

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF VERBAL FIREWORKS & SUDDEN REVERSALS



SKULDUGGERY

BY ROBIN D LAWS



Pelgrane Press

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by **Robin D Laws**

CREDITS

Author: **Robin D Laws**

Publisher: **Simon Rogers**

Layout: **Jérôme Huguenin**

Cover and grayscale interior art: **Jérôme Huguenin**

Line Art: **Hilary Wade**

Special thanks to: Elizabeth Shoemaker, Kenneth Hite, Graham Walmsley, Steve Dempsey

Playtesters: Darcy Burgess, Graham Chinner, Chris Engler, Oliver Granger, Peta Holmes, Chris Huth, Paul Jackson, Alex Johnston, Winnie Kruger, Kevin Kulp, Dan L'Estrange, Rob Lim, John Machin, Pau Martinell, Mateu Pastoret, Quim Ball-Ilosera, Albert Piqué, Albert Puignau, Eudald Bonmatí Mark Mueller, Justin Mohareb, Jason Morton, Kyle Plate, Alex Topher, Dave Versace, James Versace, Craig Wayling, Jim Zubkavich

Additional proofing: Ludovic Papais, Andrew, Raphael, Timothy Daly, Jérôme Larre

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THE GAME AND HOW TO PLAY IT

Skulduggery is a roleplaying game for 2-6 players and a Game Moderator. In *Skulduggery*, you play:

- a cabinet official attempting to please the President by shepherding an unpopular nomination
- a pirate crewman scheming for the captaincy of his scurvy vessel
- high schoolers vying for the limelight as they stage a musical
- skeezy space traders trying to corner the market on Silurian jump wine

To play *Skulduggery*, you need this book, a single ordinary six-sided die per participant, paper, and writing instruments. It helps if the GM has access to the Internet and a computer printer.

SKULDUGGERY IN A NUTSHELL

Skulduggery is a roleplaying game. If you have no idea what that means, we congratulate you for accidentally stumbling upon this text, which is aimed at a fervent niche audience. We wish we had the space here to teach you the basics of the hobby. Find friends who know what roleplaying games are and have them demonstrate the basic concept to you. Incessantly bug one of them until they run a session of *Skulduggery* for you and your friends. You'll be glad you did.

Although it makes a great introduction to the hobby for beginning players, *Skulduggery* calls for an experienced Game Moderator who is comfortable extensively improvising in response to player actions.

Skulduggery plunges the player characters into situations where they must prevail by guile and persuasion. The game is generic, meaning that its rules can be applied to various settings. It specializes in stories where negotiation and verbal gamesmanship take precedence over fighting and adventure. Left to its own devices, the tone of a *Skulduggery* session drifts toward the humorous or satirical. With some effort, it might also be put to grimly serious ends.

The setting packs provided in this book allow you to create tales of:



- modern politics and bureaucracy
- the age of piracy
- the high school drama club
- interstellar trade

We also show you how to adapt the basic rules to other situations in the same settings, and in other genres as well. *Skulduggery* works for any genre dominated by verbal power struggles. Your game packs might feature:

- ecclesiastical scheming
- court intrigue
- faculty politics
- rival generals
- organized crime (ranging from Coppola or Scorsese-style mafiosi to Guy Ritchie cockney villains)
- or even the machinations of anthropomorphic meerkats.

Although persuasion takes center stage in *Skulduggery*, quick 'n' brutal combat rules allow for sudden eruptions of violence, where thematically appropriate.

Most roleplayers will find *Skulduggery* an ideal respite

from their usual fare. It's ideal for one-shot gaming. Play it:

- when you fail to achieve quorum for your usual ongoing campaign
- as a palate-cleanser between long series
- at conventions
- when you decide at the last minute to run an off-the-cuff session.

A typical game lasts for three to four hours. Though *Skulduggery* is geared to one-shot play, some groups may wish to extend their characters' scheming and conniving to an ongoing series. The adjustments required for longer-term play appear on p. 47.

TEACHING SKULDUGGERY

Games of *Skulduggery* should be simple and fast. Don't bog down the players by teaching them the entire game from the outset. Instead, give them what they need to know, when they need to know it.

When telling players how to play *Skulduggery*, explain the basics of action resolution, including ratings and pools, boons and levies, refreshes (p. 10) and taglines (p. 34) and the various degrees of success and failure (p. 11.) Then let all of the other rules wait until they arise in play. For example, the undermining rule (p.17) allows one player character to interfere with another's attempt

at success. Explain it to the players only when prompted by one player's stated desire to mess with another.

If you're using only a few of the special case rules, or none at all, in the course of a session, you're probably doing it right.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Here's what you'll find in the rest of this book:

- **Core Rules:** The basic rules you need to run any *Skulduggery* game.
- **Customized *Skulduggery*:** Guidance for GMs creating their own setting packs and scenarios, including notes on adjusting the core rules to fit your desired genre.

The remainder of the book consists of the following ready-to-run play packs:

- **Yes Wing:** politics and bureaucracy
- **Skulduggery & Crossbones:** pirates
- **Casting Call:** high school musical
- **If Space Permits:** interstellar traders

Optional Settings: Brute Force and Physical Action

Some rules are suitable only for settings where characters might realistically resort to violence. We call this subset of the rules the brute force option. Any paragraph or section marked with the





is a brute force optional rule, for use only in appropriate genres. Violence in *Skulduggery* is nasty and decisive. Even characters in brute force settings will typically prefer to talk first and get physical only as a last resort.

Certain settings will avoid physical action altogether. In others, action sequences might require characters to run, jump, climb, drive skillfully, and confront a range of harm-threatening obstacles. These are almost invariably also settings where brute force comes into play. However, just in case you think of one where light action fits and violence doesn't, we've marked these with the



so you can separate them when customizing the rules for settings of your creation.

The scenarios in this book are either entirely action-free (Yes Wing, Casting Call) or  (Skulduggery and Crossbones, If Space Permits.) We've made note of the in-between  choice in case you want to use it for your own scenarios, and for our possible future use.



BASIC RULES

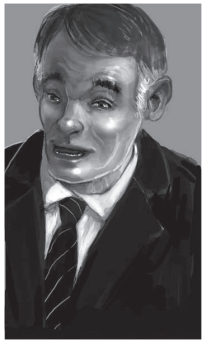
This chapter lays out the basic rules GMs use to run any game of *Skulduggery*. Although players are certainly welcome to read them, they're simple enough for you to teach your players in the course of a one-shot session.

ASSIGNING CHARACTERS

Typically, *Skulduggery* characters get used for only three to four hours, so it's important to assign them quickly. At the start of play, characters are created from modular units called **component cards**. Premade play packs come with component cards. When you create a play pack for your own customized setting, you'll create component cards as part of that process. Play packs for sequel sessions featuring preexisting characters don't require component cards.

Component cards divide into sets. Each set provides an element of the character. The sets of cards are as follows:

1. **Identity:** Provides the character's name (with gender variants), along with details of the character's rank, occupation, and/or status. Also included here are his or her general abilities (p. 26) and one or more of his or her objectives.



Winston / Winona Fingerhut

Secretary Of the Interior

As Interior Secretary, you oversee the federal department responsible for federal lands and programs relating to the country's aboriginal peoples. Notable units of your portfolio include the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Geological Survey, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. Interior Secretaries are rarely considered part of the President's inner circle, and your experience in the Bierce administration has proven no different.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: A subordinate, Chief Alex Rogers of the United States Park Police, turned a strange shade of pale when Cross' possible nomination was rumored in the press.

Personal Goal: Secure presidential pardon for political mentor Dalton Flask, now serving a five-year sentence for tax evasion.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 4, Gossip 5, Knowledge 4 (Catholic Theology), Management 2, Mischief 2, Moxy 4, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Wealth 2.

The Yes Wing

Note that not all of the sample cards shown here are from the same play pack. Cards 1-3 and 6-7 suit a modern political game, where cards 4 and 5 fit a setting where use of brute force is appropriate.

2. **Persuade:** Provides the character's Persuade rating and style (p. 23) along with two taglines (p. 34.)



The Yes Wing

Persuade (Forthright) 7

Trumps: Penetrating

Is Trumped By: Lawyerly

"Mr. President, that's not in the constitution!"

"If we don't do this, we'll not only look stupid. We'll be stupid."

3. **Rebuff:** The character's rebuff Rating and style (p. 24) along with one tagline.




The Yes Wing

Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)



Trumps: Glib

Is Trumped By: Intimidating

"Golly, we haven't had time to read all those documents!"

4.  **Attack:** The character's Attack rating and style (p. 25), along with specializations and weapons, if any.

6. **Relationships:** Details the character's ability to solve problems by drawing on favors from supporting characters; p. 31.






Skulduggery & Crossbones

Attack 8 (Caution)

Trumps: Vexation

Is Trumped By: Parry


The Yes Wing

Relationships:



President Allard Bierce 2

First Lady Malora Bierce 4

Senate Majority Leader Dwayne Pettiford 3

5.  **Defense:** The character's Defense rating and style; p. 25.

7. **Resistances:** Shows the character's ability to shrug off the temptations that might otherwise lead him or her into entertaining trouble; p. 32.

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Defense 6 (Vexation)

Trumps: Strength

Is Trumped By: Caution




The Yes Wing

Resistances:

Arrogance 7, Avarice 4, Paranoia 2, Nitpicking 6, Spite 4, Showboating 1

Handing Out Cards

Premade component cards are largely self-explanatory. For guidance on creating your own, see p. 8.

As the name suggests, each component card is formatted to be cut up into card size. Print them out onto card stock.

Component card sets for the play packs in this book can be downloaded in ready-to-print PDF format from the Pelgrane web site. Print them out onto card stock and cut them up. If you prefer, you can photocopy the cards printed in the back of the book. A card back is provided for double-sided copying.

At the start of the game, fan out the first set of component cards, with the printed side facing you and away from the player. Have each player blindly choose a card from your hand. Then repeat the process for each of the five to seven card sets provided by your play pack. Maintain an illusion of even-handedness by choosing a new player to be first to draw with each set of cards.

At the end of this process, each player will have one component card from each set. The players may then trade cards with one another. Before trading begins, ask each player to list the word given in brackets after the Persuade, Rebuff and (if applicable) Attack and Defense abilities. This is the style of each ability. Read out the explanations of these styles before trading begins. Read out only those styles that appear on the cards in players' hands.

Persuade Styles

Characters persuade in various ways, revealing their personalities and the tactics they use to get what they want.

- **Glib** — You speak so quickly and easily that listeners find it hard to penetrate your insincerity and deceptiveness.
- **Eloquent** — Your high-flown words and lofty sentiments sweep your listeners along on a cloud of beautiful wordplay.
- **Obfuscatory** — The style of your speech is so opaque, the twists and turns of your syntactical structure so labyrinthine, that your interlocutors can neither grasp what you are saying, nor admit their bafflement, and therefore agree thoroughly with whatever it is you just said.
- **Forthright** — You cut straight to the heart of any question.
- **Charming** — You are so much fun to be around, and so ingratiating, that people can't

Unpersuadable

For plot purposes you may designate that a supporting character is unpersuadable on a given point, whether or not it can be shown that taking action to the contrary would be in his self-interest. This exception to the rules is to be used sparingly. Use it only to prevent the PCs from easily attaining the scenario's central goal early in the session.

help liking you and seeking to please you.

- **Intimidating** — You get your way by fear; every word you utter drips with implied menace. ☠ You may be physically imposing, mentally, or both.

Rebuff Styles

Characters Rebuff persuasion attempts in one of six ways. As with Persuade, these reflect the way they perceive the world, and the means by which they avoid being hoodwinked.

- **Obtuse** — You don't always get what others are saying. This is not the impediment it might at first seem. When people can't make you understand them, they get frustrated and give up, before they can trick you.
- **Wary** — Nothing bothers you more than the thought that someone might put something over on you. You instinctively distrust anyone who seems to want anything from you.
- **Penetrating** — You can see through people's words to the motivations behind them—often discovering that they're only pretending to care about your interests.
- **Lawyerly** — You use your unerring nose for mile-wide loopholes to spot the flaws in others' proposals.
- **Contrary** — You hate following someone else's lead. If someone tells you to look up, you look down. If everyone else wants to go right, you want to go left.
- **Pure-Hearted** — You are utterly guileless. Without even trying to do so, you expose the bad intent of people trying to fool you.

Attack Styles

There's more than one way to strike an opponent in a physical fight. Your character's main advantage in combat is as follows:

- **Strength** — You are big and well-muscled. Your advantage lies in the sheer force of your blows.
- **Speed** — You win by lashing out quickly, leaving the other guy no time to react.
- **Finesse** — You fight gracefully, anticipating and countering your opponent's defensive moves.
- **Cunning** — Before any fight, you size up the opportunities offered to you by your environment and ruthlessly exploit them. You throw sand in your foe's face, jump up on a table to secure a height advantage, or seize an object to use as an unexpected weapon.
- **Ferocity** — Your heedless energy and snarling rage forces even the bravest opponent to fight on your terms.
- **Caution** — You hang back, rarely exposing yourself to danger, while waiting for your opponent to exhaust himself. He then makes a fatal mistake, which you, with the speed of a striking snake, take ruthless advantage of.

Defense Styles

When an opponent fails to hit you, it's because of the following quality.

- **Dodge** — Incoming blows don't hurt if you know how to duck them.
- **Parry** — You deflect incoming blows with your weapon, or other available objects.
- **Sure-Footedness** — Swift movement and a well-honed sense of balance allow you to dance out of striking range.
- **Intuition** — By watching his style and following his eyes, you can guess your foe's next move, and avoid it.
- **Misdirection** — You trick your opponent into predicting your next move, then go elsewhere, leaving him lashing at the empty air.
- **Vexation** — With taunts and patter, you alternately enrage and demoralize your opponent, provoking him into stupid mistakes.

The Trading Round

Having explained the characteristics of the two (or four) styles, ask if there are any other abilities on the cards the players need explanations for. As needed, quickly

summarize the ability descriptions (starting on p. 8) Then begin the trading round.

Cards that have not been drawn are not available to trade. The trading phase lasts for as many minutes as there are players. Cut it short if no one wants to trade, as is often the case. Players often invest in their characters within seconds, as soon as they start to imagine how their arbitrary mix of traits, tactics, abilities, and personal history fits together.

When players have committed to their final component cards, hand out paper clips to keep them bundled neatly together. The information held on a player's stack of cards provides all the information he needs to play. The stack of component cards acts as the character sheet required by other roleplaying games.

Filling In the Details

After handing out the component cards, tell players that they're encouraged to add their own touches to the characters they've been provided. So long as they don't jarringly contradict the facts given in their card stacks, they're free to closely dovetail these choices with the information they already have, or bring in elements from left field. You have the final say.



RESOLVING ACTIONS

When play begins, you'll present the players with scenes that challenge the characters as they attempt to fulfill both their collective and personal goals. The collective goal appears on the Identity card; the personal goal may appear there or on the Resistances card. When they face obstacles in pursuit of their goals, the rules system helps you determine whether they succeed or fail. In either case, the result pushes the story in a new direction, which will ultimately lead to another obstacle to overcome. Success should move the story in a positive direction for the character, failure in a negative direction.

Influencing the characters' chances of success or failure are their **ratings** and **pools**.

Ratings and Pools

The number appearing after each ability (including Persuade, Rebuff, Attack, Defense and the Resistances) is a **rating**. Players may increase their chances of success on any attempted action by spending points from a relevant ability. The number of points currently available to spend from a single ability is called a **pool**. At the start of play, the character's pool in any given ability equals the rating. As he spends points, the pool drops, until it reaches 0. When a pool reaches 0, the character can still attempt the action associated with the skill, but can't use spend points to increase his chances of success.

Pool points are most often used to allow you to reroll die results you don't like, or to force opposing characters to reroll die results they do like.

Refreshes

When a pool **refreshes**, it again equals the ability's rating, as it did at the start of play. Players gain refreshes through adroit use of taglines (p. 34.)

Winona Fingerhut's Eavesdropping pool has fallen to 2. Her rating in that ability is 6; that's the number of points she had in her Eavesdropping pool at the start of the game. She earns an Eavesdropping refresh, bringing her pool back up to 6.

Ability pools can at times exceed their ratings; if so, they can't be refreshed.

Boons

Sometimes a character gets to add points to a pool. This is called a **boon**. A boon can cause your pool to exceed

What Do Pool Points Represent?

Pool points are a literary device measuring characters' ability to influence the storyline by performing acts defined as typical for their characters. They are a game abstraction, not something the characters are aware of. Instead they emulate the way works of fiction featuring multiple protagonists parcel out time in the spotlight. Every character gets so many moments to shine, with greater results when their actions reinforce their already established qualities.

In a few cases it feels natural to describe obvious consequences of pool loss. A character with a lowered Defense pool seems hurt. A low Moxy might reflect a state of sickness or exhaustion. Most of the time, though, you're better off not tying yourself in knots trying to work out what this game abstraction simulates. Characters are no more aware of it than they are of the genre conventions of the stories they appear in, or the fact that your game group is snacking on peanuts and carrot sticks.

your rating. You can't get a boon in an ability that doesn't appear in your card stack.

Winona's Persuade rating is 7; her pool stands at 4. She gains a boon of 1, raising her pool to 5.

Boons are awarded under various circumstances, which we'll mention as we go along.

Levies

Certain events, described later in this section, may cost a character points from a particular pool. This is called a **levy**.

Finnegan's Rebuff rating is 7; his pool stands at 4. He takes a levy of 1, dropping his pool to 3.

When you must pay a levy you can't afford, your

pool drops to 0. You immediately suffer the penalty associated with an empty pool (p. 12.)

Transferring Points Giving Help to Other PCs

One PC can transfer points in a given ability to another PC's pool. To do so, the player making the transfer must be able to describe what he's doing to help the player receiving it in a way that makes some sort of narrative sense. Normally the two pools are in the same ability, but an inventive action description may convince the GM to allow a transfer between different abilities. Each transfer costs 1 point from the transferring character's pool, in addition to any points granted to the other player. For this reason, it's cheaper to make one large transfer than several small ones. The transferring character must weigh this consideration against the chance that points from an overly generous transfer will go to waste.

Space trader Finnegan Swake attempts to pull a parasitic vine from the gullet of his fellow crewman, Serig Allagan, using his Athletics ability. He has only 2 points left in that pool. The ship's doctor, Poria Manto (played by Erin), wants to help. "Can I assist by injecting the parasite with

a sedative?" This sounds fun and makes as much sense as anything else that's happened in the scenario, so the GM allows it. Poria's Physician pool stands at 6. She transfers 3 points to Finnegan's Athletics pool, increasing it to 5. Her Physician pool drops by 4 points (the transfer of 3, plus the transfer cost of 1), for a new total of 2.

Success and Failure

When a player wants his character to take an action, the GM first considers whether it ought to face any resistance at all.

If failure would seem ridiculous or unbelievable, the character automatically succeeds. The player describes what he's trying to do, and you tell him that he's done it.

Winona Fingerhut's player, Katherine, says that she's driving over to the Washington Monument, where she plans to leak a document to a friendly reporter. It would be ludicrous for her to get lost on her way there, so you don't bother to use the rules to decide if she succeeds. Instead, you just say, "Okay, you're there, and the reporter is waiting for you. Now what do you do?"

Pathetic Success

Sometimes a character confronts a challenge which should feel difficult, even though failure would be uninteresting or unacceptably slow down the story. In these cases, allow players to succeed on any result, if they spend all of their remaining points in the relevant pool. Let the characters succeed, but in a way that puts them at some other disadvantage. This is called a Pathetic Success. Make sure that the new disadvantage doesn't also lead to a dead end.

The pirate Edward Newcastle has fallen into a tiger pit, far from anyone who can assist him. He gets an Exasperating Failure, pays a point to roll again, gets a Basic Failure, pays a point to roll again, and gets a Dismal Failure. This runs him out of points in Athletics, the ability he's been using to try to get out of the pit. You rule that he gets out of the pit, but is so exhausted that he easily falls into the clutches of a colonial patrol. This is not a dead end, because you can foresee an interesting story branch even if he fails to talk his way out of arrest.

If no character in a scene has points to spend in the ability that best applies to the challenge, reconfigure the situation so that another ability comes into play. This allows the story to move ahead. *If Toby was already out of Athletics points when he fell into the pit, you might have a crazed hermit come along. Toby still has points in Persuade, so he can now try to convince the hermit to throw him a vine and pull him up.*

Pathetic Successes are available only when the GM decides that failure would be boring or slow down the story too much. They are not available to players as a general option.



If both success and failure seem like equally plausible and interesting outcomes, take the following steps to resolve the action.

Describe the Attempt

The player describes what the character tries to do and how he tries to do it, specifying the ability he’s using. Players often forget to name the ability; prompt them if necessary. They can use only those abilities appearing on their cards. If they have an ability but no points in the pool, they can still try to use it.

Winona has been denied access to a pivotal meeting. Katherine describes what she’ll do in response: “I use my Eavesdropping to find a vent that might allow me to listen in, unseen.”

If a player proposes to use an ability that doesn’t fit the task, propose a more suitable alternate choice, or suggest an alternate description of the attempt that better employs the proposed ability.

Assess Bonuses Or Penalties

The GM decides whether this challenge is especially hard or easy. Most times it is neither.

If the task is especially hard, the player suffers a **penalty**. The player subtracts the penalty from the die roll, as made in the next step. The penalty is almost always 1.

If it had already been established that the site where the meeting takes place is a high-security area, finding a vent seems a little implausible. To reflect the added difficulty, the GM would assess a penalty of 1 to Katherine’s roll.

A separate penalty of 1 applies when the player’s pool in the ability has fallen to 0.

If the player completely lacks the relevant ability , a penalty of 1 applies. Also, any Impressive Successes scored are downgraded to Ordinary Successes (see below.)

When a player proposes to use an ability that is only tangentially relevant to the task at hand, but does so entertainingly and/or convincingly, the GM can allow its use, assessing a levy of 1 or 2.

If the task is especially easy, the player gains a **bonus**. The player adds the bonus to the die roll, as made in the next step. The bonus is almost always 1.

Resolutions

Action attempts take place either as checks, involving only one character, or contests, in which two or more characters attempt to outdo each other until one of them is forced to drop out. Contests consist of exchanges. An exchange, described in greater detail below, is a roll made by a single character while engaged in a contest, plus any rerolls he may make, until he stands pat or can’t afford to reroll any more. Combats are a form of contest with a few extra wrinkles added; they too are divided into exchanges. The umbrella term encompassing checks, contests, and combats is resolution.

These terms will make more sense as we go along, but are introduced here so we can refer to them in passing.

Alternately, let’s say that Winona already made sure that the meeting would take place in an insecure location. Katherine argues that she ought to have an easier time finding a vent, and the GM agrees, allowing a bonus of 1 on her upcoming roll.

Action attempts may also face bonuses or penalties as a consequence of previous story developments.

Roll a Die

The player rolls a six-sided die. On any result higher than 4, the character succeeds. On a 3 or less, the character fails. The exact number indicates the degree of success or failure, as per the following table:

Failure (1-3)	1 Dismal
	2 Routine
	3 Exasperating
Success (4-6)	4 Hair’s-Breadth
	5 Ordinary
	6 Impressive

Tokens

You may wish to keep on hand a collection of beads, poker chips or other tokens in three colors. Two of the colors represent boons and levies, respectively. The third token represents banked refreshes gained from the use of taglines (p. 34.) In the designer's group, we use yellow poker chips for levy, green for boons, and blue for refreshes. The exact color scheme doesn't matter so long as everyone remembers what's what.

During a contest, when a player scores a Hair's-Breadth Success, award a levy token. Hand out a boon token for each Exasperating Failure.

When the action is fully resolved, the character refreshes if he has a refresh token and chooses to spend it. He then gains an additional number of pool points equal to the boon tokens in his pile. Then the pool drops by the number of levy tokens, if any. The character may not spend tokens, nor are levies applied until after the action is resolved. No levy will take a pool below 0.

In the course of a Persuade vs. Rebuff contest, Serig Allagan scores two Hair's-Breadth Successes and one Exasperating Failure. He gets two levy tokens and one boon token. He ends the contest with a Persuade pool of 2. He then immediately modifies his pool according to the tokens he got. One boon and one levy token cancel each other out, leaving him with one levy token. His Persuade pool drops by another point, from 2 to 1.

What happens depends on the character's final result. (As you'll see in the next step, characters may roll several times before standing pat on a result.)

On a **Dismal Failure**, the character fails to achieve his objective, and suffers lingering ill consequences from the attempt. In a humorous

game, the failure is played as amusingly bumbling or horrifyingly funny, depending on the situation. Rerolling a Dismal Failure costs 3 points, instead of the standard 1 point.

On a **Routine Failure**, the desired result does not take place, but no other consequences or benefits apply. The loss is neither embarrassing or memorable.

An **Exasperating Failure** is one in which the character comes aching close to success, only to fail at the last moment. Although the objective is not achieved, the character gains admiration, sympathy, or useful insight for the future. For each Exasperating Failure, the character gains a boon of 1 to apply to the ability at hand. Boons are gained after the action is fully resolved and can't be spent while it's in progress. See sidebar for more.

On a **Hair's-Breadth Success**, the character seizes a narrow victory from the jaws of defeat. The objective is achieved, but at a cost—for each Hair's-Breadth success scored in the course of an action resolution, the character pays a levy of 1. The levy is charged only after the action is fully resolved; see sidebar.

An **Ordinary Success** achieves the objective, no more and no less.

An **Impressive Success** achieves the objective and another story advantage besides.

In a contest (see below), the character's opponent must pay 3 points to counter an Impressive Success, instead of the usual 1. It costs 3 points even when you would otherwise pay nothing.

Katherine now rolls for Winona. (Let's say that she faces neither a bonus nor a penalty.) She rolls a 3—an Exasperating Failure. If she does nothing further, she'll fail to overhear the conversation.

To mark her Exasperating Failure, the GM hands her a boon token.

Reroll Or Stand Pat

Players who don't like their die results can attempt to reverse their fortunes by paying to roll again. Rerolling costs 1 point from the relevant ability pool, or 3 in the case of a Dismal Failure. For each reroll, the player must



describe the change in tactics his character is employing to achieve a new and better result.

The resolution continues until the player decides to stand pat and accept the current die result. Players stand pat on favorable results, when they decide the effort isn't worth the pool point expenditure, or when they run out of points to spend.

When the player stands pat, the current die result determines the final success or failure of the action attempt.

Fortunately for our example, Winona has no intention of failing. Katherine spends 1 point from her Eavesdropping pool to buy a reroll. Her pool drops to 5 points, from its original 6. She rolls again, and again gets an Exasperating Failure. She gets another boon token. She spends another point for another reroll, dropping her pool to 4. She rolls yet again, and gets yet another Exasperating Failure, and a third boon token. Dropping her pool to 3, she buys a third reroll. The third time's the charm—she gets a 6, an Impressive Success. She achieves her objective, and is now able to hear the proceeds of the meeting. An Impressive Success also requires the GM to grant an additional benefit. Here, the GM decides that Winona spots a listening device in the vent. Winona decides to remove it and point it out to the Secret Service, in exchange for a future favor.

She now collects the 1-point boons for each of her three Exasperating Failures—taking her pool from 3 back up to 6.

Contests

Many times a character's actions are resisted by the overt actions of another. These situations are called contests. PCs may contest other PCs or supporting characters. In a contest, one character is the actor and the other, the thwarter. The actor is trying to accomplish something, and the thwarter is trying to stop him. Examples might include:

- a pirate tries to catch a guard before he alerts the fortress guardians
- a magician attempts to locate an invisible courtier in the king's palace
- one actor attempts to distract the other during her big solo

Acting Without An Ability

Characters may attempt actions using abilities that don't appear in their card stacks. They're assumed to be using layman's intuition, dumb luck, or some other situational factor that justifies their use of the ability. The player gets one roll; without points to spend, no rerolls are possible. Impressive and Ordinary Successes are downgraded to Hair's-Breadth Successes.

If the player scores an Exasperating Failure while acting without an ability, the character still gains a boon token. At the end of the contest, the character gains 1 point in that ability. Until the point is spent, the character is treated as if he has the ability in question. However, this does not give the character a rating in that ability, or a pool that can be refreshed.

A contest begins with an action attempt by the actor. When the actor succeeds, the thwarter then counters with an action attempt of his own. If he succeeds, the acting character fails...

...unless the actor chooses to spend points to act again...

...in which case, the thwarter can spend points to act again...

....and so on.

The first roll by each contestant is, as per usual, made at no cost. All subsequent rolls, including the first rolls of new exchanges, cost 1 point from the pertinent pool, with two exceptions:

- It costs 3 points to roll again, continuing your own exchange, after scoring a Dismal Failure
- It costs 3 points to initiate a new exchange in response to an opponent's exchange that ended on an Impressive Success

The contest ends when one of the contestants loses, by:

- ending an exchange on a failure
- declining to initiate a new exchange when the

opponent has ended an exchange on a success or

- running out of pool points for the ability being used

(Fights end in a slightly different way. See p. 36 for more on personal combat and p. 41 for vehicle combat.)

Winona attempts to enlist deep-pocketed campaign donor Aloysius Donohue in her scheme to arrange a pardon for her mentor. Katherine proposes to use her Knowledge ability (specialized in Catholic theology) to impress Donohue, a devout fellow Catholic. Donohue's nephew, Declan, a supporting character, wants his uncle to stop spending money on politics so he'll inherit a larger bundle when the frail old man kicks off. He attempts to trip her up by changing the subject whenever she turns the discussion to religion. She is the actor; he's the thwarter. He'll be using his Moxy ability to counter her

As actor, she starts with an action attempt. "I start by dropping the name of my theology professor, a revered figure in Catholic circles." She rolls a 3, an Exasperating Failure. She gets a boon token.

The GM describes what's happening in the story: "Aloysius seems impressed when you mention the name of your school, then visibly stiffens at the mention of your prof. You suddenly remember the famous falling out they had in the 1980s."

"I can't let that stand," Katherine says. "I turn it around by mentioning my doctrinal break with my old mentor." She spends 1 Knowledge to reroll, taking her pool down to 3. She rolls a 4, a Hair's-Breadth Success. The GM hands her a levy token. She stands pat. "He seems resistant at first," the GM describes, "but in the end appears to be mollified." If Declan fails to counter, she wins.

But as this is the beginning of the contest, he has no reason to decline. He rolls his Moxy, getting an Ordinary Success. The GM interprets the result in terms of the scene at hand: "Declan says that he stays out of church politics like he does regular politics, because all the fighting is wearying.

Aloysius nods in agreement." Declan stands pat; if Winona's player, Katherine, fails to respond, he successfully counters her action, and old Aloysius will remain cold to the pardon scheme.

So Katherine spends another Knowledge point to reroll, dropping her pool to 2. Speaking in character as Winona, she says, "If people of conscience weren't willing to weary themselves fighting, the barbarians would take over." She rolls a 2, a Routine Failure.

The GM describes the unremarkable setback it represents: "He sighs vaguely, as if growing bored with the subject."

"I switch to a more directly faith-based metaphor," Katherine says. She spends another Knowledge point for a reroll, taking her pool to 1. She rolls a 6, an Impressive Success. "His eyes light up in ecstatic fervor," the GM narrates, while handing her a Refresh token.

A forced reroll of an Impressive Success costs 3 pool points. Declan has 3 points in his pool, which would take him to 0. He's stuck—if he stands pat, he loses. If he spends the point, he loses.

The GM mimes Declan's reaction, as he frustrated shrugs and starts texting on his mobile phone.

Katherine ends the contest with her Impressive Success. Winona achieves her objective, and something more besides. The GM decides that Aloysius hands her a video tape containing compromising footage of another PC.

Zero-Sum Contests

In some cases, the distinction between actor and thwarter won't be clear. The two contestants may both be vying to achieve the same goal in a zero-sum situation where only one can prevail. Examples might include:

- two candidates vie for audience favor in a televised political debate
- two bar brawlers arm-wrestle
- two shuttle pilots race to a distant asteroid

Here the GM decides who goes first (becoming the actor)



and who responds (as thwarter.) In a contest between a PC and a supporting character, the PC becomes the actor. In a contest between PCs, the one who had the greatest role in bringing about the contest, or who stands to gain the most from it, becomes the actor. If neither of these distinctions is clear, the PC who made the most recent action attempt is the thwarter. If none of these conditions apply, flip a coin.

Trumping

The Persuade and Rebuff abilities are always used in contests. They're paired: Rebuff is always used to counter Persuade. Attack and Defense are paired in the same way, with Defense always being used to counter Attack. As you've seen, each of these four abilities is defined as falling into one of six styles. Each style **trumps** a style from the opposite in its pair, and is trumped by another style. When a character contests against a style that trumps his, he suffers a levy of 1. This means that each reroll purchased costs the trumped contestant an additional pool point.

If their styles are not already known to opponents before a contest begins, characters reveal them as they make their first rolls of a contest.

Winona's Persuade style is Forthright. She attempts to persuade Attorney General Trenton Barlett that her mentor was unfairly tried. Barlett's Rebuff style is Lawyerly, which trumps Forthright. The cost of every reroll Winona pays for in the course of their contest increases by 1.

Wallops

If a contestant's rating (not current pool) exceeds another's by 5 or more, he can short-circuit the normal contest rules by spending 5 points on a **wallop**. No roll is required to wallop. The opposing character has one chance to avoid the wallop—by rolling and scoring an Impressive Success on his next and only roll. Otherwise, the walloping character prevails, as if he had rolled an Impressive Success.

Characters can wallop at any time during a contest. If an actor is walloped in response to a success, the one roll he gets in response to the wallop counts as a reroll, and must be paid for from his pool.

Aravian Delft, a deceased space trader reconstituted as the cyborg brain that rules the planet Vimble, is a supporting character with a Rebuff rating of 16, of which he has 12 points left in his current

pool. Player character Finnegan Swake wants to Persuade him to award an exclusive concession to sell an addictive fish oil to Delft's clone army. Finnegan's Persuade is 10. He begins the contest with an Ordinary Success, on which he stands pat. Aravian Delft's Rebuff rating exceeds Finnegan's Persuade by more than 5, entitling him to wallop. (His pool is lower than that, but that doesn't matter for this purpose.) The GM spends 5 of his points, dropping his Rebuff to 7.

Finnegan's only chance is to roll a 6 and score an Impressive Success. He rolls a 5. Delft conclusively rebuffs his offer and gets another benefit besides. Putting the rules outcomes in narrative terms, the GM describes the wily cyborg brain not only denying Finnegan's entreaties, but additionally cowing him into supplying the names of his fish oil vendors.

Multiple Targets

Characters may enter into contests against more than one opponent. Players must be able to justify how the single action they're describing could credibly work against more than one rival. The character acts, and all of the thwarters roll in response. The thwarter who gets the best response after rerolls are made is designated the champion. The champion takes over as sole responder for the remainder of the contest. If that thwarter loses, the others are all affected as well. If two or more thwarters tie for the same best response, the one with the highest pool in the ability at hand is chosen to represent the rest.

Winona wants to use her Etiquette ability at a dinner party attended by a trio of old money society ladies. Her objective is to show them that she's their social equal, which in turn will make it easier to get their assistance in her campaign to win a pardon for her mentor. All three of these supporting characters, Eleanora, Sally, and Peggy, will respond with their own Etiquette rolls. Their pools are 4, 3, and 2, respectively.

Thanks to previous boons, Winona's pool is 7, even though her rating is only 4. She rolls an Ordinary Success and stands pat. The GM describes her as successfully navigating the use of her various pieces of cutlery at the formal dinner party.



Eleanora gets an *Impressive Success*. Sally rolls a *Routine Failure*; Peggy, an *Ordinary Success*. Neither Sally nor Peggy bother to reroll; even if they got an *Impressive Success* to match Eleanora's, she'd still have the highest pool and be judged the champion. As champion, Eleanora stands pat on her *Impressive Success*. "Eleanora points out Winona's errant salad fork placement," the GM narrates, "but in such a charming, insouciant way that you can't respond directly without coming off as intolerably thin-skinned."

Because Eleanora's result is an *Impressive Success*, Winona must pay 3 points to roll

again. Her pool drops from 7 to 4. "I look for a similar tiny mistake on her part," says Winona's player, Katherine, "and try to point it out in an equally charming way that establishes us as social equals." She scores an *Impressive Success* of her own, and stands pat. "You see how quickly she knocked back her pre-dinner cocktail, and joke that a fondness for martinis also runs in your family."

The GM decides that Eleanora is having none of this, and spends 3 points from her pool to buy a reroll of her own. That drops her *Etiquette* pool from 4 to 1. She rolls an *Exasperating Failure*. That leaves her poised to lose no matter what happens—if she spends her last point on a reroll, her pool drops to 0, ending the contest.

