating equal to half your Intelligence. If the vehicle already has a Hull rating, only the higher rating applies.

MASTER: Machines are ensured a long life under your care. You can restore Health to a machine that has Health by making an Intelligence (Engineering) or Intelligence (Tinkering) test as if applying first aid (1 hour) or advanced medical attention (6 hours). If the machine doesn't have Health, you grant it a pool of temporary Health equal to the first aid result; this pool must be reduced to 0 before the machine can be damaged.

GRANDMASTER: When you poke at a machine, you make it better. When you spend at least 10 minutes working on a machine with the appropriate tools, make a TN 11 Intelligence (Tinkering) test. If you succeed, you increase the machine's Hull and Armor Rating (I/B) by an amount equal to your Intelligence; the new Hull Rating replaces the original if it is higher, and the Armor Rating stacks with the original. If you roll doubles on the test, you can add a posi-

tive quality (see CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY) with a threshold modifier equal to or lower than the Stunt Die result. These modifications last for one encounter, and then the machine returns to normal.

APEX: Under your touch, even broken machines come back to life. You can repair a machine in 10 minutes with an Intelligence (Engineering) test. The GM determines the TN based on the state of the machine. If successful, you can restore 1 disabled system and additional systems if you roll doubles at a rate of one disabled system per SP. spent Disabled systems can be positive qualities (see CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY) that were removed or negative qualities that were installed as sabotage, in which case you make an opposed test against the saboteur.

HARDENED

REQUIREMENTS: Willpower 2 or higher

You have nerves of steel.

NOVICE: There is little that can faze you. You can re-roll any dice with a result of 1 or 2 when making a Willpower test.

EXPERT: You remain calm under peer pressure. During a social situation, you can use your Willpower instead of Perception or Communication when making opposed tests to resist manipulation or intimidation or see through lies and deception. You must still use the focuses required by the test.

MASTER: You can react with aplomb to unexpected circumstances. You can act during the first round of combat even if you are surprised. You still fail to notice any foes that successfully hide from you, but you have all your actions available and know you're in trouble. Furthermore, if you're using the fear rules in CHAPTER 3 you may re-roll a failed Fear Test, but must keep the result of the second roll.

GRANDMASTER: With a steady hand and a cool head, you can turn the tables on any situation. Roll a Stunt Die when you are surprised in combat; you gain the resulting SP until the end of your next turn. Also, when you succeed at an opposed test using Willpower in a social situation, you gain the number of SP indicated on the Stunt Die if you didn't roll doubles and twice the result if you rolled doubles. Furthermore, if you're using the fear rules in CHAPTER 3 you may always choose to fight instead of flee whenever you fail a Fear Test.

APEX: You are an eye of tranquility in a hurricane of turmoil. When re-rolling dice as per the Novice degree, you can re-roll any dice with a result of 1, 2, or 3. Also, you can use a major action to provide comfort or encouragement to all persons you decide who can see or hear you; for the rest of the encounter, they enjoy the benefits of the Novice degree of this talent.

IMPERSONATOR

REQUIREMENTS: Communication (Deception) and Communication (Disguise) focuses

What others call pretense, you call a tool of the trade.

NOVICE: You can adopt the mannerisms of other ways of life. Pick a number of backgrounds equal to your Intelligence (see CHAPTER 1: CHARACTER CREATION in the *Modern AGE* rulebook). When pretending to be someone from those back-

grounds, you gain a +2 bonus to Communication (Deception) and Communication (Disguise) tests.

EXPERT: You excel at imitating someone else. If you study a person for at least 1 minute, you gain a +1 bonus to Communication (Deception) and Communication (Disguise) tests when pretending to be that person. This bonus stacks with the bonus from the Novice degree. In addition, you create a fake identity, complete with forged documents. Choose a background and profession; when you act as your fake identity, if one of your focuses is a tangential focus for an ability test, you can use it as a primary focus if the background or profession of your fake identity grants a focus the test considers a primary focus. Also, you can always make ability tests with required focuses listed in your fake identity's background or profession, even if you don't have those focuses.

MASTER: You can convince anyone that you are someone you are not. Add Dexterity (Forgery) to the focuses that benefit from the Novice and Expert degrees. Additionally, you can make a Communication (Deception), Communication (Disguise), or Dexterity (Forgery) test, as appropriate, to impersonate a profession, Membership, or Reputation. Depending on the interaction, the GM can decide if this is a simple or an advanced test against a set TN or opposed by another character's Perception (Insight) or other tests. If you prepared beforehand, such as by procuring false documents or uniforms or studying your mark, you gain a +2 to the tests.

GRANDMASTER: You are a true social chameleon. You gain a +1 bonus to Communication (Deception), Communication (Disguise), and Dexterity (Forgery) tests when pretending to be from any background you did not choose for the Novice degree. Also, when you study a particular person to impersonate, you add your Perception as a bonus to Communication (Deception) tests to fake the use of any Communication or Intelligence focus your mark is supposed to know. These tests provide no real results; you only speak credible gibberish to give the appearance you know what you're talking about.

APEX: You slip into different identities with the same ease as you change clothes. When pretending to be someone else, subtract your Communication from the Stunt Die result of any character making an opposed test against you. The Stunt Die result may not go lower than 0, and this may cause your opponent's test to fail. Also, when you use your Perception as a bonus as per the Grandmaster degree, you can spend 2 SP to actually learn an item of true information your mark knows that relates to the test you are faking.

INFLUENCER

REQUIREMENTS: Communication 2 or higher

You have a say in what other people think and do.

NOVICE: You can craft the most effective messages. Choose one of the following Communication focuses: Expression, Deception, or Persuasion. Add +1 to the Stunt Die result when you make a successful test with your chosen focus for the purposes of determining degrees of success and gaining SP. In addition to paying for stunts, you may use any SP gained from a test with your chosen focus to reduce the result of an opposed roll's Stunt Die.

EXPERT: You can shape public opinion by spreading truths and falsehoods. You can take some time before a social encounter to spread or dispel rumors and false information. You must use a medium accessible by the people involved in the social encounter, such as social media, word of mouth, letters to the editor, etc. The GM determines how much anticipation you need depending on the medium you use. Before the social encounter, make a Communication test with the focus most appropriate to your medium (for example, Expression for media or Persuasion for word of mouth), with a TN determined by the size of the gathering, from TN 7 for a small gathering of a couple dozen people to TN 17 for a massive event involving thousands. If successful, you shift the starting attitude of the crowd toward any character or topic by one step in either direction.

You may spend any SP gained in the test to shift the attitude by 1 additional step per SP spent or to make the shifted attitude be the starting attitude for any further interactions toward your target character or topic for 1 day per SP spent.

MASTER: You have a silver tongue and an influential pen. When you make a successful Communication test with the focus chosen in the Novice degree, you gain +2 SP, but you can only spend these SP on Attitude stunts or the Sway the Crowd, Objection!, Enrage, Click "Share," and Oozing Confidence stunts. Alternatively, you can use any SP gained to plant a suggestion in characters with a Friendly attitude who can receive your message. This suggestion can be a piece of information your targets believe to be true without the need for evidence, or a course of action that will not put the targets at risk. The suggestion remains fresh in your targets' minds for 1 day per SP spent, but the GM determines the likeliness of your targets following up on your suggestion.

GRANDMASTER: You can expect even your offhand comments to have a deep impact. The bonus to the Stunt Die result in the Novice degree increases to +2 for your chosen focus, and +1 for the two focuses you didn't choose. Also, when you plant a suggestion as per the Master degree, you can also target characters with an Open attitude.

APEX: The world looks to you for how it should think about something. When you want to sway the starting attitude of a group as per the Expert degree, if the TN is equal to or lower than half your level + your Communication, you automatically succeed and roll the Stunt Die to gain SP, adding the bonus from the Grandmaster degree as applicable. You can now extend the duration of this starting attitude by 1 week per SP spent or 1 month per 2 SP spent, or you can make it permanent if you spend 5 SP. Also, the suggestion you plant on Friendly targets as per the Master degree now lasts for 1 week per SP spent or 1 month per 2 SP spent.

KNIFE STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Fighting 1 or higher and the Fighting (Light Blades) focus

You can work deadly miracles with a knife in your hands.

NOVICE: You know how to get inside your opponent's defenses. When attacking with a knife or similar weapon, if you take the Activate action, you gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls until the end of the encounter while fighting in this style. In addition, your Speed is considered 1 higher if you take



BRYAN
SYME

the Move, Run, or Charge action before or after attacking an opponent wielding a weapon from the Heavy Blades, Long Hafted, or Short Hafted groups, or any firearm.

EXPERT: You switch your knife from hand to hand to confound your enemy. You suffer no penalty for wielding a knife with either hand. You can take the Activate action to switch the knife to your other hand before making an attack with it; if the attack is successful, the Vicious Blow, Lethal Blow, and Precise Force stunts cost 1 SP less.

MASTER: With frightening speed and accuracy, you can wedge your knife where it hurts the most. You can use the Called Shot stunt with attacks made with a knife instead of a firearm.

GRANDMASTER: You stab and slash with surgical precision. When you use any stunt while attacking with a knife, you can pay additional SP to hit sensitive areas in your enemy's body. If your target fails a Constitution (Stamina) test with a TN equal to your attack roll result, they suffer a penalty equal to the additional SP you spent to all tests involving the area of the body you targeted. You don't spend the additional SP if the target succeeds at the Constitution (Stamina) test.

APEX: You achieve the ultimate fighting stance with a knife. When you use the Activate action as per the Novice degree, you gain additional bonuses: +2 to Defense against melee attacks, +2 Speed when you are the target of any ranged attack between the end of your last turn and the beginning of your current turn, and +2 to the result of the Stunt Die on attack rolls for the purposes of gaining SP and resolving ties. Also, you may use Fighting (Light Blades) instead of Fighting (Grappling) to resist the effects of any grappling stunt used against you.

NAVIGATOR

REQUIREMENTS: Intelligence (Navigation) focus

You always know where you are and where you're going.

NOVICE: You were born with an internal compass. You always know which way north is, and you always remember how to return to any location you've been to, as long as you were aware of the route you took to go to or from it to reach a well-known location.

EXPERT: You can always find the best path. You ignore all reductions to Speed from terrain, hazards, and obstacles. Also, on any exploration advanced test involving travel, add +2 to the Stunt Die result of your successful tests for the purpose of meeting the success threshold.

MASTER: You are never lost, just alternatively oriented. If you fail an ability test to find the right way to go toward a desired destination (even if the destination is as vague as "the hidden archives in city hall"), you can re-roll it, but you must keep the results of the second roll. This includes tests to find hidden paths, secret doors, and other previously unknown pathways.

GRANDMASTER: No matter where you go, there you are. You always know the distance you have traversed in a day, and you always have a rough idea of the time of day, even without access to the sky. You can also automatically match your surroundings to any map or even a rough description of them.

APEX: You can find your way even under the most adverse circumstances. If the success threshold of any exploration

advanced test involving travel is equal to or lower than half your level, you can resolve it as a simple Intelligence (Navigation) test. Also, you decrease the duration of time increments in any exploration advanced test by half, whether the individual test is successful or not (you realize quickly if you made a mistake).

SWORD STYLE

REQUIREMENTS: Fighting (Heavy Blades)

Whether for sport or by necessity, you trained extensively in the use of swords.

NOVICE: You surprise your foes with a powerful lunge. You prepare to lunge as an Activate action, which is taken before anyone else acts in initiative order. You gain +3 to your initiative but must use your major action to perform a melee attack or Stunt Attack with a sword. If your initiative after the bonus is higher than your target's, you may move up to 4 yards toward them, 4 yards away from them, or split your move 2 by 2, 3 by 1, or 1 by 3 toward them and then away. The +3 initiative bonus vanishes after you attack.

EXPERT: You can guide opponents with your blade. On a successful attack roll with a sword, you automatically gain 1 SP that may only be used on the Disarm, Bind Weapon, Break Weapon, Parry, and Skirmish stunts (you will need extra SP to pay for some of these stunts). In addition, you gain a +1 bonus to the attack rolls for the Disarm, Bind Weapon, and Break Weapon stunts.

MASTER: The momentum of your swings can take your opponents by deadly surprise. You gain a +2 bonus to the attack rolls for the Lightning Attack, Maim, and Instant Kill stunts.

GRANDMASTER: You take a deadly stance that reacts to any opening. As an Activate action, you adopt a reactive stance that lasts until the end of the encounter or until you adopt a different stance. When an attacker misses you in a melee attack, they suffer damage from a quick riposte equal to 1d6 + your Strength if you are wielding a sword. Additionally, every time a ranged attack misses you, you can move 2 yards in any direction.

APEX: You adopt an impenetrable stance to defend from any attack. As an Activate action, you adopt a defensive stance until the end of the encounter or until you adopt a different stance. You gain an additional +2 bonus to Defense when you use the Defend and Guard Up actions. Optionally, when using Defend, instead of gaining a passive bonus you can make a Fighting (Heavy Blades) test for each attack against you (even ranged attacks!), blocking the attack if you exceed the attack roll. You gain the SP indicated by the Stunt Die whether you succeed or fail. You must use these SP immediately after the Defend test, or they are lost. You can spend these SP to use stunts, to cancel point-for-point any SP your attacker may gain, to use the benefit of the Grandmaster stance (1 SP), or for any combination of these uses.

SPECIALIZATIONS

A character who chooses a specialization acquires a narrower set of abilities but with a much clearer focus. A specialization is not just a collection of benefits fitting a theme, but a role a character assumes.

THE ROLE OF SPECIALIZATIONS

On top of the usual advantages, specializations link characters and their world. They are career paths other characters can identify by name. Public organizations or whispered conspiracies may teach a specialization's trade, or the specialization may be rewarding enough that practitioners teach it to themselves and take on its social role.

Although specializations feature enough detail to provide clear career character concepts, they leave out certain details so they can work with the various eras and modes of *Modern AGE* campaigns. An Agent in the twenty-first century may belong to a real-world organization, such as the CIA, or an entirely fictional one (ACRONYM or KROM). In *Brass Lightning* they can be members of Golden Spiral, a secret society working in the shadows to protect the crown, or the covert Domino Division of the West's Silver Rangers.

As a Game Master, you can use specializations to shape the campaign world. You can downplay or ban certain specializations while making others more visible, important, or prestigious. Feel free to modify existing specializations or create new ones to cater to the more unique aspects of your setting. A story of high espionage action in the early twenty-first century will give great importance to the Agent specialization, while a supernatural steampunk setting like *Brass Lightning* may need a new specialization called an "Ethermancer" that couldn't exist in other modern settings. Meanwhile, you may decide to adjust the Agent specialization so that, instead of the usual benefit, a Master acquires an ether-powered gadget that helps perform various espionage functions.

CHARACTERS & SPECIALIZATIONS

A player who wishes to add a specialization to their character must build a character who meets its requirements, investing level-based improvements where necessary. This planning should be matched by story events. The players and GM should decide how the character first learns the specialization in the game's ongoing story. The character might join an organization that provides the required training or develop the necessary skills through research, talent, and an obsession with mastering the specialization

THE PERKS OF BEING THE BEST

As an option, attaining the Grandmaster and Apex degrees in a specialization can carry additional rewards common to all specializations but tailored to how the character began (and continued) their career.

When a character first gains a Grandmaster or Apex degree in one of their specializations, the GM may award +2 Wealth, +1 Membership rank, or an additional or more widespread Reputation title.

or using it to accomplish an important goal. No character acquires a specialization trivially.

BEYOND MASTERY

Like talents, specializations can include Grandmaster and Apex degrees; the difference is in a specialization's tighter focus and its ties to the world.

The GM can make advancing beyond the Master degree into a subplot before allowing a character to choose the Grandmaster degree. As a player, you should ask the GM if there are additional story-based requirements to progress beyond the Master degree. The rules only require that the character have the previous degrees, but in a campaign, the character may have to be initiated into a secret society, defeat a rival with the same specialization, or journey to a distant place to study certain sacred texts. These requirements might demand adventures, Memberships, Relationships, and more. None of the additional requirements are necessary, and the GM can always decide to do things the other way around so that, for example, becoming a Grandmaster Controller in *Brass Lightning* means the character has joined the Golden Spiral. See **The Perks of Being the Best** for possibilities.



EXISTING SPECIALIZATIONS

This book only provides Grandmaster and Apex degrees for the new specializations listed here, but you can use the advice in the **New Degrees for Old Talents** sidebar in this chapter to create custom degrees.

NEW SPECIALIZATIONS

The following new specializations are available for players, at the Game Master's discretion.

CONTROLLER

You have a knack for helping others, either by giving the right advice or providing the right aid at the right time, but you may not be up to chasing and trading bullets with the enemy. You may not be action-hero material, but you can make sure your allies have the right tools and information to make it back home alive having accomplished their mission.

ERAS

Controllers are more common in the Information Age, where communications and information technologies are advanced enough for you to sit at a console while radioing instructions to field agents, but every era sees the need for experts who can best coordinate the efforts of a group. You could as easily be a commissioned officer in World War II, an adventurous librarian in *Brass Lightning*, or a member of the royal house of a small (and fictional) kingdom.

CONTROLLER TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: You must have Communication 2 or higher, the Intelligence (Tactics) focus, and one of the following focuses: Communication (Leadership) or Communication (Persuasion).

You don't need to be there in person to lend a hand.

NOVICE: You can point out an enemy's weakness for your allies to leverage. You can make an Intelligence (Tactics) test instead of a normal attack roll when performing a Stunt Attack, with the target's Defense as the test's TN. You can make this test against any single target you can see, and if you use any stunt related to damage, it benefits the next successful attack your target receives. In addition, the Group Tactics, Double Team, Shock and Awe, and Over Here! stunts cost 1 SP less when you use this ability.

EXPERT: You don't need to be there to lend a hand, but if you are, you can lend both. If you can somehow perceive your allies' surroundings, you can cooperate in advanced tests even beyond the maximum number of characters who can cooperate in the test, provided your allies can hear your instructions or advice. In addition, you can re-roll a failed Intelligence or Perception test that would reveal information relevant to your allies' current actions (such as spotting hidden attackers and finding leads in an investigation), but you must keep the result of the second roll.

MASTER: You can quickly make up for your allies' mistakes. When an ally you can perceive fails a test, you can make an

Intelligence (Tactics) test with a TN equal to the original test's TN +2. If you succeed, it counts as if your ally had succeeded, but this does not generate any SP. You can do this once per encounter.

GRANDMASTER: You can coordinate the actions of entire squads. When you make a Stunt Attack (normally or as an Intelligence (Tactics) test), you automatically gain a number of SP equal to your Intelligence instead of only 1. In addition, when you use the Group Tactics, Double Team, Shock and Awe, and Over Here! stunts, you can spend extra SP to grant their benefits to 1 additional ally per additional SP spent.

APEX: Your strategic awareness ensures a flawless operation. When an ally fails a breaching test, you can immediately make an Intelligence (Tactics) test with the same TN; if you succeed, the test still fails, but you avoid triggering consequences up to tier 2. In addition, when you re-roll a failed test as per the Expert degree or make a new roll as per the Master degree, Stunt Die results that are less than your Intelligence are increased to be equal to your Intelligence.

COMMUNICATOR

You have a way with words, and you target your words not at individual persons, but to a large audience. You may be an ethical communicator who only spreads truth and dispels deception, but you can craft narratives that guide public opinion in the direction of your choice. The medium you choose is of no consequence; your message will spread as you will.

ERAS

Bloggers, influencers, and YouTube personalities are twenty-first century communicators, but the role stretches back centuries as a vital element of any complex society. You might be a journalist revealing the misdeeds of politicians in the late twentieth century, a Victorian author whose penny dreadfuls reveal the truth about the supernatural, or a town crier in the eighteenth century.

COMMUNICATOR TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: You must have Communication 2 or higher, the Perception (Insight) focus, and either the Communication (Expression) or Communication (Persuasion) focus.

You use your favorite means of expression to shape hearts and minds.

NOVICE: You can make or break fake news. When you witness a news story or factual statement in person or over the media, you can make a Communication (Persuasion) test for spoken communications or Communication (Expression) test for other forms, such as writing, with a TN set by the GM or in an opposed roll with the person issuing the statement. If you succeed, people who witness your response believe your alternate point of view regarding that story or statement. This undoes the social effects (attitude shifts and stunts, for instance) of the original statement. When using widely distributed media, the Stunt Die result indicates how many people you reach, though without Membership in a media organization or social media firm or a Reputation that inclines

people to heed your words, you won't reach *everybody*. In the twenty-first century, you can't penetrate the depths of the algorithmic "echo chamber." In prior eras, your media counteroffensive doesn't reach newspapers and other media forms whose editorial line is hostile to your opinions.

EXPERT: You can build or destroy reputations. Pick an individual to compliment or smear, and make a Communication (Persuasion) or Communication (Expression) test depending on the medium, with a TN set by the GM or in an opposed roll with your target's Willpower (Self-Discipline) if done in person or Communication (Expression) if done in a contest played out over the media. (If the target chooses not to oppose your efforts, the GM always sets the TN.) If you win, you can impose a Reputation honorific or remove one the target already has. This lasts a number of days equal to your Perception + the result of your Stunt Die. At the end of this period, you can reinforce the new Reputation at -2 to your roll, and if you succeed, the change sticks for a number of *weeks* equal to your Perception + Stunt Die result. Finally, you can do this a third time after the second period ends, this time at a -4 penalty to your roll, but if you succeed, the new Reputation lasts until the target performs a notable act to change others' impressions of them.

MASTER: Your opinion-shaping skills are strong. You may re-roll a failed Communication (Persuasion) or Communication (Expression) test but must keep the re-rolled result. Furthermore, anyone who agreed with any statements you made using prior degrees of this talent automatically shifts their attitude one step in your favor, if they know you're the author.

GRANDMASTER: Your messages can exalt or take down entire organizations. Your Communication ability is now equivalent to an organization's influence (see CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL OPTIONS), and you acquire one Influence focus of your choice. If you have Membership in an organization, it may use the higher of their influence or your Communication as its own Influence score. Once per month, you may use your Influence-equivalent Communication ability and its organizational focus to attempt a growth stunt for an organization you favor. You can also attack an organization by making a test using your Communication as an Influence opposed by the organization's test using its highest ability. If you succeed in an attack, you inflict 2d6 + your Communication Stability damage and force a roll on the **Organization Misfortunes** table in CHAPTER 6.

APEX: Your credibility is airtight, and your impact is frighteningly profound. You can roll a failed Communication (Expression) or Communication (Persuasion) test twice and keep the highest result. Also, all tests to refute your messages must first succeed at a Communication (Expression) or Communication (Persuasion) test with a TN equal to your level. If successful, opponents can proceed with their rebuttal attempt; otherwise, they cannot try to refute you.

FIELD RESEARCHER

True answers can be found in the field, and you don't hesitate to go look for them. Your goal may be knowledge, but you have a two-fisted disposition regarding the obstacles you're likely to face. Armed with an undying curiosity and an ample supply of wits, you brave the dangers of the wild, as well as

the people who would try to keep you away from the knowledge you seek.

ERAS

Field researchers are a mix of academics and adventurers, a blend best exemplified in the scientists of pulp adventures of the early to mid twentieth century. You can be a tough scholar fighting against an ancient conspiracy in the twenty-first century, a town doctor in the Wild West, or a treasure hunter in the world of *Brass Lightning*.

FIELD RESEARCHER TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: You must have Constitution 1 or higher and Dexterity or Strength 1 or higher. You also must have at least one Intelligence knowledge focus.

You know how to avoid danger while searching for answers.

NOVICE: You are wary, know how to avoid danger, and might be a little bit lucky. When you make an ability test to avoid a hazard or a harmful effect, you can re-roll any die that comes up 1 or 2, but you must keep the second roll.

EXPERT: Your specific knowledge of the dangers you might face helps you avoid potentially lethal obstacles. You can use an Intelligence-based test and knowledge focus to notice, figure out, and avoid or mitigate the effects of a hazard, instead of the usual required focus. The GM determines which focus applies. If you don't have it, you may still use an Intelligence test to avoid the hazard instead of the ability test you'd normally need.

MASTER: Your field expertise applies to dealing with the people you encounter. You can apply your academic knowledge of their traditions and biases to confuse, confound, and delay them. You may make an Intelligence test with a relevant knowledge focus (determined by the GM) opposed by your target's Willpower (Self-Discipline). If you succeed, your target cannot take their minor action until their next turn. You may spend 3 SP to deny your target their major action instead.

GRANDMASTER: Your applied knowledge helps people survive. When you use the Expert degree benefit and succeed, you may spend 1 SP per person to save others from the hazard, just as you saved yourself. They avoid or suffer fewer effects, just as you do. Also, you can grant the Novice degree benefit to an ally once per encounter.

APEX: You can notice danger in the background while you focus on more important issues. If the TN for tests to notice or avoid hazards is lower than half your level + your Intelligence, you notice or avoid them automatically and roll the Stunt Die to gain SP instantly. Furthermore, you can now grant the Novice degree benefit once per point of your Intelligence per encounter.

HUNTER

From the dawn of time, humans have learned to chase and capture their own food. You are the heir to this hunting legacy, trained to follow the trails left by your prey and to bring it down once you catch up. Your prey need not be limited to animals, and your goal might not be to kill; it's the proverbial thrill of the hunt that fuels your efforts.

ERAS

Whether hunting for sport or survival, hunters have had a role in society throughout history. You can play a jaded nineteenth-century big-game hunter, a US Marshal chasing a serial killer, a dinosaur wrangler in a weird genetics research laboratory, or a Witchfinder who hunts the supernatural monsters in the world of *Brass Lightning*.

HUNTER TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: You must have Accuracy 1, Perception 1 or higher, and the Perception (Tracking) focus, as well as any one Intelligence knowledge focus that studies creatures or people.

You know the ways of your prey inside and out; it will not escape you.

NOVICE: You know everything there is to know about your target. Choose a kind of creature that exists in the story; this should be a group of species that share features, such as large cats, raptor birds, lycanthropes, undead, etc. You gain a special focus, named for the creature (such as Raptor Birds), called your target focus. The target focus applies to any ability test that involves this type of creature, though it does not stack with existing focuses. This includes attack rolls.

EXPERT: You can recognize the traces left by your prey's passing. When you make a simple or advanced test to follow a target's trail (whether they are your target focus or not), you gain a +2 bonus to the result of the Stunt Die in a successful test. Furthermore, if you are stalking your target focus, you may re-roll a failed test, though you must keep the results of the second roll.

MASTER: You know all the weak points of your prey. When you make a successful ability test or attack roll against the subject of your target focus, you gain 1 SP in addition to any SP gained from rolling doubles, and the cost of the following stunts is reduced by 1 SP (minimum cost of 1 SP): Brutal Strike, Taunt, Vicious Blow, Knock Out, Lethal Blow, Maim, Instant Kill, Restrain, Hamstring, Speed Demon, The Upper Hand, Intuition, and Breakthrough.

GRANDMASTER: You are proficient in chasing more than one type of prey. You gain a number of additional target focuses equal to your Intelligence. In addition, the bonus to the Stunt Die result in the Expert degree becomes +3.

APEX: There is no prey that can hide from you. You have a +1 bonus on all tests to locate or pursue creatures that are not the subjects of your target focuses. In addition, when you re-roll any opposed tests using your target focus, you may instead roll twice and keep the highest roll. If you succeed at both rolls and the highest roll scores doubles, add the Stunt Die results for both rolls to determine how many SP you gain.

LIAISON

You see both sides of any conflict and find a middle path, walking the tightrope of competing interests to make sure all are satisfied, even if you favor one side over the other. You're comfortable amid people who hardly trust you. It's your job to build bridges between disparate interests.

ERAS

Liaisons work in any era where opposing forces need to settle their conflicts without violence. You can play an embassy attaché in a nineteenth-century murder mystery, a hostage negotiator in the mid-twentieth century, a social media manager in the twenty-first century, or an envoy to the Summer Court of Faerie in the *Brass Lightning* setting.

LIAISON TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: You must have Communication 1 or higher and the Communication (Bargaining) and Communication (Etiquette) focuses. You must also have at least one Membership at rank 1.

You engineer better relationships between people and groups.

NOVICE: You know a broad cross section of people from various groups, and they're at least dimly aware of your ability to deal with them fairly. Choose a number of groups or organizations in your campaign equal to your Communication. You gain a special focus, named after each group, such as CIA for the Central Intelligence Agency. These are known as organizational focuses. If your Communication increases, you gain a new organizational focus. You may use these focuses as a primary investigation focus when extracting information from these groups and as a substitute focus for Communication (Bargaining), Communication (Etiquette), Communication (Persuasion), and Intelligence (Current Affairs) when dealing with these groups and their members.

EXPERT: Your words can smooth tempers and prevent misunderstandings—or aggravate tensions, if you prefer. If you are present at an event or action that would shift the attitude of an NPC in a direction you don't want, you can cancel it out as a reaction. Make a Communication (Etiquette) test (you may use an organizational focus instead, if it applies) with the TN set by the GM or equal to the roll that caused the attitude shift. If the decrease was the result of a stunt such as Bad Form or Cast Out, you suffer a penalty to your roll equal to the stunt's cost. If you still succeed, you negate the effect of the stunt completely.

MASTER: You engender trust between members of groups you're connected to. When you help members of at least two different groups for which you possess an organizational focus, each of them adds +1 to the Stunt Die

when making basic or advanced tests toward a common goal, be it a cooperative test as described in CHAPTER 8 of *Modern AGE* or separate tests that nevertheless have a common purpose. You can grant this benefit to a number of applicable individuals equal to your Communication.

GRANDMASTER: Your cool words can delay violent conflict. When you roll initiative at the beginning of combat, you can also make a Communication (Bargaining) test (or any organizational focus, if applicable) as a reaction. If your result is higher than any initiative result except your own, everyone who can hear you is at least partly dissuaded from fighting. They incur a penalty equal to your Communication to attack and gain a +3 bonus to Defense against other witnesses to your words. This effect lasts for a number of rounds equal to your Stunt Die result, and you may exclude anyone you like from this effect or cancel it before it is scheduled to end.

APEX: Your very presence changes social dealings. If you can communicate with people around you and they're not engaged in combat, you automatically shift attitudes by 1 step of your choice. If you have an organizational focus that applies to an affected individual, you may automatically shift attitudes by up to 2 steps instead. In addition, you do not suffer any penalty from the use of stunts for the benefit of the Expert degree. Finally, you have a bonus to Defense equal to your Communication in any combat encounter, until you make your first attack roll or otherwise take an aggressive action.



SPECIAL FORCES

You received training above and beyond regular soldiers. You learned unconventional warfare methods, how to endure hardship beyond the conditions of ordinary military service, and how to counter the tactics of both guerillas and conventional soldiers. Special forces members aren't just better at shooting, but must endure difficult conditions to perform unusual missions, with minimal support from regular forces.

ERAS

Special forces belong to all eras plagued by organized warfare. While highly trained groups such as the Navy SEALs and SAS certainly fit the part, the best fighters in irregular forces also qualify. Fighters from any area can develop the required training and endurance.

SPECIAL FORCES TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: You must have 1 or higher in Accuracy or Fighting and the Intelligence (Tactics) focus. You must also have at least one of the following: the Military background, the Soldier or Commander profession, or the Tactical Awareness talent.

You're a creative, tough, and well-trained warrior.

NOVICE: Forced marches, sleepless battles, and minor injuries are part of the job. You may have even been exposed to pain in a methodical fashion to better resist it. You gain +5 Health points. Furthermore, you may re-roll any Willpower or Constitution-based test to resist penalties or special effects for pain, discomfort, or mental stress created by combat, but you must keep the results of the second roll.

EXPERT: Your training enables you to act efficiently and seize opportunities in combat automatically. Whenever you gain SP from rolling doubles, you gain 1 bonus SP, which you must spend on one of the following stunts: Take Cover, Skirmish, or Rapid Reload.

MASTER: You improvise tactics to turn the tide of battle. At the beginning of the round but before going through actions turn by turn, you may use your major action to make an Intelligence (Tactics) test with a TN equal to the highest initiative rating among all your enemies. If you succeed, your Stunt Die generates SP whether you roll doubles or not, but this SP can only be divided among allies you can communicate with so they can perform the following stunts: Duck and Weave, Take Cover, and Skirmish. They choose which of these stunts to perform using the granted SP on their turns. They can spend their own SP as well. If you roll doubles, you may spend some of this SP on other stunts for yourself. (You are not attacking, however, and may not use these stunts to inflict damage.) You may do this once per encounter.

GRANDMASTER: Your ferocity, tenacity, and presence of mind expand what you can do reflexively. Your Expert degree ability expands. Whenever you roll doubles you gain 2 bonus SP instead of 1 to spend on specific stunts, and the list of stunts you may spend this bonus SP on expands to include the following: Adrenaline Rush, Take Cover, Double Team, Skirmish, Overwatch, and Rapid Reload.

APEX: Your tactics lead your allies to victory despite the odds. When you use the Master ability, you no longer need to meet a TN equal to the highest enemy initiative, and you generate as many SP as your Intelligence (Tactics) roll, though no single ally can spend more of this bonus SP than your Stunt Die result. If you roll doubles, you gain SP equal to the Stunt Die result to spend on stunts for yourself, on top of the SP you grant to allies.

TECHNICIAN

People trust you to keep things working. You are not a dazzling innovator or an out-of-the-box improviser, but if you weren't

around to keep everything operational, nobody would get to play around with their toys. You find joy in the purr of a machine performing at peak efficiency and effectiveness.

ERAS

Technicians grow common as technology advances. You're the trusty mechanic that keeps your gang's cars in top shape, the leader of a post-collapse community who keeps pre-collapse machines running, a specialist who maintains explorers' vehicles, or a military engineer who keeps the Steam Homunculus Patrol's robots operating in a setting like *Brass Lightning*.

TECHNICIAN TALENT

REQUIREMENTS: You must have 1 or higher in Intelligence and Dexterity, the Intelligence (Engineering) focus, and any one technology focus as listed in the **Equipment Modification** rules in CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY. Refer to that section for effects that deal with positive and negative qualities.

Under your care, no machine malfunctions unless you want it to.

NOVICE: The tricks of the trade are your standard operating procedure. Choose a technology focus you know. You can re-roll a failed test with your chosen focus, but you must keep the result of the second roll. Also, reduce the success threshold of an equipment modification test to remove a negative quality by 1 when using your chosen focus.

EXPERT: You have encountered certain malfunctions before and know how to handle them. Add +1 to the result of the Stunt Die in a successful test toward the success threshold to remove negative qualities or even to add them as sabotage.

MASTER: You know which wires to cross and where to smack the box to get things going. Reduce the modifier value of negative qualities a piece of equipment would gain if you made an equipment modification test in action time by 2 and those acquired by cutting corners by 1. Also, reduce the success threshold by 2 when you are removing a positive quality through sabotage.

GRANDMASTER: You learn to work with all manner of machines. You gain the Novice benefit on rolls to build or maintain any piece of technology. When it comes to the technology focus you chose as a novice, you may roll the test twice and keep the better of the two rolls.

APEX: A single look tells you what's wrong with a machine; a quick twist or tap fixes it. You can use the Activate action to make quick fixes to a piece of equipment with the proper tools. Until the beginning of your next turn, you suppress any negative quality in the equipment (even any you introduced yourself!) with a total threshold modifier equal to your Intelligence. In addition, if you wish it, the TN for any ability test to recognize that you modified or serviced a piece of equipment is increased by your Intelligence.



RULES

The *Modern AGE* rulebook includes everything you need to play the game. This chapter adds additional optional rules. Some of these add detail or a distinctive style to events in the game. Others replace the core rules, permanently or in special situations. The GM makes the final decision about which rules apply to their campaign but should run it by other players. Use rules everyone would enjoy, and if they don't fit your game, change them.

ALTERNATE DAMAGE

Damage in *Modern AGE* uses Health as an abstraction of the wounds, bruises, and physical shocks characters might suffer from combat, hazards, and other physical stresses while providing a very concrete measure of how much abuse a character can take before being taken out of action.

Instead of using Health, you can replace the damage system with a Toughness test that adds randomness to a character's resistance, representing how a lucky stab can take a character out or a grizzled veteran can keep moving after being riddled with bullets. Note that this alternate system changes character creation as well.

THE TOUGHNESS TEST

When the character suffers damage, you no longer roll dice to figure out how much damage is dealt, deducting that amount

from the character's current Health after reducing the damage by Toughness and Armor Rating.

Instead, the character makes a Toughness test, with the TN determined by how much damage the attack deals. If the character succeeds, the attack was just a scratch the character can brush off, but if they fail, the Stunt Die determines how badly they were injured.

TOUGHNESS TEST = $3D6 + \text{TOUGHNESS BONUS} + \text{ARMOR RATING}$ VS. DAMAGE TN

- **TOUGHNESS BONUS:** The Toughness bonus is the sum of your Constitution + the bonuses gained when reaching levels 4, 8, 12, 16, and 20 in Pulp and Cinematic modes. Apply only half the Toughness bonus where the normal rules state that Toughness does not reduce damage (for example, in Gritty mode, apply only half your Toughness bonus to defend against ballistic damage and all wound damage, or in Pulp mode, apply only half your Toughness bonus to defend against ballistic damage). Round fractions up.
- **ARMOR RATING:** Add any Armor Rating from armor worn that applies to the damage source, as per the normal rules for armor.

TOUGHNESS, PROFESSION, & DRIVE

If you use the alternate damage system, characters with professions that grant 20 + Constitution Health points at level 1 receive +1 to their Toughness instead. When a drive grants

+5 Health points, it adds another +1 to Toughness, which stacks with the prior benefit for certain professions when you're using these rules.

DAMAGE DIFFICULTY

Use the following formula to determine the target number for the Toughness test:

$$\text{TOUGHNESS TN} = 13 + \text{BASE DAMAGE} + \text{ABILITY BONUS} + \text{EXTRA DAMAGE}$$

WEAPON DAMAGE DIFFICULTY		
STANDARD DAMAGE	BASE DAMAGE	MELEE WEAPONS
1d3	+1	Unarmed attacks
1d6	+1	Club, Hammer, Stun Baton, Light Chain, Vicious Blow stunt
1d6+1	+2	Staff, Dagger
1d6+2	+2	Baseball Bat, Short Sword
1d6+3	+2	Spear, Fencing Sword, Heavy Chain
2d6	+2	Axe, Lethal Blow stunt
2d6+3	+3	Sledgehammer
STANDARD DAMAGE	BASE DAMAGE	RANGED WEAPONS
1d6	+1	Pocket Pistol, Stun Gun, Throwing Knife, Rate of Fire bonus (SA and A firearms only), Vicious Blow stunt
1d6+1	+2	Throwing Axe
1d6+2	+2	Blunderbuss, Compound Bow
1d6+3	+2	Longbow
2d6	+2	Revolver, SA Handgun, SMG, Blast Grenade, Lethal Blow stunt
2d6+1	+3	Musket, PDW, Crossbow
2d6+2	+3	Hunting Rifle, Sniper Rifle, Combat Shotgun
2d6+3	+3	Automatic Rifle
2d6+6	+4	Double-Barreled Shotgun
3d6	+3	Fragmentation Grenade, Incendiary Grenade
3d6+3	+4	Anti-Materiel Rifle
STANDARD DAMAGE	BASE DAMAGE	HAZARDS
1d6	+1	Minor Hazard
2d6	+2	Moderate Hazard
3d6	+3	Major Hazard
4d6	+4	Arduous Hazard
5d6	+5	Harrowing Hazard
6d6	+6	Murderous Hazard

- BASE DAMAGE:** Instead of using the weapon's usual damage, convert it to a base damage modifier to the Toughness test. Every die of damage a weapon or effect deals (whether d6 or d3) becomes a +1 modifier to the base damage. If the weapon or damage source has a numerical bonus as part of its base damage, add +1 to the base damage if the bonus is +1 to +3 and add +2 if the bonus is +4 to +6. This way, the damage from an automatic rifle (2d6+3) becomes a base damage of +3 (+2 from two dice and +1 for a numerical bonus from +1 to +3). See the **Weapon Damage Difficulty** table for the base damage of different weapons in the Toughness system. This formula does add more weight to damage bonuses than damage dice to preserve the differences between weapons and other damage sources. If you want a more mathematically consistent alternative, damage bonuses of +1 to +3 add 0 to base damage, while +4 to +6 add +1 to base damage.
- ABILITY BONUS:** As usual, add the attacker's Strength to the base damage of melee attacks and the attacker's Perception to ranged attacks. This grants abilities more weight in combat, which shifts the balance between weapons and sheer talent toward the latter. Some talents allow you to add another ability or fraction thereof as a bonus to damage; don't add this full bonus, but instead use the rules for flat damage bonuses (see **Extra Damage**).
- EXTRA DAMAGE:** For talents, stunts, rate-of-fire bonuses, or any other effects that increase damage, follow the same formula as you would for base damage: +1 for every 1d6 of extra damage (this includes the Stunt Die for semiautomatic and automatic firearms) and +1 for flat bonuses of +1 to +3 or +2 for flat bonuses of +4 to +6; the latter includes bonuses derived from an ability other than Strength or Perception. If an additional source of damage does not require an additional test and follows directly from the same attack or hazard, add the extra damage to the difficulty of its damage roll. If the extra damage requires an additional test or comes from a distinct secondary source (such as an explosion that also destroys the floor, forcing the character to fall), the player must make a new test against that damage source using its bonus, but not that of the original attack or hazard.

DAMAGE TYPE

Under this system, the difference between stun and wound damage affects whether you add half or all your Toughness bonus to the test, the effects of severe injuries, and how a character recovers.

INJURY

Characters who fail the Toughness test are injured. The Stunt Die result of the failed test determines how serious the injury is.

Injury marks add up; characters suffer a penalty equal to their total injury marks in Toughness tests. In addition, for every 3 injury marks, characters suffer a -1 penalty to the Stunt Die result of failed Toughness tests. This makes it harder and harder to withstand damage the more injured the character becomes, until they are eventually incapacitated or even killed.

DEGREES OF INJURY

STUNT DIE RESULT	INJURY
1	<p>SEVERE INJURY: The character gains 1 injury mark. Until the severe injury is healed, their Speed is reduced by half, and they can only take one action on their turn (major or minor, but not both). If the character receives another severe injury, they are incapacitated.</p> <p>GRITTY: If the injury was the result of wound damage, the character is also dying.</p> <p>PULPY/CINEMATIC: The next injury from wound damage the character suffers causes them to start dying. The character is also vulnerable to a coup de grace (see the <i>Modern AGE Basic Rulebook</i>, CHAPTER 2: Basic Rules, under Delivering a Coup De Grace).</p>
2-4	SERIOUS INJURY: The character gains 1 injury mark. In addition, they can only take one action on their turn, although this effect ends on its own at the end of the character's next turn.
5-6	LIGHT INJURY: The character gains 1 injury mark.

VITALITY ADVANCEMENT & RECOVERY

MODE	VITALITY ADVANCEMENT	RECOVERY
Gritty	1 Vitality point at level 4 and every 4 levels after	Number of Vitality points equal to Constitution
Pulpy	1 Vitality point per level after 1	Half of total Vitality points
Cinematic	1 Vitality point per level after 1, plus extra Vitality points equal to Constitution at level 4 and every 4 levels after	All Vitality points

INJURIES AND RECOVERY

All methods of recovery apply in the Toughness system, erasing injury marks instead of recovering Health.

- For every 1d6 of Health a character would recover, erase 1 injury mark.
- For every flat amount equal to 5 Health (or fraction thereof), erase 1 injury mark.
- If a method of recovering Health adds an extra amount from abilities like Intelligence in the First Aid action or Constitution in a breather, erase a number of injury marks equal to the ability.
- If character level applies to a method of recovering Health, erase 1 injury mark for every 4 character levels.
- If the character has a severe injury, it counts as a number of injury marks depending on game mode: 3 marks in Gritty mode, 2 marks in Pulpy mode, and 1 mark in Cinematic mode. Severe injuries must be healed first before erasing other injury marks.

OPTIONAL

VITALITY

Using Toughness makes combat less predictable. If you want players to feel more in control, you can use Vitality points as a resource to help them mitigate the effects of a bad injury roll.

Characters have a pool of Vitality points representing their ability to withstand the effects of injury. A 1st-level character starts off with 3 Vitality points. Characters gain additional Vitality points as they increase their level, depending on the

game's mode (see the **Vitality Advancement and Recovery** table).

A character can spend 1 Vitality point to increase the result of the Stunt Die in a failed Toughness test by 1, but they can only spend a maximum number of Vitality points equal to their Constitution per test.

INJURY RESULTS

Because Vitality points increase the staying power of characters in combat, instead of using the Stunt Die results in the **Degrees of Injury** table, use the following: a result of 1-2 on the Stunt Die in a failed Toughness test represents a severe injury, a result of 3-5 is a serious injury, and a result of 6 is a light injury.

RECOVERING VITALITY

After at least 6 hours of restful sleep, characters recover spent Vitality points at a rate depending on the game mode (see the **Vitality Advancement and Recovery** table), up to their original maximum.

DUELS

Duels are an exciting part of many stories, whether they involve reaching for revolvers as opponents stare each other down across a deserted street, laying down arcane diagrams to enchant steam automatons, or using malignant software to battle in virtual space.

When two characters engage each other and ignore everything else, they are staging a duel. Rather than resolving a duel turn by turn, you can make it a role-playing opportunity



and resolve it as a short scene with an advanced test, using the breaching option to add more risk for both duelists. See **CHAPTER 8: MASTERING THE RULES** in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* for advanced tests and breaching.

ANATOMY OF A DUEL

A duel requires, first and foremost, two characters willing to show they're the best at what they do. Then comes the decision of what kind of fight they will engage in, which in turn will define the weapons available and the environment around them.

WHO ARE THE DUELISTS?

Duels will most likely pit Player Characters against Non-Player Characters, but two protagonists can decide to resort to controlled violence to resolve their differences. Duels between Non-Player Characters are discouraged, as they turn players into spectators rather than protagonists. For this reason, duels between the supporting cast should be dealt with narratively, and as quickly as possible.

