

# **PDQ** *Sharp!* (PDQ#)



**Atomic Sock Monkey Press**  
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# Contents

PDQ# Basics . . . . .	3
PDQ# Master Chart . . . . .	3
PDQ# Characters . . . . .	4
Elements of a PDQ# Character . . . . .	4
Fortes . . . . .	4
Common Swashbuckling Fortes . . . . .	4
Forte Ranks . . . . .	4
Swashbuckling Forte . . . . .	5
Foibles . . . . .	5
Common Swashbuckling Foibles . . . . .	5
Player-Initiated vs. GM-Initiated Foibles . . . . .	5
Techniques . . . . .	6
Types of Techniques. . . . .	6
Stacking Techniques . . . . .	6
What Sort of Technique is “Laughing, then Jumping Off of Something”? . . . . .	7
Common PDQ# Fortes . . . . .	7
Acrobatics . . . . .	7
Aristocrat . . . . .	7
No Average [0] Aristos?. . . . .	7
Fencing. . . . .	7
Fencing: the Gentle Art of Slashing & Skewering. . . . .	7
PCs without Fencing?. . . . .	7
Minions. . . . .	8
Motivation: [X] . . . . .	8
Fiddly Bits: Multiple Motivations? . . . . .	8
Past: [X]. . . . .	8
Repartee . . . . .	8
Sidekick . . . . .	9
Wealthy. . . . .	9
Style Dice . . . . .	10
Bowl vs. Box . . . . .	10
Every Session . . . . .	10
GMing Style Dice. . . . .	11
Behind the Curtain: Hoarding Style Dice . . . . .	11
Good Form vs. Bad Form (Gaining Style Dice). . . . .	11
PDQ# Acclaim. . . . .	12
Social Awards (Box) . . . . .	12
Affected By Foible (Box) . . . . .	12
Good Form (Bowl) . . . . .	12
Feeding the Plot (Bowl). . . . .	12
Vexing Misfortune (Box) . . . . .	12
Win a Flashy Challenge (Box) . . . . .	12
Changing the Odds (Using Style Dice) . . . . .	12
Be Impressive . . . . .	13
Catch Your Second Wind . . . . .	13
Create the World . . . . .	13
Temporary Gear & Temporary Wealth Rewards . . . . .	14
Good Form Gifting. . . . .	14
Training Points . . . . .	14
Gaining Training Points. . . . .	14
Using Training Points . . . . .	14
Increasing a Forte Rank. . . . .	14
Purchasing a New Forte . . . . .	14

Purchasing a New Foible. . . . .	14
Purchasing a New Technique . . . . .	15
Character Generation: Build an Adventurer . . . . .	15
Name . . . . .	15
Core PDQ# Elements . . . . .	15
Fiddly Bits: Swashbuckling Forte. . . . .	16
Four Additional Fortes . . . . .	16
Fiddly Bits: Breaking Additional Fortes. . . . .	16
Spend 5 Technique Points to Purchase Techniques . . . . .	16
Style Dice & Training Points . . . . .	16
Miscellany . . . . .	16
Justifying Why the PCs are Together . . . . .	16
Example Character 1: “Xavier” (Xavia) . . . . .	17
Example Character 2: “The Raven” (Edward the Yeoman) . . . . .	17
Challenges & Duels . . . . .	18
Time, Range, and Speed . . . . .	18
Challenges. . . . .	18
Social Challenges . . . . .	19
Difficulty Ranks . . . . .	19
Challenge Results . . . . .	19
Advice: Ellipses . . . . .	19
Narration of Failure & Success?. . . . .	20
Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks . . . . .	20
Flashy Challenges . . . . .	20
Duels21	
Duel Opponents . . . . .	21
Minions & Minion Squads . . . . .	21
The Element of Surprise!. . . . .	22
The Duel Itself . . . . .	22
Engage Foes. . . . .	22
Divvy Duel Dice . . . . .	22
The Charge . . . . .	23
The Clash of Steel . . . . .	23
PCs Ganging Up . . . . .	23
The Touch . . . . .	24
Volte-face . . . . .	24
Fiddly Bits: Extra Duel Tweaks. . . . .	25
Damage . . . . .	25
The Key to Understanding PDQ# Damage. . . . .	26
Failure Ranks . . . . .	26
Wound Ranks . . . . .	26
Zeroing Out . . . . .	26
Mostly Dead. . . . .	27
Coup de Grace . . . . .	27
Recovering from Damage . . . . .	27
Failure Rank Recovery . . . . .	27
Wound Rank Recovery . . . . .	27
Mostly Dead Recovery . . . . .	27
Story Hooks . . . . .	27
Setting the Dials . . . . .	28
Aesthetics . . . . .	28
The Breadth of Forte Penumbra. . . . .	28
Bringing a Musket to a Swordfight . . . . .	28
Justify Why PCs are Together? . . . . .	28
The Purposes of Poison. . . . .	28
What’s in S7S?. . . . .	28

# PDQ# Basics

PDQ#'s core design concept pits a character's *Fortes* (called *Qualities* in other PDQ games) against *Difficulty Ranks*. Fortes are a measure of story-effectiveness rather than reality simulation and summarize a range of attributes, advantages, merits, skills, special equipment or relationships.

The PDQ# Master Chart (see below) is the foundation of PDQ#. When attempting a task, players roll dice plus the *Modifier (MOD)* from the Rank of the relevant Forte. To succeed, they must beat the *Target Number (TN)*, provided by either the *Difficulty Rank* of a task or the result of an opposing roll by another character.

**NOTE - A number of elements found in the free PDQ Core Rules download, *Dead Inside, Truth & Justice,* and *The Zorcerer of Zo* do not appear here, some have been radically altered, and all new elements have been added to PDQ#. The PDQ# system appearing here is a simplified version of the underlying rules for *Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies*.**

A free download of PDQ# can be found at

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies.asp>

## PDQ# Master Chart

Level	As Forte Rank	Modifier to roll	As Difficulty Rank	Target Number
<i>Poor</i>	Notably Inept.	-2	A trivial task.	5
<i>Average</i>	Typical human capability.	0	Straightforward task.	7
<i>Good</i>	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	+2	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	9
<i>Expert</i>	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	+4	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for a typical untrained person (Average).	11
<i>Master</i>	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field (Good).	13
<i>Impressive</i>	—	—	Ridiculously difficult task, hard for most skilled and experienced professionals in the field (Expert).	15
<i>Intimidating</i>	—	—	Ludicrously difficult task, one in a million shot, hard for most Masters of the field.	17
<i>Impossible</i>	—	—	Even Masters of the field cannot regularly accomplish this task.	19
<i>Inconceivable!</i>	—	—	The difficulty of this task beggars the imagination!	21+

# PDQ# Characters

## Elements of a PDQ# Character



### Fortes

A *Forte* is a noteworthy talent, skill, relationship, or resource of a character. It is an inherently positive aspect; a strong point. A Forte represents a broad skill, field of knowledge, unique perspective, personality trait, special gift, or social connection. (Any relevant gear needed to properly take advantage of a Forte, like lockpicks for a Thief or a sword for a Musketeer, are assumed.)

If a particular Forte is relevant *at all* to an action or topic, the character may apply it when attempting that action or understanding that topic. This is called the *penumbra* (or “shadow”) of the Forte. Therefore, a player shouldn’t pick Fortes that are too narrow or its penumbra will be too narrow; too broad, and identifying the sorts of things that should fall under the penumbra becomes pointless. Proper word choice is key. The parameters for what’s “too broad” or “too narrow” are up to the individual GM.

Consider a character who has the Forte of “Pirate.” The penumbra of Pirate probably contains such things

as sailing, maritime crime, connections to other pirates, knowing pirate stories, fighting (especially on a ship), evaluating the worth of booty, intimidation, that sort of thing. (See also *Setting the Dials*, p. 28.)

**IMPORTANT NOTE**—If a PC wants to be particularly better at some Forte that might normally fall under the penumbra of another Forte—for example, taking “Musketeer” and “Fencing” separately—that is perfectly okay, provided that the player realizes that in exchange for the benefit of being able to use both Fortes at the same time (adding the MODs together; see p. 20) when they get into a scuffle, this character generation choice *limits* the total breadth of what the character can do.

### Common Swashbuckling Fortes

Acrobatics, Brawling, Courtesy, Fencing, Firearms, Highwayman, Horsemanship, Knows the King, Musketeer, Pirate, Prankster, Repartee, Servant/Sidekick, Strong, Wealthy.

### Forte Ranks

Fortes have Ranks that indicate increasing levels of proficiency (see also the *PDQ# Master Chart*). The numbers in square brackets following the Rank of the Forte show the Rank’s *Modifier* (or *MOD*)—how much is added to or subtracted from a 2d6 dice roll for resolving a *Challenge* (see p. 18) or from a 3d6 dice roll for a *Duel* (see p. 21).

**IMPORTANT NOTE**—At everything else, characters are neither noteworthy nor inept—that is, they’re Average [0]. They can attempt a 2d6 roll for any task, knowledge, or skill that is not specifically secret, technical, or esoteric. That is, while any character can look for the secret door in the library, it’s doubtful they’ll be able to successfully decode the encrypted battle-orders for the Musketeer regiment without at least one espionage or military Forte.

Fortes also absorb *damage* (see p. 25).

During character generation, players choose several Fortes to describe their characters. *Never fear*: if after play begins, a particular Forte sees no use and doesn’t really add to the characterization of a PC, the player and the GM can work together change it to something that fits better.

## Swashbuckling Forte

Every *PDQ#* character has a particular swashbuckling specialty: some characters swashbuckle with swords, others with repartee, skullduggery, or sailing. A character's *Swashbuckling Forte* is the thing that they they astound with, granting them a wider range of abilities in that Forte.

Any Forte can be a Swashbuckling Forte, but a character can only have *one* Swashbuckling Forte. (Further, by choosing a Swashbuckling Forte the PC helps the GM tailor his adventures to the PC's tastes.)

A character gets a discount on purchasing *Techniques* (see p. 6) chained to their Swashbuckling Forte, both during character generation and later advancement after play.

## Foibles

A *Foible* is a failing or feature that presents opportunities for *interesting* failure. It is an inherent negative aspect of the character; a weak point stemming from ignorance, flawed understanding, physical or mental incapability, recurring duty(s), a particular penchant for trouble, or some other vulnerability. (Sometimes, a Foible gives a better idea of a character's motivation than *Motivation* itself; see p. 8!)

Players should pick a word or phrase that describes something that will be *fun* or *entertaining* to deal with during play. A recurring cabal of villains, an uncomfortable situation, or an activity that the character just regularly *flubs* are all possible Foibles.

Foibles are *unranked*—they do not add to rolls or absorb *damage* (see p. 25). They serve as constant *Story Hooks* (see p. 27) for characters. When a Foible comes *directly* into play, the *PC* gets *Style Dice* (see p. 10).

### Common Swashbuckling Foibles

Drunkard, Enemy of the Crown, Greedy, Honorable, Loyal to the Crown, Naïve, Perfect Gentleman, Poverty, Proud, Secret Identity, True Love, Unrequited Love.

