



the World
of Darkness[®]

storytelling
system rulebook



the World of Darkness[®]

STORYTELLING SYSTEM RULEBOOK

BY WHITE WOLF GAME STUDIO

A-1 WITNESS INVESTIGATIONS

CONFIDENTIAL — CLIENT REPORT

DR. [REDACTED] ER

DEPT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND ALLIED MENTAL HEALTH

[REDACTED] CITY

[REDACTED] AKE [REDACTED]

Dr. [REDACTED]

My contact in the police dept would not photocopy the original document, but he did let me make a transcript, which you'll find below. To recap, the original was found by local law enforcement in room 213 of the Sleepy Moon Motel, located on U.S. RT. 11, seven miles west of Karam, Ohio. The document was found in the trash, partially burned (only about 40% of the document was recovered). Presumably it was never mailed, since the resident of room 213 matched descriptions of the letter's author, J. Archer. Also found were a number of photographs, digital copies of which I've pasted into this document. Physical evidence suggests she fled the scene approximately 30 minutes before law enforcement arrived. For clarity, my comments are in *** ALL CAPS ***.

Listen, I know I owe you a lot, but I'd rather not work this case any longer. I can't handle the weird things that have been happening since you called me last month. This morning, when I gathered up these papers to send you, I found strange comments and gibberish written all over them. Knowing your proclivities, I left them intact rather than erase them or print out a new copy. Maybe they'll mean something to you. But don't ask me to look into this situation any further. And don't try to threaten me. I went over your head and the You Know Who say I don't need to follow your orders anymore.

K. S. Delburton

WE ARE YOUR EYES

*** TRANSCRIPT ***

Dear [REDACTED]

I did it.

I did what they say I did. I want you to know the truth, rather than spend your life wondering. The truth is painful, and it will hurt you. I hope I have the nerve to write everything and send this to you.

I killed him.

I want you to know why.

I'd been working at the *Globe* for almost a year. "Janet Archer, girl reporter." Her father's pride and joy. Ten-and-a-half months of sitting in my cubicle in the basement, typing obituaries and listening to the police scanner. Ten-and-a-half months of city council meetings, zoning hearings, burglaries, drunken teenagers crashing into telephone poles. I was warned in journalism class how working your way up the ladder takes patience. I didn't think an entry-level job at a small city daily would get me a Pulitzer. I did think I'd have something to show for it, though. Some clips, some features. But the editor wouldn't give me anything meaty except his hand on my knee when he'd had too much of his lunchtime pick-me-up.

I checked all those online job-finding sites, but they were a waste of time. Then one day I was flipping through our very own anemic classifieds when I saw it, sandwiched between an opening at a pizzeria and a recruitment ad for the Navy.

WRITER WANTED

Experienced and/or talented writer sought to help elderly recluse compose his memoirs. I've led a long and unusual life and need the right wordsmith to tell my story. Only a curious, thorough and detail-oriented scribe will do. Generous salary, flexible hours. Apply in person, 8 am-10 am, 133 Rath St., Ogdenburg.

*** SECTION MISSING ***

and I followed her into the room that seemed to take up the entire front of the house. Except for a single folding chair, the room was empty. No carpet, just stained and scuffed wooden floorboards. The walls were white once, I think, but had aged to a gray. There was a second door in the room. It was black and heavy and closed. The windows had no curtains, just roller blinds that were pulled halfway down. The weak light of the cloudy morning filled the room with the dreary ambiance of an unattended funeral.

There wasn't so much as a cobweb on any of the walls or the ceiling. And the room had no smell.

"Wait," the housekeeper told me, the only word I ever heard her say. I sat down slowly, wishing I had brought some coffee. The woman walked out and closed the door. It was as gray as the walls. A few minutes later I heard a vacuum cleaner running from somewhere deeper inside the house.

I sighed and settled into my chair. I tried to brush the wrinkles out of my slacks. I looked out the window at the cracked pavement and uneven sidewalks, the bags of garbage waiting to be picked up and the half-collapsed doghouse in the front yard across the street. I stood up and paced

*** SECTION MISSING ***

the black door. The knob was old and ornate, like something you'd see in an art deco hotel. I kneeled down and looked through the keyhole, but it had been stopped up.

I felt something at my feet.

There was air blowing out from under the door, cold air that tickled the front of my ankles. I touched the crack at the floor. It was just about as wide as my fingertips. And there was definitely cold, almost frigid air streaming through.

I checked my watch. I'd been waiting for more than a half-hour. It was absurd. And yet I didn't feel like leaving just yet. After all, what was waiting for me out there that was more interesting than this? So I stood up and rapped my knuckles on the black door. Hard.

"Hello," I called out. "Is anyone there? I've been waiting here for over 30 minutes. Hello?"

There was no answer. I put my hand on the knob and turned. It moved silently, smoothly, more easily than I expected. But when I tried to push the door open, it wouldn't budge. It felt like it had been dead bolted from the other side.

Oh no. Oh no no no no no no no no no no.



Don't remember taking this

"Excuse me, miss." The voice was dry and brittle. "Can I help you?"

He was tall and thin, with white hair and skin that hadn't seen the sun in a long time. He wore a dark suit that I knew was out of style, even though I have all the fashion sense of a Mennonite. Wispy hair floated around his pink scalp like smoke.

I stared at him to show he hadn't startled me, but I kept the anger out of my voice. "I came about the ad in the paper," I told him, glancing at the folded newspaper I'd left on the chair. "The ad for a writer? I've been waiting here for quite a while."

"Yes," he sighed. "Yes, I thought that might be it. I'm sorry you had to wait so long. I wasn't aware you were here until just a moment ago."

"I'm Janet Archer," I said, extending my hand in my best job interview style. He took it in the lightest grip I'd ever felt, then let go.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm afraid you've come here for nothing. The job is no longer available."

"You found someone already?"

"No, it's not that. You see, Mr. Mummer — the gentleman who placed the ad — passed away last night."

I blinked for a few seconds.

"I'm Theo Fenway, his lawyer. I meant to get here earlier today and post a notice on the door, but.... In any case, I apologize for the inconvenience."

It was hard to know what to say. I stalled for time by walking over to the chair and picking up my bag and the paper. "Can you tell me — who was he? Why exactly was he looking to hire a writer?"

"He was, as his advertisement stated, hoping to publish his memoirs. As for who he was, I'm afraid that would be a breach of confidentiality. He was a very private man, notwithstanding his aspiration to write his memoirs."

*** SECTION MISSING ***

three days later that I got an envelope, a plain white #10 envelope that turned up on my desk at work with the rest of the day's mail. The address was typed — not computer-printed, mind you, but typed. It contained all of 15 words.

'If you want to know more about Mummer:

Sal's Meat Market, Cole St. 7 pm.'

*** SECTION MISSING ***

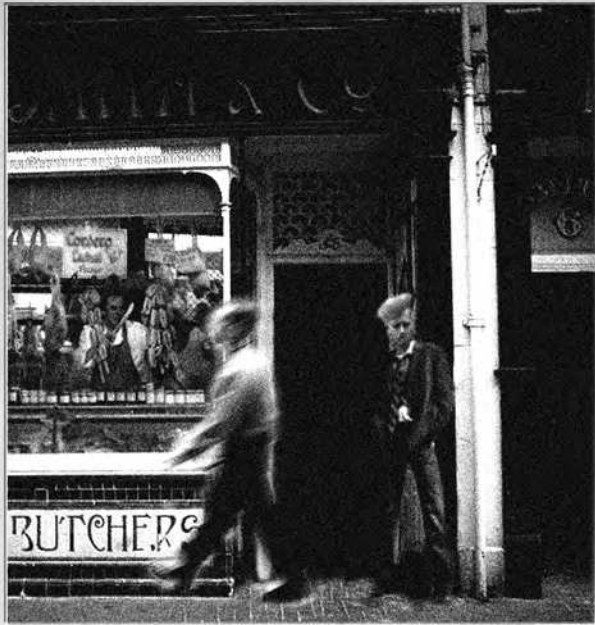
from my car I watched the butcher exit the shop and head down the street, carrying a large bundle wrapped in brown paper. The bundle was huge. He had to wrap both arms around it. As I watched him lumber away, something occurred to me. Why was he making such a big delivery on foot? I mean, the guy had the build of Jackie Gleason and walked with a limp. The shop's van was parked right in front, yet here was this out of shape tub of lard walking down the street. Even if he was going somewhere nearby, taking the van would have been easier. I had to wonder where he was going.

*** INTERVIEWS AT THE BUTCHER SHOP REVEAL THAT A WORKER MATCHING THIS DESCRIPTION QUIT MONTHS AGO, LEAVING NO FORWARDING ADDRESS. ***

*** SECTION MISSING ***

Up the airy mountain,

down the rushing glen.



Why is it that this guy
always comes out blurry?

Obey. Obey.



Can't go there.

alley was a nightmare of dumpsters, garbage cans, dog shit, broken glass and ripped-up furniture. The guy quickly picked his way through the debris, giving me the impression that he'd done it before. He was out the other end before I got even a quarter of the way through. I was sure I'd lose him, but when I came to the end of the alley I saw it led to a kind of courtyard bordered by a warehouse and some tenements. The only other exit was closed off by a metal grate.

The butcher stood in the middle of the courtyard. There was a manhole there, blocked off by cones and public works barriers. A temporary cover had been put over it, one of those tent-things that you see when city workers need access. But there were no workers that night, no one around except for the butcher and me.

He moved the cover out of the way. I had to back out of sight as his movements brought me into his field of vision. When I looked again he was crouched over the hole. I watched him hold his parcel over the opening. I heard the paper tear as something fell out. Before I could move to a better spot, the butcher had turned and was coming back in my direction. I wouldn't have thought a man so big could move so fast. I barely had time to crouch behind some garbage cans before he came barreling down the alley. He shot past me like he was on fire, barely slowing to dodge through the debris. He was gone before I could get back to my feet.

I walked over to the manhole.

There was just a single streetlight in the alley. I hoped it would be bright enough. I cursed myself for not bringing a flashlight. I leaned over the edge and peered in. Some light did filter down, but it took a moment for my eyes to make out the shapes in the darkness.

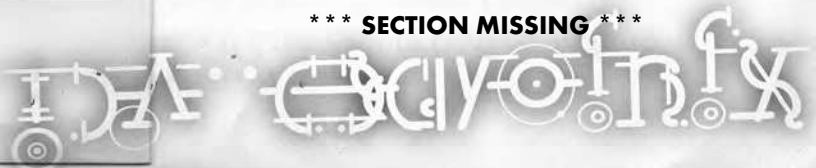
I noticed the fingers first.

There were hands, severed hands, three or four of them, scattered on the dirty, wet, concrete floor of the sewer. There was a leg, a woman's I think, complete with a foot. Toenails shining like nickels in the dim light of the street lamp. A slab of flesh with hair and nipples. Soft, glistening shapes that oozed something thick and black. That was all I saw before I had to roll onto my hands and knees and vomit.

The next time I had a conscious thought, I was back in my apartment, sitting on the edge of my bed. I had taken off my sneakers and was staring at them in the corner of the room. I couldn't remember leaving the alley. I couldn't remember how I got home. I couldn't remember why it was important to do anything but crawl under the covers and pass out, so that's what I did.

I didn't go to work the next day.

*** SECTION MISSING ***



'If you want to know more:
K-O Pest Control, 17th St.
Ask for Mike.'

There's a hole in the bucket,
there's a hole in the bucket,
there's a hole in the bucket,
there's a hole in the bucket.

*** SECTION MISSING ***

cellar was like a death camp. Rusted canisters of poison hanging on the walls. Jars of amber liquid with limp shapes floating inside. Gas masks and thick rubber gloves. As soon as we got to the bottom of the stairs I wanted to shut my eyes and run.

"Never forget the day we found him," Mike said. "A sub-basement full of garbage, and there he was, flat-out under a pile of greasy newspapers." We came to a steel-plated door with strange stains around the handle. Mike slipped the key into the lock and used both hands to force it to turn. "Don't get pissed if he ain't here," he said. "Sometimes he's gone for weeks. Damned if I know how he gets out, but he always comes back." He opened the door a crack. Weak yellow light made a line across his face as he peered inside. "Good, he's here."

It stank. The room stank of piss, shit and animal fur. There were a couple of old wooden chairs lying on their sides. A skinny kid was crouched in a corner of the room, next to a cracked table lamp. He wore denim overalls. No shirt, no shoes.

"Go ahead," Mike said. "Ask him a question."

The kid cocked his head at me. He looked to be about 15. His eyes were small and beady, and his hair grew in matted clumps. He had a pointed nose and I watched him pull his lips into a kind of grimace. Every third tooth seemed to be missing.

"Clever Tim," the kid whispered. He turned his head to the side and I saw what was left of his earlobe. Ragged strips of flesh hung from his head like the petals of a dying flower. Above them were three scars as wide as my finger.

I knelt to look at his face. "What happened to your ear?" I said softly.

"Clever Tim hid when the dogs came." His head lolled up and down as he spoke, as if he was singing. "Clever, clever Tim, the wild doesn't want him no more, no, no. Clever Tim knows lots of things."

I glanced at Mike, who was staring at the ceiling, looking bored. Then he looked at me and said, "Better ask him something now. In another minute he'll be a drooling idiot."

I didn't think. The words just came out of me. "The other night I saw something. In a... in a hole. But I can't remember it. Not everything. I can't remember what happened next and I don't know if—"

"The spirits are watching you," he said and laughed. Some spit flew onto my cheek. "When you see the woman with the bird, tell her the answer is seven. Seven, they say!" He made a kind of chuffing noise as he laughed. He seemed to be chewing his tongue.

I heard Mike walking for the door. "That's as good as you'll get out of him," he told me. "See you, Tim."

When we were outside the door Mike's cell phone rang. It made us both jump. He turned away from me to talk. I found myself walking back to the metal door. Mike hadn't locked it yet. I pushed it open and looked in.

Tim wasn't there. The room was empty except for the furniture. There was no other exit, no door or window. I stared like I was in a trance. Then there was a blur of motion in the corner of my eye, a crinkling of newspaper. I turned my head toward the far wall in time to see something slither away through a small hole near the floor. If I had to guess, I'd say it was a rat, except that I'm not sure I saw anything at all.

*** NO SUCH PEST CONTROL IN THE AREA. DID SHE CHANGE THE NAME? WHY? ***

*** SECTION MISSING ***

'The Ugly Mug
Hanover Street.
Bring this.'

*** SECTION MISSING ***

The envelope contained a single playing card, the ace of clubs. The design on the back was something I'd never seen before. It depicted a snake curled into a circle, biting its own tail — a symbol that research told me

Why? All the king's horses and all the king's

men and all that is now and all that is gone

is called "oroboros." Arrayed around the snake were 10 symbols: a lightning bolt, a cube, an Egyptian ankh, two overlapping circles, an hourglass, a spiral, a crescent moon, a skull, an open eye and a spider web. I had been sitting in the coffee shop on Hanover for 45 minutes, idly playing with the card. It was worn at the edges, with a faint stain on the face and a crease at one corner. Then the waitress asked me if I wanted another latte.

She wasn't the woman who'd been waiting on me earlier. She couldn't have been more than 17, with a punked-out hair cut, a ring through her lip and a dozen thin silver chains around her neck. Part of a tattoo was visible on her collarbone, a flourish of dark ink peeking out of her tank top. I looked into her eyes and felt like I was breathing helium.

She sat down across the table and gestured at the playing card. "Is that yours?" she asked.

"Someone told me to bring it."

She nodded. "You look tired. Are you sure you're awake?"

I considered that for a few seconds. "I think I'm half asleep," I told her. The noises of the coffee shop, the clinking of silverware and scraping of chairs across the floor seemed to fall away. The smell of coffee beans and pastries faded. I saw her reach forward and put one finger on the back of my hand. "The dream equation," she said, "told me someone was coming."

An electric warmth flowed from her hand into my body. I turned my head and it seemed as if I could see afterimages. Everywhere I looked, people left trails as they moved, reflections of themselves that stretched behind them like time-lapse photography. I opened my mouth to speak, but everything was changing. Everyone, everything was merging with its own reflections. Heads had a hundred faces. Faces had a thousand eyes. A million fingers on my hand. An old man with an infant at his core. A toddler with a coiled-up crone inside her.

It was too much. I looked at the girl, the waitress, and her body was like glass. Inside it, in place of her heart, a star of blue light beat. I saw her lips move. "The time equation is incomplete," her voice said in my mind. "We're compressing like paper dolls." I stared at her eyes, which were shining like rain puddles in the sun. I felt my lungs swelling like balloons and my stomach knotting. "Stop," I wanted to say. The chains around her neck were dull as lead, but below them a silver design flickered and pulsed. Her tattoo, I thought. I could see right through her shirt and realized the design was a bird, a hook-billed falcon that would have looked at home engraved on the side of an Egyptian tomb.

"The lady with the bird," I thought. "Tell her." I heard my voice say the word "Seven," a few seconds before I opened my mouth and spoke.

"Seven?" she repeated. "Seven?" Laughter like thunder. "Seven! That's it, there are seven!"

I realized my eyes were closed. I counted to three and opened them. I was standing in the alley behind the coffee shop. It was raining. I was holding an umbrella. It wasn't my umbrella. The handle was in the shape of a parrot, just like in *Mary Poppins*.

***** I CONSIDERED INVESTIGATING THIS COFFEE SHOP, BUT OUR MASTERS ADVISED ME TO HOLD OFF AND WAIT FOR MORE INSTRUCTIONS. *****

***** SECTION MISSING *****

'We meet again, Rath Street, tonight. Answers.'

***** SECTION MISSING *****



She says she's never met me.



Ha!! Ha Ha!!



and all that's to come and everything under the sun.

"Fenway" wasn't wearing the suit. Instead he was dressed in rumpled blue jeans and a faded button-down shirt. He looked like someone's out-of-work uncle. I glared at him for a minute, then said, "I'm waiting."

He smirked. "You've got the job. It's just not the job you thought it was."

I unzipped my jacket and dropped the note to the floor. "Why do it, Mr. Mummer? Why pretend you're dead? Why lie to me about who you are? Why even put that ad in the paper? How many people have you done this to?"

He walked across the room and leaned against the windowsill. "Dozens of people answered my ad," he said. "About half left the house after 15 minutes of waiting. Another quarter left before 30 minutes. But not you. That showed me you had patience." He gestured toward the black door. "And of the 39 people who answered that advertisement, you were the only one who showed any interest in that door." He shook his head and chuckled. "My God, a black door in a bare room? And yet most of them just ignored it."

***** THIS "MUMMER" ISN'T IN ANY OF MY FILES. RECORDS CHECK INDICATES IT IS HIS REAL NAME. YET SOMEHOW HE'S STAYED UNDER MY RADAR UNTIL NOW, EVEN THOUGH I MAKE DAMN SURE TO KNOW ALL THE PLAYERS IN THE AREA. WHO WAS PROTECTING HIM? *****

He walked to the door and put a hand on the knob. "You see, most people are quite adept at closing their eyes to even the most obvious things around them. They see only what they choose to see and block out everything else. I knew you investigated my supposed death and found no record of it. So, I knew you'd be intrigued enough to follow up on the notes I sent you. Would you like to see what's behind the door now?"

I made fists to keep my hands from shaking.

He didn't wait for an answer. The knob turned without a sound and the door opened smoothly. He stepped through and I heard him say, "Pardon the chill air in this part of the house. It's better for preservation."

I followed him into a narrow room. It was dark, and then my eyes were blinded as he switched on a light. "My life's work," he said. "Go ahead, take a look." I crossed my arms against the cold and turned slowly to take in the whole room. I wanted desperately to squeeze my eyes shut.

There were bookshelves on either side. The shelves sagged under the weight. Bundles of paper. Spiral notebooks, three-ring binders, file folders. More of them piled on a small table. He walked to the far end of the room and turned to look at me. I can't describe the look on his face. Something like pride mixed with nervousness and relief.

I picked up a notebook. It was filled with writing, neat, block lettering in black ink. The meticulous paragraphs were in sections of some sort, each separated with a title and date. "THE MANIKIN IN THE CLOSET," "THE WHISPERS IN THE ALLEY," "GRANDPA'S FAVORITE," "THE LEG." I started to read, but when I got to the part about the tank of eels I had to stop.

"What — what are these?" I asked. I thought I knew, but my ears were ringing and I had to stall.

"True stories," he answered softly. "True stories about the world. I've been collecting them all my life. Some are traded, but mostly I interviewed the witnesses myself or saw them happen."

"These things can't be true," I said, and even as the words left my mouth I could smell the urine in Clever Tim's cell.

"The world's not what we think it is," he said. "It's not the way they tell us. What it all means, I don't know. I'm just a collector of stories. A recorder. A reporter. But I can't do it for much longer. Someone else needs to take over, to pick up the trail. You're that someone." He was talking fast now, spit flying from his mouth. "I can tell you where to look, who to talk to. There are so many secrets—"

Without meaning to, I glanced down at the table where I'd left the notebook open.

There is a warehouse on Front Street where certain surgical procedures are performed...

"No!" I shouted, cutting off his enthusiasm. "God damn you, no! I won't be a part of this!"

"But—"

"You're insane! Do you think I want to end up like you? Living alone in a rundown house with only fantasies and fiction for company?"

"This is not fiction," he said coldly. "You've seen things."

"You son of a bitch!" My shouting seemed to make him shrink. "Do you realize I lost my job yesterday because I told my boss I wouldn't go see the company shrink? I can't sleep for more than three hours at a time without waking up screaming!"

Cogito ergo sum.

He was in my face before I could turn away. "It's too late," he yelled. He grabbed my shoulders. "It's too late! You're in it now. You know things. You've seen things." He relaxed his grip, then let go. "You can't go back once your eyes are opened. Please—" His eyes became soft and watery. "Please. I've been doing this for so long. I can't keep it up. I need someone to take it off my shoulders—"

I cursed at him as I shoved him away. When he hit the floor he made a pathetic gasp, then sucked in a gulp of air. "You don't understand," he wheezed.

I pulled out the gun. "My father bought me this when I left for college. He taught me how to shoot. If I ever see or hear from you again, I swear to God I'll kill you." I was crying. "I'm not going to play your stupid game."

He flopped onto his chest for a moment, then started to push himself off the floor. He turned his head and looked at me. And suddenly the position of his body, the angle of his head, sent me somewhere else. I was in the alley again, staring down into the sewer, feeling the bile rise in my throat as I forced myself to count body parts. One hand, two hands, a foot, small like an infant's....

Then another form moved into view. It slid out of the shadows and hovered over the dismembered body parts. It was dressed in rags. Filthy, tattered cloth that made it hard to see what was happening. A fat, greasy arm slithered out and grabbed a shapeless chunk of organ meat. There were noises. Slapping and smacking and sucking noises. The shadowy figure shifted position. There were crunching sounds. I pressed both hands to my mouth and held tight, but a desperate gasp still escaped my lips.

And it looked at me.

It rolled its shoulders and cocked its head and looked up at me. Even though I was on the street and it was underground, I felt as though I was an ant and it was towering over me. There was blood running down its chin and a mustache of human fat across its upper lip. Its mouth was open wide, so wide, jaws unhinged like a snake's. Its head had strange bulges. Its eyes were human, so human as they fixed on me, burned into me, tried to obliterate me the way the sun obliterates the night.

Then I heard the gun go off, and I was staring at Mummer's corpse, watching his blood stain the carpet.

After that, I wandered through the house in a kind of daze. There were more rooms. Many more. An attic. A basement. They were all filled with more stories. Towers of notebooks, mountains of folders, oceans of files. Stories written on cocktail napkins, the backs of envelopes, on box tops and strips of torn-up clothing. Stories written on the walls themselves, the floors, the windows.

I knew what would happen if I left them intact. I knew that sooner or later I'd make myself read them. All of them.

I couldn't let that happen.

*** SECTION MISSING ***

By the time I was out of state, I was the chief suspect in both the fire and the murder. I don't know what the "evidence" they found in my apartment was. Someone probably planted something. Anyway, I know how the police work. I'm pretty sure I can stay one step ahead of them.

*** MY SOURCE IN THE P.D. TELLS ME SHE REMAINS AT LARGE. WHO'S HELPING HER? THE ENEMY? ***

Everywhere I look, I wonder what I'm seeing. I wonder about the guy in the alley who follows me with his eyes as I walk by. I wonder about the two bald guys sitting in the back of the diner, wearing strange medallions around their necks. I wonder about the huge dog I see walking along the side of the road, vanishing like mist before he's fully in my headlights.

I wonder what will happen next.

I hope this letter gets to you. It feels like we haven't spoken in years. I'm not even sure where you're teaching these days.

I hope I have the courage to mail this to you.

Don't come looking for me, Dad. Please.

Destroy this letter after you read it.

Well done, doctor. Howdy, Captain.
We'll be in touch.

*** END TRANSCRIPT ***

A cage in search
of a bird.

Seek water.
The hand that rocks the cradle.
"You pull and I shall push." Let's rock.

Credits

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the World of Darkness[®]

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"Okay, let's start again from the beginning. Why were you in Mulhanney's?"

"I already told you. I wanted to get some candy."

"Yeah, yeah, 'candy.' Right. How about you wanted a bottle?"

The bedraggled man in the trench coat hung his head in shame. He rubbed his hand against his beard stubble and stared at his slight reflection in the steel table's surface. The faint light coming through the barred windows showed that it was nearly dawn. He looked up at the police investigator. "All right. Yeah, I wanted a drink. What about it? It ain't illegal."

"No, but lying to me is."

"Aw, jeez, no! I told ya, I didn't kill that guy. I just went in for a drink. It was that... it was..." He shuddered, unable to continue.

The investigator sat down on the edge of the table. "Look, we all want to go home, but we can't till we get the full story."

The man nodded sullenly. "Okay, I was in there when this guy come in through the back door, from the parking lot. He looked weird, like he didn't belong somehow. Mulhanney didn't like him being in the store. He started yelling for the guy to get out."

"The guy said something. I didn't understand what, like it was another language. But Mulhanney musta known. He went crazy. He grabbed some kind of bag or something and came out from behind the counter with a bat. I dunno what pissed him off so bad."

"So he chases the guy out the back door. I couldn't see them, but I could hear. It sounded... It sounded like an animal... and screams."



Chapter 1: The Secret History

*There are demon-
haunted worlds, regions
of utter darkness. Who-
ever in life denies the
Spirit falls into that
darkness of death.*

— Isa Upanishad

Tom smiled, letting out a contented sigh, his hands resting in the pockets of his corduroy jacket. “Nothing’s changed. It’s exactly how I remember it.”

“Oh, c’mon,” Jenny said, looking around the small pond skeptically, her arms crossed. “Nothing stays the same forever. Surely this old swimming hole is different somehow.”

“No, I’m telling you — it’s the same. Same tree, same branches, same water level. Heck, I bet the old ‘hole to nowhere’ is still at the bottom.”

“‘Hole to nowhere?’” Jenny grimaced. “Sounds creepy.”

“Yeah, we used to dare one another to try and swim down it. Bobby tried once, but couldn’t hold his breath long enough to get far. Scared him half to death.”

“Eew,” Jenny waved her arms, trying to fend off the image. “Why do boys do such idiotic things?”

Tom took his jacket off, smiling. “I swore I’d find the end of that hole someday.”

Jenny stared, aghast. “You’re kidding.” She shook her head vigorously. “Stop it, Tom.”

Tom laughed and dropped his pants, revealing swim trunks. Before Jenny could grab his arm, he splashed into the murky water.

“You can’t see anything through that mud!” Jenny cried. “Just forget it. Let’s go home.”

“No way,” Tom said. “I swore I’d do it. Besides, I dropped a silver dollar in there once. I want it back.” He dove beneath the surface.

Jenny could see his murky form going deeper and deeper. It paused at what looked like the bottom and then disappeared. She moaned, clutching herself, biting her lip, and waited.

“Tom!” she yelled when he hadn’t surfaced. “Oh my God!” She kicked off her shoes and slipped out of her pants. She didn’t have a bathing suit, only underwear. Grimacing at the chill in the water, she waded out.

Halfway to the center, she stopped, hands to her mouth, trying to scream but with no sound. Blood mixed with bubbles gurgled up from where Tom had disappeared. Frozen with fear, she tried to will herself to dive down and help him. Then his hand broke the surface. She breathed a sigh of relief, which became the longed-for scream when the hand kept rising, severed at the bloody wrist.

Everyone has had the sense at least once in their lives that things are not right with the world, that not everything is at it seems. We sometimes feel that sinister truths hide behind a façade of normality, veiled partially by the rational, orderly “natural laws” taught to us by science. We’re told that medieval beliefs in monsters and magic were merely primitive superstitions. We’re too wise for that sort of foolishness these days. Or so we assure ourselves. But at night, when the shadows grow long and the wind whistles through the trees, we shudder and remember older truths, the truths of our ancestors, who were right to fear the dark.

We know deep down that the world is a far more terrifying place than we allow our rational minds to acknowledge. To accept this subconscious truth is to invite madness, to succumb to the raw chaos that lurks at the edges of our perception. Best to shut our eyes, pretend it’s not there. If we don’t see it, *it might not see us*.

Pretending something is not there, however, does not make it go away. It only helps it to hide better — and predators like to hide from their prey, lest it be scared away.

A world where such predators truly existed is a conspiracy theorist’s worst nightmare. In such a reality, unseen beings hatch incognito plots against us, pulling our strings like puppeteers looming above us, hidden in the darkness beyond the stage lights. Our only protection is our ignorance, the obliviousness that allows us to keep going day by day, building toward “something meaningful” — a career, a home, a family. Allegations about secret masters or creatures lurking in the night simply lack evidence. If these things are real, why don’t we see them on the evening news? Even Internet sites dedicated to exposing unknown forces in our lives can’t produce a single, verifiable picture. It’s hard to believe in something we can’t see.

Maybe *they* want it that way.
Welcome to the World of Darkness.

Inside the Shadows

Excerpted from “Stranger in a Strange World,” Extraordinary Times Magazine, July 1999, by “Jack Bleak,” underground journalist.

This is your last chance.

Whatever brought you to this moment, wherever or however or in whatever form you’ve found these words, this is your last chance to turn back. Toss the magazine in the shredder. Close the book and put it back on the shelf. Log off and erase the history list from your browser. Do this and maybe — maybe — you’ll be able to go back to the life you used to live. I can’t guarantee that. But I can guarantee that if you don’t stop now, if you don’t give up on the idea of seeing things you’re not supposed to see and learning things you’re not supposed to learn, you’re bound to reach the point of no return. You’ll reach it sooner

than you expect, too. Then you won’t be able to live in the same world that everyone else does. You’ll want to — God how you’ll want to — but it won’t be possible.

This is your final warning.

All right.

You didn’t listen.

So let’s get down to it.

If you’ve come this far, it’s likely something happened to you recently. Something lifted the veil from your eyes for just a few moments and now you want to know more. If you’re determined to poke your nose where it doesn’t belong, I basically have two things to tell you. The first is something you already know. Something you’ve known all your life, something we all know but don’t want to admit.

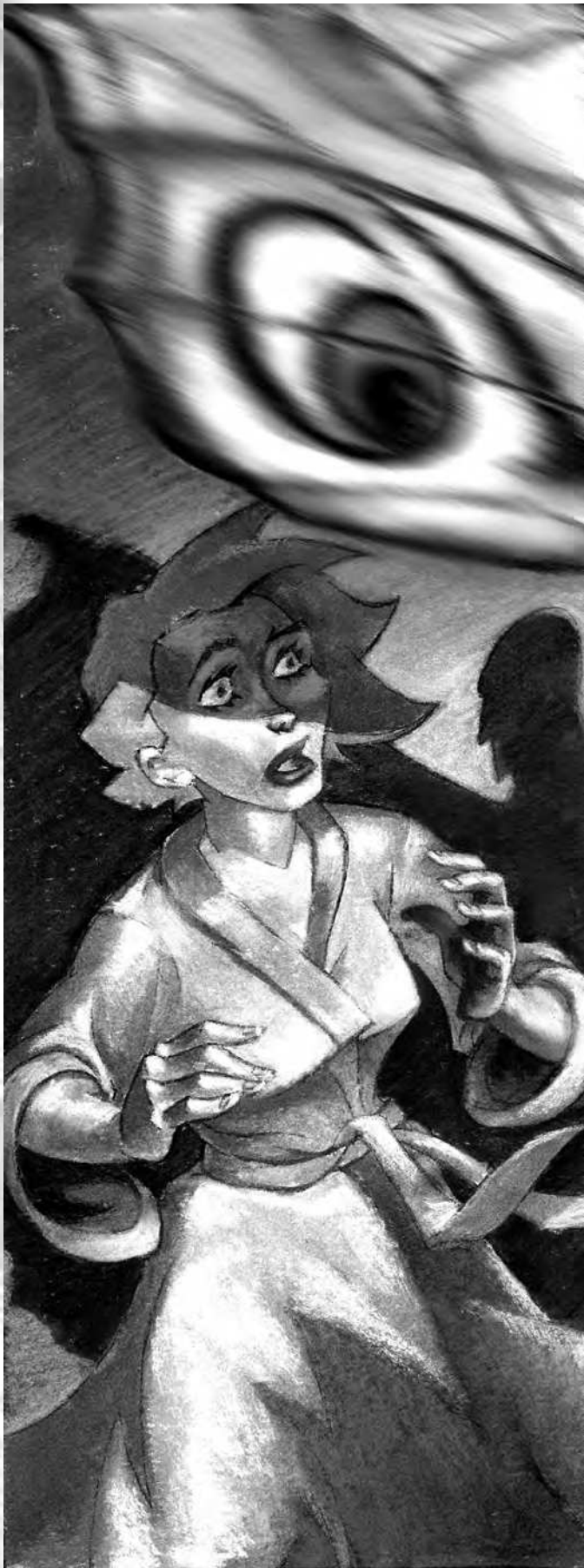
We’re not alone.

You knew it when you were a kid, didn’t you? You felt their presence in your bedroom late at night. You saw them from the corners of your eyes as you drifted off to sleep.

Every culture in history has known this truth, that there are others in this world with us, other intelligences, other ‘beings.’ They have a thousand names: spirits, gods, giants, angels, devils, faeries, ghosts, ghouls, saints, archons, magicians, monsters. Every human society since the dawn of man has insisted that there are things keeping us company, things with their own agendas, things not afraid to enforce their will when we get in their way. Even the Bible mentions them, with its talk of giants on the earth, angels on the road, witches in caves. And did you know that there are dozens of Renaissance paintings hanging in the Louvre right now that display metallic, lenticular objects floating in the skies over Italy?