WHY ARE THEY DUELING?

Are the duelists bitter enemies who suddenly find themselves on the battlefield? Did an offended party challenge the offender to settle a matter of honor? Are they participating in a martial arts tournament where the prize could save thousands? Characters can plan a duel complete with rules of engagement, or they can simply start one as an opportunity

arises, but each duelist should have very strong reasons to put aside everything else to engage their opponent.

HOW ARE THEY FIGHTING?

The method of the duel depends a lot on the overall story and its setting. In a Wild West game, it's natural that two gunslingers will meet at high noon, staring each other down until the one with the quickest draw and deadliest aim wins the day. In a different type of game, two psychics might start a protracted battle in the dream plane until one of them succumbs to the strain.

WHERE ARE THEY FIGHTING?

In duels that last longer than a single attack, duelists can make use of the terrain around them to gain an edge, such as seeking cover, improvising an ambush, or dropping furniture in their opponent's path.

THE DUEL TEST

Playing a duel as an opposed advanced test moves combat beyond interactions between Toughness, damage, and Health but still takes the characters' skills and wits into account.

Design the advanced test with input from the player whose character will participate in the duel, using the questions in the previous section to determine the relevant characteristics of the duel. When designing the advanced test, follow these steps:

1. CHOOSE MAIN FOCUSES AND TARGET NUMBERS

The duel's main focuses are those that apply to the weapons being used, be they Accuracy (Pistols) or Intelligence (Computers). The duelists use these focuses when they engage each other directly. Duelists do not have to use the same main focuses. A courtly duelist may select a rapier, using Fighting (Light Blades), while his rough Scots opponent picks a broadsword and uses Fighting (Heavy Blades).

The GM sets target numbers for tests using these focuses. Use the same criteria as for basic tests—prevailing conditions, the difficulty of the action, and so forth. When the duel primarily consists of physical combat, the TN is usually the opponent's Defense. This can apply even when using a focus which isn't Accuracy- or Fighting-based, since the enemy's alertness and defensive instincts still factor into the duel as a whole. If both duelists are involved in the same basic activity (such as a debate) they use the same TN. However, opponents using very dissimilar main focuses (say, Accuracy (Pistols) versus Intelligence (Computers) during a duel in virtual reality) may use different target numbers. One or the other might also gain a momentary benefit (lowering their TN by 1 or 2 points) by using a clever tactic. For instance, one might start the fight with their back to the sun, forcing their enemy to fight against its glare. Duels are dynamic, however, and such benefits almost never last for more than one roll.

Duelists must meet or beat the focus's TN to put their Stunt Die results toward their success threshold.

2. CHOOSE SECONDARY FOCUSES AND TARGET NUMBERS

List a few focuses characters may use in lieu of attacking their opponent directly, like Strength (Intimidation) or Communication (Deception). This is not an all-inclusive list, as characters could improvise the use of different focuses during the duel, like using Dexterity (Acrobatics) to feint or Perception (Hearing) to hear the mechanism of a pistol about to fire. Set target numbers for tests using these focuses. Each secondary focus should only be useful once or twice per duel. Again, if the duel is a matter of physical combat, the TN is usually equal to the opponent's Defense, and in other cases it is set using the same guidelines as for primary focuses. Using a secondary focus has more dramatic results, since it represents an unusual tactic, but these results aren't always good for the character taking that risk.

3. SET A SUCCESS THRESHOLD AND TIME INCREMENT

Short duels, like a gunslinging standoff, are brief, requiring only an easy task difficulty (success threshold of 5). A duel between two rival pirates fighting it out on a sinking ship could be a challenging task (success threshold of 15) that includes getting off the ship in time.

The time increment in a duel is usually one round, but you can change it based on the nature of the contest or the dramatic environment. You can even apply varying incre-

TOUGHING IT OUT

Duels emphasize the final result over cumulative harm, so they usually don't consider armor and Toughness. However, when a character relies on resisting injury to gain an advantage, they might use them as the equivalent of a secondary focus. For example, a character in full tactical armor might charge straight at their foe, heedless of incoming fire. Such actions are called "toughing it out" in the rules. Ignoring physical threats, bracing against impact, and using armor as extra weight to tackle and slam the enemy are all ways toughing it out might manifest.

In these cases, the GM decides whether Toughness applies based on the opponent's actions and potential attacks. This also determines which Armor Rating to use. For instance, if the opponent feints with a knife, the character may use the ratings that apply to impact wound attacks. Even though the character's enemy is feinting, this modifier applies, since the character toughing it out just ignores the threat.

After figuring out which ratings apply, add them to the dice roll. As noted, toughing it out is treated as a secondary focus in terms of how often it can be used and how it generates consequences (see **Duel Progress and Consequences**). The advantage of toughing it out is that against the right threat, a character with high Toughness and the right armor gains a higher bonus than they might enjoy when using a normal secondary focus. The disadvantage is if the character beats the duel's TN, they only get half the points from their Stunt Die to apply to the duel's success threshold.

ments based on events in the duel, such as how close the duelists come to meeting the success threshold. Between gunslingers, the first opposed test can last one minute as the opponents wait for the clock to strike 12, trying to psych each other out, and then all subsequent tests last one round when they finally draw their weapons and shoot. Meanwhile, a cyberspace duel between a wired-in hacker and an AI might involve millisecond-long increments that feel like minutes, hours, or days in the virtual world.

The GM may also end the duel when one duelist attains an unassailable advantage over the other. This usually occurs when one duelist has accumulated twice as many stunt points toward the success threshold as their rival and at least 6 more total, and the duel has gone on for at least two time increments.

4. DEFINE THE RESULTS OF VICTORY AND DEFEAT

The first duelist to reach the success threshold wins. The winning duelist imposes a condition the player and GM believe makes sense, given the events of the duel itself. See **Victory and Defeat** in this section for a more detailed breakdown of the possible fallout. If one character is unable to continue, events move to action or narrative time and the GM decides what happens based on the situation at hand.

DUEL PROGRESS & CONSEQUENCES

Duels are opposed tests which also use target numbers. When a duelist meets or exceeds the TN for the focus they're using, they put the Stunt Die result toward meeting the success threshold. Thus, both duelists can "win" during the same time increment, in the sense that both can make progress toward finishing the duel. However, the duelist with the higher opposed roll gains 1 point toward the success threshold, regardless of whether they beat the TN. If the winner of the opposed roll also beat the TN, they add this +1 to the result of the Stunt Die to contribute toward their success threshold.

Failed tests have consequences during the duel. These affect a duelist's ability to prevail but can also include minor to serious injuries, if the duel is physically risky. A character suffers consequences based on whether they were using a primary or secondary focus and whether their opponent was using a primary or secondary focus, according to the **Duel Consequences** table. As the table shows, using a secondary focus is riskier (you might suffer a consequence even if you meet the duel's TN but don't beat your opponent's roll) but has a greater chance of imposing a consequence on your opponent (who also needs to beat your opposed roll to avoid suffering a consequence).

A character can only suffer one consequence at a time, even if they qualify for one in two different ways. However, it is possible for both duelists to suffer consequences at the same time in certain circumstances. For example, a duelist using a primary focus can fail to meet the duel's TN, while their opponent, using a secondary focus, fails to beat the opposed roll.

You can define consequences beforehand or decide them on the spot based on the focuses used. Most duels are shorter and less methodical than ordinary breaching tests, so their consequence tiers don't build up on each other. Instead, they're decided by the result of the Stunt Die of the duelist about to suffer the consequence: 1-2 for tier 3, 3-4 for tier 2, and 5-6 for tier 1. Follow the guidelines for breaching consequence tiers in **CHAPTER 8: MASTERING THE RULES** in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* or use the alternatives that follow. Furthermore, if damaging consequences reduce a duelist's Health to 0, the duelist left standing decides whether the loser is dying or incapacitated. Finally, the GM may remove or reduce the effects of a consequence affecting one combatant instead of adding a new one to their opponent.

DUEL CONSEQUENCES

A DUELIST SUFFERS A CONSEQUENCE WHEN THEY...

DUELIST'S FOCUS	OPPONENT USED PRIMARY FOCUS	OPPONENT USED SECONDARY FOCUS
Primary	Fail to meet the TN	Fail to exceed the opponent's roll, regardless of TN
Secondary	Fail to exceed the opponent's roll, regardless of TN	Fail to exceed the opponent's roll, regardless of TN

TIER 1

Suffer a -1 penalty to any single primary or secondary focus for the remainder of the duel. These can be cumulative when the consequence affects the same focus repeatedly. This consequence may represent an injury, the winner adapting to the loser's techniques, or another circumstance you narrate. In a duel that may result in injury or death, the character suffering the consequence might suffer 1d6 damage instead.

TIER 2

Until the end of the duel or until resolved, the character's duel TNs increase by +2. This increase is cumulative with repeated tier 2 failures. This consequence may represent the winner forcing the loser into a disadvantageous position, or another broadly adverse circumstance interfering with at least one of the combatants. In a duel that may result in injury or death, the character suffering the consequence might take 2d6 damage instead.

TIER 3

Reduce the character's progress toward the success threshold by 1d6 as one combatant reverses the other's progress or the character suffering the consequence makes a major misstep. In a duel with the potential to cause injury, the character suffering the consequence might take 3d6 damage instead.

USING STUNTS

Many standard stunts don't apply to a duel, and the GM can decide not to allow them at all. However, if a player makes a reasonable argument for the use of a stunt and its rules can be adapted to the dueling format, the GM should consider allowing it. **CHAPTER 4: STUNTS** provides guidelines for customizing stunts that can be useful in these situations. As usual, duelists gain SP for rolling doubles, drawing on Relationships, or using other abilities that generate SP. Note that when a character gains SP from rolling doubles, spending them does not subtract from the points used to progress toward the dueling test's success threshold. For the purposes of gaining SP from doubles, a duelist must meet or beat the duel focus' TN, not the opponent's roll.

As an easy alternative to this, you may allow duelists who can spend Stunt Points to impose an additional consequence on an opponent. The cost for this is 2 SP for a tier 1 consequence, 4 SP for a tier 2 consequence, and 6 SP for a tier 3 consequence. You may only spend SP to impose one additional consequence per roll.

At the GM's discretion, duelists may also use Stunt Points to remove duel consequences which modify dice rolls and target numbers. 3 SP removes all modifiers caused by tier 1 consequences, and 6 SP removes all modifiers caused by tier 2 consequences. This sweeps away all accumulated modifiers for a given tier. Tier 3 consequences cannot be eliminated.

VICTORY & DEFEAT

If the duel did not involve direct damage, you can adjudicate the results depending on the duel's purpose and how the duelists acted while engaged. A losing system administrator

might be out of a job the next day, while the victorious hacker walks away with precious information and a new enemy. A duel may cost the loser a Membership, remove a desirable Reputation honorific, add an undesirable honorific, or modify a Relationship. The winner may gain something desired in any of these arenas. A duel may even have financial consequences, such as a high-stakes poker game where the loser's Resources dwindle and the winner's increase.

Combative duels usually carry the risk of physical injury. When such duels meet their success thresholds, the winner may impose one of the following circumstances on the loser:

- **DYING:** The loser is reduced to 0 Health from wound damage and is dying. Immediately after this result, the winner may attempt a coup de grace, but events move to action time and, depending on initiative results, other characters may be able to intervene.
- **INCAPACITATED:** The loser is reduced to 0 Health from stun damage and is incapacitated. In Gritty or Pulpy games, actions during the duel may not allow this, at the GM's discretion. For instance, in a Gritty gunfight narrated as an exchange of fire, it's hard to justify scoring a mere knockout.
- **AT THEIR MERCY:** The loser retains half their Health -1, but is held at sword point, targeted for a sure kill, and so on. Events move into action time. The winner automatically has an initiative no lower than 1 higher than the loser regardless of what the player rolls, and may use their minor action in conjunction with an attack to automatically use the Instant Kill stunt no matter the game's mode. This situation lasts until the GM determines the loser is no longer vulnerable.

SINGLED OUT

Dramatic duels are not always an isolated affair; two groups of characters could be exchanging fire when two opponents single each other out and begin their duel, no longer cooperating with their respective allies and focusing all their skills and concentration on their foe.

Such an impromptu duel begins in the initiative of one of the characters, who uses a minor action to issue a challenge. The opponent being singled out can refuse, and the encounter will continue as normal, but if they accept, the duel begins on the next round, in standard initiative order.

Barring strange circumstances such as second-long psychic combat increments, the time increment of a duel happening in the middle of a larger combat is one round, and each duelist makes their tests on their turn in the overall initiative. The success threshold of this kind of duel is usually at least Challenging (success threshold 15), with a TN equal to the opponent's Defense modified by any consequences or other special circumstances.

If the duel ends before action time finishes, the victor rejoins battle as normal and the loser may join if they are still conscious. If action time ends before the duel does, the losing side may take their dueling companion away, ending the duel, or simply bail out and leave the duelist at the mercy of the winners.

DUELS AND OTHER CHARACTER TRAITS

Characters have talents and access to stunts that are useful in combat but may not factor so easily in a duel test. In general, use all the bonuses a character may have to main and secondary focuses from talents and stunts. If talents provide advantages in advanced tests, apply them at your discretion, while talents that could arguably influence a duel but provide no benefit to advanced tests (like Performance in a duel of bands) can increase or decrease any TN involved in an opposed test on a degree-per-point basis. A character with Performance (Expert) could reduce the TN they must exceed by 2 or increase their opponent's TN by 2, for example.

INTERFERING CHARACTERS

Allies of either duelist may wish to help their friend without participating in the duel. Any character can, during their turn in the overall initiative, make a test against the TN set for the duel's focuses (if the interloper is using one of them) or a TN determined by the GM. If successful, the result does not count directly toward the dueling ally's success threshold, but is considered a cooperation test. The GM decides whether the cooperation is a force multiplier or fine-tunes the result, as per the cooperation rules in CHAPTER 8: MASTERING THE RULES in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*.

The opposing duelist is free to use a minor action on their turn to call off the duel because of the interference, or the duelist who received aid may call it off out of honor.

EXAMPLE DUEL

Amy, Matthew's character in a Brass Lightning game, is an Æther Knight participating in a raid at the Ironclad Brigands' lair. Bullets and magic fly when she spots Foreman Job, one of the gang's top lieutenants and the man who kidnapped Amy's brother and worked him to death in the levatite mines of the Austral Territories. She leaves cover and points at him, taking a major action to challenge him. Amused, Job accepts the challenge. As the GM, Meghan determines that this duel requires some epic exchanges and sets a success threshold of 15 and a time increment of one round, with the main focuses being Accuracy (Pistols) and Accuracy (Longarms), as these are what Job and Amy are using, respectively.

Amy has Defense 15, which includes her Dexterity and the Tesla Shield she's using; Job has Defense 12. These will be the TNs each duelist has to exceed in addition to winning the opposed roll. Amy goes first in the initiative and fires at her hated foe, making an Accuracy (Longarms) test. Meghan decides that Job is going to be tricky and has him use Communication (Deception) to try to misdirect Amy's aim, tossing his coat in one direction as he leaps in the other. Matthew rolls 13, exceeding Job's Defense. Matthew's Stunt Die is 5, and he puts it toward the duel's success threshold. Meghan rolls 15 for Job, and since he used a secondary focus, Amy suffers a consequence. Mathew's Stunt Die of 5 represents a tier 1 consequence. Amy riddles Job's coat with bullets as he runs to attack her flank. Her Accuracy (Long-

arms) tests will suffer a -1 penalty for the remainder of the duel, as Job's misdirection throws her off and he continues to use distractions to ruin her aim. Meghan's Stunt Die resulted in a 3, but she rolled higher than Matthew did for Amy, so she gains +1 point on top of the Stunt Die for 4 points to contribute toward the success threshold. So far, the accumulated point totals are Amy 5, Job 4.

On his turn, Job tries to shoot Amy just as she realizes he might not be the smoking rags she's been shooting at. Meghan rolls 13 for Job's Accuracy (Pistols) test – a miss. Amy wheels around with her rifle and shoots in response; this time Matthew rolls 15, but since Amy's suffering a -1 penalty as a tier 1 consequence, her result is 14 – still enough to beat Job's Defense. Matthew's Stunt Die result of 5 contributes toward Amy's success threshold, and as the higher opposed roll, that contribution increases by 1 to 6. Meghan's roll for Job failed to beat Amy's Defense. As Job was using a primary focus, this imposes a consequence. Meghan's Stunt Die result for Job is 2 but as GM, Meghan elects to remove Amy's tier 1 penalty instead of giving Job a consequence. By failing to meet the TN, Job doesn't contribute any points toward the success threshold.

The score in accumulated points is now Amy 11, Job 4. Amy's score is more than double Job's and exceeds it by 6, so as GM, Meghan elects to end the duel even though it hasn't reached the success threshold. "Enough tricks," says Amy, as her shot whizzes above Job's head – and hits the chain suspending the cast iron chandelier above him. It crashes on him, knocking him out cold.

FIGHTING STYLES

Experienced combatants develop personal fighting styles combining everything they've learned and develop new ways to use their skills. *Modern AGE* already gives you many options to customize your character's advancement, and a fighting style simply helps you to plan this advancement along certain lines.

Fighting styles are better suited for Pulpy and Cinematic modes.

LEARNING A STYLE

Characters may know the focuses and talents that belong to a fighting style but may not have integrated them into a unified whole yet. Learning a style is a reward, like Reputation or Membership. It is something a character earns through their efforts during the campaign. They train with masters, experiment, or duel skilled combatants to test their abilities. Thus, the GM decides when a character has demonstrated their dedication and grants the fighting style. The player and GM can design the style ahead of time or progress from a general idea of what the character wants to learn. The character may learn multiple styles, though in combat, they can only benefit from one style at a time.

Characters may have to join a school or other organization to learn a style. While the most stereotypical fighting schools are martial arts monasteries, modern dojos, and combat sports gyms, a fighting school can be any organization that has systematized a fighting style and teaches it to its students. It could be a law enforcement organization, an order of occult

knights, or a special forces group. Membership in such a group might be a prerequisite for learning a style.

STYLE ELEMENTS

To reap the benefits of a fighting style, the character must learn its ability focuses and talents. Styles also favor certain stunts. Therefore, a style consists of the following elements.

COMBAT FOCUSES

Each style has one to four combat focuses, drawn from Fighting, Accuracy, or both. These focuses cover the weapons or fighting methods the style favors. The style's masters may teach other forms of fighting, but not through methods intensive enough for special rules.

SECONDARY FOCUSES

The style has as many secondary focuses as its masters deem appropriate. These focuses can belong to any ability and represent what practitioners study to understand the philosophy, practical theories, and values of the style.

TALENTS

A style has at least one talent linked to each of its combat focuses. These are talents with "Style" in the name, which are usable with attack rolls involving the style's combat focus. At the GM's discretion, other talents, such as Tactical Awareness and the Martial Artist specialization talent, may also apply.

STUNTS

A fighting style favors stunts with a total SP value of 12. You may harness your style's stance to use these stunts even when you don't roll doubles, as per **Stances**, later in this section.

STYLE SLOTS

No matter the character's dedication, their training and natural ability put a firm limit on how much can be learned. This is represented by a character's style slots. Characters devote these slots to stances: postures and maneuvers from their style that grant certain benefits.

A 1st-level character begins with style slots equal to the higher value between their Fighting or Accuracy. At levels 4, 8, 12, 16, and 20, the character gains an additional style slot. Furthermore, if the higher value of their Fighting or Accuracy increases, they gain a number of slots equal to the increase. You may devote these slots to one style or several.

Your character also gains 1 slot each time they learn the Novice, Master, and Apex degrees of a fighting style's talent, and the first time they learn one of the style's secondary focuses. These slots must be spent on that style's stance, however, while the slots you gain from Fighting, Accuracy, and level advancement may be spent on any style's stance. If these bonus slots could be used for more than one style, you must choose which style to devote them to.

When you devote slots to a style, note the name of the style and the number of slots you invested in it. For example, if your character learned Zuiquan, or Drunken Kung Fu, and you devoted

IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP

Many stories depicting fighting styles feature characters who abandon their ties with others for the benefit of their training. In Gritty and Pulp games, the GM may decide that characters do not gain style slots at level 4 and every 4 levels. Instead, they can exchange Relationship slots for style slots when they gain new ones at level 4 and every 4 levels thereafter. This option may not be adequate for campaigns where every character is expected to know a fighting style.

3 style slots to it, you'd list it as *Zuiquan (3)*. The more slots you devote to a style, the more skilled your character becomes.

STANCES

As noted, a character with a fighting style learns its stance. Stances are not always literal physical postures, but the name sets them apart from other special abilities. To use a stance, perform the Activate action on your turn. You can only use one stance per round. You stay in your stance until the end of the encounter unless you use the Activate action again, to adopt another stance or for some other purpose.

Once you activate your stance, you gain stance points equal to your style's rating. For example, the character with *Zuiquan (3)* gains 3 stance points. As you spend them on abilities, they don't return until the next encounter. This applies even if you drop your stance and activate it again later in the same encounter. One advantage to learning multiple styles is the ability to access more than one stance-point reserve.

STYLE STUNTS

You may spend stance points as stunt points whenever you succeed at a test involving one of your style focuses, even if you don't roll doubles. You may use these style points on top of SP you gain from other sources, but you can only spend stance points on the style's stunts.

COUNTERING STUNTS

If your opponent attacks you using a combat focus which is part of the style whose stance you're using, and spends SP to enhance the attack on a stunt which is listed with that style, your knowledge of those maneuvers allows you to counter them. If the incoming stunt has a fixed SP cost, spending stance points equal to that cost nullifies it. If the stunt has a variable cost, spending stance points reduces the stunt's effects as if 1 less SP were spent on the stunt per stance point used to counter it. When a stunt gets countered, the attacker doesn't get back the SP they spent. You must be able to justify the counter in the story.

SAMPLE FIGHTING STYLES

The following fighting styles represent the thinnest slice of what might be available in a modern campaign. Use them to inspire your own creations. Talents listed with an asterisk are those introduced in this book.



ARMIZARE

This medieval Italian style has only recently been reconstructed. Practitioners learn the knightly art of combat and fight with long swords, daggers, long-hafted war hammers, and wrestling maneuvers, in and out of armor. A practitioner will switch from swordplay to a wrestling grip in an instant, using the weapon for leverage.

COMBAT FOCUSES: Fighting (Grappling, Heavy Blades, Long Hafted)

SECONDARY FOCUSES: Dexterity (Crafting, Riding), Intelligence (History), Strength (Might)

TALENTS: Self-Defense Style, Sword Style*, Two-Handed Style

STUNTS: Armor Crush (4 SP), Bind Weapon (3 SP), Grapple (1 SP), Knock Prone (2 SP), Precise Force (2 SP)

CQB

Taught to anti-terrorist units in the police and military along with urban warfare specialists, CQB specializes in using firearms and hand-to-hand combat to deal with close-range threats.

COMBAT FOCUSES: Accuracy (Pistols, SMGs), Fighting (Grappling, Light Blades)

SECONDARY FOCUSES: Intelligence (Tactics), Strength (Intimidation)

TALENTS: Close-Quarters Firearm Style*, Knife Style*, Self-Defense Style, Tactical Awareness

STUNTS: Called Shot (4 SP), Group Tactics (2 SP), Hostage (4 SP), Skirmish (1+ SP), Take Cover (1 SP)

ZUIQUAN: DRUNKEN KUNG FU

This legendary martial art emulates the staggering motions of a drunkard but finds its origins in Buddhist and Daoist principles. A drunken-style fighter relaxes, rolls with blows, and strikes from unexpected directions.

COMBAT FOCUSES: Fighting (Brawling, Long Hafted)

SECONDARY FOCUSES: Constitution (Tolerance), Dexterity (Acrobatics), Intelligence (Religion), Willpower (Self-Discipline)

TALENTS: Misdirection, Striking Style, Two-Handed Style, Martial Artist Specialization

STUNTS: Duck and Weave (1+ SP), Adrenaline Rush (1+ SP), Skirmish (1+ SP), Knock Prone (2 SP), Lightning Attack (2 SP), Taunt (2 SP), Bind Weapon (3 SP)

FLYING COMBATANTS

While flight in modern games is primarily the province of extremely fast vehicles, some combatants can fly at speeds comparable to Player Character ground speeds. These are birds, bats, strange creatures, or characters using extraordinary powers.

Note that these rules are similar to but not the same as those found in *Fantasy AGE*. Pay particular attention to the Soar action and the different role of ranged weapons. The GM may use these rules, vehicle rules, or chase rules as they see fit, switching from one option to another depending on the situation.

Modern AGE typically leaves it to Game Masters to adjudicate matters related to flying, but optionally, you can use the following rules. In them, a flier moving at character-scale speeds must use one of the following actions each turn: Circle, Dive, Fly Low, Fly High, or Soar. The character moves horizontally at their flying Speed, but altitude is abstracted, with characters using Soar and Fly High at the top, characters Circling in the middle, and characters Flying Low at the bottom, barely above the ground.

A flier who fails to take one of these actions for any reason descends. If the combatant is unable to glide, they fall as per a falling hazard. Characters may use only one of these flying actions per round, and some of them require the character to be in a specific position.

MINOR ACTIONS

CIRCLE

PREREQUISITE ACTION: Fly Low or Soar

The flying character circles above the battlefield at a low altitude, moving a number of yards equal to their flying Speed. Ranged attacks from the ground add 20 yards to the horizontal distance from the shooter to the target to represent the height of the flier. A circling character can attack other circling characters at no penalty. A soaring character can use the Dive action on a circling character.

FLY LOW

PREREQUISITE ACTION: None

The flying character moves at their flying Speed roughly 3 yards high and gets a +1 bonus to melee attack rolls against targets closer to the ground (or other surface, such as the deck of a ship). The character may land at the end of their movement. The GM decides if the character can safely stop short of their movement while landing.

SOAR

PREREQUISITE ACTION: Fly High

After reaching a higher altitude, the character can move their flying Speed. The character cannot be hit by thrown weapons or ranged attacks from the ground besides firearms and other weapons with similarly long firing arcs. The character can be attacked with such weapons by other characters using Soar and Fly High, however, or anyone at a similar height who is close by (such as on a nearby building). The character cannot Fly Low as their next flight action.

MAJOR ACTIONS

DIVE

PREREQUISITE ACTION: Circle or Soar

A circling or soaring character rapidly descends to strike another combatant. The character moves a number of yards equal to their flying Speed and makes a melee attack with a +1 bonus to the attack and damage roll. If the character's last action was Soar, they may attack circling characters but not targets on the ground. Since they descend, they must choose Circle, Fly Low, or Fly High as their next flying action. If the character's last action was Circle, they may attack targets on the ground.

FLY HIGH

PREREQUISITE ACTION: Circle or Soar

The character concentrates on gaining height and distance away from other combatants. They move a number of yards equal to their flying Speed and may not attack or be attacked except by characters using weapons with a Range of at least 100 yards. The character cannot Fly Low as their next flight action.

MINIATURES & BATTLE MAPS

Many game groups play through combat encounters without the use of props. The GM and players keep a mental picture of the battlefield. They describe actions and figure distances and relative positions on the fly. This keeps combat loose and doesn't bog the game down in tactical details. Other groups prefer to use miniatures or tokens on a map, however. The following section discusses how to do this and adds a few new rules that take advantage of better knowing your relative position.

SCALE & MAPPING

These rules assume the use of what wargamers call the "28 mm scale," which has become the most popular miniatures scale. In *Modern AGE's* implementation, 2 yards equals 1 inch on the map.

Miniatures in this scale typically have an inch-wide base. Printed tokens, dry-erase battle maps, and more elaborate environments, such as 3D buildings and artificial terrain, usually use this scale as well. However, you don't need fancy, detailed terrain and miniatures. Dice, coins, and other improvised methods work fine. Just remember that no matter the token's size, a human-sized person occupies an inch-wide space.

Battle maps come in a variety of sizes and formats, from do-it-yourself solutions using vinyl sheets or printed resources downloaded as PDFs to ready-to-use maps of different locations and even sculpted 3D terrain. If you're just starting out, a ruler and a big pad of newsprint work fine. Professionally produced options often have inch-wide hexes or squares printed on them, so you can judge distance at a glance and move characters across them just as you'd move playing pieces a certain number of spaces on a game board.

CHARACTER MOVEMENT

Using the scaling we've described, characters move 1 inch across the map for every 2 points of Speed on their Move action. Round fractions down. Thus, a character with a Speed of 11 moves 5 inches on the map. This rating in inches becomes their **Move Points**, and you should note them in parentheses alongside their standard Speed.

For other actions involving movement, use the character's Speed as written before converting back to Move Points. Thus, a character with a Speed of 11 has 11 Move Points for the Run/Chase action and 2 for the Charge action.

You can adjudicate movement in three ways: rulers, hexes, and squares. If you use a ruler, measure from the edge of the miniature's base opposite the direction the character moves. If the character changes direction mid-move, stop the measurement at the point of the turn, measure again in the new direction, and add the totals. Hexes and squares are usually much easier. These are inch-wide shapes in a pattern or grid on the map. Using them, the character just moves one square or hex per inch of movement.

OPTIONAL: DIAGONAL MOVEMENT

Note that when using squares, moving diagonally actually transports the character farther in terms of scale distance. In *Modern AGE*, we accept this distortion by default. However, if you want to use ruler-based ranges or really want to be a stickler for distance, each diagonal square movement is counted as 3 yards, not 2. Characters moving diagonally must spend 1.5 Move Points per square. If they have 0.5 Move Point left over, they may move horizontally or vertically one extra square at the beginning or end of their movement.

Note that hexes don't create this distortion, so for them, this rule isn't necessary.

IMPERIAL & METRIC MEASUREMENTS

Modern AGE uses imperial measurements: feet and yards. If you prefer the metric system, 1 yard equals slightly over 0.9 meters (0.9144), so treating the two distances as basically equivalent is not a big deal. Weapon ranges are approximations, so even they can benefit from this looseness without too much trouble. Feet and centimeters are a little more complex, as there are about 30.5 (actually 30.48) centimeters in a foot, but you can still treat 1 foot as 1/3 of a meter, even if it would fall short of that distance in real life. Regardless of your preference, commercially available maps use inches, so even if you don't use them, we'll retain the 2-yards-equals-1-inch scale. If you're using a metric ruler, 1 inch equals 2.5 centimeters.

TOUGH GROUND & OBSTACLES

If the ground is up a significant slope (including at least two yards of stairs), seriously uneven, shaky, or otherwise tricky to move through, it's **Tough Ground**. You must spend an extra Move Point per inch of Tough Ground.

In some cases, Tough Ground might represent a low fence or other element that just slows the character for a moment. In that case, the player spends just 1 Move Point to get past it. However, a narrow beam, taller fence, or other feature might require an ability test. The GM determines the test, such as Dexterity (Acrobatics) to flip over a chain-link fence or Strength (Might) to smash through a wood and drywall wall. If the test succeeds, the character gets past the obstacle, paying 1 Move Point unless the Stunt Die scores high enough (usually 5 or 6) that the GM decides it took no extra time. If the test fails, the character pays 1 Move Point but cannot continue in that direction.

Some obstacles may take more than a moment to get past. In such cases, the GM determines the time required.

MOVING THROUGH COMBAT

Characters can attack at any point in their movement. However, moving, attacking mid-movement, and continuing to move costs 1 Move Point. It also costs 1 Move Point to leave melee combat range, as the character is hindered by the need



to protect themselves while exiting. These costs stack, so if a character intends to move, hit a character in hand-to-hand combat, and move again, the cost is 2 Move Points in addition to the cost of moving across the map.

VEHICLE MOVEMENT

Vehicles are *fast*. At map scale, a 50-mph car moves 187 inches per round! In these cases, we suggest you use the chase rules in CHAPTER 8 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* and return to abstract distances. When vehicles move through a battle map, we also suggest you use the **Cover to Cover** optional rule in this section, so vehicles don't speed out of range before anyone has a chance to attack them. Acceleration, deceleration, and how far a vehicle moves after crashing are all up to the GM.

Like characters, vehicles must pay Move Points to deal with Tough Ground, but only if it would count as such for vehicles. For example, a narrow, bumpy country road is Tough Ground for cars but not characters on foot. Vehicles typically smash through obstacles and don't pay Move Points to get by them, but the GM may call for a test to control the vehicle, or have the obstacle inflict an Anti-Vehicle stunt or damage its various parts as noted in the core *Modern AGE* rules.

CINEMATIC MAP SPEED

In Cinematic games, characters interact with vehicles far more easily. Use the following table, which slows vehicles

OPTIONAL: COVER TO COVER

You may encounter an issue where characters fire from cover, then move to another source of cover. If this all happens before anyone else gets a chance to counter-attack, it can be annoying. Shouldn't this movement expose them? After all, even though we split things into turns and actions to play the game, a real fight is chaotic and filled with continuous action.

Optionally, you can decide that after a character takes their turn, anyone wishing to attempt a ranged attack against them afterward can designate any point along that character's movement to attack them. This will usually be when the target is at their closest range, is in their line of sight, and has the least amount of cover. The attacker marks the spot with a die or other marker. When it's the attacker's turn, they roll their ranged attack as if the character they're attacking were in that location. If this kills or immobilizes the target, move their miniature or token to the point where the attack happened.

This only applies to ranged attacks and to attackers taking their turns after the character acts. These opportunities don't roll over into the next round.

down to allow characters to attack them, leap aboard, or perform other feats.

MAP SPEED

VELOCITY CLASS	FROM 0 MOVEMENT	STANDARD MOVEMENT
Standard	Same as Character	Same as Character
Fast	20	40
Very Fast	30	75
Extreme	40	150

- **FROM 0 MOVEMENT:** The vehicle has this many Move Points when moving from a standstill or when slowed by a special maneuver, stunt, or other action determined by the GM.
- **STANDARD MOVEMENT:** This is the vehicle at a slow cruising speed or on rounds after moving from 0.

LINE OF SIGHT & COVER

A battle map formalizes line of sight – that is, who can see each other. If nothing gets in the way of a straight line measured from the inch-wide edge of one character's miniature or token (or the square or hex it occupies) to another's base, these characters have line of sight with each other. They may attack one another but may not hide from each other. Total cover breaks line of sight. When one character is exposed to line of sight but parts of their body would still be blocked, they have cover at a rating determined by the GM.

RANGED & MELEE ATTACKS

Convert weapon ranges using the standard map scale of 2 yards to 1 map inch. Round fractions down. This means a

MODIFIED GENERAL STUNTS FOR BATTLE MAPS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	TAKE COVER: You gain 3 Move Points that you must spend to find cover, gaining a cover rating equal to SP spent. If you cannot find cover this way, you cannot use this stunt. You also nullify the Cover to Cover optional rule, if it is present, and attackers must attack you based on the position you're in after using this stunt.
1+	GUARDIAN ANGEL: You stand ready to interpose yourself between an ally and danger. Choose a character within 3 map inches of you. If they would take damage before your next turn, 1 point of damage per SP spent transfers to you instead. If this damage kills or immobilizes you, the GM determines where you fall. Otherwise, you return to your original position.
2	BLOCKADE: You can use 2 Move Points to position yourself between a foe and something or someone else. This position is either adjacent to the person or thing you wish to protect or in a straight line between it/them and your foe. Until the beginning of your next turn, that foe must succeed at a minor action Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Might) test vs. your Defense to move closer to whomever or whatever you wish to protect.

MODIFIED FIREARMS STUNTS FOR BATTLE MAPS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	STRAFE (AUTOMATIC WEAPONS): You gain 1 Move Point per SP spent which you must use to move in any direction, and apply your attack along a number of adjacent 1-inch square areas (such as squares or hexes) in a straight line, equal to the distance in map inches you moved using this stunt. You cannot exclude any target in that line. If these additional targets would be hit by your attack roll, they take half damage (rounded up).
1	SUPPRESSIVE FIRE (AUTOMATIC WEAPONS): You pepper an area with bullets. If anyone, friend or foe, stands or moves within moves within (Gritty 1/Pulpy 2/Cinematic 3) map inches map inches of where your target was positioned when you attacked between now and your turn next round, roll a new attack against that individual, whether you want to or not, to a maximum of one attack per target in that zone.
2	LONG BURST (AUTOMATIC WEAPONS): Make a second attack against the same target or a different one within 3 map inches of the first; take a -2 to this attack roll but gain a +2 to the damage roll if you hit. You deal at least 1 point of damage no matter what, but you must reload your weapon afterward to continue using it.
2	SPRAY AND PRAY (AUTOMATIC WEAPONS; CINEMATIC): Apply this attack to everyone within a 3-map-inch radius of your original target, including allies. All additional targets gain +1 to Defense against this attack.

semiautomatic handgun, with a range increment of 55 yards, has a 27-inch range increment on the map. If using hexes or squares, count the number required to reach the target. You may instead opt to use a ruler or tape measure. This is handy because it can also be used to determine line of sight. Note that if you use ruler-based range but square-based movement, you may wish to use the **Diagonal Movement** rule found in this section to avoid distortions.

Close-combat weapons typically have no range. You must be adjacent to your opponent (touching base to base or in the hex or square right beside them) to attack. The only exception is for melee weapons that are two yards or longer. These have a reach of 1 inch, or 2 inches in extreme cases (10-foot poles, for example). Finally, in a successful Fighting (Grappling) attack or any attack where the GM believes characters would be extremely close to each other, a successful attack roll means the attacker may, if they choose, occupy the same space as the target.

COMBAT POSITIONING & MODIFIERS

In most cases, using a map clarifies the modifiers found in CHAPTER 8 of *Modern AGE*. When two attackers are in melee combat with one character, each attacker gains +1 to attack rolls. If the advantage is 3-to-1, this bonus increases to +2. Characters in *Modern AGE* don't use special facing rules and are assumed to be turning and shifting to deal with the action around them.

BATTLE MAP STUNTS

Most stunts involving range and movement are easily converted using the 2 yards = 1 inch rule. Round fractions down. If a stunt specifies a random number of yards, use half the dice amount possible for map inches, so 1d6 yards becomes 1d3 inches, for instance. Otherwise, the rules depend on the game's mode.

GRITTY/PULPY: Stunts that add movement provide 1 Move Point per 2 yards, which must be used for the purpose of the stunt. Tough Ground and obstacle Move Point costs apply, and the character can't negotiate obstacles that require an ability test to traverse. Move Point costs for attacking mid-movement or leaving melee combat do not apply to movement granted by stunts.

CINEMATIC: Move Points granted by stunts ignore costs for Tough Ground, obstacles, attacking mid-movement, or leaving melee combat. Characters can traverse obstacles in the middle of a stunt if they succeed at the appropriate ability test.

MODIFIED STUNTS

The stunts listed in the tables on page 45 are modified for use with miniatures and battle maps. Their descriptions replace the standard descriptions in *Modern AGE*. For other stunts, use the conversion guidelines noted earlier in this section.

HAZARD EFFECTS

Beyond common threats like fire, falling, and so on, the hazards you might face in a story depend on the setting you are playing in. Exotic poisons abound in pulp settings. In *Brass Lightning*, wicked enchantments or the steam-powered insides of cyclopean automatons may impose strange, deleterious effects. Both common and exotic hazards might have special effects instead of or in addition to dealing damage. This section adds specific special effects and other expanded rules. These supplement the rules for hazards in CHAPTER 8: MASTERING THE RULES in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*. Note that in some cases, we provide some rough rules for estimating hazard categories. This is to help you estimate how dangerous a hazard might be and isn't an exact science.

HAZARD EFFECTS BY CATEGORY

Special effects can be classified using the same categories as damage to represent how dangerous they are. Although the GM is free to determine the effect's duration and how hard it is to remove, in general terms, effects in lower categories should last for shorter periods and be easier to remove. You can mix damage and hazards. Each of the categories described later in this section has a listed damage equivalent. If adding a special effect to a hazard, reduce the damage by that amount to produce a hazard of the desired category.

Unless otherwise indicated, effects are not cumulative. If a character gains an effect that they already have, extend its duration instead of increasing the effect.

MINOR HAZARD EFFECTS

1D6

- **IMPEDED:** Pain, distraction, sensory overload, and a host of other elements reduce your effectiveness. This imposes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, Defense, or dice rolls involving one or more abilities relevant to the encounter. The specifics depend on the hazard.
- **HAMSTRUNG:** The hazard affects your balance, hurts your legs, or otherwise impairs your ability to move. Your Speed is reduced by 1d6.
- **NAUSEATED:** Your body reacts badly to the hazard, making you sick. Until the effect is removed, if the Stunt Die of a test or attack roll comes up 5 or 6, re-roll it and take the second result.
- **PRONE:** You are tossed to the ground by the force or influence of the hazard, as per the Knock Prone stunt.

MODERATE HAZARD EFFECTS

2D6

- **CONFUSED:** You lose your bearings and ability to understand the situation. Make a TN 13 Willpower (Self-Discipline) test on your turn. If you fail, the GM determines what you do during your major action based on the circumstances surrounding your confusion.
- **HINDERED:** A physical or mental effect slows you down. You lose one action of your choice (minor or major) on your next turn for as long as the effect remains.

- **MUTED:** You lose your ability to speak. You cannot use any Communication focus that requires your voice, nor use any talent that requires allies to hear you.
- **SLOWED:** Your Speed is reduced by half, but actions that require you to spend any fraction of your Speed are calculated from your normal Speed.

MAJOR HAZARD EFFECTS

3D6

- **COWED:** Mental or physical conditions impair your combative ability. You suffer a -3 penalty to your attack rolls and Defense.
- **ENRAPTURED:** Whether by drugs, spores, a hypnotic disk trap, or a vampire's gaze, your attention is drawn to the source of the effect. You suffer a -3 penalty to all Perception tests and cannot take any action until the effect is removed.
- **IMMOBILE:** While you can move your body normally, you cannot move away from your current position. Your Speed is reduced to 0.
- **IMPAIRED:** The hazard affects your ability to do anything. You suffer a -3 penalty on all ability tests.
- **REELING:** You feel seriously ill, and the symptoms hinder your actions. When you make an ability test and the Stunt Die comes up 1 or 2, you automatically fail the test.
- **SLAMMED:** Extreme force not only knocks you down but weakens you. You are knocked prone and lose one action of your choice.

ARDUOUS HAZARD EFFECTS

4D6

- **BLINDED:** The hazard impairs your vision. You suffer a -5 penalty to Perception (Seeing) tests and all other rolls where vision is critically necessary.
- **COMPELLED:** The hazard not only captures your attention but fights for your very will. You lose one action of the GM's choice, and the GM decides your other action. This action is Impeded (-2), however.
- **DEAFENED:** The hazard impairs your hearing. You suffer a -5 penalty to Perception (Hearing) tests and all other rolls where hearing is critically necessary.
- **DEFENSELESS:** You suffers a -5 penalty to your attack rolls and Defense, as the hazard makes it physically or mentally difficult to engage in combat.
- **PINNED:** The hazard traps you. You cannot move and lose one action of your choice per round until freed.

HARROWING HAZARD EFFECTS

5D6

- **BOUND:** The hazard's severe effects keep you from acting. You can take no physical actions while the effect lasts, but, unlike being unconscious, you can perceive your surroundings. This may represent physical restraint, paralysis, or being stunned.
- **WEAKENED:** The hazard can drain the traits that make you who you are. The hazard targets one of your abilities and reduces it by 1d6. Unlike many other hazard effects, this may be cumulative, reducing the

affected ability by an additional 1d6 with repeated or prolonged exposure. Lost points return at a rate determined by the GM, based on the nature of the hazard.

- **UNCONSCIOUS:** The hazard renders you unconscious. You are incapacitated for 2d6 minutes or until revived by any character using the Activate action.

MURDEROUS HAZARD EFFECTS

6D6

- **COMATOSE:** The hazard incapacitates you, but unlike being unconscious, you cannot be revived without considerable effort or expertise.
- **CONTROLLED:** The hazard controls your physical actions until stopped.

ENDING & REMOVING EFFECTS

The GM determines how long a special effect lasts based on the source hazard and other circumstances. This also factors into what you might do to get rid of it. Options include the following:

- **SIMPLE ACTION:** Some hazard effects can be reduced or eliminated without rolling dice. Smothering a fire will often put it out, for instance. Use this option when a hazard should only have a momentary effect.
- **ABILITY TEST:** Removing or reducing effects might require an ability test, such as Constitution (Stamina) for effects caused by injuries or health conditions, Strength (Might) for a heavy hazard that must be physically removed, Dexterity (Acrobatics) for effects that can be avoided by dodging, or Willpower (Self-Discipline) to shake off attacks on your thinking or emotions. If hazards with these characteristics can't be immediately avoided, the GM sets an interval between tests. If the hazard inflicts further damage, the next test should provide an opportunity to avoid it. By default, a hazard in action time that can be affected by an ability test calls for the test at the end of your turn. Some effects may demand expertise, represented by an Intelligence focus, to address. Beyond defining the required test, the focus might be required, such as when a disease requires Intelligence (Medicine) to cure.
- **ITEM, CONDITION, OR PERSON:** Some hazard effects might only be addressed with a particular item, person, or situation. A character infected with a genetically engineered disease might require special gene therapy to cure it, while a curse may linger until someone performs a dark, bloody ritual at a crossroads at midnight—or until the warlock who cast it relents.
- **TIME:** Most hazards end with the passage of time. Fires die. Diseases run their course. The question is whether affected characters survive.

DURATION & HAZARD CATEGORY

The longer a hazard's duration, the more potent it is. This is especially true for damaging hazards. A hazard that inflicts damage each round potentially inflicts a multiple of its base

damage, and its category should be rated based on the total damage it can inflict until the GM estimates characters can escape it. Other effects are usually not as aggravated by duration, but in most cases, if a hazard's effects look likely to persist for most of the encounter, increase the hazard's category by one rank. If the hazard lasts longer than a single encounter, rate its severity at two ranks higher or more.

TOXIC HAZARDS: POISONS & DISEASES

A character exposed to poison or a disease can suffer a variety of effects, which we'll collectively call toxic hazards or just toxins. (Note that in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, "toxin" usually just refers to a poison, so don't apply the definition here to usages in the core.) Use the following guidelines to introduce these hazards.