**IMPORTANT NOTE**—If a player makes his character's **Foible and Motivation** (see p. 8) the same thing—say, *True Love*—then those aspects will be a constant presence in his adventures. True Love will cause them trouble, but will also give them the strength to win through. This can be very fun, but limits the sorts of things that will happen to a character: their life will ultimately *revolve* around True Love.

**NOTE**—If a Foible ever needs to be rolled against (for a Challenge situation), treat it as a Poor [-2] Rank Forte. However, it *still* cannot absorb damage (see p. 25).

### Player-Initiated vs. GM-Initiated Foibles

A character's Foible can come directly into game-play in two ways:

1. *The player specifically plays to the Foible*, allowing it to dictate their responses to a situation; or
2. *The GM tries to activate the Foible*, reminding the player that the character has that particular flaw.

In the first case, the player can and *should* remind the GM when playing to his or her Foible, earning a Style Die for good roleplaying. In the second case, the player can always refuse to go along with the GM's attempt . . . he or she just doesn't get the Style Die. In those cases, the GM can escalate, sweetening the pot with multiple Style Dice and making it a better offer. The player can always refuse, of course.

Activating a Foible is all about good characterization and putting complicated situations and difficult choices in the character's path -- not about hosing the character, and not about forcing a single direction or behavior for the player to follow. It's about giving the character—and player—a chance to act non-optimally (but in-character) in a situation for a later benefit.



## Techniques

A *Technique* is a bit of inherent nature, training, or background that provides a bonus or benefit in specific, relevant situations. It's a bit of recurring style or flair of the character.

**IMPORTANT NOTE—If a PC wants to be particularly better at some particular aspects of a Forte with a very broad penumbra—for example, chaining “*Situation: While Fencing*” or “*Vs.: the Cardinal’s Men*” to the “*Musketeer*” Forte is perfectly okay, because that is providing differentiation between the character’s general strengths compared to other Musketeers.**

Then again, the character could take all Fencing-related Techniques on his Musketeer Forte, making him a specialist in fencing. That’s fine too.

However, taking “*Situation: While Fencing*” as a Technique of the “*Fencing*” Forte is just *Bad Form* (see p. 11).

When used in a Scene, a Technique can have one of two effects:

- ☛ **Roll & Keep:** When rolling, each Technique that comes into play allows an *extra die* to be rolled. The character then keeps the best 2 dice for Challenges or 3 dice for Duels and discards any other dice; or
- ☛ **Flat Bonus:** Each Technique that comes into play allows a +1 to the roll result per Technique used.

**NOTE—Techniques are functionally the same as the *Be Impressive use of Style Dice* (see p. 13).**

Each Technique can only be used once per Turn within a Scene, but multiple Techniques can be used at the same time. They can be used *before a roll* if a character wants to pull them in explicitly when doing an action, or *after a roll* when a character realizes that he has a Technique that covers the situation. (It’s up to the player whether they want to roll an extra die and assemble a better roll total from the dice they can keep, or just take the flat +1. The flat +1 usage of a Technique can be used to boost a roll total after the character has already succeeded.)

Techniques are *unranked*; this means they do not absorb *damage* (see p. 25). They appear on the character sheet in parentheses.

If a Technique *must* be used with a specific Forte, it is a *chained* Technique, and is usually listed on the character sheet near the Forte in question. Most Techniques are

chained Techniques. An *unchained* Technique can be used with any Forte.

Unchained Fortes are more “expensive” to purchase and have a wider scope than most Techniques. Chained Techniques are “cheaper” and are related to a specific Forte. Techniques chained to a character’s Swashbuckling Forte are cheapest of all.

## Types of Techniques

There are five main types of Techniques:

- ☛ **Idiom:** Idiom is the “style” or “flavor” of the action undertaken. If the player describes their character’s actions and reactions according to their Idiom, they get a bonus. *Examples:* Acrobatic, Calculating, Drunken, Pedantic, Fierce, Languid, Sarcastic, Precise.
- ☛ **Location/Situation:** Some Techniques give a bonus in particular situations or places. *Examples:* City Streets, Bars & Taverns, At Court, Mounted, In Masked Identity, Shipboard, On Cluttered Ground, Under the Orders of a Superior, Kitchens, In Total Darkness, While Wounded, With a Partner.
- ☛ **Maneuver:** Some Techniques give a bonus in using a specific type of tactic, method, or stratagem. *Examples:* Convince, Dodge, Research, Parry, Specializes in Silken Goods, Lie, Throw.
- ☛ **Foes(s) or vs. [X]:** Some Techniques give a bonus against preferred targets. *Examples:* vs. Aristocrats, vs. Mounted Foes, vs. One’s Nemesis, vs. Soldiers, vs. Enemies of the State.
- ☛ **Tool or Weapon:** Some Techniques give a bonus in using a specific weapon or tool. *Examples:* Rapier, Crowbar, Cutlass, Saber, Lockpicks, Unarmed, Dual/Paired Weapons, Prepared Speech, My Father’s Forge, Found Objects/Scenery.

Characters can mix and match Techniques—all Locations, just Idioms, all Foes, or whatever.

### Stacking Techniques

When stacking Techniques, only *one* Idiom can be active at any time.

Also, it is unlikely that many Techniques will align at one time for a particular situation. However, if they *do* align, characters should get *all* of the benefits!

### What Sort of Technique is “Laughing, then Jumping Off of Something”?

That depends on how the player envisions it:

If “LtJOoS” is seen as the character running around always grinning and bouncing around like a crazed monkey, that’s probably an Idiom (Think Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. in *the Mark of Zorro*).

If “LtJOoS” is seen as the character striking a particular pose for great effect, that’s probably a Maneuver (Think Errol Flynn in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*).

## Common PDQ# Fortes

Below is a brief list of Fortes commonly found in swashbuckling games. Bold indicates that the Forte is Core for PDQ#. At the GM’s option, some of the Fortes listed below might be contained within another’s penumbra (like Acrobatics for Pirate, or Wealth for Aristocrat, Repartee for Musketeer, etc.; see *Setting the Dials*, p. 28).

### Acrobatics

Swinging on chandeliers, climbing down a rocky crevasse, hanging by one hand off a high balcony, leaping over tables, scaling a castle wall—*Acrobatics* (also called *Athletics*) is the Forte that lets you do it all.

### Aristocrat

The *Aristocrat* Forte indicates good breeding, the knowledge of good manners, and a certain degree of status, wealth, property, political baggage (duties to liege and vassals, connections to other aristocrats), and *savoir-faire*. Aristocrat characters should *strongly* consider also taking *Minions* (see p. 8) and/or a *Sidekick* (see p. 9).

### No Average [0] Aristos?

A character *can* take Average [0] Aristocrat, with the proviso that they (or their families) are of gentle birth, but limited means and/or title. If one wishes to play a disgraced, poor, provincial, or otherwise looked down upon by the rest of the noble class, taking Aristocrat as a Foible is an acceptable option. However, the PC should be prepared for a lot of sneering comments and treatment that is, at times, *worse* than that dished out to the peasantry!



## Fencing

*Fencing* is a martial art, much more refined and potent than the simple “hack and block” of the common ruffian or soldier. Fencing also includes knowledge of fencing weaponry and various dueling traditions, as well as social connections and status with other fencers. It covers all sorts of swashbuckling combat—not just formal duels.

See also *The Duel*, p. 21.

### Fencing: the Gentle Art of Slashing & Skewering

Fencing is the *sine qua non* of swashbuckling adventure; many characters will take it as their Swashbuckling Forte. Fencing is what separates swashbuckling heroes—and villains!—from the typical Guardsman, Pirate, or Merry Man: the cheap Techniques granted from a Swashbuckling Forte makes them *devastating* with a blade.

### PCs without Fencing?

Player characters who do not take Fencing (directly, or effectively via another Forte like Musketeer) will suffer a disadvantage when it comes to sword-fighting Duels (see p. 21), as they will be using an effective Average [0] Forte to do so. That may be totally okay, depending upon the character conception and the thrust of the campaign. However, it is generally a good idea for a PC in a PDQ# game to have some access to Fencing in one of their Fortes.

## Minions

The character has a number of henchmen or followers to carry out his orders. These might be crewmembers, guardsmen, liveried servants, or employees. The TN of the Forte Rank gives the total number of Minions the character possesses.

Minions each have a Name and one Forte at Good [+2] Rank. The GM will design and play these Minions as NPCs. When the character gives an order to his Minions to carry out, the GM will determine a Difficulty Rank for the command. The character then rolls 2d6, plus the MOD of his Minion Forte, to determine how well the Minions follow their edict.

See also *Sidekick* (p. 9), and *Minion Squads* (p. 21).

## Motivation: [X]

*Motivation* is a special Forte representing the most important drive or goal of a character. Players should come up with a single word or phrase that explains the seed of their character's underlying ambition. If a situation or task *directly* involves the character's pursuit of their Motivation (and the GM agrees), it can be used in addition to any other Fortes relevant that task.



**SPECIAL RULE:** If a character is involved in a situation that is “the point” of their Motivation—meeting the character they have sworn revenge upon, or hard on accomplishing their overall goal—they can “burn” their Motivation to get a bonus of *double their Motivation MOD throughout the duration of that Scene*. However, win or lose, the character must then *discard and change their Motivation to something else!*

The seven basic swashbuckling Motivations are *Freedom, Honor, Power, Revenge, Romance, Status, and Wealth*. (Often these are more specific, like *Revenge on Marquis Dupree* or *Find a True Love*.) However, players shouldn't be limited to these—other goals and principles are perfectly fine. Examples could include *Get Married to Prince Viktor, Buy Back the Family Farm, Find My Long-Lost Father*, and so on.

See the IMPORTANT NOTE under Foible (p. 5) about making a character's Foible and Motivation the same thing.

*Motivation is one of the Core Elements of a Character.*

### Fiddly Bits: Multiple Motivations?

*Can my character have multiple Motivations?*

Sure! A character who purchases multiple Motivations in character generation has several issues or situations spur them on to great deeds. . . and great internal conflicts. (Also, a GM that doesn't force a character with multiple Motivations to choose between them in a difficult Scene is missing a trick!)

## Past: [X]

The *Past* Forte represents the character's skills and knowledge gained before the start of play. This could include what he or his family did for a living while he was growing up, a horrific event in his youth, or a profession that the character has formerly held. Useful Pasts include *Disgraced Noble, Ex-Pirate, Farmboy, and Former Seminarian*.

*Past: [X] is one of the Core Elements of a Character.*

## Repartee

Not just the knack of witty badinage, *Repartee* is also the skill of public speaking, rhetoric, and oratory. It can be useful in any situation, not simply social or political contexts. It can *definitely* be used in business or professional



situations (such as haggling over a price), or even combat! Combining Repartee with another Forte (see *Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks*, p. 20) is *always* appropriate.

## Sidekick

A *Sidekick* is a named NPC who serves the PC in some regard—as valet, chauffer, bodyguard, etc.; especially-intelligent animals like horses, dogs, or wolves can also be Sidekicks.

While ultimately *controlled* by the PC's player, Sidekicks are often more entertaining when another player or the GM *portrays* the Sidekick's responses to their master's orders.