"Eleanora attempts what seems like a witty quip about drinking and social class, but it comes out snobbish and cruel," describes the GM. "To paper over their collective embarrassment, the group begins to treat you like you belong there."

Undermining

When one player character has paid to make a die roll, but has yet to roll the die, another player may interrupt and attempt to undermine his action. The underminer describes what his character is doing to interfere with the target PC, specifying the ability he's using. The GM makes sure that the action fits the narrative situation and that the ability is appropriate to it. If not, she may propose an alternate action or ability, or, in rare cases, rule the undermining attempt impossible.

The underminer spends any number of points from the relevant pool. This number is called the **stake**. The underminer proceeds to make an undermining roll. This roll can't be rerolled, is subject to no penalties or bonuses, and accrues no boon or levy tokens.

On any success, the stake is subtracted from the target's pool in the ability he is about to roll.

On an *Impressive Success*, the stake is then added back to the pool the underminer spent from.



On a Dismal Failure, the pool the underminer spent from drops to 0 and he loses any refresh tokens he may have banked.

The timing of an undermine attempt means that the acting character always gets to make at least the one roll he's already paid for. However, the undermine may then reduce his pool to 0, making that the last roll he can afford to make.

PCs may never undermine GM-controlled characters. GM-controlled characters may never undermine PCs.

Rum Keg Annie (Brenda) wishes to interfere with John Belmay's attempt to woo a willowy captive heiress aboard the Black Swan. John's player, Errol, is about to start a Persuade attempt to capture the girl's affections. He has 9 points in his Persuade pool. Annie has 7 in hers.

"I begin humming a little ditty about John's famous exploits of debauchery," Brenda proposes, "including a mention of his various sexual diseases."

Errol objects that she ought to be using performance, but Brenda convinces the GM that it's not the quality of the singing but the persuasive content of her improvised lyrics that ought to reduce John's chances of success.

Brenda spends 5 Persuade points from her pool on the stake, dropping Annie's pool to 2. She rolls a Hair's-Breadth Success. As a result, John's Persuade pool drops from 9 to 4 before his wooing attempt even begins.

Note that the Hair's-Breadth Success does not force Brenda to take a levy token.

Only one undermining attempt can be made per resolution. Where two or more players want to undermine the same resolution, the one willing to purchase the highest stake takes precedence. If multiple players want to undermine but no one is willing to outspend anyone else, those characters are assumed to be too busy interfering with each other to undermine the target.

Pooled Effort

To boil down a complicated series of tasks into a simple outcome, call for a pooled effort contest. This is appropriate when many PCs are working together to achieve a single goal by varied means. For example, "Skulduggery and Crossbones" treats the effort to board an enemy ship and overcome its crewmen as a pooled effort.

- 1 First, the GM and group agree on the desired outcome the characters are seeking.
- 2 Then, each player specifies the ability he wants to use. If it seems unsuited to the task, the GM discusses it, suggesting an alternative ability. Sometimes the task clearly calls for a particular ability, in which case the GM simply announces what that is.
- 3 The players then describe what they're doing to achieve their goal.
- 4 Each player makes an uncontested roll of the chosen ability. When each of these rolls has resolved, with the characters out of points or standing pat, the numerical results of each are added up and averaged together. We are sorry for making you use a calculator.
- 5 The final average, rounded down to the nearest whole number, is used to determine the degree of success for the group as a whole. (On an additional expenditure of 3 points from a relevant pool by each participating character, round up to the nearest whole number.)
- 6 If the characters must risk physical harm to complete the task, any character ending on a failure must make a Defense, Athletics or Moxy roll. If this fails, the character takes one injury (p.37), unless the overall failure was Dismal, in which case the character takes two injuries. Defense is used for fights; Athletics for other overtly physical situations, and Moxy when the threat comes from passive or environmental factors, like poison, exposure or disease.

Having fallen on hard time, Finnegan Swake (Kevin) and crewmen Serig Allagan (Andrew) and Poria Manto (Erin) have agreed to act as exterminators, clearing a junked spaceship of its infestation of Silurian neuro-ants. As GM, you start by asking each player how they want to handle this.

"I use Athletics to jump in and zap the ants with the polarizing dechitinizer," says Andrew, who not coincidentally has the best Athletics rating.

“I use Knowledge (Biology) and my scanner to pinpoint the most psychically active ants, guiding Serig in his targeting efforts,” says Erin.

“I use Attack and wade right in there with my dechitinzer as if they’re a horde of enemy fighters,” says Kevin, whose other relevant abilities are comparatively poor.

The three players roll simultaneously. When it’s all over, Finnegan ends on a Routine Failure, while Serig and Poria both have Hair’s-Breadth Successes. This averages, rounding down, to a 3: an Exasperating Failure.

You tell them what this means: the group nearly gets the ants out of the ship, but then a new swarm appears, as if from nowhere. You decide that each of them must make a Moxy roll to avoid injury from exposure to the ants’ psychic disruption field.

Contestants gain boons or levies from their individual results during a pooled effort, not from the final averaged outcome.

Some pooled efforts may risk physical harm to the participants. Participants suffer wounds according to the following table.


Character’s Individual Failure	Group Result: Success	Group Result: Failure
Dismal	1 injury	2 injuries
Routine	No injury	1 injury
Exasperating	No injury	No injury



GANGING UP

Multiple actors can gang up against a single countering character at the GM’s discretion. The GM disallows tasks where the chaos and confusion added by multiple participants outweighs the benefits of combined effort.

Persuasion is the classic example of a task where ganging up doesn’t work. When faced with multiple persuaders, people become defensive and ever more resolved to stick to their original position. Characters wishing to support a Persuade attempt are better off finding unobtrusive justifications to transfer points (p. 11.)

 In combat, no more than three man-sized attackers can face off against a single opponent. Defenders may reduce this number by moving into confined spaces or putting their backs against walls.



The characters who are ganging up chooses one of their number as point person. The other characters in the outnumbering side are designated as secondaries. Each secondary must make a transfer to the point person in the ability used to resolve the contest. The resolution proceeds as a normal one-on-one contest, except that the outnumbered character faces a levy equal to the number of secondaries. Any boons or levies gained during the contest from Exasperating Failures and Hair's-Breadth Successes are awarded to the point person, with the secondaries either left out in the cold or spared additional losses, as the case may be.

If the outnumbered character loses, injuries and other consequences are suffered as normal.

If the outnumbering side loses, any injuries, losses or other consequences suffered by the point person are also suffered by the secondaries. The GM narrates the results so that the secondaries are worse off than if they'd stood back and transferred points without getting directly involved.

The pirates John Belmay (Errol), William Washburn (Claude) and Rum Keg Annie (Brenda) are all trying to wrestle a gigantic shark off the deck of their ship, the Black Swan, and into a hold where it can be safely butchered. John has an Athletics pool of 5, William has 4 and Annie 7. The group decides to make Annie the point person.

Errol transfers 4 Athletics points to Brenda; with the transfer fee of 1 taken into account, this reduces his pool to 0. William transfers 2 points, paying another 1 for the transfer, leaving his Athletics pool at 1. Annie's pool has increased to 13.

The shark's Athletics pool is 12, but it now faces a levy of 2 on all of its rolls. Although only Brenda will be rolling and choosing whether to reroll or stay pat during the contest, the GM describes the in-game events as if all three characters are wrestling the shark. And if they lose, all of them will get equally bitten.

Annie leads off with an initial roll of 2, a Routine Failure. "You slip and slide on the deck, your greasy hands unable to find purchase on the shark's slippery hide," the GM narrates.

Brenda spends a point to reroll, dropping

her Athletics pool to 12. She pays for another reroll, dropping her pool to 11. And gets a Routine Failure. Again she rerolls, dropping her pool to 10, and gets yet another Routine Failure.

"Help out better!" Annie cries to John and William.

"Lead better!" they scream in unison, now wild with frustration.

Finally, after buying another reroll and dropping to 9 Athletics, she ekes out a Hair's-Breadth Success, taking a levy token in the process. She stands pat.

The shark would normally make its first exchange for free, but with the levy of 2 must drop its Athletics from 12 to 10 just to respond. It gets an Impressive Success.

"Its mighty jaws come snapping down, as if to cut the three of you in two. Which would make for six pieces of pirate... oh, you know what I mean," describes the GM.

"I don't believe this!" Brenda growls. She spends the 3 points to keep going against an Impressive Success, taking her pool down to 6. She rolls an Ordinary Success.

"You skitter from its jaws just in time, slipping and sliding on the wet galleon deck," the GM says.

The shark must spend 3 to respond—the usual 1, plus the levy of 2 for the gang-up. Its pool falls to 7. And it scores another Impressive Success. "The horrible jaws again snap hideously your way," the GM narrates.

Brenda spends 3 to respond, dropping her pool from 6 to 3. Suddenly it's not looking so good for the hungry, shark-averse pirates.

The shark's pool drops from 7 to 3 as it makes its countering roll—yet another Impressive Success!

Horrified groans resound through the gaming room as the GM announces the results. Errol seizes the GM's die, replacing it with one he hopes will prove unluckier.

Brenda spends her last 3 points, dropping her to 0. This roll is her last, so she'd better succeed—she gasps in relief as it comes up a Hair's-Breadth Success. She earns a second levy token.

The shark spends its last 3 points, and gets an Exasperating Failure.

"In its attempts to maneuver away from you, it slithers backward into the hold, landing with a thump. Now it can safely suffocate down there, where there's no one to bite," the GM narrates.

With her pool already at 0, Brenda's 2 levy tokens are moot.

If that last roll had gone the other way, all three pirates would have suffered an injury.

Multiple Contestants, One Prize

Multiple characters can engage one another in a zero-sum contest for a single prize. Each character rolls their first result at the same time. After seeing each other's results, they decide whether to reroll. They pay to reroll results at the standard rates: 3 for a Dismal Failure, 1 to overturn any other result. Once everyone has taken all desired rerolls, the character with the best result wins.

Ties go to the character with the highest pool in the ability being contested. If two tied contestants have equal pools, compare ratings. If they have equal ratings, each rolls again. The first tie-breaker roll costs no points, but the results can be rerolled, at the standard rates. If two or more contestants are determined to win, they may spend a great many points to get Impressive Successes, perhaps precipitating yet another round of tiebreaker rolls.

Multiple contestant contests are an ideal choice when several characters, especially several PCs, all try to get the same favor from a third party character. In this context, the object of their attempts is called a granter. In this case, all of the participants use their Persuade abilities, and no one, not even the character who stands in judgment, Rebuffs. This assumes that the granter has decided to grant the favor but hasn't chosen a recipient. The granter's Rebuff comes indirectly into play if his Rebuff style trumps or is trumped by a contestant's Persuade style (see p. 16.) A contestant suffers a levy of 1 if his Persuade is trumped

by the granter's Rebuff and, in an exception to the usual rule, gains a boon of 1 if his Persuade trumps the granter's Rebuff.

The PCs Winona Fingerhut (played by Katherine), Janine Simmons (Angela), Paul Cutter (Ian) and Henry Doss (Chris) all attempt to convince the president to send them on a fact-finding tour of Italy's wine-producing regions. Their Persuade pools are as follows: Winona 8, Janine 10, Paul 7, and Henry 8. The president's Rebuff style is Obtuse; this is trumped by the Intimidating Persuade style, used by Janine, and trumps the Glib Persuade style, used by Paul.

The GM asks all four players, in the order they're sitting around the room, to make their initial pitch to the President.

"As Interior Secretary," says Katherine, "it's important to compare our conservation techniques to those used in other countries."

"As Chief of Staff," growls Angela, "I need a break from keeping the media from learning about that little thing we were discussing earlier. That thing you don't want anyone to know about."

"I'm Vice President," says Ian, "and this is the sort of meaningless, foolish trip that only someone in my lowly, useless office should have to suffer through."

"As Defense Secretary, I can arrange for a NATO junket," says Chris, "I'll get all of my counterparts completely blitzed on San Gimignano and then bamboozle them into signing that missile defense agreement we want to shove down their throats."

All four players roll simultaneously. Katherine gets a Dismal Failure. Angela rolls an Impressive Success. Paul and Chris both get Hair's-Breadth Successes, and the levy tokens that go with them. Angela's character, Janine, adds 1 to her Persuade pool, as the boon from her trump. It goes from 10 to 11. Paul loses a point due to his levy for being trumped, dropping his pool to 6.



Janine is in the lead with her Impressive Success. She stands pat. Paul drops out, used as Vice President to getting only the lousy overseas assignments. Winona and Henry keep arguing.

"I of course also know about this thing that Janine is keeping under wraps," says Katherine, in character as Winona. "I could invite key reporters and columnists over to Tuscany, so they'll help us keep it mum in hopes of getting invited again next year."

"I know you're a muscular and unafraid leader, Mr. President," says Chris, as defense secretary Doss. "Given a choice between burying some petty scandal and getting big towering anti-missile missiles, you'll go with the missiles, won't you?"

Katherine and Chris each pay 1 to reroll, taking their characters' pools to 7 apiece. Katherine rolls an Impressive Success; Chris gets a Hair's-Breadth Success, and a second levy token. Winona is now tied with Janine and can go into a tiebreaker round. After a suitable snippet of dialogue, Chris pays another point for an Ordinary Success, dropping his pool to 6. He pays again, taking it to 5, only to roll a Dismal Failure. Not wanting to spend 3 points on a reroll, he withdraws from the contest.

Now both Angela and Katherine must roll again. Keeping the narrative going, the GM questions both of them, in character as the President. They respond with appropriate dialogue and then roll. Angela gets a Routine Failure, but also picks up a pool point from her trump boon, which balances out the expenditure for the reroll. Her pool remains at 11. Katherine scores a Hair's-Breadth Success. She pays 1 for the reroll, taking her pool from 7 to 6, and takes a levy token.

Keeping up the in-character dialogue, Angela rerolls, again paying effectively nothing for the privilege, thanks to the boon from her trump. She rolls a Hair's-Breadth Success and takes a levy token. Now that she has the same result as Katherine, another tiebreaker round begins.

Katherine sees the writing on the wall: Angela can keep rerolling for free, unless she's unlucky enough to get a Dismal Failure. At the same time, every new roll costs Katherine a point, depleting her pool in the game's most used ability. She bows out, allowing the Chief Of Staff her moment in the Tuscan sun. Surely some mischief can be arranged while Janine's away.

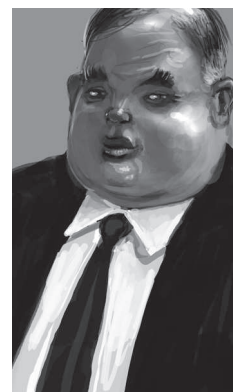
In character as the President, the GM gives the nod to Janine.

Chris has 2 levy tokens, so his pool is docked by 2, falling from 5 to 3.

Janine has 1 levy token, dropping her pool to 11 to 10.

So does Katherine, whose pool drops from 6 to 5.

Alternately, you might run a contest in which some contestants argue for the favor to be granted in the way they want, using Persuade, and another contestant or contestants argue that it should not be granted at all, using Rebuff. If a character arguing for the favor triumphs in the end, he gets the favor. When the winner argued against giving out the favor at all, it is withheld from everyone.



ABILITIES

Any word that appears in a stack of component cards and has a number next to it is the name of an ability. Characters use abilities to overcome story obstacles, or to defend against attempts to hamper them or remove them from the narrative.

The exact set of abilities appearing in a game of *Skulduggery* varies by setting. Choosing the set of abilities suitable for a new setting is part of the customization process—see p. 49.

The most important abilities, Persuade and Rebuff, are

described first. The major Brute Force options, Attack and Defense, also warrant special treatment. Everything else is a general ability.



Most abilities list one or more automatic successes. These are actions characters with those abilities can accomplish at the snap of a finger, without having to roll.

Persuade

Even in a brute force setting, Persuade remains *Skulduggery's* defining ability. Characters use it to get others to do what they want, or to stop doing things

Persuade Hints



Persuade works by finding out what your subject wants and convincing him that doing what you ask will get that for him. When stumped for a plausible line of argument, scan this list of common tactics for the choice that best suits the situation.



In most cases, you can use any of these tactics, regardless of your Persuade style. What changes is the way that you make your arguments. Styles appearing after a  icon are tough to fit with the tactic in question. Styles appearing after a  icon are especially appropriate to the tactic listed.

Quid Pro Quo: If he does you a favor, you'll do him a favor of equal value. "I'll put in a good word for you with the queen."

Payment: Offer money in exchange for services. (This is the most basic form of quid pro quo.) "I'll give you ten gold florins."

Mutual Benefit: Explain how the action will further a plan or goal of the subject's. Usually you're predicting that someone else will provide the rebuffer with a reciprocal benefit. "When word gets around that you've done this, Muffy will definitely see you as boyfriend material."

Flattery: Offer the subject ego gratification. "Only someone of your skills could unlock that cabinet without detection."  Intimidating  Charming

Coercion: Threaten to do something bad to the subject if he doesn't relent. "You don't want the press to get their hands on that security cam footage, do you?"  Charming  Intimidating

Appeal To Ideology: Show how the desired action upholds an abstract principle held by the subject. "Doing this will strike a blow for Anti-Syndicalism."

Appeal To Loyalty: Offer the emotional reward of doing a good deed either for you, or for someone else the rebuffer admires and supports. "The President needs you to take a hit for him on this one."

Appeal To Spite: Offer the emotional reward of harming or upsetting one of the subject's enemies. "Mandy will totally throw a conniption."

When in doubt, figure out what your opponent most wants, and tailor your argument to make it appear as if they'll get it by agreeing to do what you want.

As a persuasion attempt continues, you may have to switch tactics. Your subject may agree that the favor you ask will provide the benefit you offer, but require reassurances on other fronts.



they don't like. To do this, they must supply an at least halfway plausible argument that the desired course of action is also in the subject's self-interest. Persuade attempts are always contests, resisted by the subject's Rebuff ability. The persuading character is always the actor; the rebuffering character, the thwarter.

At the outset of a persuasion attempt, the acting player specifies what she wants the rebuffering character to do if she wins the contest. Examples might include:

- "Arrange a secret meeting with the President."
- "Allow me to spend unchaperoned time with her lovely daughter."
- "Agree not to try out for the lead role."
- "Confess to fouling the captain's rum supply."
- "Lower his price on quantum chastisers."

Players who are not skilled negotiators in real life may find it hard to come up with plausible reasons why the desired action would be in the rebuffer's best interest. Help them out by handing out copies of the Persuade Hint card on p. 23 at the start of play.

Prior to each Persuade roll, she improvises a brief line or two of in-character dialogue explaining why the desired action is in the thwarter's best interest.

Rebuff

Rebuff is the ability to resist persuasion attempts. It is always used reactively as the thwarting ability in a Persuade contest; see above.

Characters need not Rebuff to counter a proposition that is laughable on its face, either because it asks them to take an action which is ridiculously out of character, blatantly ignores their self-interest, or which has no

When To Let It Slide

Ideally the players offer further description of their actions before each roll. In practice, you'll sometimes want to relax the narration requirements and let them get on with the rolling. This may happen if inspiration flags, or when you want to speed up the storytelling. Choosing when to demand description and when to let it slide is as a matter of instinct, best honed over time.

chance whatsoever of success. Instead, they succeed automatically. Examples of absurd propositions: "Kill yourself now, please." "Give me all your money." "Now that I have given you the power of flight, jump off that skyscraper." "Strip naked and run into the state dinner, wearing this pork chop around your neck."

Prior to each Rebuff roll, the participant playing the rebuffer supplies a line of dialogue countering the arguments made by the persuader. When the rebuffer is a supporting character, the participant is the GM; otherwise, it's the player of the rebuffering character. For example:

- "The President clearly said he was not to be disturbed. Tell me what you need, and I'll take the matter under advisement."
- "Alas, allowing you to spend time alone with my daughter would open me up to charges of excessive liberality."
- "Even if I did step aside, your chances of getting the part would still be zero."
- "I can't confess to what I didn't do. It would be dishonest."
- "In fact, my price for these chastisers has already been heavily discounted. You do intend to pay in universal credits, I assume. Otherwise I have no choice but to add a surcharge of 3.5%."

Verbal Trumps

As previously mentioned, each Persuade style trumps, and is trumped by, a Rebuff style.

PERSUADE	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED By
Glib	Pure-Hearted	Obtuse
Eloquent	Contrary	Wary
Obfuscatory	Lawyerly	Penetrating
Forthright	Penetrating	Lawyerly
Charming	Wary	Contrary
Intimidating	Obtuse	Pure-Hearted

REBUFF	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED By
Pure-Hearted	Intimidating	Glib
Contrary	Charming	Eloquent
Lawyerly	Forthright	Obfuscatory
Penetrating	Obfuscatory	Forthright
Wary	Eloquent	Charming
Obtuse	Glib	Intimidating

Accepting Persuasion

Skulduggery stands on its head one of the basic unspoken assumptions of roleplaying. In most games, persuasion is a one-way street. The PCs can cajole, interrogate, intimidate and charm supporting characters, but are themselves immune to verbal influence. Players cling to this asymmetrical arrangement because it favors them. They hate losing control of their characters' actions. In *Skulduggery*, losing control is part of the fun. GM-controlled characters can persuade PCs to do things that aren't really in their self-interest, but can be made to seem so. PCs can persuade one another. But the wheel of fate turns quickly: the silky-tongued persuader of one scene can become the butt of an amusing scheme the next.

If you think some or your players will have trouble with this concept, be explicit about its central role in the game from the outset. *Skulduggery* is a game of reversals, and it's not a reversal if it can't happen to you.

The random, modular character generation helps out here. Players' emotional investment in their PCs will be lessened compared to a game where the players lovingly build their alter egos from scratch. Here it's not just okay, but desirable, to maintain an amused detachment from one's characters, so you can set aside the control issues and take amusement from their follies and setbacks.

Interpreting Persuade Results

When a persuasion contest ends on a **Hair's-Breadth Success** for the persuader, the persuaded character grudgingly submits to his request. He fulfills it as required, but causes some other problem that the persuader will soon have to deal with.

On an **Ordinary Success**, the persuaded character does as asked, neither exceeding expectations or subtly

sabotaging the persuader.

On an **Impressive Success**, the persuaded character does more than asked, surprising the persuader with a useful additional favor.

Regardless of the degree of success, the persuaded character may still resent or distrust the persuader after having fulfilled the request. The subject's lingering impression of the exchange persuader may be influenced by persuasion style:

Style	Lingering Impression
Glib	"I knew I shouldn't have gone along with him, but he talked rings around me, and before I knew it he had me ignoring what my gut was telling me."
Eloquent	"He argued so movingly that he could have signed me up for anything."
Obfuscatory	"I didn't understand what I was agreeing to, but I didn't want to seem stupid, so I didn't say anything."
Forthright	"Maybe I misjudged the situation, but hey, you have to admire his total frankness."
Charming	"He's such a great guy. I'm sure he didn't mean for it to turn out like it did."
Intimidating	"You don't understand. He left me no choice."

Attack

Your Attack ability allows you to physically harm others. For more detail on physical conflicts, see the Fighting rules, beginning on p. 36.

Defense

Defense allows you to avoid being harmed by enemy attacks. Gracefully avoid blows aimed at you by children, the infirm, and the elderly. For more, see p. 36.








General Abilities

Each setting grants characters access to some but not all of the abilities listed here. Abilities are presented in the following format:

Definition: This section broadly describes the sorts of actions the ability allows characters to undertake.

Automatic Success: Provides an example of an action the character can perform without having to roll.

General Ability Master List

- Appraisal
- Athletics
- Craftsmanship
-  Driving / Piloting
- Eavesdropping
- Etiquette
- Gambling
- Gossip
- Knowledge
-  Living Rough
- Management
- Mechanic
- Mischief
- Moxy
- Perception
- Performance
-  Physician
-  Riding
- Stealth
- Wealth
-  Weaponmaster

Counters: Lists abilities you can try to thwart with this ability.

Is Countered By: Lists abilities, if any, that might be used to thwart the ability in a contest. When no one actively tries to thwart the ability use, it's resolved without a contest.

Appraisal

Definition: After examining a valuable item, you can tell how much money you could get for it and who you'd approach to get the best available price. You can reel off information about the history and manufacture of the item, if pertinent to its value. Appraisal allows you to distinguish authentic items from forgeries, and to create forgeries yourself.

You get one chance to appraise an item; after that effort is resolved, you can't try again.

Automatic Success: Recognizing a renowned masterpiece as the real thing.

Counters: Persuade, when used to falsify the value, authenticity, or provenance of a valuable item, or when used to convince you to give up the item for less than its fair value.

Is Countered By: Craftsmanship, when it has been used to forge an item.

Athletics

Definition: Athletics reflects your overall physical fitness, allowing you to perform feats of physical prowess like running, jumping, climbing, lifting, and horseback riding.

Automatic Success: Run downstairs, safely swim in untroubled waters without drowning, leap over a ditch, display your physical robustness with your daily exercise routine.

Counters: Athletics abilities of rivals in zero-sum contests, like darts, arm-wrestling, foot races, or similar physical games and competitions.

Craftsmanship

Definition: This ability, found in pre-industrial settings, lets you handcraft a single type of common object, given the necessary equipment and materials. Sample items might include leather ware, cloth, clothing, ceramics, glass vessels, gems, jewels, furniture, or wicker objects.

When examining items of the sort you make, you can identify their quality. On an Impressive Success, you might even be able to name their makers.

When seeking employment or haggling over the value of items in your category, you may spend Craftsmanship points on Persuade or Rebuff.

Automatic Success: Make a simple repair to an object in your category.

Counters: Craftsmanship, when used in a zero-sum contest to decide whose work is superior.

Is Countered By: If used to create forgeries, Appraisal.



Driving / Piloting

Definition: You skillfully operate a vehicle, its type specified in brackets. You can evade pursuit or catch up to escaping drivers, sometimes executing spectacular and dangerous stunts. You can make minor repairs to vehicles of the specified sort.

For certain vehicles, like galleons or starships, the word “Driving” can be replaced by the more appropriate “Piloting.”

In some settings, vehicles might have weaponry onboard and enter into combat with one another; see p.41. To engage in vehicle combat, the character at the controls must have at least 1 point in his Driving / Piloting pool.

Automatic Success: Travel under normal conditions along a well-maintained road or standard route.

Counters: Other Driving abilities, in zero-sum chases or stunt competitions.

Eavesdropping

Definition: Allows you to covertly listen in on conversations. Within earshot, you pay close attention while seeming to direct your focus elsewhere. In modern settings, you might use electronic equipment to listen in from a distance. The consequences for getting caught with unauthorized bugging equipment can range from the embarrassing to the criminal.

Automatic Success: Overhear loud nearby conversations whose participants make no effort to keep their words to themselves.

Is Countered By: Perception

Etiquette

Definition: By showing mastery of the social rules followed among the company you find yourself in, you can prove that yourself as a well-mannered and trustworthy member of their group.

Automatic Success: Eat in a casual setting without humiliating yourself.

Counters: Etiquette, when used to critique someone else’s mastery of fine manners.

Gambling

Definition: Win at games of chance—sometimes by cheating. If you decide to follow the rules, you easily calculate the odds of various standard bets and gambits. If you wish to cheat, you know how to palm cards, mark decks, and load dice. You can spot the cheating of others. If confronted with an unfamiliar game, you can quickly learn its rules and begin to intuit its optimal strategies. Where wagering



is illegal or undertaken only in secret, Gambling finds where the action is.

Much of a gambler's success rests in his ability to disguise his talents until he moves in for the kill. You are adept at portraying yourself as a naïf barely familiar with the rudiments of the game at hand. You can figure out when to quit before angering your gambling companions, and when leaving the table without giving them a chance to recapture your winnings would itself start a fight.

Automatic Success: Identify the game being played. Find a gambling den in a community where games of chance are perfectly permissible.

Refresh: Take a relaxing day's break from gaming, avoiding intoxicants and heavy meals.

Counters: Gambling, whether used as in a zero-sum contest to see who wins a game, or to spot another's cheating in a game (see below.)

Cheating

Honest play has its limits. Any time you pay to overturn your own Dismal Failure, or to reroll in the face of an opponent's Impressive Success, your character is cheating.

After a contest by a character who took either option, any other character can attempt to prove that he cheated. To do this, that character must make a successful Gambling roll, ending on a result that equals or bests the end result of the original gambling contest.

Gossip

Definition: Gather information by tapping a variety of sources and engaging in superficial chatter. The intelligence gleaned tends to be about people's faults or secrets, professional or personal.

You can check the truth of an assertion by consulting the rumor mill.

Use Gossip to disseminate damaging information about others in a way that can't be traced back to you.

Gossip can also be used to suppress scuttlebutt regarding your own dirty laundry. On a success, you spread gossip about someone else that makes your own transgressions seem mild and boring in comparison. The rumors about you fade from public discourse as this new, more compelling scandal becomes the center of attention.

Automatic Success: Discourse knowledgeably on well-

publicized scandals of the rich and famous.

Is Countered By: Gossip can be used to identify you as the originator of a rumor, or to ensure that the dirt you're trying to obscure remains a juicy topic of discussion.

Knowledge

Definition: Either off the top of your head or through research, reel off facts on a variety of subjects, mostly of an academic nature.

Automatic Success: Easily cite the rudimentary facts of your specialization (see below.)

Specializations

The subject appearing in brackets after your Knowledge ability is your specialization, the topic of study you know in the greatest depth. Types of specialization depend on the setting. Examples might include Art History, Astronomy, Biology, Constitutional Law, Engineering, Music, or Semiotics.

Checks to see if you know a fact concerning your specialization are undertaken as normal. Checks for somewhat related fields take a levy of 1; the GM determines which fields are somewhat related based on what seems to make sense at the time. A character specialized in Art History probably treats any other historical field as somewhat related. An astronomer probably has somewhat of a handle on physics, mathematics, and general science. Constitutional law implies a glancing familiarity with other legal fields, and so on.

Knowledgeable characters may still make checks for completely unrelated fields of knowledge, but at a penalty of 1 and levy of 1.

 **Living Rough**

Definition: You can survive in the wilderness. You know how to forage for food and find fresh water. When you need warmth, you can make a fire. In extreme temperatures, you deploy techniques used to avoid frostbite or heatstroke. You know edible plants from toxic ones, and can explain how to safely behave around wild animals.

Living Rough includes the ability to follow the trails in the wilderness, whether left by men or animals.

Automatic Success: Deciding to seek shade during a resoundingly hot day. Follow a trail of bloody footprints across white marble flooring.

Counters: To determine whether you catch up with the object of a search, pit your Living Rough against his Stealth. To move without trace in the wilderness, the chased character must have a rating of at least 1 in Living Rough.

Management

Definition: Perform administrative and bureaucratic duties. Maintain account books. Devise and follow a budget. Spot errors and fraud in others' ledgers. Accomplish, directly or through intermediaries, household and office tasks. Secure supplies. Notice and rectify personnel issues.

Automatic Success: Smell alcohol on the breath of a drunken subordinate.

Counters: Can be used against another character's Management ability in a zero-sum contest to manipulate or draw resources from the organization you both belong to.



Mechanic

Definition: Repair technological devices, particularly vehicles. In a pre-industrial setting, this ability is renamed to specify a vehicle type. For example, in a pirate game, it becomes shipwright.

Automatic Success: Perform a basic check of a vehicle's soundness while it is docked or parked.

Counters: Can be used to improve a vehicle's condition during vehicle combat, p. 41.

Mischief

Definition: Plan and execute pranks, practical jokes and acts of sabotage, provided they have some sort of physical component. This is the ability you use to fill lockers with shaving cream, hack into websites, disable engines, or plant misleading evidence. If your position is one of shadowy power, this ability goes beyond mere japey, allowing you to order acts of kidnapping, cruel interrogation, or even murder.

Automatic Success: None.

Is Countered By: Perception, to spot the telltale signs of your trap before it is sprung. In a Mischief vs. Mischief contest, two pranksters battle one another, with the loser the one who is deemed by observers to have suffered the most humiliating practical joke.

Moxy

Definition: Maintain confidence and composure under stress. Appear brave in the face of danger, unruffled in the midst of chaos, and unfazed when confronted with surprising information. Avoid crying out in pain when hurt or injured.

Make Moxy to checks see if you suffer injury when exposed to non-violent environmental factors. It determines your body's response to poison, intoxicants, and contagions.

In settings where magic or advanced science exists that might override your will or judgment, use Moxy to retain self-control.

Automatic Success: Remain calm under stress-free conditions.

Is Countered By: Can be used against another character's Moxy in a zero-sum contest to determine who shows the greater self-control in a stressful or dangerous situation.

Perception

Definition: With finely honed senses, you discern telling details in your environment. Pick out and identify strange sounds or smells. Spot out-of-place people and objects.

GMs should call for Perception rolls only when something important is at stake. Players have a right to feel unfairly treated if tricked into spending points on inconsequential information.

If there is something to detect, but you fail your Perception roll, you notice nothing. Unless, that is, you score a Dismal Failure, in which case you perceive something directly contrary to the truth. (For example, if you're looking for signs of forced entry into your apartment, you decide that your alarm system is in working condition, when in fact the assassins lurking within have skilfully sabotaged it.) However, because you were asked to roll, the player still knows that his character is missing something, perhaps leading to a sense of unease.

When a less-than-practised liar tells you an untruth, Perception may allow you to spot the hallmark signs of deception: fidgeting, averted gaze, too many or too few details. It is not a reliable lie detector. Success represents the gut feeling you get when you hear a fishy story. Perception doesn't indicate what the truth is; Gossip might help with that.



Automatic Success: Seeing objects in plain sight. Noticing the telltale behavior of a really poor and obviously guilty liar.

Counters: Gambling (when used to cheat) Stealth.

Perceiving With Other Abilities

GMs may generously allow other Abilities can stand in for (or replace) Perception. To notice the strange characteristics of a wound, you could use Physician instead of Perception. Appraisal can be used to spot forged items; Gambling, to winnow out cheaters.

Performance

Definition: Entertain others with a public display of song, dance, acting, music, spoken word, or other performance art. In scenarios centering around performance, the ability may be broken up into a number of separate art forms. Each specialty, indicated in brackets, is an ability of its own, applied to situations that bring that form into play. For example, “Casting Call”, which revolves around the performance of a school musical, breaks the performance ability into singing, acting, and dancing categories, along with various others. Musical performance may specify a particular instrument.

Automatic Success: Project basic competence during a low-pressure rehearsal.

Counters: other Performance abilities, in a competitive context.



Physician

Definition: Treat wounds and injuries. Diagnose and cure disease.

Physician rolls aid injured characters. On a success, you may remove one or more injuries, at a further cost of Physician points.

- **Hair’s-Breadth:** spend 3 additional Physician points to remove 1 injury.
- **Ordinary:** spend 3 additional Physician points to remove 1 injury, or 6 points to remove 2 injuries (suffered by the same character.)
- **Impressive:** spend 1 additional Physician point

to remove 1 injury, or 3 points to remove 2 injuries (suffered by the same character.)

Automatic Success: Diagnose common maladies.



Riding

Definition: You can ride, race, and perform stunts on horseback. In some historical settings, the horse might be replaced with another beast, like a camel. In fantastic settings, the horse might be replaced by a creature from myth or science fiction. Your GM will describe unusual creatures and their quirks as mounts.

Where the character rides more than one type of animal, or the animal is something other than a horse, the beasts are listed in brackets after the ability name.

T. E. “Bumpy” Ryder-Smythe is both a splendid equestrian and an increasingly passable camel rider. His ability reads Riding (Horse, Camel.)

Attempts to ride unfamiliar animals are made at a penalty of 1.

Automatic Success: Stay on a willing creature’s back at moderate speeds, in normal terrain.

Counters: Other Riding attempts in zero-sum contests: races, chases, obstacle courses.

Stealth

Definition: Stealth allows you to take actions without being seen. You can’t hide in plain sight, but you can move deftly and silently past distracted or inattentive observers. Stealth allows you to find good hiding places, ferret away small objects with sleight of hand, even engage in acts of pickpocketing.

Automatic Success: Remain unseen in the dark, behind a barrier.

Is Countered By: Perception

Wealth

Definition: You can solve a problem by throwing money at it. You spend from your vast reserves of cash to hire services, acquire equipment, or purchase favors.

Automatic Success: Acquire any standard consumer item at a retail outlet.

Is Countered By: Wealth, in a zero-sum contest of status

to show who can muster the bigger bankroll.

Weaponmaster

Definition: Oversee the operation of a complex weapons system, either installed in a vehicle or built into a fortified structure. The type of system varies by setting; examples include a galleon's cannons, a starship's laser array, or the siege engines attacking a medieval castle. Use this ability to determine success when loosing your weapons on an opposing vehicle, structure or force.

Automatic Success: Determine the current readiness and state of repair of your weapons system.

Is Countered By: See vehicle combat, p. 41.