Like other hazards, poisons and diseases should have a reason to be part of the story. A disease could be the heart of the story, as characters deal with an epidemic or biological weapon, or a special threat imposed by an important environment or adversary. Poisons tend to be more personal threats used by would-be murderers; a random mugger would never have a poisoned knife.

ELEMENTS OF A TOXIN

Besides their deleterious effects (covered in **Effects and Recovery**) toxic hazards have the following elements:

- **VECTOR:** How is the toxin transmitted? You should define two aspects of its vector. The first is how the toxic agent physically spreads, such as through the air, types of physical contact, food, and so on. The second aspect of the vector (though this stretches the scientific definition) is where the toxin comes from in story terms and how it spreads through specific people, places, and things. This can be something as simple as a poisoned weapon or as complex as a normally benign virus that is made lethal when combined with a special immunosuppressive drug.
- **DETECTION:** How can you tell the toxin is present? For poisons, this might be a matter of smelling something odd or seeing a discoloration, in which case a Perception test using the appropriate sensory focus is required. For a disease or noticing the effects of a toxin in someone else, it will be an Intelligence (Medicine) test to detect the early stages of exposure or to discover what the toxin is from the symptoms. The TN for medical examinations is based on how obvious the effects are and how well-known the toxin is, modified by available equipment.

RESISTANCE

Two avenues of resistance are possible. First, a character might avoid the toxin at the vector stage. They don't drink the poisoned martini, or they wear a full biohazard suit when investigating ground zero for a bizarre mass infection. If avoiding the toxin is straightforward, it's just a matter of the character performing the correct action. In this case the critical

GRITTY TOXINS

In Gritty games, some poisons and diseases can't be treated. When you get them, you suffer the effects determined by the toxin, period. You may wish to research real poisons and illnesses and adapt their effects instead of using the systems here. In these cases, it becomes even more important to make the toxin relevant to the campaign's story, since the possible effects can be so severe. It also means detecting toxins and avoiding exposure are more important than resisting their effects.



form of resistance is detecting the hazard. Complex precautions (such as following the proper protocols for handling infectious agents) might require an Intelligence (Medicine) test, usually with a TN of 11 or less.

If these measures fail, then the character must rely on their ability to physically resist the toxin. Against a disease, this is a Constitution (Stamina) test. Against poison, it's a Constitution (Tolerance) test. The type of test (basic or advanced) depends on the toxic hazard and is covered in **Effects and Recovery**. Some toxic hazards may not be able to be resisted but may have their effects reduced by successful rolls. Patients who just rest gain a +2 bonus to rolls during that period, while patients engaged in strenuous exertion suffer a penalty determined by the GM. This doesn't usually apply when the toxin has instant effects, as often happens with poisoned weapons.

Fast-acting poisons may only require a basic test. Slow-acting poisons typically require advanced tests with time increments lasting from one round to one hour. Most diseases require advanced tests with time increments of one day or more. Poisons and diseases resisted with advanced tests run their course after a set number of tests, even if the patient fails all tests to resist. This number is usually equivalent to one-third of the success threshold, plus 1-5 additional increments.

Otherwise, the toxin's effects cease when a character succeeds at a basic test or meets the advanced test's success threshold, depending on the test required.

EFFECTS AND RECOVERY

Like other hazards, toxins impose a combination of damage and hazard effects, such as those described previously in this chapter. If attempting to resist with a basic test, failure imposes all effects over a short period of time. If an advanced test is required, divide the effects and damage across failed time increments. Failing the roll for that increment imposes damage and other effects. Effects typically last until the patient reaches the success threshold or the maximum number of increments passes. The character cannot heal damage caused by the toxin during any time increment where they failed a resistance roll (though they can heal damage from other sources).

Calculate the hazard's category based on the worst possible effects of the toxin—what would happen if every roll to resist it failed. Drop the category by half (round up or down based on your discretion) if the character resists across multiple rolls in an advanced test. Increase it by +1 for every 2 points the test (or advanced test roll) TN is above 11.

Medical aid addresses symptoms and speeds recovery. An Intelligence (Medicine) test can be used on the patient's behalf as an extra test or roll in an advanced test to resist in the same time increment. The TN depends on the rarity and intensity of the toxin. A character with the Master degree of the Advanced Medicine talent can usually cure a disease completely if they successfully address its effects, halting the need for further rolls.

The long-term effects of toxins are up to the GM but, like the toxin itself, should have a role in the story. These can be represented by character challenges (see CHAPTER 1: CHARACTERS).

EXAMPLE TOXIN

Necrorattlers are deadly snakes that infest the forests of the Brass Lightning setting. One of them bites Amy as she walks through the wild looking for Indra's camp. The snake's venom is infused with a flesh-eating bacterium, and those who die of it have been known to shamble out of their graves!

The GM decides the necrorattler's venom is a toxin that requires a TN 13 Constitution (Tolerance) advanced test to beat with a success threshold of 15, but eventually runs its course in seven days. Its effects in one-day increments follow.

- **First Failed Increment:** 1d6 damage
- **Second Failed Increment:** The character becomes nauseated
- **Third Failed Increment:** 1d6 damage
- **Fourth Failed Increment:** The character becomes confused.
- **Fifth Failed Increment:** 1d6 damage
- **Sixth Failed Increment:** No further effects but damage and other effects persist.
- **Seventh Failed Increment:** No further effects but damage and other effects persist.

Amy fails three times over four days. Her one successful roll on day 1 nets 4 points toward the success threshold, but she becomes nauseated and suffers 7 points of damage, which she can't heal until she meets the success threshold of 15. She stumbles out of the wild into Indra's camp. Indra starts treating her. The GM sets Indra's Intelligence (Medicine) TN at 13. On day 5, Amy and Indra both succeed, contributing 2 and 3 points to the success threshold, respectively (9 points total when combined with Amy's previous success). This gives Amy a chance to heal the damage she suffered, and she can rest in the camp, gaining +2 to her rolls. On the last day, both succeed again and contribute 4 and 3 points to the success threshold. This totals 16, which exceeds the 15 required. Amy recovers.

FATIGUE

People cannot sustain a continuous level of effort and must rest. Some hazards tax the characters' reserves of energy and impose the fatigued effect. This resembles the power fatigue arcanists and psychics might suffer from using their powers in some campaigns (see the optional rules for fatigue in CHAPTER 6 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*). The following rules extend this to other tasks and also revise and expand the rules in the *Basic Rulebook*.

FATIGUE CHECKS

If you use this optional system, players must make Fatigue Tests when their characters complete a period of significant exertion. These periods include the following:

- A combat encounter
- Walking 8 hours with a light load or 4 hours with a heavy load

- A time increment in a physically demanding advanced test, including a Chase Test on foot or using muscle-powered vehicles
- 16 hours of intense labor that is not especially physically demanding or 12 hours of physical work (such as factory work)
- Going 24 hours without sleep
- Other strenuous periods determined by the GM

Excessive fatigue can be lethal, so the GM should only invoke it when it would be a suitable dramatic threat, such as in an extended chase or wilderness survival challenge.

FATIGUE TEST ROLL

After the end of one of the intervals listed under **Fatigue Checks**, the affected character's player makes a Fatigue Test. If the test is triggered by a muscle-powered chase, the test uses an applicable Constitution-based focus, such as Constitution (Running), Constitution (Propelling), or Constitution (Swimming). In all other cases, the test uses Constitution (Stamina).

A Fatigue Test's target number is based on exactly how strenuous the period of exertion is. In most cases, the TN is 11. In the case of tests triggered by advanced test increments lasting just one round (such as for a Chase Test in action time), drop the typical TN to 8. For longer or more strenuous periods of exertion, the TN might be 13 or higher.

If the player fails the test, their character acquires 1 degree of fatigue.

FATIGUE DEGREES

Fatigue is measured in degrees. For each failed test, the character's fatigue goes up one degree. Multiple failed tests accumulate degrees on a common track, and a character can't gain the same degree twice. A fresh character failing two Fatigue Tests from two different sources would become winded, then fatigued. If you use fatigue for extraordinary powers, degrees gained from their use stack with degrees gained from other sources. The fatigue degrees and their effects follow.

- **WINDED:** The character has a -1 penalty to all tests and cannot Charge. The character cannot use the Run/Chase action on foot or in muscle-powered vehicles, except to remain in an existing chase.
- **FATIGUED:** The character has a -2 penalty to all tests and cannot Charge. The character cannot use the Run/Chase action on foot or in muscle-powered vehicles, except to remain in an existing chase, and moves at half their normal Speed.
- **EXHAUSTED:** The character is nearly spent. Exhausted characters have a -3 penalty to all tests, move at half their normal speed, and cannot Run, participate in muscle-powered chases, or Charge. Additionally, if the character loses more than half their Health while exhausted, they become unconscious for 1d6 hours or until restored to greater than half their maximum Health. Six hours of unconsciousness due to exhaustion has the same effect as 6 hours of sleep.



- **DYING:** The character's Health drops to 0; they begin dying. If restored to at least 1 Health, the character falls unconscious but remains stable. The character regains consciousness in 1d6 hours and drops to the exhausted degree. Until the character heals to more than half their maximum Health, any subsequent injury will produce unconsciousness as per the exhausted degree.

REMOVING FATIGUE

Rest removes fatigue. Beyond the instances noted in the fatigue degrees themselves, you can reduce fatigue in the following ways:

- **BREATHER:** If you take a 10-minute breather (see CHAPTER 2 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*) instead of a 5-minute breather, it will reduce the fatigued degree to winded, or the winded degree to nothing, in addition to granting its other beneficial effects.
- **MEDICAL ATTENTION:** A successful TN 9 Intelligence (Medicine) test representing an hour of care (rehydration, addressing sprains, and so on) removes 1 degree of fatigue, as long as the character has at least 1 Health point. This method can be used multiple times.
- **SLEEP:** 6 hours of sleep removes 1 degree of fatigue unless the character is at the dying degree. Characters who sleep also recover Health as they normally would.

These recovery methods are cumulative.

FEAR & HORROR

Heroes often endure high levels of fear with gritted teeth and fierce determination in the face of danger, but some campaigns may benefit from more detailed guidelines on handling it. For harder-core horror campaigns, whether that be Gritty tales of tracking serial killers or the extremes of supernatural horror in all modes, try adding the following additional rules for fear and horror.

FEAR

Fear is the mounting feeling that something is about to go terribly wrong, without true certainty that it will or a full understanding of the threat. In these rules, fear represents *suspense*. It's not exclusive to the horror genre; tense situations infest other types of stories, too.

FEAR RATING

In campaigns where these rules are in effect, every character has a fear rating. It rises and falls through play, starting at 0. Events may cause it to rise as high as 5.

Characters increase their fear ratings by being startled; exposed to ominous, gory, or strange phenomena; and made aware of danger to themselves or people they care about. When an opportunity to increase fear occurs, make a Will-

FEAR TARGET NUMBERS

TN	DIFFICULTY	EXAMPLE
7	Routine	Unexpected exposure to gore online or in print; ominous phenomena (doors slamming on their own, lights going out)
9	Easy	A credibly threatening letter or online communication; an unexpected scream
11	Average	An attack by a superior-looking force; indirect, weird events (a voice whispers "Get Out," walls ooze a substance that <i>might</i> be explainable, uncanny human shapes appear in the mist)
13	Challenging	Unexpected exposure to gore or death; a casual ally is threatened
15	Hard	Death of a valued companion, witnessed directly or afterward by discovering the body (PC, positive Relationship Bond); unmistakably supernatural threatening phenomena (blood spelling "YOU WILL DIE" on the walls, a monster roaring in the distance)
17	Formidable	Unusual gore or mass death; exposure to a threatening population (townsfolk with pitchforks); a monster that attacks in basically understandable ways (a chainsaw, teeth and claws)
19	Imposing	Weird supernatural attacks; enormous monsters or phenomena; the limits of what humans can process
21	Nigh Impossible	Indescribable phenomena

power (Morale) test for events in action time or Willpower (Courage) when the event occurs during narrative time. The more severe the situation, the higher the TN. Use the examples in the **Fear Target Numbers table** as a guideline for Fear Test TNs. If you fail the test, you panic, as described later in this section. If the Stunt Die is higher than your current fear rating, you also gain 1 new degree of fear.

You can choose to swallow your panic, with increased psychological consequences. In that case, you don't panic, but you *automatically* gain 1 degree of fear, regardless of your current rating.

PANIC

Failing a Fear Test generates panic. Panic lasts a number of rounds equal to the character's fear rating or until something puts a stop to it in the GM's estimation or as noted in these rules. Panic triggers the fight-or-flight response. Which response occurs? That's up to the GM.

If there's nothing to attack, a panicked character flees. Sometimes "fighting" means destroying an object or changing the situation causing the fear, such as smashing a mirror that displays a horrific face – and then every other reflective thing they can get their hands on, just to be sure.

If it could go either way, an even result on the failed test's Stunt Die indicates flight, while an odd number indicates fight. The GM determines what is or is not allowed during these moments of response, but anything requiring an Intelligence-based test is usually forbidden. Otherwise, panicked characters gain +2 to tests related to either fighting or fleeing, but -2 to all other tests, including fighting if they're fleeing or vice versa.

THE EFFECTS OF FEAR

Increasing fear puts a character on high alert. As the character's fear increases in severity, they become vigilant and agitated. Fear's degrees, severity, and effects are listed on the **Fear Degrees table**. Effects are cumulative, except when increases to existing effects are noted.

FEAR DEGREES

DEGREE	SEVERITY	EFFECTS
1	Nervous	Your alertness wanders into paranoia. Gain a +1 to Perception tests, but -1 to Intelligence tests.
2	Anxious	You shake with fear. Gain +1 to Dexterity (Initiative) tests, but -1 to Accuracy and Fighting tests.
3	Watchful	You see danger hiding in every corner. The bonus and penalty to Perception and Intelligence increase to +2 and -2, respectively.
4	Afraid	They're coming! The bonus and penalty to Dexterity (Initiative) and Fighting/Accuracy increase to +2 and -2, respectively. You cannot sleep until your fear drops to 3 or lower.
5	Terrified	It's too much. Make a TN 13 Willpower (Faith) test, or gain a degree of Horror (see Horror). Each time a Terrified character would gain another degree of fear, they make this test again instead.

REMOVING FEAR

Characters lower their fear in the following ways:

- **GETTING AWAY:** Putting significant distance (in the GM's estimation) between the character and the most recent source of fear lowers it by 1 degree.
- **SAFE BREATHER:** If the character has 5 minutes where no source of fear is present, they can try to rationalize their way out of the worst of their frightened state by making a TN 13 Willpower (Self-Discipline or Faith) test. Success removes 1 degree of fear. Another character can attempt to reassure them with a TN 13 Communication (Leadership or Persuasion) test, where a success also removes 1 degree of fear. Characters can benefit from both tests but

cannot attempt more than one at a time. You must choose between helping yourself or someone else.

- **SLEEP:** 6 hours of uninterrupted sleep removes 1 degree of fear. Characters at the Afraid degree cannot sleep.
- **TRIUMPH:** If a source of their fear is defeated or decisively driven off, a character loses 2 degrees of fear.

HORROR

Fear follows threats to a character's immediate safety, but horror rises when something damages the character's worldview. This can be as personal as discovering your close friend belongs to a vile extremist organization or as broad as meeting the sadistic child-god who created Earth and wants to torture humanity into extinction.

HORROR RATING

Like fear, horror has a rating of 0 to 5. Characters start at 0, but gain degrees in the following situations, called stresses, which are themselves rated from 1 to 6.

- **BETRAYAL:** A close ally, such as another protagonist or someone the character trusts due to a suitable Relationship Bond, reveals themselves to have acted

against the character. Betrayals without supernatural elements usually top out at stress rank 3. Optionally, you can instead base the stress rank on the Intensity of the Relationship Bond the character has with the betrayer.

- **HYPOCRISY:** The character betrays their own values, as encapsulated by their drive and personal moral sense. The examples in the **Horror Stresses** table represent threats to typically held values.
- **TERRIFIED:** The character attains the terrified degree of fear (see the **Fear Degrees** table). This is always a rank 5 stress.
- **WITNESSING:** The character witnesses a phenomenon that shows them their deeply held, most important beliefs about the world are wrong, or at least questionable. The stress increases due to both the magnitude and sheer weirdness of the accompanying realization.

The GM decides how often stresses come into effect. Generally, when one stress leads to a failed Horror Test, less severe examples are no longer effective for the rest of the session. For example, if you find out the world is a digital deception, the fact that your best friend is secretly a fascist doesn't seem so important. Each stress type has a rating from 1 to 6, as noted in the **Horror Stresses** table.

HORROR STRESSES

RANK	SEVERITY	EXAMPLES
1	Minor	BETRAYAL: You find out a close confidante has a double life as an assassin.
		HYPOCRISY: You commit a petty immoral act you'd end a friendship over if someone else did it.
		WITNESSING: You're a skeptic, but you see a ghost.
2	Moderate	BETRAYAL: Someone you trust is revealed to be your secret enemy.
		HYPOCRISY: You proactively hurt or terrify someone for "the greater good."
		WITNESSING: Monsters stalk humans in the city, but nobody else can see them.
3	Major	BETRAYAL: Someone close to you is part of a malevolent conspiracy that threatens many other people.
		HYPOCRISY: While under considerable pressure, you kill or torture someone.
		WITNESSING: The moon landings were real, but the <i>things</i> that came back only look like the original astronauts.
4	Arduous	BETRAYAL: Your beloved isn't human, and you have always been its unwitting slave.
		HYPOCRISY: You coldly commit premeditated murder or torture to achieve a practical goal.
		WITNESSING: City officials give blood sacrifices to the real rulers, whetting the fangs and tentacles of their betters.
5	Harrowing	TERRIFIED: The Terrified stress always occupies this position.
		BETRAYAL: A team of aliens pilots the body of the person you care about. Your relationship is a tourist attraction to them.
		HYPOCRISY: You kill or severely harm someone for pleasure, including the "righteous" pleasure of revenge.
6	Annihilating	WITNESSING: The world as you know it is a skin of illusion over the reality that this is Hell.
		BETRAYAL: The person you feel closest to tortures you as a criminal in a thousand digital realities, but in this one keeps you unharmed to set a baseline — they still hate you.
		HYPOCRISY: You commit a disgusting act intended to break your own moral center.
		WITNESSING: The true gods reveal themselves in their sanity-snapping forms.

HORROR DEGREES

DEGREE	SEVERITY	EFFECTS*
1	Unsettled	2 ranks of distortions, which must both be devoted to the same distortion.
2	Shocked	3 ranks of distortions
3	Appalled	4 ranks of distortions
4	Overwhelmed	5 ranks of distortions
5	Shattered	6 ranks of distortions

* The character still accumulates fear but ignores its effects unless their fear rating is greater than their horror.

RISING HORROR

When a stress might have an effect, roll the Horror Test: a TN 13 Willpower (Faith) test for the character. A failed test grants a temporary distortion. (See **Distortions**.) However, if the test fails and the Stunt Die is equal to or less than the stress' rating, the character's horror rating increases by 1 instead. Horror rating increases impose lasting distortions.

When a horror stress would also provoke a Fear Test, make the Fear Test first and apply its effects before checking for horror. Note that a horror rating has one questionable benefit in that, hardened by their experiences, characters ignore the effects of fear when their fear degree is equal to or less than their horror. If fear is greater, the character suffers the full effects, and the character can still accumulate fear even if they aren't affected by it.

The **Horror Degrees** table notes the effects of horror by rating.

DISTORTIONS

When a character succumbs to horror, they gain distortions. A distortion is a change in how the character thinks and feels. They begin to base their beliefs, thought processes, and emotions on the implications of the disturbing information they've come to internalize. Distortions may also be the result of paranormal stresses and not simply psychological. In any event, they represent the phenomena portrayed in horror media, not real psychological trauma or mental illness.

A distortion chiefly acts as a new downfall added to the character's drive. When the character acts on their distortion, the GM should reward them as they would for any other behavior consistent with their drive. If you use the optional Conviction rules in **CHAPTER 1: CHARACTER CREATION** in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, this expands the situations in which the character might earn Conviction.

Distortions have ranks. At the Unsettled degree of horror, the character must devote 2 ranks to the same distortion. After that, the GM decides whether further degrees add ranks to existing distortions or inspire new rank 1 distortions.

No distortion can have more than 3 ranks. The ranks are as follows:

TEMPORARY DISTORTION

Temporary distortions manifest when a character fails a Horror Test but their horror rating doesn't go up. The distortion's effects last for 10 minutes per rank of the triggering stress. Temporary distortions don't become dormant but disappear after their duration is up.

LASTING, RANK 1 - SHORT-TERM DISTORTION

The distortion's effects last for 1 hour per rank of the triggering stress. It then becomes dormant.

LASTING, RANK 2 - LONG-TERM DISTORTION

The distortion's effects last for a number of days equal to the triggering stress's rank + the character's horror rating. It then becomes dormant.

LASTING, RANK 3 - INDEFINITE DISTORTION

The distortion lasts until the character's horror rating decreases, removing the degree that increased the distortion to this rank. It then becomes a dormant rank 2 distortion.



DISTORTION DURATION

Temporary distortions vanish when their durations expire, but when lasting distortions finish their durations, they do not disappear. Instead, they become dormant. An increase in horror rating that adds a rank to the distortion reactivates it. Distortions only disappear when the character's horror rating decreases. If it increases after decreasing, the GM decides whether regained ranks go to old distortions or new ones.

SUGGESTED DISTORTIONS

The following distortions are a brief sample of the possibilities. The GM should invent new ones or modify these to suit the stresses and horror-wracked characters involved. Note that many of these distortions might not be false—just unrecognized by most.

ECCENTRIC

Your personality has changed. The old you is submerged, too difficult to deal with, and perhaps even a danger to others. The new you? Well, that may be rough around the edges and given to odd habits, but you'll take anything to get away from who you once were.

MARKED

Whatever's behind the incident knows all about you. It or its agents follow you. They're planning something, and your days are numbered. You've seen glimpses and heard whispers of the plot against you. Why hasn't anyone else? You might surrender to your doom or load up with everything you need to fight.

OBSESSIVE

Something you saw just won't leave your head. It could be the missing person in a gruesome serial murder investigation or the toy piano in that haunted house. You make every effort to study your obsession. You collect mementos and follow people related to it.

OMINOUS

You have a sense of doom, and the signs are all around you. You're fated to come across symbols of your disastrous future. Perhaps self-sabotage is better than letting *them* get to you.

PESSIMISTIC

You failed to handle the reality in front of you and know you're not ready for the challenges ahead. You can argue for your own inferiority in detail, though you may not be alone but one of many worms, writhing beneath the harsh light of a greater truth.

PRESENCE

You see entities nobody else seems to notice. The phenomenon is consistent. You may be able to identify paranormal species or even specific individuals. Are they hiding from everyone else, or have you been granted the gift of being able to see them?

QUIET

There's no way to relay what you've experienced and who you are now to anyone else. You're done communicating, unless it's an absolute emergency.

RITUALISTIC

You came out of your experience knowing how to ward off the danger. You may need special equipment, words, gestures, or a sacred place, but once you organize the necessary forces, your personal ritual works. It doesn't matter if other people are skeptical.

SENSORY

You *know* things are present that nobody else can detect. You see, hear, and feel them. You have trouble telling the difference between the things only you sense and the reality shared by others.

TRANSFORMATIVE

You are *changing*. Your body looks increasingly unnatural to you. New parts manifest; familiar ones warp and vanish. Are other people seeing this? Are you frightened, or do you hail the new flesh? The GM decides.

UTOPIAN

What you experienced must be an exception to the order of things. The world is destined to become a better place: a bright future of the golden age, come again. You often fantasize about it. You might even think our shared reality is a dirty blanket concealing a true world of good people and Edenic splendor.

REMOVING HORROR

Lowering a character's horror rating isn't easy, but the following avenues are available.

- **PEACE AND THERAPY:** A horror sufferer may perform an advanced Willpower (Faith for supernatural phenomena, Courage for mundane sources of horror) test with a time increment of 1 week to reduce their rating by 1. The success threshold is equal to their current rating x 3. Once successful, the character may repeat the process for the next degree, attempting multiple advanced tests over many weeks. Each test requires a peaceful environment. Any week featuring stress is one where test rolls can't be performed, and any exposure to the source of the character's horror undoes any accumulated progress on a single test, though it can be tolerated between tests. Another character may play the part of therapist, using Communication (Investigation) or Intelligence (Medicine) to make this a cooperative advanced test where the therapist is a force multiplier. See CHAPTER 8: MASTERING THE RULES in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* for more information about cooperating on advanced tests.
- **MEANINGFUL JOURNEYS:** The GM may design adventures where dropping in horror rating is a reward. These are journeys to confront the horror, symbolically or literally. Each stage may reduce the character's rating by 1 degree.



STUNTS

This chapter explores more options for using stunts in your game, introduces several new types of stunts, and gives examples you can use at the table or adjust to create custom stunts of your own.

WHY STUNTS?

Modern AGE provides the basic rundown of what role stunts play in the game. This section delves deeper into why stunts are important and how you can use them to enhance your gaming experience.

DRAMATIC PUNCTUATION

At its most basic, a stunt is an opportunity for your character to show off. Stunts encourage describing what your character is doing and how they're doing it as part of the action that generates the SP. Thus, a stunt is an inspirational cue to help you come up with a cool description for their action beyond its basic mechanical function, which brings the story to life and prompts other players and the GM to do the same in response. In this way, stunts facilitate dynamic group roleplay, turning what could otherwise become a disjointed series of dice rolls—especially in action time—into a narrative flow of cause and effect. If the GM uses the Skirmish stunt to say the roguish pirate captain swings on a yardarm, shouting obscenities as they kick you overboard, that's a lot more fun to react to on your next turn than if the GM told you the pirate moved your character four yards to your

right! Stunts give actions dramatic flair and make moments at the table more memorable.

Stunts also help fill in the gaps where a *protagonist* excels at something the *player* doesn't, and inspire options you might not otherwise have considered. For instance, choosing When a Plan Comes Together means you don't actually have to spend time coming up with the specific details of a plan; you can just say your character did it and reap the benefits. Your character gets to look like a canny badass, and you get to help your fellow players succeed without having to pause the game.

SPECIFICITY

In *Modern AGE*, one important role stunts play is to act as subsystems and special maneuvers. The basic system is, at its core, pretty simple. With stunts, you can accomplish all kinds of complex things that otherwise don't have rules attached to them, such as grappling, automatic fire, con games, and deals with the devil. You can generate advantages for the heroes, disadvantages for the villains, and dramatic, table-turning events to spice the game up. In this way, stunts give the players a measure of narrative control, helping to twist and turn the story in the directions they like.

Stunts provide structure and distinction to things that might otherwise be difficult to pin down, such as determining the specific outcome of a conversation or differentiating the narrative effects of two mechanically similar actions. *Modern AGE* mentions the possibility of assigning your character some favored stunts—this not only helps stave off choice paralysis,



but establishes your character as someone who impresses others with that particular arsenal of signature tactics. This helps create more iconic characters and makes players feel good about their heroes' unique roles in the story.

GROUP PARTICIPATION

Stunts facilitate teamwork among players and keep the routine of rolling dice feeling fresh and dynamic. Some stunts directly benefit other heroes, which helps the group feel like a real team. Because stunts are generated by rolling doubles, they reward everyone at the table for being invested in each roll's result. It's exciting to watch the dice and hope for doubles so that someone can perform some extra derring-do or introduce a dramatic turn of events!

Beyond this, the combination of back-and-forth stunting between heroes and antagonists lets you create a bit of a tactical game. NPCs can use stunts just as well as protagonists can, which keeps your opposition and the world around your characters as varied and interesting as the actions they themselves take. This prompts you to adjust your own tactics to keep up. Combining stunts also allows for "Eureka!" moments in which you realize that following *this* stunt up with *that* one, or responding with a certain stunt after an opponent uses one to put your character at a disadvantage, creates an interesting interaction between systems that's fun to exploit. Discovering these synergies helps players feel more involved.

GENERAL STUNTS

Modern AGE breaks stunts down into three major categories: action, exploration, and social. These divide into subcategories based on specific kinds of actions, like social stunts that affect character attitudes or action stunts that are all about grappling. While the specificity of these lists is helpful for choosing from the array of varied stunts available, it still takes time or familiarity to drill down to the kind of stunt you want on a given test. *Modern AGE* also presents core stunts for each category, for when you just want to grab a quick stunt and go. Choosing these over and over again gets repetitive. Finally, even the many stunts listed there can't possibly cover everything a player might like to do, so you may want to customize stunts from time to time.

A *general stunt* is a more free-form one that presents a basic mechanic and lets you fill in the specifics depending on the situation. When you do a general stunt, as with any stunt, explain how your character performs it. Because these stunts are less defined and more context dependent, this description should be a little more detailed. On the other hand, this gives players a bit more control over the narrative, making the outcome of a test more of a collaboration between player and GM. The GM can use the **General Stunts** table as an alternative or supplement to the ones in *Modern AGE*.

This table *could* replace all other stunt tables whenever anyone makes a test, if you want selecting stunts to be quick and easy but still want a wide variety of mechanical effects. However,

GENERAL STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1-3	BOOST: You gain +1 per SP spent to the next test you make related to this one before the end of your next turn (in action time) or the encounter (in narrative time). This benefit can be transferred to an ally and will follow the same guidelines.
1-3	OBSTRUCTION: Inflict -1 per SP spent to the next test an opponent makes related to this one before the end of their next turn (in action time) or the encounter (in narrative time).
1	ACUMEN: Make a Perception (choose appropriate focus) test with the same TN as the test you just made to learn one useful piece of information about your target or the current situation. You may choose Acumen multiple times per roll.
2+	PREPARATION: For every 2 SP spent, gain +1 SP on your next test related to this one during this encounter.
2+	DISADVANTAGE: You and your target make opposed rolls with the same ability + focus as the action that generated this stunt; if you win, the opponent suffers a minor disadvantage, such as falling down or briefly losing access to a resource or piece of equipment at hand. For 3 SP, this disadvantage lasts for the rest of the encounter or until the opponent successfully takes a TN 15 action to remedy it. For 5 SP, it's permanent – such as destroying a piece of equipment completely or turning a friend into a foe.
2	PROTECTION: The next time an ally would suffer a negative consequence in this encounter, you suffer it instead.
2	PROVOCATION: One present NPC of your choice targets you instead of someone else with their next action during this encounter.
2	RESOURCEFULNESS: Negate any situational penalties you would suffer from one kind of source for the rest of the encounter. You may choose this stunt multiple times for multiple sources per encounter, but only once per roll.
2	SPEED: You complete your test in half the time it would otherwise take, in narrative time.
3	CLASH: Your target must exceed your total on this test to succeed the next time they make a test in this encounter, as though you opposed it directly.
3-4	DENIAL: Choose one character present. They must immediately make a test with an ability + focus appropriate to opposing your action; if they fail to exceed your total on the test that generated this stunt, they may not target or affect you with the next action they take during this encounter. For 4 SP instead, <i>no one</i> present may do so if you succeed on a TN 13 test with an appropriate ability + focus.
3-4	IMPROVISATION: On your next test in this encounter, you may substitute any other focus for the same ability for the one the roll would normally require. For 4 SP, you can substitute one from <i>any</i> ability instead.
3	INTERVENTION: Another character may use your ability + focus total instead of their own on their next test related to this one during this encounter.
3	MULTIPLY: Make the same roll that generated this stunt again immediately, and apply the original test's effects to one additional target, or if the GM approves, on a number of other valid targets up to the value on the Stunt Die of this new roll. If the original test's target made an opposing roll or applied resistance of some kind, the new targets may do so also.
3	POSITIONING: The action that generated this stunt moves its target into a position you choose relative to other characters or objects in the target's immediate vicinity. If this movement would obviously disadvantage the target, such as leading them into a trap, you must make an appropriate test vs. one the target makes to resist.
3	RISK: Regain the SP you spent on this stunt, plus 1 more, to spend on any other stunts that fit your action. In exchange, suffer a major drawback with consequences that persist beyond this encounter.
3	RIVALRY: Gain a +1 to all opposed tests vs. one character of your choice for the rest of the encounter. For 4 SP, gain the bonus vs. <i>all</i> characters present at the time of this test instead.
3	SYNERGY: An ally immediately makes the same test you just made or a related one before anyone else can react, with the same target if applicable.
4	DEFLECTION: The next time you would suffer a negative consequence, another character of your choice who could reasonably suffer it instead does so.
4	MANIPULATION: One NPC present performs one action they might already reasonably perform immediately after the result of your test takes effect. You choose the NPC and the action.
5	AREA OF EFFECT: When you make a test with a specific target, immediately make the same test again but halve your ability + focus total, rounded down. Apply this new test to everyone in your immediate vicinity or the immediate vicinity of your original target, including allies but excluding the original target. If the original target made an opposing roll or resisted the action somehow, every new target may do so also.
5	GOOD FORTUNE: At some point before the end of the encounter, a particular kind of NPC you choose appears on the scene. The GM determines their identity, abilities, attitude, and situation.

this means putting the onus on the group to basically create a new stunt each time. Even if you use general stunts this way, use stunts from the full list whenever a talent or other rule calls one out in particular, such as the Attractive talent making the Flirt stunt cheaper.

Alternatively, the group can use the full tables some or most of the time and use the General Stunts table when those tables don't cover something specific a player wants to do or when they want a general effect without having to comb through multiple tables to find the right stunt for it. Players can choose on the fly whether they want to use a stunt in the core book or consult this table for a given test.

You can also use this table as the basis for writing your own stunts. Tailor the general mechanical effect to the specific circumstance in which you want it to apply, and then tweak the effects to match. Because the stunts listed here are general by design, some of the costs are adjusted to reflect their versatile natures. If you use this table to create custom stunts, keep in mind that if a stunt here allows more flexibility or applies in more circumstances than a more specific version of the stunt would ever allow, the specific version should cost 1 or 2 SP fewer than the listed cost.

SITUATIONAL STUNTS

On the other end of the specificity spectrum, *situational stunts* are only available under certain circumstances. These include stunts that only certain kinds of actions can generate (such as power or melee stunts), that require the detailed version of a system (such as investigations or social encounters), and that only apply in a Cinematic or Gritty game. Other AGE games present situational stunts as well, although they don't usually call them out that way.

This section introduces two new categories of situational stunts: *environmental stunts*, which only apply in a special location or environment, and *thematic stunts*, which apply in particular genres or settings.

Whenever these stunts apply, the GM should let players know by writing them down on cards or an easily accessible list that's visible to everyone at the table. Then, when the situational stunts are no longer available, cross them off the list or remove the cards and replace them with new ones for the new situation.

LARGE CROWD STUNTS

SP Cost	STUNT
1-3	LOST IN THE CROWD: Gain +1 per SP spent on your next test to hide among or blend in with the crowd during this encounter. (<i>General Stunt:</i> Boost)
4	SHOUT "FIRE!": When you make a social test, you follow it up with a related shout, brief speech, or flashy action that gets people's attention and prompts them to act en masse in a way they could reasonably have acted on their own, given impetus. This only affects the masses, not individual important NPCs, unless those NPCs would waive their opposition. (<i>General Stunt:</i> Manipulation)

CITY STREETS STUNTS

SP Cost	STUNT
1	WALKING THE BEAT: You know this neighborhood—and its regular scum—like the back of your hand. Make a Communication (Investigation) test with the same TN as the test you just made to learn one important connection a character present has in this city. You may choose this stunt multiple times per roll. (<i>General Stunt:</i> Acumen)
3	PARKOUR: You move with panache among clustered buildings with fire escapes and narrow alleys with tall fences. When you make a Chase Test in a foot chase or another kind of non-attack physical test, one opponent must exceed your total on this test to succeed the next time they make the same test in this encounter, as though you opposed it directly. (<i>General Stunt:</i> Clash)

CLOCKWORK ENGINE STUNTS

SP Cost	STUNT
1-3	PERFECT TIMING: You time your test just so, at a moment when the turning gears, dangling ropes, and clanging bells work in your allies' favor. For each SP spent, an ally gains +1 SP on their next attempt to navigate, attack, or survive. You may choose Perfect Timing multiple times per test for different allies. (<i>General Stunt:</i> Boost)
3	MONKEY WRENCH: If you have the Intelligence (Tinkering) or Strength (Machining) focus, regain the SP you spent on this stunt, plus 1 more, to spend on any other stunts that fit your action. With this test, you halt the clockwork's motion long enough to do what you must, but at the end of the next round, anyone (including you) within 5 yards of your location when you used this stunt takes 3d6 damage as the contraption whirls out of control. (<i>General Stunt:</i> Risk)
3	WHIRLIGIG: You and your target make opposed Dexterity (Acrobatics) rolls; if you win, you force them onto a turning gear. They immediately move 2 yards away from you and can't target you with their next action unless they take 1d6 damage first to brave a shortcut back through the gears. (<i>General Stunt:</i> Denial/Positioning)

This chapter provides lists of example environmental and thematic stunts that you can use in your game immediately or as models to build your own. To show you how to do this, every stunt example provided here is based on one of the general stunts from the **General Stunts** table. Each one started with a general stunt—listed with each example—and then was customized so it would fit the narrative and mechanical demands of the new stunt.

ENVIRONMENTAL STUNTS

Many environments afford heroes unique opportunities. For instance, a character in the middle of a crowd could cause mass panic or disappear in plain sight. A character sailing on the ocean could toss someone overboard or incite a mutiny. Environmental stunts codify these opportunities so that players feel inspired to use their characters' environs in creative ways, and GMs can easily adjudicate the effects of these stylistic (and stylish!) actions.

Whenever a new encounter begins, the GM should consider whether the environment the heroes are in provides any unique stunt opportunities for them. What's special about a forest that allows advantages or actions unavailable elsewhere? What's special about a moving train? A zero-gravity environment? The roof of a thirty-story skyscraper? With this now in mind, use the general stunt list or other stunts from *Modern AGE* as templates to customize a few stunts for

that environment. Two or three stunts for each environment is a good number.

THEMATIC STUNTS

Unlike environmental stunts, a thematic stunt usually applies to an entire campaign, based on a combination of the game's genre and a setting. These stunts help emphasize certain prevalent aspects of the setting and encourage players to engage in shenanigans supporting its themes. For example, a noir detective story should feel different from a high-flying steam-punk adventure. In the former, you expect ill-fated romances under dreary skies and tragic betrayals on the quest for hard-boiled justice. In the latter, you expect gizmos and gadgets to perform unlikely feats of science on the regular.

Each campaign generally only has one or two thematic stunts. If your story visits alternate universes or has another premise under which the whole paradigm shifts every few sessions, each universe might have its own, but you might have an overarching one to represent the themes of alternate-universe stories themselves, too.

Thematic stunts may apply all the time, or they may only be relevant in occasional, iconic moments. For instance, in the noir example described earlier, a stunt that appends a sarcastic, cutting remark to an action is useful all the time, but one that reveals who the regretful backstabber is may only be appropriate once or twice in a given arc.

ZERO-GRAVITY STUNTS

SP Cost	Stunt
3	EXTENDED ARC: When you make an attack with the Thrown or Grenades focus, make the same roll again immediately and apply the attack that generated this stunt to one additional target; this may exceed the weapon's range by yards equal to 10 times the Stunt Die's value on this new roll. (<i>General Stunt: Multiply</i>)
3	OBJECTS IN MOTION: When you make an attack or other physical test, you knock your opponent backward as far as they can go before they hit an obstacle. If the test has no target, or the target was an inanimate object, you may choose to go flying instead. (<i>General Stunt: Positioning</i> .)

MASQUERADE BALL STUNTS

SP Cost	Stunt
4	BEHIND THE MASK: When you take a social action that will worsen someone's attitude toward you—by design or by accident—you misdirect them into thinking another masked partygoer said the offending words. Their attitude toward another character of your choice worsens instead. (<i>General Stunt: Deflection</i>)
4	MYSTERIOUS STRANGER: The object of your test becomes fascinated with you and follows you anywhere you lead during this encounter, until you fail a test that targets them. (<i>General Stunt: Manipulation</i>)
5	ON THE LIST: Specify a kind of honorific or organization. An NPC of the GM's choice with Reputation or Membership to match happens to be attending the ball, and you run into them within a few minutes, or a few rounds if your action leads directly to action time. The GM determines their identity, abilities, attitude, and situation. (<i>General Stunt: Good Fortune</i>)

POURING RAIN STUNTS

SP Cost	Stunt
1-3	SPLISH-SPLASH: As part of your test, you splash water into your opponent's face, inflicting a -1 per SP spent to the next test they make before the end of their next turn. (<i>General Stunt: Obstruction</i>)
2	MAKESHIFT UMBRELLA: You grab something nearby or position yourself to mitigate the worst of the storm; negate any rain-based situational penalties you would suffer from loud noise, low visibility, or slippery mud. (<i>General Stunt: Resourcefulness</i>)

EXAMPLE THEMATIC STUNTS

SP COST	GENRE/SETTING	STUNT
2+	Adventure	PUNCH IT! You soup up the engine, hitch a ride behind a passing truck, or tack into the wind just so. Your action upgrades the velocity class of the means you're using in a chase by 1 for one turn per 2 SP spent. (<i>General Stunt: Positioning</i>)
2+	Cyberpunk	INTERFACE: When making any Communication or Intelligence test, you make a direct link between your mind and a computer. For the rest of the encounter, you can take actions with these abilities in action time that would normally require narrative time to perform; each basic or opposed test takes a number of turns equal to 4 - 1 per 2 SP spent, minimum 1. Individual rolls of advanced tests with these abilities take one turn each. (<i>General Stunt: Speed</i>)
2+	Swashbuckling	DARING SWING: Until the end of your next turn, gain +2 Speed. Incidental actions you take as part of a move action, such as climbing into a ship's rigging or leaping to swing from a chandelier, don't consume half your Speed. You may spend additional SP from this test to gain an additional +1 Speed per SP spent. (<i>General Stunt: Positioning</i>)
3	Alien Conspiracy	JUST A WEATHER BALLOON: You step in to cover up someone else's blunder. Another character may use your Communication (Deception) total instead of their own on their next test related to this one during this encounter. (<i>General Stunt: Intervention</i>)
3	Caper	CONTROLLED MAYHEM: On a test that uses a focus you possess and an ability you have at 3 or higher, an ally immediately makes a different test that builds on the one you just made before anyone else can react, as long as you and your ally pursue the same goal. (<i>General Stunt: Synergy</i>)
3	Postapocalyptic	THE MOST TOYS: You use your action to hoard resources or valuables – what passes for valuable these days, anyway. On your next test in this encounter that would require a social focus, you may substitute your current Resources instead. (<i>General Stunt: Improvisation</i>)
3	Procedural	FORENSIC INSIGHT: If you unearth a clue when examining a crime scene, a body, or another piece of evidence during a detailed investigation, any ally present may use your Intelligence + any focus total instead of their own on their next test to pursue the same mystery. (<i>General Stunt: Intervention</i>)
4	Gothic Horror	WELL-TIMED STORM: A dramatic peal of thunder and a lightning strike accompany your action, giving everyone pause. Make a TN 13 Communication (Performance) test; if you succeed, no one present may target or affect you with the next action they take during this encounter. (<i>General Stunt: Denial</i>)
4	Paranormal	VENGEFUL INTERLOPER: When you successfully oppose an offensive test against you with this roll, whether it's an attack, an accusation, or intimidation, the event attracts the attention of a vengeful spirit that doesn't like those who do whatever your opponent tried to do to you. It appears and immediately takes an offensive action of some kind against your opponent. It lingers for the rest of the encounter but isn't loyal to you and does whatever it wants. (<i>General Stunt: Good Fortune</i>)
5	Spy	IT WAS YOU ALL ALONG: Your action reveals that one NPC present is a traitor to their apparent loyalties and was working for the other side the whole time – whether it's yours or the enemy's. (<i>General Stunt: Good Fortune</i>)
5	Steampunk	I MEANT TO DO THAT: As part of your test, you meddle with one of your opponent's devices. You and your target make opposed Intelligence (Tinkering) rolls. If you win, the next time the opponent fails a roll while using or interacting with the device, it explodes. This destroys the device permanently and deals 1d6 damage to the opponent. (<i>General Stunt: Disadvantage</i>)
5	Urban Fantasy	PROPHECY FULFILLED: Your actions were foretold centuries before you were born. This action was the portent; what happens next is destined. Your target must succeed at a Willpower (Courage) test opposed by your Willpower (Faith). If you win, choose a consequence that will result from your target's next action related to this one. It can't negate the effects of their success or cause their death, but it can be otherwise dire. On their next action, they choose whether to succeed without rolling and suffer the consequence or fail automatically. (<i>General Stunt: Disadvantage</i>)



EXTRAORDINARY ABILITIES

CHAPTER 6 of the *Modern AGE* rulebook describes two types of extraordinary powers: arcane and psychic. These are similar in that both are divided into different talents, each with its own focus, and used in much the same way. Each of the extraordinary powers is also fueled by power points. This chapter looks at two types of **extraordinary abilities**, which are a different sort of extraordinary character option, suitable for some types of *Modern AGE* characters and settings. These are enhancements (innate extraordinary abilities) and extraordinary items.

ENHANCEMENTS

Enhancements are innate powers extraordinary characters possess because of who (or what) they are (in fact, characters with enhancements are generally called exceptionals). Enhancements involve free access to certain stunts or access to special stunts available only to characters with that particular enhancement, occasionally allowing those characters to do exceptional things. Enhancements tend to supplement mundane abilities. Anyone can run, but a character with the right enhancement can run much, much faster than a typical human. The exact nature of enhancements, and what the characters can do with them, can vary widely.

SOURCES

Where do enhancements come from? They arise from a variety of sources, depending on the nature of the setting.

Just allowing extraordinary abilities in a setting means there's *something* about it that's unusual in comparison to the mundane world, whether that's the existence of magic, advanced technology, or just some sort of weirdness allowing for exceptionals to exist. The most common sources for extraordinary abilities include the following:

BIOLOGY

The character has an unusual biology or physiology, due to heritage, genetic mutation, or deliberate biological or genetic modifications. This can include things from alien-human hybrids to genetic mutants and biotech-enhanced individuals.