*The GM can take over playing a Sidekick at any time.* If this usurpation of control from the player is truly negative or dangerous in a situation, this counts as an instance of *Vexing Misfortune* (see below, p. 12), and the character gains 3 Style Dice.

Sidekicks *can* earn Style Dice (see p. 10), which go to the player of their master, but they do not earn Training Points (see p. 14)—for themselves or their controlling PC. PCs can spend Style Dice or Training Points on their Sidekicks' behalf, however, to improve a Sidekick's Fortes and Techniques).

If a Sidekick is captured or incapacitated during the course of a session, this is effectively a *Vexing Misfortune* (see p. 12) to the controlling PC, and the PC receives 3 Style Dice. If the Sidekick is killed during the course of the session the player may select a new Forte of the same Rank for their character at the end of the session.

Types of Sidekicks can include:

**Bondsman/Friend:** Name, Foible, a Forte at the Rank that the PC used to add Sidekick to his sheet (or Fortes; for example, an Expert [+4] Sidekick could have an Expert [+4] Forte or two Good [+2] Fortes), plus an extra Good [+2] Forte, an Average [0] Forte, and 2 chained Techniques.

**Example:** (Good [+2] Sidekick) Oded, *Foible:* Gambler, Good [+2] Valet, Good [+2] Charming, Average [0] Brawling, *Technique:* Dress the Master for Court (with Valet), and *Technique:* An Eye for Cooks (with Charming).

**Pet/Mount:** Name, a Foible, a Good [+2] (Animal) Forte, plus a Forte at the Rank that the PC used to add Sidekick to his sheet (or Fortes; for example, an Expert [+4] Sidekick could have an Expert [+4] Forte or two Good [+2] Fortes), an Average [0] Forte, and 2 chained Techniques.



**Example:** (Good [+2] Sidekick) Thunderbolt, *Foible:* Stubborn, Good [+2] Horse, Good [+2] Fast, Average [0] Knows the Way, *Technique:* War-Trained (with Horse), and *Technique:* Sprint (with Fast).

## Wealthy

While a PDQ# character is assumed to have enough resources (based on their Fortes) to live adequately, there's nothing like simply being *Wealthy*. Wealthy means that a character is rich "enough" at his Rank to comfortably maintain that Rank, even with plenty of expenses.

However, a character's Wealthy status has an inherent *Foible: Can Be Exhausted if Squandered*. During a session, a character can use his Wealthy Forte to purchase something *beyond his means* (i.e., valued at the next higher Rank) or two things that *push his means* (i.e., valued at the same Rank as Wealthy). If the character either purchases something behind his means once or purchases two things that push his means, the character's Wealthy Forte is permanently reduced by one Rank. (Permanent increases in Rank are handled through the use of *Training Points*, see p. 14.)

See also *Temporary Wealth*, p. 14.

## Style Dice

*Style Dice* represent the heroic energy, fortune, indomitable will, and plucky attitude that makes a swashbuckling character larger-than-life. By using *Style Dice*, characters can shift the odds in their favor, get up when a normal person would be down for the count, temporarily surpass their limitations, and persevere through adversity.

The basic use of *Style Dice* is to add *bonus dice* to a character's rolls, which they can then pick through for the highest roll total amongst the dice they can *keep*: 2 dice for Challenges (see p. 18) and 3 dice for Duels (see p. 21). These are in addition to any bonus dice given for using appropriate Techniques (see p. 6). Furthermore, the character with the most *Style Dice* in front of them wins *Initiative*.

All earned *Style Dice* “go away” at the end of a session, so players should use them or lose them!

**NOTE—It's recommended that GMs use a different color and/or size of dice to represent *Style Dice*, so that there's no confusion for players between their *Style Dice* and the dice they usually roll for tasks. GMs may need a big supply of dice to provide their players with plenty of *Style Dice*. Luckily, blocks of dice can be found fairly inexpensively in your friendly local game store.**



A group could also use Poker chips, pennies, or matchsticks to represent *Style Dice*, if they don't already have a lot of dice.

## Bowl vs. Box

The GM has two sources of *Style Dice* to award to players: the *Bowl* and the *Box*.

*The Bowl* is all of the dice the GM can assign as he/she desires—the *Bowl* is the repository of player style. The *Bowl* starts a session with a number of dice equal to twice the number of players (including the GM).

*The Box* contains all of the dice that come into play due to other game mechanics.

**NOTE - The GM uses his own, personal *Style Dice* for all NPCs (however, some NPCs may have a “set” number of *Style Dice* that they start play with, which is in addition to the GM's *Style Dice*.)**

## Every Session

At the beginning of each session, the GM should give out *Style Dice* awards for pre-play social issues (all of these come from the *Box*):

**Showing Up:** Just for showing up for the session, every PC gets a *Style Die*.

**Hosting:** If the player is hosting the session in their home, they get an extra *Style Die*.

**Providing Snacks and/or Beverages:** If the player has brought snacks or delicious beverages, they get an extra *Style Die*.

**Loaning Materials:** If a player loans a pen, paper, or dice to another player, they get an extra *Style Die*.

**Outside Awesomeness:** If a player has produced outside material (artwork, handouts, short stories, placed material on a *PDQ#* wiki, made an Actual Play post to a message-board, etc.) since the last session and they make the GM aware of this, they get an extra *Style Die*.

At a minimum, all players should get *at least 1 Style Die* for showing up to play. Everything else is up to them. (The GM counts as a player here—if the GM is hosting the session, he or she gets an extra *Style Die* added to the pool in front of them—see textbox.)

## GMing Style Dice

When the GM has dice in the Bowl (or in front of him), he can say “Good Form” like any other player and hand out Style Dice. But when that pool is exhausted, he’s limited to saying “Indeed, Good Form!” and handing out dice that come out of the Box. (See the *PDQ# Acclaim* textbox on p. 12 for more details.)

GMs are advised to pump most of their Bowl dice into the PC Style Dice economy as soon as possible—not just to set the tone, but also to encourage the players to use or gift them.

After the GM has run out of Style Dice from the Bowl, there is only one thing that moves Style Dice from the Box to the Bowl: Good Form Gifting. (Mechanical effects—like a Foible coming into play, a Vexing Misfortune, or winning a Flashy Challenge—grant Style Dice directly to a player.) After a player has done Good Form Gifting, the GM can add an additional Style Die from the Box to the Bowl (or, in extreme cases, one to the Bowl and one *directly* to the stylish player) with an “Indeed, Good Form!”, thus increasing the total number of Style Dice in play.

If PCs wish to use their Style Dice to Good Form Gift the GM, the GM should take the dice, place them in front of themselves, and *immediately* note down that the players wish more of *whatever the hell just happened!*



Whenever a character *acts heroically* or *stylishly*, the GM (or even the other players!—see *Good Form Gifting*, p. 14) should give him a Style Die. GMs should award Style Dice *immediately* after the heroic or stylish action.

There are other ways that a character can gain Style Dice: *Social Awards*, being *Affected by one of their Foibles*, having *Vexing Misfortune* happen to them, or *Feeding the Plot*. (See also the textbox on p. 14, *Temporary Gear & Temporary Wealth Rewards*.)

**NOTE - Style Dice can be earned by a character for a task even if the character is already using Style Dice to perform that task.**

*Bad Form*, on the other hand, is taking *undue* advantage of one’s momentary situation, or acting cravenly, villainously, or (frankly) boringly. Biting the hand that feeds you, deceiving the innocent, creating needless mayhem or suffering, betraying a friend, breaking a truce, rubbing salt in a wound, flaunting one’s power, killing a helpless enemy—all are Bad Form.

Showing Bad Form does not deduct Style Dice. . . but the other players and GM should feel free to cry out “Bad Form!” when one of their fellows acts the cad. Within the game, however, when a character starts showing Bad Form... well, other characters are going to notice and take that into account.

**NOTE—The character with the most Style Dice in front of him wins Initiative in Duels (see p. 22).**

## Behind the Curtain: Hoarding Style Dice

Some folks may be worried about players hoarding Style Dice. Do not worry.

Once the trickle of players using or gifting Style Dice starts, it usually turns into a flood. The simple reminder that all Style Dice go away at the end of a session (“use ‘em or lose ‘em) is usually enough to trigger the players into saying “why not?”

## Good Form vs. Bad Form

### (Gaining Style Dice)

Every action a *PDQ#* character takes is an opportunity to be stylish. While Justice may be blind, Luck is a people-watcher.

The key to doing well is showing *Good Form*. Good Form is a combination of sportsmanship, justice, wit, and panache. Any action that shows flair, courage, audacity (especially in the face of a significant risk or failure), or good roleplaying is potentially Good Form.

## PDQ# Acclaim

PDQ# has a number of “ritual phrases” associated with Style Dice, meant to enhance the play experience. All players can say “Good Form!” or “Indeed, Good Form!” to another player and hand over Style Dice to them (see *Good Form Gifting*, p. 14). “Well said!” or “Well done!” or “Zounds!” or even “By the Dog!” can work. (“Good Form!” is the Musketeer version of this ritual phrase. If playing a predominantly Pirate game, “Yarr!” and “Indeed, Yarr!” are suggested. For Robin Hood/Zorro style campaigns, “Huzzah!” and “Indeed, Huzzah!” are suggested.)

In terms of *Creating the World* (see p. 13), the GM could use some ritual phrases to indicate to the players the Style Die costs of taking hold of the narration. For example, say a PC asks, “Is there a chandelier here?”

☛ **“Certes, there is!”** = Minor fact; no Style Die cost.

☛ **“Is there?”** = Significant fact; 1 Style Die cost.

☛ **“I’m not sure...”** = Major fact; 2 Style Dice cost.

(Note that simply *saying* what is ends up being cheaper than *asking*!)

A good phrase for GMs to use to inject complications into a player’s description of their successes and failures are **“But alas!...”** or **“Yet, unknown to all...”**

And, as always, groups can pick the ritual phrases they prefer, or make their own ones up.

## Social Awards (Box)

See *Every Session* (p. 10) above for the social issues that give the session’s starting Style Dice. These dice come from the Box.

## Affected By Foible (Box)

If a situation comes up that triggers a character’s *Foible* (say, a Sailor with Mute being questioned by a Musketeer, or if a Rude character needs to talk nicely with the pompous Baron of Erzay), they gain a Style Die.

If the player runs with the situation, making:

A. His attempts to successfully get around the Foible;  
or

B. His portrayal of how incredibly bad the failure caused by his Foible is;

... particularly impressive, dramatic, or entertaining, he should gain an extra Style Die or two. These dice come from the Box.

## Good Form (Bowl)

+1 Style Die for acting heroically or stylishly. *Good Form* rewards are for when the GM feels the player has described their character’s actions suitably for the swashbuckling genre. (See also the *PDQ# Acclaim* textbox, on this page.)

## Feeding the Plot (Bowl)

When the player or character does something—even inadvertently—that advances the main plot of the adventure (like accidentally starting a fire while escaping a fortress’ dungeons, which *just so happens* to distract the guard while an NPC army attacks); advances a subplot (whether their own or someone else’s) (like connecting one’s long-long brother to another character’s Motivation of *Revenge*); or gives GM an idea for new plot twists, NPCs, locations, or Scenes, the character gains a Style Die.