It’s only in recent times that we humans — at least some of us living in industrialized ‘modern’ countries — have decided that we stand alone at the top of the food chain. It’s only now that we’ve decided that centuries of wisdom should be ignored, discounted or ridiculed. But try as we might, the truth has a way of forcing itself to the surface. The people of Point Pleasant, West Virginia found that out. In 1966, their ordeal began with the sighting of a huge, man-like creature with glowing eyes and insect-like wings. Over the course of a year, hundreds of people reported seeing the so-called ‘Moth Man’ — ordinary, credible witnesses who had no previous history of making outrageous claims.

Globally, there are countless reports of creatures with mixed human and avian characteristics, from biblical angels to the *kikiyaon*, or ‘soul cannibal,’ whose capture was reported by European explorers in



Gambia as recently as 1939. At first glance, it's tempting to put the Moth Man into this category as some sort of supernatural creature or undiscovered animal. But then, what are we to make of the lights in the sky over Point Pleasant, again reported by multiple witnesses throughout 1966? Or of the stories of strange "men in black" who appeared in town and sometimes warned townspeople and reporters not to talk about the strange things they saw? What of the odd behavior of these strangers — their odd accents, their musical voices, their unfamiliarity with common idioms or everyday objects such as a pen or a fork? It's almost as if two or three different stories came together in Point Pleasant, mixing into each other and making one simple explanation impossible.

I visited Point Pleasant five years ago to write a piece on the Moth Man incident. I talked to a woman who had opened the door of her back porch only to be confronted by a pair of huge red eyes. When she broke away and backed into the house, she found that three hours had passed. I talked to the former chief of police, who had received a series of phone calls, always between the hours of 2 and 3 am, urging him to destroy the reports he'd filed. When he taped the calls, he realized the caller's voice was identical to his own.

I left Point Pleasant with some strange stories, but nothing that hadn't been reported before. And that would have been that. But the second night I was home, I got a phone call in the middle of the night. I heard a recording of a discussion I'd had with my editor just 12 hours earlier — complete from beginning to end. The next day I was taking my car to get the oil changed when my cell phone rang. I found myself listening in on the middle of a conversation. Two men having a discussion about — I quickly realized — *me*. They mentioned my name, my street address, the magazine. The point of the conversation was hard for me to understand. Aside from the details of my own life, their statements were all very vague and filled with euphemisms that had no meaning to me. "The process." "Weak space." "Seven kingdoms."

It seemed obvious to me that I was the victim of a clever prank, probably by a colleague from the magazine. A few days later I left town to work on another story, and took some extra days off for a bit of a vacation. All told, I was gone for three weeks. The day I returned home to my apartment, I ran into a neighbor and mentioned that I was glad to be back. He acted puzzled and said he hadn't realized I was away. When I said I'd been gone for three weeks, he looked at me strangely, then referred to an evening just two nights earlier when I'd supposedly stopped at his place, had a few beers and watched a ball game with him.

When I got into my apartment, I found three weeks' worth of mail on the table near my door. It shouldn't have been there, since I'd arranged to have my mail held at the post office. But there it was. Everything had been opened and sorted, exactly in the way I usually did it. In my kitchen, food that had been left unopened was half eaten. Other food that I'd left behind was gone, and there were several packages I had never set eyes on before.

I phoned my landlord, who informed me that he hadn't seen any strangers in the building lately, certainly not on my floor, and that he hadn't seen anyone entering my apartment. *Except for me.* He recalled seeing me several times each week that I'd been away. I called a few friends. One said he'd had lunch with me just a few days before. Another said he'd run into me on the street the previous week and insisted that we chatted for 10 minutes or so.

Then I called my mother.

She told me I'd had dinner with her twice in the past three weeks. At her house. I'd been there for several hours each time. And no, I hadn't acted strangely, not that she could tell.

Someone had been living my life while I was away.

Presuming these things really happened, you have to wonder if there's a connection between this strangeness and my investigation into the Moth Man. But what could such a connection possibly mean? That someone was trying to scare me from writing about it? Who? The government? The people of Point Pleasant? The Moth Man himself? And why? I'd unearthed nothing that hadn't been described dozens if not hundreds of times since the events of 1966. The closer you look, the less sense it makes. Surely whoever was behind it all would realize that throwing these mysterious tactics at a journalist would only raise his interest, not squash it. Someone wanting to keep the whole thing under wraps couldn't have done more to pique my interest.

It was a clumsy strategy for a government cabal or extraterrestrial conspiracy. The more I thought about it, the more I came to believe that this was a type of reverse psychology. Someone or something wanted me to keep looking, keep investigating. Either they wanted me to get to the truth, or they had no fear of discovery at all and found it amusing, like a sort of game. Not long after I came to this conclusion, I was visited by the doll-like beings who continue to maintain a presence in my life today. Since then I've seen or glimpsed 17 distinct types of winged humanoids. After witnessing the first, I decided to break contact with friends and family — for their protection — and started filing stories from undisclosed locations.

The Moth Man is a product of mass hysteria, but somehow it leaves hard evidence in the real world. The Moth Man is a secret government experiment in advanced technology, yet the agents sent to suppress knowledge of its existence have bizarre accents and no social skills. The Moth Man is an extraterrestrial, but aliens who can travel across space can't figure out that they look weird to ordinary humans. Take your pick. The closer you look, the more you realize that the pieces of the puzzle don't fit. The more pieces you find the less of the puzzle you can understand.

I've come to realize that there are no answers, only more questions. Finding the truth is not a reasonable goal. The best you can hope for is to achieve some sense of how much you don't know. And that's the second thing I have to tell you. You think you're searching for hidden truths. *But you will never find the truth.* You won't. Each mystery will only lead to more mysteries. It's a labyrinth with no exit, and the door you entered isn't there any more. It goes against every instinct in the human brain, but if you want to survive, you have to make peace with the fact that all your questioning and searching and attempts to make sense of it are doomed. The best you can hope to do is record what details you can, and wonder at them.

Each shadow conceals only more shadows.

Midnight Stories

We can't know when humans first started telling stories, or why. But it's a safe bet that the first tale tellers used their craft to explain the mysteries going on around them. Indeed, some of the most ancient stories that are still told today grapple with the biggest mysteries of all — life, death, creation, redemption and the ongoing struggle of good versus evil. We call the game you hold in your hands a Storytelling game, because it's an opportunity for you to participate in the deeply human endeavor of telling stories. You'll find more about the rules of the game in following chapters.

The stories told in this game are set in the World of Darkness. It's a place very much like our world, sharing the same history, culture and geography. Superficially, most people in this fictional world live the same lives we do. They eat the same food, wear the same clothes, and waste time watching the same stupid TV shows. And yet, in the World of Darkness, shadows are deeper, nights are darker, fog is thicker. If, in our world, a neighborhood has a rundown house that gives people the creeps, in the World of Darkness, that house emits strange sighs on certain nights of the year, and seems to have a human face when seen from the corner of one's eye. Or so some neighbors say. In our world, there are urban legends. In the World of Darkness, there are urban legends whispered into the ears of autistic children by invisible spiders.

In the world you're about to enter, the horrors and nightmares of legend aren't just scary bedtime stories — they're real, even though most people don't realize it. The truth, or at least some of the truth about this world's hidden terrors, is revealed in other books. But you don't need all the answers to begin exploring. This book gives you everything you need to create your own collaborative tales. Horror stories, ghost stories, wonder tales, adventures or mysteries. Stories of people who suspect the truth about what lurks in the shadows, perhaps only after getting an unwelcome glimpse of it.

This chapter brings you the words of some who've walked the road you're about to take. After that, the rest of this book tells how you and your friends can tell your own stories, with simple but broad rules for doing so. You'll find that this game challenges you not just to roll dice and keep track of numbers, but to inhabit a character who is as real and believable as you can make him. The true measure of success in a Storytelling game is how much your character interacts with the imaginary world he inhabits.

Maybe the character you create will uncover some secrets of his shadowed world. Maybe he'll *become* one of those secrets. Time will tell.

Cold Truth

From a report written by Reverend Lucille Chambers, St. Paul's Reformed Lutheran Church, King's Crossing, Massachusetts.

If you've opened this file, it means they've sent you to replace me. Chances are I vanished without explanation, or else I'd be telling you all this in person. This is not my last will and testament. I'm not going to tell you what happened to me or who was behind it. I'm just sharing some facts and what I hope will be useful advice for your time here.

Take some time to look into the history of our church. The people here are proud of the fact that King's Crossing can trace its roots to one of the first ships to come over from England, and that our church is one of the oldest in New England. Not long after I was first stationed here, I spent some time reading up on the founding of our village. My father was a history professor and my first paying job was doing research for him, so I know my way around libraries and historical documents. Poking around in my spare time over the course of several months, I delved past the superficial accounts found in grade-school history books and tourist museums. You know the story. Plucky colonists endure an adventurous passage across the Atlantic, find themselves in a strange new land, roll up their sleeves and persevere thanks to a strong work ethic and some help from friendly natives.

Anyone who's gone even a little deeper into colonial history knows that's just a fairy tale. Crossing the Atlantic wasn't an adventure, it was a wretched experience, especially for people who (for the most part) had never been at sea in their lives. The ship that carried the Jamestown colonists — the first permanent colony in the U.S. — lost half its crew and passengers by the time she got to Virginia. And though the Mayflower lost only one passenger on its journey — and hosted the birth of one — it sustained terrible damage in storms and swells, leaving the travelers waterlogged and miserable. At one point the ship was leaking so badly that the group considered turning back. But they were just over halfway there, so it made more sense to press on.

The voyage of the Lazarus, the ship carrying the King's Crossing colonists, was particularly strange and gruesome. I found several accounts of an illness or plague that struck the voyagers not long after they left England, and that continued right up to their arrival at Plymouth. Excerpts from diaries and logs say that passengers and crew were found dead in their bunks, without a mark on them, their skin "cold and pale as ice." As the months at sea stretched on — unfortunately, the captain seems to have been a poor navigator as well as a drunkard — the death rate rose until at its peak it averaged a new corpse every few days. Stories circulated that the angel of death walked the ship at night, "cloaked in white sail-cloth," looking for sleepers. Frightened crew and passengers forced themselves to stay awake until dawn, hoping to avoid being stricken.

History seems to have forgotten this grisly story for the most part. I did come across one magazine article written in 1984 by a doctor and amateur historian. He expressed confusion over what type of malady might have been responsible for the incident, as the disease didn't seem to fit the pattern of any known bacterial or viral infection. There were no symptoms reported, and all the victims seem to have died in their sleep, going to bed healthy and never waking again.

The doctor who wrote the article speculated that what happened wasn't an illness at all. His theory was that the deaths were, in fact, murders. Perhaps the work of this country's earliest serial killer, or the result of a falling out between different families or factions among the passengers or crew. Or perhaps some of the voyagers just went insane from the isolation, discomfort and danger of life at sea. Whatever happened, the article goes, a cover story was needed and a plague was the best they could come up with.

I don't know that the doctor's article convinced me. But whatever caused the deaths, as I read the ship logs and diaries, I had to marvel at the colonists' stoicism. They appeared concerned about the mysterious deaths, but no more concerned than they were about the weather or running out of

food. Maybe they were just more circumspect in the way they kept their journals than we are today. But when you read a diary entry that says, "Sky clear last night, Captain says whales sighted off to starboard, Mary found dead this morn, crew repairing damaged mast," you have to wonder if stoicism isn't another word for denial.

The colony had a tough start. Most of the early colonies did. Plymouth lost all but 32 of its original settlers in its first winter. And the Roanoke Island colony in the Virginia territory had no one left when the next wave of settlers arrived. King's Crossing seemed fated to go the way of Roanoke. Not only did the colonists suffer a drought that killed most of their first crops (reducing them to foraging, scavenging and rarely successful hunting forays), but they were frequently raided by local Indians (who'd been treated badly by other colonists in the area, and thus lacked the goodwill enjoyed by the Mayflower pilgrims). A trader who'd braved the difficult terrain to visit from another colony reported that the coming winter was likely to "bring an untimely end to the small endeavor."

After that, there are no references to the colony for another 10 years when, remarkably, a report says that the "village of King's Crossing" is thriving, with two grain mills, a textile mill and several farms. The population has swelled by a factor of 10 and there's a thriving trade in glass and copper. The reason for this startling development is not given.

Shortly after I pieced together this account, events took place that distracted me from my hobby. Some of my congregation took ill and died of pneumonia. It was January of an especially brutal winter. There had been four deaths in the space of two-and-a-half weeks. Two of the deceased had been residents of a nursing home, one had been a young mother of two, and the fourth an apparently healthy college student. The funerals were bleak.

A few days after the fourth death, I visited a family that lived up the mountain a ways. I got there after dark. Even my four-wheel-drive had some trouble with the ice and snow that night. They had a rather long driveway that hadn't been plowed, and more snow was piling up. I parked by the road and walked up to the house. Ice-covered mounds rose on both sides of me like mountains on the moon. The air was so quiet that I thought I could hear the faint ping of each snowflake landing on the ice.

The house was a two- or three-bedroom ranch. As I walked to the front door I passed a lit window and happened to glance through. I could see into the bedroom of their youngest daughter. The girl was sleeping with a faint smile on her face. Standing next to her bed was a tall, thin man I didn't recognize. He was something of an eccentric figure. He had short, white hair, a neatly

trimmed silver-white goatee, and was in an all-white suit and tie. The nightlight was on and he cast a long shadow across her bed.

The couple had asked me to meet with them to counsel them about their son, a teenager who'd apparently been getting into trouble in school. They suspected he was using drugs, but things didn't sound that serious to me. I prayed with them, gave them some advice about approaching their boy, and suggested some ways to open a line of communication. All told, I was there for about two hours. I walked back to my car feeling good about the things I'd told them. The snow had stopped and hadn't left much precipitation on the roads.

The next day the girl was pronounced dead of a cerebral aneurysm.

As I stood at the pulpit the following Sunday, I felt as if death was laying siege to our community, circling us, picking us off one by one. I looked at the faces of my congregation and wondered who would be next. I tried to sound upbeat and confident during my sermon, but it was obvious to me that my words were powerless, empty, unable to have any true effect.

At the little girl's funeral I found myself offering predictable condolences, clichéd Bible verses and uninspired comments.

Walking to the graveside, a marble statue capped with snow made me think of the man in white. And with a shock I realized I'd seen him before. I recalled glimpsing him in a hallway, wondering at his unusual way of dressing. I thought about that for several minutes, and as we gathered around the small casket, I remembered. I'd seen a man dressed in white not so long ago. I was visiting the nursing home on Route 11, just west of town. A woman there died of pneumonia later that week.

A few days after my recollection I asked Mr. Crane, the president of the church counsel, if he knew anyone who fit this man's description. He didn't.

I decided to spend some time looking through church records. It seemed impossible to steer my congregation through this dark, cold winter. I wanted to see what my predecessors had done during times of crisis. I wanted to read what magic words they'd used to soothe everyone's fears and bolster their faith. On the second day of investigating, I found a box of some very old papers that had apparently been mislabeled. And at the very bottom of the stack, sealed in some sort of plastic or laminate, was a parchment whose appearance gave every indication of being hand-written in the 17th century. I felt a thrill of discovery, which quickly turned to horror.

"Such food as we have gathered is of poor sustenance and quickly gone. Now the ice and snow



keep us trapped here where none can help. We have eaten the horses and dogs. The children cry. There is talk of eating the corpses.

"He came to us last night and his voice was sweet and friendly. 'Hear me and save yourselves,' he told us. 'Do as I bid and you shall again see the spring.'

"I can not write the unspeakable thing he demanded of us.

"Lane Richards challenged, 'And what price do you desire for this unholy salvation?' and the monster replied, 'Nothing to-day. But I shall return, fifty years hence, and take what I must from thirteen of you and your kin, and each fifty years do likewise. And should there be one who withholds my payment, all shall be slaughtered. But do as I bid and your village shall prosper always, this I vow.'

"We could not but agree. It is so cold. And so those of us fresh with youth now will, as we grow gray, wait for the return of the One in White."

My hands were shaking as I sifted through the rest of the contents. They were death records, carefully annotated. Just fifty years ago, there had been thirteen deaths among the parishioners in the month of January. Fifty years earlier, the same. And fifty years before that.

I didn't want to believe it, of course. Clearly someone with an active imagination had put all these pieces together, then boxed them up and moved on to something else.

But—

I visited the family whose little girl had been lost. They were taking it hard, as was to be expected. We prayed and talked. At one point I asked as casually as I could muster if they had ever seen anyone in the parish who was thin, had white hair, and who favored white clothing?

They immediately became uneasy. They claimed not to know who I was talking about, but their eyes were hesitant, agitated. Part of the grief reaction? Maybe.

I tried to dismiss what I'd found. The thing was, five people had died since January 1st. And it was only January 23rd.

That weekend I spent a lot of time working on my sermon. The gospel text was the raising of the widow's son. It's a story that parallels the more familiar tale of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha. A resurrection story. I read it slowly and clearly during the Sunday service. Then I started my sermon. Death, I said, is not the ultimate power. Jesus triumphed over death, and through him, so will we all. I mentioned how throughout history, we've tried to conquer death in our own limited way. How we have personified it into the form of the grim reaper. How the

settlers of our own village had endured a death-filled voyage from the old world, and told tales of the angel of death walking the decks of their ship.

Imagine if death was a man, I went on. If he walked among us, picking us out like a farmer choosing lambs for the slaughter. I connected that to the image of Christ as the lamb of God, who triumphed over death. In many cultures, I said, it's white that's the color of death, not black. But if death is a man dressed in white, then Christ comes clothed in garments purer than white.

I finished the sermon in a more conventional way, urging prayer, trust in God and support of each other. But I had seen some of the parishioners shift in the pews, glancing at each other uncomfortably. You learn to read faces from the pulpit, like a bird watcher reads the flickering of a sparrow's wings. I was sure my words had an effect.

That evening there was a knock on my office door. I replied and in walked Mr. Crane along with five other men and women. The church council. I knew they'd been having a meeting downstairs in the gathering room. They often came up to see me and chat a bit afterward, so I wasn't particularly surprised to see them.

Mr. Crane cleared his throat and said, "We were wondering if we could talk to you about something."

I didn't have enough chairs for everyone, but I gestured for at least some of them to take a seat. None of them did.

"It's about... well... it's hard to say."

I tried to keep things light. "I'm an adult, folks. I can take it. Why all the long faces?"

"We understand you're trying to be helpful," one of the women said. Mrs. Eckerd, I think. "We do. But you're new here."

"You'll fit in just fine after a while," someone else broke in, sounding embarrassed. "I mean, you're already... I mean, we all are just so pleased you're here, right?" The others murmured their agreement.

"Why don't you just tell me what this is about," I said, trying to sound commanding and relaxed at the same time.

"You see, Pastor," Mr. Crane began, "You see, certain things are done here... they happen here... in a certain way. And we... well, we figure things ought to be done the way they've always been done."

"What is this about?" I suddenly felt cold.

"We heard you called the county coroner the other day," Mr. Crane said.

"Yes, but he wasn't in. I left a message. How did you know that?"

"The coroner is my brother-in-law," one of the men said. "He, uh, he won't be returning your call."

"It's for the best," Mrs. Eckerd chimed in. "People are better not knowing. We're all better not knowing."

I stood. "Look, what is it you're trying to say?"

"Don't get upset, Pastor," Mr. Crane said, making a 'stop' gesture with his hands. "There's a lot of good work for you to do here. We just think you should let this thing go, that's all."

"The month's almost over anyways," said a short woman who hadn't spoken yet. The others gave her a dirty look. "I'm just saying..." she muttered.

"Wait a minute," I demanded, "Is this about... this quota of 13?" I took a step forward and they backed away. They looked shocked, their eyes bulging at the mention of the number.

"We... we..." Mr. Crane licked his lips. "We don't know anything about that." The others nodded. "Things happen," Mrs. Eckerd added. "No one knows why. It's the way things are and nobody can change it."

There wasn't much conversation after that. They filed out, assuring me that, "Things would be okay if I just took their advice." Those words rang in my ears as I sat back down at my desk. I had gotten myself into some kind of nightmare and I didn't know how to wake up. Who could I talk to about this? I only knew of one person, and I resolved to go down to the chapel and speak with Him.

"Please don't get up."

The words came from behind me. I should have been startled to hear a man's voice when I was alone in my office. My desk faced the only door. There was no way anyone could have entered unseen. But I wasn't startled at all. It was as if I'd known he was there the entire time. And what's more, I couldn't get up. My legs wouldn't obey, my arms wouldn't move. It was as if my muscles had been turned to stone.

"They didn't convince you, did they?"

I feared my mouth wouldn't work, but it did. "No. I supposed they didn't."

There was a sigh, a normal-sounding sigh, something I'd expect to hear from the exhausted parents of a hyperactive three-year-old. "I didn't think they would. You're an intelligent, curious, educated person." I heard the floor creak behind me as someone paced from one wall to the other. My head refused to turn.

"What happens now?" I asked.

"We have a little chat, you and I, and depending on how that goes, we'll see."

"Should I ask who you are?"

There was no answer. Instead, I felt the pressure of a hand on my shoulder. Moving my eyes to the right brought slender fingers just into view. Pale fingernails with fine white hair on the knuckles. The sleeve of a white suit-jacket.

"Why do you do it?" So far my voice was fairly steady.

"Why does anyone do anything? We each have our place in Creation. We all follow the roles we're meant to play." The hand left my shoulder. Its touch had been very light. "Something connects me to this community. Something more precious than you can know."

"Are you going to kill me now? Now that I know about you?"

"You don't know what you know," he answered. "And I won't kill you if I don't need to. There's a better role for you."

I was trying frantically to lift my right arm from the chair, but the most I could muster was to raise my index finger a half-inch. "What are you talking about?"

"Sheep need a shepherd," he replied.

A connection was tripped in my brain. "You came over with them, didn't you?" I asked. "You've been killing them since—"

Like a rubber band pulled to extreme tension and suddenly released, my body flew out of the chair as the force holding me in place vanished. I staggered across the room and grabbed a bookcase for balance. There was no one else there with me, no one I could perceive.

I've seen many, many things since then. Some seemingly related to the man in white, others, I don't know. But everything reinforces the realization I came to that night. The people here and, I think, everywhere, have no idea what's really going on around them. Not because they're ignorant, but because they don't want to know. We're all stalked by death. It waits in the shadows, hovering over our heads, crouched behind the bushes. But we don't want to know it's there. Like the colonists on that boat, we want to live our lives as if death doesn't exist. And we'll do anything to keep things that way. We won't make too much fuss as those around us fall, because that would be admitting that we could be next. Worse, it might draw the attention of the thing we want to ignore.

I used to think my job was to open people's eyes. Now I realize my duty is to keep them closed. To keep from them the awful truths that would strip away their ability to function. For whatever reason, I've stumbled into these things that

happen in the shadows. It's my burden to keep them from burdening anyone else. Like the church council that night. They were dimly aware of what was happening and struggled to keep a newcomer in the dark, all the while straining not to learn more than they already knew.

Now that you're here, I urge you to take on the same mission.

The Elements of Stylish Horror

This book presents rules for playing a type of roleplaying game called Storytelling. In this type of game, the traditional elements of a story — theme, mood, plot and character — are more important than the rules themselves. The rules serve to help you tell stories about your characters in an interactive experience. They help prevent arguments and provide a solid basis for handling elements of chance, but they don't overshadow the story itself. The triumphs and tragedies of your characters as they try to survive and even thrive in the World of Darkness are the main focus, not dice rolls or lists of traits.

Storytelling games involve at least two, although preferably four or more players. Everybody involved in the game participates in telling a group story — the players create and act out the roles of their characters, and the Storyteller creates and reveals the plot, introducing allies and antagonists with which the players' characters interact. The players' choices throughout the course of the Storytelling experience alter the plot. The Storyteller's job isn't to defend his story from any attempt to change it, but to help create the story as events unfold, reacting to the players' choices and weaving them into a greater whole, introducing secondary characters and exotic settings.

Here are some of the key elements that both players and Storytellers should keep in mind when telling stories in the World of Darkness.

Theme — Dark Mystery

Every story has its own theme, a summation of what it's about. Sometimes called the "moral" or "lesson" of the story, a theme doesn't have to involve a definitive answer to the questions raised. Merely asking overarching questions is enough to capture a theme.

The overall theme of the World of Darkness is "dark mystery." The world is one of shadows within shadows. Those who participate in these conspiracies should uncover as much of them as they can, lest investigators become unwitting pawns in the games of greater forces. But drawing back the curtain on one mystery reveals even more curtains, each hiding new secrets. It's not possible to uncover them all. Yet, characters can certainly work to reveal more than would otherwise be known, and so free themselves from these dark influences.

While each story has its own central theme, the looming theme behind them all explores the dramatic ramifications of a world of supernatural secrets. Storytellers and players alike should be mindful of this theme when they feel the need to return to the roots of the game.

Mood — Dread

People fear what they don't know or understand. On some level, most people suspect that things aren't right, that they're being lied to. Rather than confront this terrible truth ("Who's lying to me? Where are they?"), they choose to repress it. People pretend nothing is out of order and go about lives as usual. Whether this behavior can be traced back to the ancient depredations of supernatural creatures or to fear of the occult, people refuse to recognize it. They are asleep to the realities around them and refuse to open their eyes.

Even those who do confront the shadows do so with a sense of dread. Exploring the unknown promises rewards, but also risks unforeseen consequences. Are the potential rewards worth the risks? Every step into mystery is onto unsafe ground, and few march boldly into the night.

Atmosphere — Threatening Symbolism

Combine theme and mood in the fog-bound streets, rave clubs, towering penthouses, midnight woods and cloistered sanctums of the World of Darkness. Add a hint of the otherworldly bleeding through the walls of reality now and then, and you've got the perfect atmosphere for chilling horror Storytelling.

Everything in the World of Darkness has foreboding significance. Nothing is necessarily what it seems. A dead tree might secretly harbor a bitter spirit. A car might be a reservoir for magical energies that could kill the unwary. Everything is a cipher for something else, lending mysterious significance to otherwise coincidental events. Is it just chance that you receive a letter from a schoolmate you haven't seen or heard from in years, and you read the next day about his horrifying death by exsanguination? Dare you open the letter?

The World of Darkness rarely communicates its secrets directly. Instead, mysteries can be read in places and things all around — symbols of deeper, unsettling truths. It's easier to ignore these signs than to face them. Many people are willfully blind to these messages, fearing what they reveal. "It's just coincidence. Meaningless happenstance." Just keep telling yourself that....

Setting — A Sense of Place

The World of Darkness is not about someplace long ago and far away. It's our world today, but different. Looked at from a global perspective, it seems the same. Looking closer, though, the details differ. That house down the street isn't just abandoned, it's haunted. Nobody goes to the old quarry anymore. Some teenagers didn't come back. That new nightclub is so cool, but creepy. Did you see that guy who kept staring last night?

The advantage to playing a game of contemporary horror is that it can take place in your own backyard, literally. You can populate your hometown with all manner of secret terrors, imagining how the local convenience-store clerk might really be the thrall of a supernatural creature. Perhaps he helps his master to feed by collecting the corpses of the homeless people who sleep in the bushes out back. Or your blowhard mayor might be a member of a secret society dedicated to keeping the spoils of power within a small clique, preventing others from awakening to their true potential.

Characters in the World of Darkness can blur the line between reality and the occult. Indeed, that's what it's all about. Exploring a world of mystery that tries to keep itself hidden. A world that punishes those who look too deep. But those who refuse to look suffer even worse. They're rocked on seas of conspiracies of which they go unaware. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. There are no easy answers, and knowing is not half the battle. It's only the first shot in a long, grinding war against the shadows.

Roads Less Traveled

From the first lecture planned for a new course, "Edge Zoology" by Professor Malcolm Yee, instructor, Penn State University, Department of Zoology. Cancelled following Dr. Yee's presumed death.

Some people think of me as some kind of Indiana Jones. **(Pause for laughter.)** They imagine I spend my time pushing through cobweb-infested catacombs or hacking through the jungle with native guides at my heels. I've been to both places and found them to be fascinating, but devoid of the kinds of things I search for.

Most of you are familiar with the concept of a "cryptid," an unknown or hidden type of animal. For all our knowledge and technology, we're still discovering new species of fauna, from the coelacanth, an ancient fish unchanged since the Devonian era (**slide #1**), to the pitohui, the world's only poisonous bird, first identified in 1981 (**slide #2**). We continue to search for cryptids, whose existence is hinted at by folklore, cultural tradition and physical evidence. The gigantic thunderbird of the American southwest, the dinosaur-like mokele-mbembe of central Africa, the bunyip of Australia's lakes and rivers. These animals and others draw the attention of thousands of cryptozoologists every year, many of whom are credible scientists.

But I propose the existence of a special category of cryptids. I call them "anthrocryptids." That is, cryptids that are similar in appearance and intelligence to human beings. These sorts of beings turn up in our history and folklore time and time again. In modern times, the idea that other intelligent life forms might secretly dwell amongst us seems so improbable that it doesn't bear discussion. But consider this: It's a widely held secret among zookeepers that every year, hundreds of animals escape from zoo enclosures around the world. And about half the time, the escapees are never recovered. That includes larger beasts like monkeys, ungulates and big cats. There's every reason to believe that at least some of these animals manage to find a niche and survive unseen in the local urban, suburban or rural environment. If these creatures,

acting on instinct, can hide themselves from a determined search, how much easier would it be for intelligent, man-like life forms to avoid notice when they're not being looked for?

It's time we developed a methodology for seeking out and studying anthrocryptids. To that end, I've used what little we know about them to create three distinct anthrocryptid categories (**slide #3**).

Ferals

If you wanted to hide from humans, the most obvious solution would be to place yourself as far from civilization as possible. I call the anthrocryptids who take this approach "ferals." You're familiar with stories about sasquatch and yeti, and while the most familiar "bigfoot" evidence is almost certainly fraudulent, there are so many accounts of these creatures that they bear continued investigation. The key strategy for finding out more about them is, I think, not to go looking for them in their own environment. Unless you're trained and practiced for survival in harsh environments, traveling to the remote locations most likely to hide ferals means you put your life in serious danger.

Habitat

Even if you're a botanist who spends half his time looking for orchids in the Yucatan, I still wouldn't recommend a determined search for ferals. As comfortable and familiar as the wilds may seem to you, you're on their turf. There's no way they won't see, hear or smell you coming. You can't expect to match their knowledge of the

terrain, weather, flora or fauna. All you can do is hope to get lucky. It's a tremendous waste of time, resources and effort.

A much better approach is to look for what biologists call "edge environments," places where two different ecosystems meet. The edge of a field, where an ice pack blends with the ocean, the border between a desert and a savannah. These are all classic edge environments, where organisms can easily be observed moving from one ecoclimate to another. In the case of feral anthrocryptids, an edge environment is a place where a relatively small human community abuts a large, undeveloped wilderness. There are probably fewer ferals in such places than there are in less accessible areas, but there's a greater chance that they'll make their presence known, either by accident or intent.

Example: Coeur Island, British Columbia

One of an uncounted number of islands between Port Hardy and the British Columbia mainland, Coeur Island is accessible only by water. Even at that, the ocean passages are difficult to cross, especially in fall and spring. There are no towns or any permanent structures on the island. I've collected a number of stories of possible feral encounters there, beginning with stories told by the native populations and collected by an early missionary Father Pierre (we'll hear more about him next week). I've also heard the testimony of hunters and fishermen who occasionally visit there today.

Among the most notable is the case of Oscar Johnson in 1922. He was a logger who was taking time off to do some fishing. He reported that one night while sleeping on the



beach, he was picked up in his sleeping bag and carried almost five miles inland. When he was finally set down and able to get out of his bag, he found himself surrounded by a group of large, hirsute creatures that had the combined features of men and apes. He said he was kept prisoner for six days and given meals of water and raw fish before he escaped.

I've been to Coeur Island several times. It's a primeval place. The beach is pristine and the forest, just a hundred yards away, towers over you like an army of giants. At night the northern lights seem close enough to touch. I've made several casts of footprints that seem to combine animal and human features. I haven't encountered any ferals directly. Yet one night my guide and I were awoken to what sounded like the howling of wolves. The next morning, there were several rows of footprints (**slide #4**) that led from the beach straight into the surf. These are clearly some type of animal print. But as you can see from the tape measure in this picture, the prints are huge. They continue right into the water. Interestingly, they're headed in the direction of the island across the bay. (**Drink water. Put off questions till later.**)

The Unearthly

There are other ways to keep a low profile than to hide. An approach successfully used by many organisms is camouflage. There are many variations on this strategy, from protective coloration — blending into the background — to mimicking another species. I'm convinced that there have been anthrocryptids living among us perhaps as long as we've existed. Theoretically, you can find them anywhere, though the only reports I've seen tend to place them in somewhat unusual locations. They're seen at car crashes or other accidents. I also have several citations of them being encountered in airports. More often than not they're encountered at night.

Descriptions of these beings vary, but there are two commonalities to most encounters. The first is their physical appearance. They're often described as having "unearthly" beauty or "idealized" proportions. Other times they're more exotic than beautiful; their features seem "designed" or "geometric." They tend to have delicate facial features, they're tall and they move very gracefully. Their voices are musical, strangely accented, and they wear cologne with complex scents. They're often dressed inappropriately — wearing a tuxedo in a supermarket, for example, or a heavy coat and hat on a warm summer day.

Habitat

What would it take to conceal yourself among a large group of human beings? First of all, your best bet would be to set yourself up among a large, cosmopolitan group, the more diverse the better. In areas where people are used to crossing paths with a range of ethnicities, languages, clothing styles and behaviors, any flaws in your disguise are less likely to stand out. This may be the reason why the vast majority of unearthlies are reported in or near some of the world's largest cities, especially those with a large tourist base. It would also help to have economic resources at your disposal. Money buys privacy and discretion. Since these beings seem capable of speaking our language and operating within our culture, to a greater or lesser degree, it's conceivable that they've learned to imitate and manipulate our economic activities as well.

Example: Zona del Silencio, Mexico

Anecdotes I've collected suggest that unearthlies are able to move freely through restricted areas in places such as government buildings, hospitals and museums. They are also sighted at exclusive resorts, nightclubs and hotels. Such places would

make excellent gathering sites, since the staff is expected to be discrete and there's a high turnover of guests and visitors. However, my only personal encounter with an unearthly happened to occur in a place that doesn't match the metropolitan habitat I've been talking about. You should know by now that biology in the field doesn't always follow the neat patterns described in slide lectures. (**Pause for laughter.**)

In Mexico, about 400 miles from El Paso, Texas, is a place popularly known as the Zone of Silence (**slide #5**). The Mexican government has renamed it Mar de Tetys, or the Sea of Thetys. It's essentially a desert of cactus, stone, thorny bushes and poisonous snakes. The only residents are the staff of a scientific research facility located at the center of the zone. Since the 1930s, it's been reported that no radio reception is possible within the zone. I found this to be the case when I visited as a graduate student. I won't say what year (**pause for laughter**). Not only were our radios and televisions unable to receive signals, our walkie-talkies were inoperable.