Relationships

Relationship abilities allow characters to further their goals in the story by calling in favors from their allies, colleagues and relatives. A character a PC has a relationship to is called a **contact**. To gain a favor from a Relationship, the character makes an uncontested roll of the Relationship ability. The supporting character never Rebuffs the request. However, he is allowed to outright refuse the request, preventing the contest from occurring at all, if it conflicts with one of his goals, as found in his description. Descriptions of these characters appear in your play pack, formatted as follows:


Name and Title/Role (as it appears on the component card)

The title/role information is a phrase summing up the character's place in the world and implying the sorts of favors he or she can be expected to perform.

Personality: the few words that best describe the character's behavior and attitude

Goals: the character's most important objective or objectives, in order of priority.

Sample Favors: a bullet-point list of the types of actions the character is best able to perform for a PC

Abilities: the character's abilities, including Persuade, Rebuff, and  Attack, Defense and Moxy, along with general abilities

Here's a sample supporting character written up in Relationship format:



Khufu, Pharaoh Of Egypt

Personality: imperious, impetuous, indifferent to suffering

Goals: 1) build a great pyramid to house his tomb; 2) acquire treasure ; 3) sire a male heir; 4) acquire beautiful concubines; 5) maintain reputation as fearsome conqueror

Sample Favors: 1) reserve a spot in his tomb for favored persons when he dies, ensuring their ability to bask in his glory throughout the eternal afterlife 2) gift riches and treasure 3) grant rank in army, bureaucracy or priesthood 4) free slaves 5) order enslavement or death of enemies

Abilities: Attack 12, Athletics 8, Defense 6, Etiquette 4, Knowledge 4, Living Rough 4, Management 8, Moxy 8, Perception 6, Persuade 4, Rebuff 12, Riding (Horse, Camel) 8.

Burning a Relationship

Relationship rolls never deliver favors contrary to the contact's goals. To gain such a favor, the PC may choose to enter into a Persuade contest against the contact's Rebuff. As always, the PC must argue that the favor is in the contact's self-interest, even though it isn't. Once the contact discovers that it isn't, he ceases to be a contact and is scratched off the character's card. The

Relationship is now considered **burned**.



Resistances

Skulduggery PCs are subject to a wide range of **temptations**, urges that impel them to self-destructive actions. When confronted with a temptation, the player rolls a Resistance, which measures their ability to avoid indulgence entirely, or at least to partake without negative repercussions. On a success, the character may respond to the temptation as the player wishes. On a failure, the GM describes a loss of self-control and the trouble it causes.

Winona is in the middle of an interview on a cable news talk show to discuss the administration's new environmental initiative. The interviewer surprises her by asking her reaction to a financial scandal involving an ally of the President's. "I'm not prepared to comment on that," says Katherine, in character as Winona.

This is the smart thing to do, but not in keeping with the temptation to showboat that afflicts all characters in this setting. The GM requires a roll to Resist Showboating. In character as the host, she says, "But if it turns out that the accusations are true, surely you can say that the senator should resign."

Winona's first roll is a Routine Failure. "You crack a little," says the GM.

Katherine complies with the GM's prompt: "Ah, well, yes, but that's a hypothetical, and I don't do hypotheticals."

"You're not prepared to condemn embezzlement?" says the GM, once again as the interviewer.

Winona's Resist Showboating rating is a pitiful 1. She can only afford one reroll. She pays for it, dropping her pool to 0. Her roll is an Exasperating Failure. Unable to pay for another reroll, she has no choice but to stand pat.

The GM thinks for a moment, deciding what an Exasperating Failure means in this context. "You blurt out something damaging, then stop before going any further."

Katherine picks up the cue: "If the Senator was skimming from his campaign fund, he should be charged with a crime and expelled from—but of course we know no such thing, and doubtless it is a conspiracy against him by the opposition party, as craven and desperate as it is."

Winona leaves the studio cringing, knowing that the other PCs are now in a position to weaken her with the President. Her consolation prize is the 1 point boon she earns for her Exasperating Failure. This raises her Showboating Resistance back to 1.

Players may always choose to embrace temptation, declining to roll and accepting whatever ill consequences follow from their indulgence. GMs may feel free to intensify the after-effects of an unresisted wallow in temptation.

Each setting recognizes six temptations.

Where the Ω symbol appears in place of a rating, the PC is completely immune to that temptation and need never roll to avoid it. The player may still choose to have the character indulge. If he does so regularly in an ongoing game, the GM may choose to replace the Ω symbol with a rating of 1, to reflect the character's actual behavior.

GM-controlled characters are subject to the same weaknesses, but never roll to see if they fall prey to them. Instead, the GM lets them succumb or resist, depending on what sort of reversal of fortune the moment seems to call for. In general, their reactions to temptations tend to aid PCs who are currently in the underdog position, and undermine PCs on a winning streak.

Temptations give rise to the character's **key trait**, an adjective shown on the character's resistance card as a quick reference to the PC's personality and motivations. The key trait usually matches the name of the character's lowest-rated temptation. The adjective might in some cases be adjusted to fit the idiom of a particular setting.

The temptations are as follows:

Arrogance

This temptation impels you to demonstrate your superior judgment and intellect. When you succumb to arrogance, you act as if you are infallible. You overrate your own abilities and dismiss those of others. As a matter of reflex, you refuse advice. You wield the petty perks of authority as symbols of your self-evident superiority.

Key Trait: Arrogant

Avarice

This temptation kicks in whenever you are confronted with the opportunity to line your pockets or surround yourself with the fruits of wealth. You drop all other

goals to add to your riches, betraying whoever stands between you and the money you see as rightfully yours. As a penny saved is a penny earned, so you resist with miserly fury any attempt to part you from your hard-won wealth.

Key Trait: Greedy

Dissipation

The availability of intoxicating substances requires you to resist dissipation. When you fail, you indulge to the maximum, throwing aside concerns for your reputation, relationships, or physical well-being. You can't just stop at one drink; only absolute inebriation will do. The illegality of a substance merely makes it more appealing.

Key Trait: Dissolute

Gluttony

If not resisted, the impulse to gluttony leads to shameless overeating. Bouts of gluttony end only when the character has gorged to the point of nausea or immobility. Those with low resistances may be gourmets who salivate for the finest and most exotic cuisine. Alternately, they might seek their fat, salt and sugar desire in the form of low-grade but immediately satisfying junk food.

Key Trait: Gluttonous

Indolence

When confronted with a difficult task, particularly a physical onerous one, the character who succumbs to this temptation will instead remain comfortably ensconced in a comfortable chair, or perhaps settle in for a long nap. Characters with low resistance to indolence may believe in their goals, but in practice set them aside to indulge in long stretches of untaxing leisure.

Key Trait: Lazy / Indolent

Lust

The urge to gratify every sexual impulse, no matter how fleeting, rules the fevered consciousness of the libidinous character. He tosses aside long-term goals to pursue liaisons with anyone he finds attractive. The player defines what type of person the character lusts for. This may be tightly defined, or encompass any halfway interested partner capable of sexual congress.

Key Trait: Libidinous



Nitpicking

The urge to nitpick raises its ugly head whenever someone makes a minor factual error or grammatical mistake. A bout of unresisted nitpicking never addresses the main point of a discussion, but focuses with dogged persistence on a trivial surface issue. While nitpicking can sometimes work toward a character's goal, allowing him to torpedo a project with annoying distractions, the temptation applies only to useless or self-destructive descents into pettifoggery. (Strategic nitpicking is probably Obfuscatory persuasion or Lawyerly rebuff.) On a failed resistance, the character makes him seem foolish and annoying to people he needs as allies, or causes him to sabotage his own proposals through delay and vacillation.

Key Trait: Nitpicky

Paranoia

Believing themselves to be surrounded by enemies, characters with low resistance to paranoia paralyze themselves with groundless fears. They initiate plots against their supposed foes, turning imaginary





opponents into actual ones. Unable to trust others, they prove untrustworthy themselves. They make false assumptions by weaving completely unrelated events into proof of a vast conspiracy against them. Fearing the ruthlessness of the forces arrayed against them, they feel compelled to respond with bizarre secret schemes that would lead to humiliation or even imprisonment if exposed.

Key Trait: Fearful / Paranoid

Showboating

Characters who fail to resist the urge to showboat seek public attention. Grasping obviously for opportunities to appear important, they instead make themselves look foolish. When showboating verbally, the character trips himself up while gratifying his ego. If acting physically, he attempts a dangerous stunt he's unable to pull off.

Key Trait: Show-Offy

Spite

Spite is the impulse to gratuitously lash out at rivals, actual or perceived. Characters roll to resist when

confronted with a choice of pursuing their main goal, or taking a jab at a person they dislike. They launch their attacks in a passive or indirect manner, which if revealed will be regarded as deplorably underhanded. The character may float ugly rumors, damage treasured items, or make hurtful remarks to the victim's loved ones.

Key Trait: Spiteful

TAGLINES

Taglines are snippets of in-character dialogue, looking like this:

- "If I'd known the plank extended over shark-infested waters, I surely would have greeted the arrangement with more vigorous protest."
- "I've got some old costumes. You've got a barn. We can still put on the show!"
- "When I proposed a public-private partnership, this is not what I had in mind."
- "Forgive me while I lapse into unconsciousness."
- "Sure. Blame it on the alien."

Some taglines are vague; others imply particular events that might occur in the story. It is not only acceptable but expected for players to drive the plot in directions that allow them to use their taglines.

Taglines initially appear as part of a player's card stack and are replaced when used. Players start play with these three taglines. When they use a tagline, they get a new one, supplied from the list provided with each scenario. (See pages 34, 63, 71, 79, and 91 for example tagline lists.) Players use taglines by speaking them in character in a way that makes sense in context and is entertaining to the other participants. Appropriate use of a tagline allows the player to refresh one or more pools.

When a tagline is spoken, the GM judges how well it fits the situation.

Temptations and GM-Controlled Characters

Rather than rolling their resistances against the full range of temptations, supporting characters fall prey to one temptation apiece. This temptation is referred to as the character's **downfall**. If the player characters successfully place the downfall temptation in the supporting character's path, they win a significant advantage over him. The GM contrives the situation so that the PCs must overcome an obstacle, scoring at least one success in the process, to confront the supporting character with his downfall. The advantage is as great as the GM can supply without bringing the story to a premature close or otherwise throwing the pacing out of whack.

Winona Fingerhut wants to cajole journalist Billy Crigger into delaying his story about cost overruns at the Flackahoochie Dam project. She uses her Gossip to learn about him. After scoring an Ordinary Success with that ability, she hears that Crigger puts a fresh bottle of whiskey in his desk drawer every morning as soon as he arrives at the newsroom. (Note how the GM describes the Downfall narratively, rather than just using the rules terms and saying, "Crigger's Downfall is Dissolute.") Having scored the success, she can take a bottle of fine single malt to her meeting with Crigger and gain an advantage. In this case, the GM decides to have Crigger crumble altogether and give her what she wants.

Characters' downfalls need not correspond to the six temptations appearing on PCs' resistance cards. They may or may not relate to temptations defined in this section; if not, they should be self-explanatory in a word or brief phrase.

Downfalls aren't provided for supporting characters who appear as the PCs' Relationships (p. 31.) To get favors from them, players are expected to roll their Relationship abilities.

If the line is completely nonsensical in context, its use confers no benefit. The tagline is not replaced¹.

If the line makes sense as used, but is not particularly amusing or dramatic in effect and garners no noticeable response from the other participants, the player gains one refresh token. The tagline is then replaced; see below.

If the line makes sense and garners an appreciative response from one or more participants, the player gains two refresh tokens. The tagline is replaced.

If the line is so well placed that it elicits real laughter, spontaneous applause or true gasps of appreciation, the player gains three refresh tokens. The tagline is replaced.

Refresh tokens not spent immediately are referred to as **banked**. The player may spend a refresh token to refresh any pool at any time a resolution is not in progress. It is

¹ GMs should show mercy to first-time players who don't seem to grasp the concept. If they genuinely seem confused, and aren't just trying to ditch a tagline they don't like, replace the tagline but allow no refreshes. Be sure to re-explain the concept as you do so.

never possible to refresh during a resolution or contest, no matter when the tagline is spoken. When a banked refresh is spent, the player hands the token back in.

Taglines are a limited resource. In the unlikely but possible event that a group runs through all of the supplied taglines in the course of a scenario, no more become available. At this time, players get to spend any of their banked refreshes. Once they've spent as many as they can or wish to, any banked tokens are removed from play. Refreshes become impossible for the rest of the game.

Frequency of tagline use may vary from group to group and even from one scenario to the next. If you see that refresh tokens are piling up faster than players can spend them, perform an adjustment on the fly to restrict the supply. Award 1 token if the tagline is appropriate, and 2 tokens only for the most spectacularly entertaining uses.



FIGHTING

Combats occur as a series of linked contests, in which combatants trade places as actor and thwarter.

The actor tries to hit the thwarter by making an Attack check. If the attacker stands pat on a success, the thwarter may respond with a Defense check. Standing pat on a failure causes an injury to the thwarter.

Then the two combatants swap roles; the former thwarter becomes the actor, attempting to hit his opponent, who is now the thwarter. Again, a success for the attacker injures the defender, unless countered by a Defense success by the thwarter.

When an attacker scores an Impressive Success, the thwarter faces a levy of 3 on his next Defense roll. When a thwarter scores an Impressive Success, the attacker faces a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll.

The first Defense roll in response to an Impressively Successful attack likewise faces a levy of 3.

The fight concludes when one character:

- chooses to surrender
- is walloped by either the Attack or Defense ability (p.37)
- is unconscious, downed, dead, or dying (p. 37)

When multiple combatants are involved, the fight concludes all of the characters on one side of the fight have left the combat for the above reasons.

Events which would ordinarily take place at the end of a contest kick in only at the conclusion of a combat. This includes the final squaring of boon and levy tokens. Characters may not refresh during a fight.

Who Goes First?

To determine the order in which combatants act, called the **initiative ranking**, first determine whether the character starting the fight has surprised his opponent.

Surprise

If it's not clear whether the defender can tell that an attack is coming, contest the attacker's Persuade or Stealth against the defender's Perception. Use Persuade if the defender can already see the attacker but may be fooled by his efforts to disguise his hostile intent. Use Stealth if the attacker is ambushing from a hiding place.

If there is more than one defender, this is a contest

against multiple targets (p. 16.) The attackers choose which of them takes part in the surprise contest. If they gain surprise, this character is the first to attack.

Should an attacker gain surprise, he and all of his allies (if any) strike first. They choose their respective positions in the initiative rank. If there is a dispute between them as to who acts first, the attacker who entered the surprise contest goes first. Then all of the combatants on the other side go, in order of their current attack pools, from highest to lowest.

No Surprise

If no one is surprised, the characters take initiative ranks in order of their current attack pools, from highest to lowest.

Breaking Initiative Ties

When breaking ties between characters who would otherwise act at the same time (or to establish any other kind of ranking between *Skulduggery* characters), give priority to PCs over GM-controlled characters. When breaking a tie between PCs, give priority to the player who will next have a birthday.

Rounds and Exchanges

A sequence of attacks, in which each character gets the chance to attack once, in the order determined by their initiative rank, is called a **round**.

When a round ends, a new one begins. In this new round, every character who has not left the fight gets another chance to attack.

This continues until everyone on one side has left or been removed from the fight, as described above.





Combat Trumps

Each defense is trumped by one style of attack, and trumps another, like so:

Style	Trumps	Is Trumped By
Parry	Caution	Strength
Dodge	Ferocity	Speed
Sure-Footedness	Cunning	Finesse
Intuition	Finesse	Cunning
Misdirection	Speed	Ferocity
Vexation	Strength	Caution

Style	Trumps	Is Trumped By
Caution	Vexation	Parry
Ferocity	Misdirection	Dodge
Cunning	Intuition	Sure-Footedness
Finesse	Sure-Footedness	Intuition
Speed	Dodge	Misdirection
Strength	Parry	Vexation

Combat Wallops

A character successfully walloping an opponent with the Attack ability may choose the condition he ends up in: hurt, downed, or dead. By spending an additional 3 points, the attacker can kill him in spectacularly visceral fashion.

Walloping an opponent with Defense forces him to immediately disengages from the fight, certain that his attack is doomed to fail. Supporting characters remain disengaged unless left little choice by a dramatic new turn of events, like a renewed attempt to attack or corner him.

Injury

Characters who are successfully attacked and fail a Defense roll, suffer an **injury**. Injuries are cumulative; the character's condition depends on the number of injuries he's racked up.

A character with one injury is **hurt**. Hurt characters can act normally, but suffer a levy of 2 on any roll—including subsequent Defense rolls.

With two injuries, the character is **down**. All he can do is lie prone, or maybe writhe in pain. Without others to defend them downed individuals are at their enemies' mercy. A foe can kill the character merely by trying.



On a third injury, the character is either you are either **dead** (if his Moxy pool is 0) or **dying**. Dying characters have fifteen minutes to live per remaining Moxy point.

Outside of combat, characters may suffer one or more injuries by failing Athletics or Moxy checks. Athletics governs overtly physical threats, while Moxy covers insidious or subtle means of harm like poison, illness, or exposure.

Unconsciousness

In some circumstances, the worst consequence you risk from a failed Defense or Athletics roll is unconsciousness. For example, in combat, an attacker can always opt to knock the victim out rather than risk dealing permanent harm. In such situations, two injuries mean that you're **unconscious**, not down. Every half hour the player may make a Moxy roll to see if the character wakes up. After half an hour, others may wake the character by shaking him, dousing him with cold water, or otherwise jolting him. Awakened characters are **hurt**.

A character who knocks out another and then tries to kill him is invariably interrupted by a surprising event that places him at a sudden disadvantage. While the attacker deals with the troubling plot twist, the intended victim wakes up, unharmed.

Weapons

Skulduggery is interested in conflicts between people, not in the relative strengths and weaknesses of various inanimate objects. For this reason, it doesn't bother to reflect the differences between types of weapon in its combat system. How well you rend, mutilate and contuse your foes depends on your Attack value. You are free to think of your pool as incorporating the evident bad-assedness of your favored weapon, or of your inherent

bad-assedness at using a simple or inferior weapon.

Tracking Boons and Levies

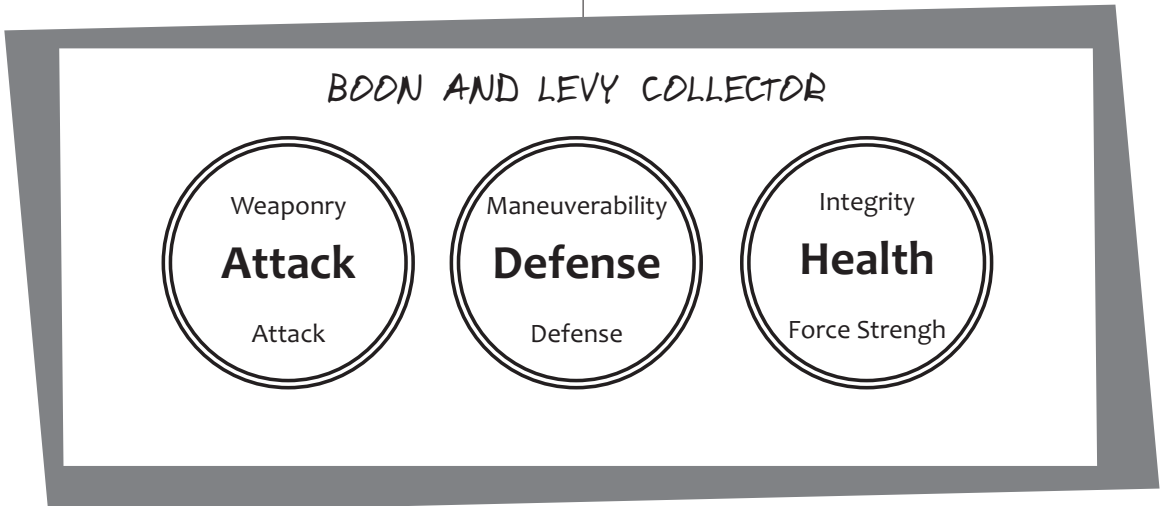
Most other contests call on a single ability, making it easy to assess boons and levies. During combat, players must track which ability a given boon or levy token applies to. When combats start, provide copies of a diagram called the Combat Boon and Levy Collector to each participant. As GM, you'll need one for each supporting character taking part in the fight. The diagram appears in a photocopy-ready page at the back of the book. (You can also download it in PDF form from the Pelgrane Press website.) When a combatant is assessed a boon or levy, place the token in the circle corresponding to the ability.

Sample Combat



Space trader Finnegan Swake is physically attacked by a vendor enraged by his admittedly long-standing failure to pay his outstanding invoices. Finnegan's combat-related pools are Attack (Cunning) 8 and Defense (Intuition) 8. The vendor, Dvor, starts with Attack (Strength) 10 and Defense (Dodge) 6. Neither combatant's Attack styles trump or are trumped by the other's Defense styles, leaving them more or less evenly matched. Dvor is a GM-controlled character.

Initiative Determination: *After chatting less than amiably about Finnegan's shortcomings as a businessman, Dvor lashes out at him without warning. In a contest pitting Dvor's Persuade against Finnegan's Perception (omitted for brevity), Dvor comes out on top. This allows him to strike first.*

Round One, Dvor's Attack: *Dvor attacks first. He gets a Hair's-Breadth Success, and stands pat on*



Resolving Physical Conflicts In Non-Violent Settings

Physical actions shouldn't dominate games where  or  abilities are not supplied. When a player wants to throw a punch, climb a wall, or do something else dangerous or action-oriented, the character makes a roll at a penalty of 1, which can't be rerolled. On a success, they achieve their goal, but in a realistic and not especially dramatic manner.

- The character punches a rival, and is then dragged off by bystanders. No one is really hurt.
- After a long and awkward struggle, the character shimmies up onto the roof.
- The character speeds his car to the hospital, where a police car catches up with him and charges him with reckless driving.
- When in doubt, imagine how the event would play out in a comedy or drama (as appropriate to your tone), as opposed to an action or adventure movie.

that result." He pulls out a force blade and wildly slashes at you," describes the GM. The GM places a levy token on the Attack circle in the boon and levy tracker she's using for Dvor.

Finnegan's player, Kevin, rolls Defense and gets a Dismal Failure. "You stumble, and his knife slashes through your jacket," the GM narrates. If this result is allowed to stand, Finnegan will suffer an injury. Kevin spends 3 Defense to reroll, dropping his Defense pool from 8 to 5. He rolls a Routine Failure. "As you regain your footing, he seems to drive his dagger deeper," the GM says. Kevin spends 1 point to reroll, dropping his Defense pool from 5 to 4, and scores a Hair's-Breadth Success. The GM gives him a levy token, which he places on the Defense circle of his boon and levy tracker. Kevin stands pat on this success. Finnegan has not been injured after all. "You dance backwards, looking down at the slash in your tunic left by his force dagger."

Round One, Finnegan's Attack: Kevin makes his first Attack roll, which costs him nothing, and scores a Hair's-Breadth success. He collects a levy token against his Attack pool, and stands pat.

"I scorch the air with a wide slash of my force cutlass!" a triumphant Kevin proclaims.

Now Dvor must respond with a Defense success. He rolls an Impressive Success. "Dvor leaps up on a radiation collector, kicking the blade from your hand," narrates the GM. This not only ends the attack, but will cost Finnegan a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll.

Round Two, Dvor's Attack: Dvor makes his first attack roll of the new exchange, which costs him

nothing. He gets an Ordinary Success. "From his superior height, he rains down a succession of blinding blows."

Kevin makes his Defense check, getting an Impressive Success. "The slashes I suffer are inconsequential!" Kevin crows. Now Dvor will also face a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll.

Round Two, Finnegan's Attack: Kevin pays the levy of 3 required by Dvor's previous Defense success, dropping his Attack pool from 8 to 5. He rolls a Hair's-Breadth Success and stands pat. "I aim an arcing blow at his knees!"

Dvor leads off with a Routine Failure. "He yowls," the GM narrates, "stung by the crackle of contact when between force field and bone." He pays 1 to reroll, dropping his Defense from 6 to 5. He gets a Dismal Failure. This costs him 3 to reroll, dropping his pool to 2. Dvor scores an Ordinary Success, protecting him from injury.

Round Three, Dvor's Attack: Because Finnegan's most recent Defense success was Impressive, Dvor's first roll faces a levy of 3, dropping his Attack from 10 to 7. He gets a Routine Failure. "Clearly still reeling from the pain, he lunges at you uncertainly," the GM says. She pays 1 from Dvor's attack pool for a reroll, taking his pool from 7 to 6. His result is an Exasperating Failure. "Shaking off the pain, he comes at you harder, swiping the air by your cheek." She collects a boon token for Dvor and pays another point, reducing his Attack pool to 5. This result is an Ordinary Success. "His next swipe hits closer to home—or, more precisely, your ribcage."



Finnegan must respond or take an injury. His first roll costs nothing. Kevin exults as it comes up as another Impressive Success. He is not only unhurt, but will subject Dvor to a costly levy on his next attack roll.

Round Three, Finnegan's Attack: Kevin makes an attack roll—this time without a levy, because Dvor's most recent Defense result was only an Ordinary Success. He gets an Ordinary Success and stands pat on it. "I just blitz right at him, with a fury of blows, hoping a few will find their mark," Kevin narrates.

Dvor now must make a Defense roll. He gets an Ordinary Success and stands pat on it. "He weaves back," the GM describes, "you make contact a bunch of times but nothing really lands."

Round Four, Dvor's Attack: Dvor must again pay a levy of 3 for his first roll of the attack, because Finnegan stood pat on an Impressive Defense Success. This drops his Attack pool from 5 to 2. The GM rolls a Hair's-Breadth Success, collecting a levy token and standing pat. "He shoulders into you, knocking you from your splendid defensive crouch."

Kevin makes a Defense roll, scoring an Ordinary Success. "I may be off my stride, but I'm still not hurt."

Round Four, Finnegan's Attack: Finnegan's first attack roll is an Exasperating Failure. Kevin collects a boon token and pays 1 Attack point to continue, dropping his pool from 5 to 4. The next roll is an Ordinary Success. He stands pat. "My first off-stride swings fall short, but then I bull into him, force blade crackling."

Dvor's first Defense result is an Exasperating Failure. Dvor earns a boon token and pays 1, dropping his Defense from 2 to 1. The GM's next roll is a Routine Failure. He pays his last point for another Exasperating Failure. Out of points and unable to reroll, he takes an injury. "Your aggressive style finally pays off," the GM says. "Dvor slips and slides and finally you smell the appallingly familiar smell of searing flesh." Dvor takes his first injury—he is now hurt, and takes a levy of 2 on all rolls.

Round Five, Dvor's Attack: Dvor's injury forces him to pay a levy of 2 for his first Attack roll. His Attack pool drops from 5 to 3. He gets an Ordinary Success; the GM stands pat on it. "Infuriated by pain, he slices at you with his force knife," the GM narrates.

Finnegan's initial Defense roll is a Routine Failure. Kevin pays 1 to reroll, dropping his Defense pool to 4. He gets an Exasperating Failure, and with it a boon token. He pays another point to reroll, getting a Hair's-Breadth success, and a levy token. "Feet skittering beneath me, I barely escape his wild swings," Kevin narrates.

Round Five, Finnegan's Attack: "I try to take advantage of his furious motion to find an opening and stick him again," Kevin says. Finnegan's first Attack roll is an Exasperating Failure. The GM pays 1 from his Attack pool, dropping it to 3. She rolls another Exasperating Failure, pays another 1 point from Dvor's pool, and gets a Hair's-Breadth Success. He has collected two boon tokens and a levy token, and his Attack is now at 2.

Dvor must now defend. If he had any points left, he'd face a levy of 2. With his pool at 0, however, he not only can't afford to reroll, but faces a penalty of 1 on the one roll he is allowed to make. The GM rolls a 4, which, after the penalty is applied, becomes an Exasperating Failure. "He evades you at first, but finally opens you up to a shot at his ribs. Again your force blade crackles home."

With two injuries, Dvor is down. He can do nothing but writhe in agony on the spaceport floor.

"I power down my weapon and walk away," Kevin says. "Let this be a lesson to all and sundry—Finnegan Swake's accounts payable department is a fearsome blade."

Finnegan now accounts for his boon and levy tokens. Attack has two levies and one boon, for a total of one levy. His Attack drops from 2 to 1. His Defense has 1 levy token, and drops from 3 to 2.

Not that it matters, but Dvor's two levies and one boon collectively drop his Attack from 5 to 4. A single Defense boon raises his pool from 0 to 1.





Vehicle Combat

In some settings, characters pit their vehicles in violent battles. Examples of vehicle combat include:

- galleons pounding one another with cannon fire
- space ship battles
- smash-up derby
- WWI flying aces
- giant robot duels

Each vehicle possesses three abilities: Weaponry is the offensive ability, taking the same role Attack does in personal combat. Maneuverability acts as an equivalent to Defense. In a departure from the pattern for persona combat, a third ability, Integrity, measures the vehicle's condition after it takes a hit.

Attacks are resolved as follows:

1. The attacker rolls Weaponry. If the attacker stands pat on a success, continue to the next step. If not, the attack ends.
2. The thwarter rolls Maneuverability. If the thwarter stands pat on a success, the attack ends. If not, continue to the next step.

3. The thwarter rolls Integrity. If the thwarter stands pat on a success, the attack ends. If not, the vehicle sustains damage.

When an attacker scores an Impressive Success with Weaponry, the thwarter faces a levy of 3 on his next Maneuverability roll. When a thwarter scores an Impressive Success with Maneuverability, the attacker faces a levy of 3 on his next Weaponry roll.

The first Maneuverability roll in response to an Impressively Successful Weaponry roll likewise faces a levy of 3.

Impressive Integrity rolls impose no levies on the opposing vessel.

Use the Boon and Levy tracker at the back of the book.

For successful vehicle combat to occur, the character at the controls must have at least 1 point in his Driving / Piloting pool. Points in this pool can be spent toward Weaponry or Maneuverability but not on Integrity. The piloting character may make all three sets of rolls for the vehicle. If this is the case, the vehicle is treated as inoperable (see below) when the character's Driving / Piloting pool drops to 0—unless another pilot with at



least 1 point in the pool is on hand to take over.

Alternately, the rolls might be made by a specialized crew of three PCs. The Driver / Pilot makes Defense rolls. A character with the Weaponmaster ability performs the Weaponry rolls, and the Mechanic makes Integrity rolls. In this case, the Driver / Pilot can only spend points from his ability on Maneuverability, while the Weaponmaster spends points from that ability on Integrity rolls. If any of these essential three crew members' relevant ability drops to 0, points may no longer be spent from the corresponding ship's pool.

When PCs add their own ability pools to a vehicle combat effort, they use a boon and levy tracker for the ship, and keep their own token piles on the side.

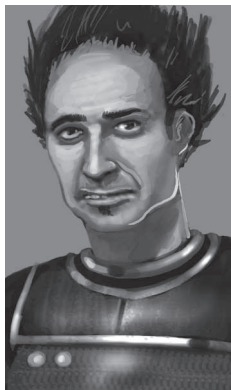
This rule is designed to give multiple players a direct role in a ship combat. When running ships crewed by supporting characters, GMs should save time by paying attention only to the ship's three pools.

Vehicle Damage

After failing its first Integrity roll, a vehicle is **compromised**. All subsequent Weaponry, Maneuverability and Integrity rolls are made at a levy of 2.

On a second failed Integrity roll, the vehicle is **inoperable**. It loses its basic propulsion and can no longer fire weapons. A sailing ship is dead in the water. Starships drift in space. Planes and other aerial vehicles must make emergency crash landings; a successful Piloting roll is required to forestall another Integrity check. All occupants of an inoperable vehicle must make Athletics rolls, and suffer injuries on failures.

On a third failed Integrity roll, the vehicle is **destroyed** beyond any hope of repair. All occupants must make further Athletics rolls, at a levy of 2, or suffer injury. When certain types of vehicle, like spaceships or aircraft in flight, are destroyed, all occupants are instantly killed.



Repair

Once it is safely out of combat and parked or docked, the Mechanic ability can be used to repair a damaged or inoperable vehicle. One success restores a damaged vehicle to full repair or renders an inoperable vehicle merely damaged. A vehicle in good repair refreshes its three pools on a Mechanics success attained in safe conditions, in a suitable facility.

Emergency repairs can be conducted during combat. The mechanic acts at the beginning of an opponent's attack, before her Weaponry roll. The roll itself takes a levy of 2. The vehicle is treated as automatically failing any Integrity rolls for the remainder of the round.

Example Of Vehicle Combat

These two exchanges from a longer contest serve as a brief example of vehicle combat.

The PC's spaceship, the Vantage, is locked in battle with a retrofitted salvage barge, the Scuttler, intent on retrieving the questionably obtained contents of the former ship's cargo hold. Finnegan Swake (Kevin) mans the helm as Pilot. Serig Allagan (Andrew) takes charge of the weapons array, while Kala Dharro (Philippa) stands ready with a positronic wrench in the engine room. The players are first up, followed by the Scuttler, as controlled by the GM. The Vantage is in full repair and has the following points in its pool: Weaponry 4, Maneuverability 2, and Integrity 6. The ship is so far unharmed.

Round Two, Vantage's Attack: As Weaponmaster, Andrew makes the Weaponry roll for his character, Serig. He has 5 points left in his Weaponmaster pool. "I let loose a net full of ion mines," says Andrew, as Serig. His first result is a Routine Failure. "The mines float wide of the Scuttler's rusty hull," the GM narrates. Andrew pays 1 from the ship's Weaponry pool, dropping it to 3, to reroll. He gets an Ordinary Success and stands pat. "A searing bolt from the main phase cannons dances across their shielding," he describes.

Since the Scuttler is controlled by supporting characters, the GM doesn't bother to track separate pools for its crewmen. Its Maneuverability pool is now 4. The Scuttler's first roll costs it

nothing. It gets an Impressive Success and stands pat. “In an impressive maneuver, the Scuttler’s helmsman tilts his hull to deflect your incoming phase blast,” says the GM. The Vantage will face a levy of 3 on its next Weaponry roll.

Round Two, Scuttler’s Attack: The Scuttler’s Weaponry pool stands at 8. The GM rolls an Ordinary Success and stands pat. “Return fire rakes your command pod,” she says. Miming the action in response to the GM’s cue, the players lurch in their chairs, first to the right and then to the left.

In addition to the ship’s Maneuverability of 2, Finnegan has 2 points left in his Piloting pool. His first roll costs nothing; he gets an Impressive Success and stands pat. “I let the impact spin me into a perfect Grunzfeld maneuver,” says Kevin. Neither he nor anyone else knows what a Grunzfeld maneuver might be, but it sure sounds effective. The Scuttler will now face a levy of 3 on its next attack.

Round Three, Vantage’s Attack: With the Scuttler’s most recent Maneuverability

roll an Impressive Success, the Vantage must pay 3 for its first attack roll. Andrew spends that three points from the ship’s Weaponry, dropping it from 4 to 1. He scores a Hair’s-Breadth success, taking a levy token for the ship’s Weaponry pool and standing pat. “I am straight for their transduction array!” Andrew cries.

The GM rolls Maneuverability for the Scuttler and gets a Dismal Failure. She pays 3 to reroll, dropping its pool to 1. She rolls an Exasperating Failure. She spends her last point to reroll, getting a Dismal Failure. “The Scuttler tries to compensate but your attack pattern is too dense for it!” the GM describes.

The ship has been hit, but how badly? The GM rolls its Integrity, getting another Dismal Failure. The Scuttler’s Integrity pool is 3, so she has to spend all of it to pay for the reroll. She gets an Exasperating Failure, earning a boon token for the Scuttler’s Integrity. Nonetheless, the ship takes damage and is now compromised. “Sensors indicate severe damage to their power grid,” the GM narrates.



RUNNING THE GAME

Skulduggery games are fast and free-wheeling. They draw on the Game Moderator's skill to improvise fun obstacles to the character's goals, personal and collective, while keeping the action moving forward.

ACTION AND REACTION

Just as the game system builds a series of moves and counter-moves into the core of its resolution system, scenarios are built around actions and reactions.

The scenario creates the potential for forward movement on multiple fronts. It gives each player both a personal and collective goal to work towards. The tension between the two goals generates story complications. More importantly, the goals, once established, place the responsibility for advancing the story on the players. They know what they want, and must scheme to get it.

Plotting becomes player-driven. They act, and you react. In concert with the wild swings of fate dictated by the die results, you find ways to put amusing but surmountable obstacles in the PCs' paths as they attempt to realize their schemes.