## Vexing Misfortune (Box)

If the GM wants to have a *Vexing Misfortune* happen to a PC that they cannot resist (for cliffhanging purposes, or to place them into specific situations—dropping them down an oubliette, taking away their favorite sword, capturing them while asleep, framing them for stealing the Baroness of Erzay’s diamond brooch or the like), the PC instantly gains *at least* 3 Style Dice to ease the pain. (GMs should probably not hit a character with Vexing Misfortune more than twice a session—once is plenty!)

## Win a Flashy Challenge (Box)

If a character wins a *Flashy Challenge* (see p. 20), they gain a Style Die.

## Changing the Odds (Using Style Dice)

Style Dice can be used to change the odds in the hero’s favor; recover from injuries; or add new material to the situation, plot, or setting (see below). By burning Style Dice, a player can make things go his character’s way.

Below is a suggested list of ways to Change the Odds, a description of their effects, and their total cost (including Style Dice). A PC may use any or all of his available Style Dice. Style Dice can be used to *Be Impressive*, *Catch Your Second Wind*, *Create the World*, or for *Good Form Gifting*—and players are encouraged to come up with new ways of using them as well.

When spent, Style Dice go back to the Bowl.

## Be Impressive

A character can spend Style Dice to *Be Impressive*, adding Style Dice to the task's pool of dice. He can also add a Style Die to gain a flat bonus of +1. However, he can still keep only 2 dice in Challenges and 3 dice in Duels.

**NOTE—*Being Impressive* functions the same as using Techniques (see p. 6).**

## Catch Your Second Wind

To recapture his *Second Wind*, a character can spend one Style Die to recover Ranks of damage (see p. 25). Roll the die, and whatever comes up is the number of Ranks recovered.

## Create the World

*Creating the World* is the most flexible use of Style . This lets the player (or players who pool their dice for a joint creation) dictate new facts about the campaign setting. There are several methods for Creating the World, including:

- ☛ **Dictate a Minor Fact** (0 dice): A minor fact is really just local color, and has limited plot significance. This includes things like “I frequent this tavern, and they consider me a regular” or “Duke Johannes loves tomato juice.”
- ☛ **Dictate a Significant Fact** (1 die): A significant fact is something with more impact on the course of the game, like “I met the Empress once at a party, and I swear she was flirting with me” or “I know a guy who trades in smuggled wine.”
- ☛ **Dictate a Major Fact** (2 dice): A major fact is something with extreme relevance and importance for the current events of the campaign, like “We’re looking for a substantial amount of silk, right? Well, it just so happens a ship with that cargo has come into port...” or “This impregnable fortress just happens to have a sewer entrance that is unguarded.”
- ☛ **Create a Named NPC** (1 die): By spending a Style Die, a player can instantly create a new permanent, recurring NPC that drops into the setting. “I greet Herman, the bartender, and ask for the usual.” While this sort of thing usually happens *en passant* in a campaign, when a player spends a Style Die in this way, he is telling the GM he wants Herman to

hang around and be important to his activities. This is usually a prelude to...

- ☛ **Giving a Named NPC Specific Fortes/Techniques** (+1 die per Rank, starting at Average [0]): By spending a Style Die, a player can grant a new NPC Fortes and Techniques. For example, “I ask Herman, since he has Good [+2] Criminal Contacts (spend 2 Style Dice), about the Black Mask...”
- ☛ **Temporary Fame, Gear, Sidekick, or Wealth** (+1 die per Rank, starting at Average [0]): For every Style Die spent, a character can pick up a Temporary Forte of *Reputation* or *Status* (say, from winning a footrace with a noted athlete or receiving preferment at court), *Gear* (by purchasing a new pistol), *Sidekick* (hiring a horse or servant), or *Wealth* (from gambling winnings or adventure trading; see also p. 14). Temporary Fortes like this have the *Can Be Stolen* or *Can be Squandered* flaws automatically, *cannot* absorb damage like other Fortes, and *disappear* at the end of the session in which they were purchased.



## Temporary Gear & Temporary Wealth Rewards

Temporary Gear and Temporary Wealth are *great* ways to represent booty taken by pirates, adventure trading profits, gambling winnings, gifts from patrons, spur-of-the-moment purchases, and interesting artifacts somehow acquired by the PCs. GMs should feel free to offer Style Dice awards in this form.

Each Style Die can be traded in for a point of MOD (minimum 1 for Average [0] Rank) Temporary Wealth. Thus, 4 Style Dice transformed into Temporary Wealth would be Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth.

But what does that *mean*? How is it represented in the game setting?

*Temporary Gear* is pretty straightforward: a Good [+2] Temporary Gear Rank represents a well-crafted (Good) sword.

*Temporary Wealth* is where it gets interesting. Some players may not be happy being told, "Oh, it's an Expert [+4] Rank amount of Temporary Wealth." They want to know how many coins (or pieces of jewelry) that is; how much value they have.

GMs can use the names of currency with these rough amounts and explanations to help concretize what the different Ranks of Temporary Wealth mean. (For this example, let's use ducats.)

**Average [0] Temporary Wealth:** 50 ducats; enough to live well for a month.

**Good [+2] Temporary Wealth:** 500 ducats; enough to live well for a year.

**Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth:** 5,000 ducats; enough to buy a small townhouse or majority ownership of a ship.

**Master [+6] Temporary Wealth:** 50,000 ducats; enough to buy an estate of middling size or a ship outright.

An important consideration for GMs: do things purchased with Temporary Wealth (say a house) also disappear at the end of the session, or do the characters retain them for the rest of the game?

## Good Form Gifting

See the *PDQ# Acclaim* textbox on p. 12 for more details.

## Training Points

*Training Points* are used for improving a character's abilities and adding new ones.

### Gaining Training Points

Since swashbuckling character tend to be pretty impressive right from the get-go, they often don't improve much during the course of a campaign. Therefore, *PDQ#* characters only earn Training Points when they *fail* at a roll, be it in a Challenge or a Duel.

Depending upon how well the player narrates the failure, a character could gain Training Points *and* Style Dice simultaneously, *provided the player takes the time to describe the failure in a particularly flavorful way.* (See also *Challenge Results*, p. 19.)

GMs should keep track of Training Points earned by each of the PCs, and announce them at the end of the session.

### Using Training Points

Training Points can be used in several ways: *Increasing a Forte Rank*, *Purchasing New Fortes*, *Purchasing New Foibles*, or *Purchasing New Techniques*.

### Increasing a Forte Rank

Spending 4 Training Points raises a Forte one Rank, up to a maximum of Master [+6]. To raise Good [+2] Housekeeping to Master [+6] Housekeeping would require 8 Training Points (4 Training Points to go from Good to Expert and 4 more to go from Expert to Master).

### Purchasing a New Forte

Spending 8 Training Points and creating a related *Story Hook* (see p. 27) grants one new Forte at Good [+2] Rank. If a character wished to learn Sailing, he would have to spend 8 Training Points and provide the GM with a relevant seed for a future plot, subplot, or adventure tied to Sailing ("hey, maybe I get shanghaied by the Imperial Navy...").

### Purchasing a New Foible

While Foibles can constrain a character's actions in-play, they are also a great method of generating Style Dice. Spending 4 Training Points and having a good explanation permits a character to gain one new Foible

(“After spending so much time in the company of the Princess, I have become more of a Gentleman”).

## Purchasing a New Technique

Training Points can also be used to purchase new Techniques: *Chained to Swashbuckling Forte* (2 Training Points), *Chained to any other Forte* (4 Training Points and an explanation), and *Unchained* (6 Training Points and a related Story Hook).

## Character Generation: Build an Adventurer

PDQ# allows you to play swashbuckling adventurers who have extraordinary skills and potent drives, allowing them to perform amazing feats of derring-do.

With luck, the GM and players have already discussed what sort of campaign they want to play in, and talked about *Setting the Dials* (see p. 28).

A PDQ# character is made up of several elements:

- ☛ My **Name**? They call me....
- ☛ I must confess, I’m known to have a **Foible** or two...
- ☛ My strongest desire, my greatest hope, my **Motivation** (Good [+2] Forte) is...
- ☛ And my **Past** (Good [+2] Forte), which has helped make me what I am today, is ....
- ☛ You might say that my **Swashbuckling Forte** (Good [+2] Forte) is...
- ☛ **Fortes**? Why yes—I’ve several! (4 additional Good [+2] Ranks; can be used to improve existing Fortes)
- ☛ And **Techniques**? *Certes, monsieur!* (5 Technique “points”)
- ☛ Chained to Swashbuckling Forte = 1 point.
- ☛ Chained to another Forte = 2 points.
- ☛ Unchained to any Forte = 3 points.
- ☛ **Style Dice & Training Points**: PDQ# characters start with at least 1 Style Die and zero (0) Training Points.
- ☛ Not enough of me yet? Ah yes, I know the feeling... Perhaps this assortment of **Miscellany** (appearance, clothing, habits) will tide you over, mm?

A player doesn’t have to decide these elements in any particular order, though each could influence the selection of the others. The PDQ# system is fast and flexible, allowing nearly anything to be defined as a Forte.



### Name

Select a *Name* for the character, suitable for the setting and period.

### Core PDQ# Elements

Four aspects are *Core Elements*—every PC and most NPCs of significance will have them. They are the absolute minimum description for an interesting and effective PDQ# PC. The four Core elements are *Foible*, *Motivation*, *Past*, and *Swashbuckling Forte*.

Select the specifics of the character’s four Core Elements:

- ☛ **Foible** is a Foible, and is always unranked.
- ☛ **Motivation** is a Forte, and starts at Good [+2] Rank.
- ☛ **Past** is a Forte, and starts at Good [+2] Rank.
- ☛ **Swashbuckling Forte** is a Forte, starts at Good [+2] Rank.

### **Fiddly Bits: Swashbuckling Forte**

#### **Can I take my Motivation or Past as my Swashbuckling Forte?**

Sure, if you want to run with that concept. If you want to be an Ex-Pirate, just list it on your character sheet as *Past/Swashbuckling Forte: (RANK) Ex-Pirate*. Since you're doubling-up here, take another Additional Forte (5 instead of 4) in the next step of character creation. (See also the *Fiddly Bits: Breaking Additional Fortes* Textbox on this page.)

## **Four Additional Fortes**

Now, select four more Fortes at Good [+2] Rank, or use those Ranks to improve other already-selected Fortes (for example, a player could use one of the four Goods to increase his Good [+2] Past: Scholar up to Expert [+4] Rank) or buy a new Forte of Repartee at Good [+2].

### **Fiddly Bits: Breaking Additional Fortes**

A player may use *only* those four Good [+2] Ranks of Additional Fortes to purchase additional character elements. These have a cost equal to:

*Fortes:* The Rank's MOD (Average [0] counts as 1). A character can *break* a Good [+2] Forte into two Average [0] Fortes. Because PDQ# characters are considered to already have an effective Average [0] Rank in anything that's not secret, technical, or esoteric (for example, Fortes like Alchemy, Aristocrat, Spy, or Priest), breaking a Good [+2] Forte into two Average [0] Fortes is really only useful if the player wishes to have an Average [0] Ranked secret, technical, or esoteric Forte. (However, having an Average [0] Forte to roll against is a great way to earn *Training Points*—see p. 14!)