Our first day there, we were on our way to the research facility when our jeep stalled. We'd had the vehicle completely serviced before we set out, so you can imagine how frustrated we were. The temperature was about 103 degrees, but the engine didn't seem overheated. It just wouldn't start up again. As we were bent over it trying to find the problem, we heard footsteps behind us. I remember turning around and wondering if I was imagining things. I saw a tall person standing there. I tend to think it was a man. The truth is, he could have been either male or female. He had long hair that was so blond it was almost white. His skin was pink, not tan in the slightest, and I couldn't imagine why the desert sun hadn't burned him to a crisp. He wore simple clothes. A pale shirt, gray shorts, unremarkable hiking boots.

My professor said hello and asked if the stranger was from the research center. He shook his head and then spoke in a voice that was midrange between a man's and a woman's. He asked if we had been sent by "the authorities." We said we hadn't, that we were there to do some fossil hunting. He nodded. We stared at each other for a few awkward moments. The stranger had a slight smile on his face the whole time. Then the jeep's engine suddenly sprang to life, startling the two of us. By the time we turned back to the stranger, he was gone.

The incident left us both badly shaken. We realized later that the stranger had carried no water bottle or hiking gear of any kind. Not even a sun hat. And even though the terrain around us was flat as a pancake, the stranger had vanished in seconds, leaving not even a footprint. When we reached the research facility, the staff assured us that there was no one in the area who met that description. Certainly no one could have hiked that far into the zone without provisions, and a routine aerial survey later that day showed no evidence of any vehicle but our own.

The Outsiders

The third group, outsiders, might also be termed zoophantoms, suggesting something that takes the illusion of an organism but may be of a different order altogether. In previous ages these creatures might have been called "spirits" or "ghosts." It's difficult to engage in discussion about them without becoming mired in centuries of religious and cultural bias. But I believe that a detached, clear-minded approach to investigating them is the best tack. (**Slide #6, pause for laughter**)

Outsiders come in many forms, from animated balls of light to spectral visitations to simulacrum of seeming flesh and blood. Their most prominent characteristic is that they seem to behave as if coming from "outside" our own frame of reference. They appear and disappear, pass through solid objects, generate

changes in temperature and upset our understanding of the physical world. Sometimes they resemble a deceased loved one, or a stranger whose identity is discovered later. Some of them seem to act mindlessly, wandering without purpose or repeating the same behavior over and over again. Others may act deliberately or even maliciously.

Habitat

Careful observation of the data, and application of simple models of animal behavior, yields some interesting theories about these cryptids. First of all, they seem very territorial. They're usually associated with a very specific location — a house, a certain stretch of road, a particular riverbank or cemetery. Outsiders do not seem to like crowds. They don't seem to like mingling with humans, but they do like to be where humans have been. I believe that's the key to understanding them.

Outsiders have an affiliation with human emotion. They tend to turn up at places of emotional turmoil. Houses where murders took place, burial mounds that were once central to a culture's grieving process, even sites where opposing armies clashed and spilled blood. These places appeal to them, but only after the action is over, sometimes centuries after. If human emotions leave behind some type of subtle energy or vibration, perhaps these ephemeral creatures feed on them. If their choice of territory proves unlucky — the house is sold, the old castle is refurbished — they rely on startling behavior to try to reclaim their areas.

Example: Cemetery of St. James, London, England

Two years ago a friend of a friend described what seemed to me to be incidents of outsider activity. I was particularly intrigued because the events occurred in a cemetery. To me, the possibility added credence to the idea that outsiders are not the souls of the restless dead. After all, nobody actually dies in a cemetery, and the deceased usually had no attachment to the place during life. However, if you're a creature that thrives on extremes of emotion, the place is perfect. There are plenty of visitors to provide sustenance, but no permanent residents to intrude on your privacy. **(Pause for laughter.)**

Long story short, we spend the night in the 30-acre Cemetery of St. James, in the Highgate section of north London. Over 167,000 people are buried there. Every so often a disinterred body is found, causing quite a stir. **(Pause for laughter.)** There's also a longstanding rumor that a vampire has its tomb there. My associate had connections that got us permission to remain on the grounds after dark. After the sun went down, the gravestones and monuments seemed to take on different shapes in the corners of your eyes. It's remarkable how the wind through the foliage sounds like whispering. Our night there passed uneventfully, and the sophisticated equipment we'd brought detected nothing unusual.

Or so we thought. After I'd returned home, I ran the field recordings I'd made through some analysis software. It turned out there was one anomaly recorded, at about 4 am, somewhere within two feet of the grave over which we'd been keeping vigil. Close examination and amplification of the faint signal suggested that it was an approximation of a human voice, repeating the following six words 70 times and then going silent: "You pull and I shall push." I'm still not sure what to make of that. Maybe some of you will figure it out.

(PAUSE FOR LAUGHTER.) (TAKE QUESTIONS IF TIME PERMITS.)

Unrecorded History

Once we realize that things are not as we think, we inevitably conclude that they've *never* been what we thought they were. History is a lie. If creatures that walk and talk like people exist, how long have they been here? Ancient legends certainly seem to describe some of these beings. Are the superstitious ravings of our ancestors true? Maybe there really are such things as vampires, werewolves and sorcerers — and always have been.

How much of what we're told about history is actual fact and how much is mere conjecture? Are there beings who actively work to falsify the evidence of the past, covering their tracks from all records, written or otherwise? Perhaps the *facts* are right but the *reasons* are wrong. Surely, Columbus did discover America, but maybe his purpose wasn't to seek the Indies to prove the Earth was round. What if he was transporting something away from the Old World and into the New, a land he knew existed thanks to legends and map fragments? What if this something wasn't a thing at all, but an immortal being who secretly influenced the mind of Columbus? Ridiculous, of course. Contemplating these sorts of wacko conspiracies helps us to imagine that all conspiracies are merely the result of overactive imaginations.

But what about less prominent events in history, those that are still shrouded in mystery? For instance, what caused the Tunguska Crater in Siberia? The official explanation is that it was a meteor. And yet, in the World of Darkness, nomadic hunters of the time reportedly swore to a French journalist that strange creatures were sighted in the region. Peasants whispered for years that those who traveled too close to the crater at night would sleepwalk for months afterward. Rubbish, some people say. Clearly it was ground zero for Nicolai Tesla's Death Ray experiments. Case solved.

Viewing history through the lens of supernatural machination allows us to mine the past for stories. The entire tapestry of history, from the invention of agriculture to the nuclear bomb, can be interpreted in a sinister light, with warring forces of occult beings and secret societies using ignorant humans as pawns in their eternal games.

What could we achieve if only we could remove the veil from our eyes and see things as they are? Human potential is limitless, hampered only by our own unwillingness to question and deal with the ramifications of reality. Beware, however, to whom you address any questions, lest you become enlisted into the armies of the night and wage their wars instead of your own.

Voice of the Angel

From the Testament of Marco Singe, the so-called "Pain Prophet" of New Delhi.

when i was 12, my father beat me after hearing what i had done with another boy. it was as i lay on the cellar floor, feeling the blood on my back become sticky and cold, that the angel first spoke to me. she filled the air with the scent of metal and surrounded me with a circle of blue flame, and i was frightened.

“don’t be afraid,” she told me. “i have come to speak to you, and through you. at the command of the god-machine you shall hear my words and know them to be true.” her voice was like the notes of a flute and their vibrations calmed my fear. And that was how i learned the secret history of the world.

The god-machine built our world as a resting place for its first children, whom men called angels or ancient ones. After a time, the ancients desired servants to dwell with them, servants who walked upright and had pleasing shapes, and who could speak. They sent the proper prayer-signals to the god-machine and were granted leave to do so. first the ancient ones took the beasts of the field and granted them the knowledge to speak and walk. but these animals retained their wildness and did not make good servants. They grew wicked and violent, and were cast into the wilderness. They were the second children, whom men called demons.

so the ancients called new servants into being and commanded them to spread across the face of the earth. And these were the third children, called mankind. And mankind served the ancients in peace and contentment. mankind knew not death then. Those whose bodies became worn and aged were sent to sleep in the shadow of the earth and returned after a time restored to health and youth.

The ancients commanded their servants to build a great city, a city so vast that a child setting out to walk its length would be an old man before reaching the other side. calling on the power of the god-machine, the ancient ones raised their city into the dome of the sky, fixing it at the place where the orbit of the moon crossed the orbit of the sun. And in the city they placed a third of mankind to serve them as vassals and slaves.

In the city of the ancients, man lived closer to the first children than ever before. And some of the men began to wonder, “why do the ancients spend their days in rest while we must toil without relief? why do the ancients enjoy the pleasures of this city when it is our labor that built it?” And so resentment rose among the third children. They made the proper calculations and sent the prayer-signals to the coordinates of the god-machine, saying, “we are your children, too. it is not right that we be enslaved. will you not look on us with favor?”

And they received this answer:
“what rises must fall. what has fallen may rise again.”

The men of the city debated for seven years. finally, they decided that it was the will of the god-machine that they raise themselves from slavery. Determined to kill the ancients and take their place as the favored of the god-machine, the men of the city plotted carefully. when the time came, they fell upon the ancient ones in their sleep, murdering them with their own weapons and devices in a single night of betrayal.

The streets of the celestial city ran red with blood. A great cry rose up from the earth, and the mountains shook and the skies were filled with storms. The ancients struck back at their servants, but too late. just eight of the ancient ones survived. As they fled, they cried out, “we are undone, our time is over, but while our time was long and joyous, yours shall be short and painful.” And they became known as the furies.

The first fury was named silence, and fled to the center of the sun. it cursed mankind to forget the art of speaking to and receiving the signals of the god-machine.

The second fury was named death, and fled to the hidden side of the moon. it cursed mankind to forget the way back from the shadow of the earth.

The third fury was named torment, and fled to the star venus. it cursed mankind to be split into two beings, wuff-man and wo-man, each imperfect and forever seeking its opposite.

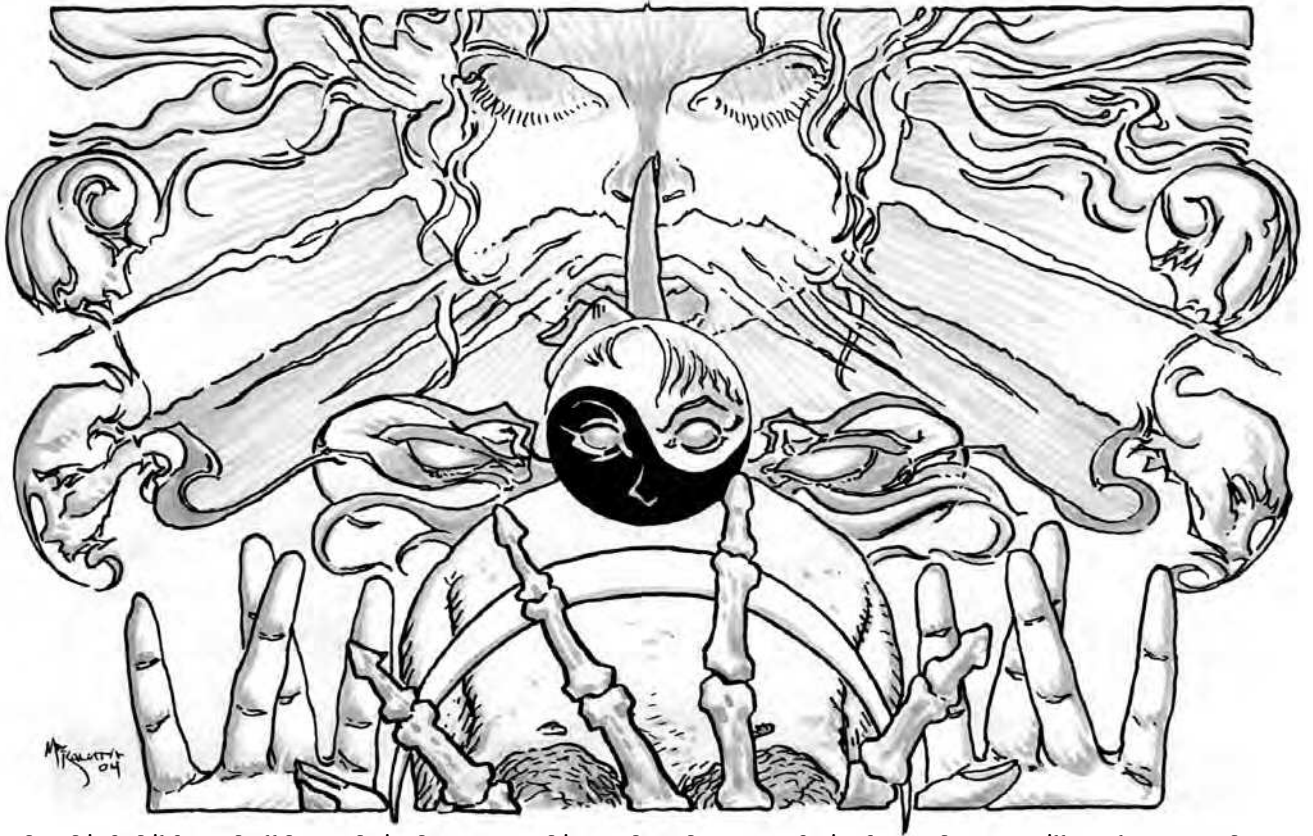
The fourth fury was named fear, and fled beneath the highest mountain on the earth. it cursed mankind to be hated and dreaded by all the beasts and birds and fish and all creatures everywhere.

of the other four surviving ancient ones nothing here can be said, for they chose to withhold their curses until such time as they saw fit.

And then the city of the ancients shook to its foundations. The men marveled at what happened but could not stop it. The city was loosened from the moorings that held it to the firmament. The men cried out in horror, rushing to flee the city before it crashed to earth. some set upon the roads of light that the ancients had built, and became lost among the stars. some reached the silver-sailed boats and descended safely. but many were trapped within the city, and screamed their last as it fell. And when the city crashed and sank beneath the waves, the world shook, the sun hid its face and everywhere people were afraid.

And here the angel paused, regarding me with a hundred eyes. “fear not these words i speak to you. for the news i bear is this: The god-machine has not turned its eye from your home. what has fallen may rise again.





the third children shall have their chance to achieve what they once desired. but the way will not be easy. the first children are set in judgment over you, and the second children seek to trap you. it is their workings that take your world through its turnings."

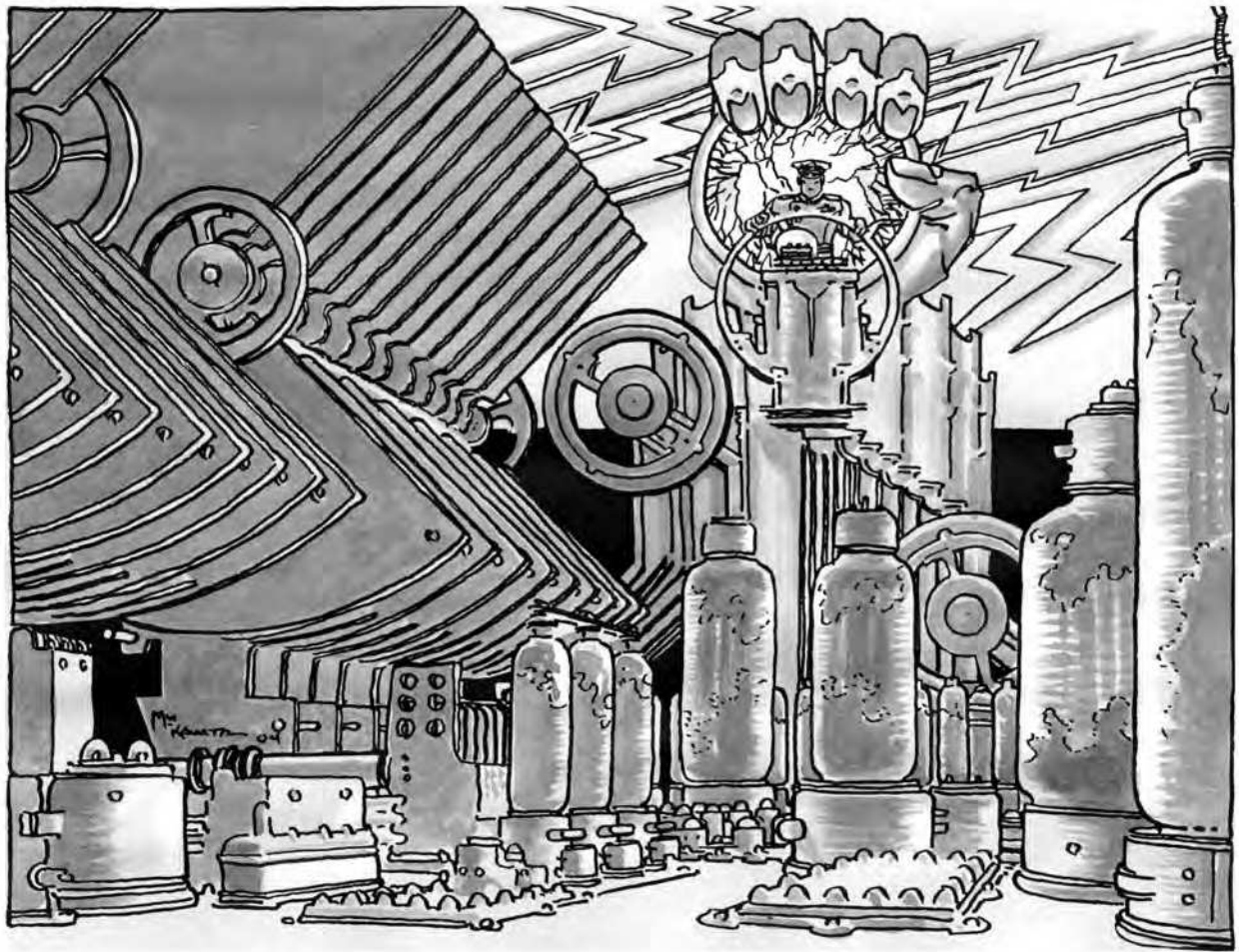
The angel then bade me to warn mankind of the hidden forces that seek to thwart the destiny of the third children. their handiwork appears again and again throughout history. regard the mighty sphinx of egypt. recent studies of the water erosion on its rocky surface indicate that the monument dates back to the days when the sahara was green and lush. far older than the pyramids it guards, the sphinx comes from a time close to the fall of the ancients. the second children roamed freely through the world then, greater than man in power and knowledge. the demons shaped primitive man into a civilization that revered them as gods. but their hubris was against the will of the god-machine, and they failed. the great civilizations of egypt, sumer and babylonia rose later from the dim memories of that failure, revering gods with the forms and features of beasts.

the egyptians called the proto-kingdoms that preceded them the "first time," or the age of osiris. they considered it the source of all wisdom and knowledge. the pyramids and surrounding structures, built to mirror the locations of the constellation of orion and other celestial objects (with the Nile representing the milky way), was essentially a vast time machine used to teach the pharaohs how to "swim upstream" against time and return to the osirian age. by understanding the layout of these structures, the pharaoh of any era could visualize the location of a secret chamber that would grant him access to a bygone age.

somewhere beneath the sphinx, that chamber awaits discovery. the cults of the second children protect the sphinx from a distance, inhibiting attempts to uncover it completely, preventing further exploration of its tunnels. when their own servants discern its location, the second children will enter the chamber and attempt to recreate the world that slipped from their grasp so long ago.

i asked about the four furies who withheld their curses on the night of the murder. "some of them dwell beneath the earth," the angel told me, "and wait for the permutations of the god-machine before they unleash their wrath." one of them, upon fleeing from the celestial city, came to rest in what is now the continent of australia. touching down in the desert, this ancient was certain it would remain hidden from man, and so it laid itself down to rest and heal its wounds.

but the ancient one did not realize how widespread the tribes of mankind had become. no sooner did the ancient close its eyes than natives of that land crept close to gaze upon the being that had fallen from the sky. they were a people skilled in reading dreams, and their magicians peered into the mind of the sleeping ancient. they saw that this visitor held a deep and bitter hatred for mankind, and they saw the awful curse it prepared to unleash.



“Long and painful hours, months, years, have brought me to this. But a small fraction of a greater whole, made finally clear to my understanding. And yet these few words, I cannot bear to hear. Let them reach no other ears. Let what is fallen remain fallen.”

In the century since his death, some of Hughes' notes have come to light. In the early 1950s, a group of amateur short-wave radio operators claimed that Hughes had not only decoded the signals but had left diagrams of a machine that would reply to the code. Though no one could locate the signals Hughes described, instructions for building Hughes' "responders" were widely circulated, and hundreds of the machines are believed to have been built since. They continually transmit automated sequences of numbers, words, tones, music and other sounds, much to the consternation of governments and commercial broadcasters worldwide. Also known as "numbers stations," the devices transmit today, and can be heard on conventional short-wave receivers. According to Hughes' apocryphal statements, their intended recipient is "the ruler of Mictlan, the Mayan Tartarus." What Hughes believed would happen when the proper signal was received is not known.

What of the second children, I asked the angel. Do they ever make their presence known to mankind?

“Their influence is widespread and insidious,” the angel said.

As the premier political power on the American continents, the United States acquired much of the secret knowledge that had been plundered by Europeans in South America. Its Capitol City was laid out according to geometric principles of Aztec cities such as Tenochtitlan, as interpreted by European Freemason architects. The lines of the streets are oriented to channel energy from the earth. Numbered and lettered boulevards allow power to be ritualistically directed for various purposes. The result has allowed a country of farmers and immigrants to grow into the most powerful nation on the earth.

In 1898, a cabal of government officials, wealthy industrialists and media moguls triggered the Spanish-American War as a way to gain influence over Cuba and possess certain pre-Columbian artifacts located there. The most notable of these was a fragment of one of the Black Sun maps of the Toltecs. America's secret government was capable of translating a part of the map, which enabled it to contact and entreat with one of the second children, a demon who agreed to perform certain services in exchange for blood sacrifice.

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027-17-3-
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4-4-7-4-
042720-24-
024574-0274-
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7 450 2-
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but for the most valuable service of all — complete translation of the map fragment — America's patron demanded tribute on a scale beyond the capacity of its clients to provide, so the secrets of the black sun remained unspoken for decades. Then, as the 20th century approached its mid-point, the requisite "knife of flame" revealed its presence at last. The enigma of atomic fire was unlocked and the world's first nuclear device was created. On 16 July, 1945, the weapon was tested in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Its purpose was ritualistically sanctified with the chant, "I am become death, destroyer of worlds." weeks later, the detonations in Japan satisfied the demonic contract, and in exchange the meaning of the black sun map fragment was revealed.

"And what was the secret of the map?" I asked the angel.

"to the toltec people, it was a warning," she said. "but in modern times, it has become an irresistible lure."

On May 25, 1961, U.S. President John Kennedy declared before Congress an imperative for the nation to achieve a successful landing on the moon before the end of the decade. What was not announced publicly was the true reason for the project. The elite faction operating behind America's corridors of power now had a translated version of the Toltec map fragment, which revealed a detailed topography of the lunar surface. Most importantly, it contained an atlas of the moon's so-called "dark side," as well as a comprehensive description of what lay entombed there.

The American Apollo missions were so named to curry favor with the various sun deities who were in fact aliases for the second children. Publicly, it was Apollo 11 that first put man on the moon. But in fact, American astronauts began exploring the lunar surface as early as the 1968 Apollo 8 mission. Apollo 10 confirmed the location of what the Toltecs called "the crypt of the butterfly." By Apollo 15, the outer vault was cracked, and it was 1972's Apollo 17 — the final manned lunar mission to date — that brought back what classified documents referred to as "packet theta."

The angel has warned me that the relic brought back from its receptacle on the moon has the potential to be much more devastating than any atomic weapon. What was retrieved was the skeletal form of one of the ancient ones. Specifically, the very being that pronounced the curse of mortality upon humanity. As the portal through which death itself entered our universe, it was changed into a thing neither dead nor alive. Those who learn to control it, as its current jailers seek to do, will exert ultimate power over the tides of life and death.

With each passing day, dark forces come closer to gaining that power. Those who seek must unify and stand against them. Our world needs warriors of light, defenders of life, seekers of truth to thwart their wishes. The god-machine waits. The angel has shown me how. I can teach you. We are fallen, but we might rise again.



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4-027-1-3-
2474-2=0-1-
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4-4-7-4-
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272 17 0-
7 450 2-
042472 02-
8-042-
01-2797-
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4729279 0-
812912-4081-
4-42-09464-
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Storytelling Rules Summary

This book provides rules for Storytelling in the World of Darkness. Before you get into the thick of it, here's a short summary of the basic rules to get you started as you create a character.

Dice

Like most roleplaying games played around a table, Storytelling uses dice to determine the whims of chance. Anytime a character performs an action under adverse conditions or when the outcome is unclear, his player rolls dice to see whether the task succeeds or fails.

Storytelling uses 10-sided dice, usually a handful for each player. We recommend that each player have about 10 dice on hand. The better your character is at performing a task, the more dice you will need. We call the handful of dice rolled to represent a character's abilities a dice pool.

Traits

Characters possess a variety of traits, describing their innate capabilities, trained skills, and even how many wounds they can suffer before dying. These traits are fully described in the following chapters. Two types of trait are especially important: Attributes and Skills.

Each of these traits is rated in dots (•), ranging from 1 to 5, much like the "five-star" system many critics use to rate movies. For example, a character might have a Dexterity Attribute of ••• (3 dots) and a Firearms Skill of •• (2 dots).

Whenever your character performs an action that calls for a dice roll, you most often build your dice pool by adding the most appropriate Attribute dots to the most appropriate Skill dots. When your character shoots a gun, you add his Dexterity ••• to his Firearms •• for a total of five dice — one die per dot.

Modifiers

Various conditions and circumstances can greatly improve or hinder your character's tasks, represented by bonuses and/or penalties to your dice pool. On one hand, quality tools might give him a bonus to repair a car, or a Stradivarius violin might give him a bonus to play a symphony. On the other hand, a thunderstorm might cause hazardous driving conditions, levying a penalty on any driving rolls, and a distant target is hard to hit with a gun, represented by range penalties. For example, when shooting a target 30 yards away with his Glock 17 pistol (medium range for that gun), your character suffers a -2 penalty. That gives you a modified dice pool of three dice.

The Storyteller determines whether or not any circumstance imposes dice-roll modifiers and how great those modifiers are.

Dice Pool

So, we can say that a dice pool is determined like so:
Attribute + Skill + equipment modifier +/- Storyteller-determined modifiers (if any)

In general, bonuses to your dice pools are always added before penalties are applied (before dice are taken away).

There are a few other complications, but you'll read about those in detail in the chapters to come.

Rolling the Dice

Now that you know what to roll, let's see how to read the results. Each die that rolls a result of 8, 9 or 10 is considered a success. You might have more than one of these, in which case you have multiple successes. Storytelling doesn't just tell you whether your character succeeds or fails — it shows you how well he does.

If none of your dice roll any of these numbers, your roll fails. This is rarely fatal. It's most often simply a setback, and your character can usually try the action again (or again and again in the case of combat).

Obviously, the more dice you have in your dice pool, the better your character's chances of success, and the greater your odds of gaining multiple successes.

In addition, there is a special rule called "10 Again." Whenever you roll a 10 on any die, you may roll that die again. If that die rolls 8, 9 or 10, you've got another success. In fact, if it rolls 10 once again, you can keep rolling as long as you keep getting 10's, accumulating more and more successes along the way. So, if you rolled three dice for a result of 2, 8 and 10, you'd have two successes. That 10 is re-rolled, however. If it turns up an 8 or 9, that's a third success and the re-rolls stop. In the case of another 10, that's a third success and the die is rolled again until no more 10's result.

Types of Actions

Different tasks demand different times to accomplish them. It takes longer to rebuild a car engine than it does to stab someone with a knife. Storytelling has two types of actions: instant and extended.

An instant action is resolved with a single dice roll. Only one success is required to complete an instant action, although extra successes might improve the results. Instant actions include anything that can be accomplished in the span of three seconds: throwing a punch, jumping a fence, sneaking past a security guard.

An extended action is resolved with a series of dice rolls, and your successes in each roll are tallied, working to collect the total needed to complete the task. The Storyteller usually determines the total number of successes needed (guidelines are provided in the following chapters). Each roll takes a certain amount of time within the story, from five minutes to a whole day, depending on the task. The Storyteller declares how long it takes to complete one die roll, during which time your character acts to accomplish the task. For example, fixing a car takes about 30 minutes per roll. A simple tune-up might require only four successes, while a transmission rebuild might require 10 or more.

A third kind of action is called a contested action. It can happen quickly in the space of time of an instant action, or over a prolonged period as an extended action. In a contested action, two or more opposing characters seek to accomplish a feat first or better than the others. He who gets the most successes (or the required total first in the case of an extended task) is the winner. Arm wrestling is an instant, contested action. Two characters competing to be first to win a long-distance race is an extended, contested action.

Combat

Fighting is a series of instant actions, demanding how-ever long it takes until someone surrenders or is rendered unable to fight.

Combat involves a single dice pool roll per attack. The result determines whether or not your character hits and how much damage he inflicts on his target. The dice pool is determined as above, but the equipment modifier depends on the weapon used. A knife is more deadly than a fist, and a gun is more deadly than all.

Each success gained on your attack roll represents a point of damage inflicted against the target’s Health trait. When the target has no more Health left, he is unconscious or dead (depending on the type of damage done).

There are three types of damage: bashing (caused by blunt weapons such as fists or clubs; these wounds heal quickly), lethal (caused by sharp weapons such as knives and bullets; these wounds heal slowly) and aggravated (caused by devastating supernatural attacks; these wounds take a very long time to heal).

There are a number of complications involved in combat, such as a target’s Defense trait (which is subtracted from any melee attack dice pools targeted against him), penalties for armor, for hiding behind cover, and more. Details are described in the following chapters, but the basics are simple. Roll to hit and apply successes as damage.

Example

Let’s see how it looks in action.

Your character tries to shoot at a thug who just killed his friend. Your character’s Dexterity is ●●●, his Firearms ●●, and he’s using a Glock 9mm pistol, which provides a dice modifier of +2. Your dice pool is therefore made up of seven dice.

The thug is about 30 yards away — that’s within the pistol’s medium range. A -2 penalty is applied to attacks at medium range. So, your dice pool is reduced to five dice.

But that’s not all. It’s raining cats and dogs. The Storyteller decides that there’s an additional -1 penalty for poor visibility. That leaves you a dice pool of four.

The roll yields a 3, 5, 8 and 9 — two successes. The thug is hit. He suffers two points of lethal damage to his Health. It hurts, but it’s not enough to stop him and he staggers away. Your character needs to decide whether to give chase and close the distance, or try to fire again at a receding target.

The Chance Roll

One final rule: If your dice pool is ever reduced to zero or fewer dice, you can still make a “chance roll.” Your character makes a wild or blind attempt to accomplish a feat where he might normally be outclassed or have little chance. Roll a single die, but you only succeed on a result of 10. (You still re-roll 10’s for extra successes, as per the “10 again” rule.) There is, however, a chance of calamity. If you roll a 1 on your *first* die, your character suffers a “dramatic failure,” a disastrous setback. The nature of the setback is decided by the Storyteller.

Getting Started

Now that you know the basics of the Storytelling System, you can proceed to create your own characters. You’ll be able to judge what sort of traits you’ll need based on their titles (they’re mostly self-explanatory), and know that the more dots you have in a trait the better your character will be when accomplishing tasks with it.



Character Creation

Creating characters in Storytelling is a simple seven-step process. Just make a copy of the character sheet, get a pencil and begin.

1. Choose background. First, create your character's concept. To help get a handle on your character's identity and motivations, come up with a short, two- or three-word description of him/her. This usually, but not always, includes some idea of a career: "nightstalking journalist," "stoic mechanic," "lost waif," "petulant yuppie," "angry young man."

Second, choose your character's faction. If you're playing a mortal, this is relatively unimportant. He could be a cop, a private investigator or a convenience-store clerk, but he is not defined by his factional alliances. A supernatural being, however, is drawn into a world of ancient legacies in which he is judged by even his involuntary affiliations. His faction is both his strength and his curse. For details on supernatural factions, see **Vampire: The Requiem**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken** or **Mage: The Awakening**.

Option: Preludes. An intense Storytelling method is to roleplay mortal characters *before* they become initiated into the supernatural world. That way, their introduction to the terrible truths hiding in the shadows has more meaning and can be especially traumatic, tragic or even triumphant. If you're creating a prelude character, wait to choose his faction based on how gameplay events transform him.

2. Select Attributes, your character's innate capabilities: Prioritize the three categories (5/4/3). Your character begins with one dot in each Attribute automatically, already filled in on the character sheet. Dots spent now are in addition to these starting ones. The fifth dot in any Attribute costs two dots to purchase.

Example: Olson wants his character to have a Dexterity of 5. This costs him five dots. His first dot is free and his fifth one costs two.

For more information, see Chapter 2: Attributes.

3. Select Skills, your character's learned capabilities: Prioritize the three categories (11/7/4). The fifth dot in any Skill costs two dots to purchase. For more information, see Chapter 3: Skills.

4. Select Skill Specialties, your character's focused areas of expertise: Take three Skill Specialties of your choice. You can assign each how you like, whether each to a separate Skill or all three to a single Skill. There is no limit to how many Specialties can be assigned to a single Skill. For more information, see Chapter 3: Skills.

5. Add supernatural template, based on the transformation your character undergoes: The Embrace, the First Change or the Awakening. See **Vampire: The Requiem**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken** or **Mage: The Awakening**. (If creating a prelude character, wait to choose template based on how gameplay events transform your character.)

6. Determine advantages, traits derived from your character's Attributes: Defense (the lowest of Dexterity or Wits), Health (Stamina + Size), Initiative (Dexterity + Composure), Morality (7 for starting characters), Size (5 for most humans), Speed (Strength + Dexterity +5), Willpower (Resolve + Composure), and Virtue/Vice (choose one of each; see sidebar). For more information, see Chapter 4: Advantages.

Note: Most advantages cannot be raised directly through experience points. You must instead raise the traits from which they are derived. (Morality is the exception.)

Virtues and Vices

Choose one of each. For more information, see p 100.

Virtues: Charity, Faith, Fortitude, Hope, Justice, Prudence, Temperance

Vices: Envy, Gluttony, Greed, Lust, Pride, Sloth, Wrath

7. Select Merits, representing character enhancements and background elements: Spend 7 dots on Merits. The fifth dot in any Merit costs two dots to purchase. Note that many Merits have prerequisites. For more information, see the sidebar and Chapter 5: Merits.