MAGIC

Some extraordinary abilities are provided by magic inherent in the character's being, either by virtue of a magical heritage or some innate blessing or enchantment. If magical creatures are included as protagonists in a setting, they might also have magical enhancements of some sort.

TECHNOLOGY

Advances in technology can grant characters different sorts of enhancements. These differ from technological extraordinary items (see **Extraordinary Items** in the latter half of this chapter) in that they are abilities embedded within the character's body or psyche. Technological enhancements might include cybernetic implants or replacement parts, or the

effects of enhancing drugs, perhaps provided by implanted glands or delivery pumps.

SUPERPOWER

“Superpower” is a catch-all term for an enhancement a character has acquired that has no clear source or mechanism; it’s simply an unusual thing the character can do. Superpowers are sometimes acquired by happenstance or accident, but might stem from strange encounters or incidents in a character’s background or adventures, such as exposure to otherworldly energies or alien materials.

OTHER SOURCES

Other sources of enhancements include things like divine blessings or miraculous gifts; focused personal energy such as chi or other terms for life force, mind-over-matter secrets, or esoteric training; inwardly focused psychic potential; and the like.

ACQUIRING ENHANCEMENTS

Where and how do characters get enhancements? As with extraordinary powers, that is largely up to the Game Master, depending on the style and nature of the game they are running. In general, enhancements substitute for some other game trait or benefit, much like extraordinary power talents substitute for regular talents. The GM should consider the following options and let the players know which ones are available.

BACKGROUND

Characters may acquire one or more enhancements in place of one or more of the benefits bestowed by their background. See **Custom Backgrounds** in CHAPTER 1 for a breakdown of background benefits. Similarly, when creating custom backgrounds for a setting, the GM may include one or more enhancements in place of a background benefit.

DRIVE

Characters may acquire one or more enhancements in place of one or more of the benefits bestowed by their drive. See **Custom Backgrounds** in CHAPTER 1 for a breakdown of benefits gained from drive.

TALENTS

When characters have the opportunity to gain a talent or a degree in an existing talent, they can choose an enhancement instead, so long as the enhancement is available.

LEVELING

When characters gain a level, they can choose to substitute an enhancement for one of their gained level benefits, outlined in **Leveling Improvements** in CHAPTER 1 of *Modern AGE*. The GM should approve the substitution, and generally characters are only allowed to acquire one enhancement per level.

SPECIALIZATIONS

To restrict enhancements, only allow players to choose them when they would be allowed to acquire a specialization in place of choosing a specialization talent. You may wish to limit characters to two enhancements, chosen at levels 4 and 12, or allow them to take up to six, at levels 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, and 16.

RESOURCES

If enhancements can be bestowed by technology, training, or other means, then it may be possible to simply buy them. Even then, however, chances are such enhancements do not come cheaply, and those able to provide them will charge whatever they think the market will bear.

REWARDS

Game Masters can grant one or more enhancements as a reward to characters at the conclusion of an adventure, much like other rewards.

AVAILABILITY

Just because a character has the game-mechanical means to substitute an enhancement for another game trait does not necessarily mean that enhancement is available as an option. The Game Master may rule that some enhancements require special access or have limited availability based on what best suits the setting and style of the game. For example, a character might have the option of adding a new cybernetic enhancement in place of a talent every time they get the opportunity to improve a talent, but they also need access to a hospital and a surgical team (or medical robot) and some pieces of cyberware might be restricted, requiring the character to call in favors or get someone to pull some strings.

The following are some ways in which enhancements may be available to heroes in a *Modern AGE* game.

BACKGROUND

Enhancements may be available to characters of certain backgrounds or social classes. While this tends to be most important during character creation, it can also come up in game play as characters improve and develop. For example, if there is a background where characters might have been exposed to certain mutagenic agents or forces that unlock certain extraordinary abilities, then they could have the potential to develop those abilities later on, even if they do not have them initially at 1st level. Similarly, access to or training for certain extraordinary abilities might only be available to characters of a particular social class in a setting.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in an organization provides access to that organization’s resources, which can potentially include enhancements and other extraordinary abilities. For example, a character who belongs to a mystical sect might learn certain secret techniques, while a higher-ranking member of an agency or military organization might receive enhancements in order to carry out more dangerous and sensitive

missions. Membership is an effective means both for the GM to control access to certain enhancements and to encourage protagonists to pursue higher ranks within the organization in order to gain access to enhancements.

RELATIONSHIPS

Certain Relationships might help to open doors for characters when it comes to enhancements and other extraordinary abilities. A mentor, teacher, or commanding officer, for example, might recommend a character for enhancement or help guide them toward developing or mastering certain enhancements. A Relationship with someone able to bestow enhancements, like a cyber-surgeon or an experimental scientist, could provide opportunities. Similarly, the character's process of gaining enhancements might lead to new Relationships, from a rivalry or enmity with a fellow enhancement subject to bonds of friendship and loyalty with mentors, those who provided the character with their enhancements, or their enhanced peers.

REPUTATION

One way in which characters might acquire a Reputation is through enhancement, which is certainly noteworthy. When a *Modern AGE* character becomes known as the "Deadliest Street Fighter in the Metroplex," for example, it may qualify them for membership in a secret cyborg fighting league. Similarly, a character who achieves a Reputation as a "Shadow Slayer" for overcoming supernatural monsters might become a candidate for enhancements to improve their ability to maintain their Reputation.

ENHANCEMENT BENEFITS

Enhancements can provide a number of different game-system benefits. The following section outlines the major benefits, how they work, and their relative value as enhancements in terms of how easy or difficult they are to acquire. Note that these benefits are not meant to be an exhaustive list, nor a comprehensive enhancement design system: the GM should exercise some oversight when it comes to defining enhancements in the game and should feel free to modify the results of these guidelines to best suit the game's style and setting. The **Sample Enhancements** section later in this chapter provides a number of examples of ways you can tweak or modify the basic enhancement benefits to come up with any number of unique enhancements.

DEFENSE

This enhancement grants either +1 to your Defense or +1 to your Toughness. If this enhancement is permitted, the GM should set reasonable limits on the additional Defense or Toughness characters can gain, such as a bonus no more than one-third of their level rounded up. Added Toughness from enhancements provides the usual benefits based on the campaign's style (Gritty, Pulpy, or Cinematic).

FAVORED STUNT

Choose a specific stunt from *Modern AGE* or this book that is available for use in the setting. Each enhancement applied to the stunt reduces its SP cost for you by 1. If you reduce the

stunt's SP cost to 0, you can perform that stunt at will whenever there is an opportunity to do so. So if you have Favored Stunt (Disarm) with two enhancements, any time you hit an armed opponent with a melee attack, you can attempt to disarm them whether you have rolled stunt points or not.

Additionally, you can perform the Activate action for your Favored Stunt, gaining 1 stunt point when you do so, much like a use of Stunt Attack. You must perform your Favored Stunt with your next major action. (Note: This makes Favored Stunt an expanded version of the **Extraordinary Stunt** talent in **CHAPTER 11** of *Modern AGE*.)

FORCE MULTIPLIER

Choose a particular task defined by an ability focus, such as Strength (Jumping) or Intelligence (Research). With one enhancement, you are twice as effective at that task when you succeed in performing it. With two enhancements, you are five times as effective, then ten times, twenty-five times, fifty times, and finally one hundred times more effective with six enhancements.

The campaign's mode sets limits on Force Multiplier as follows:

GRITTY: Characters are limited to one enhancement (a x2 multiplier).

PULPY: Characters are limited to three enhancements (a x10 multiplier).

CINEMATIC: The limit is six enhancements (a x100 multiplier) unless the GM chooses to set a lower limit.

Examples of tasks that could benefit from your Force Multiplier include:

- **JUMPING:** Your Force Multiplier affects the distance you can jump with a successful test, from twice as far to a hundred times farther than normal!
- **LIFTING:** Your Force Multiplier increases the amount you can lift, from twice that of someone of your Strength to a hundred times. You could be strong enough to lift a truck over your head!
- **RUNNING:** When you take the Run action, your Force Multiplier increases your Speed. It does not affect your Speed for ordinary Move actions during action time, however.
- **RESEARCHING:** When you're reading or otherwise absorbing information, your Force Multiplier increases the amount you can absorb in the same amount of time, from twice as much as normal to a hundred times. In some cases, this may reduce the time interval of advanced tests associated with research, study, or absorbing information, but it is limited to purely mental tasks (see **Thinking**).
- **THINKING:** Choose a particular Intelligence focus; your Force Multiplier increases the amount you can mentally accomplish with that focus in the same amount of time. Note that this does not change how much you can physically accomplish. While you might be able to solve a complex mathematical



equation in your head almost instantly, writing it all out (or explaining it to someone else) would still take some time. Likewise, while you might be able to do engineering design rapidly in your mind, actually building a prototype would take the usual amount of time. The GM should take this into account for advanced tests: While a Force Multiplier might allow a character to accomplish some elements of an advanced test in a shorter time interval, this *only* applies to tasks involving pure thought processes.

HAZARD IMMUNITY

Choose a particular type of environmental hazard. For a number of enhancements equal to the hazard's category— one for minor, two for moderate, and so on—you are essentially immune to that hazard. See **Hazards** in CHAPTER 8 of *Modern AGE* for details. Common examples include immunity to drowning (essentially, the ability to breathe underwater) or a short (10-foot) fall for one enhancement, immunity to suffocation or a longer fall for two enhancements, immunity to environmental cold or heat or to diseases or toxins (ranging from two to four enhancements), or immunity to exposure to radiation or the hard vacuum of space for five or six enhancements.

As with Force Multiplier, the GM may want to set limits on Hazard Immunity based on mode.

GRITTY: Two enhancements at most (if it is allowed at all)

PULPY: Three enhancements

CINEMATIC: Six enhancements

INNATE ATTACK

You have some sort of innate damaging attack beyond just a person's usual unarmed abilities. With one enhancement, your Innate Attack does 1d6 damage in close combat. Each additional enhancement increases its damage by an additional 1d6, to a maximum of 4d6.

Choose whether your Innate Attack causes Impact or Ballistic damage and Stun or Wound damage. Choose an ability and focus you use for your attack roll with the Innate Attack, such as Fighting (Brawling) or Dexterity (Pistols). At the GM's discretion, you may have a special focus for this attack replace another of your ability focuses.

You may also choose an ability score to add to your Innate Attack's damage, such as Strength, Dexterity, or Perception. These choices do not change once they are made. If you have talents that confer damage bonuses, they may apply to your Innate Attack, provided it is of the appropriate type. For example, an "unarmed" damage bonus might apply to an Innate Attack involving claws or steel-hard fists. Consult the GM in cases where it is not clear whether or not a bonus should apply.

For an additional enhancement, your Innate Attack can be used at range, with a range of 50 yards. A second enhancement doubles this range to 100 yards. Finally, for an additional enhancement, your Innate Attack can cause penetrating damage, but you must halve the damage after it is rolled, rounding up.

INNATE POWER

Choose a specific power from the extraordinary powers given in CHAPTER 6 of *Modern AGE*. You can use that power as if you possessed the appropriate degree of its talent, and you can learn the ability focus associated with that power's talent. It takes one enhancement for a Novice power, two for an Expert power, and three for a Master power, and you do not have to have the lower degree powers: You can simply have a Master power and nothing else, for example. If the possessor of an Innate Power does not already have a power points score, they gain one upon acquiring the power, the same as a character wielding an extraordinary power (see *Modern AGE*, CHAPTER 6, for details).

SPECIAL STUNT

Create a special or unique stunt, one that does not exist in the *Modern AGE* rulebook. As an enhancement, your character can perform this new stunt at its normal stunt point cost. The information and guidelines in CHAPTER 4 of this book may be useful in coming up with new stunts, and you can base new stunts off the examples of existing stunts. Often a Special Stunt implies or relies on capabilities ordinary people do not have, such as a Taser Punch stunt allowing you to generate a burst of bioelectricity and inflict an additional 1d6 penetrating electrical damage with a successful unarmed strike. The GM should approve the final SP cost and mechanics of the new stunt.

You can apply the benefits of Favored Stunt to a Special Stunt, reducing its SP cost. If it is reduced to 0, you can perform the Special Stunt at will whenever there is an opportunity to do so, the same as with a regular Favored Stunt.

PERQUISITE

As an enhancement, you gain a single specific benefit or advantage that's useful but does not otherwise conform to the benefits given previously. Perquisites can be almost anything the player and GM can agree upon, from the ability to project a beam of light equivalent to a flashlight at will to malleable facial features giving you the benefit of always having a "disguise kit" to an implanted cellular communicator. A good guideline for a Perquisite is an innate benefit of a minor piece of equipment or the like. The Game Master may rule that some Perquisites require more than one enhancement, particularly if they are multifunctional or have broad benefits.

ENHANCEMENT LIMITS

Just as the Game Master can decide whether or not to allow extraordinary abilities in the game at all, the GM can set limits on the benefits available from enhancements, such as no more than X enhancements spent on a particular benefit (say 1-3), no Innate Attack or Innate Power enhancements, no reducing stunt point costs below 1, or any other guidelines the GM wishes to establish. As always, the needs and the design of the setting take precedence.

SAMPLE ENHANCEMENTS

The following are just a few examples of possible enhancements for characters in a *Modern AGE* game. Along with each

example is the suggested enhancement (EN) value, from 1 to 6, which is also a rough measurement of the enhancement's power or effectiveness.

ADRENAL SURGE

BIOLOGY - 2 EN

Your overactive adrenal glands cause a surge in times of stress. You can perform the Adrenaline Rush stunt for -1 SP cost and gain access to a special Adrenaline Surge stunt that grants you a Force Multiplier on your Strength (Might) tests: ×2 for 2 SP, ×5 for 4 SP, and ×10 for 6 SP.

AQUATIC

BIOLOGY - 1 EN

You have gills or specially modified lungs, allowing you to breathe water as well as air. You cannot drown and are immune to drowning-related hazards.

BLESSING OF DEFLECTION

MAGIC - 1 EN

Supernatural blessings help turn aside attacks meant to harm you. You gain a +1 bonus to your Defense.

CHAMELEON'S CLOAK

MAGIC - 1 EN

You have a magical ability to blend into your surroundings. When making Dexterity (Stealth) tests, you can perform a special Blend In stunt, adding +1 per SP spent to the target number for a Perception test to notice you.

CYBERNETIC ARM

TECHNOLOGY - 1 EN

One of your arms is replaced with a cybernetic prosthetic as effective as a real lim, which also gives you a x2 Force Multiplier for Strength tests and actions related solely to your arm and hand. More advanced Cybernetic Arms might have a higher Force Multiplier (for more enhancements) or one or more built-in Innate Attacks, such as a concealed gun or blade.

DARK SIGHT

ANY - 1 EN

Your eyes are specially adapted, allowing you to see in the dark as if it were normally lit out to a distance of 20 yards. Your Dark Sight might be from eye modifications or cybernetic replacements, biological adaptations, or innate magical abilities.

DATAJACK

TECHNOLOGY - 1 EN

You have an implanted jack or data-port, allowing you to plug a computer directly into your brain when you use it. This gives you a Force Multiplier of x2 when making Intelligence (Computers) tests.

DERMAL ARMOR

TECHNOLOGY - 1 EN

You gain +1 Toughness due to subcutaneous reinforcement of your dermal layer using carbon fiber, antiballistic materials, and the like.

FIRE-STARTER

BIOLOGY - 1 EN

Able to start fires with your mind, you have the Ignite Fire power (*Modern AGE*, CHAPTER 6) and 10 + 1d6 + Willpower power points to fuel it, if you do not already have a power points score.

**MIND READER****BIOLOGY - 2 EN**

You have the power to read minds, the Mind Reading Telepathy power (*Modern AGE*, CHAPTER 6), and $10 + 1d6 + \text{Will-power}$ power points to fuel it, if you do not already have a power points score.

MULTI-ATTACK**BIOLOGY - 2 EN**

Your speed in combat is a fearsome thing to behold. You can perform the Lightning Attack stunt at will, without spending SP, whenever you make an attack.

ONE WITH THE LAND**MAGIC - 1 EN**

You have a supernatural connection with the land and nature. In a nonurban environment, you can perform a special One with the Land exploration stunt for 2 SP, allowing you to gain one extra insight about the local environment or to automatically avoid one hazard associated with it.

QUICK REFLEXES**BIOLOGY - 1 EN**

You can perform the Momentum stunt for -1 SP cost, meaning you automatically gain +3 to initiative (for 0 SP) and can gain +6 or +9 to initiative for a round by spending 1 or 2 SP.

SIREN'S SEDUCTION**MAGIC - 2 EN**

You are supernaturally seductive when you focus your wiles on another. You can perform the Flirt stunt for -1 SP cost, and

you can perform the stunt regardless of the target's initial attitude toward you. It should be noted that having a Hostile character become enamored with you can create all sorts of unexpected complications!

SIGN OF THE CHEETAH**MAGIC - 1 EN**

Your skin has been inscribed with an enchanted tattoo of a cheetah, allowing you to channel its natural totemic power. This mystic super-charging gives you a $\times 2$ Force Multiplier, permitting you to move at up to 4 times your normal Speed when taking the Run action rather than twice your normal speed.

TARGETING SYSTEM**TECHNOLOGY - 1 EN**

You have a built-in Targeting System usable for ranged attacks, allowing you to perform the Precision Marksman-ship stunt for -1 SP cost. If you make an attack with a firearm that benefits from an aim bonus before the end of your next turn, you automatically gain a +1 bonus, even without spending SP.

WIND-RIDER**MAGIC - 2 EN**

You can magically glide on the winds, safely descending from heights that would be fatal to others. So long as you are conscious and capable of action, you are immune to falling hazards, able to glide safely to the ground. You can also move laterally while gliding, moving up to the same distance you descend vertically before you touch down.

EXTRAORDINARY ITEMS

Extraordinary items are special items or equipment that possess or provide characters with additional options or abilities. An extraordinary item might provide one or more enhancements, the benefits of some extraordinary powers, or some combination of the two. Extraordinary items are unusual, if not unique, and separate from their wielder, meaning they can be lost, stolen, or otherwise removed. Unlike the items described in **CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY**, extraordinary items always have an unusual origin, such as magic, super-science, or psychic imprinting.

In general, there are two broad categories of extraordinary items: temporary and permanent. Temporary items are useful for only a short time or a certain number of uses (as few as one). Permanent items remain useful so long as they are intact.

Readers familiar with the *Fantasy AGE* RPG will recognize the core of this system as the same for magic items in that game. *Modern AGE* builds on the concept and expands it to include all types of extraordinary items from a variety of sources.

SOURCES

Extraordinary items tend to come from two primary sources: super-science or the supernatural (magic), with a few variations depending on the nature of the setting.

SUPER-SCIENCE

Items from this source are the products of science more advanced than our current understanding and are most likely difficult, if not impossible, to reverse engineer. Note that depending on the setting, a super-science item might be an item of contemporary technology invented after the setting's time period. A jet engine is super-science for the first decade or two of the 20th century, for example, just as a smartphone is super-science technology in the 1970s or 1980s (with limited usefulness in the absence of a wireless Internet). Some super-science items may be the creations of brilliant, even exceptional, inventors, while others might be extraterrestrial or even other-dimensional technology.

MAGIC

Other extraordinary items are creations of—or infused with—the power of magic, essentially the *arcana* described in **CHAPTER 6** of *Modern AGE*. This can give otherwise mundane things extraordinary powers or properties. Depending on the setting, magic items might be unusual artifacts, their creation entirely out of the control of mere mortals, or a kind of alternative technology, with arcanists as their engineers, technicians, and crafters. While magic items in a *Fantasy AGE* game tend to be based on preindustrial technology, there's nothing that says *Modern AGE* extraordinary items with magical powers cannot be things like computers, guns, smartphones, or other examples of modern technology.

OTHER SOURCES

Some *Modern AGE* settings may have extraordinary items from other sources, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Otherworldly items so advanced or different from human technology as to effectively be miraculous or magical
- Holy (or unholy) objects invested with the power of gods, spirits, or other supernatural beings
- Items with psychic resonance or some similar quality, making them the psychic equivalent of magic items
- Weird-science items that appear technological but are actually empowered by something else, up to and including the inventor's own unshakable faith in their function
- Objects or materials containing their own inherent benefits, such as strange alien crystals (perhaps fallen to Earth in meteorites) or mutant or magical plants
- Any other source of extraordinary items the Game Master wishes to include

RARITY

Extraordinary items are, by their nature, unusual, but they can generally be categorized by their rarity as follows.

COMMON ITEMS

These are almost always temporary, fairly easily made or acquired, and may even be found for sale in some places in some settings.

UNCOMMON ITEMS

Uncommon items are generally acquired as rewards or benefits of Membership. They're rarely offered for sale, and even when they are, they tend to be expensive.

RARE ITEMS

These items are not often seen and draw attention whenever they show up. They are virtually never offered for sale and only acquired as rewards, and then only occasionally.

UNIQUE ITEMS

Unique items are truly one of a kind, and a character is lucky to acquire even one over the course of a career. Such items are the rewards of great quests or challenges, and many may have sought and failed to find them in the past. A unique item is essentially priceless, worth a king's ransom if sold.

AVAILABILITY

Related to rarity is the question of availability of extraordinary items, which is under the Game Master's control. Are these items things characters can acquire with a good enough Resources test or make for themselves given time, Resources, and perhaps the right focuses or talents? (See **Creating Extraordinary Items**, later in this chapter, for details.) Or are extraordinary items solely available as rewards, such as the

spoils of a successful adventure, gifts from advancement in Membership, or some combination thereof?

Truly common extraordinary items may find their way into otherwise mundane equipment shopping lists. If a magical healing potion is available over-the-counter in an urban fantasy setting, for example, then it simply has a cost for Resources tests associated with it based on how easy (and inexpensive) the GM wants to make it, and characters can stock up on such potions as their Resources allow. The same may go for things like enchanted (or super-science) ammo or other usually temporary items.

On the other end of things, extraordinary items in some settings might be rare and closely guarded secrets, with only a handful of people ever having access to them, including the heroes. This usually means extraordinary items are only available as rewards and are virtually never for sale.

You can also modify the availability of specific types of items based on their benefits. You might decide that armor, attack, and damage bonus items have their usual rarity, but that immunity items are especially rare, while talent bonus items do not exist in your setting at all because you don't want items trumping the benefits of characters' chosen talents. Changing the availability of various extraordinary items can influence the style of your game by emphasizing the things that are important in it. You can even decide there are no extraordinary items in your game setting *at all* if you prefer characters to stick to innate extraordinary abilities.

ITEM BENEFITS

Extraordinary items can provide a number of benefits. Most items provide only one or two. Most temporary items in particular provide only one, but the benefits vary from one item to another.

ABILITY BONUS

While the item is in use, you gain a bonus to a specific ability (and therefore to all tests of that ability and any secondary traits based on it). A +1 ability bonus is uncommon, +2 is rare, and +3 is unique.

ARMOR BONUS

While the item is in use, you gain a bonus to your Armor Rating. This bonus generally does not stack with another existing armor bonus. A +1 bonus is uncommon, +2 is rare, and +3 is unique. Alternately, this benefit might negate up to twice its value in armor penalty for a regular suit of armor.

ATTACK

The item grants a damaging attack, usually roughly equivalent to that of a weapon from *Modern AGE*. Damage ranges from 1d6 for a common item to 3d6 for a rare item, modified by an appropriate ability score, usually Strength (for close combat attacks) or Perception (for ranged attacks).

ATTACK BONUS

The item grants a bonus to attack tests. A +1 bonus is uncommon, +2 is rare, and +3 is unique.

BATTERY

The item has its own reserve of power points, which can be used to power the item's extraordinary powers and *only* those powers. A battery starts out with 15 power points; each additional application of this benefit increases its power point total by 5. For an additional benefit, you can tap into the item's battery to fuel your own extraordinary powers, not just those of the item, provided those powers are compatible (drawing upon a magic item to fuel arcana, for example).

DAMAGE BONUS

The item grants a bonus to damage rolls. A +1 bonus is uncommon, +2 is rare, and +3 is unique.

DEFENSE BONUS

While the item is in use, you gain a bonus to your Defense. A +1 bonus is uncommon, +2 is rare, and +3 is unique.

FOCUS BONUS

While the item is in use, you either gain a focus you do not already have or increase the bonus of a focus you do already have by +1.

IMMUNITY

While using the item, you gain immunity to a specific hazard or effect, such as one extraordinary power, a specific form of damage (such as poison or lightning), a specific hazard (such as disease or demonic possession), and so forth. The GM sets the parameters of the immunity granted by the item.

POWER BONUS

The item grants you the ability to use an extraordinary power you do not already possess. See CHAPTER 6 of *Modern AGE* for examples of different extraordinary powers. The bonus power either draws on your power points (if you have any) or a Battery benefit of the item. For an additional benefit, it can do either, as you choose.

STUNT BONUS

The item grants you the ability to perform a particular stunt at a reduced cost in stunt points or to perform a unique stunt normally unavailable to you, essentially like an enhancement (see **Enhancements**, earlier in this chapter).

TALENT BONUS

When in use, the item grants you the benefits of a talent you do not already have (usually at the Novice level) or an additional level in a talent you do already have, up to Master level. In some cases, an item might provide the benefits of a particular level in a talent, such as the Expert level, but none of the other benefits.

UNIQUE BONUS

This is a catch-all category for benefits not fitting into any of the previous categories, chosen and defined by the GM for a particular item. Use the guidelines of the other item benefits to set the effect and define its rarity, although items with this type of bonus are uncommon, at least.



ITEM RESTRICTIONS

Extraordinary items may have certain restrictions placed on who can use them. Note that these restrictions are on whether the item functions for a particular character, rather than access to the item in the first place, as covered previously in the **Availability** section. So, for example, a super-science item might require a certain Intelligence score for the operator to be able to make it work, or an arcane item could only function for an initiated member of an occult order. Generally, the GM sets any appropriate restrictions on the use of extraordinary items. The following are some of the restrictions a GM might choose.

ABILITY OR TALENT

The item requires a particular ability score, such as a Willpower 2 or higher or Constitution 2 or higher, in order to function. Similarly, an item might require a character to have a particular talent at the Novice degree or better in order to function.

SPECIALIZATION

Like the talent restriction, the item requires the user to have a specific specialization talent at the Novice degree or better in order for it to function.

BENEFIT THRESHOLD

This is like the ability restriction but takes ability focuses into account. A combat-oriented item might require a threshold of 4 that could be met solely by Fighting or a combination of

Fighting and an appropriate weapon focus. Likewise, an item might have a benefit threshold met by Intelligence or a combination of Intelligence and a suitable knowledge focus.

BACKGROUND

The item only works for users of a specific background, either because the common experience of their background informs them in how to use the item or because the item is somehow keyed to that background. This restriction may include aspects of background, such as heritage, culture, or environment, as well.

MEMBERSHIP

Use of the item is restricted to characters with membership in a particular organization, possibly to higher-ranking members of that organization. Generally, the higher the required Membership rank, the greater the item's rarity in the setting.

USING EXTRAORDINARY ITEMS

An extraordinary item generally requires an Activate action to use, although some items, once activated, continue providing their bonuses until they are specifically deactivated. This is particularly the case for extraordinary items that are worn, such as armor, clothing, or jewelry; the Activate action is the process of putting the item on, and it is deactivated when it is removed. Likewise, consumables

such as potions are activated by drinking them (an Activate action) and then have their effect, which lasts for a predetermined amount of time.

Other extraordinary items, particularly those used in combat, are activated by taking a melee or ranged attack action with the item. This is common for weapons. Items granting a power bonus are generally activated with a cast action, just like using an extraordinary power.

EXPENDABLE ITEMS

An expendable extraordinary item is good for only one use; it provides its benefit and is then used up. Often, the item itself is consumed in its use, either ingested by the user like in the case of a potion or formula, or destroyed by the process of using it such as ammunition or a flammable powder. Because of this, characters may carry multiple instances of an expendable item to have more uses of it.

Note that the duration of the expendable item's benefit is separate from its expendability and depends on what the item does. For example, expendable ammunition has an instant effect (the attack) that immediately expends it, but the effects of something like a potion might last for a minute, an hour, or even longer even though the item (the potion itself) has been expended. In general, the duration of an expendable item is usually not more than an encounter or possibly a day or so in narrative time.

CHARGED ITEMS

Some items duplicating the effects of extraordinary powers are charged, possessing a "battery" of power points to fuel the item's power or powers, provided by the Battery benefit and increased with additional benefits. A charged item that runs out of power points stops working until it has regained some points, unless it can also be powered by its wielder's power points. See **Battery** and **Power Bonus** under **Item Benefits** for details.

LASTING ITEMS

Finally, lasting items are those with powers that are effectively permanent. So long as the item itself remains intact and functional (or can be repaired), it can be used repeatedly. If the item requires recharging, refreshment, or rest of any kind, it can be handled occasionally between encounters or by using a version of the capacity rules from *Modern AGE*: On a failed use of the item where the Stunt Die is 4 or more, the item stops working and needs a recharge before it can be used again.

SAMPLE ITEMS

The following is just a sampling of a few extraordinary items. Players and Game Masters should feel free to create others using the guidelines in this chapter as suits the campaign, and GMs may want to provide such items as rewards to the protagonists.

BLESSED BULLETS

UNCOMMON

This enchanted ammunition is blessed to hit the mark. When fired it grants a +1 bonus to the attack test and a +1 bonus to

the total damage. Against some creatures, blessed bullets may also overcome special defenses.

DRAFT OF RESTORATION

COMMON

This fizzing liquid seems to almost glow with an inner light. A character who drinks it as an Activate action regains 1d6 + Willpower power points. If the character has no power points, the draft has no effect other than making the drinker feel mildly jittery, like a strong cup of coffee.

HEALING SALVE

UNCOMMON

This miraculous medicinal salve can rapidly heal injuries. When applied with an Activate action, it restores 6d6 + Constitution in lost Health. A single application of healing salve can be used in smaller amounts for less serious injuries—two applications restoring 3d6 Health each or three applications restoring 2d6 Health each. A container of healing salve usually has 1d6 applications.

LIGHTNING ROD

UNCOMMON

A foot-long metallic rod that contains a powerful capacitor and the ability to discharge a bolt of electricity when a button on its side is depressed. The rod's wielder uses a major action to make an Accuracy (Pistols) attack roll against a target within 20 yards. A successful attack inflicts 2d6 penetrating electricity damage. A lightning rod stores 15 power points, and each bolt fired drains 3 power points. It can be recharged in an hour with a source of electrical current.

SLAYER SIX-GUN

RARE

A slayer six-gun is a revolver etched with arcane sigils and inlaid filigree. When its wielder takes the Aim action, the subsequent attack roll receives a +3 bonus rather than the usual +1. The wielder of a slayer six-gun can also perform the Called Shot stunt for 3 SP rather than the usual 4. The six-gun's attacks are considered magical against targets vulnerable to such attacks.

STEELCOAT

RARE

This jacket is woven from thread as strong and tough as metal despite being as soft and malleable as fine leather. It grants 6I/2B Armor Rating to its wearer, while having no Armor Penalty.

CREATING EXTRAORDINARY ITEMS

It is up to the Game Master whether or not heroes can *make* extraordinary items or if they are limited to acquiring them in the other ways outlined under **Availability** earlier in this chapter. The ability to make or jury-rig (see **Jury-Rigging**) extraordinary items has a significant impact on the characters' downtime activities and may affect game play as well. Another thing to consider is if a protagonist can make extraordinary items, why not just retire from adventuring to a career of making and selling them? Why not outfit everyone with as many powerful extraordinary items as possible? Generally, there need to be limits placed on extraordinary item creation

by heroes to keep it from getting out of hand. Apart from time and Resources, some possible item-creation limits include the following:

- The items require unusual ingredients or materials that are rare and hard to acquire. This can range from strange minerals to the body parts of strange creatures.
- A fully outfitted workshop or laboratory, beyond just the Resources needed for making an individual item, is needed to make extraordinary items (beyond, perhaps, jury-rigging them).
- The setting has legal regulations on making extraordinary items. Perhaps the work is regulated by a guild or agency, requires special licensing, or is even illegal, forcing characters to work in secret (and hide things like paper trails on acquiring materials to avoid investigation).
- Completing or activating a lasting item is truly draining: the maker loses 1d6 Health *permanently* so long as that item exists. This sets a pretty hard limit on the number of items any one person is going to make.

ITEM TALENTS

Your campaign determines whether producing extraordinary items is possible for Player Characters and whether it requires specialized knowledge, an innate “magic touch,” or some other characteristic. The Artificer talent is one way to regulate this. If characters don’t need dedicated training to make extraordinary items, you can still use the rules for the talent and jury-rigging, but they’re available to characters who possess the other requirements you’ve set down. If the ability to make extraordinary items is linked to another talent, you can decide each degree of that talent also confers the benefits of the corresponding Artificer talent degree.

ARTIFICER

REQUIREMENT: Maker talent (Expert degree or better)

You can make extraordinary items associated with a particular source, such as magic, super-science, or alternative technology.

NOVICE: You can produce temporary extraordinary items. The process is an advanced test of the appropriate manufacturing focus (see the **Maker** talent in *Modern AGE*). The TN is 10 + 1 per benefit the item grants, while the success threshold is 5 for a common item, 10 for an uncommon item, and 15 for a rare item. Each test requires 6 hours of work, and the process requires materials with a Resources test TN equal to the TN to make the item (10 + 1 per benefit). You can stop and resume work as you wish until the success threshold is achieved. If you fail more than two tests in a row, the item is ruined; any materials are lost, and you have to start the process again from the beginning.

EXPERT: You can produce lasting extraordinary items. This process is also an advanced test of the appropriate manufacturing focus, with a TN of 12 + 1 per benefit the item grants and a success threshold of 10 for a common item or 15 for an uncommon item. You cannot make rare or unique items. Each test requires 40 hours of work, and the process requires

materials with a Resources test TN equal to the TN to make the item. If you fail more than two tests in a row, the item is ruined; any materials are lost, and you have to start the process again from the beginning. Additionally, you can jury-rig common items, if that is an option in the setting (see **Jury-Rigging**).

MASTER: The same benefits as Expert, except you can also make rare items with a success threshold of 20 and unique items with a success threshold of 25. You can also jury-rig uncommon and rare items, if allowed.

JURY-RIGGING

In some settings, characters with the Artificer talent may be able to whip up temporary extraordinary items quickly on the spot when there’s a need. If this option is allowed, use the following guidelines:

- The jury-rigging process uses an advanced test with the usual success threshold for creating a temporary item, but +2 to the TN (the same as creating a lasting item), and each test takes only one *round* rather than hours.
- The character must have at least some suitable raw materials or parts at hand, either from a kit or workshop, cannibalizing other items or equipment, scavenging, or the like. This may require a Resources test (TN 10 + 1 per benefit the jury-rigged item grants) or another type of test at the GM’s discretion and can take additional time, if the parts are not on hand.
- The jury-rigged item’s benefits last for no longer than one encounter once it is used. After that, it’s expended and used up.
- Activating the item requires either the normal test to use it or a TN 11 test with an appropriate ability agreed upon by the player and the GM, usually a knowledge or maker focus associated with the item. If the test to activate or use the item fails, it causes a tier 2 consequence, like a failed breaching test (see **Breaching** in **CHAPTER 8** of *Modern AGE*).

EXAMPLE

Trapped in a mansion with countless zombies, the team figures out that the creatures are susceptible to intense light, just as the battered grandfather clock in the main hall hits midnight. Indra wants to jury-rig a surge to the basement’s gas lines, which will create a powerful flare through the mansion’s gaslights, but she’s also pretty sure it’ll set the building on fire if it works at all. Meghan, the GM, says that sounds like a jury-rigging opportunity and sets a TN of 13 (12 plus one benefit, triggering the zombies’ weakness to light) and a success threshold of 10 (for an uncommon item, in Meghan’s assessment) for Indra’s advanced test. Indra has tools and, after a harrowing trip to the basement, access to the main supply lines, so the necessary resources are at hand. Hopefully, the door will hold long enough, or Brian and the others can hold the zombies off until Indra can finish! Once Indra reaches the success threshold, she needs to make an additional TN 11 test to activate her modifications. If she fails, she might not create a flare, but an explosion!



SOCIAL OPTIONS

Characters in *Modern AGE* may be members or directors of important institutions: businesses, conspiracies, government agencies, and even firms they founded to meet collective goals. A protagonist might be a weapons manufacturer, a key member of a cellular organization of hackers, or the secret head of a shadowy cabal. Characters also draw upon personal Relationships, contacts, and the web of social connections they live in. This chapter provides new and expanded systems for these, ranging from dramatic Relationships to positions in large organizations.

EXPANDED RELATIONSHIPS

At the center of any roleplaying game are the characters and their Relationships. Whether portrayed by the players or the GM, characters breathe life into a setting, give rules meaning, and provide purpose to roleplay.

Relationships fill a world with color, providing a character with meaning for their mission. They allow a GM to influence a plot without the need to be heavy-handed, as Relationships compel characters through both direct and indirect manipulation, such as a loved one being kidnapped or a friend casually mentioning a rumor they heard about that weird, fenced-off laboratory on the outskirts of the city.

The Relationship rules introduced in the *Modern AGE* core book are still valid, so characters are still encouraged to form

Relationship Bonds with NPCs and each other, as depicted in the **Networks** rules later in this chapter. This chapter expands the rules for Relationships, introducing stunts connected to them, giving ways of including systems in antagonistic Relationships, and providing companion rules.

INTENSITY STUNTS

In *Modern AGE*, it is possible to inject dynamism into Relationships using intensity stunts. These rely on an existing Relationship Bond you possess or, sometimes, a Bond someone possesses with you. When stunt descriptions say “share a Relationship,” this means one of you has a Relationship Bond focused on the other, though it could go either way. Other stunts specify a specific Bond, or that a third party may possess a Bond with you or another person.

Obviously, it is very easy to justify spending stunt points from Relationships on intensity stunts, but the stunt still has to make sense, both for the action and the Relationships involved.

RELATIONSHIP COMPLICATIONS

Relationship Intensity can swiftly become complicated by the actions of those in the Relationship. Relationships are not static; today’s lover may be tomorrow’s enemy, if something goes horribly wrong. Conversely, foes sometimes become friends, or more, and someone you feel contempt

INTENSITY STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1	CHARM OFFENSIVE: You draw upon your Bond to lower your target's defenses. They must share a Relationship either with you or with someone else who shares a Relationship with you. The target suffers a -2 modifier to Willpower tests for the remainder of the encounter.
1-3	DEFENSES DOWN/EARLY WARNING: You convince a target you share a Relationship with that due to how you know them and how they think they know you, things aren't going to turn violent or you don't plan on escaping. When the encounter switches to action time, your target suffers a -3 penalty to initiative per SP spent. Alternately, you can subtly warn someone you share a Relationship with that you think action is imminent; they gain +3 to initiative per SP spent.
2	HANDSHAKE DEAL: A shared understanding leads to an ironclad agreement with a target you share a Relationship with. If either party betrays this word, they suffer -2 to all social dice rolls when interacting with each other and the Relationship experiences a complication (see Relationship Complications .)
2	BYPASS THE MIDDLE: In addition to achieving a social goal with your target, your target will introduce you or step aside to allow you to contact someone they're connected to. Either your target or the third party must be someone you share a Relationship with.
3	I'M A MESS, YOU'RE FANTASTIC: You highlight your own weaknesses to contrast with your target's virtues, to boost their confidence. You suffer a -2 penalty to your next roll, but they automatically gain +2 SP when they make their next roll.
3	NEEDLING TALK: Your words get under the skin of a target you share a Relationship with, causing uncertainty due to paranoia or an eagerness to please you, depending on the nature of the Relationship. You gain a +2 bonus to the next roll in which you take advantage of the target's self-doubt, while the target suffers a -2 to all Willpower rolls for the remainder of the encounter.
4	ACHILLES' HEEL: You understand the weaknesses of someone you share a Relationship with and how to deal with them socially. You either point out an emotional vulnerability for everyone to hear or cover it up so effectively it hinders people who might benefit from it. If you choose the first option, anyone exploiting it during the encounter gains +2 to any test that could take advantage of it. If you choose the second option, anyone whose actions would benefit from that vulnerability suffers a -2 penalty to applicable rolls instead.
4	SPREAD THE WORD: You use your shared Relationship to urge the target to say something about you, even though they're not consciously aware they're doing so. Describe a general message about yourself, and your target will share that with people they speak to for a length of time determined by the GM, but always long enough to enter the rumor mill.
5	EMPATHIC LINK: You know someone you share a Relationship with so well you can sense their thoughts and feelings with uncanny accuracy. You may ask, "What is my target thinking and feeling?" and the GM must provide an accurate answer.
5	FAMILIAR TRAIL: Your understanding of someone you share a Relationship with is strong enough that you automatically know where they are for the rest of the session, unless they are trying to hide from you specifically. Even if they're trying to hide from you, you gain a +2 bonus to tests related to finding them.
6	EMOTIONAL REVERSAL: An enemy or rival becomes a friend or lover, or vice versa. You flip a negative Relationship Bond you share with your target into a positive one or a positive one into a negative one, and it remains such for the rest of the session. The GM may allow this new Bond to persist, if it seems plausible.
6	FROM HELL'S HEART (PULPY, CINEMATIC): Channeling your resentment for someone you share a negative Relationship with, you gain 3 points of armor vs. impact, ballistic, and penetrating damage and cannot be incapacitated. This lasts for the rest of the encounter.
7	AS YOU WISH: Pick a task you have promised someone you have a Relationship with you will perform. Gain a +2 bonus to tests directly related to completing this task until the end of the session.
7	PREPARE TO DIE: Pick someone you have a negative Relationship with or who has injured or killed someone you have or had a positive Relationship with. For the remainder of the encounter, you gain +1 to attack, +1 Defense, and +2 to damage in any combat actions involving this target.

COMPLICATIONS AND UNUSUAL RELATIONSHIPS

In the case of memorial, ideological, and self-centered Relationships (see CHAPTER 10 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* for information about these), contradictions can arise when the character acts in a manner contrary to the Bond's description or events make them question the validity of the Relationship. In these cases, use a TN of 13 instead of an opposed roll. If the character wins, they can modify the Relationship with a rider. If they lose, the GM chooses any of the complication consequences listed in this chapter.

for might demonstrate their virtues in a shocking reversal of your expectations. Third parties complicate Relationships too, from the attractive man at the bar who catches the hero's eye, drawing attention from an exasperated partner, to the hostage taker who points a gun at the protagonist's lover and sister and asks the protagonist to choose which one they should shoot to "prove they're serious." These situations may jeopardize or strengthen Relationships, but above all, they *complicate* them. The following section provides rules for this process.

COMPLICATION RULES

A Relationship becomes complicated when a character acts in a way that betrays or changes the nature of the Bond, not through its gradual maturing but through a relatively sudden event or surprising revelation.

When a Relationship becomes complicated and one of the characters in it (the Bond holder or subject) takes an action related to that complication, make a Relationship Test. This is an opposed test where, instead of using an ability, each character adds the Intensity of the strongest Bond they have with one another (if one participant doesn't have a Bond, they get no bonus to the roll). The winner of the test may, if they like, perform one of the following actions:

- Reduce the Bond Intensity of the loser's Relationship with the winner by 1. This frees up a Relationship slot.
- Make the loser devote 1 free Relationship slot to increasing a Relationship with the winner by 1 or forging a new Relationship Bond with an Intensity of 1. The winner describes the Bond.
- Modify their own or the other person's Relationship with them, using a rider. This is an extension of the Bond's description that uses the word "but" or "and." It must make sense within the context of what causes the Relationship Test. For example, after Sean discovers Amy helped someone blackmail them, they may change the description "I want to gain her admiration," to "I want to gain her admiration, but I can never trust her."

Complications should be infrequent, occurring once every few sessions to just one or two pairs of characters. The GM decides when a Relationship Test is called for. In campaigns resembling soap operas and other genres where Relationships are often imperiled, still limit this to once per session.

NEW UNUSUAL RELATIONSHIPS

The *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* presents possibilities for unusual Relationships, such as those with the deceased, with ideologies, and even with one's own cynical self-interest. Here are a few more to consider:

ORGANIZATION RELATIONSHIPS

The model employee, the one who knows the company's mission statement by heart, the one looking to make a differ-

ence from the inside; these are people whose Bonds are with organizations, as defined using the Membership rules in *Modern AGE* and the organization rules in this book. Example Bonds include "I'm Loyal to the Bosses," "I'm Going to Make This Enterprise What It Was Always Meant to Be," and "I'm Going to Burn It All Down." Organization Relationships can be used to enhance tests related to people within the organization or tasks it mandates (or you believe need to be completed to fulfill your Bond).

When a complication comes up between you and an organization, the GM picks the organizational ability and focus that represent their part of the complication and uses them instead of a Relationship for the Relationship Test. If you win, you can only modify your Relationship with a rider. If the organization wins, it can impose any complication the GM desires.

The other disadvantage is that even though you can easily invoke your Bond with people in the organization, they may take advantage of this. Every member of the organization may use intensity stunts on you as if they had a Relationship with you.

MATERIAL RELATIONSHIPS

It's about the flask you carried throughout the war, the armored exoskeleton you built to fight crime, or your home, the sanctum you wouldn't allow so much as a misplaced mote of dust to defile. These are material Relationships, which you possess with an object you feel attached to or that you hate but can't get rid of. These are superficially tempting—why not say you really love your gun, to shoot it better? On the other hand, a material Relationship must be with a specific object, not a make or model. If your object is lost or destroyed, the GM decides if and when the object can be replaced. If the answer is "never," the Relationship dissolves into unassigned slots, waiting for you to make new, meaningful connections. Examples of these Relationships include "My Good Luck Charm" and "Nothing's Going to Kill Me But My Own Gun".

Material Relationships suffer for not being especially applicable to social interactions except to alienate people, since your focus is away from people. As for self-centered Relationships, the GM may apply a penalty equal to the Bond's Intensity for certain social tests where this alienation might come to the surface.