*Foibles:* Counts as 1 point. With the GM's permission, a player can break a Good [+2] Forte into two additional Foibles. (A great way to earn *Style Dice*—see p. 10!)

*Techniques:* A character can break a Good [+2] Forte into two additional Technique points.

These can be mixed and matched. For example, breaking a Good [+2] Forte into an extra Foible and an extra Technique point, or an extra Technique point and an Average [0] Forte, is perfectly fine.

## **Spend 5 Technique Points**

### **to Purchase Techniques**

At this point, players should use five Technique Points to select some Techniques. During character generation, Techniques cost: *Chained to Swashbuckling Forte* (1 point), *Chained to another Forte* (2 points), or *Unchained to any Forte* (3 points).

Also at this time, players should design their characters' Minions and Sidekicks (if any).

## **Style Dice & Training Points**

PCs start with at least 1 Style Die (from *Social Awards*, see p. 10) and zero (0) Training Points.

## **Miscellany**

Now just fill in some quick details on your character's appearance, habits, preferred clothing, family background, and so forth. Even a short paragraph or two describing things like where the character was born, what his family is like, where he's been, and who he's met along the way can pay *big dividends* when actually playing that character.

**IMPORTANT NOTE to GMs: Mine this section of the character's write-up to provide them with interesting adventures!**

And that's it! Look on the following page for the write-ups of two example characters:

## **Justifying Why the PCs are Together**

The PDQ# GM should suggest that everybody sit around the game table and throw out their ideas and opinions on the sort of game they all want to play (see *Setting the Dials*, p. 28) and even each others' characters. This can lead to more cohesive groups, as players differentiate and interconnect their PCs.

Another great feature of group character generation is the option to give the PCs an explicit common structure or organization. Maybe they have similar or complimentary Motivations or Pasts, or were all witness to a particular event—powerful tools for keeping the group together and friendly. Don't neglect it!



### Example Character 1: “Xavier” (Xavia)

**Foible(s):** Unrequited Love (for Lieutenant Tortelli); Secret: Not a Man.

**Motivation:** Good [+2] Freedom

**Past:** Good [+2] Aristocrat.

**Swashbuckling Forte:** Expert [+4] Musketeer.

**Additional Fortes:** Good [+2] Attractive, Good [+2] Sidekick (Horse): Thunderbolt (see p. 9), Average [0] Overheard Secrets.

**Techniques:** (with Musketeer): *Idiom:* Precise, *Situation:* In the Country, *Situation:* Mounted, *Weapon:* Pistol, and *Weapon:* Saber.

**Style Dice:** 1

**Training Points:** 0

**Miscellany:** Raised by a former Musketeer, Xavia grew up as a tomboy. Disguising her gender, she joined the King’s Musketeers as her nonexistent brother “Xavier” (with her father’s surprising assent!). She is attractive (as either a male or a female), on the short side, with black hair worn in a masculine style and green eyes that flash with haughtiness. Witty and well-spoken, she is as fast with a quip as she is with her saber.

She is in love with another Musketeer (currently on detached duty): Lieutenant Tortelli—who has no idea she is a woman.

*Overheard Secrets* is a Forte reflecting information she may have overheard while in women’s garb and identity. (Xavia traded in one of her four additional Fortes for an additional Foible and an Average [0] Forte.)

### Example Character 2: “The Raven” (Edward the Yeoman)

**Foible:** Revenge (against the evil Count James).

**Motivation:** Good [+2] Revenge (against the evil Count James).

**Past:** Good [+2] Huntsman.

**Swashbuckling Forte:** Expert [+4] Fencing.

**Additional Fortes:** Good [+2] Archery, Good [+2] Secret Identity.

**Techniques:** (with Fencing) *Idiom:* Flashy, *Situation:* When Masked, *Location:* In the Woods; *Idiom:* Acrobatic, *Weapon:* Saber. (with Archery) *Maneuver:* Trick Shot.

**Style Dice:** 1

**Training Points:** 0

**Miscellany:** Imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit, Edward escaped. Taken under the tutelage of a mysterious old swordsman, Edward learned how to fight. He seeks to make those that wrongfully incarcerated him pay... *forevermore!*

(Edward traded in one of his four additional Fortes for two additional Technique points, which he used on a chained Technique for Archery.)

Edward is 6’ tall, about 180 pounds, with blonde hair and tanned skin. As the Raven, he wears a black mask and feathered cloak.

Here are some examples of shared PC structures in PDQ#:

- ☛ **Noble Household/Family Affair:** The PCs are related, an extended family with pre-existing amities and enmities. This permits fun in-character bickering and intrigue.
- ☛ **Pirate Crew:** All PCs are Pirates, joined together in their love of treasure and rum. Arrr!
- ☛ **Regimental Comrades:** The PCs all belong to the same military organization (Musketeer detachment, naval crew, etc.); they probably possess complementary professional specialties.

- ☛ **Someone Done Us Wrong:** The PCs are joined together by a desire for revenge (may or may not rise to the level of a Motivation) against a common foe (obviously, a significant NPC).
- ☛ **The League of Extraordinary Swashbucklers:** The PCs are (secret) agents of an NPC leader, tasked with seeking out and nullifying threats within and without. PCs should have wildly-varied professions and Fortes.



## Challenges & Duels

When a character tries to perform any task, the GM will determine if the task is a *Challenge* or a *Duel*. This determination usually revolves around matters of drama, pacing, and threat level.

A *Challenge* is a low-drama, low-threat task that can be quickly resolved in a single roll (pass-fail), against inanimate factors (keeping one's footing in a storm, climbing a wall, getting information from a contact, etc.) or fighting a few *Minions* (see p. 8). A session can have any number of Challenges.

A *Duel* is a high-drama, high-threat task that must be resolved in several rolls (back-and-forth), against a *Minion Squad*, *Lieutenant*, *Villain*, or *Archvillain* NPC (see p. 21). A session should only have one or two full-blown Duels.

### Time, Range, and Speed

For most things that come up in a *PDQ#* game, the following information is sufficient.

#### Time

For most purposes, time measurements are as normal: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc. However, the terms used in *PDQ#* for identifying the passage of "game time" are Sessions, Scenes, Turns, actions, and reactions.

*Sessions* are the overall time that players take to sit down and play a *PDQ#* game. A Session will contain Scenes—often many of them.

*Scenes* are however long it takes for a distinct action or set of actions (combat, library research, defusing a bomb, a

business meeting, traveling across town, etc.) to happen. Scenes can be long or short, and can collapse or extend time as necessary. Sometimes, Scenes contain Turns.

A *Turn* means "the set of all characters' next actions and reactions." Each character takes an individual *action*: that's when they make their move, say their piece, throw a punch, etc. Other characters *react* during a character's action—saying something back or performing a defense, usually—but reactions can only be *in response* to the actions of the character whose turn it currently is. They cannot initiate moves of their own until their action. The Turn is over when each character's action and any resulting reactions have been resolved.

How the Sessions, Scenes, and Turns of game time relate to the seconds, minutes, hours, etc. of real time is variable.

#### Range

In *PDQ#*, ranges are either *Near* (can punch it), *Middling* (can run up and punch it), *Far* (can throw or shoot at it), or *Too Far* (out of range). If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to these Ranges, Near is equivalent to Average [7], Middling is equivalent to Good [9], and so forth.

#### Speed

In *PDQ#*, speeds are either *Slow* (leisurely walk), *Medium* (normal trot), *Fast* (a hurried trot or lope), or *Lickety-Split* (rapid gallop). If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to these Speeds, Slow is equivalent to Average [7], Medium is equivalent to Good [9], and so forth.

## Challenges

A *Challenge* is any non-trivial task that a character is confronted with, where there would be only mild consequences for failure (though a small amount of damage—see p. 25—can be done to a character, if the situation warrants). Most Challenges involve some sort of opposition or obstacle, and are usually "done in one roll." (Trivial tasks or ones without interesting consequences are *not* Challenges.)

There are several types of Challenge that can arise, in *PDQ#* games: *physical* (knocking out a Minion, brief athletic contests), *mental* (solving puzzles, analyzing clues, short debates), *social* (relationships with other people, groups, and society at large; see also textbox); and *professional* (business dealings, mercantile skullduggery).

## Social Challenges

Some gaming groups won't want to use the Challenge (or even the Duel) "rolled" mechanics to resolve social interactions. Instead, they may want to rely on pure roleplaying. This is perfectly fine, but the mechanics do exist if a group wishes to use them.

For *PDQ#*, it is recommended to use a middle path for "rolled" social Challenges and Duels. This middle path involves three main elements. First, the PC states his *intent* (what he is trying to achieve in the social interaction); second, he *describes* how he is trying to accomplish his intent; and third, *rolls*. (The GM may award some Style Dice to the PC at any point for insightful or flavorful roleplaying!)

## Difficulty Ranks

*Difficulty Ranks* are like Forte Ranks for things, tasks, and situations—like a wall that needs to be climbed, a lock that must be picked, a palace guard that must be sneaked past, and so forth. The Difficulty Rank shows how challenging a thing, task, or situation is.

The GM looks at the *PDQ# Master Chart* (see p. 3), and sets the Difficulty Rank of the task. The numbers in square brackets following the Difficulty Rank show its *Target Number* (or TN)—the number a character must match or beat on a roll to succeed or overcome the task.

GMs will usually figure out many Difficulty Ranks in advance when designing an adventure for players, but the simplicity of the *PDQ# Master Chart* makes it easy to determine the complexity of a task that comes up in play.

**NOTE—To accomplish higher Difficulty Rank tasks, more Fortes have to be brought into play - either from the character's other core attributes (like Motivation), or even from the assistance of other characters! (See the *Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks* textbox on p. 20.)**

The lesson here is "when in dire straits, turn first to your other Fortes, then to your allies!"

## Challenge Results

For Challenges, the GM sets the Difficulty Rank (and thus TN) of the task. The player rolls two six-sided dice (2d6), at a minimum; if the character has relevant Techniques (see p. 6), those can contribute bonus dice to the roll (see textbox, *Advice: Ellipses*, on this page). The player keeps the best two, then adds any MODs for relevant Fortes. Then, the *result* of the roll is compared to the TN.

## Advice: Ellipses

The absolute best advice for a player is: **don't finish a statement while the outcome is "live."**

**PC:** "I hold my blade low, and make a stab for his kidneys and..." (Roll dice. Roll result is a failure, by 1 point.)

**PC** "He's too fast for me, knocking my blade aside—but I spin in from the outside to blindside him with an elbow..." (This is the player pulling in a Technique of *Maneuver: Blindside*. The player uses the Flat +1 option for Techniques, and makes his roll result a tie... which PCs win!)

This allows a character to pull in Techniques *after* the roll.

Techniques can also be used before the roll, if desired, front-loading extra dice for effect—but the PC needs to include the Technique(s) being pulled in their initial narration.

*If the result is lower than the TN, the player narrates how his PC failed in the task.* The GM then tweaks the details of the PC's failure slightly (adding or subtracting elements) if necessary, or accepts the player's description as-is. Also, every failed roll in a Challenge earns a *Training Point* (see p. 14). Depending upon the sort of failure, the PC may even take *damage* (see p. 25)—and generate *Story Hooks* (see p. 27)—from it.