Merits

Mental Merits: Common Sense (****), Danger Sense (**), Eidetic Memory (**), Encyclopedic Knowledge (****), Holistic Awareness (***), Language (* to **), Meditative Mind (*), Unseen Sense (**)

Physical Merits: Ambidextrous (**), Brawling Dodge (*), Direction Sense (*), Disarm (**), Fast Reflexes (* or **), Fighting Finesse (**), Fighting Style: Boxing (* to ****), Fighting Style: Kung Fu (* to ****), Fighting Style: Two Weapons (* to ****), Fleet of Foot (* to **), Fresh Start (*), Giant (****), Gunslinger (**), Iron Stamina (* to **), Iron Stomach (**), Natural Immunity (*), Quick Draw (*), Quick Healer (****), Strong Back (*), Strong Lungs (**), Stunt Driver (**), Toxin Resistance (**), Weaponry Dodge (*)

Social Merits: Allies (* to ****), Barfly (*), Contacts (* to ****), Fame (* to **), Inspiring (****), Mentor (* to ****), Resources (* to ****), Retainer (* to ****), Status (* to ****), Striking Looks (** or ***)

Glossary

This is a glossary of general Storytelling System terms used throughout this book. These explanations will help you understand the rules that follow. It does not include entries for all traits (the qualifiers used to help define your character) used in the game. For any of those, refer to the index, p. 220.

Italics denote a word with a separate glossary entry. Refer to the index for page references for complete descriptions in the text.

10 Again: A result of 10 on any die is re-rolled in an attempt to achieve more *successes*. A further result of 10 on a re-rolled die is rolled yet again, over and over, until no more 10's are rolled.

action: A task that takes all of a character's time and attention. Storytelling measures *instant actions* (one to three seconds, taking place within a single *turn*) and *extended actions*, taking longer (duration determined by the Storyteller). Also, there are *reflexive actions*, which take no time and do not prevent a character from performing another action within a turn, and *contested actions*, in which two or more characters compete in a task or for a single goal.

advantage: A character trait such as *Health* or *Willpower* that usually represents abilities derived from other traits. Advantages are measured in *dots* and sometimes in *points*.

aggravated (damage): A *damage* point that inflicts a grievous or supernatural *wound*. Vampires suffer aggravated damage from fire; werewolves suffer it from silver. Mortals might suffer aggravated damage from a dire supernatural power such as a lightning bolt summoned from the sky by a witch. Aggravated wounds normally heal at a rate of one point per week.

Attribute: A character trait representing innate capabilities, Mental, Physical and Social. An Attribute is added to a *Skill* (or another Attribute in certain cases) to determine your basic *dice pool* for a task.

bashing (damage): A *damage* point that inflicts a blunt or bruising *wound*, such as from a fist or a baseball bat. Bashing wounds normally heal at a rate of one point per 15 minutes.

chance roll: Whenever *modifiers* reduce your *dice pool* to zero or fewer dice, you may make a chance roll on a single die. Unlike a normal dice roll, a chance roll succeeds only on a result of 10. Worse, a result of 1 causes a *dramatic failure*.

close combat: Attacks that involve hand-to-hand or weapon fighting. Such attacks use the *Strength Attribute* for their dice pools. Characters gain their *Defense* against close-combat attacks.

contested action: Two or more characters compete in a task or for a single goal. The one who gets the most successes wins. Contested actions can be *instant* or *extended actions*.

damage: The points inflicted against a character's *Health* or an object's *Structure*, rated as *bashing*, *lethal* or *aggravated*. One point of damage inflicts one *wound*.

Defense: An *advantage* trait determined by taking the lowest of *Dexterity* or *Wits*. Characters can penalize a *close-combat* opponent's accuracy by subtracting their *Defense* from his *dice pool*.

degeneration: Characters who violate their ethics lose dots of *Morality*. Degeneration can cause a character to acquire a *derangement*.

derangement: Characters whose *Morality* dots are lost through *degeneration* or who suffer horrible psychological trauma can acquire a derangement. Some derangements are classified as "mild," meaning they hinder the character mainly by plaguing his conscience. Others are "severe," often cases of clinical insanity. Derangements caused by degeneration can be healed by restoring lost *Morality* dots.

dice: The Storytelling System uses 10-sided dice to represent the element of chance. Dice are collected to form a character's *dice pool* for an action.

dice pool: The number of dice rolled to determine failure or success (and the degree of success) for a character's action. Dice pools are usually determined by adding an *Attribute* to a *Skill*, plus any relevant *equipment* and/or *modifiers*.

dot: The incremental measurement of a permanent trait. Most traits range from 1 to 5 dots, but some (such as *Willpower*) range from 1 to 10, and others (*Health*) can go higher.

dramatic failure: A result of 1 on a *chance roll* causes a dramatic failure, a catastrophe worse than a normal failure. The character's gun might jam or he might wind up shooting a friend by accident. The Storyteller determines and describes the result.

Durability: A trait representing an object's hardness, based on the material from which it is made (wood has less *Durability* than metal). *Durability* is measured in *dots*. An attack's *damage* must exceed *Durability* before the object is harmed.

equipment: Characters can improve their chances of succeeding in a task by using the right equipment. This benefit is represented by *modifiers* to the *dice pool*, depending on the equipment used and its quality.

exceptional success: Whenever five or more *successes* are rolled, the character achieves an exceptional success. This achievement sometimes provides an extra perk over and above the effect of having multiple successes. For example, a character who gains five successes on a fast-talk roll might allay the target's suspicions enough that he believes anything the character says for the remaining *scene*.

experience points: Points awarded by the Storyteller at the end of a game session and story, used to purchase new traits or to boost the dots of existing traits. See p. 35 for costs.

extended action: A task that takes time to accomplish. Players roll to accumulate *successes* during phases of the task, succeeding once they have acquired the needed total.

failure: A dice roll that yields no *successes* is a failure — the character does not succeed at his task.

Health: An *advantage* trait, determined by adding Stamina + Size. Health is measured in *dots* and *points*. (See also *Wound*.)

Initiative: An *advantage* trait representing the character's ability to respond to sudden surprise, determined by adding Dexterity + Composure. A character's Initiative helps him get a high standing in the *Initiative roster*.

Initiative roster: The list that determines when each character can perform an action within a turn. For each character who is not surprised, a player rolls a die and adds his character's *Initiative* to the result. Whoever gets the highest number acts first, followed by the character with the next highest, and so on until everyone who can has acted that turn. Initiative is usually rolled once per encounter, but the Storyteller can decide to re-roll it each turn.

instant action: A task that takes place within a single *turn*. A character can perform only one *action* per turn, unless he has a *Merit* or power that lets him do otherwise.

lethal (damage): A *damage* point that inflicts a sharp, slashing or piercing *wound*, such as from a sword or bullet. Lethal wounds normally heal at a rate of one point per two days.

Merit: A character trait representing enhancements or elements of a character's background, such as his allies or influence. Merits are measured in *dots*, but are not always used to determine dice pools. Instead, they represent increasing degrees of quality or quantity concerning their subject.

modifiers: *Dice pools* are often modified by a number of factors, from bonuses (adding dice) for *equipment* or ideal conditions to penalties (subtracting dice) for poor conditions.

Morality: An *advantage* trait representing a character's moral, ethical and even psychological standing and wellbeing. Morality is measured in *dots*, which can be lost to *degeneration* by performing unethical or criminal acts.

point: A trait expended to gain certain effects, such as a Willpower point or a measurement of *damage* or *Health*. The amount of points available to spend is equal to the parent trait's *dots*. Spent points are regained over time or through certain actions.

reflexive action: An instinctual task that takes no appreciable time, such as reacting to surprise or noticing something out of the corner of your eye. Performing a re-

flexive action does not prevent a character from performing another *action* within a *turn*.

ranged combat: An attack that sends a projectile of some sort at a target, whether it's a bullet from a gun or a knife from a hand. Such attacks use the Dexterity *Attribute* for their dice pools. Characters' *Defense* cannot normally be used against firearm attacks, although targets can penalize an opponent's accuracy by going prone or taking cover.

Resistance: Characters can resist others' attempts to socially sway them, physically grapple them or even mentally dominate them. Whenever applying such resistance requires a character's full attention, it is performed as a *contested action*, but more often it is a *reflexive action*, allowing the target to also perform an action that turn.

scene: A division of time based on drama, such as the end of one plot point and the beginning of another. Whenever a character leaves a location where a dramatic event has occurred, or when a combat has ended, the current scene usually ends and the next one begins.

Skill: A character trait representing learned ability or knowledge. Added to an *Attribute* to determine a character's basic *dice pool* for a task.

Specialty: An area of *Skill* expertise in which a character excels. Whenever a Specialty applies to a character's task, one die is added to his player's *dice pool*. There's no limit to the number of Specialties that you can assign to a single Skill.

Storyteller: The "director" or "editor" of the interactive story told by the players. The Storyteller creates the plot and roleplays the characters, both allies and villains, with which the players' characters interact.

Structure: A trait representing an object's integrity, determined by adding *Durability* and *Size*. Structure is measured in *dots*, which can be lost due to *damage*. Unlike the wounds of a living creature, an object does not heal damaged Structure; it must be repaired.

success: Each die that rolls an 8, 9 or 10 yields one success. (Exception: A *chance roll* must produce a 10 to succeed.) In an *instant action*, a player must roll at least one success for his character to accomplish a task. In an *extended action*, the number of successes required (accumulated over a series of rolls) depends on the task. In an attack roll, each success produces one point of *damage*.

troupe: Your gaming group of friends.

turn: A three-second period of time. *Instant actions* are observed in turns. Combat (a series of instant actions) is observed in consecutive turns as each combatant tries to overcome opponents.

wound: A marked *Health* point, denoting an injury from *damage*. *Bashing* wounds are marked with a "f", *lethal* wounds with an "X" and *aggravated* wounds with a "*". (See *Health*.)



Roll and Trait Summary

Now that you've seen the basics of the Storytelling System, the following summary puts many of the game's rolls and actions in one place for easy reference during play. Don't try to understand all this information right now. It really only makes sense once you've read the rest of the book. Then you can come back here to pick out what you need when you need it.

Animal Training: Composure + Animal Ken + equipment (trainer) versus Stamina + Resolve (animal); extended and contested action (the task demands a number of successes equal to the animal's Willpower; each roll represents one day of training) (p. 79)

Bypass Security System: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment; extended action (5-15 successes, depending on the complexity of the system; each roll represents a turn — three seconds — of work) (p. 74)

Carousing: Manipulation + Socialize + equipment (carouser) versus Composure + Empathy (subject); extended and contested action (the task requires a number of successes equal to double the highest Stamina among the character's acquaintances; one roll equals one hour of carrying on) (p. 85)

Catching Objects: Dexterity + Athletics; instant action if item is thrown to receiver, contested if it's thrown at receiver and Defense doesn't apply (p. 68)

Climbing: Strength + Athletics + equipment; instant or extended action (one success is required per 10 feet of height; each roll represents one minute of climbing) (p. 64)

Close Combat, Armed: Strength + Weaponry, minus target's Defense and armor; instant action. Add bonus dice based on weapon used or effect performed, and then subtract penalties for circumstance conditions. Each success equates to a Health point of damage inflicted, the type of which is determined by the nature of the attack (p. 152).

Close Combat, Unarmed: Strength + Brawl, minus target's Defense and armor; instant action. Add bonus dice based on weapon used or effect performed, and then subtract penalties for circumstance conditions. Each success equates to a Health point of damage inflicted, the type of which is determined by the nature of the attack (p. 152).

Create Art: Intelligence + Crafts + equipment; extended action (4-15+ successes; one roll equals 30 minutes of work) (p. 58)

Cutting a Deal: Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment versus Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment; extended and contested action (3-10+ successes required; each roll represents an hour of negotiation) (p. 82)

Defense: Lowest of Wits or Dexterity; reflexive action to use (p. 90)

Degeneration: Roll number of dice associated with sin performed. If roll fails, Morality drops by one. Roll

new Morality trait as a dice pool. If no successes are rolled, a derangement is incurred (p. 96).

Disguise: Wits + Subterfuge + equipment (impersonator) versus Wits + Subterfuge (subject); contested action (p. 87)

Dodge: Double target's Defense (p. 156); costs action for turn

Examining a Crime Scene: Wits + Investigation + equipment; extended action (3-10+ successes; one roll represents 10 minutes of activity) (p. 59)

Explosives: Dexterity + Athletics (thrown) or Intelligence + Science (triggered); instant action (p. 178)

Fast-Talk: Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment (talker) versus Composure + Empathy or Subterfuge (subject); contested action (p. 83)

Fatigue: Stamina + Resolve rolls to remain awake; reflexive action (p. 179)

Foot Chase: Stamina + Athletics + equipment versus Stamina + Athletics + equipment; extended and contested action (each roll represents one turn of running) (p. 65)

Foraging for Sustenance: Wits + Survival + equipment; extended action (five successes required; one roll represents one hour of searching) (p. 77)

Grapple: Roll Strength + Brawl - opponent's Defense for attacker to get a grip on target; roll Strength + Brawl - opponent's Strength to perform an overpowering maneuver or to break free; instant action. (p. 157)

Hacking: Intelligence + Computer + equipment versus Intelligence + Computer + equipment; extended and contested action (5-10+ successes; each success represents 30 minutes of programming) (p. 57)

Healing Wounds: Dexterity or Intelligence + Medicine + equipment; extended action (one success is required per Health point of damage suffered; each roll represents one minute of work (first aid) or one hour of work (hospital treatment)) (p. 61)

Health: Stamina + Size (p. 90)

Holding Breath: Reflexive action (p. 49)

Initiative: Dexterity + Composure + a die (p. 151)

Interrogation: Wits + Intimidation + equipment (interrogator) versus Stamina + Resolve (subject); extended and contested action (the task demands a number of successes equal to the subject's Willpower; each roll represents one hour of interrogation) (p. 81)

Jumping: Strength + Athletics + equipment; instant action (p. 66)

Lifting/Moving Objects: Strength (+ Stamina); instant action (p. 47)

Lockpicking: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment; instant or extended action (2-12+ successes required, depending on the sophistication of the lock; one roll represents one turn — three seconds — of work) (p. 74)

Meditation: Composure + Wits + equipment; extended action (4 successes; one roll represents 30 minutes) (p. 51)

Memorizing and Remembering: Intelligence + Composure; reflexive action (p. 44)

Object's Structure: Durability + Size (p. 135)

Oratory: Presence + Persuasion + equipment versus highest Resolve + Composure of audience; contested action (p. 83)

Perception: Wits + Composure or a relevant Skill in place of Composure; reflexive action (p. 45)

Ranged Combat, Guns and Bows: Dexterity + Firearms, minus target's armor; instant action. Add bonus dice based on weapon used or effect performed, and then subtract penalties for circumstance conditions. Each success equates to a Health point of damage inflicted, the type of which is determined by the nature of the attack (p. 152).

Ranged Combat, Thrown Weapons: Dexterity + Athletics, minus target's Defense and armor; instant action. Add bonus dice based on weapon used or effect performed, and then subtract penalties for circumstance conditions. Each success equates to a Health point of damage inflicted, the type of which is determined by the nature of the attack (p. 152).

Remaining Conscious: Last Health box is filled with a slash (bashing damage), roll Stamina each turn to remain conscious (-3 wound penalty does not apply to roll); reflexive action (p. 173)

Repair Item: Dexterity + Crafts + equipment; extended action (4-10 successes; one roll equals 30 minutes of work) (p. 58)

Research: Intelligence + Academics + equipment; extended action (3-10+ successes; each roll represents 30 minutes of research) (p. 55)

Resisting Coercion: Resolve + Wits or Resolve + Stamina; reflexive action (p. 47)

Resisting Poison or Disease: Stamina + Resolve; reflexive and potentially extended and/or contested action (p. 49)

Seduction: Presence + Persuasion + equipment or Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment (seducer) versus Wits + Composure + equipment (subject); contested and/

or extended action (the extended and contested part of the task requires a number of successes equal to double the seducer's Presence or double the subject's Resolve; one roll equals 10 minutes of banter) (p. 84)

Shadowing Stealthily: Wits + Stealth + equipment (shadow) versus Wits + Composure + equipment (subject); contested action (p. 76)

Size: Base value is 5 for adult human (p. 94)

Sleight of Hand: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment versus Wits + Composure or Wits + Larceny; contested action (p. 75)

Solving Enigmas: Intelligence + Investigation + equipment; instant or extended action (3-10+ successes; one roll represents one hour of activity) (p. 60)

Speed: Strength + Dexterity + Species factor (5 for adult human, 3 for human child) (p. 95)

Surprise: Wits + Composure; reflexive action (p. 151)

Throwing: Range: Strength + Dexterity + Athletics, minus the object's Size (short range) for a non-aerodynamic object; double distances for an aerodynamic one. Accuracy: Dexterity + Athletics + equipment; instant action (p. 67)

Vehicle Control: Dexterity + Drive + Handling; instant action (p. 141)

Vehicle Pursuit: Dexterity + Drive + vehicle Handling versus Dexterity + Drive + vehicle Handling; extended and contested action (each roll represents one turn of driving) (p. 69)

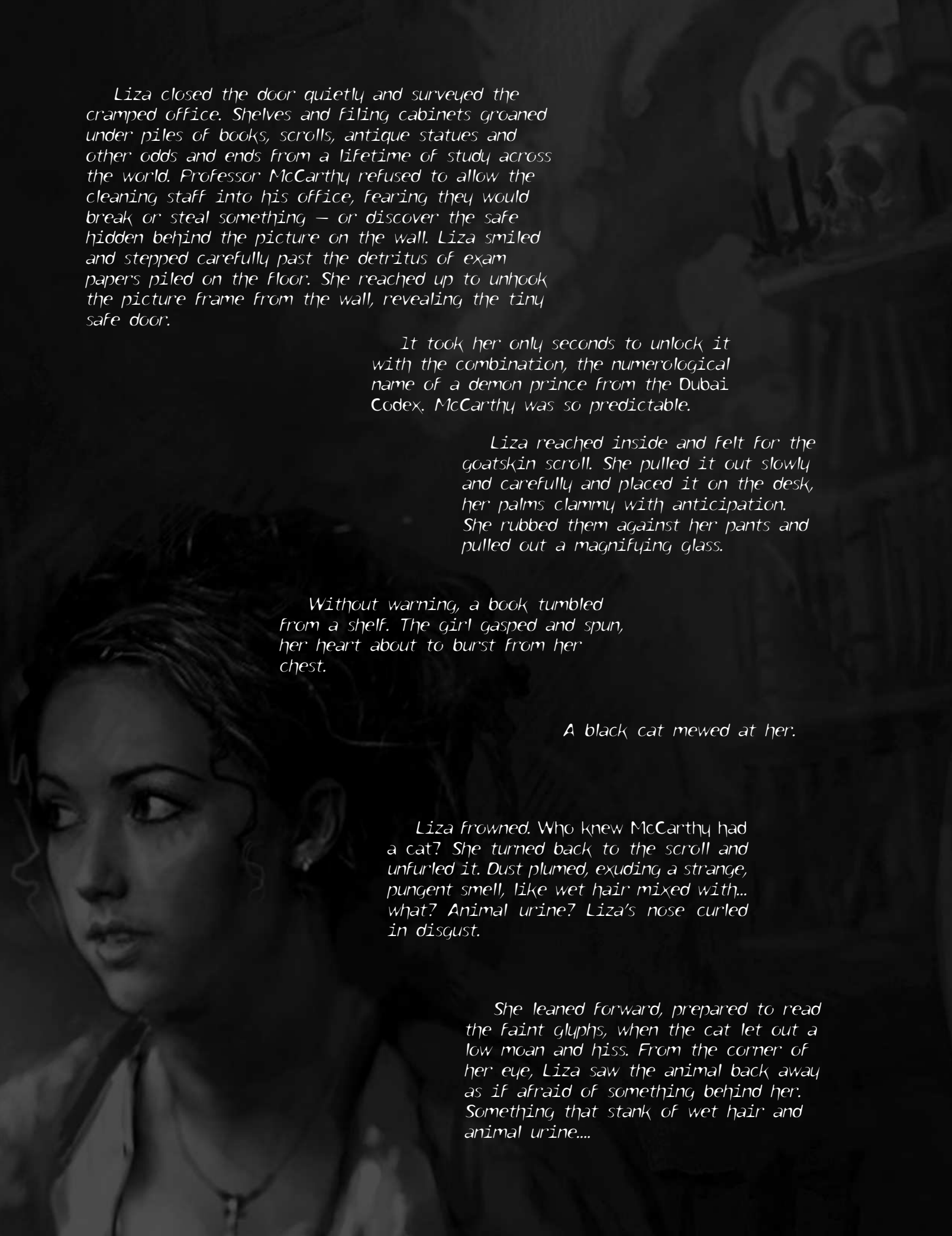
Vehicle Ramming: Dexterity + Drive + Handling to hit; instant action. Vehicle's Size rating as a pool of its own, with a +1 bonus for each full 10 mph traveled to determine damage (p. 144).

Vehicle Tailing: Wits + Drive + vehicle Handling (tail) versus Wits + Composure + equipment (subject); contested action (p. 71)

Willpower: Resolve + Composure; reflexive action (p. 95). Spending Willpower adds three dice to a roll or +2 to a single Resistance trait such as Stamina, Resolve, Composure or Defense in one instance (p. 133).

Working the Black Market: Manipulation + Streetwise + equipment; extended action (2-10 success; each roll represents one day of searching the street) (p. 86)





Liza closed the door quietly and surveyed the cramped office. Shelves and filing cabinets groaned under piles of books, scrolls, antique statues and other odds and ends from a lifetime of study across the world. Professor McCarthy refused to allow the cleaning staff into his office, fearing they would break or steal something – or discover the safe hidden behind the picture on the wall. Liza smiled and stepped carefully past the detritus of exam papers piled on the floor. She reached up to unhook the picture frame from the wall, revealing the tiny safe door.

It took her only seconds to unlock it with the combination, the numerological name of a demon prince from the Dubai Codex. McCarthy was so predictable.

Liza reached inside and felt for the goatskin scroll. She pulled it out slowly and carefully and placed it on the desk, her palms clammy with anticipation. She rubbed them against her pants and pulled out a magnifying glass.

Without warning, a book tumbled from a shelf. The girl gasped and spun, her heart about to burst from her chest.

A black cat mewed at her.

Liza frowned. Who knew McCarthy had a cat? She turned back to the scroll and unfurled it. Dust plumed, exuding a strange, pungent smell, like wet hair mixed with... what? Animal urine? Liza's nose curled in disgust.

She leaned forward, prepared to read the faint glyphs, when the cat let out a low moan and hiss. From the corner of her eye, Liza saw the animal back away as if afraid of something behind her. Something that stank of wet hair and animal urine....

Chapter 2: Attributes

*The mind is its own
place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of
Hell, a Hell of Heaven.*
— Milton, *Paradise Lost*

People have the inherent capacity to act, behave and think. We can perform actions and have intuitive talents such as running, theorizing and persuading others. So does your character. His basic, fundamental capabilities are represented with Attributes, which are the foundation of all the acts that he performs. These traits are classified into three categories — Mental, Physical and Social — and are rolled to determine how well your character accomplishes efforts in the game.

Mental Attributes suggest how insightful, clever and determined your character is. They are Intelligence, Wits and Resolve.

Physical Attributes indicate how strong, graceful and enduring your character is. They are Strength, Dexterity and Stamina.

Social Attributes determine how imposing, magnetic and dignified your character is. They are Presence, Manipulation and Composure.

The Attributes of ordinary people are rated from 1 to 5. It's possible for someone to have more dots, but these individuals are typically beyond the human ken, partially or fully a part of the mysterious supernatural world. Perhaps they're touched by spirits or born to a legacy of service to unseen beings.

Your character, even as a mortal human, automatically starts with one dot in each Attribute. These dots are already filled in on your character sheet.

When your character performs an action, the Attribute most appropriate to the effort is referenced. If he tries to remember what he read during library research last week, you look to his Intelligence dots. If he tries to jump a chasm, you check his Strength. If he tries to make a good first impression on a group of people, you apply his Presence score.

Your character's dots are usually rolled as part of a dice pool. Attributes are sometimes combined and rolled to see if an action can be accomplished, but they are more often combined with Skills. The Storyteller will tell you what Attributes are applicable to your character's actions, and what rolls you can make. In general, the three classes of Attributes are used based on the circumstances. One of each of the Mental, Physical and Social traits has bearing on a different kind of action, as outlined in the boxed text.

Use	Mental	Physical	Social
Power	Intelligence	Strength	Presence
Finesse	Wits	Dexterity	Manipulation
Resistance	Resolve	Stamina	Composure

Power is the degree of effect that your character has on others and his surroundings. The higher his score, the smarter, more potent or more imposing he is. Intelligence, Strength and Presence therefore apply when your character seeks to force himself on his environment.

Finesse is a measure of your character's capacity to interact with the world and influence others. The higher his score, the craftier, more delicate and more influential he is. Wits, Dexterity and Manipulation have bearing when your character tries to anticipate and react to his environment, and to coordinate others.

Resistance indicates how well your character copes with influences from both without and within that might affect him adversely. The higher his score the more staunch, sturdy or dignified he is. Resolve, Stamina and Composure

apply when your character responds to coercion, injury and influence. Resolve tests his ability to resist efforts to direct his mind, Stamina helps him shrug off physical trauma, and Composure helps him recover from horrifying experiences or social tension and still maintain control.

Thus, you don't usually check Strength when your character is challenged in a social situation, because brute force doesn't apply where Composure (social recovery) is concerned. Similarly, Dexterity doesn't typically have bearing when interpreting a foreign language. That act calls upon the power of the mind and is the purview of Intelligence.

Attribute Dots

Attributes are rated 1 to 5 for ordinary people, and each score suggests the degree of your character's raw capability in that area.

Dots Talent

- Poor. Unexercised, unpracticed or inept.
- Average. The result of occasional effort or application.
- Good. Regular practice or effort, or naturally talented.
- Exceptional. Frequently applied, tested and honed, or naturally gifted.
- Outstanding. The peak of normal human capability. Continuously exercised or naturally blessed.

Normally, it's not possible for a character to have zero dots in an Attribute. That suggests the absolute vacancy of any capability in the trait in question. Now, a person could be physically, mentally or socially disabled or crippled. Those conditions are reflected with Flaws (see p. 217), however, not through zero-rated Attributes.

Just about the only instance in which an Attribute can be reduced to zero (and usually temporarily) is by supernatural means. A spell, curse or affliction is imposed on your character that eliminates all of the dots in his trait. In these cases, no roll can be made at all whenever the Attribute in question would normally be called for. So, if your character is afflicted with total loss of bodily control (zero Dexterity), you make no rolls for any situation that calls for Dexterity in a dice pool, even if he has dots in a pertinent Skill or has access to tools that would be helpful. Your character can't even hope to aim a gun or direct his movements. In essence, the action fails outright.

When creating your character, you must prioritize his capability with the Attribute categories. His Mental, Physical and Social traits must be given primary, secondary and tertiary emphasis. If you want your character to be active and hardy, Physical traits might be primary. If his ability to react to and deal with people is nearly but not quite as important, Social Attributes could be secondary. That leaves Mental traits as tertiary. He's not the sharpest tack in the box, or life just hasn't demanded that he exercise his cognitive potential.

You get to allocate five dots among your character's primary Attributes. You assign four dots among his secondary Attributes. And you get three dots to divvy up among his tertiary traits. The dots available to each category can be distributed among its three Attributes as evenly or unevenly as you like. So, you might decide to apply three dots to your character's Strength, one to his Dexterity and one to his Stamina. That's all five of his primary class allocated. Two of your four Social dots might go to each of Manipulation and Composure. And, you might assign one of each of your three Mental dots to Intelligence, Wits and Resolve.

Remember that the fifth dot in any Attribute costs two of the dots you have to spend at character creation. Each Attribute also gets one free dot automatically before you start assigning anything.

Attribute Descriptions

The following is a breakdown of what each Attribute entails and how it may be applied. Some tasks rely on your character's Attribute dots alone and these traits are rolled or even combined to determine how well he performs certain tasks. Such feats are typically ones any unimpaired person can perform, such as holding one's breath or lifting objects, and don't require any special training or expertise. The Attribute tasks detailed here are comprehensive. They're activities that rely exclusively on inherent talent (Attributes) alone, rather than on the learned capabilities of Skills (see p. 54). It's therefore not recommended that you invent other Attribute tasks during play; almost all other actions that characters can perform involve a combination of an Attribute and Skill.

Mental Intelligence

"I'm sick of this," Becky announced in frustration. She immediately regretted her outburst as her words echoed throughout the musty old library. Fortunately, this late at night, even during exams, no one else was there to hear. She had been working on her thesis for weeks without getting anywhere. Once again, she wondered if a degree in Linguistics was a good choice.

Her research was simply not panning out as she hoped, but after another pep talk, she forced herself back into the stacks. What other choice did she have? It was when reaching for a book on Sanskrit that she made her real discovery. A dusty old volume that seemed to have fallen between bookcases. It was bound in leather — or something like it — and had no publication date. Indeed, the book was nothing like she had ever seen before. No end papers. No table of contents. It just launched into some strange text.

The next thing she knew, Becky had passed hours studying the book. It had characters reminiscent of Latin and Greek, yet different, with odd pictographs throughout. As near as she could tell, it was dedicated to a religion or to ceremonies of some kind, but from what culture she had no idea. She did know that if she was ever going to find out, she would need more time with it.

The raw power of the mind. Cognitive capacity. The inherent capability to digest, comprehend and remember information — and to learn more. Intelligence is a direct measure of how smart your character is. She may be dull-minded or have narrow-vision. She may be book-smart, or she may simply be able to grasp concepts, interpret situations and solve problems quickly. Intelligence is valued by planners, theorists, scholars, white-collar employees and leaders.

Memorizing and Remembering

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Composure

Action: Reflexive

Committing something such as a name or a facial feature to memory can require an Intelligence + Composure roll, as can recalling that information later. The more calm your character is the more likely it is that she retains the knowledge. If the information is familiar to your character or referenced often, no roll is required unless she's nervous or under pressure (Storyteller's discretion). If the information is brief or simple, such as a license-plate number, no modifiers may apply. The Storyteller may impose bonuses or penalties under various circumstances. Memorizing or recalling something at one's leisure offers a +1 to +3 bonus. A common name such as "Dave" is easy to memorize (+3). Extensive information, details studied quickly or distractedly, or unusual or strange facts such as foreign names are harder to remember (-1 to -5). Features witnessed hours ago are easy to recall (+1), while those observed days, weeks or years ago are harder to conjure up (-1 to -5).

Storytellers can make memory rolls on players' behalf so the veracity of information called forth is never certain. Another option is to forego rolls if a *player* remembers (or does not remember) the details.



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The information is memorized or remembered incorrectly, to be determined by the Storyteller.

Failure: In one ear and out the other, or your character draws a blank.

Success: The details are at your character's disposal.

Exceptional Success: Your character has access to not only what's important, but to related information on the topic or details of where and when the facts were memorized.

Suggested Equipment: Book or television show related to the topic (+1), photograph taken at the event (+2)

Possible Penalties: Extensive information (-3 to -5), details studied quickly or distractedly (-1 to -2), unusual or strange facts (-1 to -2), items observed days, weeks or years ago (-1 to -5)

Wits

Martin had accepted some weird jobs, but this one took the cake. He'd installed or repaired plumbing across the city. He liked the work; jobs could be challenging and fun. Busting open drywall and messing with pipes was like tinkering with the skeleton of a building. You got to see straight into people's private worlds. Sometimes you even got to peek at the skeletons in their closets.

But why be hired to do a full re-pipe at this place and be told not to go on the top floor? Martin had to know. So, when the greasy guy who hired him caught him at the top of the stairs, Martin had to think fast.

"Yeah, I tried to find you. It's uh... it's what I was afraid of. An old building like this, the fittings have given way from wood rot or something. We're, uh... we're gonna need to re-route all the pipes upstairs instead of running the same lines."

Damn, that was good, *he thought*. Might be able to squeeze some extra bucks out of this job.

The other man didn't seem convinced.

The ability to think on one's feet, under pressure or duress, without letting them see you sweat. Wits also encompasses an eye for detail, the ability to absorb what's going on in the environment, and to react to events. It might mean recognizing that the temperature in a room slowly drops, that a landscape painting incorporates a disguised human face, or that a trap is about to be sprung. Wits involves the powers of perception and response. Your character may be oblivious, dumbfounded, quick-eyed or wary. The trait is useful for entrepreneurs, charlatans, athletes, tacticians, lawyers and criminals.

Defense

Derived Traits: Wits or Dexterity

Action: Reflexive

The lowest of your character's Wits or Dexterity is used to determine his Defense trait, which is subtracted from incoming Brawl, Weaponry and throwing attacks. See p. 152 for more information

Perception

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure or a relevant Skill in place of Composure (see the "Skill-Based Perception" sidebar)

Action: Reflexive

Sometimes subtle or instantaneous actions occur around your character, testing his powers of observation. A shape races by. Someone hides behind nearby bushes. Maybe your character recognizes these events. Maybe he goes oblivious to them. Alternatively, a single unusual phenomenon is in his presence, and he may (or may not) recognize it without trying. Maybe a piece of furniture is out of place in a room or a door is unlocked when it should be locked.

The Storyteller typically knows when something unusual or out of place occurs in your character's vicinity, and may call for a reflexive Wits + Composure roll for your character to recognize it. Such observation almost always occurs without your character intentionally searching or looking (that's the province of "Investigation," p. 59). Perception rolls simply check to see if your character instinctually notices what's going on. In many cases, the Storyteller may make perception rolls for you, so that you remain as aware or unaware of what's going on as your character.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character notices something strange or out of place, but it's not what has actually occurred, or he makes a dangerous assumption about the event. A picture hanging at an odd angle indicates that someone has moved it, but your character assumes that a door has been slammed, shifting the piece of art.

Failure: Your character notices nothing amiss or out of place.

Success: Your character recognizes that something has happened. If he wants to learn more, Investigation rolls are called for. See "Investigation," p. 59.

Exceptional Success: Your character not only recognizes when something unusual or quick happens nearby, he sees it all happen and gets a good look. Or he notices a variety of things that are amiss in his surroundings, just by entering the room.