Players also act and react with one another. The persuasion system allows players to convince each others' characters to take ridiculous actions. Some scenario goals put the players in direct contention with one another. Even when they're cooperating to a common end, self-destructive behavior required by failed temptation rolls creates amusing conflicts between PCs. Often the most entertaining stretches of a *Skulduggery* session are the ones where the players interact with one another in character, with minimal intervention from you.

Scenarios may provide certain scenes as fallback measures when the players fail to take the lead. Most times you won't need them. When it's not clear what happens next, determine which of the players has last had a chance to act or do something memorable. Ask that player the simple question:

"So now what are you up to?"

(This rephrasing of the standard RPG question "So now what do you do?" serves as an empowering hint, unleashing the player's perhaps suppressed urge toward

underhandedness and clever dealing.)

Your challenge is more likely to be to keep up with unexpected schemes they decide to launch. There is no scenario devious enough to compete with a group of roleplaying gamers, so be ready to keep up.

When all else fails, look at the list of temptations, pick the one the least active player is most vulnerable to, and place a tantalizingly related obstacle in the group's path.

READING SCENARIOS

Adventures for other story-oriented RPGs may read like stories or screenplays you then interpret and modify in play, *Skulduggery* scenarios are presented as a series of building blocks that you construct into a story on the fly. Though less entertaining to read beforehand, they come to life in play, by giving your players the space to take charge and drive the narrative.

Scenarios provide a very broad structure and a series of springboards to inspire both the player's actions and your reactions. They consist of the following elements:

- **The Setting:** This section describes the time period, genre, and place in which the story occurs. In more exotic or imaginary settings, additional background material may be added, allowing you to refer to its unique details. Expect to elaborate further setting details as you go along; *Skulduggery* scenarios are too short to fully flesh out entire invented worlds.
- **Character Cards:** These not only provide abilities and ratings for the characters, but the basic attitudes and personal goals that give them reasons to launch schemes and drive the story.
- **Relationship Characters:** As named on each player's Relationship card, these characters provide a short-cut to interaction within the setting. Because the PCs know these characters and can expect at least somewhat favorable treatment from them, they can use them to gain information and further their plans.
- **Other Supporting Characters:** These characters usually represent the opposition the PCs face in furthering their collective goal, and maybe their personal goal, too. They may be outright rivals of the PCs, or less

hostile gatekeepers standing between them and their objectives. (For example, in the “If Space Permits” scenario, p. 80, the rival crews are competitors, while the members of the Vintner’s Council are gatekeepers.) Scenarios where the PCs are expected to more or less work together require a more expansive roster of these characters than ones in which the PCs’ main rivals are the other PCs.

- **Names:** A short series of names for people, places or things you may need when introducing new story elements on the fly.
- **The Opener:** A starting scene that introduces the setting and collective goals.
- **Scenes and Situations:** Notes on possible events which may take place. These are usually fallback events you can reach for when your players have grown stuck, or have rocketed through their goals with surprising speed. Given a choice between using one of these story suggestions and going where the players lead you, always set these aside for the uncharted waters of player-driven narrative.
- **The Closer:** Description of the big finish which will probably wrap up your session’s story—unless, of course, the players have taken you somewhere completely unanticipated.

INTRODUCING THE CAST

After component cards are handed out and trades completed, have the players read their character names, descriptions and personal goals to the rest of the group. Remind them that, when it comes to secrets and goals, they’re expected to separate what they know from what their characters know.

IN CONCERT AND AT ODDS

Make extensive use of the cutaway technique, where members of the group split up to achieve their own ends. This comes into play when they’re intentionally working at cross-purposes, but also when they divide their efforts to achieve their common goal. PCs may go off on their own, or split off into small teams.

Focus on each separate player/team in short bursts. Don’t be afraid to cut out of a scene in the middle and then come back to it. (In film terminology, this is called “crosscutting.”)

When a player seems momentarily stumped as to what to do next, cut to another player/scene to give him time to find a reaction. When a scene is losing energy, cut away. When it’s picking up energy, stick with it.

Keep players whose characters are not present interested by introducing plot threads that will impact their characters later.

Don’t worry too much about enforcing players’ unawareness of scenes they didn’t take part in. Allow players to keep their actions secret when it makes a difference to the story—for example, when a PC is betraying the others. If players try to use knowledge their characters don’t have to the detriment of another PC, rule out these actions as out of bounds. However, if they cleverly engineer their actions so that they make internal sense at every step, and are still able to discover their rivals’ secrets, well, all’s fair in love and *Skulduggery*.

In most cases, though, PCs working on their own will plan to fill in their partners on the results of their actions. Don’t spend time having the characters recap each other on events the players already know. Instead, take it as read that this repetitive dialogue has taken place between scenes.

IT WON’T ALL MAKE THE CUT

Each scenario contains way more material than you can fit into a single four-hour story. By providing you and the players with multiple elements suggesting many different plot directions, the scenarios provide a foundation for improvisation. Chances are that only three or so of the Relationship characters will show up, and that only one of them will get enough spotlight time to make a memorable impression. You may call for very few Resistance rolls in one scenario, while requiring them constantly in another. This may prove true even within the same scenario, as run for different groups. If your players fret at the end of a session over their unused plot threads, assure them that this is all part of the plan.

As long as the story you create together is fun and keeps moving forward, there’s no shame in leaving possible plot elements undeveloped. To heck with the road not taken! *Skulduggery* is about the choices you *do* make.

BUILDING TO THE CLOSER


Scenarios give you a certain predictable shape to work within by proposing a likely big finish in which



the characters' goal or goals are either realized or ironically squashed. Sometimes the personal goals come to fruition at the closer, sometimes not. Alternately, the closer might take story one step further by showing you the consequences after the major goal is achieved. For example, *Skulduggery and Crossbones*, p. 64, ends with a battle between pirate ships that follows after the central goal, becoming captain of the ship, has been disposed of.

On rare occasions the players might completely hijack the scenario, seizing on a new goal not on their component cards. Though this may tax your improvisatory powers by taking you into uncharted waters, be careful not to squelch this surprising turn of events. React to the players, as always, keeping an eye on the clock and envisioning possible big finishes that might satisfyingly wrap up this strange new story during its final half hour or so.

Final Comeuppances

In one shot  scenarios in which the PCs face the threat of death, and possibly threaten others with death, you may wish to mete out final comeuppances. These allow the main characters to meet blackly humorous demises, satisfyingly restoring moral order in the wake of their unscrupulous hijinks.

During the scenario's final scenes, feel free to introduce contests that suspend the standard system of combat and injury. Final comeuppance contests result in immediate death on any failed result, with no rerolls permitted. Restrict this grim fate to situations where it will seem amusing or thematically appropriate. Characters should meet final comeuppances when they've behaved callously or scandalously, for falling prey to their temptations, or by acting foolishly. Do not apply final comeuppance to properly heroic



characters, or those who seem otherwise undeserving of ignominious destruction.

Final comeuppance might lead to a horrible fate other than literal death. Characters might be imprisoned, driven mad, or consigned to a dreary existence tending the sludge vats of Denbor-7.

Why No Character Build System?

By this point you may be skimming through the book looking for the section where we show you how to run games where the players build their characters from scratch. Alas, your quest is fruitless. Even for series play, we strongly recommend starting with randomly assembled characters created from component cards. And by “strongly recommend”, we mean “provide no other option.”

Where other games seek to increase the identification between player and character, successful *Skulduggery* play requires a level of detachment. Players find it easier to watch from a mordant remove as their characters get betrayed, make fools of themselves, fall prey to temptation, and are persuaded to act against their self-interest, when they’re given characters to play. The act of carefully creating a PC increases the sense of protectiveness the player feels toward his fictional proxy. Created PCs are also likely to draw on power fantasy tropes, reflecting the vicarious desire to be cool, masterful, and dangerous. *Skulduggery* sessions undercut all of these impulses, making their protagonists impulsive, wheedling, and deserving of comeuppance. A character build system inevitably creates expectations that the game would then disappoint. Card assignment lets the players know what they’re signing up for from the jump.

Even though players get more input in describing them, replacement PCs (see below) suffer less from this problem, because the convention of detachment between player and character has already been established.

REFRESHING FOR SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Supporting characters are eligible to refresh some depleted pools after they reappear in the story after an absence of fifteen minutes or more, in real time. Roll a die, which cannot be rerolled.

Hair’s-Breadth Success: the character refreshes one pool of your choice.

Ordinary Success: the character refreshes two pools of your choice. (In both this and the above instance, pick the pools you imagine they’re most likely to use.)

Impressive Success: the character refreshes all pools.

SERIES PLAY

You may find that a one-shot session is so much fun that your players demand to extend it into a series of episodic adventures. If your players are already *Skulduggery* fans, they may agree in advance to an extended, or campaign-style series of games. Players weaned on more traditionally rules- and combat-oriented RPGs, or who prefer a semi-serious tone, may need a self-contained intro episode to inveigle them in to a longer series.

Refreshing Between Scenarios

Characters begin each new scenario with all pools equal to their ratings.

GMs choosing to run series without clear divisions between scenarios should allow all abilities to refresh after suitably long pauses in the action, as circumstances appear to warrant.

Improvement

At the end of each scenario, each player gains a number of improvement points to spend on raising ability ratings:

- 1 point for each session attended
- 1 point if the group, according to your judgment, achieved its collective goal
- 1 point if the character achieved his or her personal goal

Each point can be spent to raise a single rating by 1. Raising your lowest-rated resistance by 1 costs 3 improvement points. Points gained from a single scenario must be spent on separate abilities.

Players may add abilities they don’t have, starting with a rating of 1, provided that the ability appears in at least one other player’s stack of component cards. Players



should be prepared to explain how they gained abilities that seem implausible for their characters. These explanations can reach back into the character's past if need be. It's possible that the character learned the ability long ago but is only now revealing it.

Replacement Relationships

Where characters regularly move from one place to another, the GM switches out their relationships, creating replacement relationship characters with each new destination or scenario.

Restoring Burned Relationships

When a Relationship is burned (p. 31) it may be restored in a subsequent session. The PC must perform a favor that noticeably furthers one of the contact's top three goals. Then he must successfully contest his Persuade against the ex-contact's Rebuff, arguing that he can be trusted from now on. A Relationship burned for a second time can never be restored.

Replacement Characters

When a character dies or is otherwise conclusively removed from the storyline, the player creates a replacement. The character invents the character's name and backstory, with the GM assisting to ensure consistency with the setting. The player takes responsibility for explaining how the new character connects to the ongoing storyline as a new or newly revealed member of the group.

General Abilities: The new character has as many points in general abilities as the old one did. The player distributes these between as many abilities as desired. Only general abilities appearing on the previous character's identity card, or on the identity card of other PCs, may be chosen. No rating may exceed the value of the highest-rated ability on the former character's identity card.

Persuade, Rebuff, Attack and Defense: The player may keep the previous character's values in these four abilities, or redistribute them between the four abilities. In settings where Attack and Defense abilities do not appear, they may swap Persuade and Rebuff or leave them as is.

When he meets his untimely (if well-deserved) end, Finnegan Swake has Persuade 9, Rebuff 6, Attack 8, and

Defense 6. His player, Ian, creates a new character called Grinx Fepp, and redistributes the values as follows: Persuade 8, Rebuff 8, Attack 6, Defense 6. He'd really prefer to give himself a rating of 7 in each ability, but is only allowed to move the values around between abilities without altering the numbers themselves.

Players may assign new styles to any or all of these abilities. As each style appears once in the initial batch of cards, switching to new styles may mean that there will be certain styles that no one in the group is able to trump.

Relationships: The player chooses three Relationship characters from the six currently available. Keeping the three current contacts is perfectly acceptable. The previous character's three rating numbers, which remain unchanged, are distributed among the three chosen characters.

Resistances: The player may keep the previous character's Resistances or redistribute their values without changing the numbers—with the exception of Resistances rated at 1, which must remain as is. Ω ratings may be reassigned.

Finnegan's Resistances were Avarice 1, Dissipation Ω, Indolence 6, Lust 6, Nitpicking 2, Showboating 4. For the new character, Ian must keep the Avarice at 1, but may redistribute the other values. He does this as follows: Dissipation 2, Indolence 4, Lust Ω, Nitpicking 6, Showboating 6.

Personal Goals: Each other player, along with the GM, creates a proposed personal goal for the new character. In scenarios where the personal goals appear on characters' Identity cards, the goal arises from the character's role in the group. Where they appear on the Resistance cards, they are inspired by the character's key trait. In settings that break the formula by relating the personal goal to the value on another card, the new goals spring from that source. The player chooses the new character's personal goal from the list of proposals.

CUSTOMIZED SKULDUGGERY

This section shows you how to create scenarios of your own, either as standalones or as fresh installments in an ongoing series.

CHOOSING YOUR SETTING

Pick a time, place and situation that you like and which will appeal to your players. Take inspiration from history, media sources, and current events. Genres rich in cliché and stereotype serve well for this purpose. Stock characters and situations give your players an immediate handle on how they're expected to behave and what sorts of actions they might attempt.

Although *Skulduggery* is a generic game applicable to many genres and settings, it puts its own distinct stamp on whatever world or situation you decide to portray. Look for settings that either have the following elements built in, or can be altered to include them:

- emphasis on negotiating, deal-making, and resolution through dialogue
- amoral, self-absorbed, or self-seeking characters
- an ironic, satirical or blackly humorous tone

For example, if you want to do a western game, *Skulduggery* will support that, but it will be more

Deadwood than *Stagecoach*. A game of outlandish assassins who battle one another might resemble the 10th *Victim* more than it does *Wanted*. *Skulduggery* fantasy would owe more to Jack Vance than J. R. R. Tolkien.

ESTABLISHING GOALS

The next step is to establish the collective goal. The pursuit of this goal allows an improvised plot to unfold throughout your game session. The goal should have the following qualities:

- all PCs have a strong reason to pursue it
- it's easily understandable
- all PCs can make a contribution toward it
- you can envision multiple obstacles standing between the group and the goal
- its ultimate outcome depends on persuasion, negotiation and/or other interpersonal qualities

Next, give some thought to the possible personal goals for each character. You'll flesh these out more concrete during the next step, when you create the characters themselves.

Start by deciding whether you want to tie the goal to the characters' identities, or to their key traits. Identity-based personal goals arise from the character's professional role within the group, or the typical narrative function of the stereotype the character evokes. In scenarios where the personal goal appears on the identity card, the characters consciously pursue mixed agendas,

Serious Settings

Although best suited for blackly comedic games, you can run *Skulduggery* in a more serious vein.

Taglines present the biggest challenge. Write them as characteristic, but non-humorous statements appropriate to their historical or imaginary era. Scoring big with a straight-faced tagline is hard. Adjust for serious games by awarding two refreshes for any appropriate use, reserving the right to dispense the occasional three-refresh reward for notably dramatic instances.

In most serious settings you'll want to eliminate temptations. Should you keep them, confine their use to scenes that evoke pity, horror, or pathos.

Design collective and personal goals to arouse sympathy in the players. Include grave consequences for failure.

Games where players scheme against each other tend to descend into comedy. Either remove personal goals entirely, or write them so that they don't undermine the collective goal.



balancing their collective goals against their personal ones. Engineer events so that the balancing act goes awry, causing the character's pursuit of his personal goal to potentially undermine the collective goal.

When the personal goal ties instead to resistances, characters undermine the collective goal against their will, by falling prey to temptations.

To instill a high degree of inter-PC conflict, put the same personal goal on each of the Identity cards, as you see in "Skulduggery and Crossbones."

CREATING COMPONENT CARDS

For a standalone game or opening series installments, start by creating a set of component cards. Before reading this further in this section, take a look the component cards for the various included scenarios to see what you'll be replicating.

Identity


Name: Invent a suitable name for each character. If the stereotypes of the genre you're drawing from are gender-specific (as in "Casting Call," p. 72), make the sex of each character clear. Otherwise, supply both male and female names, so that the player can choose the character's gender.

Role / Position: On the second line of the card, list the position or occupation the character fills in the group, or the social stereotype the character conforms to.

Backstory: For each character, write a brief paragraph summing up the character's background, motivations, and attitudes.

Collective Goal: This goal is repeated on each of the six cards².

Personal Goals: Include the personal goal here if it arises from the character's role within the group or stereotypical qualities.

General Abilities: From the master list on p. 2, choose the abilities appropriate to your setting. Where needed, change ability names to be more evocative of the characters' world. The greater your players' familiarity with *Skulduggery*, the more confusing it will be for them when you alter ability names. In general,  abilities are suited to adventurous settings where you expect action

sequences to occur.

Having chosen the abilities available in your setting, now decide which ones ought to be available to each character. Be generous in assigning abilities at this stage, as you can lowball ratings for marginal abilities in the next step. Characters needn't have the same number of abilities.

Now assign ratings for each ability based on story logic. When in doubt, ask yourself what a character of this type could believably do in a work of fiction.

If the character might have acquired a glancing familiarity with an ability, assign a rating of 1.

2-3 points indicates something the character is occasionally called on to do, even though it isn't his or her forte.

4-5 points reflects a task basic to the character's job, position, or personality.

Abilities rated at 6 represent the areas where the character truly excels.

If a single ability seems like it ought to be better than any other, assign a rating of 7. Do this only in exceptional cases.

In special cases where a given profession ought to make a character more formidable in an ability that appears on another card, you might specify an adjustment of 1-3 points to one ability. You'll note that we do this on Allagan's identity card, p. 2, and on no other. Resort to these special cases very sparingly.

You'll note that there is no set number of ability points you're attempting to distribute. Although you should try to keep the various characters within the same basic ballpark, you're really just eyeballing it, based on what feels right instinctively. Should your players bother to compare their identity cards, they will discover that the game is not entirely fair. We kindly supply the following GM tagline to use when challenged on this by mewling players:

[assuming blindest possible tone] "And what about a game called *Skulduggery* did you think would be fair?"

Persuade

Use the Persuade cards from "If Space Permits," as a

² As an advanced variant for seasoned *Skulduggery* players, you could supply contradictory goals for the six characters, forcing them to discover in play that their assumptions of mutual cooperation are mistaken.

Setting-Specific Abilities

In certain fantastical or speculative settings, characters may be able to wield abilities that don't exist in our world. As needed, devise your own setting-specific abilities loosely defining what they are and what actions characters can perform while using them. Depending on the setting, there might be a single fantastical ability available to all characters, one unique ability used by a single PC, or a variety of contrasting abilities, each wielded by a different PC. These may or may not also be available to supporting characters. Specify what abilities it counters, and which counter it, if any. Examples:

Necromancy

Definition: The character manipulates the magic of death and the dead. Necromancers can carry on conversations with corpses, briefly raise them as zombies, and can exert control over the undead.

Automatic Success: Adopt a deathly pallor.

Counters: any other magic

Is Countered By: any other Magic; by Rebuff, when used to dominate an undead creature

Freeze Ray

Definition: The character projects a freezing ray from his fingertips. It can be used to harm others or shield the character or others from harm. (Points from Freeze Ray can be spent as Attack or Defense points.) It can damage objects, extinguish flames, and turn water to ice. Acts of icy sabotage allow Freeze Ray points to be spent on Mischief actions.)

Automatic Success: Act as a human air conditioner. Cool any beverage in sight.

Counters: Heat Ray

Is Countered By: Heat Ray

template. If your group has already played that scenario (or you plan to run it for them in the near future) arbitrarily redistribute the six ratings, without changing the numbers. Substitute two new taglines for the ones on each card. Write your own dialogue snippets, using language and details appropriate to the setting. Match the taglines to the persuade style:

Glib taglines are skilfully phrased, often brief, and blithely dismissive.

Eloquent taglines use inspiring, lofty language.

Obfuscatory taglines are elaborate and amusingly confusing or vague.

Forthright are clear, to the point, and disarmingly honest.

Charming taglines employ some combination of wit, self-deprecation and flattery.

Intimidating taglines convey a threat, overtly or subtly.

Rebuff

Use the rebuff cards from "If Space Permits" as a template. Write a single new tagline for each, tailored to your setting and the rebuff style.

Pure-Hearted taglines convey a sense of naive, perhaps shocked, morality.

Contrary taglines give the sense that the character raising a reflexive or all-purpose objection out of the sheer love of being a pain in the ass.

Lawyerly taglines seize on a small detail, perhaps legalistic but not necessarily so, and use it to swat away the speaker's entire proposal.

Penetrating taglines cut through the fog to question the speaker's motives.

Wary taglines reveal an instinctive sense of fear, trepidation, or caution.

Obtuse taglines showcase the character's protective



layer of stupidity.

Before proceeding further, decide if your setting is an action-adventure oriented one where it feels right to threaten characters with the possibility of death. If so, take the next two steps. If the struggles in your game are instead strictly verbal, skip to “Relationships”, below.

Attack

Use the Attack cards from “*If Space Permits*,” as a template. If your group has already played that scenario (or you plan to run it for them in the near future) arbitrarily redistribute the six ratings, without changing the numbers.

Defense

Use the Defense cards from “*If Space Permits*.” If your group has already played that scenario (or you plan to run it for them in the near future) arbitrarily redistribute the six Defense ratings between the six Defense styles.

Relationships

Start by creating six characters peripherally connected to your scenario’s main conflict, who can provide information and dispense a variety of other favors to the PCs in pursuit of their goals. Then, using the Relationship cards from “*If Space Permits*,” as a template, replace each instance of a character from that scenario with its equivalent from yours. Your first character replaces Juh Cerknor, your second character Verator Vump, and so on. Leave the ratings as is.

Resistances

Choose the six temptations that best fit your setting. Then, using the Resistances card from “*If Space Permits*,” swap out any temptations that don’t appear in your setting, replacing them with your additional choices. Reorder the lists to return your list of Resistances to alphabetical order. Leave the ratings as they are. If you placed the characters’ personal goals on the identity card, remove them here. If their personal goals coincide with their lowest-rated Resistances, include new goals here.

Other Supporting Characters

Create the cast of characters the players must battle against, hoodwink, and cajole. These characters will regard the PCs with varying degrees of hostility. Often you’ll want to identify a primary protagonist that the group will want to overcome. Make this character loathsome, obnoxious or outrageously evil, depending

on tone you’re striving for and the stakes of the conflict. Evil characters who deserve to die at the end appear in action-adventure settings. Tales of primarily verbal conflict call for milder villainy.

Settings providing the PCs with wide latitude to meet people might call for large supporting casts. If you plan to set the PCs at each other’s throats, they’ll need fewer characters to interact with—with perhaps no antagonist at all.

Start by listing the supporting characters you think you’ll need to tell the story. After working out the role you expect them to play in, devise a downfall for each. These are the weaknesses the characters use, through one or more successful contests, to gain advantage and advance their goals. Create a range of varying downfalls.

Flesh out each supporting character with notes on personality, again achieving a balance of types. You might roll Persuade and Rebuff styles randomly and base the personality on that, or start with the personality and choose the most appropriate styles.

Finally, add additional abilities and ratings. Choose ratings based on the same story logic you employed when assigning abilities to PCs. By default, give them Persuade and Rebuff ratings no greater than 4. Exceed ratings of 6-7 only when creating very formidable physical opponents. They might have Attack or Defense, or Athletics ratings as high as 12.

Don’t knock yourself out writing up every conceivable supporting character. Instead, be ready to invent and elaborate minor figures on the fly. *Skulduggery* characters are simple, so it’s easy to do.

SCENES

Now that you have your component cards, build the scenes that will form your loose story framework. While published scenarios have to be written in full to be comprehensible by readers, episodes of your own devising can be as loose as a quickly jotted sheet of point-form notes.

Opener

The opener is an introductory scene that gets the story rolling either by introducing the collective goal, or putting the group in a position to start pursuing it. If the goal doesn’t become apparent until some point during the opener, you’ll want to start the narration before handing out component cards. The opener to

Keep It Loose

When creating relationship and supporting characters and envisioning possible scenes and situations, be careful not to over-determine the results. The aim is not to create a tightly woven plot line whose various elements neatly tie into one another. Instead, create a loose grab bag of disparate elements. The connections between elements that turn these into a narrative are supplied by your players and occur on the fly, arising from the action-reaction dynamic. Give them the space to connect the dots for you.

“*Skulduggery and Crossbones*” works this way. Such preludes must be short. Until the players have their cards, they can’t take action, and are only bystanders in a story you’re telling.

A strong opener possesses the following qualities:

- All PCs are present.
- It places them in a position to start acting on the goal.
- It introduces the setting.
- It establishes a tone, usually of satire or black humor.
- It might also perform other functions:
- Starting on a thrilling note, with an action sequence. (An option in the opener for “*If Space Permits*” allows this.)
- Introduces an antagonist the group will enjoy foiling. (Also in “*If Space Permits*.”)
- Establish a time frame for events. When success depends on a future event, such as the musical performance in “*Casting Call*”, the vote in “*Skulduggery and Crossbones*,” or the presentation to the Vintner’s Council in “*If Space Permits*,” you don’t have to worry about events that leapfrog you to the closer in the first few hours of play.

Scheming In the Middle

Most of a session will be taken up with reactions to player-driven actions. As such, the plot between opener and closer can and should remain loose. Don’t plan anything that must happen to the players. Instead, jot down notes preparing for strategies the players are likely to employ. Be ready for them to surprise you with a completely off-the-wall approach.

Temptations, Distractions and Time-Fillers

What you can prepare for are lulls in the action, caused either when the group’s joint imagination for scheming

temporarily deserts them, or when they move toward their ultimate goal more quickly than anticipated. Sketch out one or two ideas for scenes that complicate a story that when it starts to drag, but won’t be missed if it’s chugging along nicely without further instigation from you. For an example, see the return of the shark in “*Skulduggery and Crossbones*,” p. 64.

Don’t worry if you lack the time or inspiration for these fallback story elements. When in doubt, you can always improvise a brush between one or more of the characters and their temptations.

Names

Satisfying names for places and supporting characters are hard to invent on the fly. Compose a list of free-floating names you can apply to new characters and locations you introduce as the story unfolds.

Closer

The closer is the final situation that resolves the group’s pursuit of its collective goal. It may also resolve their personal goals. The closer is often introduced or implied in your opener. While jotting down notes for it, think of dramatic events that might occur during or immediately after the closer, which will end the story with a bang even if the PCs scheme well enough to engineer an otherwise anticlimactic victory.



THE YES WING

THE SETTING

The PCs are cabinet secretaries or other high officials in the administration of recently elected US President Allard Bierce.

Adjust the party affiliation of the characters to contrast with that of your players. If they're mostly conservative or lean Republican, the PCs are members of a Democratic administration. If they're liberals and/or Democrats, Bierce is a Republican.

Groups outside the US might have more fun satirically sticking it to the Americans than playing politicians from their own country. If you think they'd better enjoy political shenanigans set closer to home, adjust the proper names, job titles and details of governance to match your native land. Depending on where you are, you'll either need to alter the type of executive appointment the PCs shepherd through legislative approval, or alter the collective goal entirely.

COLLECTIVE GOAL

Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

RELATIONSHIPS

President Allard Bierce

"I will absolutely, positively take that under the most urgent advisement."

Personality: Handsome and superficially impressive, Allard Bierce leaves even his closest allies wondering if there's anything behind his perfect politician's mask. He speaks entirely in talking points, reveals as little as possible of his true intentions, and never makes a decision he might otherwise postpone. When he's interacting with someone, Bierce focuses on them so intently that they leave thinking a close personal bond has been forged. He reinforces this illusion with a stunning memory for names, faces, and personal details.

Goals: Although his administration is currently foundering, Bierce wants to be remembered as a great President. To have a shot at this historical ranking, he'll first have to get reelected to second term.



Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright

Downfall: Showboating

Sample Favors: 1) call in favors from people beholden to the executive branch, and from his party hierarchy 2) agree to support legislation 3) issue pardons 4) initiate diplomatic or military actions

Abilities: Etiquette 5, Gossip 4, Knowledge 1 (Sp: Political Science), Management 2, Moxy 6, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 8, Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Penetrating) 8, Wealth 4.

Character Tracker

Player	Character	Title	Goal
	Winston / Winona Fingerhut	Secretary Of the Interior	Secure presidential pardon for political mentor Dalton Flask, now serving a five-year sentence for tax evasion.
	John / Janine Simmons	White House Chief Of Staff	Secure fundraising commitments from party leaders for a Senate campaign.
	Paul / Pauline Cutter	Vice President	Arrange for Congress to pass legislation blocking investigation of irregularities at RexMo Insurance, the corporation you ran before becoming VP.
	Henry / Renee Doss	Secretary of Defense	Start a war, allowing you to prove your unconventional theories about 21 st century warfare.
	Eldon / Elaine Willis	Senior Political Adviser	Increase the President's approval rating to 51% or higher, from its current 41%.
	Keith / Kate Odom	National Security Adviser	Gain an advantage over Frank Cross that will force him to defer to you when he becomes Secretary of State.

First Lady Malora Bierce

"Hmm. Let me talk to Al about that."

Personality: A fierce defender of her husband's interests, Malora Bierce was a top litigator at a prestigious law firm before moving to the White House. Accustomed more to the verbal oneupsmanship of the legal profession than to politics, she speaks her mind with unswerving certainty. She values personal loyalty above all other qualities, but expects it from others more than she gives it herself—with Allard as the sole exception.

Goals: 1) See Allard reelected. 2) Fund a legal scholarship in her name at Harvard Law School.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Downfall: Nitpicking

Sample Favors: 1) arrange for a meeting with the President without the chief of staff's permission 2) quietly change the President's mind on a decision he's already taken 3) create opportunities to hobnob with dignitaries and celebrities

Abilities: Etiquette 6, Gossip 4, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Civil Law), Management 2, Moxy 6, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 6, Persuade (Forthright) 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 6, Wealth 5.

Senate Majority Leader Dwayne Pettiford

"Well, don't that just send the porcupine up the poplar?"

Personality: Though raised in splendor as heir to a gigantic mining empire, Dwayne Pettiford affects a folksy manner befitting a cartoon rancher. He rose to power in the Senate through sheer slipperiness. He tries to make anyone he's talking with believe that he's going to help them, even when he plans to do the opposite. When in doubt, he throws in a confusing rural aphorism, perhaps one that he just made up.

Goals: Although he and the President are of the same party, Bierce's tanking popularity has sent Dwayne scurrying for cover. He wants to prevent a wipe-out of Senate seats for his party in the coming elections, even if that means distancing himself from the President.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Downfall: Showboating

Sample Favors: 1) direct federal money to a particular cause or district 2) strong-arm Senate colleagues to support legislation 3) quash or initiate Senate investigations

Abilities: Etiquette 2, Gossip 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Mining), Management 1, Moxy 6, Perception 3, Performance





(Media Appearance) 2, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 6, Rebuff (Wary) 6, Wealth 6.

Maxine Horne, Wealthy Donor

"I don't write checks just to strengthen my wrist, young lady."

Personality: Maxine's imperious manner speaks of her vast wealth and impeccable pedigree. She contributes money to advance her causes, but also to enjoy being fawned over by the nation's most powerful. Any treatment shy of extreme deference results in a series of sharp-tongued barbs.

Goals: Maxine is a hardcore ideologue whose politics are a more extreme and uncompromising version of the

President's. She wants him to risk his already diminishing poll numbers to press a polarizing social issue of great emotional importance to the party's base.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Downfall: Spite

Sample Favors: 1) donate money 2) convince others to donate money 3) facilitate social connections to the rich, fashionable and/or artistic

Abilities: Etiquette 6, Gossip 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Art Collecting), Management 4, Moxy 2, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 6, Rebuff (Contrary) 6, Wealth 12.

General Kelvin Howe, Chairman Of the Joint Chiefs Of Staff

"Never start a war you can't win."

Personality: Somehow the rise through the notoriously bureaucratic upper ranks of the US military has not dimmed Kelvin Howe's

idealism. He loves the army and its soldiers, and becomes stirringly sentimental in defending their interests. A holdover from a previous administration, Howe secretly distrusts the President and his advisers but stays in the job to prevent them from rashly placing the young men and women under his command in harm's way.

Goals: Rebuild the military's strained capacity.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Downfall: Paranoia

Sample Favors: 1) Lend his considerable public popularity to a military-related issue. 2) Provide information on military affairs or foreign intelligence. 3) Call in favors from military contractors.

Abilities: Etiquette 6, Gossip 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Art Collecting), Management 4, Mischief 2, Moxy 2, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Persuade (Eloquent) 6, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 6.

Maddy Lagasse, Network News Anchor

“Some people say that you’re in over your head. How would you respond to them?”

Personality: Under the carefully portrayed exterior of the hot mom next door lurks a ferociously competitive journalist with a well-honed instinct for the verbal kill.

Goals: To earn prestige and high ratings with her coverage.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Downfall: Arrogance

Sample Favors: 1) Give a softball interview. 2) Give a hardball interview. 3) Pass along leaked information to her network’s investigative reporters.

Abilities: Etiquette 2, Gossip 6, Knowledge 1 (Sp: English Literature), Mischief 4, Moxy 5, Perception 2, Performance (Media Appearance) 8, Persuade (Charming) 6, Rebuff (Obtuse) 6, Wealth 9.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Frank Cross, Secretary Of State designate

“I realize there’s a crapload of dingbats, hayseeds and also-rans opposing my nomination, so whaddaya say we blaze on out there and steamroller ‘em, huh?”

Personality: Born with a silver spoon in his mouth and a horseshoe up his ass, the brilliant, confrontational Francis Cross has always had a knack for making the right friend at the right time. Despite his many enemies, he’s bulldozed his way through the Washington power establishment as a diplomat, lobbyist, best-selling author and pundit. Drunk on his own sense of invulnerability, he treats the PCs with back-slapping camaraderie. He never worries about that little cannibalism incident. As far as Frank Cross is concerned, bad things only happen to other people.

Goals: 1) Become Secretary of State. 2) Bask in the admiration of the powerful and the contempt of the pusillanimous.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Downfall: Arrogance

Abilities: Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 4, Gossip 4, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Strategic Relations), Management 4, Mischief 4, Moxy 6, Perception 2, Performance (Media Appearance) 6, Wealth 8.

Chief Alex Rogers, United States Park Police

“I’ve spent my whole life watching some other guy catch a break.”

Personality: Though none too bright, Alex has prospered by doggedly pursuing any tiny crumb of opportunity that might fall his way. This is his right as an American, dammit. Despite his luck in stumbling across a packet of primo blackmail material, and his subsequent snagging of a top job he’s scarcely qualified for, he still thinks of himself as a victim of life’s vicissitudes. No matter what he gets, he’ll still feel slighted and unsatisfied. In person, he’s meek and confrontational, but given a while to stew, he always finds a reason to want more.

Goals: 1) Parlay his folio of blackmail material on Francis Cross into a payday that will take care of him for the rest of his life.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Downfall: Dissolute (alcoholic making a shaky stab at recovery)

Abilities: Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Gossip 3, Knowledge 3 (Sp: Western Lore), Management 3, Mischief 5, Moxy 1, Perception 2, Performance (Media Appearance) 1, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 3, Stealth 3.

Names

Use these free-floating names for other denizens of the Washington fish tank you invent while improvising your way through the story.

Men

Todd Forrest
Shane Robson
Ike Palmisano
Vincent Montano
Jason Adams
Nathan Rivard
Walton Aubuchon
Fred Crotts

Langton Eaglebury
Rick Garcia
Eric Ballentine
Robert Barajas
Colby Maggard
Myron Hurley
Andy Kosinski



Women

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Catherine Barnett | Vicky Current |
| Diane Brassfield | Sue Kramer |
| Priscilla Moody | Jill Divine |
| Patricia Alexander | Raia Tarver |
| Paula Horvath | Debra Stoneking |
| Helen Eastridge | Kelly Nails |
| Nancy Wasson | Tammy Anaya |
| Judith Frewell | |

OPENER

The action begins in the Oval Office, where President Bierce has gathered his inner council—Simmons, Cutter, Doss, Willis and Odom (or whatever subset of these have been chosen as PCs) to announce a crucial decision. Lowly Interior Secretary Fingerhut is still present from previous business. As often happens, he/she has gone unnoticed in the excitement.

The President announces that, after vetting and interviewing all the candidates for the soon-to-be vacant Secretary Of State position, he’s chosen Francis Cross.

All PCs must roll to Resist Paranoia, or gasp audibly at mention of the name.

Everyone knows Cross as a veteran diplomat known both for his brilliance and his remarkably undiplomatic behavior. Over his long career, Cross has accumulated as many fervent enemies and a few enthusiastic patrons. Even though the President’s party enjoys majority status in the Senate, Cross will prove a hard sell to the protocol-obsessed members of the Foreign Relations committee.

Bierce has fallen under Cross’ brusquely charismatic spell; attempts to talk him out of the nomination face a levy of 4.

He knows how tough the challenge will be—which is why he’ll show his full Presidential gratitude to those who deliver.

By making a few quick phone calls, Simmons can determine which of the senators are likely to be undecided. Cutter can make up an accurate list without having to check.