Players should keep in mind that failing at a task doesn't necessarily have to be a failure of skill on the part of the PC: it could just as easily be the fault of some change in the environment or the arrival of a new factor in the situation. A good example would be if a character is climbing up a rope during a tower siege. A failed roll in Climbing might not be that the character loses his grip on the rope, but rather that a defender at the top dislodged his grapple, or friendly-fire cut the line, or a comrade higher on the line starts to slip and the character lets go to avoid being struck by his falling friend, or halts his advances to catch said falling comrade.

**Example:** Vanezza (Expert [+4] Gambling) is playing cards in a dockside tavern with a bunch of sailors who have nothing better to do when ashore than gamble away their pay (Good [9] Difficulty). Vanezza rolls 2d6+4 vs. a TN of 9. She rolls a 2 and a 2, plus 4 for Gambling, for a total of 8. Vanezza narrates that she loses more coin than she wanted to... but she suspects that the sailors are actually *cheating!*

Depending upon the nature of, and how well the player narrates, this sort of failure could help the character gain

Training Points *and* Style Dice simultaneously, *provided the player takes the time to describe the failure in a particularly flavorful way.*

### Narration of Failure & Success?

If a player just *hates* narrating the elements of their PC's failures and successes, the player can just say what they're attempting and the GM can narrate the result instead. It's totally okay. (However, this means the player will lose out in a key way of earning Style Dice for their PC.)

If the result is equal or higher than the TN, the player narrates how his PC succeeded at the task. The GM then tweaks the details of the PC's success slightly (adding or subtracting elements) if necessary, or accepts the player's description as-is.

**Example:** Yuen the Nimble (Good [+2] Acrobatics) is climbing the outside wall of an aristocrat's townhouse (Good [9] Difficulty). Yuen rolls 2d6+2 vs. a TN of 9. He rolls an 11, plus 2 for Acrobatics, for a total of 13. "Yuen handily scales the wall."

The PC may earn *Style Dice* (see p. 10) for good description of their successes. As noted for narrating failures above, succeeding on a task doesn't *necessarily* have to be solely based the skill of the PC. . . but cool actions by a character are *always* apropos.



**Example:** As noted above, Yuen the Nimble climbed that outside wall of an aristocrat's townhouse. He describes the lanterns that line the walls, as well as the tricky traps (barbed wire, nightingale bricks, paralyzing darts, etc.) that he surmounted in climbing the wall. The GM gives Yuen's player a Style Die for his impressive description.

If a player is having trouble coming up with interesting descriptions of ways to fail and succeed, they can take suggestions from the other players; otherwise, the GM should help out. (However, *please note:* in some gaming groups, it's impolite for other players to volunteer suggestions without first being asked.)

### Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks

If the GM agrees that multiple Fortes can be brought to bear on a task, the character simply combines the MODs for all relevant Fortes when rolling.

Furthermore, combining multiple Fortes also works if *multiple characters* wish to team-up to perform a task. If several characters are joining forces, only one of them needs to roll; usually, that's the character who's on the spot. If damage (see p. 25) is caused by failing at the task, the brunt of it is taken by the rolling character.

## Flashy Challenges

Characters can use their abilities to contest against other characters in *Flashy Challenges* against other characters (NPCs or PCs). Flashy Challenges *must* be a quick contest chock full of swashbuckler mojo.

A Flashy Challenge is a 2d6 roll (plus relevant MODs and Techniques), the challenger versus the challenged. Whoever has the higher roll result is the winner. The winner of a Flashy Challenge gets a Style Die (from the *Box*, see p. 10); the loser of a Flashy Challenge takes a Failure Rank. Flashy Challenges are a great way to weaken opponents before a Duel. (For Flashy Challenges *during* a Duel, see *Impasse* in the textbox on p. 25.)

**Example:** Confronted in his castle, Count Erzay (Expert [+4] Fencing) attempts to overawe Bernardo the Musketeer (Master [+6] Musketeer) with a Flashy Challenge: the Count uses his sword to slice through a candle sitting upon his desk. The Count rolls a 3 and a 5, plus 4, for a total of 12 in this Flashy Challenge.

Bernardo rolls 2d6, plus his Musketeer MOD. He gets a 3 and a 4, plus 6, for a total of 13. Since this is more than the Count's 12, Bernardo wins! Bernardo has sliced through an

entire candelabra without much effect... until he blows at the candles, and all of them topple!

Bernardo gains a Style Die, and the Count takes a Failure Rank of Damage.

(If Bernardo had rolled, say, a 1 and a 3, for a total of 10—1+3+6=10—he wouldn't have beaten the Count's Flashy Challenge, and Bernardo would have taken a Failure Rank as damage, while the Count gained a Style Die.)

## Duels

*Duels* are tasks that are be *fun to play out in detail* (combat, chases, witty repartee, high-stakes gambling), which involve important people, important things, or extreme risks.

Duels in *PDQ#* include more than just the immediate success or failure of an attempted action: here, the conflict includes the back and forth of an active contest, out-maneuvering the competition, and wearing down an opponent's resistance. In Duels, 3d6—plus MODs and Techniques—are divided between attack and defense rolls (see below for more detail).

As with Challenges, there can be several types of Duels: *physical*, *mental*, *social*, *emotional*, and *professional*. Examples of Duels include fencing with Baron Korek, seducing the Baroness Korek, climbing the Deathspire, haggling with Hazin the Loquacious, and so forth.

## Duel Opponents

There are five “threat-levels” of NPC opponents in *PDQ#*:

- ☛ **Minion:** Usually (but not always) a nameless character, like a random soldier or pirate. Minions usually have only a single Average [0] or Good [+2] Forte. To a swashbuckling PC, they are only really a threat in a *Minion Squad* (see below).
- ☛ **Sidekick:** A named character that is somewhat memorable, like a servant, pet, or “Minion Sergeant.” Sidekicks have more Fortes than Minions, and may have Techniques.
- ☛ **Lieutenant:** A named character that is definitely memorable. Lieutenants are built like PCs, but have no starting Style Dice.
- ☛ **Villain:** A named character of importance. Villains are built like PCs.



- ☛ **Archvillain:** A named character of great importance, skill, and power. Villains are built like PCs, but with *more* Fortes and Style Dice. Four extra Fortes (i.e., 8 extra “points” of MOD) and 3 Style Dice makes a creditable Archvillain.

## Minions & Minion Squads

An individual Minion—at least, not all by their lonesome—is no real threat to a PC, just a Challenge.

However, two or more Minions with similar Fortes and MODs can combine into *Squads*, which are treated in a Duel as a single character: they make one attack roll and one defense roll as a unit. Each Minion adds +1d6 to their pool of dice (remember, in a Duel, it's the best of three rolls). Minions *can* add their collective MOD to rolls—for example, a Minion Squad of 4 Good [+2] Guardsmen would roll 4d6+2, keeping the best 3 divvied between attack and defense. (Minion Squads of 2 are very weak, and not recommended, unless they have a MOD of at least Expert [+4].)

Damage (see p. 25) applied to a Squad wounds the individuals in a serial fashion: each Minion in a Squad can absorb *one hit* of damage. Thus, if a PC does two points of damage to a Minion Squad, he has *Zeroed Out* (see p. 26) two Minions of that Squad.



## The Duel Itself

In this section, Fencing is our example for Dueling, but the overall method can be used for one-on-one conflicts using *any* Forte (for example, Repartee for debate, Gambler for games of chance, etc.).

The character with the most Style Dice in front of him goes first; if there is a tie, then the highest Ranked character goes first. PCs win any ties with NPCs. The “winner” here can cede initiative to foes with lower totals, if he so desires. The benefits of going first are often balanced by the benefits of being able to react to an opponent’s decisions. (See also *The Element of Surprise!*, p. 26.)

In Duels, characters roll 3d6. Relevant Techniques can add a +1 or a bonus die (before or after the fact; see the *Advice: Ellipses* textbox on p. 19); characters *keep the best three*. Then, the MOD(s) of relevant Forte(s) are added.

Dueling is handled in Turns; a character’s Turn is usually composed of at least one action (attack) round and one reaction (defense) round.

Here is a quick list of the steps of a Turn of the Duel (each will be discussed in depth below):

- ☛ **Engage Foes.**
- ☛ **Divvy Duel Dice:** Character divides their three dice each Turn between attack and defense.
- ☛ **The Charge:** The attacker’s attack and the defender’s defense are announced.
- ☛ **The Clash of Steel:** The attacker and defender roll. Roll results are compared.
- ☛ **The Touch:** If necessary, damage (see p. 25) is determined.

## The Element of Surprise!

If surprised by the sudden appearance of an enemy, the surprised character—PC or NPC—loses Initiative for that Turn. If caught *completely and horribly unawares* (often by an turncoat ally, a long-dead foe back from the grave, impressive mystical effects, or other story-intensive situations), the character can only *strongly defend* on that Turn, with no attack roll possible. (And the GM should consider handing over some Style Dice.)

- ☛ **Volte-face:** Steps 3, 4, and 5 are repeated, this time with the attacker becoming the defender and vice-versa. After the second Clash of Steel (and Touch, if necessary), go to next set of duelists.
- ☛ After all combatants have had their attack and defense, go to **Next Turn**. (That is, unless someone calls for an *Impasse*—see the *Fiddly Bits: Extra Duel Tweaks* textbox on p. 25.)

## Engage Foes

A character must *Engage* foe(s) to enter into the Duel with them, and can only Engage two foes per Turn (Minion Squads count as a single foe). If there are four or more characters in a Duel, they *must* split into pairs and trios (see also the *PCs Ganging Up* textbox on p. 23)—because *that is the swashbuckling way*.

A character’s defense roll stands against all Engaged opponents, but separate attacks must be made against each foe.

**Example 1:** Molly (Expert [+4] Pirate; Techniques of *Idiom*: Acrobatic and *Weapon*: Cutlass) is engaging a Minion Squad of four Good [+2] Guardsmen.

**Example 2:** Pyotr (Good [+2] Fencing; Techniques of *Idiom*: Precise and *Weapon*: Paired Rapier & Main Gauche, as well as an unchained Technique of *Foe*: vs. Criminals) begins a duel with Muktar the Hawk, a Lieutenant-level foe (with Expert [+4] Highwayman; Techniques of *Idiom*: Fierce, and *Weapon*: Scimitar).

## Divvy Duel Dice

In Duels, the PC will be rolling three six-sided dice (3d6). There are four main ways to divide up the basic 3d6 in Duels between attack and defense:

- ☛ **All-out Defense (Negligible Attack) =**  
0d6 attack, 3d6 defense.
- ☛ **Strong Defense (Weak Attack) =**  
1d6 attack, 2d6 defense.

## PCs Ganging Up

It is *tres gauche* for PCs to join forces against small Minion Squads and lone Lieutenants. **Bad Form!**

When characters team up (be they PC or NPC) versus a single foe, only **one** of the characters rolls—the other characters simply provides MODs of their relevant Fortes to the roll. (This rule is to encourage the swashbuckling genre's tendency towards one-on-one duels, rather than several against one.)