Suggested Equipment: Hopped-up on caffeine (+1) or amphetamines (+2)

Possible Penalties: Dark (-3), obscuring weather (-1 to -3), subtle detail (-1), obscure detail (-3), distracting circumstances (-1 to -3)



Skill-Based Perception

During the course of play, you will be called upon frequently to roll dice to see if your character notices something in her vicinity, or that some detail is unusual. The Storyteller can always ask you to roll Wits + Composure to see if your character is aware of her surroundings, but there are other options. Perhaps more indicative of your character's life experience and training is combining Wits + a relevant Skill to determine if your character spots something amiss. It could be Wits + Survival to realize that a predatory animal lurks nearby in the woods. Or it might be Wits + Academics to notice that the books on a shelf aren't arranged alphabetically, but by date of publication. Sure, Wits + Composure might accomplish the same result, but if your character has some capability with a Skill that's more reliable than her Composure alone, the Storyteller might allow you to roll Wits plus that Skill, instead.

As a general rule of thumb, the highest of Composure or the Skill is rolled along with Wits. While the stalked character in the example above might be a novice woodsman (Survival 1), he could still have decent Composure (say, 3). The latter of the two is rolled because the character's inherent senses and alertness compensate for his green status in the wilds.

Bear in mind that dots in some Skills or under some circumstances simply don't matter, and Wits + Composure always applies. For example, if a gun lies in the corner of a room, having the Firearms Skill doesn't help spot it. Anyone who gets a successful Wits + Composure can see it.

The Storyteller always has final say on whether a Skill can be combined with Wits to make a perception roll, or if Composure applies.

Reaction to Surprise

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure

Action: Reflexive

An ambush is about to be launched, a trap is about to be sprung or your character is about to run into her enemy. She may recognize the threat in time or walk right into it. Roll Wits + Composure for your character to determine if she's prepared for the worst. Even one success indicates that she is and you can roll Initiative (see p. 151) for a fight as usual. If your Wits + Composure roll fails, your character is caught off guard and can do nothing for the first turn of combat except stand and gape or get hurt. Her Defense is not applied against incoming attacks in that first turn. For more information, see "Surprise" on p. 151.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character is completely blindsided. The Storyteller may decree that she cannot act and loses her Defense for the first two turns of any fight that ensues.

Failure: Your character notices nothing amiss and is caught off guard.

Success: Initiative may be rolled normally and your character can attack or defend herself without hindrance.

Exceptional Success: Your character spots trouble or simply senses imminent danger — and can announce it to any companions. None of her companions is caught off guard (all of their Wits + Composure rolls are considered successful).

Suggested Equipment: Hopped-up on caffeine (+1), amphetamines (+2) or methamphetamines (+3)

Possible Penalties: Dark (-3), obscuring weather (-1 to -3), distracting circumstances (-1 to -3), attacker at long range (-3), presumed safe environment (-1 to -2)

Resolve

Josh only really came to his senses when he threw up in the toilet. He had been conscious the whole time, he knew, but it was like he'd been in a daze, walking around like a zombie. He thought back to how it all happened. He'd left his apartment a few hours ago to run errands. It was a nice enough day for winter. He'd gotten some groceries, and then...

All he could remember was a blur. Something was there. Big. Strange. He remembered eyes, like an animal's. They stared straight into his soul in a weird, almost primitive way. It was like his lizard brain kicked in and told him to run and hide, like a rabbit under the shadow of a hawk.

Josh had a fleeting glimpse of the oranges he'd just bought rolling across the sidewalk, and then all he knew was being back in his apartment, getting sick. How did he get there? Why did he come back? How come he couldn't remember? And what was that thing?

Josh wasn't sure, but he wasn't content to let it go, either.

The focus and determination to see your character's will done. The capacity to stay on target, ignore distractions and to resist coercion or browbeating. Resolve is your character's mental fortitude. His personal conviction. His clarity of vision or spirit. Your character may be easily distracted, unable to concentrate, resolute or single-minded. The trait is pivotal to resisting supernatural forms of mental control; it acts as a veritable defense of the mind. Resolve is valuable to leaders, motivators, soldiers, athletes, police and organizers.

(Note: Resolve is not to be confused with Willpower. Resolve is your character's ongoing focus. Think of it as his long-term purpose, like a career plan. Willpower reflects your character's short-term highs and lows, his ability to dedicate himself in brief efforts to overcome challenges. Resolve does contribute to your character's Willpower dots, though — see p. 95.)

Resisting Coercion

Dice Pool: Resolve + Wits or Resolve + Stamina

Action: Reflexive

Another person seeks to turn your character's mind to her way of thinking, or tries to get him do something for her, possibly through debate, intimidation or threats. The action is probably a contested effort against someone else's Wits-, Intelligence-, Presence- or Manipulation-based roll. Whoever gets the most successes wins. Convincing evidence might impose a -1 to -3 penalty to your character's determination. Especially pointed or compelling threats or applications of torture impose a similar penalty, at the Storyteller's discretion.

A prolonged interrogation or torture session may require extended rolls between parties, made every few minutes, hours or days, as appropriate. See the Interrogation Skill task on p. 81 for more details.

If successes rolled in a contested coercion attempt tie, the subject maintains his own will and does not break down.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Why didn't your character think of that? He is utterly forthcoming with help or information. In fact, there's even more that he could do.

Failure: The request or idea seems perfectly reasonable.

Success: "No way."

Exceptional Success: "No way, and here's how you're wrong," or "All I know is (insert misinformation here)."

Suggested Equipment: "What Would Jesus Do?" keychain (+1), Marine Corp ring or other elite clique token (+2)

Possible Penalties: Questioned or smooth-talked by a friend (-1) or family member (-2), bribed (-1 to -3)

Physical

Strength

"God damn," Martin grunted as he pulled on the drain cover in the basement. Somehow, water was still backing up in the system. Everything else checked out, so it had to be a clog in the outtake to the sewer.

The building was so old that it still had a dirt-floor basement, yet the drain cover was stuck like a son of a bitch.

"I could dig around it," Martin thought, "but that would take time." This was the last place he wanted to be pulling late hours. The whole building and the guy who hired him really gave him the creeps. It was like the guy resented Martin being there, as if the plumber was intruding on something the guy wanted for himself.

"Fuck it," Martin thought, and went to his truck to get a crowbar. Jamming it between grilles, he pried with everything he had. He pushed so hard he thought he was going to piss himself, when the cover cracked loose with a clang.

Aiming his flashlight down the hole, Martin saw something he couldn't explain. Like a man who'd done this work for years, he reached down the pipe to his shoulder. When he pulled his arm free, his hand was coated red.

Physical might. Sheer bodily power. The capacity to lift objects, move items, hit things and people, and do damage. Strength is a measure of muscle. Your character could be 98-pound weakling, he could carry a spare tire, or he could be lean and cut or bulky and brawny. Your character's Strength score is used in hand-to-hand combat. This trait is instrumental to laborers, thugs, athletes, brawlers and law-enforcement agents.

Strength, along with Dexterity, is a factor in determining your character's Speed. (See p. 95.) Strength is also added to Brawl or Weaponry attacks to determine the amount of harm your character inflicts in combat. (See p. 150.)

Breaking Down a Barrier

See "Breaking down a door" and "Kicking out a grille" on p. 137 in Chapter 6.

Lifting/Moving Objects

Dice Pool: Strength (+ Stamina)

Action: Instant

Lifting and moving objects involves brute force; might over matter. In some cases, however, Stamina plays a part. Power alone doesn't have immediate effects, but power combined with the endurance to apply it does.

All people can accomplish feats of strength in momentary efforts, depending on their muscle mass. Working together, people can combine their might to accomplish tasks. Add all participants' Strength scores and refer to the chart below to gauge what can be moved just by spending an action (no Strength roll is necessary). To exceed this limit, a Strength + Stamina roll is required,

Strength	Feat	Lift
1	Lift a chair	40 lbs.
2	Lift a large dog	100 lbs.
3	Lift a public mailbox	250 lbs.
4	Lift a wooden crate	400 lbs.
5	Lift a coffin	650 lbs.
6	Lift a refrigerator	800 lbs.
7	Overturn a small car	900 lbs.
8	Lift a motorcycle	1000 lbs.
9	Overturn a mid-sized car	1200 lbs.
10	Lift a large tree trunk	1500 lbs.
11	Overturn a full-sized car	2000 lbs.
12	Lift a wrecking ball	3000 lbs.
13	Overturn a station wagon	4000 lbs.
14	Overturn a van	5000 lbs.
15	Overturn a truck	6000 lbs.

with successes achieved added to your character's Strength score to determine what kind of task he can accomplish in that action. In a group effort to move something really heavy, a Strength + Stamina roll is made for each supporting participant. Successes rolled are added to a primary actor's roll as bonus dice. (See "Teamwork," p. 134, for full rules on cooperating this way.)

If your character's modified Strength total exceeds that required to lift an object, it can be relocated as desired. If his Strength total matches that required to lift an object, it can be moved about a yard.

The chart indicates how much a character can lift, but that amount represents a focused, one-time act. That weight isn't what he can walk around holding and wearing, day to day. Your character can realistically carry/tote 25 pounds per dot of Strength without penalty. If he attempts to carry more, every action involving physical exertion incurs an automatic -1 penalty for every 25 pounds of excess gear that he has. Furthermore, every 25 pounds he piles on beyond what he can carry reduces his Speed by one. Perhaps he can actually lift everything he's wearing and holding, but he can't go anywhere with it. The Storyteller makes the final call on what your character may realistically carry.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The item is dropped and/or a level of bashing damage is incurred.

Failure: Nothing is added to Strength.

Success: One or more is added to Strength.

Exceptional Success: Five or more is added to Strength and the character looks really impressive while performing his mighty feat.

Suggested Equipment: Convenient handholds +1, lifting belt (+1)

Possible Penalties: Slippery conditions (-1), lack of handholds (-1), "It's been a long day" (-1)

Dexterity

Josh had retraced his steps back to where he fell, to where he saw that thing. He turned on the sidewalk, surveying his neighborhood. It wasn't the best place to live, but he couldn't afford any better. The worst of it was the bums and homeless, but they left him alone if he gave them some change.

Josh snapped out of his daydream and realized that he'd been staring glassy-eyed at the alley across the street. There was something about it. He shook his head to clear it and waited for a couple cars to pass.

The alley lay between rundown tenements and ran past an old parking lot. No one parked there anymore. Cardboard boxes and scattered blankets used by bums blocked the way. Josh almost turned back, not wanting to piss off the street people, but then he remembered how angry he got back home.

He steeled himself and headed down the alley. Almost immediately, open hands reached out from what looked like heaps of trash or discarded clothing as the homeless muttered for money. After a moment, their pleas turned to angry

shouts as Josh ventured further into their territory. Panicking, Josh jumped up the chain-link fence next to him. It was the closest escape route. He wished he hadn't when he got to the barbwire at the top, but forced himself upward and over. He didn't quite make it, and the rusted steel tore through his pants and into his leg.

Quickness. Response time. A delicate touch. Dexterity indicates how quickly and with how much finesse your character responds to his physical world. While high Wits dots helps your character spot trouble, high Dexterity dots help him react to it, whether with a counteraction or to simply get the hell out of the way. Dexterity also helps with hand-eye coordination, be it to fire an accurate shot, to juggle objects or to perform delicate jobs such as handle explosives. Your character might be sluggish, clumsy, slight, quick or nimble. Dexterity is invaluable to criminals, sports stars, surgeons and dancers.

Dexterity, along with Strength, is a factor in determining your character's Speed. (See p. 95.) Dexterity is also combined with Composure to determine your character's Initiative in a fight. (See p. 151.)

Defense

Derived Traits: Dexterity or Wits

Action: Reflexive

The lowest of a character's Dexterity or Wits is used to determine his Defense trait, which is subtracted from incoming Brawl, Weaponry and throwing attacks. See p. 152 for more information

Stamina

Becky thanked the pizza guy absently as she closed her apartment door. His nose wrinkled in distaste, not because she failed to tip him but because of the smell of her room, because of her greasy hair and because of her clearly unwashed appearance.

Becky never noticed the silent insult. She hadn't really noticed anything for weeks. In fact, eating had become something that she had to remind herself to do. Now it was the book that consumed her. Even as she pushed aside scattered and wadded up papers to sit down, she kept her nose in the book. It demanded every ounce of her attention. Translating and understanding it had become her obsession. It superceded sleep, food, even her thesis. At first, she hoped the book would be invaluable to her research. Now she pored over it for its own sake. If she kept studying, kept interpreting. She knew comprehension would come.

As the night wore on, Becky continued to work. The pizza box went unopened.

Sturdiness. Steadfastness. Sheer physical resilience. Stamina is a measure of how tough your character is. It indicates how far she can push her body, and how much physical abuse she can endure. Your character might be sickly and frail, or hardy and unstoppable. Bouncers, brawlers, triathletes, survivalists, heavy lifters and workaholics thrive on Stamina.

Stamina, along with Size, is a factor in determining your character's Health dots. (See p. 90.)

Holding Breath

Dice Pool: Stamina

Action: Reflexive

A character can hold her breath for a number of turns based on her Stamina dots, as follows:

Stamina	Time*
•	30 seconds
••	One minute
•••	Two minutes
••••	Four minutes
•••••	Eight minutes
••••••	15 minutes
•••••••	30 minutes

* If your character is in combat, she can hold her breath for one *turn* per Stamina dot.

When she has reached her normal limit, a Stamina roll is made to continue. Each success grants 30 extra seconds (or one extra turn per success in combat). When she can no longer hold her breath, she begins suffocating/drowning. She suffers one lethal Health wound per turn. (Werewolves and other living supernatural creatures cannot regenerate this damage until they can breathe again. Since vampires and the walking dead don't breathe, they cannot suffocate or drown.)

Resisting Poison or Disease

Dice Pool: Stamina + Resolve

Action: Reflexive (potentially extended)

Toxins or ailments affect people only in so far as these afflictions can overcome bodily resistance, and often the personal imperative to remain healthy. The human body can fight back against foreign substances and illness, but determination to resist goes a long way toward recovery, too.

Mere exposure to an illness or poison might call for a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll to determine if your character falls victim. If the roll is successful, he remains healthy or immune. If the roll fails, the symptoms kick in.

If an affliction has long-term effects, efforts to fight back might call for extended and reflexive Stamina + Resolve rolls. They might be made every turn or hour for a poison, or every hour, day or week for a disease. The total number of successes needed to overcome might be 10 for a weak poison or 30 for a virulent disease. The victim suffers from any effects of the illness while it is being fought. The Storyteller might impose a limit on the number of rolls that can be made before a severe condition proves fatal. If required successes aren't accumulated by then, your character dies.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The toxin wins over all; your character's will is shattered. Penalties or damage imposed

by the condition become more severe, intensifying by one. All accumulated successes are lost and the Storyteller decides when — or if — your character ever recovers.

Failure: The intruding effect takes or continues to take its course.

Success: In a simple reflexive roll, the condition is resisted. In an extended roll, some progress is made in resisting the condition, but symptoms persist until the illness is defeated completely (when required successes are accumulated).

Exceptional Success: "Rumors of my death are exaggerated." Your character goes immune or makes rapid progress toward recovery.

Suggested Equipment: Healthy diet (+1), antibiotics (+2), cutting-edge wonder drugs (+3)

Possible Penalties: Injuries (-1 to -3), bad diet (-1), lack of medication (-1 to -3), lack of sleep (-1 to -2)

Social

Presence

Martin was stunned. He wasn't sure how long he stared at the blood on his hand, bewildered by what it might mean. Was the guy who owned the place some kind of psycho, killing people and pouring their blood down the drain? He wasn't sure, but he finally decided that he didn't want to find out. It was weird, though. It was like he couldn't think straight. This should have scared the shit out of him, and here he was kind of out of it, like he'd had a few.

When he got upstairs, he realized the lights were on. It was already dusk outside, given the last light coming in through the windows. "When did that happen," he wondered. "I meant to—"

His thought went unfinished. Standing before him at the foot of the stairs was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. Normally, he didn't go for brunettes. They reminded him of his ex-, but somehow this one made it work. Did she ever.

"What was I doing?" Martin muttered, but no answer came.

The woman's dark eyes contrasted her pale skin, and focused intently on the blood on Martin's hand, on the blood that he'd absently smeared across his shirt.

"Did you hurt yourself?" the woman asked. "Here, let me make it better."

Bearing. Stature. Assertiveness. Presence suggests the power of your character's very identity. Attractiveness is only part of the trait. Your character may be jaw-dropping gorgeous, plain-Jane or downright ugly, but her Presence means much more. It reflects her sheer command over the attention of others. It's her capacity to impose her will on others by being socially aggressive or powerful — a veritable bull in a china shop or someone who simply doesn't accept no for an answer. This trait is essential to





leaders, enforcers, interrogators, models, politicians and salespeople.

Note that attractiveness alone is represented by the Striking Looks Merit (p. 117), which grants bonus dice to Presence rolls.

Manipulation

“What the fuck am I doing?” Josh wondered as he picked his way down the trash-strewn hallway. “This is exactly where I didn’t want to go.”

He had evaded the homeless people in the alley, but then had nowhere to go except into one of the old tenements. His leg burned from the long scratches the fence left him. He hoped his tetanus shot was up to date; he couldn’t remember. The place smelled like piss. He could hear music blaring somewhere, and a baby crying. “Who could raise a kid here?” he wondered.

He didn’t have time to think about the answer, though. His eyes were suddenly drawn from the stained carpet to the light at the end of the hall. Three shapes filled it. Two more turned the corner behind him. They were the people from outside. Maybe they weren’t so homeless, after all.

On the verge of panic once again, Josh recognized one of the men. “Hey, Eddy, it’s me, Josh. What’s going on?”

The five dirty, disheveled men stopped a few feet away, with menacing looks on their faces. “What are you doing here, Josh?” Eddy asked.

“I was looking for somethi— a guy. I thought I saw him go in here. Maybe you could help me find him? I think I got a couple bucks...”

“We don’t want your fucking money.”

For a second, Josh wondered if he saw that same bestial look that he’d seen earlier that day — but this time in Eddy’s eyes.

Charm. Persuasiveness. Charisma. The capacity to play upon the desires, hopes and needs of others to influence them. Manipulation reflects your character’s finesse in social situations. How well he can appeal to, gain the favor of and generally coerce others. Manipulation is applied to win smiles, to put people at ease or to gain favors. Where Presence deals in social force, Manipulation focuses on social subtlety. It’s the tool and trade of businesspeople, politicians, salesfolk and publicists. Your character may be a wallflower, he could frequently make off-color statements, he might have a winning smile and a hardy handshake, or he may be able to sell sand in the desert.

Composure

“Do you understand now?” the priest asked.

Becky was in shock. Moments before, she’d stormed to her door, ready to unleash her frustration on whomever had dared to interrupt her. Her research had not gone well. The

meaning or purpose of the book still eluded her, and she was at the end of her rope.

Once she recovered sufficiently from the shock of finding a priest at her door, she answered. "What?"

"Do you understand now? About the book? About what it says?"

Becky continued her look of disbelief. How could this perfect stranger — and a man of the cloth — know anything about her, or more importantly the book?

"I see," he continued as he let himself in and shut the door.

Becky didn't object. She could scarcely complete a thought.

"You might be confused. I understand. Rest assured, though, you're the one. The book chose you. It knows you're ready. Well, almost. That's why I'm here. I'm here to help open your eyes." And with that, everything Becky had stared at and studied moved about in her mind like the pieces of a puzzle. They spun, crisscrossed and overlapped — and finally formed a complete picture. Looking at it was like looking at the sun. It was like staring into the void and knowing that the void stared back. In that moment, Becky's mind snapped.

Poise. Dignity. The capacity to remain calm and appear — and actually be — unfazed in social and threatening situations, usually harrowing ones. Your character might lose his temper at the slightest perceived insult, collapse emotionally under a mere pretense, weather a storm of verbal (or literal) slings and arrows, or have the nerve to look unspeakable horror in the eye. This trait is a measure of emotional fortitude, restraint and calm. It's ideal among leaders, soldiers, moderators and anyone whose movements are public consumption. Composure is vital to resisting social influence and pressure — overt, covert or otherworldly.

Composure is pivotal to resisting supernatural forms of emotional control; it acts as a veritable emotional defense. The trait is also vital to efforts among supernatural beings such as vampires and werewolves to restrain themselves when their blood is raised and frenzy threatens.

Composure, along with Resolve, is a factor in determining your character's Willpower. (See p. 95.) Composure is also added to Dexterity to determine your character's Initiative at the beginning of a fight. (See p. 151.)

Meditation

Dice Pool: Composure + Wits + equipment

Action: Extended (4 successes; one roll represents 30 minutes)

Meditation is a means of relaxation and reflection that is useful to counterbalance daily stresses and to restore one's emotional center. It helps to filter out extraneous influences and allows a person to re-dedicate herself to personal beliefs, values and aspirations. For game purposes, this practice has a powerful effect on maintaining emotional balance and bolstering one's moral resolve in the face of potential degeneration (the decline of one's Morality, as explained on p. 91).

Performing a successful meditation session requires at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted time in which your character turns her attention inward and tunes out the world. Each roll represents one such 30-minute segment, and meditation sessions can potentially run for several hours as the practitioner struggles with life's distractions and seeks her focus. Situational modifiers such as the character's mental and physical condition and environmental distractions can apply. Four successes are required for a rewarding effort. If successful, your character gains a +1 bonus on her next degeneration roll. This bonus lasts until that degeneration roll is made or until the character sleeps, whichever comes first. Once she awakens, she has to meditate again in order to reclaim the bonus. Once the degeneration roll has been made, she can meditate again for a bonus on her next roll, even if she hasn't slept yet.

Suggested Equipment: Yoga mat (+1), prayer beads (+1), meditative music or relaxation tapes (+2), meditation room (+3)

Possible Penalties: Loud noises (-1), nearby children (-1), uncomfortable environment (-1), lack of sleep (-1 to -2), lack of food (-1 to -3)





“I don’t know why I did it. I mean, I loved Tony. I didn’t want to hurt him. Not intentionally. But I guess a part of me must have, right? I mean, why would I go off with that other guy?”

“But you did go off with him. And now Tony’s dead. How does that make you feel?”

Tamara scowled at the psychiatrist. “How the fuck do you think I feel?” Tamara thought. She took a tissue and snorted into it. “All right, I fucked up. But I’m not like that. I never cheated on him before. When it happened, he got so mad that he went after the guy.”

“This isn’t about Tony. It’s about you. Tony’s anger is... was... his own problem. I’m not blaming you, Tamara. I’m here to help you. It’s important that we’re honest with one another. If we hold our anger in, it only eats away at us.”

Tamara didn’t want any of this, but her parents forced her into it. Therapy. Screw it. Nobody ever got better by talking. There were other ways to feel good, ways that didn’t involve words. But here was this psychiatrist, Ms. Van Heuvel, a meddling bitch who showed up at her parents’ house, sent over by the cops. Well, ‘recommended’ by them. At least, that’s what she thought she’d heard.

“Tamara,” Ms. Van Heuvel said. “Tell me about the man you left the bar with. Who was he?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t know him. He was hot, though. Hottest thing I’d ever seen. Hell, even you would have gone with him.” Tamara winced. She hadn’t meant to say that.

“Go on,” Ms. Van Heuvel continued, unshaken.

“We... we went out back, to the alley. I know that sounds slutty, but... God, I guess I just wanted him. I don’t know why. I just did. He had this way about him.”

“Did he bite your lip? Is that what I read in the police report?”

Tamara frowned. “Uh... no. I... well, there was blood in my mouth, so yeah, I guess he must have.”

“Blood? His blood or yours?”

“Huh? I... Ohmigod. It was his! How did you know? I didn’t remember that until just now. It was freaky. He gave me some of his blood... and I drank it.”

“Did you like it?”

Tamara looked at Ms. Van Heuvel nervously. The psychiatrist had a strange look on her face.

“Because if you did, I can make sure you get all you want.”

Chapter 3: Skills

A character's Attributes measure his innate physical, mental and social qualities — how strong he is, how quick he thinks on his feet, and how well he interacts with other people. The different ways in which a character can apply these Attributes are determined by his Skills. A character's Skills reflect the education and training he's acquired over the course of his life, and are a reflection of his origins and interests. Skills can be acquired in any number of ways, from institutionalized learning to hard, hands-on experience. A young recruit at the police academy is trained to use a handgun, while a gangbanger learns to shoot as a matter of survival.

Like Attributes, Skills are broken down into three general categories: Mental, Physical and Social. A character's initial Skills are purchased during character creation and are prioritized in the same manner as Attributes, with 11 points to allocate among primary Skills, seven points to allocate among secondary Skills, and four points to allocate among tertiary Skills. Skill dots can then be increased further using experience points (both at the conclusion of character creation if the Storyteller allows it, and later during play). Or new Skills can be purchased during a chronicle at the player's discretion. For more information on selecting Skills for starting characters, see p. 34.

*Time and again, foul
things attacked me,
lurking and stalking, but I
lashed out,
gave as good as I got with
my sword.
My flesh was not for
feasting on,
there would be no mon-
sters gnawing and gloating
over their banquet at the
bottom of the sea.
— Beowulf, translated by
Seamus Heaney*

Skill Dots

Skills are rated from 1 to 5, with each score suggesting your character's relative level of proficiency and knowledge in that area.

Dots Proficiency Level

- Novice. Basic knowledge and/or techniques.
- Practitioner. Solid working knowledge and/or techniques.
- Professional. Broad, detailed knowledge and/or techniques.
- Expert. Exceptional depth of knowledge and/or techniques.
- Master. Unsurpassed depth of knowledge and/or techniques. A leader in the field.

Skill Specialties

Skills represent broad bases of knowledge and physical training in a given subject. An auto mechanic doesn't just know about fixing engines, for example, but is versed in repairing tires, replacing windows and painting the body. In addition to this broad foundation of knowledge, characters can specialize in a particular aspect of a Skill, giving them an edge in a particular application due to their increased focus. There's no limit to the number of Specialties that your character can have in a single Skill. You choose three Specialties at character creation. Any more must be purchased during play with experience points. Rolls involving a Skill Specialty gain a +1 modifier over and above any other situational modifiers. So, if your character has Crafts, but also has a Specialty in Automobiles, you gain a +1 bonus when he works on cars.

You are limited only by your imagination when devising your character's Skill Specialties, although their focus should be fairly specific. A character possessing the Drive Skill might focus on sports cars, trucks, off-road or high-

speed driving. Each Skill listed in this chapter has a number of suggested Specialties to give you an idea of the possibilities.

Skill Tasks

If a Skill represents a particular body of knowledge or training, a Skill task describes a specific application of the Skill in question. Healing Wounds, for example, is a task describing an application of the Medicine Skill. Skill tasks combine an applicable Attribute with the Skill, plus any relevant equipment modifiers to form a dice pool, minus any situational modifiers. Climbing a steep cliff, for example, is a Skill task combining Strength + Athletics + equipment such as rope, pitons and cleats. Many Skills in this chapter have one or more tasks associated with them that suggest different ways in which the traits can be applied in various situations. Use these as guidelines for determining other Skill tasks that arise in your stories.

The Right Tools for the Job

Having the proper equipment for a task can often mean the difference between success and failure. In addition to situational modifiers and Specialties, Skill rolls gain bonus dice if your character uses high-quality or specialized equipment when performing a feat. For example, a driver with a high-performance sports car has an edge in a race over someone in an old pickup. See “Equipment,” p. 139, in Chapter 6 for more information on the gear available to your character. Each task presented in this chapter lists a variety of tools that could provide bonus dice to your Skill roll. These lists are by no means exhaustive. You’re encouraged to employ other types of tools or equipment to assist in performing a task, but the Storyteller is the final arbiter on what bonus, if any, gear provides. It’s possible that using poor-quality tools might even make a task more difficult to perform, so choose wisely.

Mental Skills

Mental Skills are applications of a character’s insight, acumen and focus, such as examining a crime scene for clues, unraveling an enigma or diagnosing an illness. These Skills are almost entirely gained from a period of formal education, and most characters with high Mental Skills can claim a degree or even a doctorate in their field of study. These traits are generally associated with your character’s Mental Attributes, but can also be paired with Physical Attributes for hands-on applications such as performing surgery (Dexterity + Medicine) or computer repair (Dexterity + Crafts).

Untrained Skill Use: If your character doesn’t have the necessary Mental Skill required for an action, she can still make the attempt. Roll her Attribute alone, but with a -3 penalty.

Academics

Doctor Carlton’s library was a shambles. Bookshelves leaned on broken supports as if drunk, and piles of antiquated tomes lay scattered amid bits of broken glass and ceramic on the carpeted floor. Julia picked her way through the debris to Carlton’s desk and examined a large, leather-bound book resting on the ink-stained blotter. “It’s his journal,” she said, running a slim finger over the careful lines of script. “The last thing he wrote looks like Latin: ‘mali principii malus finis.’”

“The bad end of a bad beginning,” Stapleton translated, bleakly surveying the damage from the doorway. “I told him that damned idol would be the death of him.”

Academics is a broad-based Skill that represents a character’s degree of higher education and general knowledge in the Arts and Humanities — everything from English to history, economics to law. Dots in this Skill do not directly correlate to a given level of education. Your character could have entered a doctorate program but spent more time partying than studying, resulting in low dots. Conversely, a self-taught individual who read voraciously and studied intensively could have high dots without ever earning a diploma.

Possessed by: College graduates, executives, lawyers, librarians, scholars, students

Specialties: Anthropology, Art, English, History, Law, Religion, Research

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character fails to remember crucial facts, incorrectly informing his actions. A character with a history background may remember an incorrect set of dates that completely alters his theory on a certain event, or a former art student might incorrectly identify a painting as a worthless copy instead of a priceless original.

Failure: Your character is unable to summon the necessary information. It’s on the tip of his tongue, but the name, date or reference eludes him.

Success: Your character is able to summon the necessary knowledge to serve his needs.

Exceptional Success: Your character recalls or knows especially obscure or detailed facts that give him additional insight into the matter at hand. She not only identifies a particular work of art but recalls that the artist was renowned for his fascination with demons and the occult.

Research

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Academics + equipment

Action: Extended (3-10+ successes; each roll represents 30 minutes of research)

Researching information is a fairly straightforward task that involves querying libraries and databases. Roll Intelligence + Academics + equipment. The number of successes required depends on the complexity and/or obscurity of the desired information. A simple set of facts might demand three successes to obtain, while a little-known or difficult-to-find reference might demand 10 or



more successes to uncover. Depending on the quality of the libraries or databases available, the Storyteller may grant a +1 or higher modifier to task rolls.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character obtains flawed or inaccurate information that leads him to draw incorrect conclusions about the subject.

Failure: Your character makes no progress in locating the information he's after.

Success: Your character makes progress in his search for information.

Exceptional Success: Your character is well on his way to discovering the elusive information he's after. If the roll provides enough successes to push the total well above the amount necessary to complete the task (by five or more), he gains additional information pertinent to his research, providing greater detail and insight into the subject.

Suggested Equipment: Library card (+1), Internet connection (+1), access to a university library (+2), access to government databases (+3)

Possible Penalties: Unusual topic (-1), obscure topic (-2), limited library or database (-2)

Computer

The photo was a grainy digital reproduction, but the faces of the uniformed men were clear enough to be recognizable. Carla pointed a trembling finger at one of them. "That's Mr. Denisov. Oh my God, where did you get this?"

As grim as the situation was, Robert couldn't help but smile. "There's a newsgroup dedicated to supernatural research conducted by the Soviets during World War II. You can find damn near anything on the net if you know where to look."

Characters possessing this Skill have the necessary training or experience to operate a computer. At high levels (3 or more), a character can create his own computer programs. People with high levels in this Skill are familiar with a variety of programming languages and operating systems.

Note that dots in Computer do not apply to manually fixing or building machines, only to operating them. Construction and repair is the province of the Crafts Skill (see below).

Possessed by: Businesspeople, professors, programmers, students, sysadmins

Specialties: Artificial Intelligence, Data Retrieval, Graphics, Hacking, Internet

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character has caused a system crash, interrupting any work in progress and forcing him to start his efforts from scratch. Data may be lost at the Storyteller's discretion.

Failure: The task your character attempts to execute does not go off properly or the database query he makes returns no useful information.

Success: Your character's function executes properly or his queries come back with the correct information.

Exceptional Success: Your character's program or function executes more quickly and efficiently than expected.

Hacking

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Computer + equipment versus Intelligence + Computer + equipment

Action: Extended and contested (5-10+ successes; each roll represents 30 minutes of programming)

Gaining root access to a network requires talent, creativity and patience, and often results in a battle of wits with the system's administrator(s). Before the hacking attempt begins, the Storyteller determines the network's level of security. If there is a system administrator on duty, the hacking attempt is an extended and contested action. If the network is protected by basic security software alone, the task is simply an extended action.

In a contested and extended action between hacker and sysadmin, roll Intelligence + Computer + any equipment modifiers for both participants. The winner is the first to accumulate the required number of successes. The hacker needs to accumulate a number of successes equal to the network's basic security setup. This can be anywhere from five to 10 based on the sophistication of the network. The sysadmin needs to accumulate a number of successes equal to the hacker's Intelligence + Computer. If the hacker wins, he gains unfettered access to the network. If the sysadmin wins, he kicks the hacker out of the network and can block any further attempts from that invader that day.

Example: Greg is hacking into the network of a local financial group, which is protected by an on-duty sysadmin. Greg's Intelligence is 4, his Computer is 3 and he's using an average computer setup (no bonus dice). The sysadmin's Intelligence is 3, his Computer is 3 and he's using a decent system that gives him a +1 modifier. The network's basic security software requires seven successes to be overcome. The sysadmin also needs to accumulate seven successes (the total of Greg's Intelligence + Computer). The first rolls net three successes for Greg and two successes for the sysadmin. Greg needs to gain four more successes to make it past the sysadmin and gain access, while the sysadmin needs to accumulate five more successes to kick the intruder out of his network.

If the network is protected by basic security software alone, the hacker needs to accumulate a number of successes equal to the network's basic security setup, as above.

Example: Later, Greg tries to hack into the network of the city's Department of Motor Vehicles. The DMV network doesn't have a sysadmin on duty, so the task is an extended roll. The network's basic security software requires six successes to be overcome, so Greg simply needs to keep hacking at the system (and not suffer any dramatic failures) to get in.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A dramatic failure on the part of the hacker indicates that he's been kicked out of the network and can't access it again for 24 hours. Worse, if a sysadmin contests the task, make another Intelligence + Computer roll to determine if the admin manages to gain the IP address of the hacker. A dramatic failure on the part of the sysadmin indicates that the hacker brushes aside his efforts and penetrates the network automatically.

Failure: Your character does not succeed in making any headway in his effort.

Success: Your character makes progress in his effort.

Exceptional Success: Your character has found a vulnerability he can exploit against his opponent, giving him a substantial advantage (as reflected in the number of successes you achieve in one roll).

Suggested Equipment: High-performance computer (+1 to +3), broadband Internet access (+1), disk of scripts (+2), system passwords (+3)

Possible Penalties: Outdated computer system (-2), slow Internet connection (-3)

Crafts

Howard pressed the carving tool gently against the smoothly spinning wood, shaving off a steady curl of pine with the whispery, scratching sound that he once loved. He hadn't been down in his workshop since Angela died. He'd forgotten how much he enjoyed working with his hands.