Any PC knows the public face of each undecided senator (see descriptions, below.) A Gossip success reveals the connection between Cross and any given undecided.

SCENES AND SITUATIONS

Expect the players to drive the story by selecting the undecided senators they want to woo as they cobble together their ten-seat majority.

Senators

To conserve space, all Senators have the same ability ratings except for their varying Persuade and Rebuff styles:

Eavesdropping 2, Etiquette 4, Gossip 6, Management 2, Moxy 3, Perception 5, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Persuade (Glib) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 4, Wealth 3.

Some of these characters will change as you play them, so feel free to alter the abilities to fit your alterations.

To gain confirmation, Cross must win a majority of votes from the nineteen members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. (He must then be voted on by the full Senate, but given the makeup of the entire chamber, that’s a reliable formality.) Normally passing the committee would also be a breeze, as it is made up of eleven members of the president’s party and seven opposition Senators. However, Cross has made so many enemies over the years that some Senators of his own party could conceivably nix the nomination.

To secure the nomination the PCs must sway enough undecideds to put Cross over the top when the vote is held. The vote happens as part of the Closer. Decided Senators are loyal partisans to their parties who are highly unlikely to switch—though the PCs might decide to try. PCs face a levy of 1 on all contests made to sway a decided Senator.

There are five undecideds on the President’s side of the aisle, and two in the other party. Cross has seven reliable votes. He needs four more to get over top to eleven. He could pick up all but one of the President’s own Senators. Or he could lose one or two more, provided he can pick up one or both of the opposition undecideds.

We provide sketchier information on the decided Senators, who are less likely to focus the players’ attention. Improvise additional details if players choose to concentrate on them.

To preserve the device that allows you to choose the President’s political party, the Senator’s states have been assigned without regard to the current regional power bases of Republicans and Democrats. Political junkies are encouraged to adjust the states for added realism.

Before bringing any of these Senators into the storyline yourself, give the players the chance to make the first move. They'll probably reach out to their Relationships for information on them. A thorough poll of the various Relationship characters should yield the scoop on each of the swing Senators. Assuming they ask halfway relevant questions, they'll learn each senator's goals and history with Cross. Where goals or histories are secret, they get an intimation that something furtive might be in play.

If the players seem preoccupied with other plot tangents, or fail to see a way forward, have the undecideds contact them. Initial contacts are of course made between low-level staffers; mention this without going into great detail. These Senators hate Cross, but those with active or overt agendas want to see if they can leverage their known distaste for him into a satisfying quid-pro-quo. When a goal is italicized, the Senator, though preferring to be approached first, is willing to make the first move in realizing it.

Undecided Senators

The President's Party

Annette Gilbert

Illinois

Personality: Annette Gilbert made her way to Congress during a long, uphill struggle to succeed in a man's world. Unable to enjoy her success, she cultivates the ever-growing chip on her shoulder. And no one, over the course of her long, uphill struggle to power, slighted her more often than the former head of the committee, Chet McGinn.

Goals: Now that her party is in the majority, Gilbert has made it her personal project to *see McGinn destroyed*.

Downfall: Spiteful

Persuade / Rebuff Styles: Glib / Penetrating

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Fortright

History With Cross: His high-handed responses to her in past appearances before the committee convinced her (not inaccurately) that Cross is an arrogant sexist.

Patricia Gregory

Delaware

Personality: Unusually skittish and awkward for

a politician., Patricia's straight-talking style keeps her popular, back home. For the first time in her life, though, her approval numbers have started slipping. Succumbing to conspiracy theory, she attributes this to a shadowy network of enemies. She knows that this makes her sound crazy—which is exactly how *they* want it—and takes pains to conceal these feverish imaginings even from her most trusted aides.

Goals: 1) Expose the secret conspiracy against her. 2) *Get a large public works project approved for Delaware and named after her.*

Downfall: Fearful

Persuade / Rebuff Styles: Fortright / Wary

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

History With Cross: His name comes up frequently on conspiracy-oriented websites, making Patricia wonder if he isn't part of the cabal that's persecuting her.

Douglas Lopez

Michigan

Personality: Handsome and polished by political standards, Douglas Lopez projects an air of bland competence. In TV appearances, he's never less than affable, knowledgeable, and well-spoken. However, colleagues and voters alike can't escape the feeling that there's something not quite right about him.

Goals: 1) To hide his secret hobby (see below.) 2) To join the secret hobby he falsely imagines Cross to be involved in (also see below.) 3) To feast on a well-cooked giant panda.

Downfall: Gluttonous. Lopez is a member of Tooth and Claw, a secret society drawn from America's elite. Every year they gather in a secret location to gorge themselves on decadent food. The leading item on the menu is always the lovingly prepared meat of a rare or endangered species.

Persuade / Rebuff Styles: Glib / Wary

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

History With Cross: Lopez heard strange rumors from a fellow Tooth and Claw initiate about Cross' eating habits. He fears that Cross might be a member of an eating club even more sinister and secret than his own. Whatever it is, he wants in. However, he has to be careful in seeking his ultra-exclusive invitation, lest he reveal the horrible



stuff he's already doing.

Bradley Myers

Minnesota

Personality: This former NFL offensive lineman revels in the spotlight, just as he did in his day giving locker room interviews. He speaks nearly entirely in sports clichés.

Goals: 1) *To gather support for a presidential run after Bierce's second term is up.* 2) Land a book deal.

Downfall: Showboating

Persuade / Rebuff Styles: Intimidating / Lawyerly

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

History With Cross: Myers views him as another alpha male, and thus as a threat until dominance is established.

Diane Pendleton

Kentucky

Personality: Like many political women of her generation, Diane Pendleton had to harden herself and appear tougher than the men around her. She plays her mean lady professor persona to the hilt.

Goals: Conceal her religious conversion.

Downfall: After a spiritual crisis following a failed run for her party's presidential nomination, Diane converted to the quirky faith of Pneumalogics. Though made famous by movie stars and pop idols, this growing worldwide faith is still considered kooky by most, and a dangerous cult by a few. The church hierarchy has instructed Pendleton to keep quiet about her membership in the church, so she can better further their extensive business and legal interests.

Persuade / Rebuff Styles: Intimidating / Pure-Hearted

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

History With Cross: In a long ago moment of weakness, when she was a mere White House staffer, Pendleton and Cross had a brief affair, which he ended by leaving a message on her answering machine.

The Opposition

Chet McGinn

New Jersey

Personality: A blowhard's blowhard, Chet McGinn ran roughshod over members of the President's party when they were out in the minority. He's having a hard time adjusting to the political wilderness of opposition status. Yearning for the rush of power, he vacillates between being a loudmouth critic of the administration to acting as a deal-maker, according to which move earns him the richest, thickest dose of flattery.

Goals: 1) Have as many people groveling to him as possible. 2) *Have the first lady's PR liaison, Nancy Winter, fired* for having been caught on tape profanely insulting him. Mrs. Bierce is fiercely loyal to Nancy, who she roomed with as an undergraduate.

Downfall: Arrogant

Persuade / Rebuff Styles: Eloquent / Lawyerly

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

History With Cross: McGinn is still smarting from a recent appearance with Cross on a cable news show. Cross humiliatingly filleted him.

Solomon Thomas

Iowa

Personality: This silver-haired political lion heavily features his much younger wife and fine brood of cute children in all of his campaign literature. Behind their backs, he's carrying on with leggy staffer Ashley Wafford. Behind her back, he's also "mentoring" an ex-stripper, ex-meth addict named Nicole Shook.

Goals: 1) Successfully juggle his three lives without getting caught. 2) Add a few notches to his one-night stand list.

Downfall: Libidinous

Persuade / Rebuff Styles: Eloquent / Contrary

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

History With Cross: Thomas' ex-stripper girlfriend tearfully reports an unpleasant sexual encounter with Cross in the strip club parking lot. She's a pathological

liar, but that doesn't mean it didn't happen. (Decide the truth according to what makes the most interesting trouble for the PCs.)

Decided For Cross

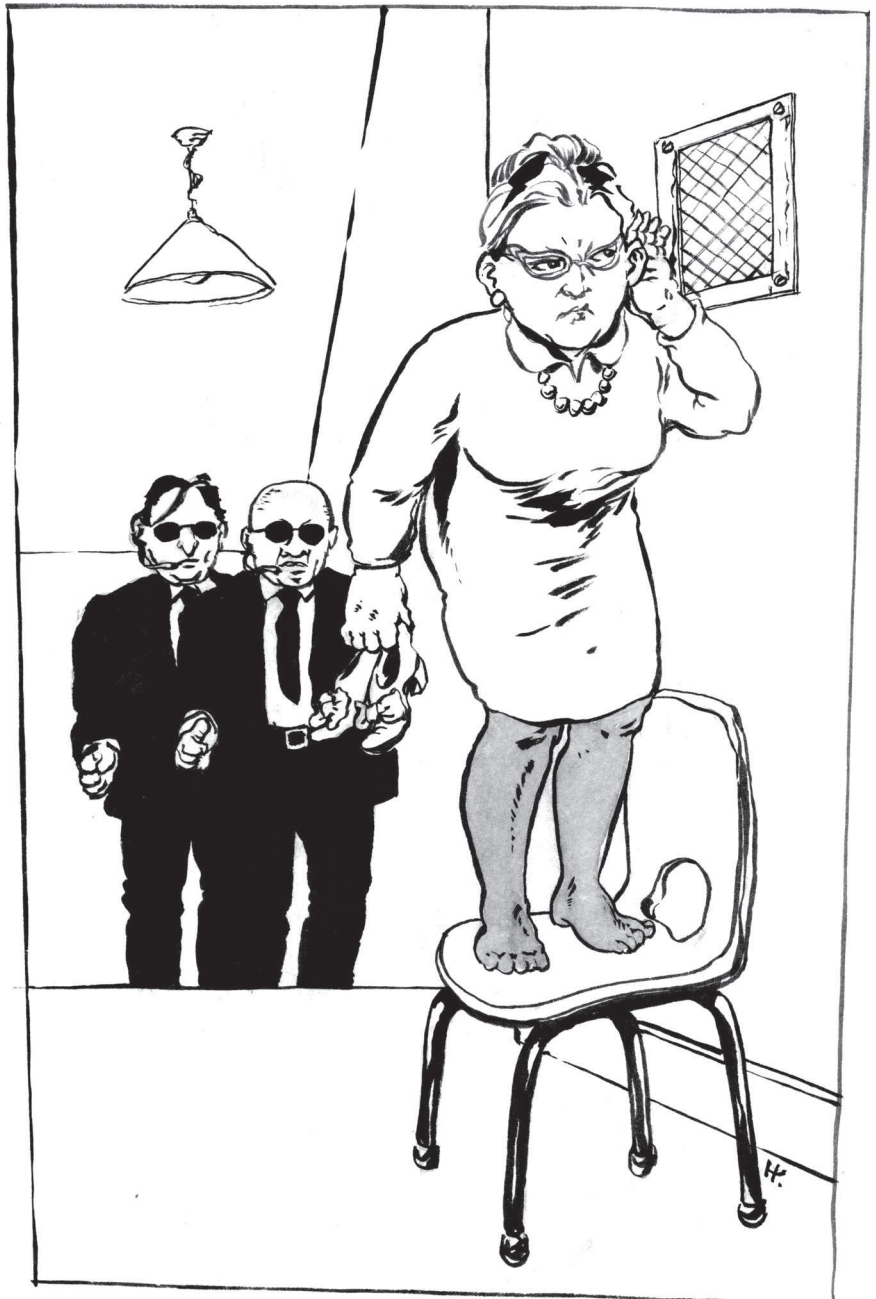
All of these Senators are firmly loyal to the President:

- **Daron Borland**, Vermont (Glib / Pure-Hearted) self-righteously believes that no one is more committed to his pet issue than he is. If he's a Dem, the issue is climate control; if he's a Republican, it's a flat tax.
- **Gerald Burnlee**, Texas (Glib / Obtuse) lives to correct others' pronunciation, word usage, and punctuation.
- **Martha Eason**, Hawaii (Forthright / Contrary) bears a tight-lipped grudge against anyone who dares question her commitment to the President's agenda.
- **Geoffery Hollis**, Rhode Island (Obfuscatory / Contrary) fears being caught out as an idiot and has his staffers do all the talking for him.
- **Brian Millay**, Virginia (Forthright / Wary) would rather engage in monologue than conversation.
- **Stanley Spires**, New Mexico (Charming / Wary) hews to the party line because otherwise he'd have to form independent judgments, an exercise he finds wearisome.

Decided Against Cross

All of these Senators are fierce opponents of the President.

- **Brad Froman**, Florida (Obfuscatory / Lawyerly) cares only about fundraising. His network of rich Bierce haters would go ballistic if he caved to the President in any controversy.
- **Fredric Luo**, New Hampshire (Obfuscatory / Obtuse) finds it easier to stick to the party line after a head injury robbed him of his ability to form short-term memories. He was so dumb before his kayaking accident that no one around him can tell the difference.
- **Charles O'Neal**, Arkansas (Glib / Contrary) hates Bierce for speaking out against him when both were fellow senators and O'Neal faced ethics charges over corporate-funded renovations to his hunting lodge.
- **Jesse Reid**, Ohio (Eloquent / Pure-Hearted) is too fiercely ideological for Bierce's people to sway.



- **Ingrid Belt**, Utah (Obfuscatory / Penetrating) spends her time generating talking points for her party faithful to parrot on cable news shows. She specializes in arguments bulletproofed against rational response by their sheer bat-guano insanity.
- **Joan Trumble**, Arizona (Intimidating / Obtuse), a former prosecutor, believes that the Bierce administration is completely corrupt.

The Terrible Secret of Francis Cross

Ten years ago, Francis Cross and his longtime friend Jay Dekker got lost while camping in the wilderness near Hi-De-Ho National Park. Dekker died of exposure and a disoriented Cross wandered over the park boundaries, to be discovered by park policeman Ed McCall. In Cross' knapsack, McCall found Dekker's severed hand, which showed signs of having been gnawed by human teeth. McCall took photos and videos of his find, including a confession of cannibalism by Cross. After being fed at the station, Cross returned to his senses and offered to pull strings on McCall's behalf in exchange for suppressing the bit about Dekker's hand. Assured that Cross didn't kill his friend, but merely fed on him a little after his demise, McCall agreed. Cross used his political connections to arrange for McCall to be made head of the Park Police, in addition to paying him an annual stipend.

Half a year ago, McCall died in a tragic elk-related accident and Alex Rogers was made head of the Park Police. Rogers found McCall's secret file, including the video tape, hidden in the ceiling of his predecessor's office. He's been sitting on it ever since, anxious to cash in but afraid that it might be a scam or some weird entrapment scheme.

An entry point to this plot line appears on Fingerhut's identity card. If Fingerhut is not in play, or that player doesn't pick up the thread, Rogers establishes a connection with another PC and commences a shakedown. Keep the obstacles coming so that the threat that Cross' secret might be exposed remains active throughout the session.

Fires To Put Out

Deploy some of following complications if needed, either to bring in a player who isn't engaged or hasn't had a shot at the spotlight.



- Current executives at RexMo Insurance contact the Vice President with alarming news. Federal investigators are hot on the trail of financial shenanigans they and Cutter are equally complicit in. If the investigation isn't blocked, and quickly, they could all wind up doing hard time.
- Fingerhut's jailed mentor Dalton Flask places a panicked call, claiming that a prison gang is extorting him. He needs out of prison, pronto.
- Software magnate Gilbert Nickels, a supposedly committed backer of Simmons' senatorial ambitions calls to say he's having second thoughts. If he doesn't get some other cool backers on board soon, Gilbert will instead devote his spare cash to orphans in Africa.
- A favorable regime change threatens the chances of war in whatever country Doss has targeted for invasion. Find a reason for Odom

to want to protect the new regime that's messing up Doss' plans.

- The President mis-speaks at a banquet, offending one of his core interest groups and threatening his approval rating. He calls on Willis to perform damage control.

CLOSER

Just as the committee vote is about to take place, a crisis erupts that threatens the support of one or more undecideds who appeared to be in the bag. The PCs must race against time to suppress the impending revelation before it all blows up in their faces. Possible crises:

- a new threat that Cross' secret will be revealed, from an unexpected source
- one or more of the PCs' underhanded schemes on Cross' behalf unravel, threatening both the nomination and their own careers

TAGLINES

- Let me interrupt you right there. I don't want to say anything. I just want to interrupt.
- I hope he's not off "Hiking the Appalachian Trail", if you know what I mean.
- Don't mess with my bubble of denial.
- Do I smell the stench of appeasement?
- If Washington is Hollywood for the ugly, you're a freaking superstar.
- We must stand fast to our principles, after of course determining what those might be.
- The blogs are going to link us into the ground on this one.
- That's what I admire about you, Senator-- your brave embrace of incredibly unpopular causes.
- I wouldn't let him run the clown barrel at a rodeo.
- Help, I'm running out of euphemisms.
- I'd say you're toast, but I'm beholden to the bread industry.
- They put the "rank" in "rank and file."
- It's only wrong when the other guy does it.
- The day we can't make a quick buck off this is the day we stop being Americans.
- I'd make a joke about having to kill you, but then I'd have to kill you.
- Could you acronym that for me, please?
- Was that a non-denial denial, or a denial denial?
- That's a great idea. If you're Hitler.
- You're overmining my undermining!
- The English would refer to this as "tired and

emotional."

- Will that make sense if I have some more coffee?
- Grab him by the earmarks and squeeze.
- Maybe just this once the Senators will set ego aside. Kidding!
- I used to believe that, when I was young and drunk.
- He's gone off the reservation, over the median, and straight through the liquor 'n' fireworks emporium.
- Swing voters are not as interesting as the term implies.
- How cute. You still have illusions left to shatter.
- This isn't a crisis. It's a cris-portunity.
- This is not entirely consistent with family values.
- I just have a wide stance.
- Ethics, schmethics.
- Redact that son of a bitch.
- They're not bombs. They're personnel and terrain readjusters.
- If I said that, I was misquoted.
- How about you take the blame and I take the credit?
- I don't have a conscience, but I do have an ulcer.



SKULDUGGERY & CROSSBONES

THE SETTING

The action occurs in the early part of the 18th century, aboard the pirate sloop *Black Swan*, becalmed in the Caribbean.

In this setting, the Mechanic ability is renamed to Shipwright, and allows characters to repair sailing vessels.

COLLECTIVE GOAL

Prepare your becalmed pirate ship to successfully defend against impending attack by the privateer vessel *The Indomitable*.

RELATIONSHIPS

Shaky Nate, Ship's Doctor

Personality: Bedraggled and nearly toothless, the grizzled fellow named Shaky Nate is charged with the duty of keeping the crew of the *Black Swan* hale, healthy, and comparatively scurvy-free. When not called to duty, he spends his time calibrating his perpetual drunken stupor to a state of tipsy bliss. If asked, he claims to have been trained as a doctor back in Portsmouth. In fact, he picked up his medical knowledge second-hand, as assistant to a long-deceased quack aboard a previous pirate ship. Aside from possibly the PCs, no one on the ship seems concerned by the fact that their resident healer is nicknamed "Shaky."

Goals: 1) Stay drunk. 2) Remain sheltered from heat. 3) Remain in the good graces of his fellow pirates, who keep him fed and supplied with rum.

Sample Favors: 1) Patch up wounds. 2) Mediate disputes.

Downfall: Dissolute

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Abilities: Appraisal 2, Attack (Caution) 2, Athletics 1, Defense (Parry) 2, Eavesdropping 3, Gambling 4, Gossip 1, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Natural History), Living Rough



4, Moxy 4, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Perception 3, Physician 6, Pilot (Ship) 1, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 2, Shipwright 1, Stealth 1, Weaponmaster 1.

Jabsy, Captain Nimmons' Parrot

Personality: Jabsy is a talking bird who, until moments before the latter's decapitation by a great white shark, perched perpetually on Captain Nimmons' shoulder. He speaks in a perfect rendition of his master's voice. The bird's eerily accurate imitation extends even to the captain's uneasy, hesitant body language. Although everyone knows that birds merely mimic human

Character Tracker

Player	Character	Key Temptation
	John “Peg Leg” Belmay	
	Christopher “Black Palm” Bradish	
	Edward Newcastle	
	Luc-David “Frenchie” Corriveau	
	William “Monkey Paw” Washburn	
	“Rum Keg” Annie Evans	

intelligence, Jubsy seems to match his comments to their conversational context. Characters may come to suspect that he’s the smartest creature on the ship.

Goals: 1) Get a cracker.

Sample Favors: 1) Give advice as Captain Nimmons would have done. 2) Spy on events with a bird’s eye view, then report back. 3) Strategically defecate on targets below.

Downfall: Gluttonous (crackers)

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Finesse) 6, Athletics 3, Defense (Dodge) 10, Eavesdropping 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Philosophy), Living Rough 4, Moxy 6, Persuade (Eloquent) 6, Perception 6, Performance (Singing) 4, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 8, Stealth 6.

Old Tar, Helmsman

Personality: Decades of exposure to wind and sun have baked the brains of the monstrosly broad-shouldered helmsman known only as Old Tar. He speaks only in grunts, groans, and of course the obligatory, “Arrhh.” If he’s capable of ordinary speech, no one has heard it. He’s been on the ship longer than anyone—some say he helped to build it. He owes his long survival to his avoidance of piratical politics. Old Tar shows steadfast loyalty to whoever the others anoint as captain, and otherwise keeps his own counsel.

Goals: 1) Avoid factional entanglement. 2) Protect the ship.

Sample Favors: 1) Provide unintelligible advice on navigational matters.

Downfall: Fearful (Avoids conflict)

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Abilities: Appraisal 2, Attack (Strength) 8, Athletics 8, Craftsmanship (Woodcarving) 3, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 8, Eavesdropping 4, Gambling 4, Living Rough 6, Moxy 6, Persuade (Intimidating) 1, Perception 4, Physician 2, Pilot (Ship) 9, Rebuff (Obtuse) 7, Shipwright 7, Weaponmaster 2.

Wee Danny, Cabin Boy

Personality: Wee Danny is a twelve-year old of uncertain origin who stowed aboard the *Black Swan* when it last docked in the free pirate port of Tortuga. Each person who asks about his life before the Swan gets a different answer. He might be an apprentice who escaped a cruel master, a disenfranchised royal relative, or an ordinary scrappy orphan. The crew of the *Swan* treats him as a sort of pet, often failing to notice his presence.

Goals: 1) Arrange for the election of a captain who will treat him well. 2) Don’t get caught doing it, in case someone nasty wins.

Sample Favors: 1) Spy on rivals. 2) Commit acts of





sabotage against rivals of his chosen candidate.

Downfall: Fearful (easy prey)

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Abilities: Appraisal 3, Attack (Ferocity) 6, Athletics 6, Defense (Misdirection) 6, Eavesdropping 6, Gambling 2, Gossip 6, Knowledge 3 (Sp: European Aristocracy), Living Rough 6, Moxy 2, Persuade (Charming) 4, Perception 6, Performance (Jigs and Reels) 4, Physician 3, Pilot (Ship) 3, Rebuff (Wary) 4, Shipwright 2, Stealth 7, Weaponmaster 3.

Bartholomew Cubbins, Account Keeper

Personality: Once the account keeper on an honest trading vessel, the meek and mousy Cubbins was

kidnapped three years ago by the crew of the *Black Swan*. Since then he has been forced to perform similar duties for them. He counts all the treasure, making careful records of each man's due share. When the ship weighs anchor in a place where treasure can be spent, he parcels it out with trembling hand, waiting for the disputes to begin. His captors used to keep him chained up but he is now so resigned to his fate that they let him roam around free.

Goals: 1) Avoid getting his throat slit. 2) Prevent theft of treasure under his care, except when doing so would interfere with goal #1. 3) Create conditions for an absolutely guaranteed safe escape.

Sample Favors: 1) Provide information on status of treasure haul and who is owed what. 2) Give political advice.

Downfall: Fearful

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Fortright / Obfusatory

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Caution) 1, Athletics 1, Defense (Dodge) 2, Eavesdropping 4, Gossip 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Economics), Living Rough 3, Management 3, Moxy 1, Persuade (Obfusatory) 2, Perception 4, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 4.

Barrel Bill Buntledge, Captain's Enforcer

Personality: The titanic bald brawler Barrel Bill is so named because it's the 18th century and the nickname "Brick Shithouse Bill" hasn't been invented yet. He likes nothing better than to flog a man within an inch of his life, or slowly break and twist his bones. Barrel Bill doesn't want to be captain himself, because it's too much work. That said, Bill can think of many of his fellow crewmen in need of a good keelhauling, and Nimmons' comparatively lenient tenure has left his bloodlust unslaked.

Goals: 1) Make sure that he winning candidate shares his cruel streak. 2) Hurt people and get away with it.

Sample Favors: 1) Beat and torture deserving crewmen. 2) Intimidate the weak.

Replacing Dead PCs

Given the treacherous nature of the storyline, PCs may be killed by their fellows before the session expires. When this happens, allow players to continue, using the same abilities and pool levels, but assigning new names from the above list. Encourage players to create their own new personalities for these replacement characters. However, replacement PCs are introduced with an impediment ruling them out as captain material. Collaborate with players to decide what this might be, varying it for each replacement. Examples might include:

- hasn't been on the ship long enough
- disqualified by physical impairment
- was already captain once, and made a terrible hash of it
- that incident in port that one time that no one will speak of
- dress code violations

Only if the entire complement of original characters dies will the crew even consider listening to leadership pitches from replacement characters.

This mechanism allows players to keep participating after their first characters are killed, without entirely removing the incentive for killing off one's rivals.

Downfall: Spiteful

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Appraisal 2, Attack (Strength) 10, Athletics 6, Defense (Intuition) 4, Gambling 3, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Graeco-Roman Sporting Events), Living Rough 4, Moxy 5, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Pilot (Ship) 1, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Shipwright 3, Weaponmaster 2.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Because this scenario pits the PCs against one another, it includes fewer supporting characters than usual.

William Vane, First Mate

"I declare your objection null and void, the reasons for which require no explanation."

Personality: Foppish, nasal-voiced, and supercilious, William Vane has long coveted the captain's cabin. He believes himself cleverer and more vicious than Captain Nimmons. He and Nimmons grew up together in the south of England. Vane schemed to get ahead; Nimmons always blundered his way to success and brought Vane along with him.

Goals: Gleeful at his hated friend's demise, Vane steps up immediately to declare himself captain.

Downfall: Arrogance. Although he sort of understands that no one on the ship likes him, he doesn't see how this might serve as an impediment to his plans.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Cunning) 4, Athletics 2, Defense (Vexation) 4, Eavesdropping 6, Gambling 5, Gossip 5, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Art Appreciation), Living Rough 4, Management 2, Moxy 2, Persuade (Glib) 2, Perception 1, Pilot (Ship) 3, Rebuff (Contrary) 6, Shipwright 2, Stealth 5, Weaponmaster 2.

Names

Use the following names for additional crewmen.

Peter Coin	Black Henry Braden
Joseph "Scar" Robbins	Benjamin Cursefield
Mean George Mings	Simon Hornigold
Thomas Weston	Charles Behn
William Wales	Francis Condent
Bloody Sam Challice	Christophe Bretagne
Louis Laforet	Nicholas Butler
Richard Elfrith	Walter Sawkins
Jerome "the Hook" Vallantine	
Red Leonard Pike	





OPENER

The component cards for this scenario contain spoilers for the first scene. Hand them out after the shark bites Nimmons' head off.

As the action begins, the crew of the pirate sloop *Black Swan* have been becalmed for two agonizing weeks. Lay on the sensory details with a trowel as you emphasize the misery of its tormented crew. Paraphrase the description; read the speech.

The weather has been chokingly hot and humid. Stores of fresh water, hardtack and salted cod dwindle. The rum barrels fare no better. Worse, the crew has reason

to worry when the winds reappear.

The ship's sneering first mate, William Vane, calls the crew to attention. Captain Nigel "Wobbly" Nimmons stands on the forward deck and launches into a speech. Though he is wasted from lack of food, his wig remains combed and powdered. His velvet frock coat seems scarcely wilted. His beloved parrot Jubsy perches on his shoulder. Speaking in the tones of a blandly reassuring bureaucrat, he launches into a speech:

"My friends, I, your captain, stand before you to acknowledge that mistakes have been made. While it is beyond any man's power to summon the winds, I acknowledge in retrospect that it was a mistake for me to kill that albatross. Though a believer in the advances of science and no slave to superstition, it was insensitive of me to use the beastly thing as target practice. While in no way conceding that my albatross slaying in any way relates to our becalmed state, I apologize for any distress or offense I may have caused.

"Still, we must buck up, for as you will all recall we were pursued by that persistent buccaneering vessel, *The Indomitable*, before the winds abandoned us. As it is larger and better armed than us, and its ladders no doubt deeper, we face genuine challenges when we escape our present woe. Its captain, the sterling and dashing Neville Flynn, would be a dangerous enemy even if we were not starving. So yes, I admit that it was an error on my part, when last we met, to accuse him of having made romantic advances on his sister.

"Nonetheless, I'm sure you'll all agree that nothing brings a crew together like adversity. With this in mind, I'd like to propose a jolly new round of austerity—"

Before Nimmons can complete his sentence, a great white shark, the largest one any of these seasoned seamen have ever seen, leaps across the ship's bow. It chomps Nimmons' head off, swallows it, and disappears over the other side.

Now what do the characters do?

Drowning

Pirate adventures being what they are, one of the characters may well end up overboard and facing the risk of drowning. On a successful Athletics check, the character swims and makes it back to the ship without harm. On a failure, he suffers an injury. If others intervene to keep him in the water, he may need to make multiple consecutive Athletics checks, taking an injury for each check failed.

SCENES AND SITUATIONS

Vane Assumes Command

Moments after Nimmons hits the ground, Willam Vane jumps up and claims command of the ship. Vane admits that this contravenes the ship's pirate charter, which calls for the election of a new captain. He cites the emergency they now find themselves in as reason to assume that he, as the first mate, would win the vote. If you haven't already described Vane and how unpopular he is, do so now. He calls Jubsy to sit on his shoulder, but the parrot refuses.

Out of fear, all of the relationship characters treat Vane as captain until the PCs do something to remove him from consideration.

Allow the player-driven scheming to commence. They will probably team up to get ride of Vane, then fall on each other. Some groups will get straight to the backstabbing, where others might agree to a peaceful campaign.

The Vote

According to the Swan's pirate charter, a two-day period of discussion and debate precedes the secret ballot to select a new captain. Explain the voting procedures as follows. Italicized passages are for your reference only.

Every time a character takes a successful action that proves popular with the crew during this period, he gains a boon of 1-3 points, which can be applied to the final electioneering contest.

1 point boons are granted for actions that make crewmen happy without materially improving their present position. Election-style promises, especially ones that the characters won't have to make good on before the

scenario ends, fall into this category.

2 point boons are awarded for minor but concrete improvements to the crew's current state.

3 point boons are granted for big victories, like disposing of Vane or Barrel Bill.

To spur competition, keep track of the running boon total in a way that the players can see: for example, with a white board.

The vote plays out as a multiple participant persuade contest (p. 21) with the crew as a whole acting as granter. Each candidate moves to the foredeck and gives a short initial speech to the crew. This devolves into a free-wheeling debate, with each reroll representing a new interjection or counterpoint to a previous debater's point.

The crew's Rebuff style depends on circumstances when the vote occurs. Contestants can further prepare for victory by arranging for the crew to be in the mood most susceptible to their style of argument. **Tell the players which conditions are favorable or unfavorable to their situations.**

They'll be in a Pure-Hearted mood (trumped by Glib, trumps Intimidating) if Wee Danny has done something inspiring or heroic. *If his heroics are exposed as a sham perpetrated by another, the would-be deceiver suffers a levy of 1.*

If kept from eating the last of the meager food supply, they'll be in a Contrary mood (trumped by Eloquent, trumps Charming.) *The crew is very intent on eating that food.*

The crew will be in a Lawyerly mood (trumped by Obfuscatory, trumps Fortright) if the ship's lost pirate charter is found and passed around immediately before the vote. Allow any character who determinedly pursues the charter to find it, after overcoming suitably amusing anecdotes. It's located in the third place someone thinks to look for it.

They'll be in a Wary mood (trumped by Charming, trumps Eloquent) if something bad has happened to Wee Danny. *However, candidates who are believed to be responsible for Danny's misfortune suffer a levy of 1 in the vote contest.*

The crew's mood is Penetrating (trumped by Fortright, trumps Obfuscatory) if the treasure has gone missing, or something seems amiss with Bartholomew's ledgers. *Candidates deemed responsible for missing treasure*





or bookkeeping irregularities face a levy of 1 in the vote contest.

To induce an Obtuse reception (trumped by Intimidating, trumps Glib), get the crew drunk. *Doing so requires the last of the grog supply. Because this is a recipe for later disaster, the Relationship characters will try to stop this from happening. The key to the supplies is in the hand of the third Relationship character asked for it.*

When several Rebuff-altering conditions seem to apply, use the one that, as of the beginning of the vote, came most recently into play.

Adjust your pacing so that the vote takes place around the three-hour mark (assuming a four-hour session.)

You may find yourself prompting the players with requests or complaints from crew members. They'll want to know the candidates' plans and proposals, for getting the ship moving again and for defeating the *Indomitable*. Like many requests of real-life voters, the first item is beyond any candidates' control.

Assorted requests from individual crewmen might include:

- promises of larger grog rations
- better quality grog
- alcoholic choices other than grog
- better food rations
- laundry service
- newer, shinier weapons
- investment in cannons
- sell off some of current cannons to distribute proceeds to crew
- extended shore leave
- juicier targets for plunder
- settling of complex theological questions
- permission for talent competition
- vendetta against white whale
- did we mention the grog?

The Returning Shark and Other Delaying Measures

Campaigning for the captaincy—and undermining the other candidates—should easily take up three hours. If this thread loses energy, confront the PCs with their temptations.

Should another major complication seem appropriate, the giant shark returns, again jumping up out of the water to chomp off an unwary head. It always takes a crewman from the ranks, not a PC or Relationship character.

To kill it, the PCs must devise and execute a scheme to attract its attention when they're ready for it. For example, an unpopular person might be dangled off the plank as bait. Then a character must score an Attack or Athletics success, armed with a harpoon—or cutlass, if they're willing to get dangerously close. As the shark only pops up for a few seconds, only one character can try, without rerolls. Clever plans that keep him out of the water longer remove this disadvantage. On Exasperating Success, the shark is wounded and swims away, never to be seen again, granting a 1-point boon to the upcoming vote contest. On an Ordinary Success, it is killed but sinks beneath the waves (2-point boon.) It can be hauled up and served as a feast to a hungry crew (3-point boon) on an Impressive Success.

Closer: Battle With the Indomitable

When the new captain is chosen, check to see if the other PCs do anything immediately to counter his or her accession. If they all seem at least momentarily resigned to the outcome, the winds then suddenly pick up. The *Black Swan* is able to set sail again!

Not long after they resume their course, their enemy appears on the horizon. It's the *Indomitable*. It bears down on them, ready to pound them with its superior guns.

The *Indomitable's* statistics (including the values of its helmsman, weaponmaster and engineer) are: Weaponry 12, Maneuverability 8, Integrity 12.

The *Black Swan's* values are Weaponry 5, Maneuverability 7, and Integrity 4. The character commanding the ship's cannons adds his Weaponmaster to Weaponry. The helmsman adds Pilot to Maneuverability; a third character can add his Shipwright to Integrity.

If Old Tar is still around when the fight begins, he promptly collapses, forcing a PC to take his place. He falls prey to whatever condition seems most darkly amusing, given previous story developments. If nothing else makes sense, he dies of starvation, having deprived himself so that other crewmen might eat.

After reducing the *Indomitable's* Maneuverability to 0, a successful Maneuverability roll on the part of the *Black Swan's* crew allows them to board the *Indomitable*. The *Indomitable* can board the *Black Swan* under reversed circumstances, but might instead prefer to sink the ship from a distance and let all the pirates drown.

Use the pooled effort rules (p. 18) to determine the

outcome of a boarding attempt. Players roll Attack to see how well they did. The pooled effort outcomes break down as follows:

1. **Dismal Failure.** The crew of the *Black Swan* is defeated and captured, allowing their enemies to take over their ship. Heads roll.
2. **Routine Failure.** The *Black Swan* crew is repulsed. The *Indomitable* may be dead in the water, but its crew has proven itself too tough to overcome.
3. **Exasperating Failure:** The crew of the *Indomitable* rallies at the last moment, beating back the men of the *Black Swan*. Although their ship remains uncaptured, it's clear that this bunch won't be terrorizing any poor defenseless pirates any time soon.
4. **Hair's-Breadth Success:** The *Black Swan* takes over the *Indomitable*, but its crewmen sustain a few minor casualties.
5. **Ordinary Success:** The *Indomitable* is captured without serious harm to any *Black Swan* crewman.
6. **Impressive Success:** The *Indomitable* crew abjectly surrenders, with nary a scratch to the *Black Swan* crew.