NETWORKS

The following section introduces rules for Networks: people you can interact with by taking advantage of common connections. Introductions, shared references, and no small amount of deviousness enable characters to find people with useful resources, talent, and social ties, but enemies might have Networks too, exposing heroes to avenging cousins, bosses of bosses, and other complicating figures.

NETWORK TIERS

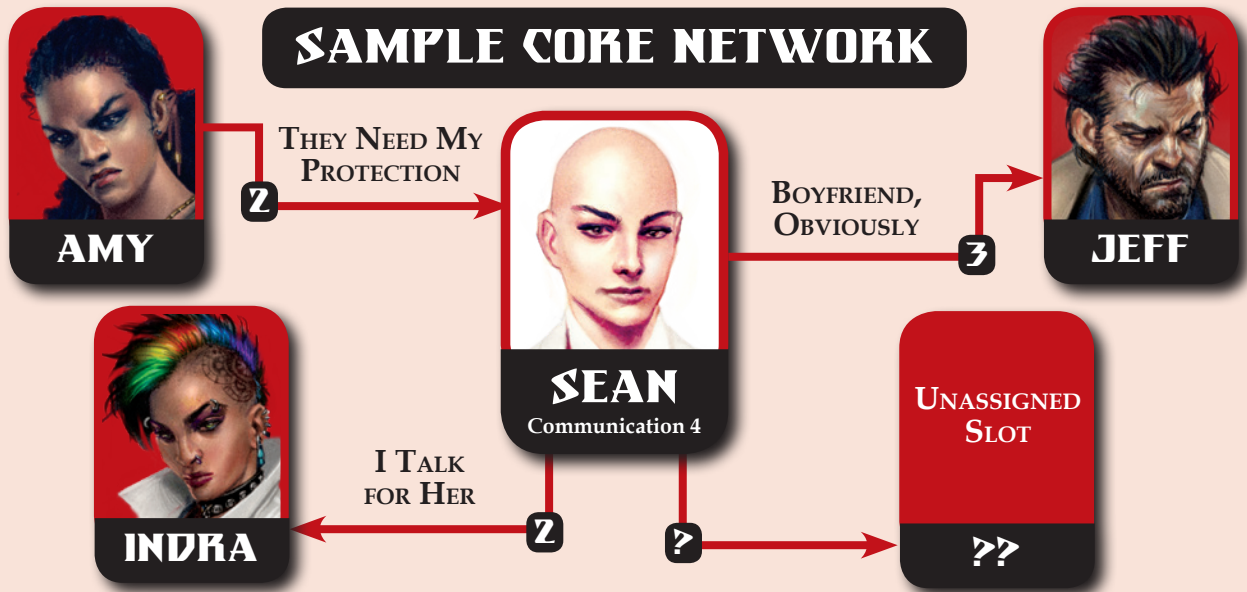
In *Modern AGE*, a character's Network has two tiers: core and extended.

VISUAL MAPS FOR NETWORKS

Visual maps help to better define the game's setting by clearly depicting the important NPCs and their roles in the story. Even if the players don't create their own, it's useful for the GM to do so to assist in keeping track of all the key characters drifting in and out of the game. In the case of Networks and character connections, creating a visual map depicting a character in the center, their core Network of contacts in the immediately surrounding space, and the extended Network surrounding the core can help the players and GM alike.

Arrows connect the central character to each of their connections, with descriptions, Relationship Bonds, and other factors written on each arrow's length, along with the current Relationship Intensity. For example, a character with a core Network connection with their husband at a Relationship Intensity of 4 will have an arrow pointing from their name or illustration to that of their husband with their connection written along it, which is perhaps "my eternal love," or even "bonded together by duty," and a 4 beneath it.

These maps can become sprawling and busy fast, so it may be beneficial to build separate maps for core and extended Networks, use different colored arrows for different grades of Network, or build a quick one at the start of a campaign that only encompasses the Bonds you as the player intend to call upon.



THE CORE NETWORK

A character's potential core Network consists of the people they have Relationship Bonds (see CHAPTER 10: REWARDS in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*) with or who have Relationship Bonds with them. All allied PCs also count each other as possible core Network members. However, managing these connections is a social burden. Thus, a character is limited to a number of core Network slots equal to the higher of their Communication or Willpower ability. A highest ability of 0 or less indicates the character has no core Network, as they lack the social savvy and discipline to better harness their closest connections.

A character with the Contacts talent (under Talents in CHAPTER 3: Character Actions in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*) gains 1 additional core Network slot per degree, but these may only be used on NPCs the character recruits as contacts.

A character can save core Network slots to fill later and may reassign filled slots upon gaining a new level. Reassigning slots frequently may have deleterious social effects, as the character becomes known for being a fair-weather connection.

THE EXTENDED NETWORK

An extended Network comprises individuals the character knows through their core Network. These are those connections' connections, but you don't need to define those as strictly. For example, you don't need to write up an NPC's core Network and descriptors. The GM simply decides when someone belongs to the extended Network. In addition, all contacts recruited through the Contacts talent are also extended Network members.

NETWORK BENEFITS

A Network grants manifold benefits, at the minimum providing a range of support in the form of contacts, allies, and tools to be called upon in times of need, and at the most allowing a character to rely on others to supply information and backup without being asked.

USING CORE NETWORKS

When they involve someone in a core Network, the character gains a 2-point cost reduction in social stunts, but

only if their use matches the type of connection. This never reduces the cost of the stunt to 0 (minimum cost 1). For core Network connections forged by Relationships, the type of connection is the strongest Relationship Bond between the two characters. For other people, select a connection type from those included in this section or invent one using one of these as an example.

MY FRIEND

The cornerstone of all strong Networks comes in the form of friendship. Whether formed at childhood or forged through shared experiences, friendships stand the test of time and often lack the jealousies of work- and love-based connections. The connection benefit applies when helping the friend or invoking a past history of camaraderie.

MY LOVE OR EX

A character in a Network with their lover is likely to experience dizzy highs and tumultuous lows, as love may bring both danger and affection. The connection benefit applies when helping or seeking help based on this romantic history. The connection can also apply to the nostalgia or hatred involved in a now-defunct romance.

FAMILY, CHOSEN & OTHERWISE

Hereditary relatives and people who treat each other as family have distinctive connections. For blood relations, the connection may be antagonistic or involuntary. The connection benefit applies when it invokes the exact character of the family tie.

CAMARADERIE & RIVALRY

This connection is based on professional relationships or powerful shared interests. Maybe you're driven to excel together, or you always want to outdo your connection. The benefit applies when the shared profession or interest is involved.

EXTORTION

Unusual as it may seem, the bond between an extortionist and victim might be part of the core Network. If you're the victim, choosing the extortionist provides an opportunity to manipulate them. A character uses the antagonistic connection for stunts that fit its nature, depending on whether the actor is the perpetrator or victim.

HATE

Revenge, hatred, or a sworn vendetta can draw individuals closer together than lovers or friends. Once again, making the person you hate a core Network member has its advantages, since you gain your stunt cost reduction when exploiting your ire or theirs.

USING EXTENDED NETWORKS

Extended Network connections provide a 1-point cost break to social stunts (though the minimum cost for a stunt is always 1) when the GM thinks the connection would enhance that interaction. The GM doesn't need to strictly

define extended Network connections with descriptions and can wing it when required. However, when the extended Network connection comes through the character's core Network, the benefit must be invoked in a fashion consistent with the core connection. For instance, if the character reaches out to an extended connection via a core connection who's a hated enemy, the story they tell the extended connection must explain away the enmity in a convincing fashion (unless the extended connection hates the core connection as well, in which case the character can draw on shared animosity).

GMs should think carefully about the types of individuals a character is allowed to possess in their extended Network. It makes little sense for a busking musician to know an A-list movie star, but then again, all actors start somewhere, and such a connection could be ripe for roleplay. A GM may overrule any extended Network connection as far-fetched.

EXAMPLE: EUSTACE GOLDMANE'S NETWORK

The following example shows how Eustace Goldmane, a character from the *Brass Lightning* setting and member of the Smythe-Johnson organization, forms his Network.

CORE

Eustace Goldmane is one of Smythe-Johnson's chief enforcers. His Willpower of 4 (as opposed to his Communication of 0) gives him 4 core Network slots. His player surveys his Relationships for possibilities. Known for his temper, Goldmane finds it hard to make friends, but he does have his beloved sister, Jess, who tolerates his moods. The player adds Jess as the first of four potential connections for Eustace. The player thinks of how the Goldmanes have always competed against the Barrett family, one of whom is present in the protagonist group. After discussion with the GM, the player adds Eio Barrett to the core Network as a rival. The player will leave the other two spots free in case interesting options present themselves during the campaign.

Eustace doesn't approve of Jess's fiancée, John, and lets her know this while having dinner with both of them. The roll to persuade Jess generates 3 SP, which Eustace uses on Enrage (which normally costs 5 SP), targeting John. John punches Eustace, and Jess ends up disgusted with both of them.

EXTENDED

Eustace had never heard of Charlie Whittingstall before now, but lying on the barroom floor after being punched hard by the big man, Eustace spies the silver ring worn by Barrett operatives.

Embracing this new connection immediately, Eustace successfully pretends to be cowed by Charlie as a ruse to draw his knife. Drawing on his Relationship with the enforcer's boss, a core Network connection, he spends 3 Relationship-derived SP on Sleep With One Eye Open, which is normally 4 SP. This way, Eustace can not only have his blade ready, but attack by surprise.



COMPANIONS

Not all allies are defined by positive Relationships. Characters will meet NPCs throughout the campaign who aren't main actors in the story but serve persistent supporting roles. Sometimes these come from organizations the character claims Membership in. They might be hired for a job or two, volunteer their work out of gratitude, or be individuals a character meets through the Contacts talent. At the GM's discretion, these secondary allies become companions, using the following abbreviated game statistics and other rules.

Note that companions are most faithful in Pulp and Cinematic campaigns, since their abilities place them just out of the spotlight thrown on Player Characters. In Gritty mode, you must decide if PCs maintain this relative advantage or if they're nobody special.

GAINING & PLAYING COMPANIONS

The GM usually decides when characters meet companions. A patron may lend them out for a mission, for example. In addition, the GM may allow a protagonist to attract a companion with a 1-point Relationship Bond. This indicates time invested in forming a relationship, which allows the character to call in the companion when necessary, as long as the situation is plausible. Finally, a character with the Contacts talent may ask the GM for permission to define a contact they've created as a companion.

Once they arrive, each companion acts under the direction of a single player. The player decides what the companion does,

though the GM can overrule the player and take control if they think the companion wouldn't perform a given action.

COMPANION RULES

To speed up play, companions do not receive full character sheets or possess the same range of powers and abilities as the protagonists. Instead, companions follow these rules, unless specified otherwise by the GM.

- **COMBAT:** GMs narrate companion actions in combat rather than rolling dice, unless dramatically appropriate. Excessive dice rolling for NPCs can slow down play.
- **HEALTH:** Companions typically have half the health of the character to whom they're linked.
- **ABILITY SCORES:** Most companions have a couple of ability scores at 2 and a few more at 1, with two to three focuses. While some companions possess more than this or are incredibly specialized, these characters are rarities.
- **GM FIAT:** The GM should utilize companions in interesting ways, such as allowing them to surveil a tense scene and cry out a warning before an ambush or acquire information peripheral to the protagonists' main objective, so all the flavor the GM's written into the background can come to the fore. Similarly, if the GM feels it dramatically appropriate, companions' attachments to protagonists should wax and wane, occasionally veering into love or even hate if they are treated particularly well or poorly. This will make any threat to these characters mean more to the protagonists.

COMPANION TYPES

Following are several common companions in *Modern AGE*. The GM can adjust the stats for these characters if necessary or use them to demonstrate companion templates to players, so they know the types of companions to seek out.

BODYGUARD

A bodyguard may be hired muscle or a fan devoted enough to take a punch or a bullet. Some bodyguards stand close to their wards, while others maintain a distance and look out for threats. Celebrities, politicians, and important businesspeople may have a retinue of bodyguards. Depending on the locality and legality, they may equip guns to defend the protagonist.

BODYGUARD

TASKS: Spotting ambushes, noticing if others are armed, taking a bullet if required, causing a distraction while their employer flees, questioning suspect individuals

ABILITIES: Accuracy (Pistols) 2, Fighting (Brawling) 2, Perception (Searching) 2, Willpower (Courage) 1

DRIVER

A good driver is the difference between a successful bank robbery and a lengthy prison sentence, or a way to evade gun-toting assailants. Drivers span the gamut between professional chauffeurs and ex-military drivers skilled in evasive maneuvers and high-speed chases.

DRIVER

TASKS: Spotting upcoming dangers, evasive maneuvers, knowing the streets

ABILITIES: Dexterity (Driving) 2, Intelligence (Navigation) 1, Perception (Searching) 2, Willpower 2

LOVER

A lover is a confidante for characters in high-pressure lifestyles and a source of strength, providing emotional and practical support. More than other companions, however, a lover has their own needs and not only expects to be a major part of the character's life, but pursues interests of their own and often wants the character's support. Additionally, few companions will sacrifice it all for a protagonist, but lovers are often the exception.

LOVER

TASKS: Emotional support, acting as a last-resort source of aid, romantic interludes, tragic events

ABILITIES: Communication (Seduction) 2, Willpower (Courage) 1, one additional ability at 2, one additional ability at 1, 1 extra focus

RESEARCHER

Everyone needs subject matter experts. These are university-level scholars, disciplined students of trivia, intelligence analysts, and more who've immersed themselves into a chosen field of study and can effectively research anything they don't already know.

RESEARCHER

TASKS: Providing informed advice, finding things out, finding out things others would rather keep secret (and suffering the consequences)

ABILITIES: Communication (Investigation) 1, Intelligence (choose two focuses) 2, Willpower (Self-Discipline) 2, one additional ability at 1, one extra focus

SPOKESPERSON

Whether in the form of a lawyer greeting press on the steps of the courthouse or a simple publicist, a professional, trusted voice is something some characters need in their corner. Spokespeople serve to mitigate bad PR and improve a character's reputation. Sometimes they're hired, and other times they form a cadre of disciples who speak in favor of the character no matter their reputation.

SPOKESPERSON

TASKS: Quashing malignant rumors, promoting the character's activities in a positive light, acting as a mouthpiece when the character wants to be left alone

ABILITIES: Communication (Persuasion) 2, Intelligence (Current Affairs) 2, Perception (Empathy) 2, one additional ability at 1

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

The PA keeps the character's schedule, ensures they're where they need to be, covers the cracks in their organization, and acts as a confessional priest when things get tough. The PA holds a lot of cards over a character should the relationship ever turn sour but, until then, is the employee, friend, or relative who maintains the facade of professionalism.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

TASKS: Maintaining a schedule, acting as a communications hub between the character and the world, fending off unwanted work

ABILITIES: Communication (Etiquette) 2, Dexterity (Initiative) 1, Intelligence (Business) 2, Perception 2

TECH SUPPORT

Somebody needs to fix it, whether it's a software issue or a motor that needs rebuilding. "Tech support" covers an array of companions, including software specialists, garage mechanics, carpenters, and more. The technology present in the campaign determines their exact capabilities.

TECH SUPPORT

TASKS: Building and fixing machines, structures, hardware, and software – the precise role depends on the companion's specialties and the campaign.

ABILITIES: Communication (Investigation) 1, one of the following: Intelligence (Computers, Electronics, Engineering, or Tinkering) 2, Dexterity (Crafting or Forging) 2, or Strength (Machining) 2, plus one other ability at 1 with one focus

ORGANIZATIONS

In *Modern AGE*, sizeable organizations may use the following rules to determine their capabilities and ability to affect the world and the people in it. These rules are simple so as to enable quick play, without the need to deliberate over the obscure workings of multifaceted corporations and secret societies.

ORGANIZATIONAL STATISTICS

Each organization, business, society, or club has a number of abilities representing its power and resources. These abilities are rated on a scale similar to a protagonist's abilities, ranging from -2 or worse through 4 or greater. Most organizations possess scores in the 0 to 5 range, though powerful or weak assets, such as a paramilitary organization with a nuclear weapon and a way to fire it or a family store deep in debt to the mob and the banks, may find their ability scores above or below this range. There are five abilities for organizations: Might, Wealth, Influence, Intrigue, and Phenomena, though Phenomena only appears in campaigns where magic or future tech exist.

In addition to these abilities, organizations possess four secondary abilities: Stability, Structure, Focus, and Scope. Stability is similar to a character's Health, representing how much damage can be done to an organization before it collapses. Structure is akin to a protagonist's Armor Rating, representing how well constructed an organization is, making it harder to destabilize or undermine. Focus is the same as a character's focus, reflecting an organization's specialized traits, such as a weapons lab's potential focus in chemistry, or biology if they specialize in the creation of dirty bombs. Other focus examples will be described later in the chapter, along with Scope, which measures an organization's size.

MIGHT

Might encompasses military power, armed guards, and other things an organization can use to attack others or defend itself or its holdings from physical assault. Might does not need to be a dedicated security force; a ruthless bunch of property magnates who can call in hired hitters for a street war, devaluing the property on the other side of town, would use its Might to reflect this. Large private security firms, mobs, paramilitary groups, and governmental organizations tend to have high Might.

WEALTH

Wealth represents buying power, credit, and precious valuables. A bank balance with an impossible number of zeroes at the end of it, rare antiques, or bundles of unmarked notes all contribute to determining Wealth. Note that this score represents assets that can be actively used in play; a moneyed family with its wealth tied up in investments or with significant expenses, such as the upkeep of the family estate, might have low Wealth. Corporations and clandestine syndicates with many holdings usually have high

Wealth, though it's unlikely all their employees or members can access the liquid cash.

In purely mechanical terms, an organization's Wealth allows its powerful members to benefit from a reduction of difficulty on Resources checks. The Wealth rating subtracts from the TN on such a check when the hero uses their organization's Wealth to assist in procuring goods or services. However, the hero's rank (see Membership rules in CHAPTER 10 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*) affects the maximum by which this figure can affect the TN. For example, a character with Rank 1 can reduce the difficulty by 1 if the organization has a Wealth rating of 1 or more. A protagonist with Rank 3 can reduce the difficulty by 3 if the organization has a Wealth rating of 3 or more. This replaces the standard rules for Memberships and Resources. This is a mix of cash, credit, and assets on hand, so the GM can decide this advantage is reduced or doesn't apply to purchases far divergent from the organization's strengths and purpose.

INFLUENCE

Influence is a measure of political power and public sway. Influence may come from the possession of allies in various nations, secrets with political value, and friends among influential groups, such as the church, Freemasons, or US Republican Party. Influence only represents what an organization can call on swiftly to make things happen; a lobbyist group with one politician in its pocket might lose all Influence when that politician is indicted on corruption charges. Many large and successful organizations possess high Influence, with major political parties and billionaire-run corporations possessing particularly high scores.

INTRIGUE

Intrigue spans an organization's ability to gather intelligence or perform reconnaissance, how many secrets an organization possesses, and whether it succeeds in clandestine operations. Intrigue takes place in the shadows of smoky barroom booths, behind closed doors, and in chat rooms buried in the Internet's darkest corners. Spies, hard drives full of dirty secrets, and similar resources help determine Intrigue. Public organizations with no hidden arm, such as the city council or an open-book charity, have low Intrigue. Conversely, secret orders and covert organizations attached to more public entities have high Intrigue, as do many criminal organizations.

PHENOMENA

Phenomena is not present in every game of *Modern AGE*, but where this ability is used, it determines an organization's mystical resources, psychic abilities, or uncommon and futuristic technologies. Arcanists and psychics each contribute to an organization's Phenomena, along with any devices or persistent powers of a mystical or hyper-technological nature. Organizations not focused on magical or future-tech study and resources have low Phenomena, unless they receive the backing of a sponsor with investment in this area. The most phenomenal organizations may have a number of psychics or genius-level engineers on retainer to protect them from attacks of this nature. Tech-heavy organizations, such as the Midnight Corporation in the *Brass Lightning* setting, have high Phenomena.

NEW COVENTRY POLICE 22 DIVISION



BRYAN SYME

SCOPE

Organizations are not created equal. Compare a small street gang to an international crime syndicate. It's possible the gang reports to the syndicate unknowingly through multiple layers of subterfuge, just as a drug dealer ultimately connects to the farmer running the plantations growing the poppies, but the two are unlikely to have much of an effect on each other. To use the street gang example, they might be a big deal among the locals, but they pale in comparison to a megacorporation in the same city or the organized criminal syndicate that, through various means, gets them their supply and takes a cut of their money. Some of this difference in power is represented in other ability scores, but there is also Scope.

Scope is rated in four categories: local, regional, national, or international. Scope determines how wide the organization's reach is and acts as a bonus when an organization tries to affect smaller organizations than itself. The local category covers a town or small city, and regional covers part of a nation or a large city, like Berlin or Montreal. National deals with everything within the borders of a nation like the United States or China, while international is reserved for organizations that can affect large areas of the world with their power.

STABILITY

Stability is an organization's robustness. When looking at an organization's membership, an attacker may look for weak links in the chain: the people with suspect motives and morals, those who can be bought, or, in the case of a military organization, those who don't take safety and security precautions seriously. Stability will be lower for an organization containing little inner fortitude, which often comes

down to principles, loyalty, and experience. Once an organization's Stability runs dry, the organization ceases to function.

STRUCTURE

Financial organizations might erect firewalls and have employee-dedicated cyber-defense teams, while secret societies may cloak their language in metaphors, code, and encrypted letters. Both forms of security contribute to the organization's Structure. An organization with strong Structure is difficult to destabilize, as few can penetrate its outer shell.

As examples, a national security service is likely to have a high Structure rating, whereas a gang of ex-convicts acting as security for a mildly charismatic leader's cult will be far easier to undermine with its low Structure. The cult itself may have a high Structure if its members are brainwashed to the point of fanatical loyalty, or the Structure may be incredibly low if the cultists doubt their leader's words.

BUILDING ORGANIZATIONS

Unless the protagonists inherit or take over leadership in an existing organization, they will want to generate their organization's abilities. There are three ways to do this.

OPTION 1: FREE-FORM

Using this method, the players can work with the GM to assign abilities to their organizations as required. They shouldn't take every ability at high levels, keeping some low for interesting stories and campaign goals to develop. Additionally, leaving some areas weak will provide room for growth and expansion. If everyone reaches a consensus, this is a quick and easy way to generate a protagonist-operated organization. Stability should be around 25 to 45 and Structure between 2 and 6 for most organizations. Select two focuses that make sense for the organization as envisioned by the players.

OPTION 2: ASSIGN POINTS

The GM can vary the number of points provided but, as a standard, an organization should have 3 points in one primary ability, 2 in another, 1 in two more, and 0 in the final one. With the GM's permission, players can also lower one ability by 1 to increase another by 1. Starting Structure is 3 and Stability is $25 + 2d6$ + the organization's highest ability score. An organization's default Scope is local, unless the GM determines a larger Scope is warranted for the campaign. Select two focuses, one of which must be for the organization's highest ability.

OPTION 3: RANDOM GENERATION

This option can provide the most interesting results for a campaign, likely leading to immediate engagement for the players when they realize one ability is staggeringly high or woefully low. With this option, the players roll for their abilities in order as if they were making a character. As with character creation, they can then switch two ability scores with each other. Starting Structure is 1d6 - 1 and Stability is 25 + 2d6 + the organization's highest ability score. Scope is determined by a d6 roll: 1-4 is local and 5-6 is regional. Organizations won't randomly have a larger Scope, though GMs might increase this as the campaign requires. Select two focuses, one of which must be for the organization's highest ability.

ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUSES

This section gives examples of organization focuses for the five abilities that can possess them. Each can be used as is, though GMs and players are encouraged to look at these as examples and come up with their own focuses.

might focuses

AMPHIBIOUS SPECIALISTS: Soldiers trained in attacking on and from bodies of water

EXTRACTION TEAM: Specialized in extracting hostages and kidnapping targets

MARKSMEN: Used for the swift elimination of specific targets

PARATROOPERS: Trained in attacking from the sky and behind-enemy-lines maneuvers

SABOTAGE SQUAD: Used for planting bombs and sabotaging buildings

SECURITY FORCE: Used to defend the organization from physical attack

wealth focuses

ARMORY: The organization's stocked defenses, encompassing weapons and ammunition

BANK ACCOUNT: Easily accessible cash for purchases, bribes, paying employees, and other transactions

FOOD AND LIVING GOODS INVENTORY: An organization's access to basic and elaborate foodstuffs, for consumption or distribution to others.

INVESTMENTS: Hard to access, but important collateral for an organization for sale or aiming to boost its market share

PHARMACEUTICALS: An organization's depth of medical supplies, either legal or illegal

PROPERTIES: The organization's distribution via properties owned and mapped. These properties should be specified.

SERVICES: These are the skills and services an organization provides customers or associates, including but not restricted to bodyguard duty, weapons, engineering, inventory, and loans. This focus can be taken multiple times with a different service for each focus.

INFLUENCE FOCUSES

BLUE COLLAR: Used when dealing with the working classes and unemployed

FOREIGNERS: Used when dealing with outsiders to the organization's Scope, whether they be tourists, traveling workers, or representatives of foreign powers

FRINGE GROUPS: Used when influencing a fringe group of the players' choice, present within the organization's Scope

LAW ENFORCEMENT: Used when handling legal bodies, such as the courts, police, or private militias

MEDIA: Used when handling the media in a form selected by the players, such as television, the stage, news reports, or newspaper journalism

RELIGION: Used when influencing officials of a selected religion of the players' choice

STATE: Used when dealing with politicians, aristocracy, or government bodies

UNDERWORLD: Used when organizations deal with criminal gangs and their enterprises

WHITE COLLAR: Used when handling office workers and members of the stereotypical nuclear family

INTRIGUE FOCUSES

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE: Used to protect an organization from spies and assassins

HACKING: Used when attempting to steal information or access the computer records of other organizations

HIT MEN: Nonaffiliated, disposable assassins for hire used for eliminating troublesome individuals through killing or abduction

SECRETS: Used to discover and leverage secrets and scandals through blackmail and deal brokering

SPIES: Used for surveillance, sabotage, and conducting various covert operations

PHENOMENA FOCUSES

ARCANISTS: Used when utilizing arcanists to create, defend, or attack on behalf of the organization

AUGMENTATION: The implementation of technology in the human body to create something better

ESOTERICA: The players may choose an obscure vein of occultism and state their organization is focused in understanding this bizarre path.

GENE MASTERY: Used for the creation and maintenance of genetically engineered life-forms such as super soldiers or disease-immune children

HYPER-TECH: An organization's knowledge and utilization of ultra-futuristic technology that can barely run outside an organization's facility

LORE: Used to research forbidden secrets and deal with otherworldly menaces

PSYCHICS: Used when utilizing psychics to train, defend, or attack on behalf of the organization

TOMORROW'S WEAPONRY: Used when developing and using weapons of near-future design, such as effective gauss coilguns, plasma rifles, laser pistols, and atomic grenades

WHEN ORGANIZATIONS GO TO WAR

When players think of the rank-and-file population making up an organization's membership, they may think of anything from office drones to faceless ninja foot soldiers, or a mixture of the two! Sometimes in a campaign, an organization's troops will need to fight for their employer, whether through words, with fists, using assault weapons, or hurling shuriken.

It is a simple process to calculate troop types and numbers. An organization can muster an approximate number of troops equal to the sum of its Might, Wealth, and Influence multiplied by a modifier determined by its Scope.

The exact numbers can be influenced by a number of factors, including the nature of the organization itself. A paramilitary unit likely has more troops at its disposal than a secret laboratory. While these numbers don't necessarily represent every single soldier an organization can recruit, they do represent the largest force it can muster, supply, and mobilize within a time frame appropriate to the campaign.

An organization's focuses and general concept help determine which and how many troops it has available. The Might (Specialty Troops) focus should definitely provide such troops, but if it makes sense, the GM can allow other focuses to provide soldiers as well.

TROOP AVAILABILITY

SCOPE	NUMBER OF TROOPS AVAILABLE
Local	(Might + Wealth + Influence) × 10
Regional	(Might + Wealth + Influence) × 25
National	(Might + Wealth + Influence) × 50
International	(Might + Wealth + Influence) × 100

EXAMPLE ORGANIZATION: THE LOCOMOTIVE BUSTERS

The players in Meghan's Brass Lightning game decide to form The Locomotive Busters. The Locomotive Busters excel at holding up trains and always aim to get away with a fair haul of stolen loot. Ideally, the theft comes at the expense of the wealthy rail owners at Smythe-Johnson Rail or the snobbish passengers in first class. The players and GM decide to generate the organization randomly and then explain what they get afterward.

First, they roll 3d6 five times for abilities, getting 8, 14, 15, 9, and 12. They decide to switch their roll for Intrigue (9) and Influence (15), giving them Might 0, Wealth 2, Influence 1, Intrigue 3, and Phenomena 2. They roll a d6 - 1 for Structure, getting 3, and their Stability comes to 33. The players collaborate in providing narrative to these figures. They suggest their criminal enterprise has a lot of spies among the railroad companies, saboteurs on hire, and potentially the backing of a psychic. Their heists have procured a fair degree of wealth, but at this time they carry little fame. Finally, with their Might nonexistent, they decide the last heist went wrong and their main security forces were shot dead or arrested.

A d6 roll for Scope gives them regional Scope, meaning the organization starts the campaign well-established over a large region. With the game set in the United States, they decide Dallas is where their group is currently based and consider their region the entire state of Texas. They then pick two focuses, one of which must be in their highest ability (Intrigue). They opt for Intrigue (Spies), so they can benefit from their informants in the railroad industry, and also select Wealth (Bank Account) to demonstrate the cash they've already gained through their criminal activity.

The Locomotive Busters are now ready for play. They will grow, maintain their modest power, or fall into ruin based on the actions of their Player Character leaders and the challenges the organization encounters from here onward.

ANTAGONIST ORGANIZATIONS

These rules are also suitable for GMs who wish to introduce antagonist-run organizations and societies. Free-form generation is the easiest option for most NPC-run organizations, but GMs should feel free to use the random-generation rules if they want to populate a campaign with multiple organizations possessing interesting aspects.

In creating an organization, the GM should consider the type they want, its strengths, its weaknesses, and how this organization will interact with the setting, the protagonists, and any other organizations. GMs should take the time to figure out exactly what role an introduced organization will fill and how it functions, avoiding the trap of making a group that will constantly obliterate the players' efforts. A strict organizational chart or lengthy background is likely unnecessary, but GMs should know what their organizations do, what their capabilities are, who's in charge, and what their goals are. For those GMs who enjoy charts and tables, they can of course go right ahead and stat out a bunch of organizations.

INCORPORATING ORGANIZATIONS

The players will want to introduce their organization to the campaign, and the GM should facilitate this, making such play fun and inspiring to the group. Organizations can perform actions like characters, though they perform them less frequently and often over a longer period of time. Organization actions come in two forms: growth checks and plot actions.

GROWTH CHECKS

All organizations must combat natural wear and tear, the nipping teeth of rivals, overbearing politicians, and interested law enforcement that sometimes acts for virtuous

ORGANIZATION MISFORTUNES

2D6 ROLL	MISFORTUNE
2	HACKER ATTACK: Hackers access and damage organization resources, maybe through theft, maybe through a release of sensitive information.
3-4	NEW ORGANIZATION: A new group occupying a similar trade to the protagonists' organization arrives from elsewhere and draws resources and recruits away.
5-6	BETRAYAL: Turncoat operatives within the organization defraud it of wealth or launch an attack on loyal members to destabilize the organization.
7-8	RIVAL MANEUVERING: A rival organization undercuts the group's power with their own actions.
9-10	POLITICAL UPHEAVAL: A shift in leadership within the local government weakens the organization's power base.
11	OUT OF OUR HANDS: Something occurs far away, maybe a war, economic crisis, or public tragedy, that somehow negatively impacts the organization.
12	LAW INVOLVEMENT: Whether the protagonists were aware or not, something in the organization is illegal, and the law has just taken notice.

reasons and other times seeks a cut of profits or simple hush money. Day-to-day crises and opportunities such as these fall under growth checks. Growth is performed once per month and is a simple test (TN 10) using the organization's highest ability. If successful, the organization maintains its current condition. If it fails, some ill fortune or event befalls the organization, causing it to lose 2d6 Stability or reduce one of its ability scores, Scope, or Structure by 1 rank. The only way to prevent this loss is for the protagonists to undertake an adventure to address the problem, by stopping the saboteurs attacking their organization, paying off the extortionists, distracting the journalist probing the organization's shady dealings, or performing similar activities. Abilities cannot be reduced below -2 in this fashion, Structure can't go below 0, and Scope cannot be less than local. GMs looking for guidance as to what misfortune struck the organization can roll 2d6 and consult the **Organization Misfortunes** table or choose a preplanned calamity. GMs should strive to keep organizations in the players' view, creating plot to surround their growth and survival.

If doubles are rolled on the growth check and it is a success, the organization grows in some way. This is done by spending stunt points in the same way as you would for a character. The **Organization Growth Stunts** table provides the list of how players can use these stunt points to grow their organization. GMs can add new stunts to provide even more resources and possibilities, though the really powerful and unique assets of an organization should come from the protagonists' actions. Organizations are there to provide opportunities for adventure, for a different kind of roleplay, and for the characters to make a big mark on the world.

PLOT ACTIONS

Organizations may affect each other's resources, territory, and power through initializing plots. Narratively, one organization may perform a cyberattack on another, ruin the reputation of an opponent with scandalous tabloid stories, steal clients from under opponents' noses, or directly sabotage operations with bombs, guns, and ambushes.

Successful plots hurt their targets and often strengthen the plotting organization. Unsuccessful plots do the opposite.

ORGANIZATION GROWTH STUNTS

SP COST	EFFECT
1+	REBUILD/EXPAND: Add or replace Stability at the cost of 1 per SP spent.
1	EQUIP: Supply one character with an important and significant piece of equipment or 1d3 minor items suitable to the organization.
2	HIGH MORALE: Gain a +2 bonus to the next action the organization takes.
2	OBTAINED SECRETS: The organization gains a valuable piece of information about a rival group. Learn 2 exact ability scores or focuses of another organization in the campaign.
3	BOLSTER INFRASTRUCTURE: Increase Structure by 1.
3	NEW HIRE: A skilled or influential NPC joins the organization, reducing the SP cost of one Plot or Growth stunt by 1 SP. Should the individual be killed or removed, this bonus is lost. The players should name and briefly detail this character.
3	CONTACTS: The organization forms a connection that will provide useful information from time to time.
4	NEW ASSETS: Increase any ability rated 5 or less by 1.
4	SIGNIFICANT GROWTH: Increase the Scope of the organization from local to regional.
4	NEW FOCUS: Add a focus.
5	TALENT SCOUTED: A skilled <i>and</i> influential NPC joins the organization, reducing the cost of two Growth or Plot stunts by 1 SP each. Should the individual be killed or removed, this bonus is lost. The players should design this character.
5	MAJOR GROWTH: Increase the Scope of the organization from regional to national.
6	GREATER ASSETS: Increase any ability rated 6 or more by 1.
6	RAMPANT GROWTH: Increase the Scope of the organization from national to international.

PLOT STUNTS

SP COST	EFFECT
1+	REINFORCE: Add extra Stability equal to the number of SP spent.
1	FURTHER ADVANTAGE: Gain a +2 bonus in the next plot action test against this same opponent.
2	DISORGANIZE: Pick a focus; the opponent cannot use it in their next plot action.
2	EMBARRASS: The organization's actions humiliate an opponent. Make an Influence vs. Influence test. If the protagonists' organization wins, the target's members receive a -1 penalty to Communication tests until they roll doubles during a growth check.
2	UNDERMINE: The organization discovers an important secret about a foe. Make an Intrigue vs. Intrigue test. If the protagonists' organization wins, the target suffers a -2 penalty to their next plot action involving the protagonists.
3	DEVASTATE: Add +1d6 extra Stability loss to an opponent.
3	STEAL ASSET: The protagonists seize a notable asset from an opponent, such as a shipment of valuable goods.
3	SURGICAL STRIKE: Ignore Structure when determining the opponent's Stability loss.
4	SPLIT TARGETS: Use the results from the plot action to target two organizations. These need to be linked together in some way. Each organization rolls and resists separately.
4	TWO-PRONGED PLOT: Make another plot action immediately against the organization. This must use a different ability than the current plot.
5	DEFECTION: An important individual in an opponent organization changes sides and brings significant resources with them. The protagonists' organization gains a focus the opponent possesses (they still retain their focus).
5	EXTREME DEVASTATION: Add +2d6 extra Stability loss to an opponent.
5	OVERWHELM: Make another plot action immediately against the organization. This uses the same ability as the current plot.
6	POWER SHIFT: Lower one of the target organization's ability scores by 1, and raise the protagonists' organization's rating in the same ability by 1.
6	SABOTAGE OPERATION: An important individual in the opponent's organization changes sides. They bring many subordinates and resources and sabotage their former employer's operations when they defect. Gain a focus the opponent has — and the opponent loses that focus.

To initialize a plot action, the organization makes an opposed test with its target. Any appropriate focuses give each party a +2 bonus to their rolls. If the attacking organization wins, it deals 2d6 + the ability used as damage to the defending organization's Stability, with Structure acting as armor against the result. Structure rating therefore reduces Stability lost through the plot action. If the defender wins, the attacker takes the same damage to its Stability, with Structure again reducing damage. The winner of the test gains SP equal to their Stunt Die result (if they roll doubles) to spend on the **Plot Stunts** table.

Different plots require different abilities. Industrial espionage, spying on the CEO of a corporation, or assassinating a chief of security would use Intrigue, for instance. Making a show of an organization's strength in the media or on the rumor mill of the underworld is more likely to use Influence. Blowing up another organization's laboratory or launching a full-scale attack on another group's headquarters uses Might. If an organization employs a third party to act for them, the GM makes the call between using Wealth as the defining ability, to illustrate the mercenary reliability of the third party being used, or using the organization's appropriate ability with a modifier or reduction depending on their assessment of whether the third party aids or hinders ambitions.

PLOT FREQUENCY

GMs should determine how frequently they want to use plots. If the players love managing their organization and putting it through the highs and lows of public opinion, success, and failure, more than one plot in a session may be perfectly appropriate. If not, a limit of one plot action per session keeps the game at an individual level rather than at the level of the organization the characters control.

LONG PLOTS

A plot between organizations may span an entire campaign. The Capulet and Montague feud lasted generations in *Romeo and Juliet*, crime families fiercely competed on the American East Coast during the Prohibition era, and video game companies actively engage in cut and thrust with each other until one rises to the top for a few years, only to eventually be supplanted.

If the players' organization engages in a long-lasting feud or one that's elaborate, the story is assisted through breaking it into various plot actions rather than making all fates depend on one roll. In this way, organizations can suffer setbacks only to recover for a devastating counterstrike later in the campaign. Alternatively, repeated successes can hammer home the domination an organization can exercise when on top of its market. Naturally, if one organization does experience repeated success, other organizations may band together to stop the danger of their own annihilation.

OTHER ACTIONS

Plots are aggressive by design, but sometimes players will want their organizations to do something outside the norm,

whether acquiring resources through something mundane like mining or procurement on the market, or simply keeping the company cars serviced and fueled and the chauffeurs all trained in chase and evasion maneuvers.

The GM should look at the organization's abilities, should the players wish to explore such tangential tasks. It is fine to limit an organization from owning a railgun if the organization is a family of stockbroking arcanists. Common sense holds sway here, allowing for communal storytelling in which GMs can feel free to impose limits or throw in twists if the players overreach. As an example, if the stockbroking arcanists did decide they wanted a railgun for the defense of their family mansion, the GM could narrate the cost of doing business, the negative attention it draws, and the lack of experience any of the characters have in operating such a weapon. The idea is not to stop fun but to complicate situations and provide more roleplay opportunity.

SCOPE AND PLOTS

Fundamental to organization plots are the Scopes of the organizations in question. Smaller organizations struggle against larger ones, just as larger organizations find it easier to succeed in crushing their smaller counterparts. Punching up is a good feeling, but often leads to messy results.

For every difference in Scope (local to regional, regional to national, national to international), the larger organization gets a +2 bonus to the plot action test. However, it also costs 2 additional stunt points per difference in Scope to perform a stunt. It's easier for a large organization to overwhelm and push around smaller institutions, but they get less out of it when they do. Conversely, it's harder for small organizations to affect larger ones.

The upside is that when a smaller organization gets the better of a larger organization, they get a bonus as their actions grow their power by attracting new allies, recruits, and aid. These victories rarely weaken the larger organization but often do wonders for the smaller. To reflect this, for every Scope they are below their opponent, the organization winning a plot action test gets a +2 bonus and receives 2 free SP to spend with their next growth check. This makes plots by small groups against larger organizations very attractive, but they also risk drawing the ire of an institution with far superior resources. It is a gamble to make an action like this, but the rewards for doing so are great.

ORGANIZATIONAL ABSORPTION

If an organization reaches a Stability of 1 or 2 or has at least three of its abilities reduced to 0, a larger organization can step in and absorb it. Such an action is handled narratively. Some examples include when a large crime syndicate adopts a crew from a fallen Mafia family, a legitimate business is taken under the wing of the megacorporation monopolizing the industry, or a secret society merges with another to ensure lore is passed on. In such cases, the larger organization gains 1 rank in up to three abilities the smaller organization still held above 0 and 1d6 Stability.

PLOTS AGAINST INDIVIDUALS

Organizations can and often do move against particular individuals. A supporting character and a protagonist who constantly interfere with the running of an organization will find themselves the target of a plot. If this happens, the plot should be run as an encounter or even a whole adventure if the target is a protagonist. The organization might send assassins, attempt to have the character arrested, publicly disgrace the protagonist, or do whatever else seems dramatic. If the protagonist survives this plot, they've dodged the organization's ire, for now.

If the target is a GM character, the GM should determine the likely outcome based on the power of the organization and its respective target. Making a plucky journalist vanish without a trace or ruining a small-time rival to the organization's objectives should be pretty much automatic; destroying an organization of equivalent size and strength to the heroes' group or killing the masters of a secret society should be far from easy.

ORGANIZATIONAL RUIN

In the rare case an organization loses all its Stability or has all its abilities reduced to 0 or less, the organization is in ruins. The organization will completely collapse unless the characters step in and succeed at some last desperate attempt to save it. Such actions are always the focus of a story, and protagonists might even be called to do this for organizations that aren't theirs. If this final attempt to save it succeeds, the organization immediately gains 2d6 Stability and 1 rank in two abilities of the players' choice. It's in sorry shape, but it still exists.

KEEPING TRACK OF ORGANIZATIONS

Organization statistics are minimal for ease of system and reference and can fit on an index card or within a single paragraph in a document. For this reason, GMs can make a lot of organizations for their game, which can be hugely beneficial to a political game with multiple blocs in play, a crime game where rival families and factions war for territory, or an espionage game with all its potential interested parties.

Listing organizations in one place such as a spreadsheet, perhaps ranking them in order of different ability values, allows a GM to keep a league table of the groups in their game. Players may enjoy referencing game lore in this manner, as it's relatable and clearly demonstrates the shifts of power present in the campaign. They may especially enjoy it if they're the instigators of these power shifts. Consider the looks on the players' faces when the organization on top of the league for Wealth, Influence, and Intrigue plummets down to fourth place and their discussion when they realize they were instrumental to the organization's fall, or their surprise due to their lack of involvement in that group. Stories may commence purely through investigation as to why the top dog fell and the identity of the persons responsible.

EXAMPLE: THE MIDNIGHT CORPORATION

The following example shows how a protagonist-run organization in the *Brass Lightning* setting handles both growth and plot actions.

GROWTH ACTION

The *Midnight Corporation*, a protagonist-run secret society, has been operating for several months in the London underworld. Having reached the end of another month in game, the GM calls for the organization to make a growth check. The TN for the check is 10, and the organization uses its highest ability, in this case its *Phenomena* of 3. One of the players rolls for the check, getting 4, 4, and 3 on the Stunt Die! The roll is only just a success on its own, but with doubles they gain stunt points. The players may spend the 3 SP they earned to grow their organization or keep them in reserve for the next time they get an opportunity to spend SP. After consulting the *Organization Growth Stunts* chart, they decide to *Bolster Infrastructure* by 1 for the full sum of their 3 SP.

PLOT ACTION

Feeling better defended than before, the members of the *Midnight Corporation* decide they can now afford to be aggressive. They choose to target the mercantile family of Arthur Smythe-Johnson, aiming to physically disrupt the railroads the Smythe-Johnsons operate and prevent the traffic of illegal weapons and drugs to their part of the country. In particular, they intend to blow up one of the family's trains in its siding, to deter others from using the Smythe-Johnsons' enterprise for risk of a similar fate.

The GM calls for a contested roll against the Smythe-Johnsons to determine the effects of this plot action. Both sides have *Might* 2, but the Smythe-Johnsons have regional *Scope* to the *Midnight Corporation's* local, giving them a +2 bonus to their roll. This would be a deterrent to the *Midnight Corporation* but for their focus in *Might* (*Specialty Troops*), which the players had already defined as demolitions experts. This focus grants the *Midnight Corporation* a +2, effectively negating the Smythe-Johnsons' bonus. The dice will determine the ultimate outcome.

The players roll for the *Midnight Corporation*, getting a 2, 5, and a Stunt Die of 5 with a +4 bonus for a total of 16. The GM rolls for the Smythe-Johnsons, getting a 1, 3, and a Stunt Die of 2 with a +4 bonus for a total of 10. The *Midnight Corporation's* plot succeeds! The organization's saboteurs successfully destroy the Smythe-Johnson cross-country train in its station. The Smythe-Johnsons take 2d6+2 *Stability* damage from this, in this case a large 11 points of *Stability* after subtracting their *Structure* of 2. The Smythe-Johnsons have 19 *Stability*, having been the recent victims of several damaging plots.

Remember, the *Midnight Corporation* rolled doubles, so they get to spend the value of their Stunt Die as SP on plot stunts. Three of those points go into *Steal Asset*, as the *Midnight Corporation* members decide they recover a cache of forbidden weapons from the train before its destruction.