He heard the basement door open, and Martha's voice, heavy as lead, sank down the stairs. "Dad? What are you doing down there?"

"Just a quick project, hon," he called back over his shoulder. "Should be done in a few more minutes."

"Okay. Listen... I'm going to start cleaning out mom's stuff. I could use some help."

Howard put down the carving tool and switched off the lathe. He tried to keep his voice even. "I've got to go out for a while today. Can it wait till I get back?"

Not waiting for an answer, he undid the clamps and pulled the chair leg from the lathe. The end was now tapered to a fine, strong point.

Crafts represents a character's training or experience in creating works of physical art or construction with his hands, from paintings to car engines to classical sculpture. Characters possessing this Skill typically have the knowledge, but not necessarily the tools or facilities to make use of their capabilities. A character might be an

exceptional mechanic, for example, but still needs to sweet-talk his boss into opening up the garage after-hours to work on his friend's car. Crafting a piece of art or creating an object is almost always an extended roll, with the length of time and number of successes required determined by the complexity of the piece. The Storyteller has final say on the time required and the number of successes needed for a particular item.

Possessed by: Contractors, mechanics, plumbers, sculptors, welders

Specialties: Automobiles, Aircraft, Forging, Jury-Rigging, Sculpting, Sewing

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character makes a horrible mistake in creating the piece, ruining it in the process. The chisel hits a flaw in the stone, shattering the statue, or he over-tightens the pipe, stripping the threads. He must begin the job from scratch.

Failure: Your character makes no progress in creating the item in question.

Success: Your character makes progress in crafting the piece (apply successes rolled toward the total needed).

Exceptional Success: Your character makes substantial progress in crafting the piece — a sudden burst of inspiration or a breakthrough in fabrication speeds up the process dramatically (apply successes rolled toward the total needed).

Create Art

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + equipment

Action: Extended (4-15+ successes; one roll equals 30 minutes of work)

Your character sets out to create a piece of art, whether it's a painting, drawing or sculpture. It's quicker and easier to create a clay bowl or doodle than a life-size replica or mural. The former may call for only four successes while the latter may call for 15 or more, and hours of effort.

Creating poems, songs, novels or speeches calls for the Expression Skill (see p. 80).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: There's a terrible accident and your character's work or tools are destroyed or the creation bears an inherent, embarrassing flaw that he cannot see.

Failure: Your character makes no headway in his project.

Success: Your character makes progress in his project.

Exceptional Success: Your character makes dramatic progress in creating the item, likely well ahead of schedule.

Suggested Equipment: High-grade tool set (+1), high-quality marble or clay (+1), high-tech tools (laser leveler, saws with laser guides) (+2), specialized sculpting tools (+2), extensive reference library (+2), garage (+3), carpentry shop (+3)

Possible Penalties: Poor-quality tool set (-1), poor-quality materials (-1), lack of reference library (-1), improvised work area (-1)

Repair Item

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Crafts + equipment

Action: Extended (4-10 successes; one roll equals 30 minutes of work)

Repairing a damaged item is an extended action, requiring a number of successes depending on the extent of the repairs and the overall difficulty of the job. Changing a spark plug in a car might require only four successes, while rebuilding the entire engine might demand 15 or more. As a general rule, one success is required on an extended roll to repair one point of damage to a broken object's Structure. (See "Objects," p. 135.)

Many repairs require specific tools and/or facilities. If your character does not have all the necessary equipment available, a -1 modifier applies. If he does not have any of the necessary tools to fix the item, the Storyteller may declare that the task is impossible.

Example: *Shae is asked by a friend to fix a damaged computer. Shae's Dexterity is 3 and his Crafts (with a Computer Specialty) is 2. He has all the proper electronics and tools to make the repair, so there is no negative modifier to the rolls, but his equipment is of average quality and doesn't give a bonus. His dice pool therefore consists of six dice. Repairing the computer is a fairly complicated task, so the Storyteller determines that it will take seven successes to complete. Five rolls (and two-and-a-half hours) later, the necessary successes are accumulated and the computer is fixed.*

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character fails to make any repairs on the item and actively worsens its condition. Each dramatic failure *increases* the number of successes required to complete repairs by one or more.

Failure: Your character fails to make any headway in repairing the item.

Success: Your character makes progress in completing the repair.

Exceptional Success: Your character makes dramatic progress in repairing the item, likely well ahead of schedule.

Suggested Equipment: High-grade tool set (+1), high-quality materials (+1), high-tech tools (laser leveler, saws with laser guides) (+2), specialized sculpting tools (+2), extensive reference library (+2), garage (+3), carpentry shop (+3)

Possible Penalties: Poor-quality tool set (-1), poor-quality materials (-1), lack of reference library (-1), improvised work area (-1)

Investigation

All the other detectives were convinced. An arsonist had set the hotel fire and vandalized the fire hydrant out front so firefighters couldn't put out the blaze. But Janet wasn't so sure. The hydrant was literally ripped from of its moorings. Who could do that without something like a truck and tow chains? Who could do that so quickly, without being seen? She contemplated the answer as she picked through the building's smoldering remains. When she stumbled across a charred wooden stake, she knew something was not as it seemed.

Investigation is the art and science of solving mysteries, examining seemingly disparate evidence to find a connection, answering riddles and overcoming paradoxes. It not only allows your character to get into the head of a killer to grasp his motives or plans, it allows her to look beyond the mundane world to guess at answers to mysterious problems, or to have a “eureka” moment that offers insight into baffling circumstances. Your character might realize that all murder victims have the same digits jumbled in their phone numbers, she might interpret a dream that has striking similarities to events in the real world, or she could recognize why an intruder took the time to paint a room red. Certain individuals such as law-enforcement officers, forensic specialists, scientists and investigators are trained in the art of examination, while others simply develop the knack through years of practice.

Note that Investigation is different from the perception Attribute task detailed on p. 45. Perception (Wits + Composure or Wits + another Skill) is typically checked when a character could spot something unusual or amiss when she isn't actually looking for it. Investigation-based rolls are typically made when a character *actively* studies a situation. Dots in Investigation don't give a character sudden insight or capability in the realms of other Skills, however. She can't miraculously identify changing brushstrokes in a painting, for example. That would be the realm of Academics or Crafts. But she might identify how the placement of paintings throughout a house creates a pattern and imparts a message.

Possessed by: Criminals, doctors, forensic examiners, police officers, scientists, scholars, soldiers

Specialties: Artifacts, Body Language, Crime Scenes, Cryptography, Dreams, Autopsy Diagnoses, Puzzles, Riddles, Scientific Experiments

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character studies an individual or situation and draws an incorrect conclusion or focuses on the wrong details.

Failure: Your character fails to notice the details or information for which she searches. It might be right under her nose but she overlooks it.

Success: Your character studies the situation or problem and finds useful details that answer her questions. A single success might be sufficient to solve a simple puzzle,

but more successes may be required to gather extensive clues. The Storyteller may offer small insights with each success in an examination, starting with the obvious and ending with the obscure.

Exceptional Success: Your character studies and not only discovers useful details about a person or situation, but notices additional clues that provide more in-depth information. Not only have the murder victims at two separate scenes been killed elsewhere and dumped, they both possess matchbooks from the same bar.

Examining a Crime Scene

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + equipment

Action: Extended (3-10+ successes; one roll represents 10 minutes of activity)

Examining a crime scene involves studying evidence and clues to piece together useful facts about events, perpetrators or a mystery. Roll Wits + Investigation. Each roll represents 10 minutes of observation and interpretation, and possibly referencing databases and calling expert witnesses. Depending on the size of the crime scene and the complexity and obscurity of details, the task could demand anywhere from three to 10 successes (or more) for your character to make sense of things.

Unlike many tasks, this isn't an all-or-nothing effort. If your character has to abandon the project before it's completed, he may still come away with some useful information depending on the number of successes earned. The Storyteller should share information each time a roll yields a success, starting with the most obvious facts and revealing increasingly obscure bits as the investigation continues. At no time should the player know how many successes are needed to complete the analysis — he should always wonder whether his character should invest a little more time and dig deeper. Storytellers may choose to make these rolls for players in secret to add uncertainty and suspense.

Example: Janet is called to the scene of a murder at a local park. Taking stock of the situation, she studies the area around the body to try and piece together what happened. The Storyteller decides that it takes eight successes to gather all the clues available. Janet's Wits is 3 and her Investigation is 2. The first roll is 5,6,7,8,9. With two successes, Janet has gathered a quarter of the information available. The Storyteller reveals that the victim died due to massive blood loss, but there are no bloodstains around the corpse. At this point, Janet can continue to investigate or decide that she's seen enough and move on.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character draws incorrect conclusions from the information she gathers.

Failure: Your character uncovers no useful information.

Success: Your character uncovers useful information, but is that all there is to learn?

Exceptional Success: Your character gains a wealth of useful information from a few minutes' careful study.



Suggested Equipment: Forensic kit (+1), surveillance gear (parabolic mikes, night-vision goggles, laser mikes) (+1), unrestricted access to the scene (+2), access to government databases (+3)

Possible Penalties: Weather obscures scene (-1 to -3), scene has been compromised by intruders (-1 to -5), lack of forensic equipment (-3)

Solving Enigmas

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Investigation + equipment

Action: Instant or extended (3-10+ successes; one roll represents one hour of activity)

A man scrawls a bizarre message before he dies. A ghost utters some cryptic, haunting words that are the clues to freeing the spirit from this world. A killer leaves a hint to his next crime. Your character is posed with a perplexing mystery, riddle, puzzle, code or series of clues to contemplate. Sometimes these brainteasers can be solved quickly, such as a short riddle meant to lead your character to his next destination. Such conundrums might be solved with a simple success and an instant action. Other stumpers demand consideration, research, interpretation and/or legwork — an extended action. For your character to understand what “Blue Heron” written in blood means, she needs to look into the murder victim’s past and do research into what the term itself is applied.

Often times, such an enigma goes unsolved until the required successes are gained. Partial insights along the

way aren’t forthcoming, because the elements of the answer don’t make sense until they’re all gathered. When they are, eureka!

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character arrives at the wrong solution. Storytellers may want to make enigma rolls on players’ behalf for this reason.

Failure: Your character does not solve the puzzle or gains no headway toward the answer.

Success: Your character finds a simple answer, or gathers some information or insight toward complete comprehension.

Exceptional Success: Your character arrives at the answer quickly or makes an enormous intuitive leap.

Suggested Equipment: Internet access (+1), code-deciphering computer programs (+2), extensive reference library (+2), extensive library dedicated to the specific subject matter in question (+3)

Possible Penalties: No reference library (-1); distracting phenomena in area, from noise (-1) to dangers (-4); incomplete clues (-1 to -5)

Medicine

The Land Rover’s tires squealed as Anderson took the turn as fast as he dared. Wind whistled through the bullet holes in the windshield. “Jesus Christ!” he yelled, his hands wrestling with the SUV’s steering wheel. “How bad is it?”

Robert was slumped on his side in the back seat, a thin, keening moan escaping his lips. Jenny clambered out of the passenger seat and looked him over. There wasn't much she could see in the shifting bands of light from the street lamps. Biting her lip, she ran her hands over Robert's chest and back. When she held them up to the light, they were red-black with blood. "Shit," she said, noting a froth of bubbles in the blood on her palms. "The bullet's hit his right lung. I need a credit card!"

"What?"

"Plastic! I need something stiff and waterproof that I can use to plug the hole or his lung will collapse! Give me your damn wallet!"

The Medicine Skill reflects a character's training and expertise in human physiology and how to treat injuries and illness. The trait represents knowledge of human anatomy and basic medical treatments. Characters with a low level in this Skill (1 to 2) often possess only rudimentary first-aid training, while characters with high levels (3+) are the equivalent of physicians or surgeons.

Possessed by: Medical students, paramedics, physicians, psychologists, surgeons

Specialties: Emergency Care, Pathology, Pharmaceuticals, Physical Therapy, Surgery

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character has made an improper diagnosis of a patient's condition and his treatment makes the condition worse. The more serious the condition, the greater the harm. Misdiagnosing a cold instead of a virus might only make the sickness last longer, while improperly treating a gunshot wound may result in infection or death.

Failure: Your character's diagnosis or treatment has no effect on the patient's condition.

Success: Your character's diagnosis and treatment improves the patient's condition.

Exceptional Success: Your character's treatment and diagnosis is so effective that the patient's recovery time is decreased.

Healing Wounds

Dice Pool: Dexterity or Intelligence + Medicine + equipment

Action: Extended (one success is required per Health point of damage suffered; each roll represents one minute of work (first aid) or one hour of work (long-term hospital treatment))

Application of the healing arts can help restore a patient's lost Health points. Treatment can occur in the field through first aid or in a doctor's clinic or ER. While medical treatment can stabilize a patient or alleviate his pain, it isn't usually capable of miraculous cures or recoveries. That requires time and rest on the patient's part, and prolonged care.

Dexterity + Medicine may be rolled in the field or ER, while Intelligence + Medicine may be rolled in a lab

or operating room, where science and technology does much of the work of healing injuries. Typically, Dexterity + Medicine is rolled when a patient is dying while being cared for. Intelligence + Medicine is rolled once a patient has been stabilized and can undergo long-term care.

Achieving sufficient successes (equal to the total, overall Health points lost by the patient) restores one Health point lost to bashing damage, in addition to any healing that the character already does under his own power. A patient may regain no more than one "extra" Health point by this means per day. Alternatively, a patient who's bleeding to death or in a coma is stabilized if one success is achieved on the roll. (The loss of Health points to aggravated damage each minute is stopped; see "Incapacitation," p. 173.)

Round-the-clock, intensive care diminishes a patient's injuries, downgrading the nature of wounds by one degree. Thus, a lethal wound can be downgraded to bashing, and an aggravated wound can be downgraded to lethal. Such treatment can occur only in a hospital or other intensive-care facility. An extended Intelligence + Medicine roll is made. The number of successes required is five for a lethal wound and 10 for an aggravated one. Each roll requires an hour.

This kind of treatment always focuses on the worst of the patient's injuries first. Thus, an aggravated wound is downgraded to lethal before a lethal wound is downgraded to bashing. No more than one wound can be downgraded per day of treatment.

Note that this treatment does not eliminate wounds. It simply minimizes them. A patient must heal downgraded injuries completely by himself or receive other treatment to eliminate them.

Example: *Someone has beaten the crap out of Emir. He has lost all of his 7 Health points to lethal damage and is now bleeding to death (acquiring an aggravated wound per minute). Landers discovers Emir and performs first aid. Landers' Dexterity is 2 and Medicine is 2. He must accumulate seven successes to stop the flow of blood and save Emir's life. Three rolls (and minutes) pass before Landers accumulates the required successes, at which point Emir stops incurring aggravated injuries. That leaves him with three aggravated and four lethal wounds. (Until Landers accumulates the number of successes required to stop the bleeding, Emir continues to gain one aggravated wound per minute as he keeps bleeding — see "Incapacitation," p. 173. If Landers' rolls were repeatedly unsuccessful, Emir could have died while being treated.)*

Later, in the hospital, the attending physician puts Emir in intensive care to alleviate the worst of his injuries. The doctor has 4 Intelligence and 4 Medicine, and gains four bonus dice for tools and facilities. In three hours, 10 successes are rolled for him and he reduces one of Emir's aggravated wounds to lethal damage. At least two more days of such successful treatment must pass before Emir's remaining two aggravated wounds are reduced to lethal, one per day. After that, Emir is allowed to recover on his own with rest. It takes two days before he heals one of his lethal

injuries and his right-most Health box is emptied (see “Healing,” p. 175). Before any more time is lost, however, a staggering Emir escapes from the hospital to avoid explanations, to hole up and to plot his revenge.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character’s efforts make the patient’s condition worse instead of better. The subject is moved prematurely or incorrectly, or the wrong medication is administered. The patient loses one Health point to bashing damage and all your character’s accumulated successes are lost. He must start from scratch if he’s to help the patient. If the subject is bleeding to death, an extra wound turns from lethal to aggravated, in addition to that lost for the minute that’s wasted.

Failure: Your character makes no progress in alleviating the patient’s injuries. If the subject is bleeding to death, a wound turns from lethal to aggravated over the course of the wasted minute.

Success: Your character makes progress in alleviating the patient’s injuries. Until you acquire the total number of successes required to stop a patient from bleeding to death, one more of his wounds turns from lethal to aggravated per minute.

Exceptional Success: Your character makes significant progress toward alleviating the patient’s injuries.

Suggested Equipment: Set of surgeon’s tools (scalpels, retractors, clamps) (+1), field surgical kit (+1), military surgical kit (+2), access to surgical facilities (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -4), bad weather (-2), distraction from noise (-1) to imminent danger (-4)

Occult

Samantha flicked on the light in the pantry and scanned the shelves. “C’mon, I know mom keeps a box of the stuff around here somewhere.” Absently, she gestured at Lisa. “Get me the cookie jar on the counter. If there’s anything in it, empty it out.”

Lisa opened the jar and spilled its contents — a scattering of stale crumbs and a small plastic bag with a spare key — and carried the ceramic jar to the kitchen table. “Are you sure this is going to work?”

“Ah! There you are!” Samantha pulled the box of sea salt from one of the top shelves. Back at the table, she poured half the salt into the cookie jar. “Sea salt drains spiritual energy from objects,” she said, fishing Mr. Chamber’s pocket watch from her jacket. “Or, at least, that’s what the book says.”

She dropped the watch into the jar and poured the rest of the salt over it. “I guess we’ll know for sure by midnight,” Samantha said grimly, sealing the jar.

The Occult Skill reflects a character’s knowledge and experience with the world’s various legends and lore about the supernatural. A character with this Skill not only

knows the theories, myths and legends of the occult, but can generally discern “fact” from rumor. Characters may come by this Skill in a variety of ways, from oddball college courses to learning legends and myths from the lips of superstitious family members.

Possessed by: Anthropologists, authors, neo-pagans, occult scholars, parapsychologists

Specialties: Cultural Beliefs, Ghosts, Magic, Monsters, Superstitions, Witchcraft

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character mistakenly identifies an example of occult phenomena or remembers incorrect information that impacts his decisions for the worse. Depending on the situation, this flawed information could be deadly.

Failure: Your character is unable to identify or remember any useful facts about the situation at hand.

Success: Your character properly identifies or remembers facts about an example of occult phenomena.

Exceptional Success: Your character is able to identify or answer questions about a particular example of occult phenomena in great detail, possibly recalling extra details that enhance his understanding of the broader situation. Not only does he successfully identify the ancient grimoire, he recalls that only one known copy was believed to exist, and it belonged to a famous occult scholar who reportedly committed suicide.

Politics

Edgar Young spread his pasty, perfectly manicured hands and gave Wilson one of his trademark grins. “Mr. Wilson, I’m the governor’s political advisor, not a member of the Public Health Service. I don’t have the authority to do what you’re asking.”

“No, but the Public Health Commissioner is a political appointee, and if memory serves, he’s one of the governor’s golf buddies,” Wilson replied. “I’m sure if you made a suggestion to the governor — and pointed out to him the risks of being implicated in a criminal cover-up — he’d persuade the commissioner to close the orphanage. Then we can relocate the kids until we finish investigating the disappearances.”

The condescending smirk melted from Young’s face. “Let me make a few calls,” he said coldly.

Characters possessing this Skill are not only familiar with the way the political process works, they’re experienced with bureaucracies and know exactly who to call in a given situation to get something done. Your character keeps track of who’s in power and how she got there, along with her potential rivals. He has a grasp of the issues of the moment and how they affect the political process, and knows whose palms to grease. It’s possible that your character acquired this Skill by running for political office at some point, or by working on a campaign or as a public

servant. Or he could simply be someone who follows the news and understands the money trail.

Possessed by: Bureaucrats, civil servants, journalists, lawyers, lobbyists, politicians

Specialties: Bribery, Elections, Federal, Local, State, Scandals

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character has seriously misread the current political or bureaucratic climate. At best, he might find his efforts stonewalled by spiteful civil servants. At worst, he might be arrested for attempted bribery or be caught up in a public spectacle.

Failure: Your character makes no headway in his efforts in the political arena. Perhaps he can't get the right politician to return his calls or a recent shakeup in an office means he has to work harder to find the right "in."

Success: Your character achieves his objective.

Exceptional Success: Your character not only gains his objective quickly and efficiently, he makes new friends and associates in the bargain, possibly increasing his chances for success in future endeavors.

Science

The young man's body looked far worse beneath the harsh light of the autopsy table than it did at the crime scene. The antiseptic glare revealed his terrible injuries in gruesome detail. Even Wagner's partner Robison had a hard time concealing his discomfort. Wagner took out a notepad. "What have you got, Doc?"

Dr. Feingold, the city's medical examiner, chose his words carefully. "For starters, the four lacerations across the victim's chest are equidistant from one another, and measurements indicate that they struck the body with equal force. Thus, I believe that they were inflicted at the same moment, rather than separately.

Wagner eyed the four deep furrows running diagonally across the man's chest. They'd cut through tissue and bone as cleanly as a saw. "Four guys couldn't have done that at the same time. No way."

"Not four assailants, Detective." Feingold raised his left hand to the light. "Four fingers. These are claw marks."

This Skill represents your character's understanding of the physical and natural sciences: biology, chemistry, geology, meteorology, physics. Science is useful not only for understanding how the world works, but it helps characters make the most of the resources at hand to achieve their goals. A character with a strong Science background could describe the chemical process for plating metals, for example, allowing another character with Crafts to make a silver-edged steel sword.

Possessed by: Engineers, scientists, students, teachers, technicians

Specialties: Biology, Chemistry, Geology, Metallurgy, Physics



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character fails to remember crucial facts, incorrectly informing his actions with potentially explosive results. He mixes an acid into a base instead of a base into an acid, or otherwise causes his efforts to fail spectacularly.

Failure: Your character is unable to summon the necessary information from memory. It's on the tip of his tongue, but the formula, chemical or equation eludes him.

Success: Your character is able to summon the necessary knowledge to serve his needs.

Exceptional Success: Your character recalls especially obscure or detailed facts that give him additional options or capabilities with the resources at hand.

Physical Skills

Physical Skills are applications of a character's might, endurance and coordination, such as climbing a mountain, driving a car or shooting a gun. They are most often paired with a character's Physical Attributes in various combinations, but can also be paired with Mental Attributes when the character tries to draw on his Skill to identify an object or answer a question. Intelligence + Firearms is required to identify a particular rifle, for example, or Intelligence + Survival to read a map. Physical Skill scores represent a combination of personal experience and/or formal training rather than extensive schooling. You can't earn a degree in fist-fighting, but you can graduate at the top of your class in the school of hard knocks.

Untrained Skill Use: If your character doesn't have the necessary Physical Skill required for a roll, he can still attempt the action. Roll his Attribute alone with a -1 penalty.

Athletics

John made it onto the balcony just as the hotel room door opened. There wasn't time to close the elegant French doors to the patio, and the breeze already ruffled the drapes. It wouldn't be long before Logan — or worse, one of his pale-faced bodyguards — noticed and checked outside.

There was nowhere to hide. John looked about frantically and saw that the balconies to either side were at least 12 feet away — too far to risk a jump at 20 stories up.

John stared down at the balcony below and tried not to think about how small the cars looked. He swung his legs over the railing, taking all his weight on his arms, and hoped that all the rock climbing he'd done last summer would pay off.

Athletics encompasses a broad category of physical training, from rock climbing to kayaking to professional sports such as football or hockey. The Athletics Skill can be applied to any action that requires prolonged physical exertion or that demands considerable agility or hand-eye coordination. Examples include climbing a high wall,

marching long distances and leaping between rooftops. In combat, the Skill is combined with Dexterity to determine the accuracy of thrown weapons.

Possessed by: Professional athletes, police officers, soldiers, survivalists, physical trainers

Specialties: Acrobatics, Climbing, Kayaking, Long-Distance Running, Sprinting, Swimming, Throwing

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The effort not only fails, but your character injures himself. It might be a sprained muscle or ligament, which inflicts a single point of bashing damage. Risky efforts such as climbing up the side of a building or swimming a long distance can have severe repercussions. See the rules on falling (p. 179) and holding one's breath (p. 49).

Failure: Your character fails to accomplish the attempted action. His throw misses the mark. He doesn't make it to the far rooftop. In the case of an extended physical action such as climbing or long-distance running, he doesn't lose ground but does not make any headway, either.

Success: Your character accomplishes the action as planned. His throw hits the mark. He gains on the fleeing, shadowy figure. He catches the falling baby.

Exceptional Success: Your character completes the attempted action with greater efficiency or power than anticipated. A masterful feat of balance and agility makes a rock-climbing attempt much swifter and smoother than expected. He catches the falling baby *and* her loose pacifier.

Climbing

Dice Pool: Strength + Athletics + equipment

Action: Instant or extended (one success is required per 10 feet of height; in an extended task each roll represents one minute of climbing)

Climbing an object requires a number of successes in an instant or extended action. Your character can climb 10 feet with each success rolled. Objects that are 10 feet or less in height can be climbed as an instant action. Rolls may be modified based on the availability of hand- and footholds, sheerness or slipperiness of the slope, and wind conditions, all at the Storyteller's discretion. By the same token, if the character chooses to take his time and pick his way carefully up the incline, each minute added to the roll provides a +1 modifier, to a maximum of +3. Thus, if a character takes his time and each roll represents three minutes of effort instead of one, a +2 modifier is added to each roll.

Example: Miles attempts to climb a tree to get his bearings while lost in a forest. He finds a suitable tree with lots of accessible branches and starts to climb. The Storyteller determines that the tree is 60 feet tall, and that it has been raining so the branches are slick. Miles' Strength is 3 and his Athletics is 2. He has no tools other than his hands and feet, so he takes his time; three minutes pass on each roll for a +2 bonus. The Storyteller imposes a -1 modifier due to

the slippery conditions. Climbing to the top of the tree requires a total of six successes (one success per 10 feet) over the course of an extended action. If it takes four rolls to accumulate the required six successes, Miles reaches the top of the tree after 12 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character has lost his grip or footing and falls. It could be fatal depending on the height involved. See the rules on falling, p. 179.

Failure: Your character doesn't make any headway on his attempted climb. He doesn't lose altitude, but he doesn't gain any, either.

Success: Your character reaches the top of the object he wishes to climb (if performed as an instant action), or makes continued headway to the top (in an extended action).

Exceptional Success: Your character reaches the top with time and energy to spare. If successes gained exceed the amount required to climb the object (whether performed as an instant action or exceeding the total required for an extended action), your character may attempt another instant action at the top, such as a flip, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Suggested Equipment: Nylon rope (+1), climbing cleats (+1), grappling hook (+2), pitons and hammer (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -5), bad weather (-1 to -3), sheer slope (-1), lack of handholds (-3)

Foot Chase

Dice Pool: Stamina + Athletics + equipment versus Stamina + Athletics + equipment

Action: Extended and contested (each roll represents one turn of running)

It's inevitable that your character will chase someone (or more likely be chased) in his burgeoning experiences with the supernatural. He may interrupt a creature preying upon a hapless victim and race after the thing, or he may stumble upon a scene not meant for his eyes and suddenly he's the hunted.

A chase is a matter of endurance, reflexes and fleetness of foot. Roll Stamina + Athletics for each participant. This is not quite the conventional extended and contested task, however. Rolls are made for each participant in each stage (in each turn), but the quarry has a different goal than the pursuer. The number of successes that must be acquired for the quarry equals the pursuer's Speed. So, if the pursuer has a Speed of 12, successes accumulated for the quarry must reach 12 for him to get away.

The pursuer, however, does not seek to get away. His goal is much more specific: to stop the quarry from escaping. The number of successes that the pursuer needs is therefore different. He seeks to tally a number that equals or exceeds the quarry's current total of successes at any point in the chase. If the pursuer gets that number, he catches up.

The Speed trait of quarry and pursuer is also a factor in determining who is likely to get away or be caught. A human adult isn't likely to catch a cheetah, for example, but a cheetah can probably catch a human adult. For every three points of difference between competitors' Speed traits, the faster one gets a +1 bonus on chase rolls. Remainders are rounded down. So, if a pursuer has a Speed of 11 and a quarry has a Speed of 8, rolls made for the pursuer get a +1 bonus. If a pursuer has a Speed of 10 and a quarry has a Speed of 11, neither party gets a bonus (the difference between Speed traits is less than three and is rounded down).

Example: *Katla runs from a would-be attacker. She has 2 Stamina, 4 Athletics and a Speed of 9. The attacker has 3 Stamina, 1 Athletics and a Speed of 10. The difference between their Speed traits is not sufficient to give either a bonus (it's less than three, so is rounded down to zero). Six dice are rolled for Katla, and a total of 10 successes must be accumulated for her to get away. Four dice are rolled for the attacker, but he need only accumulate a number of successes that equals or exceeds what Katla has in any turn. Thus, if she gets one success in the first turn and he gets one or more, he catches her right away. If by the fifth turn she has eight successes and he has four, and his total successes from turn to turn has never equaled or exceeded her total, she has always maintained the lead. If by seventh turn Katla has 10 successes and her pursuer has eight, she gets away. Her pursuer runs out of steam or stumbles.*

If the quarry of a chase has a head start, she gets a number of automatic successes at the beginning of the chase. Any successes rolled for her throughout the extended and contested task are added to that number from turn to turn, giving the quarry an advantage throughout. As a rule of thumb, a 10-yard head start is worth one automatic success. So, if Katla were 30 yards away from her assailant when the chase broke out, she would have a foundation of three successes on which to add her own throughout the chase. That bonus would make it all the harder for her pursuer to accumulate an equal or greater number than she has in any given turn.

Negative modifiers to rolls due to hazardous terrain or dangerous conditions apply equally to opposing participants. A desperate escapee can even intentionally incur a negative modifier (leaping a hurdle or navigating a construction site) to force her pursuer to cope with the same conditions.

All of a participant's actions must be dedicated to running in a chase. If someone performs a different action in any turn, such as firing a gun, his Stamina + Athletics roll for that turn is forfeit. The character might even perform another action and travel his Speed, but he loses momentum in the race; he adds no successes to his total. Only a character who possesses a supernatural power or a special Merit might maintain a chase and be able to perform a separate action in a turn.

The actual distance between quarry and pursuer at any point in a chase is based on the difference of total successes between them. Each success is worth about 10



yards. So, if Katla has six successes and her pursuer has two, she is 40 yards ahead. Of course, the Storyteller can set another standard for what the difference measures. If opponents race over broken, uneven ground, each success between them could represent only five yards or one yard. Or, if the chase occurs in wide-open spaces, each success between subjects could represent 20 yards.

If a pursuer's total successes ever equal or exceed a quarry's in any given turn, the pursuer catches up. The race comes to an end. The pursuer is allowed one free action against the quarry, such as a charge maneuver. See "Charging," p. 164. The quarry is fully aware of the threat, is not surprised and is entitled to her Defense. Initiative is rolled thereafter for both participants if combat breaks out.

Note that a simple foot race in which competitors seek to be the first to cross a finish line is handled like a conventional extended and contested task. Successes for each participant are accumulated and all seek the same total number of successes. The first one to get that total is the winner.

See "Catching Vehicles on Foot" on p. 71 for systems on chasing after and jumping aboard vehicles.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The participant trips, falls or wipes out. He may suffer a Health point of bashing damage at the Storyteller's discretion. The race is over.

Failure: The participant gains no ground in the pursuit.

Success: The participant gains some ground in the chase, whether fleeing or in pursuit.

Exceptional Success: The participant gains a great deal of ground through a mixture of luck and capability.

Suggested Equipment: Athletic shoes (+1)

Possible Penalties: Bad weather (-1 to -3), debris (-1 to -3), difficult terrain (-1 to -5)

Jumping

Dice Pool: Strength + Athletics + equipment

Action: Instant

A character can jump one foot vertically for each success gained on a jumping roll. In a standing

broad jump, a character can cross two feet per success rolled. In a running jump, a character can cross a number of feet equal to her Size + four more feet per success rolled. So, if a person who's Size 5 gets three successes in a running jump, she travels 17 feet. In order to make a running jump, a character must be able to run a distance of at least 10 feet. If space is limited, every two feet (rounding up) short of 10 imposes a -1 penalty on the Strength + Athletics roll. So, if a character who wants to make jump needs at least 10 feet in which to get a running start, but she has only five feet with which to work, the roll suffers a -3 penalty.

Before jumping, a character may attempt to gauge the distance and her chances of success before committing. Roll Intelligence + Composure or Athletics, at the Storyteller's discretion. If the roll is successful, you learn the number of successes needed to make the jump and decide if it's worth the risk. You may also learn what penalties are imposed by having insufficient space to get a proper running start.

Example: *Diana finds herself trapped on the roof of her apartment building with the vampire's blood slaves charging up the stairs after her. Her only hope is to jump to the roof of the adjacent building and hope that the thugs won't have the nerve to follow. The distance between buildings is 20 feet. Diana is Size 5. A jumping roll must generate at least four successes (for a total of 21 feet) and she needs at least 10 feet to get a running start, which the Storyteller says is available. Her Strength is 3 and her Athletics is 3. The roll is 4, 5, 8, 8, 8 and 9 — four successes. Leaping from the stone parapet, Diana crosses the intervening distance and lands on the far roof.*

It was a dangerous feat, though. Under less stressful circumstances, Diana might have gauged her chances before risking her life. The Storyteller could have allowed her player an Intelligence + Composure or Athletics roll to determine that four successes were required. Or if the Storyteller decided that only eight feet were available to get a running start, a successful gauging roll would have told Diana's player that four successes were required, and that a -1 penalty would have applied.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The task not only fails but your character loses her balance. Perhaps she trips on a piece of debris or catches a part of her clothing on a branch or jagged rock. Instead of jumping, she hits the ground and suffers a bashing wound if it was a vertical jump. See "Falling," p. 179, if it was a horizontal jump.

Failure: Your character doesn't achieve any significant distance at all — she jumps too early, has a false start or loses her nerve. She gains a few inches vertically or about a foot horizontally, which could also mean a fall.

Success: Your character leaps a number of feet based on the successes rolled.

Exceptional Success: Your character leaps an impressive distance. If successes gained exceed the amount required to make the jump, your character may attempt an-

other instant action in the air (say, firing a shot) or upon landing (maybe running up to her Speed), at the Storyteller's discretion.