On any failed result, PCs must make Defense rolls to avoid injury.

During the battle, look out for possible Final Comeuppances (p. 46.) Depending on how they fare in the battle, the tale ends with the new captain boldly setting sail toward a new destination for plunder, or going down with all hands as the *Black Swan* sinks beneath the waves. Or the PCs might escape in a rowboat as the ship sinks. Or do something unexpected. Whatever happens, find a note of finality and call the story to an end.

TAGLINES

- I don't have scurvy. I have scabies. There's a difference, you know.
- I wove this lanyard from the silken hair of a sharp-toothed mermaid.
- Your breath reeks of grog and rotten lung.
- I propose that we institute "talk like a landlubber" day.
- Have you ever seen a narwhal?
- I would put my culinary supremacy on proud display, had we ingredients of any description.
- That was brave and magnificent—two qualities I loathe.

- The next person to comment on the irony of dying of thirst while surrounded by water gets a dagger in the eye.
- Maybe this is a bad time to mention this, but over the years I've killed loads of albatross.
- That is a handsome tattoo. Can I have it when you die?
- I don't believe the ship's charter covers such an eventuality.
- I don't believe the ship's charter covers such an eventuality.
- We serve under the black flag, but that's no excuse for rudeness.
- We serve under the black flag, but that's no excuse for rudeness.
- Rest assured that I betray my friends only after prolonged consideration.
- Rest assured that I betray my friends only after prolonged consideration.
- Don't you normally wear that patch on the other eye?
- What does this look like? A pope hat, or a pirate hat?
- What does this look like? A pope hat, or a pirate hat?
- A thought comes to mind, but I will save it for your eulogy.
- Why let me tell you of the evil spirit Davy Jones, who perches in the rigging of becalmed ships, his eyes like saucers and his tongue like licks of flame...
- Later, you must tell me how you did that.
- I would gladly trade all my worldly treasure for a moment's peace. Not literally, of course.
- Are you making pirate sounds, or just clearing your throat?
- The ocean tried to drown me once, but then threw me back up.
- The last time I trusted a parrot, I woke up in Bermuda, with nary a cracker to call my own.
- Is it my malnutrition talking, or have you come increasingly to resemble a leg of mutton?
- The shriek of the gulls is an incessant demand for the spilling of your blood.
- Is that the Black Hand, or have you given up washing again?
- You wouldn't say that if it weren't for all the sunstroke.
- They call them pieces of eight, but really it's eight pieces of something else.
- You give ruthless savagery a bad name.
- Has anyone ever told you that your hairline resembles the coast of Antigua?
- I said that only under duress.
- Never have I set eyes on a more contemptible pack of sea dogs!
- Piracy isn't what it used to be...



CASTING CALL

THE SETTING

The PCs are seniors at Luserville High in an unspecified American state. Their town, Luserville, is named after the 19th century Belgian-American pioneer and botanist Andreas Luser. Draw on either your real life or your media-derived mastery of American high school stereotypes to fill in the rest.

Before handing out component cards, ask players to keep their personal goals secret. If a player winds up trading away an identity card, however, his new character may act as if he knows the secret of the original card's personal goal.

Resistances Renamed

To better fit the setting, the following resistances are renamed:

Standard Name	Casting Call Name
Arrogant	Stuck-Up
Dissolute	Partying
Indolent	Lazy
Lustful	Horny
Showboating	Show-Off

Nitpicky keeps its standard name.

COLLECTIVE GOAL

Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

RELATIONSHIPS

Chelsea Burns, Class Gossip

"You totally won't believe the latest wait till I tell you don't tell anyone else though this is so unbelievable isn't it?"

Personality: Pretty and loquacious, Chelsea Burns loves people. No, scratch that: she loves talking about people. If you want to know what her fellow students are up to, or wish to introduce information into the school's social bloodstream, go to Chelsea. Kids with interesting lives fear her; those with boring ones adore the gossip she spreads. Chelsea fears being discredited, and so never spreads a rumor until she's confident that it won't backfire on her.

Goals: 1) Learn other people's secrets. 2) Gain attention and popularity by sharing them.



Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Sample Favors: Gain, share, or spread information.

Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 6, Gossip 8, Moxxy 1, Perception 6, Persuade (Glib) 2, Rebuff (Wary) 6, Stealth 3.

Gary Cottle, School Principal

"Whoa, whoa. There's no call to get exercised."

Personality: Blandness personified, Gary Cottle is a seasoned administrator who rose in the educational ranks by making sure his superiors never received any news they didn't want to hear. He takes a liking to certain students but keeps his distance from most. Cottle considers the good feelings generated by the annual theatrical production a net positive for the school's image but won't go out on a limb to protect it. Strong emotions alarm him, whether they come from students, faculty, or parents. The principal's overriding instinct is to calm the waters.

Goals: Protect his political position within the system

Character Tracker

Player	Character	Title	Goal
	Alyssa Watson	<i>The Popular Girl</i>	Have the audience cheer louder for your bow than for anyone else's.
	Tom Cleat	<i>The Quarterback</i>	Find true love with someone who understands you for who you really are.
	Jayne Bates	<i>The Wallflower</i>	Get back at Tom Cleat for toying with your affections.
	Darin Hemner	<i>The Flamboyant One</i>	Get noticed by a talent scout.
	Carita Blackburn	<i>The Goth Chick</i>	Get back at Alyssa Watson for being mean to your friends.
	Terrell Jerome	<i>The Outlaw</i>	Find an outlet for your energies that will get your probation officer off your back.

by keeping his superiors, parents, and staff calm and unaware.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Sample Favors: 1) Placate upset faculty or parents. 2) Soften unreasonable disciplinary measures.

Abilities: Etiquette 6, Moxy 6, Persuade (Glib) 5, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8.

Brittany Davison, School Paper Editor

"I am both the Woodward and the Bernstein of Luserville High. They are historical figures you can look up on Wikipedia."

Personality: The chirpy, idealistic Brittany Davison runs the *Luserville Luse-Lip*, the so-called school paper. (In fact, it's a blog, updated daily, under the supervision of a burned out English teacher named Mrs. Truby.) Brittany takes herself seriously as a journalist. She covers any perceived injustice with the pure passion of a politically engaged teenager.

Goals: 1) Fight injustice. 2) Get a headstart for her journalism portfolio.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Sample Favors: 1) Run articles favorable to a character's agenda, provided that they're serious and not gossipy. 2) Ferret out information.

Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Moxy 4, Perception 6, Persuade (Eloquent) 4, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 4, Stealth 4.

Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher

"I'm sorry, gang. I told you I couldn't promise anything."

Personality: Attractive and friendly, Ms. Jurado is the young teacher every bookish girl wants to be and every heterosexual boy fantasizes about before bedtime. The school band serves as the pit orchestra for the play; she'll rehearse and conduct it. Although she has no direct influence over the production, she can try to put in a good word with the director on the characters' behalf.

Goals: 1) Help the students to achieve their dreams. 2) Show them that authority figures can be cool, too.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Sample Favors: 1) Intercede with other teachers or staff. 2) Rally resources to save the show. 3) Give vocal tips to struggling performers.

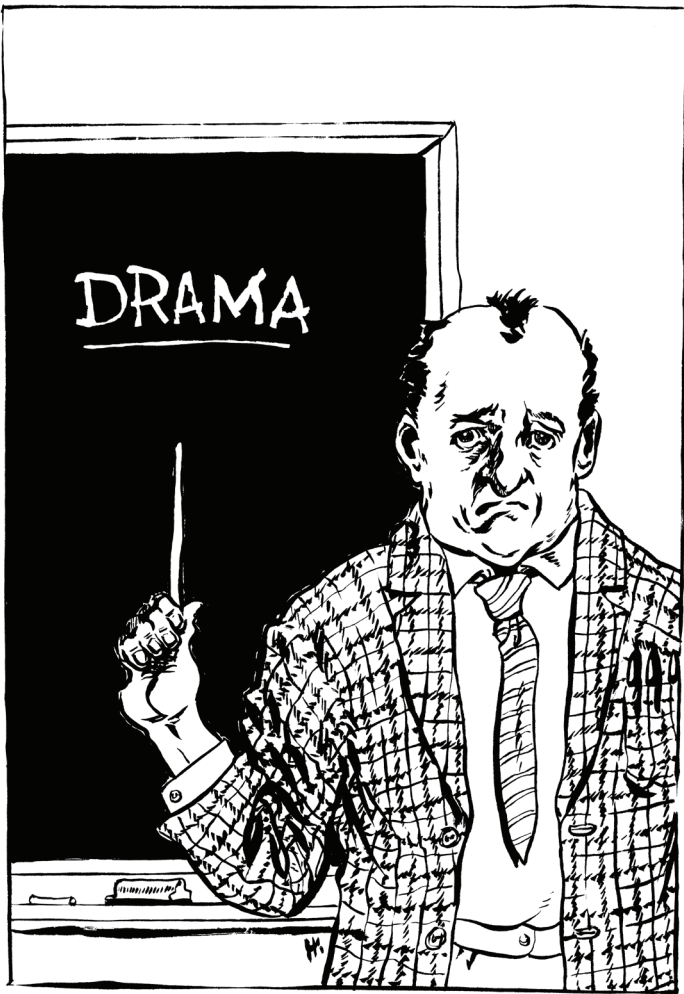
Abilities: Etiquette 6, Moxy 6, Perception 4, Performance (Piano) 5, Performance (Singing) 3, Persuade (Charming) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 4.

Josh Mandell, Media Club President

"Do you want that in hi-def?"

Personality: Bouncily enthusiastic, Josh loves to spread the joy of computers and audio visual equipment. No matter how geeky the drama kids might be, they'll never be as far down on the nerdy scale as Josh. Rubbing elbows with them constitutes a social upgrade. Although Josh maintains crushes on all three of the female PCs, his fruitless infatuation with Alyssa Watson





borders on the paralyzing.

Goals: 1) Become marginally cooler without abandoning his nerdish enthusiasms. 2) Have Alyssa acknowledge his existence.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Sample Favors: 1) Supply, explain or run audio-visual equipment. 2) Provide computer tech support. 3) Rally other members of the geek tribe. 4) Optimize your *Champions* character.

Abilities: Craftsmanship (Photoshop) 6, Mechanic 6, Perception 3, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Contrary) 4.

Cody Yamamoto, Lord of the Stoners
“Whoa, did you just... whoa....”

Personality: Skateboarder and THC inhaler supreme, Cody Yamamoto lopes in slow motion through the halls as Luserville’s alpha stoner. Good-natured but paranoid, he may be talked out of his state of extreme relaxation

when presented with an opportunity to frustrate the Man.

Goals: 1) Be stoned. 2) Be very, very stoned. 3) Strike lazy blows for freedom. 4) Get and consume junk food.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Sample Favors: 1) Supply weed. 2) Create a diversion. 3) Rally fellow stoners. 4) Provide access to Luserville’s criminal underbelly, such as it is.

Abilities: Craftsmanship (Makeshift Bongs) 8, Eavesdropping 3, Gossip 3, Moxy 6, Performance (Guitar) 6, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 6.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Mr. George Femby, Antagonistic Vice-Principal

“You’re all pursuing your dreams, which it is my job to discourage.”

Personality: Femby is the classic antagonist character in high school movies: a pompous, bullying authority figure who hates everything that gives teenagers pleasure. He also despises teachers who undermine him by acting like the students’ friends. The secret source of his eternal spite lies in his own high school years, when he girl he had a crush on ditched him for the lead in the high school play.

Goals: 1) Stop the musical. 2) Keep a lid on the Mr. Kuperhufft scandal (this occurs during the action—see p. 77.)

Downfall: Spiteful

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 2, Moxy 2, Perception 6, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Stealth 3.

Mr. Wynton Kuperhufft, Drama Teacher

“You gotta give yourself the freedom to make mistakes. Terrible, terrible mistakes.”

Personality: Wynton Kuperhufft, born and raised in Luserville, went to New York to become a star on Broadway. While there he accumulated debts and a coke

habit. After a stint in rehab he crawled back in shame to Luserville, where he's been inspiring kids to follow their showbiz dreams for over a decade. More undisciplined artiste than authority figure, he begs, screams, cajoles and screams again to mold his charges into the stars of tomorrow.

Kuperhufft loses his position as teacher during the scenario: see p. 77.

Goals: Before the "Scandal" scene: 1) Put on the best damn musical performance ever, gosh darn it.. Afterwards: 2) Remain in hiding; avoid prosecution for statutory rape.

Downfall: Libidinous / Dissolute

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Abilities: Athletics 3, Craftsmanship (Boudoir Photography) 3, Craftsmanship (Choreography) 5, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 3, Gossip 3, Mechanic 3, Moxy 3, Perception 1, Performance (Acting) 2, Performance (Dancing) 2, Performance (Singing) 2, Persuade (Eloquent) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 3.

Mr. Stanley Leaf, Replacement Drama Teacher

"Everybody who stays reasonably quiet the whole period gets an A."

Personality: Some teachers begin idealistically and burn out over time. Good-natured but hopeless Stanley Leaf began mediocre and deteriorated from there. He's waiting patiently for a retirement buy-out package. In the meantime, he savors the bourbon-laced coffee he nurses all day long. More frazzled, distracted babysitter than teacher, he's parachuted in to replace Kuperhufft after his scandalous departure. The other half of the time he continues in his original role as woodworking teacher in the shop department.

Goals: 1) Keep kids under enough control to escape Mr. Fembly's attention. 2) Stay mildly sozzled.

Downfall: Indolent / Dissolute

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Abilities: Craftsmanship (Woodworking) 3, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Mechanic 6, Moxy 1, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 2.

Deandra Clare, Casting Agent

"You remind me of a young Lindsay Lohan."

Personality: The bustling, blustery, colorfully-dressed Deandra Clare projects bluff confidence and a breezy cynicism. She regards talented young people with all the empathy of a USDA inspector appraising a side of beef. Her cynicism cloaks her own smothered dreams—when she was in high school, she dreamed of stardom herself, but only got to work behind the scenes.

Goals: Deandra is currently trolling local high school productions in search of performers for a reality talent show called *Road Stars*. In the show, contestants will be dumped into the cast of a Broadway touring company. The audience will follow them as they sink or swim. Clare is on the lookout for students who are both talented enough to survive, and screwed up enough to create useful conflict on the show.

Downfall: Show-Offy

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Abilities: Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 3, Gossip 3, Moxy 6, Performance (Acting) 1, Performance (Dancing) 1, Performance (Singing) 1, Persuade (Glib) 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 6.

Ivan Fembly, Probation Officer

"You never get a second chance at a second chance."

Although being an authority figure runs in the family, Ivan Fembly is less of an oppressive jerk than his older brother, George (above.) He genuinely wants the at-risk youth under his supervision, most notably Terrell, to turn their lives around. However, he's used to disappointment and has wearily learned not to expect much. Ivan trusts George, especially in his capacity as vice-principal, and would need to be heavily persuaded that his brother's spin on events is not entirely trustworthy.

Goals: 1) Support his family. 2) Keep his job. 3) Occasionally help an offender to help himself.

Downfall: Nitpicky

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Abilities: Moxy 6, Persuade (Forthright) 3, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 8.

NAMES

When adding a supporting character to your improvised narrative, choose a name from the following list.



Teachers and Other Adults

Men:

John Tromble
 Dave Dijon
 Jim Kelner
 Bob Carpenter
 Bill Keel
 Richard Michael
 Gregory Gilmartin
 Joe Casey
 Henry Cheeks
 Roy Barnett
 Glenn Finnell
 Walter Larrick
 Philip Monteith
 Curtis Roman
 Randall Toney
 Martin Theroux

Women:

Lisa Robinett
 Michelle Aguirre
 Kimberly Donati
 Melissa Olson
 Angela Gartman
 Tammy Stewart
 Karen Cuttlinger
 Amy Dunn
 Christine Dickenson
 Julie Taylor
 Tina Imel
 Pamela Winer

Students

Boys:

Mike Peters
 Matt Schmidt
 Andrew Aden
 Justin Russo
 Anthony Thang
 Jonathan Amatulli
 Zack Chianese
 Eric Zayas

Girls:

Jessica Herrera
 Amanda Rezig
 Sarah Finck
 Lauren Vogan
 Nicole Kaelin
 Amber Chin
 Courtney Kljestan
 Rebecca Donovan

Patricia Tye
 Elizabeth Hause
 Cynthia Harris
 Dawn Angulo

Chris Goodwin
 Danny Kilner
 David Omar
 Ryan Haevischer
 Nicholas Ortega
 Jacob Kramer
 Kevin Jarnicki
 Brian Buliavac

Ashley Laranang
 Samantha Vera
 Stephanie Pixley
 Megan Blumenthal
 Kayla Griswold
 Rachel Melo
 Heather Maicon
 Tiffany Bunn



OPENER

The action begins with PCs clustered around a bulletin board, waiting for the beloved drama teacher Mr. Kuperhufft to pin up the sign-up sheet for this year’s musical production. Explain that the show is the highlight of Luserville’s year—even more important than anything sports-related.

If you’re running with less than six players, the other PCs still appear, as supporting characters run by you. This is necessary because their personal goals sometimes revolve around another PC.

The sign-up sheet announces that the show will be *Wagons Ho*. A quick trip to the library reveals the information given in the sidebar.

Wait for the players to take the initiative in the scene, pursuing their goals with one another, or trying to influence Mr. Kuperhufft.

Find a way to introduce the main antagonist, the oppressive Vice Principal, Mr. Femby. If the players give you nothing else to work with he brusquely forces the Partying character to submit to a search for illicit substances.

Wagons Ho

This year's play selection is *Wagons Ho*, a 1956 musical in the corny western mold of *Oklahoma!* and the movie *Seven Brides For Seven Brothers*, with book by Leon Sugar and music by the team of Johnny Bridgeman and Irwin Duckworth. The main roles, in order of desirability, are:

- Sally Sue Buckton, the romantic female lead, daughter of a rich rancher
- Lonesome Bob, the romantic male lead, a soulful ranch hand
- Emma Redlace, the rival for Bob's affections, who gets the best number and most revealing costumes
- Tin Can, the comic second banana role, a friend to Bob
- Aunt Ree, Sally Sue's confidant
- Hank Buckton, the sinister father figure who keeps them apart

If no one does anything, get the scene moving by bringing a temptation into play:

- the Horny character is tempted to make a pass at the other PC he or she finds most attractive. (If it's Tom Cleat, and he decides he's attracted to a male character, allow him to make the pass covertly.)
- the Stuck-Up character must roll to resist a boast about being a shoo-in for the lead
- the Partying character must roll to resist an action revealing him or her to be embarrassingly drunk or stoned

After this interlude, pause to let the players start any schemes they want to pursue in advance of the auditions.

SCENES AND SITUATIONS

In addition to player-driven sequences, the story is marked by three obligatory episodes: the audition, the scandal, and the big night.

Pre-Audition Scheming

Characters can score boons to their rolls in the upcoming audition by:

- Calling in a favor from Ms. Jurado, This earns a 1-point boon at best.
- Learning, via Gossip and then some confirmatory Eavesdropping or Stealth, that Kuperhufft is engaged in an affair with a former student that probably began when she was still in his class, and underage. This might earn as many as 3 points.

Characters can impose 1-point penalties to other PCs by taking action to distract them or prevent them from rehearsing.

Auditions

The characters audition in turn for Mr. Kuperhufft and Ms. Jurado. Players roll Performance. The audition includes line readings from a scene, performance of a song, and a dance demonstration. Players can therefore spend from all three of their Performance skills. Roll for PCs who have become supporting characters.

Assuming no successful scheming to the contrary, roles are distributed according to the result each character stands pat on. Divide the characters by sex and rank them in descending order of result. The girl with the best result gets Sally Sue Buckton; the runner-up gets Emma Redlace, and the loser gets Aunt Ree. The best boy gets Lonesome Bob, the second-best is Tin Can, and the worst gets to be Hank Buckton. (Other students are auditioning for the roles but naturally the story focuses on the ones who get the lead roles.)

Ties are resolved according to Kuperhufft's advance pairing of role to personality type:

Character	Kuperhufft's Default Casting	Final Casting
Alyssa	Sally Sue	
Jayne	Aunt Ree	
Carita	Emma Redlace	
Tom	Lonesome	
Darin	Tin Can	
Terrell	Hank	

While resolving ties, start by assigning the top roles and go on until all the roles for that sex are handed out.

If, for example, Alyssa and Jayne tie for first place, both standing pat on Impressive Successes, Alyssa gets to play Sally Sue, as per the default casting. However, then Jayne gets to play Emma Redlace, because it's a better role than Aunt Ree, despite the default casting. Carita is then given the role of Aunt Ree.





Scandal

Players may then want to scheme to bring about a reassignment of the roles, or to pursue their personal goals. After each has a chance to do something interesting (whether they take it or not), move on to the next plot development.

The players show up at their first rehearsal, to be greeted by Mr. Fembly. Looking smugly pleased with himself, he announces that the rehearsal has been canceled, due to the sudden retirement of Mr. Kuperhufft. Unless otherwise persuaded, he refuses to explain why. He says that the show will go on—for now—with Mr. Leaf taking over. He then warns the cast that “any hijinks whatsoever” will result in his immediate and final cancellation of the entire show, which he views as a distraction from the core mission of the high school, which is job training for the service industry. Shows make Luservillians think they’re something more than Luservillians. He’s here to assure them that once a Luser, always a Luser.

Ms. Jurado, if consulted, seems on the verge of tears. She wants to keep the play going but there’s only so much she can do. The kids had better be on their best behavior.

Subsequent use of Gossip, or a Jennifer Jurado relationship roll, reveals the real story: Kuperhufft and a former student, Alexis Garrett, skipped town together last night. Alexis was

a senior last year; all of the PCs (except Terrell) know her slightly, as they would a popular girl a year ahead of them. Kuperhufft gave her the lead role in last year’s play. Word has it that her parents searched their daughter’s room, finding a vial of coke and compromising cell phone photos of her with Kuperhufft. She’s of age now but wasn’t last year.

The next rehearsal starts as scheduled. Mr. Leaf proves hopeless: “You kids just do whatever you’re supposed to do.” Ms. Jurado tries her best to fill in the gaps. Things seem dismal.

Scheming characters might Persuade Mr. Leaf that the casting decisions made by Kuperhufft are now in doubt. Female characters might claim that they lost out after spurning his advances.

A Barn and Some Costumes

Let the players drive the plot and pursue their personal goals for a while, as rehearsals founder in the background. Wait for a Dismal Failure or other opportunity for a PC to bring about a potential embarrassment to the school. Fembly appears again, and, unless somehow schemed against and countered, declares the musical canceled. The school auditorium and its resources will be barred to the students. The age of extra-curricular arts events, with their obviously morally degenerating effects, is now over at Luserville High.

At this point it may occur to a player that his or her character has access to a barn. If they assert this, it is true. The obvious corollary of this statement is that another character has some old costumes. This, too, is true if asserted.

As the players consider the various practical implications of putting on the show at an off-campus location without official support, throw entertaining obstacles in their path.

Additional Complications

As always, sit back and allow players to drive the plot by advancing their various schemes and personal goals. Add, as necessary for pacing purposes, additional complications arising from these. Introduce new characters and situations needed, until you have about twenty to thirty minutes left in the session.

Possible complications might include:

- Ms. Jurado being forced to bow out after pressure from Fembly.
- Josh Mandell loses or damages audio visual equipment in lovelorn fit over Alyssa.
- The spiteful character succumbs to the

temptation to bait someone crucial to their production.

Much the same happens if the players manage to save the production's official status, so that it is still held at the school auditorium.

During this phase, look to set up crises that can explode during the opening night performance, which is the climactic scene you're leading toward.

Closer

And now it's time for the big show. Build up narrative excitement by describing the gathering crowd and the mixture of terror and anticipation as curtain time approaches.

Ask players if they're doing anything during the show to achieve objectives other than a successful performance. Play those out, interspersing them with any other crises that you've already laid the groundwork for.

Use the pooled effort rules to determine how enthusiastically the audience responds. The audience consists mostly of parents and relatives, so any collective success elicits a standing ovation. However, a Hair's-Breadth success indicates an obvious pity ovation and an Ordinary Success a palpably average response. Only an Impressive Success yields the surge of affection any high school dramatist craves.

Any PC whose own contribution to the pooled result was an Impressive Success gets approached with an audition offer from the talent scout Deandra Clare. For Darin Hemner, this outcome represents the achievement of his personal goal. This assumes that the group succeeded—if not, individual star turns go unrecognized as a pained Deandra slips out of the hall before intermission.

Alyssa also achieves her goal on a personal Impressive Success, provided no one else stands pat on an Impressive Success. However, if, while other Impressive Success holders bow, she can attempt Performance (Acting) checks to steal focus from them. If successful for each other Impressively Successful character, she does seem to have garnered slightly louder applause than the others.

Wrap up by addressing, if possible, the achievement of any other personal goals.

TAGLINES

- This never happened to Stephen Sondheim.
- That's my glory you're basking in.

- You were flat in that last number. In more ways than one.
- All right. Who mentioned the Scottish Play?
- Drama fail!
- Your ass hat is showing.
- *Line!*
- How about we take it from the top, with a little less suck?
- In our grade two assembly, I played the role of lead radish.
- I hope whoever hurled in the makeup case is proud of themselves.
- I can either forgive you, or myself. I choose myself.
- Wouldn't it be terrible if something happened to you right before the show?
- I've seen better performances from garden furniture.
- Sometimes, all you have to do is believe. This isn't one of those times.
- How Disney of you.
- I'm, like, twelve seconds from going all Christian Bale here.
- Drama club is just an excuse to overcome sexual repression.
- I think that smell is coming from *your* locker.
- In your case, you have a small part, *and* you're a small actor.
- Okay, we've rehearsed enough. Pizza!
- I wasn't upstaging you. You were downstaging yourself.
- At this point, my character's motivation is to feel you up.
- I have entered a lamestorm.
- Don't make me defriend you.
- It's not about memorizing the words. It's about memorizing the feeling.
- I'm not wasted enough to understand that.
- The excitement's in me, and it's got to come out.
- You should believe in yourself, because no one else will.
- I'm photographing this in my mind for later.
- Some people just can't take constructive criticism.
- They weren't clapping. They were booing with their hands.
- It's so great that you can do that without seeming embarrassed.
- I'm going to bust the fourth wall on your ass.
- If everyone had the same kind of negative attitude you do, they'd have stopped at two Spider-Man movies.
- Now that I've seen the real you, I'd like to go back to seeing the fake you.
- I'm trying to fit this in 140 characters. What's shorter for "douchebag?"



IF SPACE PERMITS

THE SETTING

If Space Permits is a space opera of whimsical cynicism set in the year 4687. The action occurs in and around the planet Siluria, in a region of space called the Lowflux Reach. Centuries after a paroxysm of interstellar violence known as the Hutton Wars, humanity has settled into a quiet existence on hundreds of habitable planets. Technological mastery has slipped away as people pursue lives of fleeting pleasure. People refer to this present-day period as the Long Peace.

Introduce the setting to your players by reading or paraphrasing the above two paragraphs. Further broad details appear below. Provide these details, in your own words, as responses to player questions.

Finer details of the world appear in a section called the Setting Glossary, on p. 81. References appearing in boldface throughout this chapter are explained there.

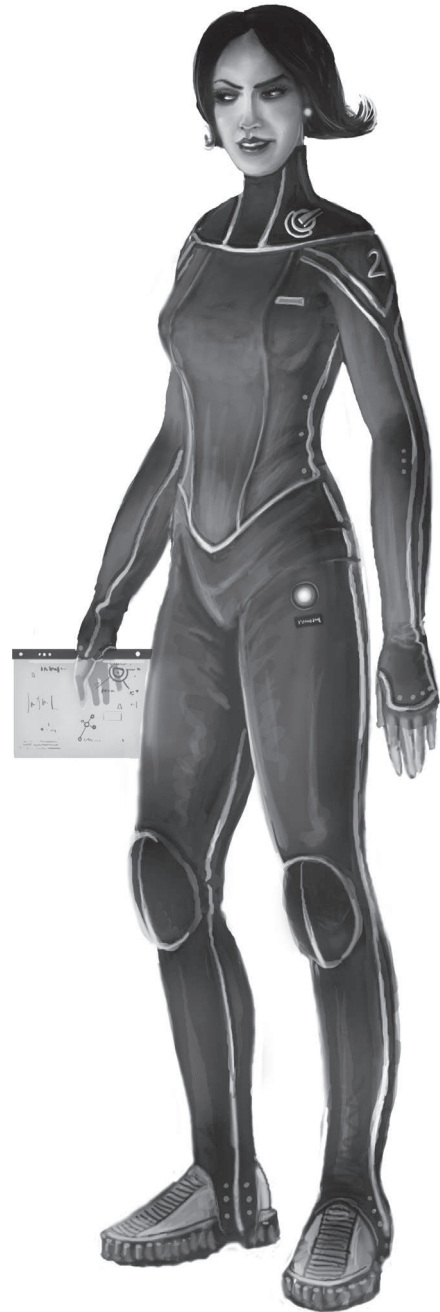
Interstellar Travel

Inhabitants of the Lowflux Reach travel the light years between its various colonized planets using a faster-than-like technology known as the strangequark drive. Now poorly understood, these drives can be operated only by engineers trained in the mental discipline of fa-tho. Some engineers style themselves as priests and treat fa-tho as a religious discipline. Others, like the engineer of the *Vantage*, regard it as a trick of the mind, like meditation or self-hypnosis. Strangequark drives push ships into an alternate dimension-slash-wormhole and then back out again as their near their destinations.

Ship Combat and Weaponry

Interstellar vessels are also capable of propulsion power outside of strangequark space. It is under propulsion power that ship-to-ship battles occur. When two vessels come into close proximity in strangequark space, they are knocked into standard space, where they may then fight it out.

Typical shipboard weapons include concentrated energy bursts called phase beams, bomb-like weapons released in mine nets, and sfishes. The latter are steel-and-ceramic pods containing space creatures resembling gigantic



jellyfish. A sfish affixes itself to a ship's hull, releasing the creature, which proceeds to devour its outer surfaces.

After introducing these weapon systems, also allow players to name and describe any suitably space operish weaponry while describing their actions during any ship-to-ship fights. Likewise, let them improvise the names of ship sub-systems they might be targeting on an enemy vessel, or that they might be repairing on their own ship. Needless to say, you can also make up ship combat details on the fly. However you and the players describe weapons or other ship features, remember that it's the rules that ultimately determine what happens. If a player describes a disintegration beam that supposedly destroys an enemy ship on a hit, you'll

Character Tracker

Player	Character	Title	Goal
	Finnegan Swake / Ula Seizz	Pilot	
	Serig / Seriga Allagan	<i>Armsman</i>	
	Kalan / Kala Dharro	Engineer	
	Por / Poria Manto	Medical Officer	
	Thortho / Thortha Doxx	Legal Officer	
	Vraiman / Virala Krikle	Financial Officer	

have to step in and modify the description, because the rules don't allow for one-shot kills.

Ship Types

Common ship types include:

- **Skipper:** a small freighter accommodating a cargo hold and up to a dozen crewmen. The *Vantage* is a skipper.
- **Hauler:** a large freighter requiring a crew of seventy.
- **Jumper:** a medium-sized freighter.
- **Javelin:** a fast-moving, heavily armed attack vehicle, built for police actions against pirates, but sometimes captured by the criminals it was designed to catch.
- **Heap, a.k.a. Galleon:** a jury-rigged holdover from the Hutton Wars, pressed back into service by pirates. No two are exactly the same, but most are heavily armed and armored and less than agile.
- **Flimmer:** a lightly armed shuttle craft holding up to six passengers, capable only of short-haul flights from orbit to planetary surface.

Skipper, are capable of entering a world's atmosphere and docking at a space port on its surface. Other ship types are too large and must remain in orbit. They keep multiple flimmers on hand.

Heavily militarized vessels are rare in the interstellar peace of the contemporary era.

Alien Races

The Lowflux Reach once teemed with sapient alien species. These were wiped out without exception during the Hutton Wars. People of the Long Peace look back on the actions of their ancestors with melancholy regret. Every so often a report emerges of an alien species sighting, but nothing ever comes of it. Some fear a sudden apocalyptic resurgence of vengeful aliens, but that's never happened, either.

Alien animals still exist, on Siluria and other planets, though often greatly reduced in numbers after centuries of ecological competition from introduced species.

COLLECTIVE GOAL

Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

SETTING GLOSSARY

Flittercraft: a class of hovering cars used for ground transport

gosht: popular Silurian team sport played with skates on an iced surface, with paint guns

jump wine: a powerfully intoxicating beverage fermented from the Silurian madgrape, a genetic hybrid between the genetically modified grapes of Ancient Earth and a local hairy fruit called the loquat. Primarily alcoholic, it also acts as a neurostimulant at the peak of



drunkenness, causing drinkers to uncontrollably jump and twitch. In a state of high twitch, adherents of the planet's vine worshiping fertility cult may experience divine visions of the ineffable oneness pervading all existence.

retronovel: is a form of narrative entertainment, see p. 91.

zontari: electronic instrument played on virtual strings, known for its plaintive dissonance. The traditional instrument of Siluria, it is heard reaching a crescendo during the drunken nights of the vine festival.

RELATIONSHIPS

Juh Cerknor, Judge

Personality: Silver-haired centenarian Juh Cerknor maintains his craggy good looks through regular nano-surgery. He uses the status his judicial offices confer on him as his entrée to romance. When an attractive woman arrives on the Silurian social scene, Juh suavely sidles in to sweep her off her feet. No more or less bent than most in the known galaxy, Juh will happily twist the requirements of his post to feather his own nest.

Goals: 1) Romance and seduce beautiful women. 2) Treat himself to small luxuries.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Fortright / Obfuscatory

Sample Favors: 1) Drop charges or injunctions against patrons and associates. 2) Grant injunctions and increase legal penalties for the rivals of patrons and associates.

Abilities: Appraisal 3, Athletics 3, Attack (Caution) 4, Defense (Dodge) 4, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 6, Gambling 4, Gossip 4, Management 1, Moxy 3, Persuade

(Charming) 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 4, Stealth 4, Wealth 1.

Her Holiness Lamas Lem, Vine Bishop

Personality: The diminutive Lamas Lem projects a sense of serenity that puts even jaded and mercenary spacefarers off their guard. At once pixie-like and ageless, this wise holy woman protects the spiritual nature of the Silurian wine-making process. When others attempt to profane it, her steely side comes out. With a sense of sad resignation, she metes out sentences for crimes against the vine, which range from lashing to exile to death by alcohol poisoning.

Goals: 1) See that the holy laws of the Vine are properly observed. 2) Foster the bliss and happiness of the faithful. 3) Promote the Silurian wine industry.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Sample Favors: 1) Provide favorable advice to members of her congregation. 2) Assign watchers to ensure that a given group of individual does not commit infractions against the faith.

Abilities: Craftsmanship 6 (Wine Making), Etiquette 6, Gambling 4, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Theology of the Living Vine), Management 6, Moxy 6, Persuade (Eloquent) 8, Physician 3, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 8, Wealth 3.

Ora Nosth, Wine Critic

Personality: Prickly and pompous, Ora Nosth expects scraping deference from everyone she encounters. Wine aficionados recognize her as the greatest authority in the known galaxy, and compete with one another to fawn over her. She assumes that all people fit into this category and becomes childishly frustrated when treated in a less than adoring manner. Creased with age and painfully thin, Ora Nosth resembles a well-dressed grape vine.

Adjusting For Small Groups

If no one draws the Pilot identity, the character with the highest Pilot rating gets an upgrade to Pilot 6. That character is taken out of contention for further upgrades.

If no one draws the Armsman identity, the character with the highest Weaponmaster rating gets an upgrade to Weaponmaster 6.

If no one draws the Engineer, a character who has not yet received an upgrade gets Engineer 6.

In a two-player game, one character may be upgraded to both Pilot and Weaponmaster, and rolls both Attack and Defense in ship combat.

Goals: 1) Deign to accept the worship she is due. 2) Pronounce on the quality of this year's Silurian vintage. Her opinion of the wines will be governed chiefly by the thoroughness with which the Silurian Vintner's Council sucks up to her.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Sample Favors: 1) Grant or withhold crucial ratings for wines, which determine whether they can sell at an outrageous premium.

Abilities: Eavesdropping 3, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 1, Etiquette 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Wine) Moxy 6, Perception 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Contrary) 10, Wealth 9.