All this being said, PCs are *totally* encouraged to gang up on Villains and Archvillains. Indeed, they may need to, simply to survive!

### ☛ **Strong Attack (Weak Defense) =**

2d6 attack, 1d6 defense.

### ☛ **All-out Attack (Negligible Defense) =**

3d6 attack, 0d6 defense.

Note that even if a duelist is going for an All-Out Attack, they still get a Negligible Defense. Though they are rolling zero dice, with a result of zero, they *still* get to add their Fencing MOD to that.

Using Fencing Techniques allows the character to add a +1 bonus or to “re-roll” dice to maximize the basic 3d6 roll result (see p. 6). Technique dice do not have to be assigned specifically to attack or defense before they're rolled; they can also be used after the roll, if relevant.

**Example 1:** Molly will go for a Strong Attack (Weak Defense) against the Minion Squad; this is 2d6 for attack and 1d6 for defense. The Minion Squad will respond with a Strong Defense (Weak Attack); this is 1d6 for attack and 2d6 for defense—but since there are 4 of them, they have an extra die to roll, which they can use in place of any low-result die.

**Example 2:** Pyotr is wary of Muktar, so he opts for a Strong Defense (Weak Attack); this is 1d6 for attack and 2d6 for defense. Muktar, for his part, will be using an All-Out Attack (Negligible Defense); this is 3d6 for attack and zero dice for defense.

## The Charge

The attacker announces and describes his type of attack (and any Fortes used), then the defender announces and describes his type of defense (and any Fortes used).

**Example 1:** Molly bounds forward and begins laying about with her cutlass. (She is using Expert [+4]

Pirate and adding in her Technique of *Weapon: Cutlass* up front; she could probably also pull in the *Idiom: Acrobatic Technique*.) Her Forte gives her MOD bonus of +4 to her attack and defense rolls, and her Technique allows her to re-roll a die (if she chooses, or add a flat +1).

For their part, the guardsmen are a bit taken aback by the screaming pirate, but know their duty. The Minion Squad has no Techniques, but their Good [+2] Guardsman Forte adds its MOD to their attack and defense rolls, and since there are four of them, they're rolling four dice in total.

**Example 2:** Because Pyotr has heard tales of the martial prowess of the Hawk, this influences his assay. Pyotr's Good [+2] Fencing gives a +2 MOD to both his attack and defense.

Muktar moves forward with brutal speed and strength, whirling his flashing scimitar, with seemingly little thought of even trying to parry Pyotr's blows. (He is using his Expert [+4] Highwayman Forte and the Techniques of *Idiom: Fierce* and *Weapon: Scimitar*.) His Forte gives his MOD bonus of +4 to his attack and defense rolls, and his Techniques allow him to re-roll two dice, or add a total of +2.

## The Clash of Steel

In the Clash of Steel, the attacker's roll, plus any relevant MODs from Fortes (plus any use of Techniques), is compared to the defender's roll, plus any relevant MODs from Fortes (plus any use of Techniques).

Comparing the roll results:

- ☛ **If attack roll  $\geq$  defense roll**, the attacker does damage to the defender (see below, *The Touch*).
- ☛ **If attack roll  $<$  defense roll**, the attack does no damage.



**NOTE - The attacker's defense roll result and the defender's attack roll result *can* be rolled at this time and saved for the *Volte-face* phase of the Turn (see below).**

As with Challenges, the player narrates the PC's successes or failures (recall that Training Points are earned by failed rolls; see p. 14).

In PC vs. PC match-ups, *the losing character's player* narrates. Ties between PC mean no damage is done, no Training Points are earned, and the pair of them need to combine their narrations of the lock-up.

**Example 1:** Molly is rolling 2d6+4 for attack and 1d6+4 for defense, and she has a Technique in play. The Guardsman Minion Squad is rolling 1d6+2 for attack and 2d6+2 for defense, and it has a bonus die (because there are 4 of them).

Molly gets a 3 and a 3 on her attack dice, a 5 on her defense dice; she rolls her Technique die and gets a 4, and uses this 4 to replace one of her 3s on the attack roll. Thus, her overall attack roll is 3+4+4=11. Her overall defense roll is 5+4=9.

The Minion Squad gets a 4 on its attack die, a 2 and a 4 on its defense dice; and rolls a 2 on its extra die for having 4 Minions in the Squad—which does it no good. The Squad's overall attack roll is 4+2=6, and its overall defense roll is 2+4+2=8.

Comparing Molly's attack of 11 to the Guardsman Squad's 8 means she has done damage to the Squad—go to the Touch! (The Squad's attack roll and Molly's defense roll are saved for the *Volte-face*.) Her cutlass is a whirlwind of steel, driving back the foolish guardsmen!

**Example 2:** Pyotr is rolling 1d6+2 for attack and 2d6+2 for defense. Muktar is rolling 3d6+4 for attack and 0d6+4 for defense, with two Techniques in play.

Pyotr gets a 3 on his attack die, a 2 and 5 on his defense dice. His overall attack roll is 3+2=5. His overall defense roll is 2+5+2=9.

Muktar gets a 1, a 3, and a 6 on his attack dice, a zero on his defense dice, and he uses his Technique dice to re-roll the 1 and the 3, rolling a 2 and a 4. He uses the 2 to replace the 1 and the 4 to replace the 3. Thus, his overall attack roll is 2+4+6+4=16. His overall defense roll is 0+4=4.

Comparing Pyotr's attack of 5 to Muktar's defense of 4 means Pyotr has done damage to the Hawk—go to the Touch! (Muktar's attack roll and Pyotr's defense roll are saved for the *Volte-face*.) Pyotr's nimble blade easily pierces the rudimentary defenses of the charging Highwayman's furious assault... but at what cost to our hero?

## The Touch

If damage has been taken, the defender applies it to his or her Fortes. See p. 25 for a full discussion of damage.

**IMPORTANT NOTE—For purposes of the *Volte-Face* (see below), even if a defending foe is greatly weakened or even Zeroed Out in a PC's attack, the foe's pre-damage attack *still* goes off.**

Also, note that the first hit of damage taken by a PC in a Scene generates a *Story Hook* (see below, p. 27), as does any damage that Zeroes Out a Forte.

**Example 1:** Molly's attack of 11 to the Guardsman Squad's 8 means the Squad takes 3 ranks of damage, in this case Wound Ranks. That's enough to Zero Out (see p. 26) three of the Guardsmen entirely. This will drop the strength of the Squad to only one Minion next Turn—making the sole survivor not even Duel-worthy!

**Example 2:** Pyotr's attack of 5 to Muktar's defense of 4 means Muktar takes 1 Wound Rank in damage. Muktar is able to put the damage on another of his Fortes, such that his Highwayman Forte remains at Expert [+4].

## Volte-face

The attacker now becomes the defender, and the defender the attacker. Run through the Charge and the Clash of Steel again (and the Touch, if necessary). See above for the IMPORTANT NOTE regarding weakened or Zeroed Out defenders.

Then, the spotlight moves onto the next set of duelists. When all sets of duelists have had their attack and defense, move to the next Turn.

**Example 1:** The Squad's attack of 6 to Molly's 9 means the Squad's blows were easily warded off.

**Example 2:** Muktar's attack of 16 to Pyotr's 9 (2 + 5, plus 2) means that Pyotr should take 7 Wound Ranks in damage. However, Pyotr decides to try and pull in his two Fencing Techniques of *Idiom*: Acrobatic and *Weapon*: Paired Rapier & Main Gauche. Pyotr describes how he's trying to use his Techniques: "I twist away into a tumbling roll, using both my rapier and main-gauche to deflect Muktar's blows!" (Pyotr chooses the re-roll option for Techniques on both counts—he rolls a 4 and a 6. He replaces his roll of 2 with his Technique roll of 6; this makes his defense 5 + 6, plus 2, for a total of 13.)

Though Pyotr could not counter Muktar's attack, through the use of Techniques, he was able to reduce the damage he took from 7 Wound Ranks to only 3 Wound Ranks!



Taking those three Wound Ranks, Pyotr temporarily reduces his Good [+2] Captain Forte to Poor [-2], because he doesn't think his navigational acumen will help him in this swordfight (and gains a Story Hook, see p. 27, related to Captain), which handles two of the Wound Ranks. He takes the last Wound Rank on his Motivation: True Love, reducing it from Good [+2] to Average [0].

Repeat the Duel Turn sequence as many times as necessary to determine overall victory, by one of the duelists surrendering, escaping, or being knocked out of the conflict (see below, *Zeroing Out*).

### Fiddly Bits: Extra Duel Tweaks

Here are some extra methods to add more interest to Duels. The Tweaks marked with an asterisk (\*) can be used once per Duel for free, but after that use require the expenditure of a Style Die.

**Cyrano Gambit:** If a character wishes to add in a *seemingly unrelated* Forte—for example, adding Repartee to their Fencing in a swordfight—to the relevant Forte of the Duel, in order to take advantage of its MOD (see the *Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks* textbox on p. 20), they *must* roleplay it to get the bonus!

**Dirty Tricks\*:** Throwing sand in eyes, low blows, “what in the world can that be?” (points off-screen)—all sorts of stuff. Counts as a *Feint* (see below).

**Disarm\*:** An attack against a foe's *weapon* rather than a foe himself. The attacker must do at least his foe's Fencing MOD in damage to make the foe drop their weapon. Disarmed foes cannot use Fencing (unless they have the Unarmed Fighting Technique; see p. 6), and must either find a new weapon, brawl, surrender, or attempt to escape.

**Feint\*:** An attack can be declared a Feint. If the attack is successful, the character does *no damage* but gains the margin of success (minimum 1 for a tie) as a *bonus* on their next Turn's attack. If the feint fails, the character gets the margin as a *penalty* on their next Turn's defense roll. Both engaged duelists can Feint.

**Impasse\*:** Anyone (PC or NPC) can call for the momentary suspension of Duel-based violence between Turns. (Impasses are those moments during a fencing duel in a swashbuckling movie where there's no active sword-related mayhem—getting locked corps-a-corps, slicing candles, yanking rugs, grabbing the chandelier rope and cutting it for some elevator action, that sort of thing. It's basically a Flashy Challenge—see p. 20—that gives the

winner a mild advantage and dings the loser for a Failure Rank.) **Recall** that the winner of a Flashy Challenge gets a Style Die, and the loser takes a Failure Rank. (GMs should decide if Impasses use 3d6 for being in Duels, or 2d6 like other Flashy Challenges, and stick to that rubric.)

**Parry-Riposte\*:** If a character is defending before attacking in a Turn, he may sacrifice his attack roll for the Turn and declare his defense a *parry-riposte*. If his defense is successful, the character gains the margin of defense (minimum 1 for a tie) as a *bonus* on his next Turn's attack. If the defense fails, the character gets the margin of defense as a *penalty* on their next Turn's attack. If both duelists declare that they are Parry-Riposting, the nothing happens that Turn. Neither are attacking, so neither can defend.

**Surrender:** Players who decide to surrender before Zeroing Out may put conditions on their defeat—a *conditional surrender*. (“If I surrender, you will let Lady Agatha and Lord Gilgamesh go free?”) A character can always offer terms for his withdrawal, so long as he isn't *totally* defeated. Whether or not their opponent accepts said terms is another question. (If the NPC displays Bad Form, the PC gets a Style Die.)