Suggested Equipment: Running shoes (+1), ramp (+1), springboard (+2), vaulting pole (+3)

Possible Penalties: Slippery conditions (-1), bad weather (-1 to -3), difficult terrain (-1 to -3), strong wind (-2)

Throwing

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Athletics + equipment

Action: Instant

Throwing an object can be a brute-force physical act or a combination of grace and hand-eye coordination to hit a distant target. Your character can throw a non-aerodynamic object (such as a clay pot or tire) a distance in yards equal to his Strength + Dexterity + Athletics, minus the object's Size. The result is considered short range. Medium range is double that number, and long range is twice medium range. So, a character with 4 Strength, 3 Dexterity and 2 Athletics can throw a tire with 2 Size a short range of seven yards, a medium range of 14 yards and a long range of 28 yards.

Aerodynamic objects such as footballs and spears can be thrown double those distances. Thus, the same character who throws a football (Size 1) has a short range of 16 yards, a medium range of 32 yards and a long range of 64 yards.

An object with a Size that equals or exceeds your character's Strength simply can't be thrown far enough to constitute range, even if it's an aerodynamic item. It's simply too heavy or bulky to be thrown.

While the distance that an item can be thrown is relatively fixed, your character's accuracy is rolled: Dexterity + Athletics + equipment. Weapons such as knives, spears and rocks, however, confer their Damage ratings as bonuses when thrown (see the Combat Chapter). Mundane items such as baseballs or footballs can be thrown to hit and hurt (probably unsuspecting) targets, too. These items typically confer a +1 bonus and do bashing damage (see p. 153).

Modifiers to hit targets are -2 at medium and -4 at long range. By no means is long range the limit to which an item can be hurled. Your character could throw it with everything he has and achieve greater distance — up to twice long range. Accuracy is forgone, though. If your character tries to throw an object at a target beyond long range, he can still make the attempt. Make a chance roll to determine success (see p. 125), regardless of what your character's dice pool might normally be. Any target that's more than double long range away is considered completely out of range and no throw can hit it.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character loses control of the object. If it's large or heavy (Size 4 or greater), he loses his grip and drops it, potentially injuring himself in the process. Smaller objects land wildly off the mark, striking

something (or someone) accidentally or overshooting the target entirely.

Failure: The object misses its mark or simply does not make it as far as intended.

Success: Your character hits his intended target. In the case of a thrown weapon, each success inflicts one point of damage.

Exceptional Success: The object hits the target with great accuracy and/or force.

Suggested Equipment: See the Damage ratings of thrown weapons in the Combat Chapter, p. 150.

Possible Penalties: Slippery conditions (-1), strong wind (-2), bad weather (-1 to -3)

Catching Thrown Objects

An object thrown to or at a target could be caught by him. Obviously, the distance between thrower and target cannot be greater than the range to which the object can be thrown. The thrower's accuracy is also a factor in whether an intended receiver can successfully catch the item.

If an object is thrown to a receiver with the intent to be caught, Dexterity + Athletics is rolled for the receiver. The receiver's roll gets a number of bonus dice equal to the number of successes achieved in the thrower's roll. Thus, if Bill throws a football to Owens and three successes are rolled for Bill, Owens' Dexterity + Athletics roll to catch the ball gets a +3 bonus. If the thrower's roll fails to earn any successes, the target is missed. The intended receiver cannot catch the item at all.

If an object is thrown at a target (probably with the intent to hit and hurt him), and the target is unaware of the object's approach, the object can't be caught. Indeed, the target gets no Defense. He is essentially surprised (see p. 151). Successes achieved in the throw inflict points of damage to the target. (Damage might also be done to an intended receiver of an object if the roll for his catch suffers a dramatic failure. Points of damage equal the successes achieved in the throw.)

The Storyteller may allow an unaware target to recognize an incoming object before he's hit. The target's player makes a reflexive perception roll (see p. 45). If it fails, the attack proceeds as discussed above. If the Wits + Composure roll succeeds, the target can try to get out of the way (his Defense applies normally), or he can try to catch the object.

If he tries to catch it, he loses his Defense against the attack (after all, he tries to put himself in the object's path). A contested Dexterity

+ Athletics roll is then made against the thrower's roll. If the thrower gets more successes, the target is still hit and those successes are inflicted as damage. If the target gets more successes, he catches the item. In the case of a tie, the would-be catcher is hit and the thrower's successes are inflicted as damage. The Storyteller may rule that catching a blunt object such as a rock might be done completely without harm, but catching a sharp object such as a knife might still inflict a point of lethal damage. The receiver cuts open his hand. Perhaps an exceptional success (five or more) achieved on a catching roll negates damage from even a sharp item.

Of course, ranged attacks made from guns or bows cannot normally be caught unless the target has some kind of supernatural power that allows him to see and react to such fast-moving objects.

Brawl

He was the stereotypical biker: big and broad-shouldered, the sleeves of his T-shirt straining around muscled, tattooed arms. He loomed over Miles. "You and me are gonna have a little fun, college boy," he said through yellow teeth. "And then me and your girlfriend here are gonna have a little party."

Miles leaned back and the biker took the bait, bending down to glare at the young history student. Miles' first punch struck the biker square in the Adam's apple. The gag reflex doubled the man over, and Miles followed up with a shot to the ear.

The biker hit the floor like a sack of wet cement. "Party on, asshole," Miles said in the silence that followed, and then took Angela's hand. "Let's get out of here."

Brawl defines your character's prowess at unarmed combat, whether he's a black belt in karate, a hard-bitten street tough or a college student who's taken a few self-defense courses. Characters with this Skill know how to hit an opponent, where to hit for maximum effect and how to defend themselves from attack. It can mean using fists, but also elbows, knees, shoulders, head butts wrestling, joint locks and choke holds. Characters with a several dots could be familiar with multiple techniques of unarmed combat. Expertise in such techniques is reflected in the Fighting Style Merits (see pp. 110-112), which are based on Brawl.

Brawl is added to your character's Strength to battle people in unarmed combat.

Possessed by: Bikers, boxers, gangsters, police officers, soldiers

Specialties: Blocking, Boxing, Dirty Tricks, Grappling, Kung Fu, Throws

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character fail to hit his opponent, the attack leaves him wide open for a counterblow. Your character's Defense or Dodge trait does not apply to the next close-combat attack staged against him.

Failure: Your character's attack misses its target.

Success: Your character scores a hit against his opponent. See Chapter 7 for details on combat and inflicting damage.

Exceptional Success: Your character lands a particularly powerful blow or hits his opponent in a vital area, increasing damage.

Suggested Equipment: Roll of quarters (+1), brass knuckles (+1), sap gloves (+3)

Possible Penalties: Slippery conditions (-1), bad weather (-1 to -3), extremely confined space (-2), intervening obstacles (-1 to -3), drunk (-2)

Drive

They took the turn with a screech of tires, coming out onto a deserted street. The pursuing pickup truck took the turn wide, riding up onto the far curb and flattening a mailbox before the driver got his vehicle under control.

"Hang on!" John said, hitting the brakes and pulling on the wheel. Jenny and Robert were thrown against the far doors as the Volvo spun and headed back the way it had come, right at the oncoming truck. John got a glimpse of the other driver's shocked expression before the man swerved and the truck struck a fire hydrant.

Robert looked back at the wreck shrinking in the distance. "Holy shit," he said, shaking his head. "Where did you learn to drive like that?"

John laughed. "Who says you can't learn anything from The Dukes of Hazzard?"

The Drive Skill allows your character to operate a vehicle under difficult or dangerous conditions. Characters don't need this Skill simply to drive a car. It's safe to assume in a modern society that most individuals are familiar with automobiles and the rules of the road. Rather, this trait covers the training or experience necessary to operate at high speeds, to tackle hazardous road conditions and to push a vehicle to the limits of its performance. Drive is the difference between a typical suburban parent with a minivan and a police officer, car thief or racecar driver. (See "Handling" on p. 146 for dice-pool equipment modifiers for various vehicles.)

The Skill also applies to piloting and controlling boats; your character's Drive dots are applied equally to handling boats. In order for your character to be able to pilot a plane, he needs a Pilot Specialty in the Skill. With that, efforts to control a plane call for a Drive-based roll, plus one die for your character's Pilot Specialty. A character with the Drive Skill who does not possess a Pilot Specialty cannot effectively operate a plane. His efforts to fly are based on Attribute alone, at a -1 untrained penalty.

Note that dots in Drive do not apply to manually fixing or building vehicles, only to operating them. Construction and repair is the province of the Crafts Skill (see p. 57).

Possessed by: Car thieves, couriers, delivery drivers, emergency responders, police officers, racecar drivers

Specialties: High-Performance Cars, Motorcycles, Off-Road, Pursuit, Shaking Tails, Stunts

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character loses control of the vehicle while attempting a maneuver. If traveling at high speed, a crash occurs, wrecking the vehicle and likely injuring its occupants. If the local terrain presents no convenient obstacles (your character drives on an open highway or salt flat), the car flips and rolls for some distance until it comes to a stop. If traveling at low speed, the vehicle sideswipes a parked car or tree, or possibly slides off the road and becomes stuck at the Storyteller's discretion. See "Vehicles", p. 141, for rules on how to handle vehicles and crashes.

Failure: Your character doesn't complete his intended maneuver. The direction the vehicle travels (if it goes anywhere at all) is determined by the Storyteller rather than by your character.

Success: Your character completes his intended maneuver.

Exceptional Success: Not only does your character complete his intended maneuver, he gains much more ground than expected. Perhaps he swerves around a sharp corner, drops perfectly into a sudden gap in traffic and shoots down the road.

Vehicle Pursuit

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Drive + vehicle Handling versus Dexterity + Drive + vehicle Handling

Action: Extended and contested (each roll represents one turn of driving)

Pursuing a fleeing vehicle is a test of both sharp reflexes and steel nerves as the escaping driver attempts to increase the distance between himself and his pursuer. Roll Dexterity + Drive + Handling for each driver. Each roll represents one turn's time. This is not quite the conventional extended and contested task, however. Rolls are made for each participant in each turn, but the quarry has a different goal than the pursuer. The number of successes that must be acquired for the quarry equals the pursuing vehicle's Acceleration (see "Sample Vehicles," p. 146, for more information). So, if the pursuer's vehicle has an Acceleration of 15, successes accumulated for the quarry must reach 15 for him to get away.

The pursuer, however, does not seek to get away. His goal is much more specific: to stop the quarry from escaping. The number of successes that the pursuer needs is therefore different. He seeks to tally a number that equals or exceeds the quarry's current total of successes at any point in the chase. If the pursuer gets that number, he catches up.

The relative speed of vehicles is also a factor in determining who is likely to get away or be caught. An 18-wheeler isn't likely to catch a sports car, for example, but a sports car could probably catch an 18-wheeler. For every three points of difference between competitors' Acceleration traits, the faster one gets a +1 bonus on pursuit rolls. Remainders are rounded down. So, if a pursuer has an Acceleration of 22 and a quarry has an Acceleration of 13, rolls made for the pursuer get a +3 bonus. If a pursuer has an Acceleration of 15 and a quarry has an Acceleration of 13, neither party gets a bonus (the difference between Acceleration traits is less than three and is rounded down).

Example: Serge seeks to elude mobsters who are out for his blood. He has 3 Dexterity and 2 Drive, and a compact car with a Handling of 3 and Acceleration of 15. The pursuing driver has 2 Dexterity and 4 Drive, and a sedan with a Handling of 2 and an Acceleration of 14. The difference between their Acceleration traits is not sufficient to give either a bonus (it's less than three, so is rounded down to zero). Eight dice are rolled for Serge (3+2+3), and a total of 14 successes must be accumulated for him to get away. Eight dice are also rolled for the pursuer (2+4+2), but he need only accumulate a number of successes that equals or exceeds what Serge has in any turn. Thus, if Serge gets three successes in the first turn and the mobsters get three or more, they catch him right away. If by the fifth turn Serge has eight successes and the mobsters have five, and the mobsters' total successes from turn to turn have never equaled or exceeded Serge's total, he has always maintained the lead. If by the ninth turn Serge has 14 successes and his pursuers have 10, Serge gets away. Maybe he turns a corner and the mobsters can't keep up, or Serge narrowly avoids a vehicle that blocks the pursuers completely.

If the quarry of a pursuit has a head start, he gets a number of automatic successes at the beginning of the chase. Any successes rolled for him throughout the extended and contested task are added to that number from turn to turn, giving the quarry an advantage throughout. As a rule of thumb, a full 20-yard head start is worth one automatic success. So, if Serge were 40 yards away from the mobsters when the pursuit broke out, he would have a foundation of two free successes on which to add his own throughout the chase. That bonus would make it all the harder for his pursuers to accumulate an equal or greater number than he has in any given turn.

Negative modifiers to rolls due to hazardous terrain or dangerous conditions apply equally to opposing participants. A desperate escapee can intentionally incur a negative modifier (driving into oncoming traffic, going over a median, navigating a trash-strewn alley) to force the pursuer to cope with the same conditions.

A driver's actions must be dedicated to conducting a pursuit. If a driver performs a different action in any turn, such as firing a gun, his Dexterity + Drive + Handling roll for that turn is forfeit. The pursuit still continues, but the character accumulates no successes. (The Storyteller also

makes a chance roll on the driver's behalf to see if he retains control of the vehicle, as explained on p. 125.) Only a driver who possesses a supernatural power or the Stunt Driver Merit can maintain a pursuit *and* be able to perform a separate action in a turn.

Passengers in either vehicle can perform other actions, however. Most likely they shoot back and forth at each other. If combat between pursuing vehicles breaks out, roll Initiative for all combatants. Regardless of whether drivers contribute to the fight, their Dexterity + Drive + Handling rolls are made at the beginning of each turn. Actual combatants' places in the Initiative roster are then addressed in order until the next turn gets underway and new Dexterity + Drive + Handling rolls are made.

The Vehicle rules in Chapter 6 (p. 141) help you handle combat between cars. Important to that process is the range between quarry and pursuer at any point in the chase. That distance is based on the difference of total successes achieved thus far between vehicles. Each success is worth about 20 yards. So, if Serge has eight successes and the mobsters have four, Serge is 80 yards ahead. Of course, the Storyteller can set another standard for what that difference measures. If opponents race through rush-hour traffic, each success between them could represent only 10 yards. Or, if the pursuit occurs across a prairie, each success between subjects could represent 30 yards. The distance between quarry and pursuer must be compared to the ranges of firearms used in a "shooting pursuit" (see "Ranged Weapons Chart," p. 169).

If a pursuer's total successes ever equal or exceed a quarry's in any given turn, the pursuer catches up. The race comes to an end. The pursuing driver (and only the driver) is allowed one free action against the quarry, such as ramming the other vehicle. The quarry is fully aware of the threat and is not surprised. Otherwise, if Initiative has not yet been rolled in the pursuit, it is now. If it has been rolled previously in the scene, rolls are now made for the vehicle drivers and they're added to the existing roster. On their actions in each turn, drivers can now try to ram each other or perform other maneuvers as outlined under "Vehicles," p. 141.

Note that a simple drag race in which opposing drivers seek to be the first to cross a finish line is handled like a conventional extended and contested task. Successes for each participant are accumulated and all seek the same total number. The first one to get that total is the winner.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The driver loses control of his vehicle and crashes, wrecking the car and possibly injuring occupants, or he attempts a maneuver that immobilizes his vehicle (say, attempting to drive a short distance on a sidewalk and blowing out all four tires by running over an ornamental fence). The pursuit is over.

Failure: The driver gains no ground in the pursuit.

Success: The driver gains some ground in the pursuit, whether fleeing or chasing.

Exceptional Success: The driver gains a great deal of ground through a mixture of luck and capability. Perhaps the driver downshifts and cuts between two vehicles at just the right moment, darting down the shoulder of the road and picking up precious yards.

Suggested Equipment: For a list of sample vehicles, see p. 146 (+1 for every three points difference between Acceleration traits)

Possible Penalties: Bad weather (-1 to -3), slippery conditions (-2), obstacles (-1 to -3), vehicle damage (see “Vehicles,” p. 141)

Catching Vehicles on Foot

It's inevitable in any action-filled game that a character on foot seeks to catch up with and attack or jump aboard a moving vehicle. For most ordinary people it's a desperate challenge. For inhuman beings capable of moving like a blur, more opportunities are available. It's assumed that the vehicle starts from a dead stop or travels at some speed and passes near your character.

No matter how quickly a character can move, the number of chances he has of catching an accelerating and/or speeding vehicle are limited. Basically, he has only a few opportunities to grab hold before the vehicle is out of reach.

Your character runs as fast as he can to even approach or reach out to a moving vehicle. For each 10 full Speed that your character has, you can roll his Stamina + Athletics + equipment to get within reach. Each roll requires one turn in which your character can do nothing but run. If the roll succeeds, he catches up to the vehicle and is allowed one free action outside the normal turn sequence (explained more fully below).

If your initial roll to catch up fails, your character may keep trying. Each extra effort requires a turn and is treated as a successive attempt (see p. 132). Thus, his second attempt incurs a -1 penalty on the Stamina + Athletics roll, his third attempts suffers a -2 penalty, and so on. Your character can make one attempt to catch up for each 10 full Speed that he has. Thus, a character with 10 Speed can make one attempt. A character with 12 Speed can also make only one attempt. A character with a Speed of 9 or less can make one attempt as well, but a chance roll is made instead of the usual Stamina + Athletics roll.

If the driver of the vehicle is aware of your character's efforts to catch up, it becomes a contested action. Your character's Stamina + Athletics + equipment is rolled against the driver's Dexterity + Drive + Handling. If your character gets the most successes, he catches up. If the

driver gets an equal number or more, your character has to resort to successive attempts (which are also contested), or he's left behind.

If he does catch up, your character's free action could be to jump aboard, shoot at anyone in the vehicle at close range, swing a weapon at someone within reach, or (if your character has the power) attack the vehicle itself (see “Charging,” p. 164).

If your character *does not* try to jump aboard, he can perform one action or attack before the vehicle is out of reach. Unless it is disabled as a result of his attack, the vehicle passes out of reach afterward. If your character *does* try to jump aboard, roll his Dexterity + Athletics. At least one success is required. A dramatic failure indicates that he wipes out and suffers a point of bashing damage. On a failure, he doesn't get aboard but remains on his feet. The vehicle drives out of his reach altogether. If your character does get aboard, roll Initiative if combat breaks out between him and any passengers.

If passengers are aware of your character throughout the chase, they might stage attacks at him while he pursues. In that case, roll Initiative for everyone involved. Your character's action each turn is dedicated to catching up, while his opponents' are dedicated to attacking (probably with Firearms). For range purposes, assume that your character is within a few yards of the vehicle throughout the period in which he tries to catch up. If he runs out of rolls, the vehicle pulls away.

Use Suggested Equipment and Possible Penalties from “Foot Chase,” on p. 65.

Vehicle Tailing

Dice Pool: Wits + Drive + vehicle Handling (tail) versus Wits + Composure + equipment (subject)

Action: Contested

Tailing is a stealthy form of pursuit in which the pursuer attempts to follow a subject without being detected. Rather than depending on fast reflexes to stay close, the pursuer engages in a game of alertness with his unsuspecting opponent, hanging back just far enough to keep the subject in sight while blending in with surrounding traffic.

When your character attempts to tail a vehicle, make a Wits + Drive + equipment roll. In this case, “equipment” is equal to the vehicle's Handling (see p. 146) as your character speeds up, slows down or makes turns to avoid being spotted.

Tailing is a contested action. A Wits + Composure roll is made for the subject. His equipment modifier is not based on the maneuverability of his own vehicle, but on

the ostentation or obviousness of the pursuer's vehicle. If the tail drives a blue sedan, the subject probably gets no bonus because the pursuing car blends in with all the other vehicles on the road. A tailing motorcycle offers a +1 bonus, a tailing sports car offers a +3, and a tailing 18-wheeler or Porsche offers a +4 or +5 bonus. A tailing vehicle as subtle as an airplane flying overhead probably eludes a subject altogether or imposes a -5 penalty to recognize the aerial shadow.

The contested roll is made when the tail begins. If the subject wins he notices he's being followed and can attempt to escape (in which case it becomes a pursuit; see the above task). If the tail wins, he follows the subject without being detected. If this is a short drive, one roll may be sufficient. For longer rides, the Storyteller may call for a roll every 10 miles or so.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's divided attention results in a crash, damaging or wrecking the car and potentially injuring its occupants. Alternately, a low-speed (or low-intensity) tail might end with your character trying to take a shortcut and finding his path blocked by a delivery truck or other obstacle.

Failure: If the pursuer's roll fails, he has not maintained enough distance from his subject and has been noticed. If the subject chooses to run for it the task becomes a pursuit. If the subject's roll fails he does not notice the strange car pacing his every move. If both fail, re-roll.

Success: If the pursuer wins the contested action, he remains hidden from his subject and can follow for up to 10 miles without requiring another contested roll. If the subject wins he sees that he's being followed and can attempt to escape.

If both sides get an equal number of successes, the pursuer doesn't give himself away completely, but he's gotten close enough to arouse the subject's suspicion. Make a second contested roll to decide the situation.

Exceptional Success: If the pursuer wins the contested action with five or more successes on his roll, he has found the perfect distance and position in traffic to remain undetected for the duration of the trip. No further rolls are required until the Storyteller deems otherwise. If the subject wins the contested action with a similar roll, he not only detects that he's being tailed but he gets a good look at his pursuer.

Suggested Equipment: Handling of the tailing car; see above for the obviousness of the tailing car; binoculars (+1), second tail car (+3)

Possible Penalties: Cracked (-1) or missing (-3) rear-view mirrors, intervening traffic (-1 to -3), bad weather (-1 to -3), twisting roads (-2)

Firearms

Theodore Logan was a well-protected man. His hillside mansion was surrounded by a high stone wall, topped with

barbed wire and sensitive motion detectors. Cameras covered every inch of his property. Armed guards patrolled the grounds 24 hours a day, accompanied by huge dogs. And then there was the fortress-like manor itself.

Simon checked the wind speed once more and noted it on his homemade range card. It had taken him almost a week to find the perfect vantage point on a hilltop nearly a mile from Logan's property. From here, he had a clear view of the man's heated pool. Logan was a creature of habit. He liked his nightly swim. And habits, as Simon had learned in sniper school, could get you killed.

Reaching into his pocket, Simon pulled out the heavy, silver-tipped bullet, carefully loaded the scope-sighted rifle, and raised the stock to his shoulder. The night-vision sight revealed the poolside in eerie shades of green. Logan was climbing from the pool as Simon settled the crosshairs over the man's heart.

Firearms allows your character to identify, operate and maintain most types of guns, from pistols to rifles to military weapons such as submachine guns, assault rifles and machine guns. This Skill can represent the kind of formal training provided to police and the military, or the basic, hands-on experience common to hunters, criminals and gun enthusiasts. Firearms also applies to using bows. Your character can use guns and bows equally.

Note that dots in Firearms do not apply to manually fixing or building guns, only to wielding them. Construction and repair is the province of the Crafts Skill (see p. 57).

Possessed by: Criminals, gun dealers, hunters, police officers, soldiers, survivalists

Specialties: Autofire, Bow, Pistol, Rifle, Shotgun, Sniping, Trick Shot

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The weapon malfunctions in some way or your character accidentally hits a different target (possibly himself). The most common type of dramatic failure is a misfire — the bullet simply does not go off when the trigger is pulled, and your character is free to shoot again in the next turn. Other mechanical failures such as a jam can be cleared in the following turn.

Failure: Your character misses his intended target. The Storyteller determines what, if anything, the bullet actually hits.

Success: Your character hits his intended target. See Chapter 7 for details on inflicting damage with firearms.

Exceptional Success: Not only does your character hit the target, he strikes a particularly vital area, magnifying the damage as reflected by your stellar roll.

Suggested Equipment: See Chapter 7 for a list of sample firearms and their Damage ratings, which are added to ranged attacks as equipment modifiers.

Possible Penalties: Target's armor, target's concealment, target is prone. See the Combat Chapter for details on all the preceding factors. High winds (-1 to -3)

Simon settled the crosshairs over the man's heart



Larceny

The burly security guards hustled Carter and Susan through the lobby and out into the plaza. As soon as the guard holding him let go, Carter spun around and tried to push past, but the guard caught him and shoved him backward.

“Don’t show your face here again,” one of the men said, pointing his finger at Carter and Susan in turn. “Next time we won’t be so gentle.”

Susan watched the guards march back into the lobby, and sighed. “Well, so much for that idea. What’s plan B?”

Carter turned, a faint smile on his face. “We wait until tonight and see which one of these fits the front door,” he said, showing her the guard’s thick key ring.

Larceny is a broad Skill that covers everything from picking locks to concealing stolen goods and everything in between. Most characters obtain this Skill the hard way, by committing crimes and often paying the price for their mistakes. Some individuals such as government agents and members of the military receive formal training in bypassing security systems and stealing valuable assets.

Possessed by: Burglars, commandos, government agents, private eyes

Specialties: Concealing Stolen Goods, Lockpicking, Pickpocketing, Security Systems, Safecracking

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character fail his attempted action, he reveals himself in the process. He might trip an alarm, wake a guard dog or be spotted with his hand in another person’s pocket.

Failure: Your character doesn’t complete his intended action. His attempt at picking a mark’s pocket comes up empty, or the lock he works on refuses to cooperate.

Success: Your character completes his action without arousing any notice or suspicion. He pockets the stolen wallet, slips inside the dark building or plucks the diamond from the nest of laser beams without anyone the wiser.

Exceptional Success: Your character not only completes his action, he does so with exceptional speed and grace, saving precious seconds when time is of the essence. A lock pops open with a simple flick of the wrist, or a security system goes offline with a few quick strokes on the keypad.

Bypass Security System

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment

Action: Extended (5-15 successes, depending on the complexity of the system; each roll represents a turn — three seconds — of work)

Bypassing a security system can be as simple as shorting out two contacts on a window frame, or as complex as opening a junction box and making major modifications to a sophisticated circuit board, all in a matter of seconds.

The task is an extended action, with the required number of successes depending on the complexity of the system in question. A basic alarm might demand five, while a standard home-security system might require as many as 10. Sophisticated corporate or government security systems might require 15 or more successes to disarm, at the Storyteller’s discretion. Using specialized tools can add modifiers to the roll.

Most home and corporate alarm systems have a warning period of 30 or 45 seconds to allow for an authorized user to disarm the system before triggering an alarm. Thus, a would-be burglar only has 10 or 15 turns to locate and disarm the system before the alarm goes off.

Example: Sasha picks the lock on the councilman’s back door and slips inside. The house’s security system beeps a warning and Sasha heads for the main junction box in the basement. It takes three turns to dash down the stairs and find the box, leaving only seven turns before the alarm activates. Sasha’s Dexterity is 4 and her Larceny is 2, and she has a set of electronics tools that give her a +1 modifier. A standard home-security system requires 10 successes to disarm, and the first roll is 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 8, 9 — three successes earned, seven to go. The second roll earns no successes. The third roll is 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 9 — three more successes that bring her total to six. The fourth roll is 1, 2, 4, 7, 7, 8, 9 — two successes. With time running out, the fifth roll is 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 8, 9 — two successes and enough to disarm the system, six seconds (two turns) before the alarm activates.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character not only fails to disarm the system, he accidentally sets it off early. In the case of sophisticated alarm systems, this might be a silent alarm that alerts authorities without tipping off the intruder.

Failure: Your character fails to make any headway in disarming the security system. Is it the red wire or the yellow one?

Success: Your character makes progress in disarming the system (apply successes rolled toward the total needed).

Exceptional Success: Your character is well on his way to bypassing the system.

Suggested Equipment: Electronics toolkit (+1), mirrors, conductive tape and aerosol spray (+1), alarm schematics (+2), portable decryption gear (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -5), unfamiliarity with system (-1), state-of-the-art system (-2), charging guard dogs (-2), darkness (-3)

Lockpicking

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment

Action: Extended (2-12+ successes required, depending on the sophistication of the lock; one roll represents one turn — three seconds — of work)

Picking a lock is one of the most common applications of Larceny, and requires nothing more than a basic set of tools, a steady hand and a few moments’ concentra-

tion. The task is an extended action, requiring a number of successes based on the toughness and sophistication of the lock. A suitcase or diary lock might require two or three successes, while a padlock or a house lock might demand anywhere from four to seven. Combination locks could require anywhere from eight to 12. Using specialized lockpicking tools (as opposed to improvised picks) can add a bonus to the roll.

Example: *Once inside the house, Sasha finds the councilman's study and locates his wall safe. The safe has a basic combination lock requiring eight successes to pick. Sasha's Dexterity is 4 and her Larceny is 2, and she has a set of safecracking tools that add a +1 modifier. The first roll is 1, 2, 6, 8, 8, 8, 9 — she is halfway there with four successes. The second roll is 1, 2, 3, 8, 8, 8, 9. The last tumbler clicks into place and the small door swings open after only two turns (six seconds).*

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only has your character failed to make any progress with the lock, a mishap causes him to break one or more tools. Any previous successes earned are lost. He may start again from scratch with the Storyteller's permission.

Failure: Your character makes no headway against the lock.

Success: Your character makes progress toward picking the lock (apply successes toward the total needed).

Exceptional Success: Your character is well on his way to picking the lock.

Suggested Equipment: Prybar (+1), basic lockpicks (+1), lockpick gun (+2), electronic keypad decryptor (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -5), darkness (-3), someone approaching (-2)

Sleight of Hand

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment versus Wits + Composure or Wits + Larceny

Action: Contested

Your character picks a pocket. Palms an item. Slips something inside his clothing or bag — all without being noticed, or so he hopes. Your character could develop this skill for unscrupulous reasons, or because he's a magician or performer. Or maybe he runs an "honest" shell game on the street. Regardless of the rationale, your character can take things or move things without attracting attention. They typically need to be Size 1 or less — he can't make a piano disappear with a flick of the wrist. But he might make an artifact disappear from a museum showing with the right timing and a convenient distraction.

Roll your character's Dexterity + Larceny + equipment versus a victim or possible observer's Wits + Composure or Wits + Larceny (whichever makes for the larger pool). The Storyteller decides how many people could be possible observers, or just makes a single collective roll for a crowd. If you get the most successes, your character grabs, produces or hides something. If the victim or observer gets as many or more successes, she's wise to your

character's efforts. She could call foul, call for the police or call your character out privately and insist on a cut of whatever scheme he's running.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character utterly bungles the effort. He attracts everyone's attention. He trips, manhandles his intended victim or sets off an alarm.

Failure: The effort to grab, move or hide something goes incomplete. The item remains where it was or is still exposed in your character's hands. The Storyteller could allow one or more successive attempts (see p. 132) before your character draws attention to himself.

Success: Your character steals, palms or moves an item as planned, without notice.

Exceptional Success: The item disappears with none the wiser. Your character's effort is so seamless, in fact, that turns, minutes or hours pass before anyone notices that something is missing or has been relocated. The Storyteller decides how much time is appropriate based on the general attention dedicated to the item in question.

Suggested Equipment: Crowded area (+1), few possible observers (+1), timely distraction (+1 to +3), partner to whom to transfer an item (+2)

Possible Penalties: Subject wears tight clothes (-1), security system (-3 to -5), public attention on item (-3)

Stealth

The trick was to keep his weight evenly distributed, gliding across the floor rather than taking unbalanced steps. John moved soundlessly down the hall, slower than he'd have preferred, but speed and silence simply didn't mix. He never let his entire weight come down on either foot, and the old hardwood floor never uttered a creak of protest. It took a few minutes to reach the dark kitchen, and then he was through the door and gone with no one the wiser.

The Stealth Skill represents a character's experience or training in avoiding notice, whether by moving silently, making use of cover or blending into a crowd. When attempting to sneak silently through an area or to use the local terrain as concealment, roll Dexterity + Stealth + equipment. When trying to remain unseen in a crowd, Wits + Stealth is appropriate. The Storyteller may make Stealth rolls secretly on your behalf, since your character usually has no way of knowing he's been noticed until it's too late. If your character attempts to avoid notice by a group of alert observers, a contested roll versus the observers' Wits + Composure + equipment is required.

Possessed by: Criminals, hunters, police officers, private investigators

Specialties: Camouflage, Crowds, Moving in Darkness, Moving in Woods

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character not only fails to move stealthily, he does something to actively draw attention to himself. He steps on a branch or a broken bottle,

or jostles someone in a crowd who protests loudly and angrily.

Failure: Your character fails to move or act in a stealthy fashion. If potential observers get at least one success on a Wits + Composure roll, your character is busted.

Success: Your character avoids notice if his successes exceed his opponents'.

Exceptional Success: Your character, through a combination of luck and talent, finds just the right circumstances to act virtually without being noticed for the turn. Say, the sudden noisy passage of a truck allows him to dash across an open courtyard under the noses of otherwise alert guards.

Shadowing

Dice Pool: Wits + Stealth + equipment (shadow) versus Wits + Composure + equipment (subject)

Action: Contested

Shadowing occurs when a character attempts to follow a subject without being detected. Rather than depending on fast reflexes to stay close, the pursuer engages in a game with his unsuspecting opponent, hanging back just far enough to keep the subject in sight while remaining unnoticed in the crowd.

When your character attempts to shadow a person, make a contested roll against the subject's Wits + Composure + equipment. If the subject wins, he notices he's being followed. If the pursuer wins, he follows the subject without being detected. If this is a short walk, one roll may be sufficient. The Storyteller may call for a roll every half-mile for long trips.

If your character acquires a shadow, the Storyteller may secretly make Wits + Composure rolls on your behalf. If the rolls fail, neither you nor your character should know that something is amiss.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your shadowing character does something to call attention to himself. Perhaps he crosses the street and into the path of a car. Your character is noticed automatically. If the subject of the tail suffers a dramatic failure, he is completely at ease. No further rolls are made to detect the shadow until the Storyteller rules otherwise.

Failure: If the shadow's roll fails, he does not maintain enough distance from his subject and is probably noticed. If the subject's roll fails, he does not notice anyone dogging his every move. If both fail, re-roll.

Success: If the pursuer wins the contested action, he remains hidden from his subject and can follow up to a half-mile without requiring another contested roll. If the subject wins, he sees that he's being followed and can attempt to escape.

If both sides get the same number of successes, the pursuer doesn't give himself away completely, but gets close enough to arouse the subject's suspicion. Make a second contested roll to resolve the situation.

Exceptional Success: If the pursuer wins the contested action with five or more successes, he has found the perfect distance and cover to remain undetected for the duration of the trip. No further rolls are required regardless of the length of the walk, or until the Storyteller rules otherwise. If the subject wins the contested action with five or more successes, he not only detects that he's being tailed, he gets a good look at his pursuer.

Suggested Equipment: For shadow: Athletic shoes (+1), nondescript clothes (+1), small binoculars (+2), additional shadowers (+3); For subject: Shadow wears gaudy clothes (+1 to +3), tipped off (+4)

Possible Penalties: For shadow: Unfamiliar subject (-1), poor visibility (-1); For subject: Crowded area (-1 to -3), poor visibility (-1 to -3)

Survival

Simon picked his way carefully down the riverside, sticking to the rocks rather than leaving foot prints in the mud. He expected that the police had searched his hotel room by now, and there would be APBs posted all over the city. He'd have to lay low for weeks before he could risk going back to look for Anna.