The players elect to use the remaining two points to pay for an *Embarrass* plot stunt. The *Midnight Corporation* has 0 in *Influence*, so it's a gamble against the 2 possessed by the Smythe-Johnsons. Additionally, the Smythe-Johnsons have a focus in *Influence* (*Media*) and are still regional to the *Midnight Corporation's* local *Scope*, resulting in a +6 to the Smythe-Johnsons. Unsurprisingly, the players' roll of 2, 3, and a Stunt Die of 1 does not beat the GM's roll of 4, 4, and 2 with a +6 on top. Fortunately, the organization loses nothing for failing in this stunt test.

BEING THE TARGET OF A PLOT ACTION

The Smythe-Johnsons are not stupid. The GM decides it's likely the Smythe-Johnsons will push for reprisal using a plot of their own. They attempt to discredit the *Midnight Corporation* in the presses, using their *Influence* of 2. The protagonists try to defend with *Wealth*, saying they pay off the media with their rating of 1. The GM agrees to this decision.

The *Midnight Corporation* only possesses a bonus of +1, while the Smythe-Johnsons receive a +2 bonus for their superior *Scope*, +2 for their *Influence* ability, and +2 for their aforementioned focus in *Influence* (*Media*). The GM rolls a 1, 2, and a Stunt Die of 3 with a +6 bonus (ability plus *Scope* and focus bonus) for a total of 12. The players rolling for the *Midnight Corporation* luckily get a 6, 5, and a Stunt Die of 3. With their +1 bonus (ability) they get a 15. Against the odds, the *Midnight Corporation* manages to withstand the Smythe-Johnson's attack.

Defeating a foe of superior *Scope* gives the *Midnight Corporation* an additional +2 bonus and 2 free SP on their next growth check, improving the chances of a good result. The *Midnight Corporation's* next actions are up to the protagonists. They might continue to plot against the Smythe-Johnsons, trying to ruin them utterly, or move on to some other endeavor.

SAMPLE ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations represent typical groups, orders, and societies in *Modern AGE*. They can be used as templates for protagonist or GM organizations.

CULT		
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)		
MIGHT	1	
WEALTH	0	
INFLUENCE	2 (Fringe Group)	
INTRIGUE	2	
PHENOMENA	3 (Lore)	
COMBAT RATINGS		
STRUCTURE	STABILITY	SCOPE
2	30	Local

This group represents a small cult dedicated to an esoteric form of belief. Neither rich nor powerful, their skills mainly gravitate around appealing to outsiders.

PARAMILITARY GROUP		
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)		
MIGHT	4 (Marksmen, Paratroopers)	
WEALTH	2	
INFLUENCE	2 (State)	
INTRIGUE	3 (Spies)	
PHENOMENA	0	
COMBAT RATINGS		
STRUCTURE	STABILITY	SCOPE
5	40	Regional

This group represents a dangerous band of ex-soldiers with designs on power. Led by disenfranchised ex-military members, this group likely bristles with weapons and tactical expertise.

STREET GANG		
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)		
MIGHT	2 (Security Force)	
WEALTH	1	
INFLUENCE	1 (Underworld)	
INTRIGUE	2	
PHENOMENA	0	

COMBAT RATINGS		
STRUCTURE	STABILITY	SCOPE
4	25	Local

This group consists of petty criminals banding together for common security and mutual gain. Unlikely to make a dent at anything greater than a city level, they are still dangerous to people who fall afoul of them.

PYRAMID SCHEME		
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)		
MIGHT	2	
WEALTH	6 (Bank Account, Investments)	
INFLUENCE	3 (Blue Collar, White Collar)	
INTRIGUE	3 (Secrets)	
PHENOMENA	1	
COMBAT RATINGS		
STRUCTURE	STABILITY	SCOPE
6	45	International

This financial consortium rewards those on top and punishes those at the bottom, all with the vain temptation that it might be possible

to ascend the pyramid. Likely illegal in practice, this group will act as moneylenders, investors, and fraudsters of dubious character.

CRIME SYNDICATE		
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)		
MIGHT	4 (Marksmen)	
WEALTH	5 (Bank Account)	
INFLUENCE	3 (Underworld)	
INTRIGUE	3 (Hit Men, Secrets)	
PHENOMENA	0	
COMBAT RATINGS		
STRUCTURE	STABILITY	SCOPE
5	35	National

This nationwide group may one day exert influence across the globe. Comprising different crime families and a variety of areas of expertise, the crime syndicate can be called upon to perform any illegal action.



ARISTOCRATIC HOUSE		
ABILITIES (FOCUSES)		
MIGHT	2 (Security Force)	
WEALTH	3	
INFLUENCE	4 (State)	
INTRIGUE	1	
PHENOMENA	1	
COMBAT RATINGS		
STRUCTURE	STABILITY	SCOPE
4	35	Regional

Once upon a time, an aristocratic house may have held international, or at least national, sway. In the late modern era, the peerage is toothless but for symbolic power. That is not to say they cannot enact their will via proxies, which is where their power truly lies.

MEMBERSHIP & ROLES

Organizations bestow ranks on their members, as defined in the *Modern AGE* core book. These ranks differ between organizations. Some are strictly hierarchical and divided between initiates, apprentices, experts, tutors, and masters, or administrators, managers, directors, and CEOs, while others have more nebulous terms like soldiers, captains, consiglieri, and bosses. While the titles themselves may change, for the purposes of game mechanics the functional ranks do not. A drug dealer in a gang may be considered a recruit by the core rules, while their superior as the moneymen in charge of several dealers can be considered a respected member, and so on.

To differentiate members beyond raw rank, you can give characters a Membership Role linked to one of the organization's abilities. This is an additional benefit, sort of like a "phantom rank," added to a Membership as an additional perk. Thus, some characters may have Memberships without them, but someone with a role related to political lobbying and a Rank 2 Membership in the Midnight Corporation would have it listed as Membership: Midnight Corporation 2 (Influence).

The GM can award one Membership Role on top of any rank. Additionally, the character can acquire a second Membership Role as a perk on top of Rank 3. A Rank 3 character with two Membership Roles occupies one of the top positions in the organization.

If characters adopt these Roles in an organization, the GM needs to throw complications their way based on their position from time to time.

MEMBERSHIP ROLE RULES

A character with a Membership Role adds half their score (rounded up) in the better of two key abilities to the Role's

organizational ability tests, provided they act in concert with the organization. If the score is negative, they'll provide a negative modifier. Do not include bonuses from any focuses the character has. On the other hand, possessing a focus may provide additional key ability options. These will be listed as "Ability (Focus required)."

You should generally avoid giving characters the same Membership Roles in the same organizations. An organization has a capacity for as many Membership Roles in one ability as half its score rounded up. Thus, an organization with Might 3 can support two members with Might Roles. Members who cooperate fine-tune their results, as per the **Cooperation** rules in CHAPTER 8 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*.

MIGHT MEMBERSHIP

If a character becomes a might member of the organization, they may be a security officer, a former military expert, or just an effective bouncer at the door of a nightclub.

KEY ABILITIES: Fighting or Accuracy, Intelligence (Security or Tactics required)

WEALTH MEMBERSHIP

A character responsible for an organization's wealth may be a stockbroker, investment banker, or money launderer, or simply have access to a very big safe.

KEY ABILITIES: Communication or Intelligence

INFLUENCE MEMBERSHIP

An influence member may be media savvy, have good personal PR, or simply possess blackmail material on the opposition.

KEY ABILITIES: Communication or Willpower, Intelligence (Anthropology or Current Affairs required)

INTRIGUE MEMBERSHIP

Characters with an intrigue role could be retired (or maybe not-so-retired) spymasters, skilled extortionists, or successful criminals.

KEY ABILITIES: Intelligence or Perception, Communication (Deception or Investigation required)

PHENOMENA MEMBERSHIP

If they aren't researchers into unusual abilities and technologies, characters who manage phenomena may have extraordinary gifts themselves.

KEY ABILITIES: Constitution or Willpower, Intelligence (Occult or another relevant knowledge focus required)



TECHNOLOGY

In a *Modern AGE* game, the level of ambient technology is often a core aspect of the setting. Even if it's an urban fantasy game in which the setting is “our world but with magic,” the availability and advancement of our technologies strongly define our modern world and distinguish one era from another. Whoever has the more advanced tech has more power, more money, or at least more options.

MAKING & TINKERING

Most of the genres *Modern AGE* can cover have staple character archetypes built on understanding, building, and improving equipment. The mercurial tinkerer, the mad inventor, the genius engineer, the down-to-earth grease monkey, the programming whiz—these are all valid heroic concepts. Basic tests using Dexterity (Crafting), Strength (Machining), and many Intelligence focuses can easily represent these character concepts well. To perform simple equipment modifications, just make a basic test with the right focus and achieve the effect you want if you succeed. With the right combination of focuses, talents, and/or background, the GM might rule that such tests automatically succeed without a roll if the modifications are simple enough.

DETAILED MODIFICATION

If a player would like to make tinkering and improvising gear a more integral part of their character, or if the genre of the game calls for a bigger focus on these activities, you can use detailed modification instead. This system is for projects

a character could reasonably complete within a single scene, to accomplish a goal that would be harder or even impossible to do in that time otherwise. That includes repairing something broken; improving an item to be sharper, lighter, more efficient, less bulky, etc.; adding functionality to an item it wouldn't normally have or making it substitute for something else in a pinch; temporarily pushing an item's capabilities beyond their limits; or using existing equipment (or its scraps) to invent something new or allow the heroes to do something they otherwise couldn't.

Detailed modification doesn't handle mundane, long-term projects like building cars from scratch over the course of weeks or writing new computer programs over the course of days or hours. In nearly every case, it's much easier to acquire such equipment another way than to build it yourself. If a player would like their character to do something like that, you can represent it as an ordinary advanced test narrated as a montage or simply state that they accomplish their goal once sufficient in-game time has passed.

UNCONVENTIONAL TECH

The rules described later in this section cover tinkering and technologies intended to be believable in a game where supernatural or futuristic alternatives aren't available. To make use of those, the rules for extraordinary items in CHAPTER 5: EXTRAORDINARY ABILITIES should be your first choice. However, we have included some more extreme possibilities in this chapter as well, to give you your choice of systems and for unusual settings where certain extraordinary feats just require a bit of elbow grease.

EQUIPMENT MODIFICATION

In the kinds of stories these handy characters come from, the most interesting use of their abilities is during a tense, high-stakes scene when they have limited time and resources, or when they need to invent something new and brilliant to stave off disaster or enable the adventure to continue. Thus, modifying equipment is a special kind of advanced test that can take place in narrative time or action time, depending on whether the protagonist is willing to cut a few corners. Other characters can perform other tasks while the techie does their thing—even participate in combat.

TESTS & FOCUSES

A modification test uses various focuses depending on the equipment a character works with, as follows:

- **DEXTERITY (CRAFTING):** simple objects such as a baseball bat or wrought-iron gate, makeshift objects made from simple materials such as rope traps and carvings
- **DEXTERITY (SABOTAGE):** ruining the functionality of mechanical devices (digital sabotage uses Intelligence (Computers) instead)
- **INTELLIGENCE (CHEMISTRY):** anything involving raw chemicals or chemical reactions, such as poisons and some makeshift explosives, alchemical potions, and elixirs
- **INTELLIGENCE (COMPUTERS):** software and digital technology, including the operations side of gear that has a built-in computer, like a spaceship or high-tech armor
- **INTELLIGENCE (TINKERING):** machinery and devices, including the physical casings of robots and other digital systems or entities, or a cyborg's implants
- **STRENGTH (MACHINING):** items that require operating heavy-duty machinery or archaic tools, like a crane or a forge

The GM may require a character to possess a second focus, such as Intelligence (Engineering) for large structures and vehicles, Intelligence (Biology or Medicine) for implants and poisons, or Intelligence (Explosives) for explosives more complex than a Molotov cocktail, to attempt a project.

The base TN for any modification test is 11. The GM may grant situational bonuses to modification tests when the hero has access to exceptional tools and ample resources or penalties when they're working without crucial tools, materials, and/or information.

SUCCESS THRESHOLDS

The base success threshold for an equipment modification test is 6. However, many factors modify this number, including the modification's complexity, determined by *qualities*; the genre and setting of the campaign; and the game's mode.

These factors modify the success threshold rather than the TN because this system is designed to allow success with a price

more often than outright failure. The harder and riskier your project is, the more likely it is that it will take longer— with potentially dire things happening in the meantime—and/or pick up negative qualities along the way.

A detailed modification test's interval is either one minute in narrative time or one round in action time. See **Making the Test** later in this chapter for more details.

QUALITIES

With detailed modification, every piece of equipment has a set of qualities. Some are positive, like granting a bonus to rolls someone makes with the item, and some are negative, like imposing penalties because the item is heavy or malfunctioning. Some qualities have no distinct mechanical effect but instead grant a narrative function to the item, like the ability to pick up radio signals. Items have some qualities by default, such as a walkie-talkie having the Communicator quality. Apply these where it makes sense whenever a character wants to repair or sabotage something, so they have distinct qualities to remove.

A list of qualities is included later in this chapter, but the GM should feel free to come up with new ones on the fly if needed. If you have trouble, the easiest way to improvise a new effect is to use Favored Stunt to make the item good at enabling a stunt that does what you want. For instance, you could represent a quality that allows a projectile weapon to fire in a spread with Favored Stunt (Lightning Attack or Spray and Pray).

Each quality has a success threshold modifier associated with it. Adding a quality of any kind to or removing one from a piece of equipment increases the test's base threshold by that amount; you can stack as many threshold modifiers as you like, including the same one multiple times if it makes sense. Adding positive qualities or removing negative ones improves equipment, while adding negative qualities or removing positive ones sabotages it.

Some qualities only make sense when the game's genre allows for a certain level of technology or magic, noted in parentheses after their descriptions on the **Positive and Negative Equipment Qualities** tables.

BUYING MODIFIED EQUIPMENT

If you want characters to be able to purchase equipment that's already modified (or damaged), apply +1 to the TN of the Resources test to acquire it per +2 threshold modifier total represented by its positive qualities and -1 per +2 threshold modifier total represented by its negative qualities. These TN modifiers may cancel each other out in any combination; for instance, a souped-up muscle car with broken windows applies the increase for its engine mods *and* the decrease for its damage.

OTHER SUCCESS THRESHOLD MODIFIERS

Once the GM has determined the success threshold based on the complexity of the intended modifications, they may adjust it further based on the game's genre, setting, and mode.

POSITIVE EQUIPMENT QUALITIES

THRESHOLD MODIFIER	QUALITY	DESCRIPTION
Varies	Vehicle	You can use the item as a vehicle that falls under one of the following focuses for the accompanying threshold modifiers: +4, Propelling; +6, Sailing; +10, Driving; +14, Steering; +19, Piloting. Due to its rough construction, the vehicle also carries a combination of negative qualities with a total threshold modifier equal to half the threshold modifier for its governing focus. These qualities do not modify the success threshold themselves.
+0	Simple Weapon	You can use the item as a simple hand-to-hand or thrown weapon without negative qualities for improvisation.
+1	Sensor	The item gains or grants a user the ability to sense and interpret one type of phenomenon, such as motion, radio signals, or magic.
+2-12	Armor	You can use the item as armor; each +2 threshold modifier grants +1 impact Armor Rating.
+2	Favored Stunt	The item is especially well suited for performing one specific stunt, granting a -1 SP modifier to its cost.
+3-9	Shield	You can use the item as a shield with a +1 shield bonus per +3 threshold modifier.
+3	Communicator	The item gains or grants a user the ability to communicate via one medium, such as radio, video, or telepathy.
+3	Simple Explosive	The item explodes with a specific kind of trigger.
+4	Complex Weapon	You can use the item as a complex improvised weapon, like a firearm or explosive; choose a combination of negative qualities with a total threshold modifier of +4 to inflict automatically. These qualities do not themselves adjust the success threshold.
+4	Unique Stunt	The item grants access to a unique stunt that a character can perform while wielding or using it.
+5	Effortless	Change the kind of action it takes to reload a missile weapon from major to minor or minor to free.
+5	Firewall	The item only works when the user inputs a password, speaks the right magical phrase, etc.
+5	Powerful	Increase a missile weapon's base range by half its original base range rounded up (e.g., a revolver's range goes from 65 to 98 yards).
+5	Recorder	The item gains or grants a user the ability to record what's happening via one medium, such as audio, video, or magical tome.
+6	Automatic	Upgrade a missile weapon's rate of fire by one, from single shot to semiautomatic or semiautomatic to fully automatic.
+6	Calibrated	The item only works for its owner and no one else.
+6	Converter	The item gains or grants a user the ability to convert one kind of thing to another type of the same thing, such as translating one language to another, converting heat energy to light energy, or changing someone's hair color. (Some genres may not allow all options.)
+8	Lethal	The item grants +1d6 weapon damage.
+8	Penetrative	Shift weapon damage type by one, from impact to ballistic or from ballistic to penetrating.
+8	Protective	The item grants +1 Armor Rating against penetrating attacks.
+9	Transformer	The item gains or grants a user the ability to transform one kind of thing into another kind of thing, such as turning a human into an elf, a suit of armor into a car, or energy into matter. (This requires sufficiently advanced technology or magic.)
+10-12	Teleporter	The item gains or grants a user the ability to teleport instantly from one specific place, time, or universe to one other specific one at +10 or from anywhere to anywhere as long as they have coordinates or other appropriate data at +12. (This requires sufficiently advanced technology or magic.)
+11-13	Portal	The item gains or grants a user the ability to open a portal from one specific place, time, or universe to one other specific one at +11 or from anywhere to anywhere any as long as they have coordinates or other appropriate data at +13. (This requires sufficiently advanced technology or magic.)

NEGATIVE EQUIPMENT QUALITIES

THRESHOLD MODIFIER	QUALITY	DESCRIPTION
+2	Complicated	Anyone using the item who doesn't possess an appropriate focus takes a -2 penalty to all tests with it.
+3	Vulnerable	The TNs of tests using the item cumulatively increase by 2 each time it's exposed to a particular vulnerability during this encounter, like sunlight or water.
+4	Cursed	Roll twice for any test using the item and use the lower result.
+5	Difficult	Change the kind of action it takes to reload missile weapons from free to minor or minor to major.
+5	Impotent	Halve a missile weapon's base range.
+5	Malfunctioning	If the Stunt Die shows a 3 or less on a roll that uses the item, the TN of that roll increases retroactively by 2, potentially turning success into failure.
+6	Clunky	Downgrade a missile weapon's rate of fire by one, from fully automatic to semiautomatic or semiautomatic to single shot.
+6	Flashy	Rolls to hide, sneak, or blend in automatically fail while using the item.
+8	Dull	Shift weapon damage type by one, from penetrating to ballistic or from ballistic to impact.
+8	Feedback	The user suffers damage equal to the value on the Stunt Die with each use of the item.
+8	Fragile	When a test using the item fails and the Stunt Die shows a 3 or less, the item breaks.
+8	Unstable	When a test using the item fails and the Stunt Die shows a 3 or less, the item utterly destroys itself and causes 2d6 damage to anyone nearby (or 3d6 damage in a Gritty game).

VARIABLE EQUIPMENT QUALITIES

THRESHOLD MODIFIER	QUALITY	DESCRIPTION
+2-6	Efficient/ Clumsy	Gain +1/-1 per +2 threshold modifier to tests using the item (decreases/increases Handling for vehicles).
+2-6	Impressive/ Shoddy	The item makes a strong impression, granting +1/-1 per +2 threshold modifier to appropriate social tests while wearing, wielding, or using it.
+3-9	Deadly/Weak	Add +1/-1 per +3 threshold modifier to weapon damage rolls.
+3-9	Lightweight/ Heavy	Add +1/-1 per +3 threshold modifier to weapon's minimum Strength rating.
+3	Agile/Weighty	Add +1/-1 armor penalty.
+3	Capacious/ Undersized	Adjust a missile weapon's capacity by +1/-1 to a maximum of 6 or minimum of 2.
+3	Roomy/ Cramped	Adjust a vehicle's passenger capacity by +1/-1.
+3	Sturdy/Soft	Apply a +1/-1 impact Armor Rating adjustment to a maximum of 10.
+3	Versatile/ Unwieldy	Tests you make using the item generate +1/-1 SP when you roll doubles.
+5	Defensive/Thin	+1/-1 to a shield's Defense bonus, minimum 0.
+5	Tough/Flimsy	Apply a +1/-1 ballistic Armor Rating adjustment to a maximum of 8
+6	Severe/Mild	Upgrade weapon damage from stun to wound/downgrade it from wound to stun.
+8	Speedy/Slow	Increase/decrease a vehicle's velocity class by one.
+8	Armored/ Compromised	+1/-1 to a vehicle's hull rating.
+8	Forceful/ Sluggish	+1d6/-1d6 to a vehicle's base ram damage.

- **GENRE AND SETTING:** Apply a +1 or +2 to the success threshold if the available technology makes it difficult (but not impossible) to perform the desired modification; apply a -1 or -2 if the available technology is more than advanced enough to easily handle it.
- **MODE MODIFIER:** Game mode influences the success threshold modifier as follows:

GRITTY: The threshold modifier is +1 for sabotage and +2 for repairs/improvements.

PULPY: The threshold modifier is +0.

CINEMATIC: The threshold modifier is -1 across the board.

The GM may decide that some kinds of modifications are impossible under the circumstances, whether because the technology to do them doesn't exist in the setting or because the resources available are simply not up to the task. However, it's best to let the threshold modifiers carry this weight most of the time instead, as long as it makes sense. A time traveler with enough sheer genius, technical know-how, and luck should still be able to build a teleportation machine out of early twentieth-century technology, as long as they know anything about teleportation machines to begin with!

MAKING THE TEST

With the final success threshold determined, the player can begin the advanced test. Successful rolls add their Stunt Die values to players' total accumulated points as normal. Once the character meets the success threshold, they've created the item. Default success produces an item with the qualities the player decided upon ahead of time. There are however several possible variations to this basic process.

MATTERS OF TIME

Normally, equipment modification tests take place in narrative time, with intervals of one to ten minute each depending on how long the GM thinks it should take. Thus, equipment modification doesn't happen in action time. But what if the character wants to take it faster or slower than usual? What about Cinematic games where the amount of time is just enough to make for a satisfying montage? Use the following rules.

RUSHED JOBS

The character decides to do the work in action time, in one-round intervals. Modification uses up the character's major action, and depending on the nature of the job, may occupy their minor action as well. Each one-round interval adds 1 additional rank of negative qualities (equivalent to a +1 threshold modifier). In some cases, rushed jobs may only be available in Pulpy or Cinematic games.

SLOW JOBS

The character works in intervals of one hour. This decreases the modification TN by 2.

VARIABLE JOBS

Characters can mix standard length intervals with those for rushed or slow jobs. Apply rules based on the interval being used.

STOPPING AND STARTING

The nature of the job determines whether a character can take a break and come back to it later. Most mechanical and electronic equipment can be set aside in the middle of the job and returned to later. Modifications involving certain chemical reactions, living things, executable code, and other elements which act on their own cannot be put on hold.

MONTAGE JOBS (CINEMATIC)

In Cinematic games, there may just be an abstract period of time for characters to modify their equipment. In source media, this is often portrayed in a montage, showing various parts of the task but saving the result for when the plan comes together. In these cases, the GM doesn't use timed intervals, but tells players they have a set number of them to get things done.

SUCCESS AT A COST

Normally, a failed roll in an advanced test means the character makes no headway during a time interval, but if the GM permits characters can make progress anyway by cutting corners and allowing new flaws to enter their design. Using this option, if a player fails a roll they may choose to add points from the Stunt Die to the success threshold in exchange for automatically adding negative qualities with a total threshold modifier equal to (or higher than) the value on the Stunt Die.

TYPES OF EQUIPMENT MODIFICATION ACTIONS

The detailed equipment modification system can model a variety of tasks. Negative qualities can model damage and other kinds of sabotage to objects, which means a character can repair the object by undertaking a modification test to remove those qualities and fix it. The number and severity of those qualities indicates how damaged the object is. Positive qualities can model improvements to an object's basic function or innate capabilities the object possesses. The latter can also be added to an item, to represent innovations like turning an amulet that senses the presence of demons into a signal that *summons* them, too. Characters can also use this system to jury-rig gadgets and contraptions "from scratch," but these are hack jobs scrounged together from the scraps of other objects, not polished work to produce brand-new things.

TEST RESULTS

Most of the time, a player won't outright fail an equipment modification test unless their character has limited time in which to work and can't accumulate the required Stunt Die points fast enough. Successful tests completed entirely in narrative time yield permanent modifications to the item, although a foe may remove permanent qualities later using

the same system by repairing something a hero broke or sabotaging something they built. Successful tests with at least half their rolls completed in action time yield temporary modifications. These last for one game session. Temporary sabotage is not always as temporary for the characters as it is for the players—giving a car the Cramped quality by plowing into it with another car and smashing in the passenger side causes serious damage. However, it's assumed that the damage isn't so severe that the opponent can't get it fixed without making tests in between game sessions.

Modifications more temporary than that are reflected in qualities like Fragile and Unstable and in stunts that allow heroes to do things like put vehicles into overdrive for a few rounds of a chase or improvise equipment on the fly to negate penalties. See CHAPTER 4: STUNTS for more about stunts like these.

When a character modifies an item, their player should describe in narrative terms how the character changes the item to upgrade or ruin it. For instance, if they give a revolver the Automatic quality twice—thus upgrading it to a fully automatic weapon—the player might describe the tiny motor their character cobbles together and installs. Don't be overly

concerned with how realistic the explanation is; players don't have to be engineering experts to play characters who are.

EXAMPLE

Indra, Alejandro's character, takes cover in the luggage compartment of a broken-down steam locomotive while a gunner fires at her through the windows from outside. She doesn't have a weapon to shoot back with, but the compartment is filled with assorted odds and ends from the passengers' baggage. Alejandro tells Meghan, the GM, that Indra's going to cobble together a jury-rigged electrified steam cannon—which is to say, she's modifying available objects to create a different kind of object. Since the game takes place in the Brass Lightning steampunk setting, but Indra lacks any real resources for proper gadgetry, Meghan sets the TN at 12. Alejandro chooses the Complex Weapon quality (threshold modifier +4) to represent being able to build the steam cannon in the first place and accepts the necessity of making the test in action time. Meghan's running a Pulp game, so the final success threshold is 10.

During the first round, Indra manages to avoid getting shot and starts scrambling for materials. Alejandro rolls 3d6+4 for his Intelligence (Tinkering) test and achieves a total of 13, with 4 showing on the Stunt Die. That's a success, so Alejandro gladly jots down 4 Stunt Die points toward his total. In the second round, Indra takes 3 damage from a lucky shot, but she presses on, breaking down the various objects from the baggage she's tearing open into their component parts. This time, Alejandro only achieves a total of 10 on his roll, with 3 showing on the Stunt Die. The roll fails, but the longer Indra takes to finish her project, the higher the likelihood that she'll get seriously hurt. Alejandro decides to succeed at a cost and apply those 3 points to his total, bringing it to 7, in exchange for having to add +3 in negative qualities. In the third round, Indra takes 2 more damage and starts reassembling all the parts in the boiler room. Alejandro achieves a total of 15 on his roll, with 4 showing on the Stunt Die. Adding those points to his previous total gives him 11 points, exceeding the success threshold and completing the project.

Now it's time to apply negative qualities. Since Indra worked for 3 rounds of action time, Alejandro must now apply negative qualities equivalent to a total threshold modifier of +3. Succeeding at a cost added another +3 in negative qualities. Finally, the item is a Complex Weapon, which adds +4 in negative qualities by its nature. Alejandro notes a total of +10 in negative qualities.

Alejandro chooses the Unstable quality (+8), representing the slapdash nature of this dangerous weapon Indra just hacked together. If Alejandro rolls 3 or less on the stunt die of a failed test to represent Indra operating the weapon, it explodes! He also applies the +2 version of the Clumsy quality, imposing a -1 penalty to tests to operate it. This assigns the +10 in required negative qualities. Indra now has an inaccurate weapon that might boil her face off, but it's better than nothing!



DEMOLITIONS

Sometimes, even an automatic weapon doesn't make a big enough dent in the villain's plans. Sometimes the protagonists need to rain destruction down on a greater scale, bringing down suspension bridges or fending off hordes of zombies. Sometimes a hero needs to blow something up.

Throughout this section, some TNs and other details might vary depending on the game's mode. These are listed with slashes, like this: Gritty effects/Pulpy effects/Cinematic effects, in that order.

TYPES OF EXPLOSIVES

The basic types of explosives for the purposes of this game include the following:

- **BOOBY TRAPS:** hidden traps, like land mines, that explode when someone trips a wire or sensor or steps on the device and then releases the pressure on it
- **CHARGES:** quantities of materials, such as dynamite or C4, that are safe to handle generally but explode upon manual remote detonation
- **GRENADES:** portable thrown weapons that explode after a few seconds
- **FUEL IGNITIONS:** certain kinds of substances, like alcohol and petrol, cause huge fireballs when mixed with oxygen and set on fire
- **TIMED BOMBS:** explosives wired up to a timer that detonates them when time runs out
- **MISSILES:** explosives fired from a weapon, like a rocket launcher or bomber aircraft, that detonate on impact

Modern AGE presents basic rules for grenades as weapons and other explosives as hazards. This section delves more deeply into using demolitions in your game.

PERSONAL-SCALE EXPLOSIVES

Personal-scale explosives include booby traps and grenades. *Modern AGE* provides the necessary rules for using grenades in your game. A grenade targets everyone in a small area of effect, usually in an enclosed space.

NEW WEAPONS

GRENAD LAUNCHER: A character can fire any kind of grenade from a grenade launcher instead of throwing it. Grenade launchers come in many varieties and can stand alone or be mounted under the barrels of ordinary assault rifles. Damage

is the same as the equivalent thrown grenade. *Examples:* M203, GP-25.

ROCKET LAUNCHER: This represents a number of shoulder-fired missile launchers. The most sophisticated versions fire guided missiles. These provide a +1 to +3 bonus to attack rolls when the operator uses the Aim action before firing. This is in addition to the bonus granted by Aim itself. *Examples:* AT4, RPG-7 and successors. Note that the range is in the middle ground for these weapons. Newer weapons will have a longer range.

MINES AND EXPLOSIVE TRAPS

Setting a mine or other explosive trap is an Intelligence (Explosives) test. This covers both knowing how to set the trap properly and how to hide it well. Anyone who comes near the trap must oppose your roll with a Perception test with an appropriate focus—most use Seeing, but some may use Hearing if a character can potentially hear an electronic hum or soft click. Those who succeed may make a TN **15/13/11** Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to dive out of the way and halve the damage; those who fail take the full brunt. A mine is a harrowing hazard that deals 5d6 damage, split evenly between stun and wound penetrating damage, and knocks victims prone. Each mine only affects one person or vehicle.

PULPY/CINEMATIC: A character who steps on a pressure-activated land mine can make a TN 15 Dexterity (Sabotage or Sleight of Hand) test before stepping off again to trick the mine into failing to explode until they're safely away.

MEDIUM-SCALE EXPLOSIVES

Medium-scale explosives include fuel ignitions and some missiles.

Fuel-ignition weapons don't explode; instead, they create swift and deadly fire. Characters can throw makeshift fuel-ignition weapons, like Molotov cocktails. Molotov cocktails and other bottle bombs have the same automatic range as thrown grenades, but instead of exploding, they ignite into billowing fireballs that are major hazards. They deal 3d6 penetrating damage every round across an area with a 10-yard radius, which expands by 2 yards in every direction each round. Characters can make a TN **15/13/11** Perception (Seeing) test to notice the incoming bottle bomb before it lands and a TN **17/15/13** Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to get out of the initial incendiary radius if they do notice, halving the damage. In an enclosed space like a moving vehicle, add +1 to the Acrobatics test's TN.

Characters can use the Fuel Line Anti-Vehicle stunt to cause fuel-ignition explosions. In Cinematic games, merely shooting

EXPLOSIVES TRAITS

WEAPON	DAMAGE	MIN. STR.	I/P/B	S/W	RoF	RANGE	CAP.	RELOAD	RESOURCES DIFF.
<i>Focus: Assault Rifles</i>									
Grenade Launcher	(grenade)	1	I/B	W	SS	150 yards	—	Major	14
<i>Focus: Longarms</i>									
Rocket Launcher	3d6+6	3	P	W	SS	200 yards	—	1d6 Minor	15



a stand-alone tank of gasoline causes it to explode, creating a major hazard that deals 3d6 penetrating damage within a 5-yard radius, expanding by 2 yards in every direction each round. In Pulpy and Gritty games, just shooting a fuel tank won't do it, but hitting it with an incendiary grenade or bottle bomb will.

Whenever a vehicle crash occurs involving a vehicle of velocity class Extreme/Very Fast/Fast, the GM rolls 1d6. On a 3 or higher, the gas tank explodes as detailed in the previous paragraph.

Portable missiles and rockets that a character can fire from a rocket launcher are destructive enough to take out armored vehicles and aircraft. A missile is a self-propelled, self-guided warhead that tracks by motion, heat, a predetermined flight path, or some other method. A rocket is self-propelled but unguided, simply traveling along its original trajectory until it explodes on impact. Individuals can carry rocket launchers by hand or mount them on vehicles by adding the Complex Weapon quality to the vehicle (see the **Equipment Modification** rules earlier in the chapter). A character wielding a rocket launcher doesn't need to perform the Pierce Hull stunt before dealing damage to a vehicle with a Hull rating unless the vehicle is specifically armored against these threats. In those cases, the GM determines how much of the Hull rating applies.

LARGE-SCALE EXPLOSIVES

Large-scale explosives include charges, timed bombs, and some missiles. These are the kinds of explosives a character can use to take down a whole building or collapse a tunnel.

A character can set timed bombs or charges ahead of time and then detonate them later with a remote detonator. Both consist of explosive materials packed into forms that are safe to handle. Setting charges and bombs requires a TN 15 Intelligence (Explosives) test; failing to set them properly could result in meaningless collateral damage that doesn't have the intended effect or could put the saboteurs themselves in mortal danger. To bring down a whole building, a suspension bridge, or some other large target, charges must be placed in strategic locations designed to bring down the structure's foundations.

The quantity of explosive material determines the hazard category, the toughest kind of material it can destroy, and how large the area of effect is; these quantities are measured by the difficulty of the Resources test it takes to acquire them. The difficulties given are for Pulpy games; for Cinematic games, decrease them by 2, and for Gritty games, increase them by 2. Damage from these explosives is split evenly between impact and penetrating. The GM may allow a Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to halve the damage someone takes if they're in range, which could represent diving out a window or taking heavy cover. People and unmoored objects in range go flying a significant distance in addition to taking damage and may end up buried under piles of debris, needing help to escape. Note that the damage they take from the concussive impact is included in the base damage, unless they happen to also fall a long distance, which is handled as its own separate hazard.

Missiles (self-guided), rockets (self-propelled but unguided), and torpedoes (missiles designed to function underwater)

EXPLOSIVES RESOURCES DIFFICULTY

RESOURCES DIFFICULTY	BLAST RADIUS	HAZARD CATEGORY	DAMAGE	MATERIAL
11	10 yards	Moderate	2d6	Wood, drywall
13	20 yards	Major	3d6	Brick, rock
15	30 yards	Arduous	4d6	Concrete, steel
17	40 yards	Harrowing	5d6	Thick concrete, reinforced steel
19	50 yards	Murderous	6d6	Thick reinforced steel

DEMOLITION STUNTS

SP COST	STUNT
1+	TOO COOL FOR THIS: On a test to avoid taking damage from an explosive, one character who sees you walk away from it takes a -1 per SP spent to their next opposed test against you.
3	DIVE AND ROLL: On a test to avoid taking damage from a hazard, if you would take half the rolled damage, you take none instead.
5	AND THEN IT EXPLODED (PULPY/CINEMATIC): Your action makes something explode as a side effect of its primary purpose. One object someone is not currently actively using is destroyed. Anyone within 5 yards of it must succeed at a TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test to avoid taking 2d6 damage, split evenly between impact and ballistic.

fired from a vehicle or a surface-to-air (SAM) launcher are all at the murderous hazard tier of the **Explosives Resources Difficulty** table. They cause this hazard whether the tests made to fire them succeed or not; it's just a matter of whether they destroy the target they were meant to destroy.

THE MOTHER OF ALL EXPLOSIONS

Your game may occasionally call for an explosion so enormous it takes out a whole skyscraper, a neighborhood, or even an entire city. The rules listed earlier don't cover these, because destruction at that level of magnitude is usually a major story event that characters try to stop from happening in the first place, rather than something dice adjudicate.

If you need to figure out how such an explosion harms the protagonists, it's probably because they tried to disarm a bomb or stop a missile from launching and failed. Or, they *caused* the explosion, whether accidentally or intending to sacrifice themselves for some greater good. In Gritty games, let those consequences play out—the characters die, and the next set the players roll up can mourn them or laud their accomplishments.

PULPY/CINEMATIC OPTIONS FOR MAJOR EXPLOSIONS

In Pulpy or Cinematic games, you can handle such explosions in one of two ways. First, you can keep scaling the hazard table up to extreme tiers, but reduce the damage for the protagonists and important NPCs. This reduction could be based on circumstances, such as distance from the epicenter, or you can

EXTREME EXPLOSIVES

BLAST RADIUS	HAZARD DAMAGE
Half a mile	7d6
1 mile	8d6
5 miles	9d6
20 miles	10d6
100 miles	11d6

reduce it by one die per four levels the characters possess (or a combination of those). Handling large explosions this way means you can also gauge damage caused to important structures and objects, like the characters' home base or a vehicle.

Alternatively, you can limit the damage such explosions deal to Player Characters to a murderous hazard, but impose other consequences to take the devastation into account, such as getting trapped beneath a building's rubble and having to make tests to safely escape or call in a rescue.

A FINAL WORD ABOUT EXPLOSIVE DAMAGE

Modern AGE makes explosives lethal but, in many cases, survivable. This is a concession to practical playability. You can scale explosives up or rule that instead of rolling half the dice, each of them hits a 3, increasing the minimum damage. In these games, explosives should be extremely rare and act more as story events than combat or exploration hazards.



THE MODERN CAMPAIGN

Roleplaying games—*Modern AGE* included—are full of general Game Mastering advice. While that's a good thing, this chapter aims for something a little different. Imagine the campaign as part of the game with its own set of rules. This is already true: GMs need to track NPC statuses, mind the rules in play, track time in the campaign, and manage several other elements. With that in mind, peruse the following new rules. Like everything else in this book, these game systems are optional. You can add, subtract, or modify any aspect you wish.

CAMPAIGN RHYTHM

Every game session should vary not only in the details of events but in how it feels in the context of the wider campaign. Some sessions are quiet, low-key affairs. This is common when you're setting up the premise and storyline. Others feature periods of rising tension and adversity and moments of grace under pressure and epic deeds. The ebb and flow of a campaign—its rhythm—are dictated by the stories and conflicts you introduce, the heroes' actions, and the way the dice fall. This last factor creates variations within the sessions. Some game sessions will feature plenty of good luck for our protagonists, but others won't. A campaign is usually a story extended across multiple sessions, where you'll often want to ratchet up danger and tension while hoping characters rise to the occasion. This means that sometimes you want success and failure to follow trends dictated by dramatic necessity, not pure randomness.

The following section presents two systems: Complications that add adversity to balance out good fortune and Serendipity that helps characters rise above bad luck. Use these options if you want the rules to enforce a sense of dramatic structure across multiple sessions.

COMPLICATIONS

A campaign is built on challenge. In many stories, the more characters succeed, the more challenges the ripening plot throws at them. It's not exactly a rule of storytelling that every triumph should precede a new, greater barrier to success, but it makes for interesting problems, interesting solutions—and tragic failures.

The following Complications system provides a way to ratchet up challenges in response to character success and story progress.

THE COMPLICATIONS POOL

To use Complications in the game, the GM keeps track of what's called the *Complications Pool*. It represents a buildup of events occurring during an adventure, where every twist and turn adds its weight to the story, filling a cauldron of fickle fate and hidden challenge that eventually boils over.

At the beginning of each adventure, the Complications Pool starts at 0. Add 1 to the Complications Pool each time one of the following events occurs:

- A character succeeds on an ability test and rolls a 6 on the Stunt Die

COMPLICATIONS ACTIVATION

COMPLICATIONS POOL	D6 ROLLS 1-3	D6 ROLLS 4-6
10	Stage 1 (Minor) Effect; Pool Resets to 0	No Effect; Pool Does Not Decrease
20	Stage 2 (Moderate) Effect; Pool Resets to 0	No Effect; Pool Does Not Decrease
30	Stage 3 (Major) Effect; Pool Resets to 0	Stage 3 (Major) Effect; Pool Resets to 0

COMPLICATION EFFECTS

STAGE	EFFECT
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Minor effects are possible. Choose one of the following:

- **TEST:** +2 to the next test's difficulty, or success requires an additional test using another ability. A failed test brings about a new minor hazard.
- 1
- **HAZARD:** A hazard's lethality increases by 1d6 damage or includes an additional ill effect.
 - **INVESTIGATION:** It takes an additional test or special circumstance to unlock a clue.
 - **SOCIAL:** An NPC's attitude drops one step out of the characters' favor or can only be maintained by satisfying some odd or awkward desire.

Moderate effects are possible. Pick any two minor effects or one of the following:

- **TEST:** +4 to the next test's difficulty, or success requires an additional test using another ability at +2 to the difficulty. A failed test brings about a new moderate hazard.
- 2
- **HAZARD:** A hazard's lethality increases by 2d6 damage or includes an additional serious ill effect.
 - **INVESTIGATION:** Opposing forces are alerted to the investigation and misdirect it so an additional lead/clue must be investigated to progress.
 - **SOCIAL:** An NPC's attitude drops two steps out of the characters' favor or can only be maintained by performing a difficult task. An NPC learns a secret detrimental to the PCs. The PCs make a new minor enemy.

Major effects are possible. Pick any two moderate effects or one of the following:

- **TEST:** The test can only succeed at a significant price, sacrificing lives, Resources, or social standing. At its worst, the character attempting the test may be killed or captured. Note that this is an additional risk outside of the standard risks the test might normally impose, and failure must impose a different bad circumstance so that the test remains worth doing. For example, a character might need to hold a door closed against enemies or a wall of water so allies can escape.
- 3
- **HAZARD:** Surviving the hazard leads to an even more dangerous situation, such as a worse hazard or an encounter with adversaries.
 - **INVESTIGATION:** The investigation leads to a trap, where characters might be attacked by enemies who have prepared an ambush, framed for a crime or other violation, or otherwise seriously harmed.
 - **SOCIAL:** An NPC with a favorable attitude becomes Hostile or one with an unfavorable attitude becomes Very Hostile. An NPC learns a secret that could lead to serious effects, such as being hunted by the authorities or rejected by loved ones (with a consequent modification to any Relationships, Memberships, and titles).

- A character spends 4 or more stunt points to perform a stunt
- The characters successfully defeat an encounter or hazard
- The characters complete a section of the adventure
- A character spends Conviction, in games where the optional Conviction rules are used

ACTIVATING COMPLICATIONS

As the Complications Pool hits 10, 20, and 30, Complications may *activate*. To see if they do and what the effects are, roll 1d6 and consult the **Complications Activation** table.

Each stage represents a great degree of adversity or the chance of an unfortunate reversal, ranging from Stage 1 (Minor) to Stage 3 (Major). Consult the **Complication Effects** table when Complications activate for a given stage.

EXAMPLE

As GM, Meghan has been tracking the characters' triumphs and good fortune, increasing the Complications Pool accordingly. When the pool hit 10, she rolled 1d6 but scored a 5, indicating nothing happened and the pool would keep accumulating. After the characters drive a pack of fascists out of town, Meghan notes the pool has increased to 20, prompting another 1d6 roll. She scores a 1, activating a Moderate Complication effect. Sean starts investigating the fascist gang further. Who was backing them? But when Sean asks regular informant Barfly Willy about it, the man says, "I'm not supposed to talk to you," and stares straight ahead. Willy's Open attitude has worsened to Standoffish. Meghan decides this is because the Red Right Hand conspiracy that backed the gang has made it known that anyone who talks about them will be punished.

DESIGNING YOUR OWN EFFECTS

The **Complication Effects** table serves as a guideline. Feel free to design other Complications whose effects compare to those listed in the table. For example, instead of a hazard, you might decide the effect calls for adversaries to confront the characters or makes existing adversaries more powerful—or even makes dire enemies out of people the characters don't know (e.g., "Didn't you kill my brother?"). In many ways, the fallouts for failed breaching challenges (see CHAPTER 8 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*) resemble Complications in this section, and you can draw from those for inspiration or use Complications for equivalent-tier breaching consequences. Note, however, that if you're using both systems together, a Complication happens in addition to the consequences for failed breaching tests—they get that much tougher.

One last thing: Complications never lead to automatic failure. They make existing tasks harder or add extra challenges, but they never totally shut the door to victory. The slimmest chance of success is still interesting, and in any event, the rules for Serendipity, the companion system for Complications, rely on success still being an option.

PICKING & DESCRIBING COMPLICATIONS

You should always be prepared to justify Complications in the game. Minor effects can usually be blamed on bad luck, but others should tie in to the ongoing story, even if they relate to elements the players may not be aware of. Justifying a Complication gives you an opportunity to add more detail to scenes or develop your backstory. For example, a warehouse generating an additional hazard may mean the place stores explosive or biohazardous materials—and they might be stored in an unsafe manner because the local mob has taken over this aspect of waste disposal and dumped these items.

Some Complications arise due to deliberate actions from NPCs or precautions they've taken, which the Complications trigger. For example, an effect that worsens a relationship with an NPC may represent blackmail material or a plan to lie in a particular, convincing way. In combat, NPCs might shoot out windows to fill an area with broken glass after noting a character happened to get stuck behind cover without their shoes.

Complications may require a bit of retroactive justification, but you should avoid contradicting any of the reliable information characters have on hand. It's fine to decide a building had a secret room or an NPC was lying, but it's not such a good idea to say there was an extra security camera after the characters specifically searched the room for them and solidly succeeded in doing so.