**Weapon Recovery:** Use an action to recover a lost weapon (or come into possession of a new one).

## Damage

If a character fails at a Challenge or Duel, there is a good chance that they might take *damage*. Damage is the general term for the loss of capability to continue a task; it is a loss of resources, be they physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. In *PDQ#*, this damage is represented by a temporary reduction to the character's listed Fortes.

The player selects which of his Fortes takes the damage, and can spread out the overall damage across several Fortes at once. Whichever Forte the player decides takes the “first hit” of damage in a conflict generates a *Story Hook* (see p. 27), as does the damage that causes one of a character's Fortes to *Zero Out* (see below, p. 26). If character is forced to use a Forte that has taken damage, before that damage has been recovered (see p. 27), they use the current Rank.

In *Challenges*, damage is equal to the difference between the roll total—after including all MODs—and the TN. In *Flashy Challenges*, the loser takes a single rank of damage (a Failure Rank; see below). In *Duels*, damage is equal to the difference between the roll totals of the successful attacker and failing defender. (In the case of tied rolls, PCs always



### The Key to Understanding PDQ# Damage

Basically, in any PDQ# challenge or duel, some of a character's Fortes can be thought of as useful for either "attack," "defense," or "absorption." The player has to make choices about what to sacrifice for their character's well-being and effectiveness. It's resource management at a basic level. The player must make a decision on which abilities will be most useful for the remainder of the conflict scene.

As an example, say a character has Good [+2] Rank in the following Fortes: *Acrobatics*, *Fencing*, *Puzzle-Solving*, and *Spice Merchant*.

In combat (a physical task), the character will probably opt to keep *Acrobatics* and *Fencing* at Good [+2] as long as possible, and apply Wound Ranks to *Puzzle-Solving* and *Spice Merchant*. In an argument (a social task), the character will want to keep *Puzzle-Solving* high for as long as possible, and take Failure Ranks on *Acrobatics* and *Fencing* first. If haggling over something at the market (could be a mental, a social, or even a professional conflict, depending on how the GM spins the situation), the character would protect *Spice Merchant*, and maybe try to keep *Puzzle-Solving* at Good [+2] as long as he could, while sacrificing *Acrobatics* and *Fencing*.

Additionally (and importantly!), a player's selection of which Fortes takes the *first hit* of in conflict gives the GM a powerful tool for generating *Story Hooks* (see p. 27) for future Scenes and sessions.

The abstraction of how Failure or Wound Ranks are applied isn't meant to be a one-to-one relation ("Hey, why does getting punched in the face lower *Spice Merchant*?"), but amusing justifications can be made up anyway ("Well, your black eye makes it hard to see your wares..."), which could become fully-fledged *Story Hooks*. Though the player decides upon which ability the damage affects, either the player or the GM can come up with a rationale, if they want.

win versus NPCs, and do a single rank of damage. In the case of ties between PCs, neither wins and no damage is done.)

There are two main types of damage: *Failure Ranks* and *Wound Ranks*. The type of damage accrued depends upon the nature of the situation. A character can suffer both types in the course of a conflict situation. They are functionally the same thing *during* a challenge, but are regained by the character at different rates *afterward* (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

### Failure Ranks

In mental, social, and some physical challenges, this loss of capability is usually fleeting, and is represented by *Failure Ranks*. All Failure Ranks are recovered at the end of a Scene (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

### Wound Ranks

In many physical challenges (especially duels), the harm is more enduring, and is represented by *Wound Ranks*. This is most often injuries taken in combat, but also includes *environmental damage* taken by running through a fire, falling off a roof, or starting to drown. While most things that do physical injury to a character cause him to accrue Wound Ranks, some physical actions aimed at delaying, tripping, entangling, grappling, pushing, pulling, flipping, throwing, tiring, or confusing an opponent could be seen as Failure Ranks instead.

Only *some* Wound Ranks are recovered at the end of a Scene (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

### Zeroing Out

When a character is forced to reduce the last of his Fortes *below* Poor [-2] Rank, this causes them to *Zero Out* that Forte. A Zeroed Out Forte can no longer be used for any rolls or to absorb more damage. Note, however, a character gets another *Story Hook* whenever he Zeroes Out a Forte.

After a character Zeroes Out all of his Fortes, he is at defeat's doorstep: the character is now *Mostly Dead*.

**NOTE—This is different from older versions of PDQ, where Zeroing Out any Poor Quality knocked a character out of a conflict.**

**ADDITIONAL NOTE—A single damage Rank is enough to Zero Out a Minion.**

## Mostly Dead

Characters who have Zeroed Out all of their Fortes (“Death first!”) are *Mostly Dead*. This means two things:

The character unconditionally surrenders, and is at the complete mercy of their opponent.

For the rest of the session, the character is *Mostly Dead* (for physical damage). Other forms of similar impairment are: *Driven Insane* (for mental damage), *Social Pariah* (for social damage), and *Bankrupted* (for business or professional damage).

In *PDQ#* games, just because a character is *Mostly Dead* does not mean they die. It does mean that the character’s opponent can then knock out, clap in irons, or (admittedly) *Coup de Grace* the fallen character. Being *Mostly Dead* is often just the prelude to an exciting escape from a Villain’s dungeon!

### Coup de Grace

For physical conflicts, the default assumption in *PDQ#* is that characters can *only* be killed once they are unconscious or otherwise helpless. This requires no roll, check, or action, simply a statement on the attacker’s next action that he wishes to kill the victim. Only the most monstrous of villains and grimmest of heroes will opt to do this regularly—many characters will have codes of honor, hidden agendas, or other limitations that prevent the killing of a helpless foe.

## Recovering from Damage

Once a Scene ends, the injured character will begin to recover lost Ranks of damage. (However, *Mostly Dead* characters have a tougher row to hoe; see below).

### Failure Rank Recovery

All Failure Ranks are recovered at the end of the Scene, restoring all affected Fortes to their starting Ranks.

### Wound Rank Recovery

Only some Wound Ranks are recovered at the end of the Scene; players roll 2d6 to determine the number of Ranks their characters get back. Each player selects which Forte Ranks are restored. However, the character will not recover any more Ranks until the end of the *next* Scene, when the GM tells them to roll again, a Forte comes into play, or the character spends Style Dice to heal (see p. 13).

**NOTE - A relevant Forte like “Quick Healer” should allow the character to gain back the standard 2d6 roll, plus their MOD. A Foible like “Slow Healer” would mean that the character only gets one (1) Rank back of normal recovery—but they do gain some Style Dice for the Foible.)**

## Mostly Dead Recovery

If a character is *Mostly Dead*, Style Dice *must* be used to restore all of the character’s Fortes to Poor [-2] before normal recovery can happen.

To restore a Forte to Poor [-2] from zero, a *Style Die per Forte* must be spent. (However, these Style Dice can be spent by any other player on the character’s behalf.) Once all of a character’s Fortes are at Poor [-2] Rank, normal healing may commence.

Furthermore, the character gains a new Story Hook, related to his recovery.

## Story Hooks

*Story Hooks* are exciting or interesting subplots, complications, and events that characters. Whenever a character takes the first hit of damage in a Scene, whichever Forte the player selects to take that hit of damage generates a Story Hook. When the ability is announced, the GM should make a note of what it is, and come up with something interesting related that trait for the next Scene or game session. This “something interesting” can be good, bad, or indifferent, but it should capture the player’s interest. For example, the reason Sir Liam constantly has to ride off to rescue Princess Gwen from dragons, ogres, and enchantments is that he consistently uses his Average [0] True Love for Princess Gwen to absorb the first Wound Rank he takes in combat. (Story Hooks might also be generated based on the spending of Style Dice, Zeroing Out, Recovering from being *Mostly Dead*, etc.)

A quick and easy way to come up with Story Hooks is to compare the selected Forte to the current events of the adventure, one of the character’s Core elements (Foible, Past, Swashbuckling Forte, Motivation), or the character’s Background description. One of these will almost always offer inspiration to a new subplot or event for the game.

# Setting the Dials

For maximum enjoyment, all players and the GM should sit down to discuss the sort of swashbuckling game they'd like to play, and cover some important questions. This is *Setting the Dials*.

## Aesthetics

*Underlying aesthetic?* Musketeer (defense of Order), Pirate (glorification of Chaos), or Highwayman (Chaos in defense of Order, or Order in defense of Chaos).

*Concentration?* Action, Adventure, Heroism, Intrigue, Romance, Villainy, or a mixture of all.

*Themes?* Honor, Revenge, Status, Wealth, Friendship, Responsibility, Loyalty, Kindness, Hatred, Desperation, Self-Reliance, Cooperation.

*Session Style?* Episodes, Miniseries, Series.

## The Breadth of Forte Penumbra

This is where GMs and players come to agreement on what sorts of things fall under the penumbra of their various Fortes (see p. 4), so that a player doesn't suddenly find out in the middle of play that under the GM's interpretation of the Pirate Forte, he doesn't have the acrobatic skill he thought he did!

## Bringing a Musket to a Swordfight

GMs and players need to determine how potent *firearms* are in their *PDQ#* campaign. Consider: is having a gun be more powerful than a sword (or even vastly more powerful, like a one-shot kill weapon) any fun? Think deeply about this before you decide which way to go; it will definitely affect the nature of your *PDQ#* game.

Are guns just another weapon? Pistols and muskets do damage as normal.

Are guns more powerful weapons? Firearms do damage as normal, plus additional Damage Ranks equal to the MOD of the attacker's Firearms Forte.

Are guns one-shot kill weapons? Firearms do damage as normal, plus additional Damage Ranks equal to the TN of the attacker's Firearms Forte.

## Justify Why PCs are Together?

Noble Household/Family Affair, Pirate Crew, Regimental Comrades, Someone Done Us Wrong, The Sovereign's Troubleshooters, or something else?

## The Purposes of Poison

As for firearms, GMs and players also need to determine how potent *poison* is in their *PDQ#* campaign.

*Does poison harm?* Apply the MOD of the poison to the damage total after a *successful attack* or *failed Challenge roll*.

*Does poison weaken?* Characters cannot heal normally, gain a Story Hook of "Poisoned!"; and the cost of Style Dice-based *Catch Your Second Wind* is doubled, until they find the antidote.

*Does poison incapacitate or kill?* Failing a Challenge roll versus the TN of the poison makes the character instantly become *Mostly Dead* (or its equivalent).

*Is the poison one-shot or enduring?* A *one-shot poison* does its work and is gone; an *enduring poison* hangs around until it's removed from the victim's system (a Story Hook).

All of the above qualities of poison can be combined, increasing the poison's toxicity, cost, and rarity.

## What's in S7S?

What additions to *PDQ#* appear in *Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies*?

- More extensive rules discussion.
- A vast, detailed setting—the World of the 7 Skies, its Cloud-Islands, skyships, intricate politics, the Church, the arcane Koldun, and the Mysterious Blue.
- Mystical powers and magical items.
- Rules for Skyship and Sanctum Challenges and Duels.
- An analysis of the swashbuckling genre for RPG purposes.
- And much, much more!