Quelk Queln, Police Officer

Personality: Quelk Queln takes bribes, but only the token amount required so that his corrupt colleagues will consider him part of the team. It's not money that thrills this massive and barrel-chested enforcer of the law, but the chance to make others cower before him. More thrilling still is the opportunity to crack a skull and get away with it—which, alas, happens all too rarely now that a new Governor has come to Siluria, inexplicably intent on enforcing the letter of the law.

Goals: 1) Hurt people who can't hurt him back. 2) Bask in the fear of the helpless. 3) Undermine the new governor.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Sample Favors: 1) Hassle, arrest or assault rivals. 2) Sabotage criminal charges against his friends.

Abilities: Athletics 6, Attack (Ferocity) 6, Eavesdropping 3, Defense (Dodge) 6, Etiquette 6, Moxy 6, Perception 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 1, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 1.

Sura Zonn, President of Freight Handler's Union

Personality: The translucent-haired Sura Zonn keeps her orange eyes peeled for any sign of commercial activity in Siluria's spacedocks that circumvent her union's right to a fair share. She indignantly upholds the right of her members to their 5.6% pilferage rate, as set out in a 4664 judicial decision. She bristles at any suggestion that her people ought to move more quickly and efficiently as a violation of her union's long-established rights and customs.

Goals: 1) Protect the avarice and indolence of her

members. 2) Strike back with ferocious collective inaction in the face of any slight or insult.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Sample Favors: 1) Slow, speed, or reject the transport of any goods through the spacedock. 2) Stage a loud and disruptive demonstration.

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Athletics 3, Attack (Caution) 2, Defense (Dodge) 2, Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 1, Gossip 3, Knowledge 2 (Sp: Labor Law and Custom), Management 4, Mechanic 3, Moxy 4, Perception 2, Persuade (Forthright) 2, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 6, Wealth 4.

Verator Vump, Customs Official

Personality: A plump, balding sybarite, Verator Vump clothes himself in fine silks and dines in Siluria's finest eating establishments. His conspicuous expenditures raise suspicions regarding his honesty. Vump explains away his apparent wealth as the income from an inheritance. Fear of exposure from a righteous young district Governor has forced him to accept his bribes more carefully than he used to. Still, his love of pleasure requires him to love money too.

Goals: To enjoy good food, fine wine, and fashionable clothing, in that order.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Sample Favors: 1) Grant or refuse an export license. 2) Carefully inspect a rival's cargo hold. 3) Decline to accept an associate's cargo hold.

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Athletics 1, Attack (Cunning) 2, Eavesdropping 6, Defense (Misdirection) 3, Etiquette 6, Gossip 6, Management 2, Moxy 5, Perception 5, Persuade (Glib) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 4, Wealth 3.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

These supporting characters place obstacles in the PCs' paths on the way to achieving their collective goals. They might also get in the way of their personal goals.

Rival Merchant Crews

The following characters share the same goal as the PCs: to secure the jump wine monopoly. Names and statistics for their ships are provided after the character entries. Additional crew members for each ship are named and



given downfalls. For brevity's sake, their ability lists are condensed; add absent abilities as needed.

Artan Shubb

Personality: Cruelly handsome, Artan Shubb gets under the skin of his rivals by sneeringly mocking them. He carefully tracks the exploits of potential competitors and has well versed himself in the Vantage crew's humiliating misadventure on Hling—whatever that is. (See "Opener," p. 87.)

Downfall: Arrogance

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright

Abilities: Appraisal 4, Athletics 6, Attack (Finesse) 8, Defense (Vexation) 8, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 1, Gambling 2, Gossip 3, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Extinct Religions), Living Rough 3, Management 3, Mechanic 3, Moxy 5, Perception 3, Persuade (Forthright) 4, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 5, Rebuff (Penetrating) 4, Stealth 3, Weaponmaster 1.

The Refulgent: Weaponry 11, Defense 7, Integrity 9.

Refulgent Crew

Droser Sfitt, Showboating Weaponmaster: Attack (Speed) 4, Defense (Dodge) 3, Persuade 3 (Forthright), Rebuff 4 (Pure-Hearted) Weaponmaster 3.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Glurn Carnakas, Nitpicking Engineer: Attack (Cunning) 3, Defense (Misdirection) 4, Mechanic 3, Persuade 4 (Eloquent), Rebuff 4 (Lawyerly).

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Viril Vultt, Spiteful Financial Officer: Attack (Finesse) 2, Defense (Misdirection) 3, Persuade 3 (Charming), Rebuff 4 (Wary.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Cardo Huminth

Personality: The standoffish Cardo Huminth resists



human contact, cloaking herself in a translucent bubble-suit to protect her from the bacteria she slavishly fears. When she desires privacy or wishes to conclude a discussion he finds tedious, she fills her suit with an opaque mist.

Downfall: Fearful

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright

Abilities: Appraisal 5, Athletics 2, Attack (Caution) 3, Defense (Parry) 6, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 4, Gossip 4, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Transportation), Living Rough 5, Management 3, Moxy 2, Perception 1, Persuade (Forthright) 3, Physician 6, Pilot (Spacecraft) 5, Rebuff (Penetrating) 5, Weaponmaster 1.

The Aggravant: Weaponry 17, Defense 13, Integrity 6.

Aggravant Crew

Boscki Rrson, Libidinous Weaponmaster: Attack (Ferocity) 5, Defense (Misdirection) 3, Persuade 2 (Intimidating), Rebuff 2 (Contrary) Weaponmaster 4.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Jobala Drint, Greedy Engineer: Attack (Ferocity) 4, Defense (Vexation) 3, Health 1, Mechanic 3, Persuade 3 (Glib), Rebuff 3 (Obtuse.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Trefor Elinc, Dissolute Financial Officer: Attack (Speed) 3, Defense (Dodge) 4, Persuade 2 (Forthright), Rebuff 5 (Lawyerly.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Dover Blunk

Personality: The skittish and doughy Dover Blunk remains perpetually on the lookout for phonies and fraudsters. He trusts only his own crewmen, and even these he keeps under close watch. He burns with enmity for Elvben Knute (see below), who once swindled him out of a moderately priced lunch.

Downfall: Fearful

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Abilities: Appraisal 3, Athletics 7, Attack (Finesse) 9, Defense (Vexation) 7, Driving 3 (Fluttercraft), Eavesdropping 7, Etiquette 3, Gossip 3, Knowledge 5 (Sp: History), Management 2, Mechanic 1, Moxy 3, Perception 2, Persuade (Forthright) 3, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 5, Rebuff (Wary) 4, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 1.

The Damson: Weaponry 9, Defense 8, Integrity 8.

Damson Crew

Glorsy Fraden, Nitpicky Weaponmaster: Attack (Strength) 4, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 2, Persuade 4 (Charming), Rebuff 4 (Contrary) Weaponmaster 2.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Jamin Dav, Indolent Engineer: Attack (Cunning) 4, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 5, Mechanic 2, Persuade 5 (Eloquent), Rebuff 4 (Lawyerly.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Erri Turg, Gluttonous Financial Officer: Attack (Ferocity) 1, Defense (Vexation) 2, Persuade 4 (Eloquent), Rebuff 3 (Pure-Hearted.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Elvben Knute

Personality: When not at the negotiating table, the suave and florid-faced Elvben Knute parks himself in the most luxurious gambling den he can find. PCs can undermine him by appealing to his wagering instinct, or by dangling the possibility of vengeance in front of the odious Dover Blunk (above.)

Downfall: Gambling

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright

Abilities: Appraisal 5, Athletics 3, Attack (Cunning) 6, Defense (Misdirection) 6, Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 4, Gambling 8, Gossip 4, Knowledge 2 (Sp: Probabilities), Management 2, Moxy 4, Persuade (Glib) 4, Pilot (Spacecraft) 3, Rebuff (Penetrating) 5, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 1.

The Queen's Ransom: Weaponry 8, Defense 8, Integrity 7.

Damson Crew

Hararc Blabe, Arrogant Weaponmaster: Attack (Caution) 5, Defense (Vexation) 3, Persuade 3 (Forthright), Rebuff 4 (Contrary) Weaponmaster 3.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Jetton Derc, Fearful Engineer: Attack (Cunning) 5, Defense (Dodge) 6, Mechanic 2, Persuade 5 (Obfuscatory), Rebuff 5 (Wary.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Puge Thormis, Suicidal Financial Officer: Attack (Ferocity) 1, Defense (Parry) 2, Persuade 5 (Forthright), Rebuff 2 (Lawyerly.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory



Vintner's Council Executive

The three executive members of the Vintner's Council jointly decide who gets this year's monopoly.

Bef Hospitalk, Council President

Personality: The austere and prudish Bef Hospitalk strongly dislikes informality, loose talk, and pleasure of any variety. It is thus ironic that, as heir to the vaunted Hospitalk clan of vintners, that she sells and oversees an product famed for its pronounced intoxicating effect. Under strenuous protest from other council members, she has altered the consortium's promotional materials to suggest that jump wine be enjoyed only in extreme moderation. She tried and failed to get the word "jump" removed from labels. Bef twitches whenever she hears it. Averse to human desire, she hides her aging face, formerly renowned for its beauty, behind a gossamer veil.

Downfall: Nitpicky

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Craftsmanship (Winemaking) 6, Defense (Dodge) 2, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 6, Gossip 2, Management 6, Moxy 4, Persuade (Forthright) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 6, Wealth 8.

Therugna Fes, Council Vice President

Personality: Red-faced and squat, Therugna Fes forever finds herself on the edge of a verbal explosion. She can't stand foolishness or stupidity, yet sees it all around her—particularly in the actions of her servants and other social inferiors. Therugna harbors violent fantasies in which she beats Bef Hospitalk to death with her gnarled vinewood club. Yet she is forced to support her hated rival's continuance on the executive. Hospitalk has in her possession an audio recording of Therugna blaspheming against the vine faith. She is heard reserving special vituperation for the Vine Bishop, Lamas Lem (p. 2.) Penalties she might face were her blasphemies to come to light range all the way up to the holy death penalty. Until this recording is destroyed or its threat somehow nullified, Therugna must do as Hospitalk demands.

When Hospitalk's term expires next year, Therugna takes over. If something happens to her before then, Therugna ascends to her role immediately.

Downfall: Arrogance (Temper)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Appraisal 4, Craftsmanship (Winemaking) 6, Defense (Dodge) 2, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 1, Gossip 2, Knowledge 3 (Sp: Gosht), Management 2, Mechanic 5, Moxy 1, Perception 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Wealth 7.

Gorala Kabah, Council Past President

Personality: During her term as council president, the outwardly meek and nondescript Gorala Kabah systematically looted its treasury, funneling funds back into her renowned but money-losing Kabah family winery. Despite her efforts to cover up the embezzlement, Bef Hospitalk discovered her crimes during her ascent to the council presidency. Rather than turn her in, Hospitalk blackmailed Kabah into rubber-stamping all of her demands. Kabah would happily destroy Hospitalk, if only she could ensure that the ledgers Hospitalk keeps locked in a vault in her family wine cellars would never be revealed.

Downfall: Greedy (Fear of Failure / Exposure)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Abilities: Appraisal 7, Attack (Caution) 2, Craftsmanship (Winemaking) 7, Defense (Dodge) 2, Driving 1 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 2, Gossip 2, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Zontari), Living Rough 1, Management 3, Mechanic 3, Moxy 1, Perception 3, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 1, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 6, Wealth 3.

NAMES

When you need a name for a person or place as part of your improvised narrative, choose an item from the lists below.

People

Ati Gah	Fostro Espen
Ghalith Ghaal	Guala Der
Gwel Kostro	Hopa Frexix
Kebo Kurp	Masro Sadd
Omerth Regia	Rel Enneti
Seko Govel	Vo Vignont
Vrent Soblarin	Wenzel Vhudd
Zew Erlot	

Places

Aoise	Arbel
Banagrif	Barayth
Bode	Egura
Estolia	Hurth

Killmarven
Mastretto
Psistone
Tarling
Tules

Malahar
Old Blorn
Skery
Thiinth
Velmar

Ships

Blazer
Champion
Roarer
Duster
Flash
Glaive
Gust
Melancholy
Peacekeeper
Pritschka
Ready
Salk
Transverse
Unstinting
Wasp
Woodnote
Ourobours

Capacious
Courser
Daimyo
Eloquent
Forget
Polygaster
Mantis
Moralizer
Plenty
Raptor
Regal
Toiler
Troika
Warbreaker
Whirligig
Gladiator

OPENER

The player characters are the crew of a small trading ship, the *Vantage*. As the action begins, they're approaching the moons of Siluria. Down on their luck after a regrettable incident on the icy surface of the planet Hling, they hope to resuscitate their ailing account books with a successful bid for a monopoly over the export of a famous commodity, Silurian jump wine. (Leave the exact nature of the unpleasantness on Hling for the group to make up themselves—or to allude to vaguely without ever precisely describing—as the story develops.)

They're hailed by Artan Shubb, pilot of the *Refulgent* (p. 2.) He calls to trash talk the crew of the *Vantage*, generally belittling them and letting them know that news of their escapade on Hling has preceded them. Shubb tells himself that he's shaking their confidence, but is really giving in to his own arrogance. This is not a Persuade attempt on his part: if he did so and won, the scenario would end prematurely with the PCs flying off to soak in their own unworthiness. Not much fun to be had there. However, the PCs are free to turn this around and try to Persuade him of something.

Although Shubb isn't looking for a fight, a touch of starship combat might nonetheless start the story off with a bang. Look for opportunities to spark a fight via misunderstanding or miscommunication. For example, the PCs are likely to respond to Shubb's taunts in a rude

Merchant Vessel Command Structure

In keeping with their quasi-piratical leanings, most merchant vessels are cooperatives. Crew members buy their way onboard a ship either with a cash investment or by offering services. After a probationary period, they become full members of a collective. The crew makes decisions jointly and shares both in the risks and rewards of interstellar trade. During armed engagement the pilot is nominally in charge. In reality, crew members man their battle stations independently, often acting at cross purposes.

The *Vantage* and its rival crews all function as cooperatives. This setting detail allows the PCs to operate at amusing cross-purposes, with no one of them in charge.

but non-violent way. Any Dismal Failures they happen to score along the way might cause their gestures to be interpreted as attack maneuvers.

SCENES AND SITUATIONS

The rest of the action takes place in Siluria City, usually referred to simply as "the capital."

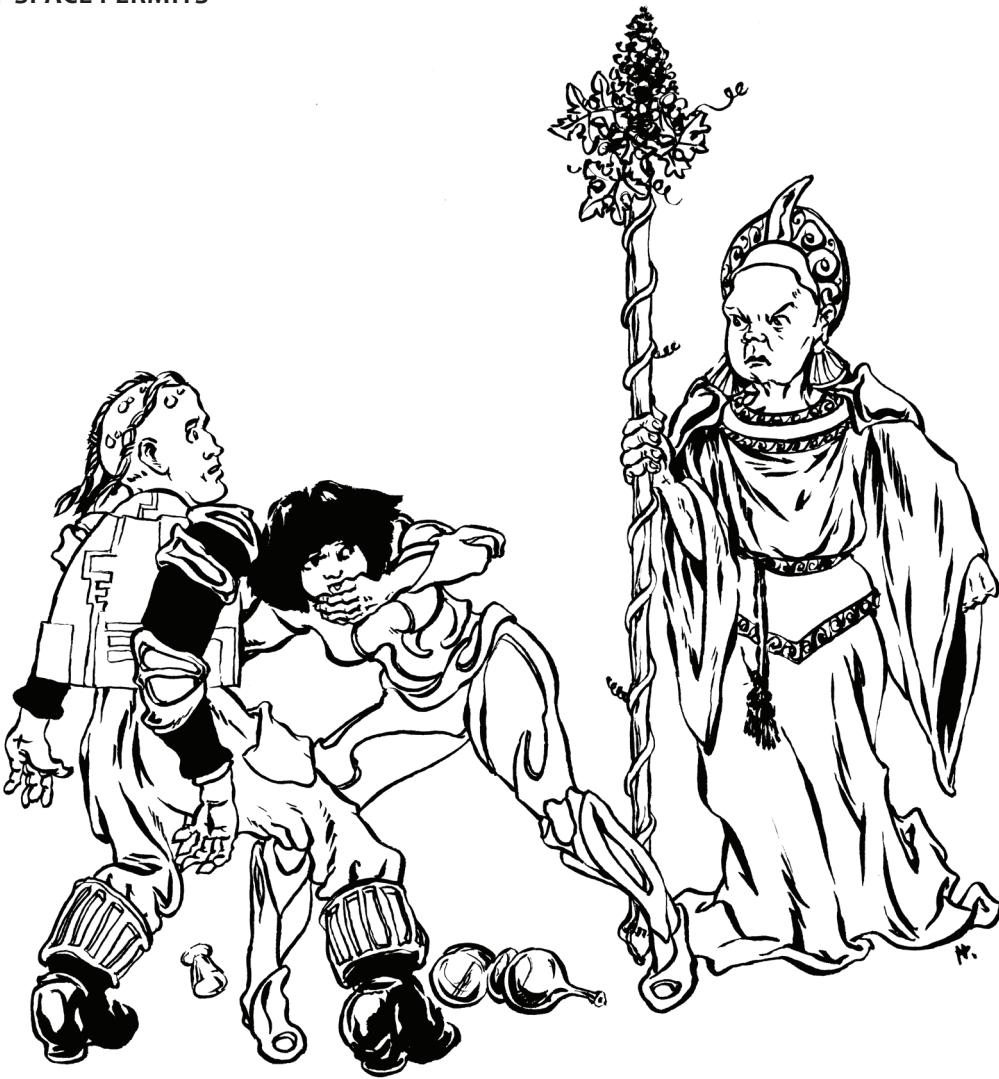
Getting Situated

The ship can dock at its surface-side spaceport, allowing its financially embarrassed crew to sleep onboard without paying for an expensive lodgings. The city bulges with tourists, mostly from elsewhere on the planet. They're ready for the frenzied bacchanal that is Siluria City's annual Vine Festival.

Describing Siluria City

Siluria City's rustic collection of brick and stone buildings scattered amid a series of steeply sloping hillsides. The cold and glassy River Silur weaves through its streets. Some of the hillsides are forested; most are covered with vineyards. Villas, inns, shops and taverns line its winding, cobbled streets. To maintain an illusion of old-fashioned charm, Siluria's architects discreetly disguise all evidence of technological advancement.





them by other means.

Players might come up with inventive schemes completely on their own, or make an effort to tailor their skulduggery to the specific weaknesses of rival pilots. As always, your role is to build on player-driven plot elements by making them more entertaining, not to shut down ideas that we haven't covered or that seem initially unlikely to you.

If they do shape their plots to the downfalls of specific pilots, prepare to respond to schemes like this:

Artan Shubb (Arrogance): Challenge him to a contest he thinks he can't lose, with the loser forced to bow out. Crews of both ships undoubtedly cheat to skew the odds in their favor.

Cardo Huminth (Fearful): Plant a belief in a highly dangerous Silurian contagion that her suit can't protect her from.

Likely Schemes

Once situated, leave the PCs at loose ends so that the players can drive the plot by developing a suitable scheme to gain the monopoly. The most likely schemes are:

- Eliminating competing bidders
- Manipulating the Vintner's Council
- Something else we haven't thought of that you'll have to completely improvise your way through

Eliminating Competing Bidders

The fun of this scheme lies in finding inventive ways to get rival crews to drop out of the bidding. Allow the PCs to easily learn who their rivals are. They can use Gossip or consult nearly any of their Relationships. It's okay if they fail the first time around, provided they get the list before the effort becomes frustrating. A Relationship character might, for example, supply the names automatically if they've already tried and failed to get

Dover Blunk (Fearful): Use his paranoia to convince him that his own crew members are plotting against him.

Elvben Knute (Gambling): Beat him at a wager, or cause him to incur unpayably large gambling debts to dangerous local casino enforcers.

Alternatively, the longstanding animosity between **Dover Blunk** and **Elvben Knute** might be used to pit the two against one another, so that each does something to remove the other from the bidding process.

The opener establishes Artan Shubb as a primary antagonist. If you can swing it, preserve his role in the story until the very end, so they can eliminate or otherwise dispose of him last. This lends the scenario a sense of structure—the rival introduced at the beginning gets his comeuppance at the end. If the players focus on him early and win, go with that appearance—then have him show up at the end, having miraculously reversed

their earlier victory over him, spoiling for vengeance. Don't struggle too hard to make this happen; structure isn't everything, especially in *Skulduggery*.

Manipulating the Vintner's Council

When choosing the recipient of the contract, all three members of the Vintner's Council must agree on the winning bidder. Each bidder must make a presentation to the group. Presentations are received on the morning of Vine Festival's final day. The council announces the decision at the festival's climax, right after the crowning of the Vine King.

Bef Hospitalk judges applicants on an unconventional measure: she wants to award the contract to the crew who will ensure that any promotional material for jump wine is larded with anti-drunkenness messaging. If they do this, the players automatically realize, they'll cut their potential profits by more than half. To sway Hospitalk, they must Persuade her that they'll punctiliously enforce her temperance policies. As she's blackmailing the other councilors into obedience, persuading her wins the contract.

Alternately, they could gain the agreement of the other two by successfully scheming to remove Hospitalk from the council. They might return the blackmail material to Fes and Kabah, or keep it themselves for future use. In the latter case, the councilors scheme to reverse this lamentable development and deliver comeuppance to the PCs.

If the crew secures the contract with anticlimactic ease early in the session, they must then scheme to defend it against attempts to reverse the council's decision.

- Rival crews try to eliminate them from the field, by taking advantage of their flaws to disqualify them.
- If they've agreed to Hospitalk's demands, adherents of the vine religion learn of this affront against holy intoxication and agitate to have the crew burned at the stake. Their religious ally, Bishop Lamas Lem, remains sympathetic to them in private but must, to retain her own position, seem to be seeking their demise in public. Religious rioters might also attack the council, threatening to destroy the crew's precious cargo.

The Vine Festival

The scenario's scheming takes place against the backdrop of the Vine Festival, a religious celebration of divine inebriation. Every temptation is celebrated, giving

Where Are Last Year's Winners?

Players may wonder why the previous year's contract winner is not bidding again. Any Vintner's Council member claims that the winning crew, of the ship *Oneiros*, retired to enjoy their well-earned riches. A Gossip success reveals this to be untruthful: after offloading the cargo, the *Oneiros* was attacked by the *Wastrel*, a ship crewed by rival bidders. Both ships were destroyed in the battle.

If the group fixates on this detail, bedraggled, embittered survivors of the *Oneiros* might show up to claim this year's contract, as per an obscure clause in last year's arrangement. Or they could act as ambushing pirates, doing unto the *Vantage* what was done unto them.

crew members ample opportunity to be led astray from their schemes.

Becoming Vine King / Queen

The celebration centers around the election of a ceremonial Vine King (or Queen, if the Show-Offy PC is female.) At the end of each of the festival's three nights, contestants gather onstage in an amphitheater to compete in its three rounds. These are:

1. **Hollering.** Contestants must demonstrate an aptitude for bellowing. Those who cannot be heard over the hooting, sozzled crowd are eliminated. To stay in the contest requires an Athletics or Moxy success. Allow plausible suggestions of other ability uses, if appropriately underhanded.
2. **Projectile Vomiting / Drinking Endurance:** Depending on your group's enthusiasm for juvenile gross-out humor, the second night either pits the remaining contestants in a competition to see who can achieve the longest horizontal upchuck in the wake of epic jump wine consumption, or merely measures the drinkers' ability to remain conscious. To go on to the next round requires an Athletics or Moxy success (vomiting) or a Moxy success (simple endurance.)
3. **Deft Handling of the Vine Pole:** At the height of the final night, the remaining handful of contestants are





handed a large pole representing the first grape vine to be planted in Siluria. Given that this is a fertility rite, it goes without saying that the pole is strongly phallic in shape. Each contestant in turn must dance and prance suggestively with the vine pole, without dropping it or otherwise allowing it to touch the stage floor. The one whose jiggling and quaking arouses the greatest excitement in the audience, as judged by device called a pheromone meter, wins the contest and is crowned Vine King. At some convenient prior moment, the character learns that the winner is almost always in the jump stage of neurostimulation during his performance. To win, a player must overcome last year's winner (or a rival crew member) in a Moxy contest. Remaining PCs may perform entertaining and plausible actions to bolster their candidate or hamper others.

The three-evening format of the event allows you to break up the main scheming story with other comic interludes.

To weave the Vine King story thread together with the one in which the PCs eliminate rival bidders, have a member of each competing crew vie for the crown, alongside the PC(s.)

The Show-Offy character's personal goal asks him to win this contest. Other PCs might decide to enter too, either to throw the event to their friend, or to stir the pot with some inter-party competition.

Other Personal Goals

The Vine King plotline takes care of the personal goals of the Show-Offy character. Be prepared to respond to other personal goals as follows.

Libidinous

The **Libidinous** character seeks to bed either the son (Dwenp) or daughter (Lwala) of Bef Hospitalk, as his or her proclivities warrant. In either case, this supporting character is good-looking and utterly naïve. The prudish Bef Hospitalk has kept her only child cloistered from the world. Having come of age, the younger Hospitalk has now been enrolled at university by a very reluctant parent, terrified of her child's potential corruption. Her only friend, Drogo, is actually an employee paid to perform chaperon duties.

When first encountered, Dwenp/Lwala fervently parrots Bef's censorious views. Deep down he/she yearns for experience, and can be talked into bed if the seducer allows him/her to retain an illusion of loyalty to Bef.

Dwenp/Lwala Hospitalk

Athletics 6, Attack (Caution) 2, Craftsmanship (Bowl Making / Flute Carving) 3, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 5, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Etiquette 4, Living Rough 3, Moxy 3, Perception 3, Persuade (Charming) 1, Rebuff (Wary) 6.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

This goal could dovetail with the collective goal, if something happens to Bef Hospitalk, Dwenp/Lwala inherits her position on council for the rest of her term. A thoroughly besotted Dwenp/Lwala might happily go along with his/her new lover's requests.

Nitpicky

The Vintner's Council is most proud of the mural on their headquarters, painted by the late, great Silurian artist Vomo Thuke. Sadly for this character, it depicts a savage attack on Siluria conducted by his/her ancestor, Ithion. The raid occurred during the late period of the Hutton Wars, when all the alien races were dead and the armed forces fell upon one another to determine who would rule the Lowflux Reach. Siluria celebrates the Battle of Ithion's Wake as their great leap into the Long Peace. The character has always been taught that Ithion was forced to bring the Silurian leadership to heel, on the grounds of their being a treacherous pack of low-life swine. Its portrayal of a grotesquely sinister Ithion repulsed by brave Silurians after a cowardly ambush can only be seen (by the Nitpicky character, at least) as a gross historical inaccuracy. Any alteration to the work would be considered a desecration of a beloved and iconic piece of art, not to mention an assault on Silurian national pride and the honor of the Vintner's Council.

Dissolute

The super-distilled version of jump wine known as *pfha* is not available for sale during the wine festival. One may drink it only at other times of year. Even then one must belong to a special club and, before drinking, sign various legal waivers acknowledging one's pending temporary insanity. To learn the name of a vendor who has any *pfha* requires a Gossip success; to broach the subject with him requires an Etiquette success. The PC might then Persuade him, or offer some other inducement. It's most fun to make it hard to get while eventually putting it in the character's hands.

Once attained, the ecstatic state of *frolah* that arrives shortly after ingestion fills the user with a feeling of intense spiritual oneness. It also impels the user to total honesty for a twenty-four period. For this duration

the character's Persuade and Rebuff styles become Forthright and Pure-Hearted. Unwelcome truths can't remain unspoken; while gripped by *frolah*, the character can't help but blurt them out.

Indolent

This personal goal allows the player to have fun playing a wild card and disrupting the rest of the group. The retronovel is a form of narrative entertainment delivered via an engineered retrovirus and experienced as a vivid, prolonged hallucination. Meant to be enjoyed while resting comfortably in a darkened room, retronovels feel like they're happening to you. They stimulate autonomic responses and even make you think you're eating and drinking as the character does. The experiencer can break from the waking dream before the dosage time elapses, but may confuse reality and fictional events of the retronovel if when he dozes off or lets attention lapse. (Moxy successes allow the experiencer to clear his head.)

Greedy

The urge to skim from the rest of the crew speaks for itself, and provides opportunities for inter-group betrayal and revelation.

CLOSER

Though your story might go somewhere else, the climactic moments of the Vine Festival offer your most dramatic setting for a final big scene. The final obstacle facing the characters could be any of the following:

- disgruntled rivals attacking or sabotaging them after they get the contract
- an enraged crowd rioting after offenses against the Vine faith, the Vintner's Council mural, or other taboo-breaking, either by the PCs or their rivals
- Bef Hospitalk discovers their perfidy and sends goons to forcibly remove the contract from their hands

The ideal ending to any scenario in this setting consists of the crew fleeing the planet, narrowly escaping hostile ships. However, your player-driven storyline may naturally lead you to some other equally satisfying final scene.

TAGLINES

- You will enjoy being corrected on this crucial

point.

- What you say is true, but I must object to the manner of its expression.
- Though not a medical doctor *per se*, I can't help but wonder if you have succumbed to an infestation of mind parasites.
- During the Hutton Wars, my ancestors would surely have slain your ancestors.
- When I compare to you a Relixian eel, I naturally refer only to that creature's best qualities.
- If you are running a cognitive enhancement chip, please inform the manufacturer that it is malfunctioning.
- Run! It's a brainshark!
- You commit a grave heresy by even looking at it.
- That's precisely that attitude that led to the Rebellion of Vrenk.
- I don't care if it's broken. Make it unbroken!
- I am philosophically exempt from local laws.
- The problem surely lies with your instrumentation.
- Am I the first to perceive the flaws in this system?
- My sub-orbital rotation is legendary.
- This is not trespassing. I am here in response to an implicit invitation.
- I taste a full berry, with impertinent tannins and a hint of space flotsam.
- Allow me to revise my demands.
- I am writing a book on unmitigated hogwash, and will include your theory in it.
- Excuse me. During your lengthy comment, I became mentally absent.
- Such sentiments are common in the galaxy's less refined quadrants.
- Please grant me pause while I run that statement through my anti-deception software.
- I did say that, but can be excused on the grounds of spontaneous hallucination.
- I covet that.
- I forgive your dullness.
- My lamentations will be heard as far as the Dureo Nebula.
- To use the technical term, this device is ass.
- You are clearly a socialist and/or robot.
- I'd happily comply, were it not for the eleventh protocol.
- I grow weary, and must slake my bodily desires.
- Later we will recall this misunderstanding and enjoy a merry laugh.
- If you pretend you didn't say that, I'll pretend I'm not carrying a force blade.
- It will take, at the very least, a leuketic nano-acid to remove this taste from my mouth.



The Yes Wing

Winston / Winona Fingerhut

Secretary Of the Interior

As Interior Secretary, you oversee the federal department responsible for federal lands and programs relating to the country's aboriginal peoples. Notable units of your portfolio include the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Geological Survey, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. Interior Secretaries are rarely considered part of the President's inner circle, and your experience in the Bierce administration has proven no different.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: A subordinate, Chief Alex Rogers of the United States Park Police, turned a strange shade of pale when Cross' possible nomination was rumored in the press.

Personal Goal: Secure presidential pardon for political mentor Dalton Flask, now serving a five-year sentence for tax evasion.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 4, Gossip 5, Knowledge 4 (Catholic Theology), Management 2, Mischief 2, Moxy 4, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Wealth 2.



The Yes Wing

Keith / Kate Odom

National Security Adviser

You occupy an appointed position as the President's chief Adviser on foreign affairs. It's your job to warn the President of unpleasant foreign developments before they happen. As such, you operate as a buffer and gatekeeper, playing the administration's various foreign off against one another.

Personal Goal: Gain an advantage over Frank Cross that will force him to defer to you when he becomes Secretary of State.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: Eventually you want to make the leap to Secretary of State, but not yet. Until then, you want someone you can control in the position. There's something weak about Cross that you can't put your finger on, and you intend to exploit it.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 1, Performance (Media Appearance) 5, Gossip 3, Knowledge 3 (Sp: International Relations), Management 4, Mischief 5, Moxy 2, Perception 1.



The Yes Wing

Paul / Pauline Cutter

Vice President Of the United States

You succeed the President if anything, god forbid, should happen to him. Until then, your influence waxes and wanes according to the whims of the President. If you convince him to do it, he may give you a task force or allow you unofficial power over a particular executive function, like streamlining bureaucracy or supervising a secret torture program. Until then, your duties are mostly ceremonial, consisting mostly of funerals and photo ops.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: As a former Senator on friendly terms with ex-colleagues on the other side of the aisle, you're expected to collect some the swing votes on the judiciary committee.

Personal Goal: Arrange for Congress to pass legislation blocking investigation of irregularities at RexMo Insurance, the corporation you ran before becoming VP.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 4, Gossip 6, Knowledge 1 (Sp: Golf), Management 3, Mischief 2, Moxy 5, Perception 5, Performance (Media Appearance) 3, Wealth 6.



The Yes Wing

Eldon / Elaine Willis

Senior Political Adviser

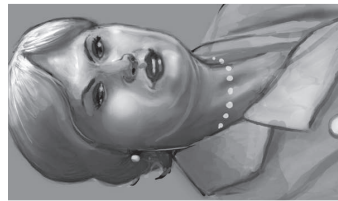
You ran the election campaign that got Allard Bierce elected to the Presidency, not to mention his previous successful bids for the US Senate and the governorship of a major state. Without your mastery of messaging, demographics and the electoral process, he'd be nowhere. Yet ever since he took office, his approval ratings have slowly inched downwards, as the realities of governing departed from the sharp lines of campaigning. When Bierce considers the political fallout of a choice, your phone is the first to ring.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: If the President can't confirm Cross, he'll seem weak, preventing you from increasing his approval rating (see below.)

Personal Goal: Increase the President's approval rating to 51% or higher, from its current 41%.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 5, Gossip 6, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Politics), Management 6, Mischief 6, Moxy 4, Perception 2, Performance (Media Appearance) 1.



The Yes Wing

John / Janine Simmons

White House Chief Of Staff

As Chief Of Staff, you are a political appointee responsible for running the day-to-day affairs of the White House. You are the President's most senior adviser, and derive much of your power from the ability to decide who gets to meet with him. If other Washington power players aren't afraid of your wrath, you aren't doing your job right.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: The President has tapped you to lead the confirmation effort.

Personal Goal: Get fundraising commitments from party leaders for a Senate campaign.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 4, Gossip 6, Knowledge 1 (Classic Cars), Management 6, Mischief 4, Moxy 5, Perception 2, Performance (Media Appearance) 4, Wealth 2.



The Yes Wing

Henry / Renee Doss

Secretary of Defense

You are the civilian overseer of the mighty US military. If a war breaks out, you'll be in charge of winning it. You help construct the vast military budget and sell it to Congress. Suppliers of military equipment grow rich when you favor them—and go howling to their patrons on Capitol Hill when you don't.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: Frank Cross is one of your oldest pals. Your annual fishing trip with Francis and a few other Washington insiders is a highlight of your year.

Personal Goal: Start a war, allowing you to prove your unconventional theories about 21st century warfare.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 4, Gossip 1, Knowledge 1 (Sp: Military Strategy), Management 1, Mischief 4, Moxy 3, Perception 5, Performance (Media Appearance) 1, Wealth 8.





Persuade (Glib) 8

Trumps: Pure-Hearted

Is Trumped By: Obtuse

“Let me run that up the flagpole and see what organizational synergies come back down.”

“It’s only true if we admit it.”



Persuade (Eloquent) 7

Trumps: Contrary

Is Trumped By: Wary

“Can we stand by and let that happen, here in the land of our glorious forefathers?”

“The force of accumulated history and wisdom dictates but one course of action.”

The Yes Wing



Persuade (Forthright) 7

Trumps: Penetrating

Is Trumped By: Lawyerly

“Mr. President, that’s not in the constitution!”

“If we don’t do this, we’ll not only look stupid. We’ll be stupid.”



Persuade (Charming) 9

Trumps: Wary

Is Trumped By: Contrary

“That tie makes you look ten years younger.”

“Not to change the subject, but I hear Wonkette is considering you for its list of ten hottest cabinet-level appointees.”

The Yes Wing



Persuade (Obfuscatory) 8

Trumps: Lawyerly

Is Trumped By: Penetrating

“Clearly you have forgotten chapter 5, section 803.”

“Consider that idea pre-rejected.”



Persuade (Intimidating) 9

Trumps: Obtuse

Is Trumped By: Pure-Hearted

“If you’re making this a pissing match, you better stand back.”

“Back home, that’s what we call a shooting-in-the-face offense.”

The Yes Wing

The Yes Wing



Rebuff 6 (Lawyerly)

Trumps: Forthright

Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory

“Sure, that would be great...if it weren't for Farlow v. Tackett.”



Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)

Trumps: Glib

Is Trumped By: Intimidating

“Golly, we haven't had time to read all those documents!”



Rebuff 6 (Contrary)

Trumps: Charming

Is Trumped By: Eloquent

“No offense, but the Devil's Advocate's in me and it's got to come out.”



Rebuff 6 (Wary)

Trumps: Eloquent

Is Trumped By: Charming

“The last time you said that, we nearly crashed the global economy.”



Rebuff 6 (Pure-Hearted)

Trumps: Intimidating

Is Trumped By: Glib

“But that would be wrong!”



Rebuff 6 (Penetrating)

Trumps: Obfuscatory

Is Trumped By: Forthright

“Did you know that 34% of all statistics are completely made up?”

The Yes Wing

The Yes Wing

The Yes Wing

The Yes Wing

The Yes Wing

The Yes Wing



Relationships:

- President Allard Bierce 2
- First Lady Malora Bierce 4
- Senate Majority Leader Dwayne Pettiford 3

The Yes Wing



Relationships:

- President Allard Bierce 2
- Senate Majority Leader Dwayne Pettiford 4
- Maxine Horne, Wealthy Donor 3

The Yes Wing



Relationships:

- Senate Majority Leader Dwayne Pettiford 3
- General Kelvin Howe (Joint Chiefs Of Staff) 3
- Maxine Horne, Wealthy Donor 4

The Yes Wing



Relationships:

- Maddy Lagasse, Network Anchor 4
- First Lady Malora Bierce 3
- Maxine Horne, Wealthy Donor 3

The Yes Wing



Relationships:

- President Allard Bierce 2
- Senate Majority Leader Dwayne Pettiford 2
- General Kelvin Howe (Joint Chiefs Of Staff) 4

The Yes Wing



Relationships:

- General Kelvin Howe (Joint Chiefs Of Staff) 3
- Maddy Lagasse, Network Anchor 3
- Maxine Horne, Wealthy Donor 3

The Yes Wing

The Yes Wing



Resistances:

Arrogance 1, Avarice 2, Paranoia 4, Nitpicking 4, Spite Ω , Showboating 6

The Yes Wing



Resistances:

Arrogance 6, Avarice 1, Paranoia Ω , Nitpicking 2, Spite 6, Showboating 4

The Yes Wing



Resistances:

Arrogance 4, Avarice 4, Paranoia 6, Nitpicking Ω , Spite 1, Showboating 2

The Yes Wing



Resistances:

Arrogance 2, Avarice Ω , Paranoia 1, Nitpicking 4, Spite 4, Showboating 4

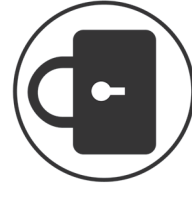
The Yes Wing



Resistances:

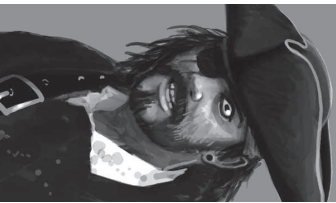
Arrogance 7, Avarice 4, Paranoia 2, Nitpicking 6, Spite 4, Showboating 1

The Yes Wing



Resistances:

Arrogance 3, Avarice 6, Paranoia 4, Nitpicking 1, Spite 2, Showboating Ω



John "Peg Leg" Belmayer

You began your pirate career as a young man, taking part in a mutiny that stole the very first ship you sailed on and turned it to piratical ends. Six years ago you lost your left leg in a battle with *The Indomitable*. With its captain, Vincent Pearl coming to destroy your ship, you find it only fitting that your red-hot hatred of the scurvy sea dog be regarded as qualification for the vacant captaincy of the *Black Swan*.

Collective Goal: Prepare your becalmed pirate ship to successfully defend against impending attack by the privateer vessel *The Indomitable*.

Personal Goal: Become captain of the *Black Swan*.

Abilities: Appraisal 2, Athletics 5, Craftsmanship (Whittling) 2, Eavesdropping 1, Gambling 4, Gossip 1, Knowledge 3 (Sp: Superstitions and Omens), Living Rough 5, Mischief 4, Moxy 3, Perception 5, Performance (Fiddle) 1, Physician 5, Pilot (Ship) 1, Shipwright 3, Stealth 3, Weaponmaster 5.



Luc-David "Frenchie" Corriveau

You began your career as an indentured servant in France. Brought to Tortuga as a youth, you escaped your cruel masters and signed on aboard the *Black Swan*. Early on Captain Nimmons learned not to leave you alone with prisoners, due to your supposed habit of treating them sadistically. In your view, these accusations are exaggerated. There's no point taking prisoners if you can't have a little fun with them. By taking command of the ship, you'll be in charge of the floggings. There haven't been nearly enough floggings.

Collective Goal: Prepare your becalmed pirate ship to successfully defend against impending attack by the privateer vessel *The Indomitable*.

Personal Goal: Become captain of the *Black Swan*.

Abilities: Appraisal 4, Athletics 2, Craftsmanship (Leather Goods) 7, Eavesdropping 6, Gambling 3, Gossip 2, Knowledge 3 (Sp: French Literature), Living Rough 1, Mischief 4, Moxy 5, Perception 1, Physician 4, Pilot (Ship) 2, Shipwright 5, Stealth 4, Weaponmaster 1.

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Christopher "Black Palm" Bradish

You left a wife and child in England to search for sunken treasure off the Bermuda coast. When that failed, you turned to piracy. You've since impregnated two other comely lasses who are waiting for your return to various port towns. You believe that you can do right by all of your wives, if only you become captain and amass enough stolen gold to set them all up in lavish households. As you are doing it for the women you love, surely any scruple you trample or throat you slit in your effort to become captain of the *Black Swan* will be excused by a merciful God.

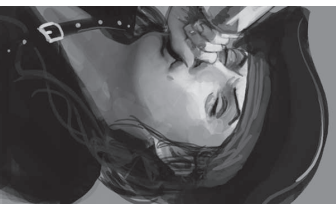
Collective Goal: Prepare your becalmed pirate ship to successfully defend against impending attack by the privateer vessel *The Indomitable*.

Personal Goal: Become captain of the *Black Swan*.

Abilities: Appraisal 5, Athletics 5, Craftsmanship (Rum Distilling) 4, Eavesdropping 3, Gambling 4, Gossip 2, Knowledge 2 (Sp: English Common Law), Living Rough 5, Mischief 3, Moxy 6, Perception 4, Performance (Flute) 4, Physician 1, Pilot (Ship) 5, Shipwright 6, Stealth 5, Weaponmaster 5.

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Skulduggery & Crossbones



"Rum Keg" Annie Evans

As the only female pirate aboard the *Swan* (well, except, depending on how precisely you define things, Hairy Tim, who wears a gown), you believe that it's high time the fairer sex had its chance to despoil, rampage and slaughter. It's not that you enjoy these things per se; you simply believe that the rights of women have been trampled for too long. Captain Nimmons treated you as an equal, but now that he's gone, you have decided that it's time to demand treatment as more than an equal.

Collective Goal: Prepare your becalmed pirate ship to successfully defend against impending attack by the privateer vessel *The Indomitable*.

Personal Goal: Become captain of the *Black Swan*.

Abilities: Appraisal 4, Athletics 7, Craftsmanship (Embroidery) 3, Eavesdropping 5, Gambling 2, Gossip 4, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Chess), Living Rough 4, Mischief 3, Moxy 3, Perception 6, Physician 5, Pilot (Ship) 5, Shipwright 1, Stealth 1, Weaponmaster 1.



Edward Newcastle

Once the captain of your own ship, the *Mountain*, you became infamous when you led a pirate blockade of Charleston, South Carolina and plundered six vessels anchored at its harbor. Since then your fortunes have fallen, and you've taken a position aboard the *Black Swan* as a common seaman. Mocking younger pirates have taken to calling you "Whitebeard." You'll show them who's the fool, when you seize command of the *Swan*.

Collective Goal: Prepare your becalmed pirate ship to successfully defend against impending attack by the privateer vessel *The Indomitable*.

Personal Goal: Become captain of the *Black Swan*.

Abilities: Appraisal 4, Athletics 1, Craftsmanship (Knives) 5, Eavesdropping 3, Gambling 4, Gossip 2, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Treasure Locations), Living Rough 1, Mischief 6, Moxy 6, Perception 2, Physician 6, Pilot (Ship) 6, Shipwright 5, Stealth 5, Weaponmaster 5.

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Persuade (Obfuscatory) 8

Trumps: Lawyerly

Is Trumped By: Penetrating

“I will illustrate the point with a story about a dolphin, an octopus, and a lady’s bodice.”

“Though our contract was verbal, I hasten your attention to this written codicil, deemed valid in many pertinent jurisdictions.”

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Persuade (Intimidating) 7

Trumps: Obtuse

Is Trumped By: Pure-Hearted

“On a purely tangential note, my gleaming cutlass hungers for blood.”

“The last man who said that to me became a meal for the fishes.”

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Persuade (Eloquent) 7

Trumps: Contrary

Is Trumped By: Wary

“Dare you trample on the sacred freedoms of the pirate’s code?”

“Beneath our veneer or rapine and plunder, can one not hear the beating hearts of civilized men?”

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Persuade (Charming) 9

Trumps: Wary

Is Trumped By: Contrary

“Permit me to freshen your grog.”

“In these unbearable conditions, you always manage to keep that ruffle clean and starched.”

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Persuade (Clib) 9

Trumps: Pure-Hearted

Is Trumped By: Obtuse

“Clearly you have not yet learned the lessons of the era.”

“Trust that I have thoroughly educated myself in such matters.”

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Persuade (Forthright) 8

Trumps: Penetrating

Is Trumped By: Lawyerly

“The others will not say this, but even for a person trapped on a becalmed pirate ship, your hygiene is in many ways deficient.”

“We are united then, and need speak no further on it.”



Rebuff 6 (Pure-Hearted)

Trumps: Intimidating

Is Trumped By: Clib

“Despite what my detractors say of me, I am deep down an honorable man!”



Rebuff 6 (Penetrating)

Trumps: Obfuscatory

Is Trumped By: Fortright

“Mysteriously, you have omitted all reference to your true objective.”

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Rebuff 6 (Lawyerly)

Trumps: Fortright

Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory

“Your argument is rife with misinterpretation.”



Rebuff 6 (Wary)

Trumps: Eloquent

Is Trumped By: Charming

“Something smells fishy here. Other than the fish, which of course goes without saying.”

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Rebuff 6 (Contrary)

Trumps: Charming

Is Trumped By: Eloquent

“I attach very little importance to everything.”



Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)

Trumps: Clib

Is Trumped By: Intimidating

“In one or two days, I will be sober again, at which point I will grant your offer the consideration it deserves.”

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Attack 8 (Strength)

Trumps: Parry

Is Trumped By: Vexation

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Attack 8 (Caution)

Trumps: Vexation

Is Trumped By: Parry

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Attack 7 (Speed)

Trumps: Dodge

Is Trumped By: Misdirection

Skulduggery & Crossbones

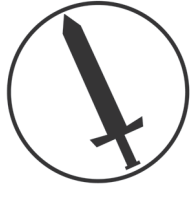


Attack 6 (Ferocity)

Trumps: Misdirection

Is Trumped By: Dodge

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Attack 7 (Finesse)

Trumps: Sure-Footedness

Is Trumped By: Cunning

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Attack 6 (Cunning)

Trumps: Intuition

Is Trumped By: Sure-Footedness



Defense 6 (Parry)

Trumps: Caution

Is Trumped By: Strength

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Defense 6 (Dodge)

Trumps: Ferocity

Is Trumped By: Speed

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Defense 6 (Sure-Footedness)

Trumps: Cunning

Is Trumped By: Finesse

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Defense 6 (Intuition)

Trumps: Finesse

Is Trumped By: Cunning

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Defense 6 (Misdirection)

Trumps: Speed

Is Trumped By: Ferocity

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Defense 6 (Vexation)

Trumps: Strength

Is Trumped By: Caution

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Relationships:

- Shaky Nate, Ship's Doctor 3
- Wee Danny, Cabin Boy 3
- Old Tar, Helmsman 4

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Relationships:

- Old Tar, Helmsman 3
- Bartholomew Cubbins, Account Keeper 2
- Barrel Bill Buntledge, Captain's Enforcer 3

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Relationships:

- Wee Danny, Cabin Boy 2
- Bartholomew Cubbins, Account Keeper 4
- Barrel Bill Buntledge, Captain's Enforcer 3

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Relationships:

- Shaky Nate, Ship's Doctor 2
- Jubsy, Captain Nimmons' Parrot 2
- Wee Danny, Cabin Boy 4

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Relationships:

- Shaky Nate, Ship's Doctor 2
- Jubsy, Captain Nimmons' Parrot 4
- Old Tar, Helmsman 3

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Relationships:

- Jubsy, Captain Nimmons' Parrot 4
- Bartholomew Cubbins, Account Keeper 3
- Barrel Bill Buntledge, Captain's Enforcer 3



Key Trait: Gluttonous

Resistances: Arrogant 6, Dissolute 4, Gluttonous 1, Greedy 4, Indolent 2, Spiteful Ω .



Key Trait: Spiteful

Resistances: Arrogant 3, Dissolute 6, Gluttonous Ω , Greedy 2, Indolent 3, Spiteful 1

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Key Trait: Greedy

Resistances: Arrogant 2, Dissolute Ω , Gluttonous 3, Greedy 1, Indolent 6, Spiteful 4,



Key Trait: Arrogant

Resistances: Arrogant 1, Dissolute 3, Gluttonous 2, Greedy 5, Indolent Ω , Spiteful 6

Skulduggery & Crossbones



Key Trait: Indolent

Resistances: Greedy 3, Indolent 1, Spiteful 2, Arrogant Ω , Dissolute 2, Gluttonous 6



Key Trait: Dissolute

Resistances: Arrogant 4, Dissolute 1, Gluttonous 6, Greedy 4, Indolent 5, Spiteful 3

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Casting Call

Jayne Bates *The Wallflower*



You've always been shy and awkward, but deep down you think you might maybe be capable of blossoming into, well, someone other than the pitiful klutz everyone at Luserville High sees you as. Maybe if you were able to speak up for yourself, that self-centered airhead Tom Cleat wouldn't have led you on all last year. He pretended he was interested, but when you gathered up the courage to talk to him, he clammed up and gave you the brush-off. The school play will give you a chance to break through your shell—and make him wish he'd never broken your heart.

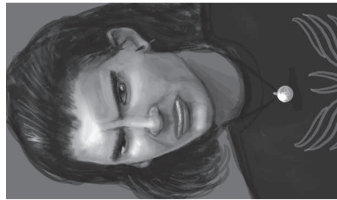
Collective Goal: Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

Personal Goal: Get back at Tom Cleat for toying with your affections.

Abilities: Athletics 1, Craftsmanship (Photography) 5, Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 3, Gossip 6, Moxy 3, Perception 4, Performance (Acting) 4, Performance (Dancing) 1, Performance (Singing) 6.

Casting Call

Terrell Jerome *The Outlaw*



You only recently arrived in Luserville, where you've come to live with your aunt after getting into bad trouble in the big city. Moving away from your running buddies was part of the deal your lawyer made to get your probation on burglary and gun charges. Life isn't easy at Luserville; the guys hate the way the girls look at you. All of them want to prove themselves against you, when all you want is to be left alone. And now your probation officer, Ivan Femby, is pushing you harder to show you've changed.

Collective Goal: Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

Personal Goal: Get your probation officer off your back.

Abilities: Athletics 5, Gambling 4, Mechanic 3, Mischief 4, Moxy 6, Perception 5, Performance (Acting) 2, Performance (Dancing) 4, Performance (Singing) 3, Stealth 5.

Casting Call

Tom Cleat *The Quarterback*



You have everyone else at Luserville High fooled, but you can't fool yourself. Sure, you're a star athlete, and devastatingly good-looking. But inside you've always felt that there's something missing in your life, a part of you that even you don't understand. You're lonely, and when you look in the mirror, you see a big phony. Maybe getting involved in the school play will shake you out of your funk and help you expand your boundaries.

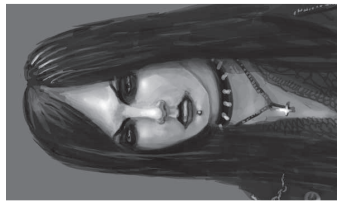
Collective Goal: Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

Personal Goal: Find true love with someone who understands you for who you really are.

Abilities: Athletics 6, Eavesdropping 1, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Gossip 1, Mechanic 2, Moxy 3, Perception 3, Performance (Acting) 2, Performance (Dancing) 2, Performance (Singing) 2.

Casting Call

Carita Blackburn *The Goth Chick*



School musicals are stupid, and so are everyone in them, because they're so fucking sincere and there are never any vampires in them. But when that stuck-up preppie bitch Alyssa Watson reduced your friend Morgana to tears by picking on her all-black look and genuine antique Victorian parasol, you decided to take the dark vengeance of the night. You'll audition for the stupid play and outshine her in every way.

Collective Goal: Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

Personal Goal: Get back at Alyssa Watson for being mean to your friends.

Abilities: Craftsmanship (Jewelry) 3, Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 2, Gossip 6, Mischief 4, Moxy 5, Perception 4, Performance (Acting) 6, Performance (Dancing) 2, Performance (Singing) 3, Stealth 3.

Casting Call

Alyssa Watson *The Popular Girl*



As head of the cheerleading squad and student council vice-president, few would doubt your status as most beautiful and popular girl at Luserville High. Yet one prize eludes your grasp—the acclaim due to the lead in the annual musical. Last year you got the lead even though you weren't a senior—and then were cruelly laid low by a case of mono. Now, in your senior year, you're about to rectify that—and let nothing and no one stand in your way.

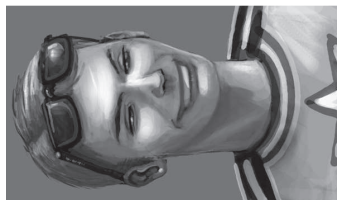
Collective Goal: Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

Personal Goal: Have the audience cheer louder for your bow than for anyone else's.

Abilities: Athletics 2, Craftsmanship (Poster Making) 3, Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 1, Gossip 3, Moxy 2, Perception 1, Performance (Acting) 2, Performance (Dancing) 5, Performance (Singing) 3, Wealth 4.

Casting Call

Darin Hemner *The Flamboyant One*



As soon as the school year ends, you're packing up your scarf and your dance belt and hopping on a bus for New York, New York. Maybe you'll audition for *American Idol*, or possibly one of those dance shows. Though never afraid to be out and proud, you'll still be happy to put Luserville and its small-town attitudes behind you. But if knocking them dead in the school auditorium wins you a leg up in your insatiable quest for fame, that's cool, too.

Collective Goal: Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

Personal Goal: Get noticed by a talent scout.

Abilities: Athletics 5, Craftsmanship (Costumes) 5, Eavesdropping 2, Etiquette 2, Gossip 4, Mischief 2, Moxy 6, Perception 3, Performance (Acting) 3, Performance (Dancing) 5, Performance (Singing) 3, Stealth 2, Wealth 2.



Casting Call

Persuade (Eloquent) 9

Trumps: Contrary

Is Trumped By: Wary

“Are you going to look yourself in the mirror tomorrow and see the face of a quitter? Or is this show going to go on?”

“Is this show to be, or not to be? Because, like, that totally is the question.”



Casting Call

Persuade (Glib) 8

Trumps: Pure-Hearted

Is Trumped By: Obtuse

“Trust me, it’s better for you to let me take credit for this.”

“It’s time to ask ourselves the crucial question: what would Shia LaBeouf do?”



Casting Call

Persuade (Forthright) 7

Trumps: Penetrating

Is Trumped By: Lawyery

“You want the truth? I’ll give you some truth.”

“Like my grandma used to say, it’s always darkest before you get run over by a train.”



Casting Call

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 7

Trumps: Lawyery

Is Trumped By: Penetrating

“The hard part is harder than the easy part, so why don’t you do both just to keep it consistent?”

“Honestly, sir, I left the thing back at the deal, so don’t worry, everything’s taken care of.”



Casting Call

Persuade (Intimidating) 9

Trumps: Obtuse

Is Trumped By: Pure-Hearted

“If you don’t step off, things are gonna get hurt around here.”

“You’ll regret this in ways that not even Shakespeare could imagine.”



Casting Call

Persuade (Charming) 8

Trumps: Wary

Is Trumped By: Contrary

“Whatever else separates us, all of us are united in our pursuit of awesomeness.”

“I know you want to make us happy, and you know you want to make us happy, so why don’t you accept the inevitable and make us happy?”

Casting Call



Rebuff 6 (Contrary)

Trumps: Charming

Is Trumped By: Eloquent

“Yeah but all perception is subjectively filtered through our brains, so who’s to say, right?”

Casting Call



Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)

Trumps: Clib

Is Trumped By: Intimidating

“I’m sorry. Was I supposed to be paying attention?”

Casting Call



Rebuff 6 (Lawyerly)

Trumps: Fortright

Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory

“Spoken like someone who has not read the full text of the school’s conduct manual.”

Casting Call



Rebuff 6 (Wary)

Trumps: Eloquent

Is Trumped By: Charming

“I just can’t trust someone who wears a jacket like that.”

Casting Call



Rebuff 6 (Pure-Hearted)

Trumps: Intimidating

Is Trumped By: Clib

“But that’s something only a horrible person would say!”

Casting Call



Rebuff 6 (Penetrating)

Trumps: Obfuscatory

Is Trumped By: Fortright

“I bet that argument works all the time on people who aren’t really listening.”



Relationships:

Gary Cottle, School Principal 2
Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher 4
Brittany Davison, School Paper Editor 3

Casting Call



Relationships:

Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher 4
Cody Yamamoto, Lord of the Stoners 3
Josh Mandell, Media Club President 3

Casting Call



Relationships:

Chelsea Burns, Class Gossip 2
Cody Yamamoto, Lord of the Stoners 4
Josh Mandell, Media Club President 3

Casting Call



Relationships:

Gary Cottle, School Principal 2
Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher 2
Chelsea Burns, Class Gossip 4

Casting Call



Relationships:

Gary Cottle, School Principal 3
Chelsea Burns, Class Gossip 3
Brittany Davison, School Paper Editor 4

Casting Call



Relationships:

Gary Cottle, School Principal 2
Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher 2
Chelsea Burns, Class Gossip 4

Casting Call

Casting Call



Key Trait: Lazy

Resistances: Horny 3, Lazy 1, Nitpicking 2, Partying 2, Show-Off Ω , Stuck-Up 6

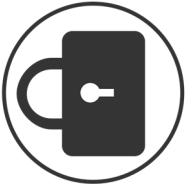
Casting Call



Key Trait: Partying

Resistances: Horny 4, Lazy 5, Nitpicking 3, Partying 1, Show-Off 4, Stuck-Up 6

Casting Call



Key Trait: Horny

Resistances: Horny 1, Lazy 6, Nitpicking Ω , Partying 4, Show-Off 2, Stuck-Up 3

Casting Call



Key Trait: Show-Offy

Resistances: Horny 5, Lazy Ω , Nitpicking 6, Partying 3, Show-Off 1, Stuck-Up 2

Casting Call



Key Trait: Stuck-Up

Resistances: Horny 4, Lazy Ω , Nitpicking 4, Partying 2, Show-Off 6, Stuck-Up 1

Casting Call



Key Trait: Nitpicky

Resistances: Horny 2, Lazy 3, Nitpicking 1, Partying 6, Show-Off 3, Stuck-Up Ω



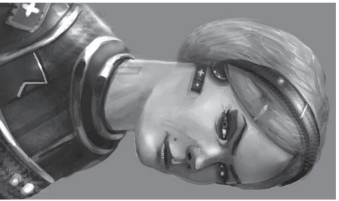
Finnegan Swake / Ula Seizz

Pilot

Aboard the *Vantage*, you serve as its pilot. You plot courses and choose destinations. When danger threatens, you take the helm personally to maneuver the ship past enemies and hazards. On shore, you are the ship's key negotiator, seeking out profitable trade arrangements. You hammer suppliers down to their lowest prices and convince buyers to purchase at premium rates.

Collective Goal: Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

General Abilities: Appraisal 5, Athletics 3, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 1, Gambling 3, Gossip 3, Knowledge 3 (Sp: Astronomy), Living Rough 3, Management 2, Mechanic 2, Mischief 4, Moxy 3, Perception 3, Physician 1, Piloting (Spacecraft, Cars) 6, Stealth 3, Weaponmaster 1.



Por / Poria Manto

Medical Officer

On or off the ship, you keep the crew healthy, sealing their wounds, immunizing them against alien viruses, and flushing their systems of space parasites. You support the team's trade mission by seeking out valuable pharmaceuticals and medical treatments for export.

Collective Goal: Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

General Abilities: Appraisal 1, Athletics 3, Eavesdropping 1, Etiquette 3, Gambling 2, Gossip 2, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Biology), Living Rough 1, Management 1, Mischief 2, Moxy 3, Perception 3, Physician 6,

If Space Permits



Serig / Seriga Allagan

Armsman

Aboard the *Vantage*, you serve as the ship's armsman. In battle with other ships, you man the firing array, targeting enemy vessels.

On shore, you are the team's bodyguard, providing physical protection when trade disputes threaten to turn violent. On occasion, you might even be asked to initiate aggressive measures, whether scaring off rivals, intervening in local disputes, or strong-arming on behalf of suppliers or clients.

Collective Goal: Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

General Abilities: Appraisal 1, Athletics 5, Eavesdropping 2, Etiquette 1, Gambling 3, Gossip 2, Knowledge 3 (Sp: Warfare), Living Rough 5, Management 2, Mechanic 2, Mischief 2, Moxy 4, Perception 5, Physician 2, Piloting (Spacecraft) 1, Stealth 3, Weaponmaster 6.

Special: Add 2 to your Attack rating.

If Space Permits



Thortho / Thorta Doxx

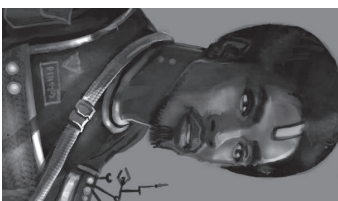
Legal Officer

Any aggressive trading ship needs a lawyer well-versed in the strictures of interstellar commercial law. After initial terms have been hashed out, you duel with legal counsel for your vendors and customers to hammer out the fine print. You are likewise conversant in the interstellar laws concerning warfare, piracy, and ship-to-ship force.

Collective Goal: Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

General Abilities: Appraisal 2, Athletics 3, Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 4, Gambling 2, Gossip 2, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Interstellar Law), Living Rough 1, Management 2, Mischief 3, Moxy 4, Perception 3, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 1, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 1.

If Space Permits



Kalan / Kala Dharro

Engineer

Despite its age and battle-scarred condition, you keep the *Vantage* in working order. During crises, you divert power from unneeded systems to keep the propulsion and weapons going. You scramble to seal off hull breaches and keep crucial functions online.

On shore, you acquire needed parts. You support the ship's trade mission by snffing out and appraising cargoes of technological goods.

Collective Goal: Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

General Abilities: Appraisal 3, Athletics 3, Eavesdropping 1, Etiquette 1, Gambling 4, Gossip 2, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Astronautics), Living Rough 2, Management 4, Mechanic 6, Mischief 6, Moxy 3, Perception 3, Piloting (Spacecraft, Cars) 3, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 3.

If Space Permits



Vrainman / Virala Krikle

Financial Officer

You maintain the ship's accounts and protect its financial future. You manage the ship's cash flow and keep on good terms with its creditors, separating those who can force you to pay from those who can be lightly regarded. You know that unless you secure a lucrative monopoly soon, the ship will be reclaimed by the Raktari, a dangerous debt consolidation syndicate.

Collective Goal: Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

General Abilities: Appraisal 6, Athletics 3, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 6, Gambling 4, Gossip 1, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Economics), Living Rough 1, Management 3, Mischief 4, Moxy 1, Perception 3, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 1, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 1.

If Space Permits



Persuade (Clib) 8

Trumps: Pure-Hearted

Is Trumped By: Obtuse

“I wish merely to observe the whirligig of humanity.”

“Good faith is the essential grease of commerce.”



Persuade (Eloquent) 7

Trumps: Contrary

Is Trumped By: Wary

“Yours is a name held in high esteem throughout the five quadrants.”

“Enlightened men, having learned the dark lessons of the Hutton Wars, regard a taste for vengeance as a mere historical curiosity.”



Persuade (Obfuscatory) 8

Trumps: Lawyerly

Is Trumped By: Penetrating

“You have wholly forfeited your right of Astlaar, and therefore must relent.”

“Your lapse lies in a failure to read my psychic resonance.”

If Space Permits



Persuade (Forthright) 7

Trumps: Penetrating

Is Trumped By: Lawyerly

“Conclude your shilly-shallying!”

“Let’s begin by admitting that we each intend to cheat the other.”



Persuade (Charming) 9

Trumps: Wary

Is Trumped By: Contrary

“I will struggle to keep up with your brilliant discourse.”

“This reminds me of an amusing anecdote concerning the Princess Virah and a ewux.”



Persuade (Intimidating) 9

Trumps: Obtuse

Is Trumped By: Pure-Hearted

“Yield, or face the wrath of a thousand suns!”

“I spend much of my time modulating the edge frequency of this force blade.”

If Space Permits

If Space Permits



If Space Permits

Rebuff 6 (Pure-Hearted)

Trumps: Intimidating

Is Trumped By: Glib

“I grant you that we live in a cynical age, but surely mercy has not been completely extinguished!”



If Space Permits

Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)

Trumps: Glib

Is Trumped By: Intimidating

“I have forgotten the crux of our disagreement. Let us drink.”



If Space Permits

Rebuff 6 (Penetrating)

Trumps: Obfuscatory

Is Trumped By: Fortright

“I don't know what you're talking about, and, more fatally, neither do you.”



If Space Permits

Rebuff 6 (Wary)

Trumps: Eloquent

Is Trumped By: Charming

“Your argument is undermined by the suspicious twitching of your left eyebrow.”



If Space Permits

Rebuff 6 (Contrary)

Trumps: Charming

Is Trumped By: Eloquent

“Out of concern for your intellectual welfare, I will correct that logical fallacy.”



If Space Permits

Rebuff 6 (Lawyerly)

Trumps: Fortright

Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory

“I reject your logic as an unfortunate by-product of the Kessik Paradox.”

If Space Permits



Attack 8 (Strength)

Trumps: Parry

Is Trumped By: Vexation

If Space Permits



Attack 7(Ferocity)

Trumps: Misdirection

Is Trumped By: Dodge

If Space Permits



Attack 6 (Finesse)

Trumps: Sure-Footedness

Is Trumped By: Cunning

If Space Permits



Attack 6 (Speed)

Trumps: Dodge

Is Trumped By: Misdirection

If Space Permits



Attack 8 (Caution)

Trumps: Vexation

Is Trumped By: Parry

If Space Permits



Attack 7 (Cunning)

Trumps: Intuition

Is Trumped By: Sure-Footedness



Defense 6 (Parry)

Trumps: Caution

Is Trumped By: Strength

If Space Permits



Defense 6

Trumps: Finesse

Is Trumped By: Cunning

If Space Permits



Defense 6 (Misdirection)

Trumps: Speed

Is Trumped By: Ferocity

If Space Permits



Defense 5 (Sure-Footedness)

Trumps: Cunning

Is Trumped By: Finesse

If Space Permits



Defense 6 (Dodge)

Trumps: Ferocity

Is Trumped By: Speed

If Space Permits



Defense 6 (Vexation)

Trumps: Strength

Is Trumped By: Caution

If Space Permits

If Space Permits



Relationships:

Quelk Queln, Police Officer 3
Her Holiness Lamas Lem, Vine Bishop 3
Sura Zonn, President of Freight Handler's Union
4

If Space Permits



Relationships:

Verator Vump, Customs Official 3
Her Holiness Lamas Lem, Vine Bishop 2
Ora Nosth, Wine Critic 3

If Space Permits



Relationships:

Juh Cerknor, Judge 2
Quelk Queln, Police Officer 4
Sura Zonn, President of Freight Handler's Union 3

If Space Permits



Relationships:

Juh Cerknor, Judge 2
Ora Nosth, Wine Critic 2
Her Holiness Lamas Lem, Vine Bishop 4

If Space Permits



Relationships:

Juh Cerknor, Judge 2
Verator Vump, Customs Official 4
Quelk Queln, Police Officer 3

If Space Permits



Relationships:

Ora Nosth, Wine Critic 4
Verator Vump, Customs Official 3
Sura Zonn, President of Freight Handler's Union 3



Key Trait: Show-Offy

Resistances: Avarice 4, Dissipation 2, Indolence 4, Lust Ω , Nitpicking 6, Showboating 1

Personal Goal: Be crowned as Grape King / Queen at the annual harvest festival.



Key Trait: Libidinous

Resistances: Avarice 2, Dissipation 4, Indolence Ω , Lust 1, Nitpicking 4, Showboating 6

Personal Goal: Bed, as the character's sexual preferences suggest, either Dwenp, the handsome son, or Lwala, the nubile daughter, of Vintner's Council President Bef Hospitalk.

If Space Permits



Key Trait: Indolent

Resistances: Avarice 4, Dissipation 6, Indolence 1, Lust 4, Nitpicking Ω , Showboating 2

Personal Goal: Finish experiencing the epic retronovel *Sirens Of the Hutton Wars* with minimal interruption.



Key Trait: Dissolute

Resistances: Avarice Ω , Dissipation 1, Indolence 4, Lust 2, Nitpicking 4, Showboating 4

Personal Goal: Experience the legendary state of consciousness known as *froidh*, brought on by overindulgence in the questionably legal Silurian wine derivative called *pfha*.

If Space Permits



Key Trait: Greedy

Resistances: Avarice 1, Dissipation Ω , Indolence 4, Lust 6, Nitpicking 2, Showboating 4

Personal Goal: Set up a secret arrangement allowing you to skim at least 10% of the revenues off the top of the group's hoped-for Silurian wine monopoly.



Key Trait: Nitpicky

Resistances: Avarice 6, Dissipation 4, Indolence 2, Lust 3, Nitpicking 1, Showboating Ω

Personal Goal: Arrange for and supervise the repainting of a mural on the Vintner's Council headquarters, unfairly depicting a raid conducted on Siluria by your ancestor thion during the Hutton Wars.

If Space Permits

If Space Permits



APPENDICES

Randomized Styles

Use this chart to randomly roll a Persuade, Rebuff, Attack or Defense style for a character in need of one.

Die Roll	Persuade	Rebuff	Attack	Defense
1	Glib	Pure-Hearted	Strength	Dodge
2	Eloquent	Contrary	Speed	Parry
3	Obfuscatory	Lawyerly	Finesse	Sure-Footedness
4	Forthright	Penetrating	Cunning	Intuition
5	Charming	Wary	Ferocity	Misdirection
6	Intimidating	Obtuse	Caution	Vexation

Success/Failure

Failure (1-3)	1. Dismal	Pay three points to reroll
	2. Routine	
	3. Exasperating	Gain a boon token
Success (4-6)	4. Hair's Breadth	Gain a levy token
	5. Ordinary	
	6. Impressive	Costs three points to counter

Pooled Effort

Character's Individual Failure	Group Result: Success	Group Result: Failure
Dismal	1 injury	2 injuries
Routine	No injury	1 injury
Exasperating	No injury	No injury

Verbal Trumps

	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED By		TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED By
Glib	Pure-Hearted	Obtuse	Pure-Hearted	Intimidating	Glib
Eloquent	Contrary	Wary	Contrary	Charming	Eloquent
Obfuscatory	Lawyerly	Penetrating	Lawyerly	Forthright	Obfuscatory
Forthright	Penetrating	Lawyerly	Penetrating	Obfuscatory	Forthright
Charming	Wary	Contrary	Wary	Eloquent	Charming
Intimidating	Obtuse	Pure-Hearted	Obtuse	Glib	Intimidating

Combat Trumps

Style	Trumps	Is Trumped By	Style	Trumps	Is Trumped By
Parry	Caution	Strength	Caution	Vexation	Parry
Dodge	Ferocity	Speed	Ferocity	Misdirection	Dodge
Sure-Footedness	Cunning	Finesse	Cunning	Intuition	Sure-Footedness
Intuition	Finesse	Cunning	Finesse	Sure-Footedness	Intuition
Misdirection	Speed	Ferocity	Speed	Dodge	Misdirection
Vexation	Strength	Caution	Strength	Parry	Vexation



BODN AND LEVY COLLECTOR

Weaponry
Attack
Attack

Maneuverability
Defense
Defense

Integrity
Health
Force Strength

Weaponry
Attack
Attack

Maneuverability
Defense
Defense

Integrity
Health
Force Strength

Weaponry
Attack
Attack

Maneuverability
Defense
Defense

Integrity
Health
Force Strength

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