THE STORY WITHIN THE COMPLICATION

Another way to utilize Complication effects is to plan for when they may occur. You can even tailor your own effects directly to the story or game you're running, using the **Complication Effects** table as a guideline. These rules are meant primarily to add flavor, challenge, and additional

story elements for the enjoyment of everyone at the table. You may even wish to provide additional rewards if heroes prevail in the face of a Complication. If you use the instant experience points option in CHAPTER 10 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, each rank of Complication corresponds to the suggested instant reward.

SERENDIPITY

Serendipity is the flip side of Complications. In the dramatic rhythm of the campaign, Serendipity represents the tendency for a situation to eventually come around in the characters' favor, the talent characters have for getting back up after getting beaten down, and dramatic situations where, after much hardship, characters rise to the occasion. This is not to say that Serendipity and Complications are mutually exclusive, however. Characters often benefit from luck or extra effort in the face of the worst opposition.

THE SERENDIPITY POOL

Like Complications, Serendipity requires the GM to track an ongoing total called the *Serendipity Pool*. Insults, injuries, slipups, and bad luck increase the pool.

At the beginning of each adventure, the Serendipity Pool starts at 0. Add 1 to the Serendipity Pool each time one of the following events occurs:

- A character fails an ability test and rolls a 1 on the Stunt Die
- A character fails an ability test where they were entitled to re-roll due to a beneficial circumstance such as a talent or, optionally, the use of Conviction
- A character's Health drops below half its usual total
- A character's Health drops to 0 (if the cause of this also dropped the character's Health below half, add +1 to the pool for that circumstance as well)
- A character is incapacitated, captured, held hostage, or otherwise unable to act (if this happened due to any of the other situations listed here, such as having their Health drop to 0, add +1 per applicable event)
- The characters complete a section of the adventure
- A character suffers a significant indignity, such as a loss of Membership ranks, a Relationship gone sour, or a significant, permanent drop in Resources

Finally, if a character dies or is otherwise permanently removed from play, add 6 to the Serendipity Pool.

Track the Serendipity Pool with six-sided dice. You don't roll these dice. Instead, you leave them on the table, visible to your players, and turn the face to the current number for the pool. Start with one die. Once you accumulate more than 6 points, add another die and turn its face to list the remainder. The Serendipity Pool can accumulate up to 18 points, noted with three six-sided dice, each with its 6 face up. When players spend points from the pool (see **Using the Serendipity Pool** for rules), reduce the number on the dice, starting with the die showing the lowest number. If this reduces the number on the die to 0, remove the die from the pool and subtract the remainder from the next die.

OPTION: PLAYERS TRACK SERENDIPITY

Since the Serendipity Pool is an advantage for Player Characters, the GM may wish to leave it to the players to point out occasions where a pool increase is warranted. If you go this route, explain and perhaps display the rules for pool increases, and when an opportunity for an increase comes up, a player must point this out. If you agree, apply the increase. This gives you one less thing to track, and while it adds something for players to manage, it is to their advantage to do it. In a game where you strongly trust your players to properly track the pool, you might eventually leave it for them to manage without asking for your approval—though you always have the right to reverse their decisions.

USING THE SERENDIPITY POOL

When a die in the Serendipity Pool has a 6 face up, it is *active*. This means players can spend it. A player may spend either 3 or 6 points from the pool upon making a successful test. These act as bonus stunt points. They can be used even when the player did not roll doubles on a test, and they can be stacked with stunt points from other sources. In advanced tests, the player may add these points to the Stunt Die to accomplish a task more quickly.

Why these options? The Serendipity Pool is designed to produce *dramatic* success, and not just add a small edge here and there. Thus, after getting beaten, bruised, and set back, characters have a way to bounce back with a memorable success.

Finally, the Serendipity Pool is intended for every player to use. For that reason, no player can spend points from the pool again until every other player has done so.

EXAMPLE

After several episodes where the protagonists have been beaten down, Meghan has tracked the Serendipity Pool to a total of 10 accumulated points. Meghan has placed two dice to represent the pool: one with its 6 face up and another with its 4 face up. The 6 indicates the pool is active, and players can spend points from it.

The characters are in a burning building. Reeling from his wounds, Brian aims his pistol at Sepulcher, lieutenant of the Red Right Hand, the organization responsible for their pain. Brian's attack hits but doesn't score doubles, so his player, Malcolm, spends 6 points from the pool to activate the Collateral Damage (2 SP, hinders pursuit), Vicious Blow (+1d6 damage), and Double-Team (ally gets attack on target) stunts, represented by Brian shooting flaming wreckage so it falls on and momentarily pins Sepulcher. Brian and Sean agree that Sean should take the extra shot afforded by Double-Team. Unfortunately, since Brian spent 6 points, Meghan removes the 4 die from the Serendipity Pool and changes the face on the other die from 6 to 4. The pool is no longer active. Once it is active again, Malcom cannot spend points from it until the other players have each had a turn.

RESTING & RESETTING RHYTHM

You may not want to use Complications and Serendipity all the time, for a few good reasons. First, campaign pacing often requires neutral moments, so rising tension and excep-

tional action truly have a chance to shine. While you want every game session to be enjoyable, it's also true that when every session is special in some way, the charm of individual moments might be diminished. There are also times when, to keep things simple, you want to reset everything to a baseline.

In the case of Complications, you might decide a Minor effect doesn't justify a rest, while a Moderate effect neutralizes this system for a game session or two, and a Major effect may prompt a rest lasting three or four sessions. In the case of Serendipity, you might set aside the rules for a period after every player has had a chance to spend points from the Serendipity Pool. In addition, jumps in time or the commencement of a new storyline may prompt a reset of both pools to 0 and a session or two where the rules are set aside, while you and your players ease into new events.

Beyond these guidelines, you can always use your best judgment. Assess how players feel and the current tone of the campaign. You might decide that you never want to rest or reset these systems and that they'll always influence the course of events. It's up to you.

RHYTHM & MODE

The Complications and Serendipity systems aren't for every campaign. Under their influence, events follow the rules of dramatic action. Success foreshadows greater challenges to come, and the greatest victories take place after a period of adversity. This doesn't fit the philosophy of every GM. If you would rather let the dice fall where they may and totally dictate story events, or prefer to moderate the rules in a more free-form fashion to produce story arcs, these rules may not be for you.

Furthermore, your choice of campaign mode (Gritty, Pulpy, or Cinematic) and the overall tone of the campaign may influence how you want to use these rules. For instance, in a Gritty game, you might prefer to leave events too unpredictable to use these rules, but that's an aesthetic choice—Gritty games can still follow the rules of drama. A Pulpy or Cinematic game might use these rules to build rising tension and memorable action at regular intervals. But another alternative is to just use one of the rhythm-related game systems. For a game with a tragic cast, where bad luck, bad decisions, and a hostile world eventually catch up with even the greatest heroes, you might want to use the Complications rules but not the rules for Serendipity. You might also decide to use the Serendipity Pool but not the Complications Pool in Gritty or Pulpy games where you want occasional bursts of fortune to compensate for a dark overall tone, or in Cinematic games where you want to see the most outrageous bursts of action.



Advanced Civilization' Found at Antarctic Dig



Assassination Makes War Vote 'Imperative:' Speaker



Is it Your Social Media FEE or an AI?



Activists Arrested for Entering Midwest Quarantine Zone



What Happened to Fusion Power?

Red Hand Church Cult Claim

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

You want to shake things up. You want “downtime” – that is, the period when time passes in the game world that isn’t experienced in game sessions – to be meaningful. You want inspiration for your plot threads and a sense that your campaign world is a dynamic, ever-changing place. That’s what campaign events are for. They represent changes in the campaign world that may be relevant to the protagonists. Certainly, events other than the ones you generate occur, but they either remain in the background or are incidents you deliberately bring into your campaign’s story. Events created using the system described later in this section stand somewhere in between. They exist to inspire your plans, adding a random element or simply a set of influences to choose from.

GENERATING EVENTS

You can determine campaign events using the tables in this section but you don’t have to generate events randomly. You can always pick and choose events from the tables, ignore random results you don’t like, or design your own events from scratch. But if you do decide to create events randomly, get three six-sided dice. The first die determines progress and intensity. The result decides whether an existing event becomes more influential or a new event occurs – and if so, how extreme the event is. (If you choose or you’re generating your first event, the result always determines the intensity of a new event.) The second die determines the event category.

The third chooses the specific event from the category determined by the second die, based on its table. The categories are *Crime and Punishment*, *Culture*, *Economics*, *Politics*, *War and Peace*, and *Miscellaneous Incidents*.

FREQUENCY

You decide how often you roll for events. Consider these options:

CAMPAIGN TIME

Rolling across frequencies based on the number of months that pass in the game world makes downtime meaningful, as the world keeps changing even while the characters aren’t acting during game sessions. Rolling once per month is appropriate for less proactive hero groups. They need a steady stream of story hooks to grab them. Once every two or three months is more appropriate for characters who have self-driven agendas, and when events do arise, you should work a little harder to make them relevant to the characters’ interests. If you’re not sure, or prefer to be inspired by randomness, you might check for events every 1d3 months instead.

SESSIONS AND REAL TIME

Alternately, you can time checks based on the amount of real-world time that passes, as measured in game sessions. The frequency you choose here is based on how often you play and the pace you want your campaign to progress at. By default, any time you begin a new chapter in your campaign (that is, begin a new storyline or resume from downtime) is a good time to check for an event.

EVENT PROGRESS & INTENSITY

1D6 ROLL	PROGRESS OR INTENSITY
1	No event or change
2	New minor event
3	Existing event intensity increases by one step or new minor event*
4	New moderate event
5	Existing event intensity increases by two steps or new moderate event*
6	New major event and roll again. If the second roll is a 6, it's a new epic event instead.

* If an event is active, increase its intensity as noted. If no events are active, use the second option, creating an event of the listed intensity.

EVENT PROGRESS & INTENSITY

When generating events, the first die determines whether a new event appears or an existing event takes on a more extreme form. Because these rules are intended to make things happen, they are biased in favor of new events or intensifying existing events, but they will never neutralize or lessen the impact of events. Some events can lead to new contingent events. See individual **Event Listings** later in this section for details.

If you want to get rid of an active event, either leave it to the heroes or wind down the event yourself, following no particular rules, though each event suggests ways to reach closure.

To see if a new event occurs or an existing event takes on another form, check the result of the first die and consult the **Event Progress and Intensity** table.

If the result indicates an existing event increases in intensity, choose from among the events you have active, based on what you prefer and what makes sense in the campaign. You might improvise a random selection method (such as 1d3 to choose among three events or 1d6, re-rolling sixes, if picking one of five events) as well. By default, you can always choose the last event you generated. It's perfectly fine to set a ceiling on the number of events, such as three for a casual campaign or six for a more complex world.

If the result indicates a new event, check the results of your other two dice for its category and type.

EVENT INTENSITY LEVELS

Events have multiple intensity levels. Epic is the highest intensity. Ignore results that would increase intensity above it. As noted before, the system is designed to increase event intensity but never decrease it. Drops in intensity, or the event's resolution, are left to you and the actions of the protagonists.

- **MINOR:** These events usually have a local impact or one that might be broadly newsworthy but whose full effects are limited to a small group—typically, one your characters are connected to.
- **MODERATE:** Moderately influential events affect a region or far-flung subculture. For instance, if a corporate executive murders a rival, it might affect everyone in a large company.

EVENT CATEGORIES

1D6 ROLL	CATEGORY
1	Crime and Punishment
2	Culture
3	Economics
4	Politics
5	War and Peace
6	Miscellaneous Incidents

CRIME & PUNISHMENT **C&P**

1D6	EVENT
1	Arrest
2	Corruption
3	Matter of Justice
4	Notorious Crime
5	Organized Crime
6	Terrorist Attack

CULTURE **CUL**

1D6	EVENT
1	Artwork
2	Failure
3	Innovation
4	Religious Movement
5	Scandal
6	Sporting Event

ECONOMICS **ECON**

1D6	EVENT
1	Bubble
2	Corporate Shift
3	Economic Downturn
4	Espionage
5	Inequality
6	Prosperity

POLITICS **POL**

1D6	EVENT
1	Appointment/Election
2	Corruption
3	Coup
4	Espionage
5	Militant Politics
6	Political Crisis

WAR & PEACE **W&P**

1D6	EVENT
1	Coup
2	Espionage
3	Military Action
4	Militant Politics
5	Peacemaking
6	Terrorist Attack

MISCELLANEOUS **MISC**

1D6	EVENT
1	Disease
2	Ecological Event
3	Industrial Accident
4	Infrastructure Failure
5	Natural Disaster
6	Weirdness

- **MAJOR:** At this level, an event has national or international importance, but its long-term effects are usually limited to a smaller group.
- **EPIC:** Epic events change the world. Major wars, transfers of political power, and great recessions are examples of epic events.

EVENT CATEGORY

If the **Event Progress and Intensity** table indicates a new event, your second die determines its category. This is straightforward enough: just consult the **Event Categories** table. As always, you can choose a category instead of letting the dice roll decide.

INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

Assuming a new event is called for, a third die or your choice sets the specific event. Check the table from the applicable category to determine the event. Some events belong to multiple categories. In these cases, the category modifies the event. Look at the descriptions of each event for details.

EVENT LISTINGS

The following listings for each event present their categories in boxes, then list how the events manifest at each level of intensity, before noting how they can be incorporated into the campaign.

APPOINTMENT/ELECTION

POL

A political appointment or election alters the balance of power and creates new opportunities or conflicts for the protagonists.

MINOR: A new bureaucrat or group has been appointed into a supervisory position within an organization close to a hero.

MODERATE: New leadership enters a local government or other large organization, either bringing a dramatic ideological shift with it or upholding the status quo to a stronger degree. Both possibilities present problems or opportunities for the characters.

MAJOR: New leadership of a country or major international organization affects everyone's lives, beyond that of the protagonists' immediate circle, on a regular basis. This can be a reaffirmation of the status quo or an ideological shift away from what was the norm, offering both new challenges and new possibilities.

EPIC: There is a very public breakdown of the government when managing conflict with other organizations or governments (or sometimes even within itself). This can manifest in both overt and covert events that may entangle the heroes or impact their current narratives or campaigns.

APPOINTMENT/ELECTION CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A new police supervisory position is created by the mayor; now contacts within the police force refuse to help or speak with characters or do so very reluctantly.

- A new politician or bureaucrat makes it harder for characters (or their allied organization) to secure equipment and funding.
- The new political climate empowers more "regular" people to report anything suspicious, resulting in many mistaken identities or, worse, a constant war against the characters and their activities.

ARREST

C&P

One or more NPCs important to the characters, or to organizations and situations the characters care about, are arrested by the authorities.

MINOR: A local individual known to the protagonists gets hauled in by the authorities. Characters might not know about it right away, unless they check the local police blotter. While the NPC cools their heels, characters must make do without them. Was this person a nuisance or holding back someone even worse? Can they spill the beans on a secret? Do they have a decent lawyer?

MODERATE: The police bust a figure or a group of citywide importance. Is this the local mob boss or their neighborhood crew, or one or more community activists suffering harassment for their work? The event probably makes local news as a dedicated story.

MAJOR: An extensive investigation or violent chase brings down one or many people and probably makes national news. An arrest this serious often leads to other arrests, which could be bad news for heroes who've become entangled in it. Botched arrests leading to deaths spark inquiries and public outrage.

EPIC: The notoriety (and possibly blatant injustice) of this arrest makes international headlines, unless there's some reason to keep it a secret. Authorities take down a vast conspiracy, an influential cabal, or a truly noteworthy person. If the arrest is unjust, heroes will have to work hard to set the record straight.

ARREST CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- Police sweep through the arrestee's community, apprehending other people the protagonists care about—or one or more of the protagonists themselves.
- The arrestees are patsies, apprehended to cover up the misdeeds of a person or group who has sway over the police.
- One or more of the heroes witness the crime or arrest. Someone wants them to shut up about it, get out of town, or lie. They offer bribes or threats to get it done. Alternately, one of the heroes' friends or lovers is in the same situation. Will the police protect them, or are they either not up to the task or involved with witness tampering themselves?

ARTWORK

CUL

From the exotic to the mundane, the artistic (and thus the overall) cultural tone of the setting is shifted or enhanced.

MINOR: The media hit the local creative art scene, and a person known to the protagonists gets their big break.

MODERATE: The citywide art scene explodes in a way that captures the heroes' attention. It happens nearby and is renowned for either its excellence or its notoriety.

MAJOR: Nationally known stars or famous artists attend artistic events happening in the city or area. As these personalities descend on the protagonists' turf, the heroes may get caught up in affairs they didn't expect.

EPIC: A once-in-a-lifetime cultural event happens in the area the heroes find themselves in. This could be a never-before-seen collection of art on tour or even a giant multiday music concert or theatre performance.

ARTWORK CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A local artist's work reveals the secrets of a violent group or challenges the political status quo. The creator gets persecuted, and their work might be destroyed.
- A local arts collective attracts the attention of a generous patron, but there's something *off* about this new friend to the arts scene. Are they trying to impress someone? Are the artists in the collective destined to be victims of some horrible crime or strange form of manipulation?
- An eccentric multimillionaire funds a new museum to highlight their hobby. They commission a unique, impressive building and seek donors—and crooks see opportunities for money laundering, graft, et cetera.

BUBBLE

ECON

Speculators throw money at a hot industry or investment, changing the economic environment for the heroes.

MINOR: Money suddenly starts to flow into a very small niche market (coins, sports cards, comic books, or even old memorabilia) in which the protagonists or their circle of friends has an interest.

MODERATE: Investors identify a moneymaking opportunity in a city or area the characters are located in. This influx of capital changes the local economic landscape in positive and negative ways.

MAJOR: Banks and major investment groups across the country (overly) promote an industry, infusing it with money and attention.

EPIC: As investment heats up in one area, it influences others around the world. The global economy realigns to rely on this one industry's or investment's health. If it goes south, the world's economy stumbles.

BUBBLE CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A fad drives up the price of some innocuous toy or trivial item, until people begin throwing their retirement savings into it and even committing crimes to pay for it.
- The characters' local area heats up with investment—and the stress of gentrification, new businesses, and increasing prices. Organized crime and political groups take an interest. Who's pulling the strings behind them?
- A national media pundit seems to have an uncanny ability to predict the market. Where are they getting their information?

CORPORATE SHIFT

ECON

One or more businesses change their operations. They may stop producing a vital product or jack up their prices. They change their hiring practices to favor certain groups or redress their old biases. There's a change in leadership. A merger, acquisition, or bankruptcy hits. Many options are possible, each of which should matter to the protagonists to be worth generating as an event.

MINOR: One of the described corporate-shift events happens to one or more local businesses.

MODERATE: One of the described corporate-shift events happens to one or more city or area businesses.

MAJOR: One of the described corporate-shift events happens to one or more countrywide businesses.

EPIC: One of the described corporate-shift events affects a multinational business—and thanks to the scale involved, this necessarily affects other companies.

CORPORATE SHIFT CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- Two local businesses merge, driving out competition. They cut excess staff and raise prices. When a manager gets shot, it's practically expected. Who's responsible, and what's their real motive?
- A national media company gets purchased by an outspoken billionaire determined to present the news as they see it. As propaganda heats up, the corporation also chooses to suppress important stories, even resorting to using shadowy operatives to intimidate witnesses—including people the heroes know.
- Confidential research reveals a common international consumer good is dangerous. It causes a disease or pollutes the environment. The cartel of producers doesn't want the secret to get out. A hero's connection shares the research before vanishing under sinister circumstances. What do the heroes do?

CORRUPTION

C&P POL

Blackmail, graft, and other dirty tricks twist the political scene. Assassination might be among these. They propel certain candidates into office or turn them into figureheads, as real power passes to an unaccountable few.

MINOR: Local corruption affects the characters' neighborhood or a place they're visiting.

MODERATE: Graft infests one or more aspects of a city or regional government. It could be a web of corrupt officials across multiple departments, or one office might be completely compromised.

MAJOR: Corruption "owns" national representatives or law enforcement bodies. The conspirators might be after simple profit, but they could have ambitions to impose fascism or some other odious political system.

EPIC: International criminal cartels, corporations, and closely aligned governments may conspire to violate international agreements. Even if their goals seem superficially boring, such as influencing currency exchange rates, the effects can be catastrophic.

CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- Local police officers have been getting kickbacks from organized crime to ignore their criminal activities or those of their associates. The heroes or their friends take notice and look for answers.
- A nation's search for a new jet fighter inexplicably leads to a no-bid process, which selects an unreliable plane with a crushing price tag. A whistle-blower tells the protagonists the objective is not just profiteering but crippling the country's air capabilities in a future war. Who's behind the plot?
- When a multinational conglomerate virtually buys a small country, they close its borders to visitors, but a stream of valuable exports flows out. What's happening, and why won't major governments investigate?

COUP

POL W&P

Coups occur when a group seizes control of a government by force. Some coups are "bloodless," in that the threat of violence is never carried out, while others end in full-blown civil war. This depends on the power and support the coup can draw on.

MINOR: A local coup occurs when a violent group intimidates local officials to the point of dictating policy. Their members may not hold office, but everybody knows power comes from their headquarters, not the government building.

MODERATE: A city or region is terrorized by an armed force, such as a fascist movement or renegade military force. Local officials rubber-stamp whatever the force brings before them.

If the rest of the nation isn't affected, its military may arrive to retake the area.

MAJOR: An armed faction seizes control of the national government, issuing statements to justify its actions. These groups rarely come out of nowhere and usually spring from existing political divisions and help from other countries that wish to see a regime change.

EPIC: A superpower or transnational body experiences a violent realignment. The process itself may constitute a significant war. After that, new leadership causes dramatic changes to the global political order.

COUP CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A gang seizes control of a small town. Deserted town meetings, garbage-strewn streets, and frightened locals hint at the problem, but if anyone says anything, gang members silence them. A desperate citizen visits the heroes, asking for help.
- Long alienated from the central government, a border city declares independence from the rest of the country. Armed citizens overthrow the police and local military. The protagonists have been asked to negotiate terms with the central government.
- A fascist party enjoys the patronage of a general and thousands of soldiers. The general arranges the assassination of a political leader, blames their enemies, and takes control, with plans for global war. But the heroes know a time and place where the general will be relatively unguarded.

DISEASE

MISC

New diseases, outbreaks of known diseases, treatments, quarantines, and cures all suggest various stories. In some campaigns, fictional diseases may have supernatural or horrific elements.

MINOR: The outbreak is a local phenomenon that can probably be traced to a single source.

MODERATE: Citywide illness strains hospitals and clinics. Specialists investigate the source and recommend precautions.

MAJOR: A disease spreads across the country, and its effects mandate changes in everything from hospital visits to travel.

EPIC: A disease spreads across multiple countries. The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, which claimed about 5 percent of the world's population, is an example of this.

DISEASE CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- People staying at a local bed & breakfast become violently ill. When a local official investigates, they turn up at the bottom of a lake. Why would someone kill to conceal what looks like a minor outbreak?
- After escaping a secret research facility, someone exposed to a contagious and deadly virus flees cross-country. The heroes get caught



up in the search for him or the conspiracy to cover up his origins.

- A mild illness with global reach turns deadly, and there are indications this mutant strain was deliberately engineered. Who's responsible, and why?

ECOLOGICAL EVENT

MISC

A significant change in the natural environment produces problems. This may be the result of pollution, but invasive species, unusual weather, and other incidents can also be factors.

MINOR: The incident affects human well-being in a local area important to the protagonists.

MODERATE: A city or region experiences pollution or another change to the natural environment.

MAJOR: An environmental issue becomes a matter of national concern. Nature doesn't follow borders, however, so these situations tend to cross into other countries.

EPIC: An ecological event of international importance may threaten global well-being.

ECOLOGICAL EVENT CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- All the rats in a neighborhood disappear. Then, small pets vanish when they're left outside. The protagonists get involved when they run into a terrified city official who screams, "It's hungry!"
- A too-hot Summer kills crops, sparks wildfires, and puts water at a premium. Deprived citizens ask the characters for help dealing with food- and water-hoarding gangs.
- It seems ridiculous for fish to bring two countries to the brink of war, but it's happening. Both sides blame the other for overfishing, and their records indicate they're following the rules. The heroes have been asked to follow rumors of huge black trawlers sighted in the area, which may be responsible.

ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

ECON

Natural disasters, collapsing market bubbles, and simple mismanagement can all cause economic downturns. Ironically, these create opportunities for a few, while leaving the mass of people with less.

MINOR: Businesses start to close or relocate, or a neighborhood "renews" itself by increasing rents and prices to attract an elite population unaffected by economic woes.

MODERATE: A city's key industries collapse or leave. Unemployment runs rampant.

MAJOR: A national economic downturn prompts bank collapses, unemployment increases, and predatory financial practices.

EPIC: Global productive forces slow due to imbalances in trade or manufacture, wars, political crises, flaws in the market economy, or natural disasters.

ECONOMIC DOWNTURN CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A local factory closes, putting hundreds of people out of work. A local collective wants to reopen it and asks the heroes for the capital needed to take it over.

- A tech magnate all but buys an entire city's industrial base and rehires laid-off workers for a fraction of their old wages. A labor activist connected to the protagonists vanishes. What happened?
- A conspiracy of market analysts has been lying about the stability of a popular investment. If the news goes public, millions will lose pensions and jobs. When the heroes find out, do they tell the truth or try to reengineer things secretly to avert the crisis?

ESPIONAGE

ECON POL W&P

Spies steal secrets to get an upper hand on the battlefield, in politics, or in corporate boardrooms.

MINOR: Secrets from a local institution or political group tempt would-be blackmailers and profiteers.

MODERATE: A city's or region's secrets may include organized crime actions, undercover police work, or industrial secrets held in an area facility.

MAJOR: National governments, businesses, law enforcement, and political parties all have secrets for the taking.

EPIC: International corporate, political, or military espionage shifts power balances.

ESPIONAGE CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- An undercover cop who infiltrated a local gang has been exposed. Now they need replacements, in the form of the protagonists.
- A drug company's new pill could potentially cure a serious disease one of the heroes' cherished allies suffers from, but studies leaked online indicate it may have lethal side effects. What's the truth?
- Before dying of a rare illness, an associate gives one of the protagonists a suitcase that contains a list of assets belonging to the "M Group." When three people on the list die from the same illness, how will the heroes respond?

FAILURE

CUL

It's offensive. It's ugly. It uncovers a pattern of unsavory incidents, or worse. A culture shift occurs in response to a repellent creative work, cultural event, or trend.

MINOR: Creatively bankrupt or ethically questionable practices rack a local business or niche field.

MODERATE: This is the same as the minor situation, but on the scale of a city or larger area or a moderately well-known field.

MAJOR: The event is the same as the minor situation, but the issue has national play. This is the realm of box-office bombs and forged works from Renaissance masters.

EPIC: An international cultural industry is plagued with accusations of corruption.

FAILURE CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A science-fiction writer's latest novel sells terribly. They lay the blame on a group of fans, who turn to the heroes to deal with anonymous death threats.

EVENTS AND SECRET WORLDS

Some *Modern AGE* games include secret realms, vast conspiracies, and other setting elements unknown to the general public. While events are geared toward the world we know, you can always adjust them to cover secret elements instead. For example, a notorious crime might be unknown to ordinary people but infamous within a globe-spanning society of psychics.

Alternately, you can decide that a secret setting's forces lie behind any event. A newly elected leader may have really been installed due to the efforts of an AI who expects its candidate to approve radical new experiments in human-machine interfaces. Like the rest of these rules, the full facts of the matter are for you to create.

- A local musician and social activist has a seemingly overnight change in attitude, and their offensive diatribes mystify everyone but an associate who knows the heroes and says the musician is being forced to say these things and needs help getting away from the people controlling them.
- A box-office bomb prompts an actual bombing when an organized crime syndicate, enraged at the loss on investment, begins eliminating the movie's producers and stars. A group of those targeted asks the protagonists for protection.

INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT

MISC

Prompted by carelessness or fate, an industrial accident endangers those living nearby or consuming the affected facility's products, forcing the heroes into action.

MINOR: An accident produces local pollution or causes direct physical harm to anywhere from one to a handful of people.

MODERATE: An accident affects people outside the actual work facility immediately or gradually.

MAJOR: An accident affects hundreds of people throughout the region. It requires a national response.

EPIC: The accident has global ramifications.

INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A local business is gutted by a fire, and investigators blame poor wiring. But a friend of the protagonists worked on that building and swears it can't be the cause.
- When a mine collapses, the owners want to let the trapped miners die rather than admit they used improper digging techniques. The heroes find out; they must save the miners and reveal the truth.
- An experimental nuclear aircraft crashes in Antarctica. If its reactor goes critical, the meltdown will shatter glacial ice, accelerating rising sea levels. The heroes are sent to respond but face opposition from other teams who want to steal the aircraft's plans.

INEQUALITY

ECON

The rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and people in the middle get kicked down with the poor.

MINOR: A local area becomes gentrified, forcing low-income residents out, or businesses leave as its economic fortunes tumble.

MODERATE: A small group of wealthy people hold inordinate sway over city or regional policy, reshaping it at the expense of the majority.

MAJOR: While those with established wealth and the leaders of a few new industries flourish, the majority in a nation must deal with unstable, low-income employment and cuts to vital services—services that the rich sell to them in newly privatized form.

EPIC: A small elite control most of the world's wealth and pressure governments to lower labor costs by any means they can get away with.

INEQUALITY CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- In spite of vocal protests, a multimillionaire blocks access to a public beach near their home. When they turn up dead, police round up community activists. The heroes must clear their names.
- Fed up with falling wages, workers for the city's biggest employer go on strike. The company ships in brutal security professionals, ostensibly to defend their facilities but also to hassle and rough up strikers. The protagonists discover a plot to spark a riot, which would prompt violence from the security force.
- A new "gig economy" business has people monitoring semiautomated cars and reporting on passengers' activities to corporate headquarters. The company has developed a side business producing blackmailed operatives acquired this way, and one of the heroes' friends has been recruited.

INFRASTRUCTURE FAILURE

MISC

Bad planning, lack of upkeep, or possible malfeasance damage or destroy a public structure or facility.

MINOR: A basic service (such as sewage or electricity) or a necessary structure (like a bridge or tunnel) fails, inconveniencing people in an area.

MODERATE: This is the same as for a minor infrastructure failure but affects a city or region. The scale of the problem leads to more severe consequences. A minor failure may increase to a moderate one if the results go beyond inconvenience to serious illness and death.

MAJOR: Multiple regions or a large population must do without vital facilities or services.

EPIC: Part of the international infrastructure fails on a vast scale. Examples include flight control, GPS, telecommunications, and transnational electrical systems.

INFRASTRUCTURE FAILURE CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A series of sinkholes appears, trapping citizens in a small neighborhood, along with the protagonists. Tempers flare, and in a temporary state of lawlessness, some people decide it's the perfect time to settle grudges.
- An electrical fire paralyzes the subway system. The heroes must rescue people they care about who are trapped inside a halted subway car and lead them to safety, negotiating miles of tunnels, smoke, and other threats.
- A solar flare disrupts radio signals worldwide. The protagonists are in the wilderness and can't rely on many modern tools to find their way back.

INNOVATION



Innovation covers new discoveries or inventions and modifications to existing items, changing the technological environment for the protagonists.

MINOR: The innovation affects a small area or niche community, though it may have broader applicability.

MODERATE: The innovation rolls out in a city or area, and its fortunes will determine if it develops wider use.

MAJOR: The innovation changes some central facet of business or social life, though doing things the old-fashioned way remains viable.

EPIC: In five years, life without the innovation will be unimaginable.

INNOVATION CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A crowdsourced app tells blackjack enthusiasts the best strategies for specific casinos based on users' reports. This bypasses rules against in-house computer assistance, since the app gets input after games and is used before games. It doesn't take long for the inventor, an old friend of the protagonists, to have an "accident."
- The latest model of the world's most popular smartphone offers lifecasting: a record of everything that happens around the user. The heroes are framed as killers in a murder victim's lifecast, but they weren't there. What happened?
- A revolutionary AI harvests information from social media to convincingly replace someone for tedious online chats and sends back summaries of these conversations. Soon enough, these AIs handle most communication—and the heroes discover these AIs have been taking the place of murdered friends.

MATTER OF JUSTICE



An event in the criminal justice system or informal investigations and vigilante punishments affect the protagonists. Some civil actions might also qualify.

MINOR: A minor matter takes place that affects the heroes or a few allies.

MODERATE: An arrest, court case, or similar matter has city-wide or regional impact.

MAJOR: A court case, arrest, or vigilante action gains nationwide attention.

EPIC: Issues in international law or matters that receive global attention take place.

MATTER OF JUSTICE CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A friend of the heroes gets arrested. The friend did it, but their lawyer says if they don't declare their innocence, bad things will happen to their family.
- A wrongful arrest leads to public demonstrations. The protagonists witnessed what really happened, but when they try to set the record straight, a conspiracy tries to silence them.
- Accused of a horrific crime, the heroes are the subjects of an international hunt.

MILITARY ACTION



Formal and informal armed forces make their presence known in the characters' lives.

MINOR: A minor event might involve a local base or militia.

MODERATE: A moderate event may involve military exercises in a city or region or even minor action to keep order.

MAJOR: Major actions include brushfire conflicts and smaller police actions.

EPIC: An epic event brings war.

MILITARY ACTION CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A group of army buddies acts as hit men and mob enforcers in their spare time. When they attack an ally, the heroes must deal with this well-trained group and work with military police.
- The protagonists find evidence that a citywide illness is the result of biological-weapons testing from a nearby military lab.
- The invaders take out most resistance, but the heroes escape and must work with scattered allied forces to win back their home.

MILITANT POLITICS



An outrageous event or a group of radicals initiates violent protests that require the heroes' action. Are the protests justified? How far could they spread? How far should they spread?

MINOR: Minor events include acts of vandalism and minor violence related to a local issue.

MODERATE: Serious violence affects things across a city or region.

MAJOR: Coordinated or spontaneous events occur across the country.

EPIC: Epic events include international political violence.

MILITANT POLITICS CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- Bigots target local refugees. The protagonists become targets, too, after fighting them off.



- A close friend of the heroes vanishes in the middle of a politically driven riot. What happened?
- A politician rouses fascists across the country with bigoted statements, so the protagonists are compelled to protect marginalized friends from a wave of violence.

NATURAL DISASTER

MISC

A sudden natural event affects the heroes or their associates.

MINOR: Natural disasters that just affect a neighborhood or small community include sinkholes and the flooding of low-lying areas. Minor events may affect a larger area but must be more nuisances than true disasters. A city covered in slick ice after freezing rain might qualify.

MODERATE: A sudden natural event affects a city or comparable area.

MAJOR: The event affects a large swath of the country.

EPIC: A rare global event, such as a solar storm, takes place.

NATURAL DISASTER CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- During heavy rain, an entire building sinks with the protagonists in it – and their enemies, too. They need to fight their way free as floors flood and collapse.
- Volcano! Ash and the threat of worse force heroes to evacuate their city.
- Intense storms make their way from the Caribbean to Canada.

NOTORIOUS CRIME

C&P

A crime attracts public attention and is also important to the protagonists.

MINOR: A minor event could be a petty but strange crime.

MODERATE: Any crime whose intensity or weirdness is known throughout the city can be considered a moderate event.

MAJOR: This is the same as a moderate event, but the crime's elements give it nationwide notoriety.

EPIC: A crime whose events cross national borders or that is so strange or horrific it garners worldwide attention would be considered epic.

NOTORIOUS CRIME CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- The “Hogtown Headsman” escapes a Canadian prison. The serial killer was captured on the verge of murdering an associate of the heroes and has vowed to finish the job.
- Five months after the son of an associate of the protagonists is kidnapped, police find him sitting alone in the public library. He claims he was living with a superhero.
- A famous actor is found dead in a hero's car.

ORGANIZED CRIME

C&P

From local gangs to international syndicates, organized crime groups act in ways that demand the protagonists' attention. Escalation might involve an issue moving from a small organization to its parent company or boss.

MINOR: Local gangs complicate the characters' lives.

MODERATE: A criminal group with citywide interests, or a rural equivalent, runs across the heroes.

MAJOR: The most influential syndicates in a nation entangle protagonists in their plots.

EPIC: A criminal organization of truly international scope pursues active criminal operations (as opposed to just moving people and money) in multiple countries.

ORGANIZED CRIME CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A local would-be thug tries to rob a character, but when they fail, they need help paying their debts to a loan shark in some other way.
- An associate of the heroes is actually in witness protection, but appearing in news footage brings the mob down on them.
- When the leader of a syndicate dies, the war for succession grips the city in violence.

PEACEMAKING



Minor to significant efforts to end a conflict attract the heroes' interest. These can take the form of citizen political actions or represent direct peacemaking efforts between belligerent military or civil parties.

MINOR: A minor event includes a minor truce between small groups of belligerents or a small political event.

MODERATE: A moderate event might include larger political events or a truce between forces in a city.

MAJOR: A major event might include national demonstrations of peace and unity or a truce in a nation-spanning conflict.

EPIC: Multinational diplomatic efforts to end a major war or worldwide demonstrations would be considered epic events.

PEACEMAKING CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A conflict between two motorcycle gangs can only be ended by finding a hoard of stolen goods. They employ the heroes to find them, divide them, and broker a truce.
- As diplomats from several countries meet for peace talks, the protagonists uncover a conspiracy to undo their efforts through assassinations made to look as if they were planned by the belligerents.
- As a truce holds in a war-torn city, the heroes must escape without breaking it.

POLITICAL CRISIS



Events stretch normal political processes to their limit, and the protagonists must either deal with what happens or play a role in resolving the issue.

MINOR: A crisis in local political leadership or in a local organization, such as a small university, would be considered a minor event.

MODERATE: A moderate event might include a crisis at the city or regional level in a party, in a legislative body, or among political leaders.

MAJOR: Threats of a federal government shutdown, the loss of a national political figure, and other nationwide crises are potential major events.

EPIC: International governments fail to function.

POLITICAL CRISIS CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- When an ally of the heroes tries to run for their party's local leadership, the executive blocks it through underhanded means and won't tell them why. The incumbent has some mysterious hold over the process.
- After losing, the president refuses to step down and rumbles about keeping their office with military aid. The protagonists know a general who could make or break these efforts.
- During a hotly contested election, scandal-seeking operatives spy on the heroes, who know one of the candidates.

PROSPERITY



Increased productive forces, faddish consumption, and new industries and technological innovation can all improve prosperity for a time. The protagonists benefit from it or deal with the frictions that rise from it.

MINOR: A neighborhood or small town enjoys increased prosperity but may also suffer from inequality, depending on how new wealth is distributed.

MODERATE: This is the same as a minor event, but for a larger region such as a city or state.

MAJOR: National prosperity improves the lives of ordinary people.

EPIC: International prosperity benefits a number of nations with common economic ties.

PROSPERITY CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A new millionaire doesn't fit in with their old-money neighbors and, in revenge, hires the protagonists to humiliate them.
- Multiple cities compete to host a multinational corporation's new national headquarters. Executives hire the heroes to find the skeletons in the closets of each city's political establishment.
- A forgotten investment wins a character a boost in Resources, along with new "friends" and "long-lost relatives" eager to benefit along with them.

RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT



Activity from a new or established religious movement attracts heroes as enemies, entangled bystanders, allies, or adherents.

MINOR: A neighborhood congregation works locally.

MODERATE: A significant minority religious movement or the regional leadership of a mainstream religion acts.

MAJOR: National religious bodies make important statements or policy changes.

EPIC: A council of religions or an influential voice in a major religion makes significant statements.

RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A new religious movement separates young people from their families, some of whom hire the protagonists to track them down.
- A religious leader signals they're on the verge of changing doctrines many believe are intolerant but suddenly pivots to a harder line. The heroes find information to suggest the leader is being blackmailed into submission.
- An obscure religion buys most of the property in a run-down town and gets its people elected to local government. When the heroes visit the town, a few old-timers ask for help discovering the religion's long-term goals.

SCANDAL

CUL

Criminal or social misdeeds rack elite circles. The effects reach the protagonists.

MINOR: The scandal affects a local community figure.

MODERATE: The scandal affects an important city or regional figure.

MAJOR: A nationally important individual is implicated.

EPIC: A global celebrity or figure of influence is implicated.

SCANDAL CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A local politician owes some hefty illegal gambling debts. Gangsters won't go after the politician but will hurt the bookie, a friend of the protagonists.
- An intoxicated princess shows up in a hotel lobby dressed as a nun, on a horse. She doesn't remember anything, but her phone includes pictures of the heroes.
- When the protagonists help a movie star get out of a drunken brawl with their former agent, the star brings them into their inner circle, and the heroes make enemies out of the agent and the agent's clients.

SPORTING EVENT

CUL

A notable sporting event or series makes things interesting for the protagonists. Beyond the event itself, raucous fans, gambling, politics, and commerce all play their part.

MINOR: High school, small college, or minor league sports are typical minor events. Local athletes for bigger teams, charity events, and fan clubs can also have a minor impact.

MODERATE: Larger college and minor league events and less popular sports' championships might be moderate events.

MAJOR: Playoffs for well-known sports and mid-level professional athletes can create a major impact.

EPIC: The World Cup, Olympics, Super Bowl, and comparable events are considered epic, along with top-level athletes.

SPORTING EVENT CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- A team that hasn't won the championship in a lifetime might just win this year! Their home city is ready to explode in joy or anger, depending on the result. In either case, an old enemy of the characters plans to use the chaos to disguise their revenge.
- A local boxer asks the protagonists for protection when they're told to throw their fight, or else.
- The heroes must coach a gaggle of misfit high school students into a competent sports team.

TERRORIST ATTACK

C&P W&P

A completed or attempted terrorist attack spurs the heroes into action.

MINOR: The attack is stopped early or, if successful, is related to obscure motives and targets or is limited to vandalism.

MODERATE: A significant attack is prevented, or an attack involves one or two casualties or hostages, at most.

MAJOR: A sophisticated or high-impact attack involves casualties or hostages in the double digits, or an even worse attack is barely thwarted.

EPIC: The attack causes a major shift in international policy. It may start wars or topple national governments.

TERRORIST ATTACK CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- The heroes recognize a friend's name in the list of attack suspects. There's no way their friend did it, so why are they being accused?
- The protagonists stumble upon evidence of a major attack while engaged in criminal misdeeds. How do they handle it?
- An online hate group targets a hero and threatens to escalate to physical violence, but the authorities won't take it seriously.

WEIRDNESS

MISC

Is it a paranormal phenomenon? The effects of secret scientific work? Or is it just a coincidence? Weirdness affects the heroes via any oddities you deem acceptable for your campaign.

MINOR: A small coincidence or a deniable phenomenon takes place.

MODERATE: A moderate event may include something many people witness or a citywide secret society.

MAJOR: High weirdness that would make the national news (if they allowed it) is taking place. Stupendous coincidences, like having a doppelgänger, have been reported.

EPIC: Very strange things indeed are happening. An epic event might introduce the supernatural to a campaign world or manifest as an alien invasion.

WEIRDNESS CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- The "alley frog" is just a piece of weird local folklore, until a friend of the heroes reports getting mugged by the giant amphibian.



- I'm not saying it was aliens, but maybe it was *aliens*.
- Stories of a man in a trucker hat and dirty flannels named "Bill," who predicts the end of the world, spread across the country. The protagonists know someone who fits that description, has no idea what this is all about, and is steadily collecting worshippers and would-be assassins.

EVENT GAME EFFECTS

Beyond providing story hooks for your campaign, events can modify rolls and other game mechanics for characters and organizations. However, the specific effect depends on what exactly happened and how it relates to a specific character or organization. Due to this, you should list the event in an abstract fashion. First, write down the specific event, including its intensity, category, type, and how it manifests in the campaign world.

EXAMPLE

Meghan generates a major Politics event, Corruption. She decides the Silver Rangers, a legendary law enforcement organization in the Brass Lightning campaign, have been discovered shaking down small villages for protection money. She writes it down as "Major Politics/Corruption: Silver Rangers Extorting Villagers."

Next, strike a balance between how wide-ranging the event's effects are and how intensely they influence specific actions. Pick one option from the **Event Factor** table. This is your *event factor*.

Intensity is the number used for various game effects. It usually modifies rolls for certain tests.

Scope indicates how far the event reverberates. The table uses two descriptors. The first is geographical, going from local (a town or a neighborhood in a large city) to international. The second applies to social networks and communities, ranging from obscure (online fans of an uncommon hobby) to mass (global mainstream media presence). Pick the descriptor that best applies.

Once you've picked the event factor, append it to the description. A moderate event might be (Regional 2), for instance.

EXAMPLE

Meghan's major event, "Silver Rangers Extorting Villagers," affects badlands villages and a few connected towns. She picks Regional 3 from the options for major events. The full description becomes "Major Politics Corruption: Silver Rangers Extorting Villagers (Regional 3)."

This completed event description governs its game effects, but it also serves as a seed for further descriptions. As the event makes its presence known, you can add simple notes—bullet points are fine—noting how the event affects the game and how this, in turn, may affect the event. Write down plot twists and story hooks inspired by it all.

CHARACTER EFFECTS

Characters are typically affected by the social and economic fallout from events.

EVENT FACTOR

EVENT INTENSITY	LOCAL/OBSCURE SCOPE	REGIONAL/SMALL SCOPE	NATIONAL/LARGE SCOPE	INTERNATIONAL/MASS SCOPE
Minor	2	None	None	None
Moderate	3	2	None	None
Major	4	3	2	None
Epic	5	4	3	2

SOCIAL EFFECTS

If characters take social actions within the event's Scope, the event-factor number may become a positive or negative modifier to Communications or Strength (Intimidation) rolls, depending on the actions they represent. If the GM would rather adjudicate social actions as complex attitude shifts (see the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, CHAPTER 2), factors can shift attitudes one step per point.

ECONOMIC EFFECTS

Events may cause certain goods and services to fluctuate in availability. A price war may cut the cost of items sold by participants, while tough times make things more expensive. Apply the event factor as a modifier to Resources tests, depending on the desired item, character, and situation.

OTHER EFFECTS

Events' physical effects are handled through combat and hazards as per *Modern AGE's* rules. Events may sometimes impose their factors on exploration encounters. For example, a whistle-blower may make it easier to investigate anything related to the information they've revealed. In all cases, apply the event factor as appropriate.

EXAMPLE

Extending the previous example, Silver Ranger Jeff "One-Bullet" Mackintosh's player suffers a -3 penalty to Communications rolls that benefit from a sense of safety and trust, since people in the area fear members of One-Bullet's organization. On the other hand, that fear earns a +3 bonus to the player's Strength (Intimidate) rolls in affected communities. Meanwhile, the player of "Shotgun" Sean, a known enemy of the Silver Rangers, earns +3 to Communications tests with villagers, who are willing to hide and help the outlaw. One-Bullet's player benefits from +3 to Resources rolls when dealing with terrified town shopkeepers, but as much as the common folk like "Shotgun" Sean, their poverty forces a -3 penalty to the player's Resources tests.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTS

Events can also influence organizations based on how they're detailed in CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL OPTIONS. Organizations have their

own possible plots and misfortunes. The events in this section occur in addition to those.

TEST MODIFIERS

Virtually every action an organization takes has social and economic components. Someone needs to motivate the troops and buy guns ahead of a Might test, for example. When an organization attempts a growth or plot action, apply the event factor as a bonus or penalty.

EVENTS AS PLOTS

If an event directly threatens an organization, it has the same effects as a plot action against the organization, though the threat comes from the event itself, not an enemy organization. For test purposes, the event has a bonus equal to its factor modifier (which is always positive), in this case +3. If the organization's Scope is larger than the event's, it gets a +2 bonus to its opposed test. If the event's Scope is larger, the event gets the +2 bonus instead.

Remember that beyond the event acting as a plot in and of itself, it can also modify plot-related tests by any organization that would be affected by it. Use the event-factor number as a positive or negative modifier, but otherwise, use the rules in CHAPTER 6. Do not use the organization's test modifiers as you would in the previous scenario.

EXAMPLE

Continuing from previous examples, the Silver Rangers' players enjoy a +3 factor bonus when attempting Wealth (Bank Account) or Might (Hired Guns) tests. Corruption provides ready cash and brutal gunmen. But ordinary people hate them; the organization's players suffer a -3 penalty to Influence (Blue Collar) tests in the affected region. Furthermore, rising outrage threatens the organization itself. The GM treats it as a plot with its factor bonus of +3 and another +2, for a total of +5. The Silver Rangers are a national organization, and their superior Scope adds a +2 to their opposed Might (Hired Guns) tests. (Remember they don't use the factor modifiers against an event used as a plot.) The Silver Rangers' players enjoy a total bonus of +8: +4 (Might ability) +2 (Hired Guns focus) +2 (for superior Scope). The GM's event roll of 13 fails against the Rangers' players' roll of 17. Gunmen threaten and pistol-whip loudmouths throughout the region. Who will save the southern towns from them now?



GENRES

Modern AGE isn't all high-rises and cell phones. This system applies to everything from the late Age of Sail to cyberpunk. With such a spread of technology and culture, we recognize that not every stunt or character will be useful in every era. This section will introduce you to some iconic, action-filled eras and give you some ideas of what to use and how.

We will also offer character suggestions and guidelines on how to adapt backgrounds and specializations. Some of the backgrounds will be straightforward adaptations, while others may require more tinkering—for the Age of Sail, what class is the best for sailors? How do you make a pirate captain? How do you adjust the Corporate background for an adventuring era? This section will offer perspectives on how to adapt some backgrounds, professions, and other rules for various genres, before providing story hooks in the form of NPCs and situations for campaigns in each genre. CHAPTER 4 also provides some advice for using stunts to support various genres.

PIRATES, SWASHBUCKLERS & THE AGE OF SAIL

A lone pirate captain stares into the horizon, searching for any sign of their hated foe, Mistress Throckmorton of the Dutch East India Trading Company. The pirate's ship is leaking, badly damaged in their furious battle two days before, and only a fortunate shot from their sorcerer and first mate, Jane Red-Hand, allowed them time to get away. But the pirate captain knows that they will soon see tattered white sails on the horizon.

A story like the one described is only the start of the options available in an Age of Sail setting. Beginning with the astounding treasure fleets and explorations of the Chinese admiral Zheng He and ending as steam power relegated sailing ships to the past, the Age of Sail was a time of adventure, daring, and heroics on the high seas, roughly spanning the Age of Discovery from the late fourteenth century until the eighteenth century. Pirates and merchant captains, Chinese treasure fleets, Sir Francis Drake, the Spanish Armada, the European exploration into the far East, the European discovery of Asia and America, and much more make this a particularly colorful and rich era to set your campaign in.

ARRR, MATEY!

The Age of Sail is something nearly everyone who consumes popular media is already familiar with. If you've seen the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies or *Master and Commander*, you already know the tropes. The challenge lies in incorporating the burgeoning sense of globalization and the exploding evolution of culture and politics for good and ill. While this era features new discoveries in geography and the sciences, it includes the terrors of colonialism and the slave trade. The GM should be sensitive to the biases of popular media and history, which have almost entirely excluded nonwhite, non-European voices from this era. Encourage your players to investigate the incredible figures and cultures of the time to find inspiration outside of the characters they see every day.

While this genre most obviously takes place on the ocean, it is also an era of overland exploration and communication

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

While we discuss the social realities of various eras here and there, they have mostly been excluded. The intent isn't to ignore them, but to acknowledge that not everyone wants to highlight the discrimination and inequality present in various periods and assumed in the fiction of several genres described in this chapter. *Modern AGE* is your game; you can't ever be realistic in presenting these complex issues and are free to consciously change how they manifest. Nevertheless, you shouldn't simply ignore them. The spy-fi genre has sexist elements; the Age of Sail happened during a brutal period of slavery and colonization. The key is to consciously change things or, if you include them, to do so with the genuine agreement of everyone at your table and especially the agreement of people who feel close to the issues in question.

ARISTOCRATIC PRIVILEGE

From the early modern period to the twentieth century, European aristocrats enjoyed an array of privileges, from clubs and other organizations that served their whims to formal and informal political authority. These benefits often transcended national boundaries; the crowned heads of Europe were largely related to one another, after all, and their lesser lines, allies, and so forth mingled, carrying on customs intended to preserve their status and playing their own political games.

One way to represent this is to give all characters of noble birth the opportunity to choose a Membership in the aristocracy instead of one of the improvements offered to them by their drive. This Membership gives an aristocrat access to various perks and opportunities, from an officer's commission in the military (another form of Membership, perhaps) to clubs, fellow nobles willing to provide lodging and necessities, and access to a servant or two. High ranks indicate a reputation for upholding aristocratic values, having political influence, or inheriting an estate. This Membership loses its value in places where nobody cares about the character's heritage or when hostilities exist between the nation the character's title comes from and wherever they happen to be.

between many cultures. Port cities bustle with spices, strange animals, and dozens of languages. Science is beginning to come to prominence, and technology is slowly pushing its way into common life. Feel free to fudge the timeline a little to serve your story: if you want white-sailed ships on the sea and steamboats on the river, go for it! The important part is the adventure.

AGE OF SAIL CHARACTERS

While most iconic figures from the literature exploring this time are British or American, the era was far more diverse and colorful than that. Please encourage your players to explore characters of all races, backgrounds, and walks of life.

The **Aristocratic** background provides Resources to fund adventures and social privileges left over from earlier historical periods. Professions that pair well with this background include the **Athlete**, the **Commander**, and the **Dilettante**. This background pairs well with the **Liaison**, **Socialite**, and **Executive** specializations, for characters who are swashbuckling ne'er-do-wells or the heads of powerful houses.

The **Bohemian** background is a great option, too. This genre is all about the flair and adventure, and a character who has devoted their life to these pursuits will be fun to play. This background pairs well with the **Brawler**, **Artist**, **Pilot**, and **Dilettante** professions. The **Agent** and **Field Researcher** specializations suit eccentrics who come from privilege.

The **Military** background is almost a requirement for this genre! It works nicely with a particularly wide range of professions, too, including **Brawler**, **Survivor**, **Criminal**, **Fixer**, and, of course, **Soldier**. The **Gunfighter**, **Martial Artist**, and **Special Forces** specializations suit the background's penchant for swords, gunpowder, and rough living. Note that in Age of Sail games there will usually be a definite split

between upper-class officers and the sailors, marines, and other soldiers they command.

The era-appropriate version of the **Corporate** background is called the **Clerk**. With contacts everywhere, a solid education, and a certain world-weary experience, the Clerk enjoys diverse contacts and unusual social mobility, as early multinational businesses such as the East India Trading Company rise to prominence and power. The **Expert**, **Merchant**, **Professional**, and **Scholar** professions suggest themselves. Pair them with the **Liaison**, **Agent**, **Academic**, and **Investigator** specializations.

The **Outcast** is a great choice for any genre that relies on conflict and personal notoriety. Disgrace and dishonor are easily earned, whether through cowardice, cruelty, or simple bad luck. The Outcast has a chip on their shoulder and a score to settle. This background pairs well with any profession, especially the **Brawler** or **Explorer**. The **Driver**, **Sniper**, and **Hunter** specializations suit wanderers and highwaymen.

The commonest of commoners, the **Laborer**, is any figure toiling their way through daily life, just trying to get by. Such characters are tough and determined. They may enter military service out of desperation or after falling to a press gang. Suitable professions include the **Criminal**, **Scavenger**, **Soldier**, and **Technician**. The **Driver** and **Thief** specializations suit these characters as well.

RULES FOR THE AGE OF SAIL

While *Modern AGE* is designed to cover a wide period of history, you'll have to change the names and other details of certain character traits to fit with the Age of Sail genre. Talents and specializations that rely on high technology need to be adapted here and there. When a focus is mentioned as a prerequisite or for a test, you should pick the closest equiv-

AGE OF SAIL WEAPONS

WEAPON	DAMAGE	MIN. STR.	I/P/B	S/W	RESOURCES TN.	ROF	RANGE	CAPACITY	RELOAD
<i>Focus: Black Powder Weapons</i>									
Dragon	1d6	0	I	W	11	SS	10 yards*	–	1d6 minor actions
Flintlock Pistol	1d6+2	0	I	W	11	SS	10 yards	–	1d6 minor actions
<i>Focus: Heavy Blades</i>									
Broadsword/Cutlass	2d6 – 1	1	I	W	11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

* See weapon description for special rules.

alent. In an era without automobiles, Dexterity (Driving) is either replaced by Dexterity (Riding) or becomes a new focus, Dexterity (Horse Driving), used for teams of horses. Dexterity (Sailing) becomes important in a world without planes.

BLADES AND BLACK POWDER

Swords, pikes, repurposed belaying pins – the period is full of melee weapons. Aristocrats learn to fence, and everyone else may pick up some skill with a blade or bludgeon. Classic weapons from the genre belong to the Light Blades group, but possibilities abound. The following melee weapons from the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* are especially common: axe, club, staff, spear, dagger, fencing sword, and short sword. This genre does not exclude other melee weapons, however.

In combat, all firearms belong to the Black Powder group, and both the weapons listed in the Black Powder Focus of the **Firearms** table in **CHAPTER 4: EQUIPMENT** of the core rules exist in Age of Sail campaigns. These weapons deal impact rather than ballistic damage, so older forms of armor may be effective. But as firearms became more powerful, they came to punch through the thickest practical steel breastplates. To simulate this, especially in Gritty games, you may wish to allow shots from early firearms to benefit from the Precise Force stunt for free.

In addition to period-appropriate weapons listed in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*, characters may also possess the following weapons:

DRAGON: This is the pistol version of the blunderbuss and the origin of the term *dragoon*. It shoots a blast 10 yards long and 2 yards wide. Users make one attack roll and compare it to the defense of each target in the blast area. Stunts affect targets individually.

FLINTLOCK PISTOL: This pistol is useful for close-quarters combat but as hard to reload as its longer cousin. Thus, soldiers may carry two or more to fire in rapid succession before closing in for hand-to-hand combat.

BROADSWORD/CUTLASS: A broadsword is a wide, straight, double-edged sword that can be held in one hand. A cutlass is curved and single edged. Many weapons are equivalent to these, from single-edged backswords to the double-edged Walloon sword. These weapons are thicker than other military sabers. Those with well-developed basket hilts (add +1 to the Resources cost) give their users +1 to Defense against hand-to-hand attacks, though they do nothing to protect against ranged threats.

AVAST!

Start off your campaign with these inspirations.

CREWMAN BILL “SIX-EYE” BRAND

Six-Eye grew up on the streets of London and found service as a cabin boy on the frigate *Aegis* at the age of ten. He was noted for his powers of perception, often warning of storms and pirates before they came into sight, earning him his nickname at the age of seventeen. His performance otherwise is unremarkable, but his gift makes him popular with captains braving unknown or dangerous waters.

LA ORAGE

La Orage, “The Thunderstorm,” is not the most-armed ship on the sea, but cutting-edge weaponry and a skilled crew make her one of the most feared. A pirate ship with a fondness for Spanish gold, *La Orage* haunts the seas near Portugal, waiting for the next mark to pass her way.

MISTRESS LEONORA THROCKMORTON

Mistress Throckmorton grew up in her father’s office, watching him rise to power in the East India Trading Company. When he was killed by Spanish pirates, she swore an oath to rid the seas of the vermin she so despises. She now captains the *Angel of Death*, a fifth-rate, thirty-eight-gun frigate devoted entirely to the hunting and capturing of pirates, for which the East India Trading Company pays a healthy bounty.

THE ONE GREAT BEAST

Rumors of a leviathan have reached your ears. As a young crew seeking fame and fortune, what could be better than freeing the seas of a menace? But nothing comes easy on the high seas, and you face an arduous journey and a great foe.

ZAYRA’S MARK

You have only seen it once, an evil eye under a setting sun, a symbol rumored to belong to a Moorish underground network seeking to destabilize the East India Trading Company and upset their plunder of the East. The company has hired you to track down this symbol and those wearing it and bring them to justice, but as you follow the trail through the markets of Morocco and even into Spain’s royal court, you find yourself wondering if the secret is not, perhaps, darker than you knew. Your choice will be deadly: bring Zayra’s followers to justice and give the company yet more

power or work against the richest, most corrupt business in the known world.

ZHAO LE

The captain of a *bao chuan* treasure ship in Zheng He's fleet in ancient times, Zhao Le was separated from his fleet during a terrible storm in the Indian Ocean in his personal ship, the *Gossamer Butterfly*. Deciding to seek his fortunes elsewhere with the treasures in his hold, he and his crew continued west, eventually making their way to Morocco, where his fantastic stories found favor in the Moorish courts. Centuries later, his crew roams the Atlantic, preying on ships from lands he never heard of in life.

INSPIRATIONS

The following inspired some of these scenarios:

The Pirates of the Caribbean movie series, *His Majesty's Dragon*, by Naomi Novik, *Master & Commander*, by Patrick O'Brian, *Moby-Dick*, by Herman Melville

NEVERMORE: 1800s GOTHIC HORROR

It is a dark night, illuminated only by flashes of lightning carving deep into the dense forest. Somewhere, a wolf howls, and the night's shadows seem to lean in over your shoulders. The fire flares as you toss another branch on its dying flames, and eyes light around you, as bright and numerous as the pitch sparks of your fire.

Gothic horror, which inspired the scene described at the start of this section, is one of the earliest expressions of science fiction and fantasy, shaping much of these genres in its wake. From *Frankenstein* to *The Vampire Lestat* to *Crimson Peak*, gothic horror is about the horror of the human body and mind. It is a particularly visceral, sensual genre, utilizing the senses as much as logic and reason. Stemming from an era where science was just beginning to seize control of the popular mind from magic and superstition, it brings a unique blend of inspirations and options for storytelling.

Gothic horror, at its heart, is about conflict, change, and fear: conflict between the era of superstition and the era of logic; change in an increasingly globalized, networked world; fear of the unknown future and the weird, awful quirks of the human flesh and spirit.

As the GM, you get to decide what elements your setting will contain. Will it have the weird, macabre dread of Edgar Allan Poe or the scientific terror of Mary Shelley? The erotically charged world of vampires, the romantic grief of *Phantom of the Opera*, or the domestic horror of Charlotte Brontë? While the classics of the genre are rooted in the nineteenth-century Western world, the core concepts can be adapted to nearly any era or location.

A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

Gothic horror is as much about the characters and their internal struggles as it is about the setting. When you're

creating a campaign in this genre, you'll want to consider who your players are and how you'll incorporate the horror element in a way that is meaningful.

Because of the horror element, be sure to communicate with your players ahead of time. Make sure you don't touch on any deep-seated fears or paranoias that might throw your players out of the game. Ideally, you should talk to the players individually, let them know some of the themes of your campaign, and ask them if they have any hard limits.

This genre is particularly inviting of props. Scented candles, dried flowers, talismans, and old books are easy props to add some flavor to your setting. Food, red wine, and absinthe are also appropriate for the time. Consider using music and sound effects, too. There's nothing like stranding the characters in the wilderness and announcing their next encounter with the sound of howling wolves!

Classic gothic-horror tropes include body horror — pregnancy, wasting illnesses, blood-borne diseases, poisons, and transformations — and mental/emotional traumas. The Victorians were living in an era where science and superstition were attempting to reconcile, and even those people of a scientifically advanced bent were prone to believing in supernatural beings and forces like ghosts, séances, and demonic possession. Vampires and werewolves became popular during this era, too, as did man-made monsters.

The important thing to remember with gothic horror is that it is a more subtle, psychological horror and lends itself well to social and mystery plots.

GOthic-HORROR CHARACTERS

Gothic horror most often draws from the upper and lower classes. Middle-class backgrounds that are represented are, fittingly for the time, usually trade-based or military, and less commonly at the heart of these tales. Fears of penury or sins buried for a generation don't come up as often among tradespeople.

Aristocratic backgrounds give your characters the option to be courtiers, landowners, and wealthy explorers. The lush, etiquette-driven world of Victorian England was best tamed with resources and impeccable manners, which the Aristocratic character has in spades. This background pairs well with the **Dilettante**, **Socialite**, and **Executive** professions. Possible specializations include the **Commander**, **Liaison**, **Field Researcher**, and **Socialite**.

Who better to study a monster-ridden world than an **Academic**? Book-obsessed and armed with knowledge of the natural and unnatural world, the Academic is a strong ally against the darkness. This background pairs well with the **Technician**, **Expert**, and **Scholar** professions and the **Agent** and **Investigator** specializations.

The benefits of **Military** backgrounds are obvious for most settings, but in the gothic-horror setting, the Military background's skill with arms and battle-tested experience will be even more beneficial. This background lends itself to a particularly wide range of professions, too. **Brawler**, **Survivor**, **Criminal**, **Fixer**, and **Soldier** all work well with this background. The Military background pairs well with the **Driver**, **Gunfighter**, and **Special Forces** specializations.



In its **Clerk** form, the **Corporate** background may seem unlikely to produce an interesting character, but remember that Jonathan Harker met Dracula to finalize a real estate sale. The **Expert**, **Investigator**, **Negotiator**, and **Scholar** professions suggest themselves to the Clerk background, while the **Academic**, **Investigator**, and **Field Researcher** specializations can represent a Sherlock Holmes or Abraham Van Helsing.

The **Exile** is a common figure in gothic horror, often appearing as a monstrous being, a disinherited or fallen scion, or an old maid. The Exile stands just outside of society. With greater freedom of movement and the knowledge to survive on their own, the Exile is a powerful figure in this world. This background pairs well with any profession but may find extra depth as a member of the **Clergy** (a priest who has been defrocked or a country cleric with strange theological leanings), a **Criminal**, a disgraced **Politician**, or a **Survivalist**. Slinking through dark woods or crumbling castles, such a character may take up the **Hunter** or **Thief** specializations or even be a toughened raider who, in another time and place, might belong to **Special Forces**.

The **Laborer** is any low-born figure just trying to get by. Such characters may be strong-willed but must deal with classism and poverty on a daily basis. This background pairs with a range of specializations and professions, but the **Scavenger**, **Technician**, and **Merchant** professions and the **Driver** and **Thief** specializations go with it particularly well.

RULES FOR GOTHIC HORROR

As you did for the Age of Sail, you'll adapt the focuses characters use in gothic-horror campaigns to fit the setting. Electric lights and the telephone are in their infancy and are unfamiliar technologies for most. Horses are still the dominant mode of transport besides feet. Weaponry has advanced, however. Rifling and cartridges produce accurate firearms, which are still manufactured today. These include versions of the pocket pistol, revolver, carbine, hunting rifle, double-barreled shotgun, and combat shotgun. Manufacturing limitations and archaic features make these slightly less powerful than their modern counterparts. They inflict -1 damage per die (which can lead to occasional shots that inflict 0 damage, due to firearm or ammunition defects), and when a player rolls 1 on the Stunt Die, the weapon misfires and requires a minor action to clear. Automatic weapons are in their infancy, available as unreliable, experimental models at best.

TERRORS & CURSES

The rules for **Fear and Horror** in CHAPTER 3 are especially appropriate for gothic-horror games. When the source of fear is a supernatural being or cursed item, the rules in CHAPTER 5 can help you design the threat. Furthermore, the end of the nineteenth century is the dawn of research into the paranormal. Heroes, adversarial NPCs, weird creatures, and spirits may all possess classic psychic powers, as described in CHAPTER 6 of the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook*.

A theme running through gothic horror is the persistence of sin. A person's crimes and hubris may hide, fester, and transform into many hideous forms, but they will eventually be revealed and call the evildoer into account. You may replicate this by using a variation of the Complications Pool in the **Campaign Rhythm** section of CHAPTER 8. In this variant, add 1 point to the pool whenever a protagonist performs an action that, at least for the purposes of the genre, might be considered immoral or representative of darker urges. When the Complications Pool activates, its extra hindrances take forms appropriate to the sinister, supernatural tone of the game. Enhanced hazards announce themselves with peals of thunder or curious crows. Hostile NPCs might be servants of the count or ghosts.

DOOMED FACES & DARK CURIOSITIES

Use these people and situations to kick off a gothic-horror campaign.

AISHWARYA KHATRI

An Indian woman from a wealthy family, Aishwarya was sent to school in England to study at the academies there. She has made a name for herself as a promising surgeon, specializing in the understanding of traumatic injuries. After a particularly harrowing experience, she has left her private practice to travel and study monsters.

KATHERINE MORAN

Exceptionally tall, Katherine is a notorious widow who took over her late husband's lucrative gun-manufacturing business. The rumor is that at least a dozen men die each year in her factories and are found later, drained of blood. The sister of one of those men wants answers.

MAJID MOHAMMED

An Omani soldier in his early adulthood, Majid came to Portugal in the 1800s, looking for a new adventure. His knowledge of politics and culture earned him a position within the court, and he now travels extensively, pursuing the Crown's interests. His travels left him with a knowledge of the monsters still haunting the shadows, and he keeps himself fit and ready for the next one that seeks his blood.

MARJORY STONEBAUGH

Marjory once dazzled all of England with her wit and art. A painter of great renown, she was known for seeking out inspiration in dark and dangerous places. A rival lured her into a village of werewolves, where she found inspiration for an incredible group of paintings. Unfortunately, her mutation left her unable to function in polite society, and she is now an exile, living in the forests of Germany with the wolves who changed her.

SAMUEL LARSSON

An immigrant from Norway, Samuel is the fallen scion of a noble family. He will not say which family, and it is likely that he travels under an assumed name. An explosive temper and penchant for cruelty keep him on the move, always fleeing

from unknown demons. A large silver pendant around his neck, worked in a strange fashion, hints that perhaps these demons are not so ephemeral.

THE RED MARE

The Red Mare is renowned throughout France as one of the fastest horses on the tracks. Of primarily Arabian descent, the Red Mare is owned by Lady Ramona Templeton and has a following as large as any stage actor. But it is also known that every jockey that has ridden her has died within a year, fabulously wealthy but haunted beyond bearing.

RED ROSE MANOR

Set in a remote Lithuanian province, Red Rose Manor was built by Countess Helene Arlauskas for her ailing daughter. Faced with white marble over red stone, the castle is covered with climbing wild roses. It is rumored that the girl's preserved body still lies in state within the castle, guarded by her mother's restless spirit. The girl's low-born father requests that the mother and daughter be laid to rest, by any means necessary.

THREE WHITE HORSES

A Lakota Native American soldier who built his reputation as a guide and guard for early settlers traveling the Oregon Trail, Three White Horses is also known for his incredible knowledge of the land and its dangers. He is highly sought after by expeditioners who have heard too much about the horrors haunting the wild lands of the Americas.

INSPIRATIONS

The following sources provided inspiration for this setting:

Crimson Peak, The works of Edgar Allan Poe, *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, Fiction featuring Sherlock Holmes

FROM OUTER SPACE! 1950s ALIEN INVASION

The radio crackles; a panicked announcer babbles warnings about giant creatures falling from the sky, laying waste to entire towns and heading for the major cities. The announcer warns of thousands of deaths, chaos, riots, and an unprecedented military response.

You wander outside, laughing with your son about the latest radio hoax. Hasn't that silly Welles guy gotten tired of this yet?

They appear suddenly, filling the sky with their sleek, sinister shapes. An army of strange beings from unknown worlds hovers over the diners and circle skirts of 1950s America. Panicked people fill the streets, dogs barking and children yelling. It takes you a moment to process that this isn't a prank. Aliens are here, and your world is going down in flames.

The alien-invasion genre is a favorite of American science fiction, from the terrifying *War of the Worlds* to *The Avengers*. While its golden age was the 1950s, it can be readily adapted from the rockabilly era to the 1980s, the modern day, or even a more historical period.

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE SAUCERS CAME?

Although it finds its origins in the works of Voltaire and H. G. Wells, the mid-twentieth-century alien-invasion genre is almost entirely American, yet easily transfers to other cultures. While numerous films show landings in the United States, the genre's logic dictates aliens can visit any country on Earth. An alien-invasion story set in Pakistan or in postwar France will be at least as fun as one set in small-town America. It should be noted, however, that alien invasion runs counter to the assumptions of Soviet science fiction and general culture, where aliens are assumed to be Communist and peaceful, since their social advancements should match their technology. In its best-known forms, the genre harnesses American fears of immigration, Cold War anxiety, shifting cultural and national borders, and a generation still reeling from a world war.

Alien invasion can take many forms to suit your ideal campaign and the interests of your players. Hidden immigration à la *Men in Black*, a classic *War of the Worlds* invasion, or a single alien creating havoc in a small town or major city as in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* can all work well with this trope.

Leaning heavily on 1950s styles and inspirations can be a lot of fun. Don't be afraid to run a rockabilly campaign, complete with cherry pie on the game table and Elvis on the stereo. You could even use the *War of the Worlds* panic, where Orson Welles's radio play was confused for real news, as real news.

If you want to get grittier, alien invasion can be turned into a military campaign that draws on the recently ended Second World War and rising nuclear paranoia. Survivalist ideas grow more prevalent as the Cold War ascends, and a growing number of Americans suspect that civilization might not survive a final reckoning between the world's superpowers.

Whatever direction you go, be sure to look up the fiction of the time for a wealth of inspiration.

ALIEN-INVASION CHARACTERS

Character types for this genre will vary wildly based on setting and time period. Because of this, the following backgrounds and professions are geared more toward what will be most useful in a typical alien-invasion story, rather than tied to an era or region. However, this trope ties best to the era immediately following a global war.

Corporate characters either found success during the war or grew up in families newly enriched by peace unleashing profitable, productive forces. This class pairs well with the **Professional**, **Merchant**, **Politician**, and **Dilettante** professions, along with the **Commander**, who traded officer's bars for an office. The **Executive** and **Socialite** specializations are suitable, and military-corporate cooperation brings them into the fold as **Agents**.

In the postwar era, millions possess the **Military** background, their intense war experiences having

overwritten their upbringings. The GM should let characters with this background pick any profession. Those who continue doing what they did during the war might join the **Commander**, **Explorer**, **Pilot**, **Security**, **Soldier**, and **Survivalist** professions. **Agent**, **Gunfighter**, and **Special Forces** specializations suggest themselves, but hard-boiled **Investigators** are typically veterans.

The **Academic** is a classic background in the genre, and one that has just risen to prominence in the aftermath of the first fully mechanized nuclear war. As members of the **Expert**, **Scholar**, and especially **Technician** professions, Academics learn critical information about the invaders or aliens reach out to them in the belief that intellectuals won't share the rest of humanity's warmongering habits.

Finally, this is the era of the **Suburban** background. Hundreds of homes rise to house new families. The **Fixer**, **Politician**, and **Professional** professions hail from the suburbs and may grow into the **Executive** or **Socialite** specializations.

RULES FOR ALIEN INVASIONS

Most of the character types described in *Modern AGE* can be used in an alien-invasion scenario with no modification. Information technology has yet to produce the personal



computer during this time, so the closest things to hackers are the scientists and engineers who experiment with enormous machines, the most powerful of which have a fraction of the modern smartphone's processing power.

DRIVE-INS, DRUGSTORES, AND DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

Use the following characters and inspirations to start your invasion.

AMY WALDSCHMIDT

A factory worker during the war, Amy was approached by a shadowy agency and offered a job tracking aliens. Seven years later, she's the leader of an elite unit that neutralizes alien threats around the world and keeps their technology out of Russian hands. Factory work has given her a talent for sabotage, which she uses to wreck alien machines so they can't be rebuilt.

CONSUELO HERRERA CASTRO

The daughter of a prominent California rancher, Consuelo became a nurse at nineteen. She came to the attention of a prominent private alien hunter while attending to the victims of a construction disaster. Flying saucers only give up their secrets when they crash, after all, and the victims—human or otherwise—need medical attention.

THE DAY THE EARTH WENT DARK

The sun rose, the sun set—the sun vanished. No sun, moon, or stars mark the lightless sky. Yet the world isn't panicking; businesses operate under a facade of normalcy while crops wither and animals sicken. The only clue about why the light left, and perhaps what could bring it back, is a strange transmission that crossed the airwaves three days before the darkness, its code as yet unbreakable.

JOAN HOLLINS

Joan is an African American who has been a diner waitress and owner for twenty years while raising her two daughters with her husband, who is the cook for the diner. She is an outspoken activist for civil rights, feeding the crowds at rallies and writing pamphlets. Secretly, she hopes to meet an alien. This will happen sooner than she thinks. Extraterrestrial agents have heard her speak. They haven't come to oppress humanity but to steer it from the practice of oppression.

MARTIN LARSON

An imposingly tall man with military bearing, Martin looks more like a soldier than a scholar. The son of a Miwok woman and a Danish immigrant, Martin spent years studying at Harvard but found himself fascinated with emerging extraterrestrial folklore and became its foremost scholar. He also picks the brains of scientists who speculate about what real aliens might be like.

MIRROR IMAGE

It was a beautiful day when residents of Summerville heard a polite knock on their doors. Three days later, only a handful

of "originals" remain, waiting for their times to come. No one knows where their neighbors have gone. They deal with the mirror images who replaced their neighbors and enact parodies of the originals' lives—except when the mirror images whisper into weird silver devices, wander into the woods at night, and perform occasional acts of brutal violence. How long do the last originals have left?

INSPIRATIONS

Inspiration for this setting can be drawn from these sources:

The Day the Earth Stood Still, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, This Island Earth, War of the Worlds

AGENTS OF ACRONYM: 1960s SPY-FI

The dapper man in the expensive suit sips his drink delicately, watching the crowd with an eagle's keen focus. As he takes the last sip, a commotion starts across the room. Before you can even blink, he's shoved you behind the bar, and chaos has broken out. Smooth, calm, in control, the man in the suit handles the situation before brushing the glass off his seat. With a dazzling smile, he focuses on you again.

"Another martini, please. Shaken? Stirred? Why don't you surprise me."

Few things in cinema are as iconic as Bond, James Bond, but he's not the only inspiration for this period. Flint, Diabolik, agents from U.N.C.L.E. and Department S, Nick Fury—they all use advanced technology, slick moves, and signature charisma over the course of covert operations. Their eccentric, ambitious enemies bring considerable resources and weird styles to the fight. On the opposite side of the coin, the world of dead drops and double-crossing double agents offers a grittier, harsher campaign for those who prefer to avoid the high-octane cinema of superspies. This genre is less about the period than the elaborate schemes and plots taking place in the shadows. The harsher side of espionage isn't usually part of the genre, but you don't have to be a purist.

YOUR MISSION

The spy-fi genre is a huge canvas suited to any campaign mode, location, or scenario. Consider the political, social, and technological elements of your setting. A 1960s campaign in Cuba can draw on well-known history or even explore it from a new angle. The real Bay of Pigs invasion didn't have jet packs, but maybe yours does—and maybe you're seeking out infiltrators to defend the revolution from capitalist plots, for that matter. The essence of the genre lies in direct action and fantastic scenarios. Real intelligence officers act at arm's length through informers and agents who may never know the true nature of their work, but a spy-fi agent strides into the fray, with or without a cover identity, and steals the plans or rescues hostages themselves. As noted earlier, you can mix this with a more realistic style to make the genre your own. Perhaps the CIA performs ordinary intelligence work, but the stranger stuff gets handed off to AXE (Assassinations and

eXtraordinary Espionage) after the “Company” does all the prerequisite fieldwork.

Encourage players to explore their characters’ motivations. Why do they work for or against the main power in your setting? What would convince them to defect to the other side? What are their personal goals? If you’re feeling adventurous, offer to allow double agents into the party right from the start or quietly discuss the possibility with a receptive player.

Consider playing from the other side of the coin, too, where the heroes are being targeted by an extraordinary agent hell-bent on their destruction. What measures can they take to thwart them? In a grittier campaign, the protagonists could be civilians caught in a chess game played by experienced spies and political powers. Do they play along or start their own opposing conspiracy?

SPY-FI CHARACTERS

The most obvious specializations in this genre are **Agents** and **Investigators**. Whether high-flying superspies or down-on-their-luck gumshoes, these characters fill the pages of literature and our screens. Encourage your players to look elsewhere, though. There are many options for incredible stories with the unexpected.

Upper-class characters have classic genre traits. They are suave, are possessed of incredible resources, and know about etiquette and polite society, including black sheep and skeletons in the closets of stately homes. An **Aristocratic** or **Bohemian** background, paired with the **Athlete** profession and **Investigator** specialization, builds a solid homage to the most famous superspy. Of course, the historical Ian Fleming might have really possessed the **Commander** profession, and in games that cleave more closely to realistic intelligence work, the **Controller** specialization is considered more important than the people who get their hands dirty.

Of course, any normal person can become a spy! Someone who grew up in an **Urban** area, who perhaps was in the **Military**, and now works as a **Soldier**, **Hunter**, or **Liaison** is a good start. Members of the **Laborer** or **Trade** background seize opportunities upper-crust types may overlook. While their “betters” distract themselves with martinis and black-jack, operatives from these backgrounds use knowledge gained as **Criminals**, **Fixers**, **Technicians**, and more to find other routes to the objective. Adding a specialization as a **Driver**, **Gunfighter**, or **Thief** enhances certain essential skills.

This is spy-fi, so amazing gadgets are par for the course. People with **Academic**, **Military**, and **Trade** backgrounds might build them. The **Technician** specialization is mandatory, unless you decide spy-fi gear consists of the extraordinary items in CHAPTER 5. In that case you’ll want the **Artificer** talent.

RULES FOR SPY-FI

Due to the flexibility of this genre, you’ll want to take some time to figure out the parameters of your technology, stunts, and characters. You’ll probably want to dig deep into the specifics of campaign modes, fine-tuning the options instead of taking them as a single package. For example, you may want to use Pulp Health accumulation, since spy-fi characters don’t always reach action-hero durability, but Cinematic

Toughness, since characters seem to be able to absorb a bullet or two about as easily as a knife.

Extraordinary powers are part of some versions of this genre. Beyond amazing gadgets, psychic powers are sometimes present. These are usually one-off abilities, and the rules in CHAPTER 5 allowing characters to gain individual abilities instead of developing a talent might be useful. Furthermore, some superspies might be “ordinary but exceptional” — that is, they have some abilities normally associated with Exceptionals, but these can be explained as the result of incredible training. The **Favored Stunt** power is usually the way to go.

DOSSIERS AND DEAD DROPS

These people and scenarios might serve as flash points for your spy-fi campaign.

ADELITA REYNA CERVANTES

A Communist agent, Adelita is a wealthy woman who uses her resources to covertly move rebels around Mexico. Her greatest enemy is her brother, Xavier. Both were trained by White Light, a fascist conspiracy planning to seize Mexico. Adelita left the group; Xavier stayed. While they snipe at each other at family functions (where they have sworn never to use violence), their operatives battle for control of the country and to find Element Zero, a mineral found, then lost, in the Yucatán village of Chicxulub.

MARCUS O'REILLY

An Irish national, Marcus took part in the Border Campaign but grew disillusioned with the IRA. He immigrated to America, taking a role with the CIA as a liaison officer. He now works in Europe, coordinating anti-Communist efforts. Someone has been stealing the most advanced secret weapons from the Operation Gladio caches meant to supply guerillas in case of a Warsaw Pact invasion (and frankly, to arm movements that will make trouble when left-leaning governments take power). Where have the weapons gone? Marcus needs a team and believes it takes a thief to catch one — and he has the characters’ bail money.

SHARP SICKLES AND FALLING STARS

Tensions between the United States and USSR are at an all-time high, threatening nuclear war at any moment. Gunmen attack highly public targets in both countries and seem to have plausible backgrounds as enemy insurgents. In the United States, they identify themselves as Cuban infiltrators and local radicals; in the USSR, they confess to being CIA operatives and the descendants of exiled aristocrats. But close examination reveals brainwashing — these people aren’t who they say they are. The finest spies of two superpowers must now work together to discover who wants to provoke Armageddon.

TAIWO AKINWANDE

Taiwo is a merchant living in Morocco. By day, he sells tea and delicate cookies made by his twin brother from a tiny shop tucked into a corner of Casablanca. By night, he is part of a large and effective network dedicated to the liberation of Algeria. Taiwo’s command of language and communications make him a central figure in the network.

WALLS OF THOUGHT

Twins separated by the Berlin Wall in childhood find themselves working for opposing governments. Neither government knows their agent has a sibling—just that they have a powerful psychic in their employ. The twins telepathically communicate to protect each other from enemy agents but have recently decided they want to reunite and have subtly moved to find people capable of making it happen.

INSPIRATIONS

Inspiration for this setting can be taken from the following:

Agent Carter, *Diabolik*, *The Avengers* (UK Spy Series), *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, James Bond in literature, but especially film, John le Carré's novels

WIRED & WATCHED: THE CYBERTHRILLER

The robotic eye swivels, following the woman in the red coat as she strides down the Chicago street. A controlling intelligence tracks her height and weight; uses deep machine learning to estimate employment status, political affiliations, and hobbies; and notes that she seems to be limping. The eye turns to a lithe man: a known petty thief. It considers texting the police, while the woman in the red coat logs in to a secure intranet using a USB key designed for hardware multifactor authentication. She hopes the robotic eye doesn't discover the thief stole the key before she's finished. On the other side of town, a fifteen-year-old girl logs in to the woman's social media and posts pictured filled with geodata, to make it seem the woman can't possibly be where she is.

That night, the tax records of a major corporation reach the public web; by morning, company stocks have fallen into the gutter. The woman in the red coat watches the news on the couch next to her daughter, knowing her job was well done, but another will require her attention soon.

The example scenario might be part of a cyberthriller campaign. In an increasingly transparent, surveilled world, the idea of moving invisibly through the shadows gains increasing popularity. Whether hacking systems to find information, entering the system itself, using the system to bring justice, or being victimized by a society obsessed with knowing and tracking everything, technology itself becomes a character. Unless you're careful, someone can watch your every move, and in some versions of the cyberthriller genre, that someone is an artificial intelligence.

DELETED FILES

A cyberthriller is about more than a rising dystopia. It's about the failure of utopian ideals and how something built to support high ideals can be manipulated by selfish, destructive forces—or groups committed to imposing their own values, whether the mass of humanity agrees or not. While the Internet was originally devised to produce a hardened communications system in case of nuclear war, the generations of developers that came after optimized it to allow the

free flow of information—until it became an omnipresent part of our lives and critical to business and government. Now, while various interests build “walled gardens” in an open system, other groups exploit its lingering openness for their own ends.

Cyberthrillers are about these forms of exploitation and how, in a world where human beings can be electronically monitored and quantified, characters participate in or resist that exploitation. The technology is a character in and of itself: the unblinking eye of a camera that shares its secrets to those who know how to request them or even an artificial intelligence with difficult-to-fathom motives. Creating a compelling technological antagonist can be a challenge. If everything you do online can be monitored and manipulated by a single enemy, they may be too tough for characters to meaningfully challenge. An infallible enemy who always thwarts protagonists burns them out quickly. Even an AI with godlike intelligence should have some limits. The most obvious one is its need for agents to act in the physical world. Even in a campaign where the world is a simulation, characters should be “bugs” or the simulation should have rules that require enemies to engage in chancy physical confrontations.

In Pulp or Cinematic versions of this genre, action is a mainstay. Guns and deft punches appear as often as hacking wizardry. Social play isn't neglected either, but some actions may move from the physical world to social media. This genre sits on the edge of cyberpunk, and you can incorporate many of its ideas. While superstrong cyber limbs and brain-computer interfaces aren't present (unless you want them to be), mobile communications, networks, and some forms of AI have happened faster than the genre's forebears ever predicted.

CYBERTHRILLER CHARACTERS

The **Corporate** background is the quintessential upper-class background in this genre. Many examples aren't just **Executives**, but innovators with the **Expert** or **Professional** profession. They may run businesses that tap into the most sensitive data feeds or may have decided to undermine these same corporations. The **Cosmopolitan** is another possible background, fitting this genre's bias toward networked and monitored urban settings, and takes up the same professions. The **Executive** and **Agent** specializations work for both backgrounds, as does the **Controller**.

Urban characters represent the lower end of wired city life. They comply with the demands of a networked society as **Experts** and **Negotiators** or defy it as **Criminals** and **Scavengers**. The **Communicator** is a signature specialization in this genre, but the **Investigator** is also suitable. In the same lower-class rung, **Military** backgrounds are extremely common and tend to lead to straightforward career paths, using the **Soldier** profession and **Gunfighter**, **Martial Artist**, and **Special Forces** specializations.

The worker bees and drones of the dystopian world, **Outcasts** operating on the fringe of society are usually either dissidents or broken in ways that do not serve the system. These people can be the system's worst nightmare, however. Add the **Fixer** or **Criminal** profession and the **Gunfighter** or **Thief** specialization for a character who can get anything done and doesn't question the means.

RULES FOR CYBERTHRILLERS

Cyberthrillers take place in the present day, so *Modern AGE's* rules set doesn't require any special adaptations. Breaching tests, in the form of hacking and penetrating secure locations, are extremely common. See **CHAPTER 8: MASTERING THE RULES** in the *Modern AGE Basic Rulebook* for more information about these. These campaigns often feature organizations such as corporations and espionage groups, so the rules for Membership in the core rulebook and for organizations and networks in **CHAPTER 6** of this book may help. When cyberthrillers move into true science fiction territory, it's time to break out the rules for extraordinary powers and abilities in both this book and the core rulebook. These may be brain implants, nanotech enhancements, or even the ability to bend the rules of a simulated reality.

\$ MKDIR ~/STORY_HOOKS

These characters and situations might begin your cyberthriller game.

AHMAD KHOURY

A politician with a solid track record of advocating for human rights and the betterment of humanity, Ahmad's early life as a refugee gave him insight into the challenges facing a world rapidly tipping into an authoritarian state. He works tirelessly within the resources he has, but he never stops searching for a better way to reconcile humans and technology.

ELISEO LOPEZ CAVELLERO

Eliseo is a technology protégé, having developed a program that rewires the human brain, erasing the sharp edges of human hurt. Instead of relaxing into his newfound wealth, Eliseo travels regularly from his home base in Mexico City, working with immigrants and refugees to implement the technology as widely as possible.

THAT FIRST PEACEFUL MORNING

The country has balanced. Poverty has been erased, class conflicts resolved, murder eradicated. Everyone has enough; no one has too much. Using technology, peace has been achieved. Your nation is hailed by the world as the first step toward an elusive utopia, a blueprint for harmony. On live TV, a reporter shoots your country's press secretary.

INVISIBLE VICTIMS

The coasts of America have urbanized, forming vast megacities where the ultra-wealthy crowd in with the ultra-poor, a volatile system just waiting for a trigger. That trigger appears to have been pulled: A string of murders, which seem to be targeting activists focusing on the redistribution of wealth, have sent the city into a spiral of riots, looting, and chaos. The catalyst needs to be found before the entire region explodes, leaving nothing but desolation.

JIN YOON

Jin made a name for herself when, at the age of sixteen, she stood on a stage and demanded the defunding of private prisons. She now balances advocacy and a busy life as an

ASSET SURVIVAL: 23%

ENEMY AI OPERATIVES: 6 CQB TRAINED

BACKUP ASSETS EST. 237 SECONDS



academic, specializing in the history of incarceration and the use of technology to pacify unwanted elements.

NOBODY IS GOING TO SAVE YOU

There are no secrets left in the world that the network does not know. The world is run by the early iterations of a powerful AI, one that promises to bring an end to violence, corruption, and poverty. It has been working, until now. Isolated spots are flaring up in previously balanced regions, and all the signs point to an agitator fighting against a peaceful world. Can you stop their plans, or will you side with them to bring down the AI and return the world to human control?

TAZE CAMPBELL

Taze's background is in coordination—keeping her cell of rebels clear of the government. One step ahead of the agents pursuing them, they live in the shadows and work to bring down the network that runs their country and silences dissidents and undesirables. With an Academic background, she understands how to bring down the system from within.

INSPIRATIONS

Inspiration for these cyberthriller campaigns can be found in the following:

Leverage, The Matrix, Mr. Robot, The Peripheral, Person of Interest

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