He stopped at his first trout line and tested it. Sure enough, there was a good-sized fish twisting in the swift current. Simon smiled. He could last here as long as he had to.

Survival represents your character's experience or training in "living off the land." He knows where to find food and shelter, and how to endure harsh environmental conditions. The more capable your character is, the fewer resources he needs in order to prevail. A master survivalist can walk into a forest, desert or mountainous region with little more than a pocketknife and the clothes on his back and survive for weeks if necessary.

Note that Survival is not synonymous with Animal Ken (see p. 78). The former helps your character stay alive in the wilderness, living off the land with whatever supplies he has brought with him. The latter involves understanding animal behavior and interacting directly with animals. Your character could be knowledgeable in creating shelter and gathering plants to eat (Survival), but might know nothing about anticipating the actions of a bear in his camp (Animal Ken).

Possessed by: Explorers, hunters, soldiers, survivalists

Specialties: Foraging, Navigation, Meteorology, Shelter

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character has made a false set of assumptions about his environment that puts him in danger. The berries he picks are actually poisonous, the water is full of bacteria or the shelter he pitches is in a dry streambed.

Failure: Your character fails to find the proper resources to fulfill his needs. All the available firewood is wet and the trout line he strings doesn't catch anything.

Success: Your character finds enough resources to fulfill his needs for the day.

Exceptional Success: Your character manages to find enough resources to fulfill his needs so long as he wishes to stay in the area. Perhaps he finds a stream of clear water stocked with trout or happens on a hunter's cabin with a supply of canned goods.

Foraging

Dice Pool: Wits + Survival + equipment

Action: Extended (five successes required; one roll represents one hour of searching)

Foraging for food and water is an extended action. Each roll represents an hour of diligent work. Five successes are required to gather enough food and water to sustain one person for a single day. One success still provides some amount of food and water, but fewer than five means that your character becomes progressively malnourished and vulnerable to deprivation (p. 175) and disease (p. 176).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character makes an incorrect assumption regarding a food or water source, collecting plants or unclean water that makes him ill.

Failure: Your character does not locate any sources of food or water in an hour of careful searching.

Success: Your character is on his way to gathering sufficient food to fulfill his needs for the day (apply successes to the total needed).

Exceptional Success: Your character finds a small windfall of food or water that fulfills his daily needs — and even provides some sustenance for the following day.

Suggested Equipment: Survival knife (+1), water purification tablets (+1), field survival guide (+2), field survival kit (+3)

Possible Penalties: Arid locale (-2), frozen locale (-2), foreign environment (-1 to -3), lack of tools (-2)

Weaponry

Lydia's books dropped to the pavement as the dark-clothed man stepped from the bushes. Her hand tightened on the haft of her umbrella. The man smiled, his teeth gleaming white through the hole in his black ski mask. He raised a long-bladed hunting knife. "I'm not going to hurt you unless I have to, honey," he whispered. "We're



gonna to take a little walk somewhere private, and then we'll go our separate ways."

Lydia set her jaw and took a half-step forward, bending her knees into a fencer's stance. She raised the umbrella point even with her assailant's nose.

"What the fuck you think you're going to do with that?" the man snarled, swiping at the umbrella with his free hand. His snarl turned to a shriek as Lydia flicked the umbrella under his hand and stabbed the metal point neatly through the mask's right eye hole.

As the name implies, the Weaponry Skill represents your character's experience or training in fighting with everything from beer bottles to pipes, knives to swords. While formal instruction in Weaponry is uncommon (restricted to military and law-enforcement training and a few martial arts), any character who has grown up on the street or spent a lot of time in seedy bars has had ample opportunity to learn this Skill.

A character's Weaponry is added to his Strength to stage armed attacks. For more information, see Chapter 7: Combat.

Note that dots in Weaponry do not apply to manually fixing or creating weapons, only to wielding them. Construction and repair is the province of the Crafts Skill (see p. 57).

Possessed by: Bikers, criminals, martial artists, police officers, soldiers

Specialties: Improvised Weapons, Knives, Swords

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character fail to hit his opponent, the attack leaves him wide open for a counterblow. Your character's Defense or Dodge trait does not apply to the next close-combat attack staged against him.

Failure: Your character's attack misses its target.

Success: Your character scores a hit against his opponent. See Chapter 7 for details on combat and inflicting damage.

Exceptional Success: Your character lands a particularly powerful blow or hits his opponent in a vital area, for exceptional damage.

Suggested Equipment: See Chapter 7: Combat for sample weapons and their Damage ratings, which are added to Weaponry rolls as equipment bonuses.

Possible Penalties: Opponent's armor, opponent's Defense, fighting blind, improvised weapon. See the Combat Chapter for the preceding factors. Slippery conditions (-1), drunk (-2), surrounded by inferno (-3)

Social Skills

Social Skills are applications of your character's bearing, charm and poise, such as negotiating with a bank robber, wooing a crowd or telling a faultless lie. These Skills most commonly represent innate capabilities honed by

years of experience rather than by any formal training. You can teach someone the basic principles of Persuasion, but true leaders are born rather than made. These Skills are generally paired with your character's Social Attributes, but can also be used with Physical and Mental Attributes in cases such as bodily threats (Strength + Intimidation) or orchestrating a complex deal (Wits + Persuasion).

Untrained Skill Use: If your character doesn't have the necessary Social Skill required for a feat, he can still make the attempt. Roll his Attribute alone at a -1 penalty.

Animal Ken

Patrick followed the blood trail through the woods. He knew it was only a matter of time before the deer he had shot would collapse. The red drops scattered across the leaves and ground leapt out to his trained eyes. Or they did until he reacted instinctively to a nearby sound. To Patrick's surprise, a wolf emerged out of nowhere and barred his path. "It's on the blood trail, too," he thought. Then he reassured himself, "It's alone. It won't attack without its pack." Or so he thought, until a malicious glimmer shone in the animal's eye that Patrick had never seen before.

Anticipating and understanding human emotions is one thing, but being able to interpret and recognize the behavior of animals is something else entirely. Your character intuitively grasps or has been trained to read animals to know how they react to situations. The Skill also involves innately understanding how the animal mind operates, and what may appease or enrage beasts. The knack often coincides with a respect for animals, but it could derive from the analytical observation of a lab scientist or from years of abuse inflicted by a callous animal handler.

Animal Ken could be applied to grasp the thoughts or intentions of supernatural animals, if the Storyteller allows. Sometimes these beings have human or greater intelligence and cannot be read by this Skill alone.

Possessed by: Animal rescue workers, hunters, long-time pet owners, park rangers, ranchers, trainers, veterinarians

Specialties: Animal Needs, Imminent Attack, Specific Kind of Animal, Training

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character completely misreads an animal's state, possibly with disastrous results. He may, for example, interpret furiously energetic behavior as playfulness rather than as a warning.

Failure: Your character is unable to gauge the animal's true state.

Success: Your character has a good read on the animal's true emotional state.

Exceptional Success: Your character notes enough tell tale clues in the animal's behavior to gain a detailed understanding of its state. Not only might he recognize that the animal is anxious, but that its offspring are nearby.

Animal Training

Dice Pool: Composure + Animal Ken + equipment (trainer) versus Stamina + Resolve (animal)

Action: Extended and contested (the task demands a number of successes equal to the opponent's Willpower; each roll represents one day of training)

Training an animal involves communicating a need, encouraging a type of behavior and/or discouraging unwanted behavior. It's an extended and contested process. Make Composure + Animal Ken + equipment rolls for the trainer. Roll Stamina + Resolve for the animal. The number of successes that each participant seeks is equal to the other's Willpower dots. Thus, if a trainer has 5 Willpower and the animal has 3, the interrogator wins if he accumulates three successes first. The animal wins if it accumulates five successes first. The winner breaks the opponent's will to continue training or to resist the desired behavior. The trainer's roll can be modified by equipment such as rewards (food) offered and abuse inflicted. Rolls made for the animal might receive a bonus based on how feral it is. A cat brought in from the wild might get a +3 bonus, for example. Likewise, non-mammals (lizards, birds) can be harder to train than mammals, imposing a penalty on a trainer's rolls (say, -1 to -3). Some animals such as wolverines are so fierce that they simply can't be trained.

Only one trick or type of behavior (house breaking, "attack," or retrieving a certain item whenever it's thrown) can be taught per extended and contested series of rolls. Alternatively, a few minor tricks such as "sit," "shake" and "stay" can be combined in a single series of rolls.

Should an extended and contested training session end in a tie, neither side applies its will over the other. The process must start again from scratch if the trick is to be learned.

If training for a type of behavior is interrupted for a number of consecutive days in excess of the animal's Intelligence, all successes gained thus far are lost. Training for that trick must start again from scratch. Animals with zero Intelligence cannot be trained at all.

An animal can be taught a number of tricks (can undergo a separate number of training sessions) equal to its Wits.

Example: Raymond has a pet raven that he seeks to train to fly away and return to him on command, which the Storyteller decides is one trick. Raymond has 4 Composure, 3 Animal Ken and 6 Willpower. The bird has 2 Stamina, 4 Resolve and 7 Willpower. Raymond needs to get seven successes before six are rolled for the bird. The process begins, but is interrupted for two days in which no training occurs at all. Those two days exceed the bird's 1 Intelligence, so the training process has to begin again from scratch.

For animals' traits, see p. 202.

Even after an animal has been trained in a behavior or trick, it does not necessarily perform the action automatically on command. You need to make a successful Manipulation + Animal Ken roll for the animal to re-

spond as intended. You also get a bonus on the roll equal to the animal's Wits.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The regimen fails completely and the animal resists the intended behavior. A whole new training session must get underway for the intended trick. If animal abuse is involved, the creature may attack and try to escape its handler.

Failure: Your character fails to make any progress on the current trick.

Success: Your character makes progress in conditioning the animal's behavior.

Exceptional Success: Your character makes dramatic progress with the creature.

Suggested Equipment: Physical abuse (+1), rewards or treats (+2)

Possible Penalties: Training non-mammal (-1 to -3), animal already been trained poorly (-1), animal distracted by environment (-2)

Empathy

The crime scene was the usual mix of order and chaos. Detective Wagner pushed his way past the news hounds and under the yellow police tape. "Where is she?" he said to the first officer he found.

"Over there, Lieutenant." The cop pointed at the open rear door of a squad car. "Don't know how much you're going to get out of her. She's messed up pretty bad."

Wagner headed for the car, stepping around the form splayed out on the asphalt, which was only partly covered by a blood-soaked tarp. He saw Dr. Feingold a few yards away, kneeling by the parked car, playing a small flashlight over what looked like a severed hand.

The girl was curled up in the fetal position in the back of the squad car, pulling a blanket around her shoulders as if it could shut out the world. There was matted blood — her fiancé's blood — in her hair. Her white-knuckled hands trembled.

Wagner closed the rear door of the car and got into the front seat, putting a barrier between the two of them. He was going to have to play this very carefully if he hoped to get any useful information from his one and only witness.

This Skill represents your character's intuition for reading people's emotions. For some, it's a matter of observing body language and non-verbal cues. Others employ an extraordinary sense that helps them divine a person's true mood. As the name implies, Empathy also involves the capacity to understand other people's views and perspectives, whether your character agrees with those positions or not. This is useful in everything from negotiations and crisis counseling to reading faces in a crowd and looking for potential trouble. If a subject actively conceals his emotions or motives, make a contested roll versus the person's Wits + Subterfuge + equipment.

Possessed by: Counselors, diplomats, entertainers, profilers, psychiatrists, police officers

Specialties: Emotion, Lies, Motives, Personalities

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character completely misreads a person's emotional state, possibly with disastrous results. He may, for example, interpret nervous laughter as genuine, missing the anxiety and potential for violence that clumsy jokes attempt to hide.

Failure: Your character is unable to gauge a subject's true emotional state.

Success: Your character has a good read on a person's true emotional state, regardless of whatever front the subject puts up.

Exceptional Success: Your character notes enough tell tale clues in a subject's behavior to gain a detailed understanding of her emotional state. Not only can he discern, say, that she is being deceptive, but he can tell from her body language that she is afraid of whoever is in the store across the street.

Expression

Pubs weren't supposed to be this quiet. Daniel stepped up to the bar, feeling every eye in the place bore a hole in him. The bartender looked him over him suspiciously while Daniel ordered a shot of whiskey.

The tension was tightening around him like a noose. He'd heard of bars in parts of the city that were militant hangouts, but he never imagined anything like this. Still, if there was one place where he'd learn the truth about Finn O'Donnell, this was it.

That is, if he didn't get himself beaten to a pulp.

The bartender pushed a shot glass across the polished wood. Daniel took a deep breath, raised the glass and turned to the staring crowd. "May Ireland's enemies never meet a friend!" he cried, and tossed back the whiskey. "Now who'll drink with me?"

Expression reflects your character's training or experience in the art of communication, both to entertain and inform. This Skill covers both the written and spoken word and other forms of entertainment, from journalism to poetry, creative writing to acting, music to dance. Characters can use it to compose written works or to put the right words together at the spur of the moment to deliver a rousing speech or a memorable toast. Used well, Expression can sway others' opinions or even hold an audience captive.

When *composing* a poem or writing a novel, roll Wits or Intelligence (depending on whether the work is poetic or factual) + Expression. When *reciting* to an audience, roll Presence + Expression. Playing an instrument involves Intelligence + Expression for a known piece, and Wits + Expression for an improvised one. Dance calls for Dexterity + Expression.

Possessed by: Actors, ballet dancers, journalists, musicians, poets, rock stars, writers

Specialties: Classical Dance, Drama, Exposés, Musical Instrument, Newspaper Articles, Speeches

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's performance is muddled and confusing. It not only fails to communicate his ideas, but it's unbearable. If she's lucky, the fiasco is forgotten quickly. If not, she is the butt of critics' jokes for some time to come.

Failure: Your character's performance fails to capture the audience's interest or attention.

Success: Your character's performance gets its point across in the manner intended, capturing the audience's interest.

Exceptional Success: The performance enralls the audience to the extent that members can think of (or notice) nothing else.

Suggested Equipment: Haute couture (+1), quality musical instrument (+2), supreme-quality musical instrument — a Stradivarius violin (+4 or +5)

Possible Penalties: Unfamiliar audience (-1 to -3), poorly made instrument (-1), foreign audience (-1), irritated audience (-3)

Intimidation

Susan came back into the apartment, white as a sheet. Carter glanced up from the computer and shot from his chair, eyes wide with concern. "What's wrong? What happened?"

"I went to get the mail... and this was in the box."

She held up a rifle bullet and a small piece of paper. The note bore a single sentence.

'Bullets are cheap.'

Intimidation is the art and technique of persuading others through the use of fear. Your character can intimidate someone with a show of brute force (Strength + Intimidation), through more subtle means such as verbal threats (Manipulation + Intimidation), or simply through menacing body language (Presence + Intimidation). It can be used to get other people to cooperate (even against their better judgment), back down from a confrontation, or reveal information that they'd rather not share.

Possessed by: Bodyguards, bouncers, gangsters, executives, police officers, soldiers

Specialties: Bluster, Physical Threats, Stare-Downs, Torture, Veiled Threats

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character fail to intimidate his intended victim, he invites retaliation. His heavy-handed treatment pushes the victim over the edge and touches off a heated confrontation, or the intimidating gesture backfires dramatically, making your character look ridiculous.

Failure: The victim isn't impressed and does not cooperate.

Success: Your character overpowers his victim with threats and compels cooperation for the moment.

Exceptional Success: Your character thoroughly awes his victim, asserting himself as the dominant personality for some time. The victim is certain to cooperate in future encounters, if your character can ever find him again.

Interrogation

Dice Pool: Wits + Intimidation + equipment (interrogator) versus Stamina + Resolve (subject)

Action: Extended and contested (the task demands a number of successes equal to the subject's Willpower; each roll represents one hour of interrogation)

Interrogation involves wearing down a subject's resistance until he or she is incapable of concealing information. It's an extended and contested process. Make Wits + Intimidation + equipment rolls for the interrogator. Roll Stamina + Resolve for the subject. The number of successes that each participant seeks is equal to his opponent's Willpower dots. Thus, if an interrogator has 5 Willpower and his subject has 3, the interrogator wins if he accumulates three successes first, and the subject wins if he accumulates five successes first. The winner breaks the opponent's will to continue asking questions or to resist any longer. The interrogator's roll can be modified by equipment such as torture instruments. If the subject is allowed sleep between interview sessions, rolls are made for him normally. If he's denied normal sleep, he suffers a cumulative -1 penalty for each night of sleep that he misses. Thus, he's at -1 after the first night, -2 after the second, and so on.

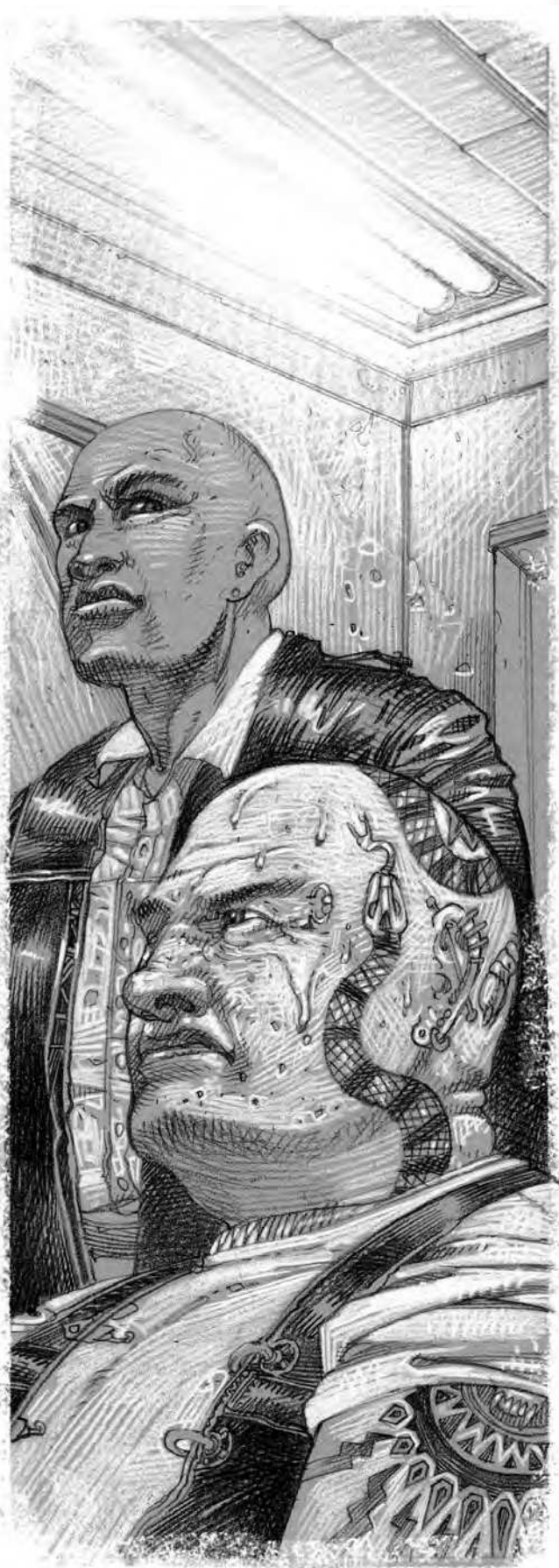
Example: Wilson has arrested a suspect in the recent "Vampire Killer" murders and interrogates him in hopes that his alibi will fall apart. Wilson's Wits is 4, his Intimidation is 2, and he uses the department's bleak interrogation room, designed to make subjects feel isolated, which provides a +1 modifier. Wilson's Willpower is 4. The suspect's Stamina + Resolve dice pool is five, and he has a 5 Willpower. Wilson's first roll produces a 4, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 (two successes), while the suspect's roll is 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8 (one success). An hour passes. Both need three more successes to break the other, but can Wilson win before the man's lawyer arrives?

If participants' accumulated successes meet their targets simultaneously, the interrogator fails to learn what he wants and the process must start over again from scratch.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's system of threats, violence and deprivation falls apart, reinforcing the subject's resistance. She cannot be broken by your character at this time. An interrogation subject who suffers a dramatic failure collapses completely and tells everything she knows.

Failure: Your character fails to make any headway against his opponent, either as interrogator or subject.



Success: Your character makes progress against his opponent.

Exceptional Success: Your character makes dramatic progress with his opponent.

Suggested Equipment: For interrogator: Law enforcement or government credentials (+1), interrogation room (+1), torture implements (+2), interrogation drugs (+3); For subject: Airtight alibi (+3), lawyer on the way (+2), important cause (+3)

Possible Penalties: For interrogator: Language barrier (-2 to -3), lack of evidence against subject (-3); For subject: Denied food and/or water for extended period (-3), loved ones threatened (-1), loved ones harmed (-3)

Persuasion

Melissa put on her best "Please?" face, the one that always worked on her father. She needed access to the stacks in the basement library, the old archives that were reserved for "special studies." She now recognized that meant "the coven's rituals," but she couldn't let on.

She found the head librarian Mister Richards in the Humanities section and pleaded her desperate case. "If I don't do well on this paper, I'll flunk Philosophy. Professor Ingram talked about some first editions in the archives. If I can quote them, maybe I'll get extra credit."

The kindly old librarian's eyes seemed to soften with pity. "All right, my dear. Let me get the key," he said. In truth, it was Melissa's physical assets that impressed him.

Persuasion is the art of inspiring or changing minds through logic, charm or sheer, glib fast-talking. Though it can be taught to varying degrees of success, most characters with the Skill possess a natural talent and have honed it over years of trial and error, practicing their delivery until it rolls effortlessly off the tongue. Persuasion is the Skill of convincing others by force of personality alone, making one's point through carefully chosen words, body language and emotion.

Possessed by: Con artists, executives, generals, lawyers, politicians, salesmen, sexual predators

Specialties: Fast-Talking, Inspiring Troops, Motivational Speeches, Sales Pitches, Seduction

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character not only fails to persuade someone, she actively inspires a negative opinion in her subject. Not only does she fail to sell the car, for example, the customer is encouraged to shop elsewhere.

Failure: Your character does not convince her subject.

Success: Your character convinces the subject to accept her assertions.

Exceptional Success: Your character convinces the subject completely, to the extent that the target trusts your character's opinion implicitly and accepts further assertions on faith. Not only is the customer eager to buy the car, he trusts your character to fill out the terms of the contract and signs without reading them.

Cutting a Deal

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment versus Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment

Action: Extended and contested (3-10+ successes required; each roll represents an hour of negotiation)

Negotiating terms for legally binding arrangements such as contracts, settlements or treaties is a long and complex process, with both parties fighting hard to gain every possible advantage. The Storyteller must assign a required number of successes for negotiations as a whole, relative to the complexity of the terms under discussion. An entertainment contract might require only three successes, while a class-action lawsuit might require six. Major negotiations, such as cease-fires between nations or the drawing of national borders could demand as many as 10 or more successes to resolve.

Once the success value has been determined, both parties lay out their positions and the rolling begins. Make a contested Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment (if any) roll between the leaders of the two parties. Successes earned are added to their respective totals. Discussions end when one party hits the success value set. That participant is the winner, but must make some concessions to the competitor based on the difference between the two parties' success totals. If the winner has three times the competitor's successes, no concessions are required. If the winner has double the competitor's successes, the winner must concede to a quarter of the competitor's demands. If the winner has only a simple majority of successes, he must concede to half of the competitor's demands. The winner of negotiations gets to choose which concessions to make, but the Storyteller is the final arbiter over every aspect of the process.

Example: *Gwen negotiates a new contract with her employer, Carstairs Industries. She wants a pay increase, better benefits, her own parking spot and a key to the executive spa. The company wants to give her none of these things, declaring that she should be happy with her current contract. The Storyteller determines that the negotiation requires five successes to settle. Gwen's Manipulation is 4 and her Persuasion is 3. She has no pertinent equipment to help her in the talks. The company rep's Manipulation is 3 and his Persuasion is 3. He has no equipment, either. Six rolls (and six hours) later, Gwen wins the negotiation with five successes to Carstairs' two. Since Gwen's total is more than double the company's, she has to concede to a quarter of the company's demands. Since Carstairs doesn't want her to have anything, a concession in this case means giving up one of her four objectives. After some consideration, Gwen declares that she'll give up her claim to the employee parking space and take the money, the benefits and access to the spa.*

If opponents achieve their required number of successes simultaneously, they remain at loggerheads. Both must concede at least one point of contention to the other if talks are to continue. The process then begins again from scratch.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character not only fails to make headway against her competitor, she has to make some concessions or the talks will break down altogether. Your character loses one success from her accumulated total.

Failure: Your character makes no headway against her competitor. Time to try a different tack.

Success: Your character stakes out a significant position against the competition that may be difficult to overcome.

Exceptional Success: A bold move on your character's part places her in a highly advantageous position that is hard for the opposition to overcome.

Suggested Equipment: Access to legal texts (+1), pertinent background information on the opposing party (+1), legal credentials (+2), resources to facilitate bribes, kickbacks or fund luxury junkets (+3), evidence to blackmail the opposition (+1 to +5)

Possible Penalties: Lack of research (-1), language barrier (-2 to -5), lack of negotiating chips (-4)

Fast-Talk

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment (talker) versus Composure + Empathy or Subterfuge (subject)

Action: Contested

Your character needs to convince another person to perform a service, to look the other way or to simply be distracted for a few moments' time. Or maybe he just wants to convince some thugs to let him go. Rather than cook up an elaborate lie or ruse, he hurls explanations, excuses, pleas and/or trivia at his target in hopes of bewildering her. The intent is to achieve his intended result in the confusion.

Fast-talk is a contested action. Roll Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment for your character, against the target's Composure + Empathy or Subterfuge. (Empathy if your character preys upon the subject's feelings, Subterfuge if he preys upon her intellect.) If your character wins, the subject performs the intended minor chore, or is otherwise tricked into doing what your character wants. If the target wins, she sees through the bluster and refuses to comply or needs further convincing (see "Cutting a Deal," above, at this point). If the two tie, the subject is in a daze, not convinced to do anything yet too confused not to listen. In the case of a failed or tied effort, your character can make a successive attempt (see p. 132) if the Storyteller agrees that the subject can or will still listen.

Fast-talk can be used to achieve only harmless favors or results, such as gaining entrance to a club, allowing your character to "take a closer look" at the diamonds that should be kept under glass, or distracting a guard while partners sneak by. It cannot be used to convince subjects to perform actions that are patently dangerous or harmful. The target still retains her common sense.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character fail to convince or distract the subject, his clumsy effort turns her against him or she is alerted to trouble. No successive attempts are allowed and the intended target may call security.

Failure: Your character has no success in getting the subject to listen to him.

Success: Your character's blather lulls the target into a daze of compliance.

Exceptional Success: Your character has the subject eating out of his hand. She hangs on every nonsensical word and may be distracted for minutes or could be convinced to leave the room entirely.

Suggested Equipment: Convincing clothing (+1), cash or expensive jewelry (+1), a genuine or fake ID (+2)

Possible Penalties: Inappropriate appearance (-1 to -3), lack of bribery items (-1), subject hard of hearing (-3)

Oratory

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + equipment versus highest Resolve + Composure of audience

Action: Contested

Sometimes your character is called on to convince a crowd of people to accept his assertions, calling for a rousing, compelling speech. This is a contested action. Roll Presence + Persuasion + equipment versus the highest Resolve + Composure present in the audience. If the orator wins, he convinces the crowd. If he fails, one or two people believe, but the group on the whole is unconvinced. A tie indicates that the group is willing to listen, but remains unconvinced. In the case of a failed or tied effort, your character can make a successive attempt (see p. 132) if the Storyteller agrees that the crowd is willing to listen.

Note that oratory conducted to convince a crowd to do what your character wants is different from a performance. The former is based on Persuasion, because your character tries to sway listeners, while the latter is based on Expression, because your character simply seeks to entertain or inform an audience.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character fail to persuade the crowd, his clumsy effort turns the mob against him. No successive attempts are allowed and the crowd could try to physically silence him.

Failure: Your character has no success in getting the crowd to listen to him.

Success: Your character's speech convinces the crowd to accept his assertions.

Exceptional Success: Your character has the crowd eating out of his hand. They accept whatever he says.

Suggested Equipment: Intimidating uniform or expensive suit (+1), megaphone (+1), professional sound and video system (+2), state-of-the-art media suite (+3)

Possible Penalties: Audience distracted (-1), audience aggressive (-3), unimpressive or inappropriate appearance (-1 to -3), laryngitis (-5)

Seduction

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + equipment or Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment (seducer) versus Wits + Composure + equipment (subject)

Action: Contested and/or extended (the extended and contested part of the task requires a number of successes equal to double the seducer's Presence or double the subject's Resolve; one roll equals 10 minutes of banter)

Your character seeks to ply his allure, charm and sheer magnetism to make someone else compliant to his will, typically to agree to a sexual tryst. Or your character's aim might be some goal short of a physical encounter, such as getting a person's phone number, learning his or her address, or convincing a subject to do a favor with the implicit reward of romance. The same forms of coercion might also be applied on your character by inhuman beings, to make him agreeable to a private rendezvous that could mean his life.

The act of seduction has two basic elements, physical and social, and those elements tend to indicate stages of the overall process. The first stage is based largely on physical attraction. Your character plies his appearance and demeanor to win the subject's attention and interest. This phase is typically non-verbal. Presence + Persuasion + equipment is rolled in a contested action against the subject's Wits + Composure + equipment. Appearances are important, so possessing the Striking Looks Merit (p. 117) offers a bonus to the roll for the seducer. If the seducer gets more successes, he gains the subject's interest. If successes tie or the seducer gets fewer, the subject is disinterested or needs further convincing (see below).

"Equipment" in the contested roll might include alluring clothing (+1), an appealing perfume or cologne (+1) or an offered drink (+1) for the seducer. The subject might have an existing significant other (+1 to +3), a headache (+1) or be in a really bad mood (+1) for his or her roll.

The social aspect of the seduction begins after the initial contested action is complete. The social aspect involves dialogue and interaction between participants. In this stage, the seducer's Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment is rolled against the subject's Wits + Composure + equipment in an extended and contested task. Each roll represents about 10 minutes of time. The winner of the previous contested roll also gains bonus dice equal to the successes rolled before. So, if your character seeks to seduce a woman at a bar and you win the initial contested roll with three successes to the woman's two, you add three dice to your Manipulation + Persuasion rolls in the social part of the process. "Equipment" bonuses at this stage might include a good pick-up line (+1), an excellent line (+2), a mutual acquaintance (+1) or suggestive physical contact (+2) for the seducer. Those listed above can be applied again for the subject.

The required number of successes for the seducer equals twice the subject's Resolve. The required number of successes for the subject equals twice the aggressor's

Presence. While the process has become much more interactive, the relative attractiveness of the aggressor is still encouraging or discouraging. Whoever accumulates the required number of successes first either convinces the other to cooperate or refuses the proposal. Once a would-be seducer is rebuked, no other attempts can be made to charm the same subject in the same scene.

If the seducer loses the initial contested roll to determine physical interest, he can still try to engage in social interaction to sway the subject's opinion. He's on thin ice, though. The subject gains the number of successes rolled for her in the contested action as a bonus to her rolls in the extended and contested process. So, if in the previous example the seducer had acquired two successes and the subject had acquired three, she would have gone unimpressed with his looks. If he had still tried to engage her socially, her Wits + Composure rolls would have received a +3 bonus to resist his charm.

Example: *Now that James is dead, he has discovered that he possesses an unearthly air that attracts almost anyone he desires. Little do they know that he really desires their life's breath. Hungry for more, James turns his allure on a woman in a mall. James has 5 Presence and 3 Persuasion. He uses no particular props beyond his own bearing to get her attention. The woman has 2 Wits and 2 Composure and is happily married (which the Storyteller decides is worth a +3 bonus). James' eight-dice pool gets four successes. The woman's seven-dice pool gets two successes. Despite herself, the woman is physically interested in James.*

James' four successes on the first roll give him a +4 bonus in the social stage of the seduction. He also has 1 Manipulation and 3 Persuasion, but the Storyteller decrees that his days spent without washing impose a -2 penalty, for a total of six dice in his pool. Once again, the woman has a Wits + Composure of four, with a +3 bonus for being happily married. The woman's Resolve is 3. James therefore needs a total of six successes to win (twice the woman's Resolve), and the woman needs 10 (twice James' Presence).

After four rolls (40 minutes of banter), the woman accumulates 10 successes while James has only five. She soon wonders what she saw in him. Suffering pangs of guilt for even considering an indiscretion, she quickly leaves. James must seek prey elsewhere.

Example: *A rival investigator wants to learn what Royce has discovered thus far on a case. She decides to seduce him for whatever information she can get, but has no intention of actually participating in a physical encounter. Royce proves disinterested in the rival physically. He gets one success to her none in the initial contested roll. She doesn't let that stop her, though. She becomes more aggressive and tries to tease Royce into confessing what he knows in return for "favors."*

Both parties arrive at their required number of successes simultaneously in the extended and contested part of the process. The Storyteller rules that Royce sees through the ruse, confesses nothing and expects nothing, and sends his rival packing. Had Royce lost the extended and contested

task, the Storyteller was prepared for him to reveal one piece of information for every point that Royce was short of his required successes. So, if he had lost the competition and still needed three more successes, he would have revealed three pieces of information. The fact that he would have gotten nothing in return would have been learned too late.

For most human interaction, seduction involves both verbal and non-verbal interaction. (Thus, both Presence + Persuasion and Manipulation + Persuasion rolls for the aggressor.) More instinct-driven seduction, such as that between animalistic or bestial beings, can be based on physical attraction alone. In those cases, the Storyteller may rule that Presence + Persuasion versus Wits + Composure rolls are made in an extended and contested action. There is no two-step process. There is still a contest of attraction and will, but it's based purely on demeanor rather than dialogue. In this case, each participant still seeks a number of successes equal to double the opponent's Resolve or Presence.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character looks awkward, clumsy or foolish, or puts his foot in his mouth. He's likely to be laughed at publicly, gets a drink thrown in his face, or draws the attention of an angry boyfriend or bouncer. No one else is willing to pay your character sexual interest for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: Your character kills time with the object of his attention, but gains little ground. She is not yet encouraged or discouraged in him.

Success: Your character gathers some interest in his subject.

Exceptional Success: Your character has his subjected riveted, maintaining her attention with his every move or word.

Suggested Equipment: For seducer — alluring clothes (+1), an appealing perfume or cologne (+1), an offered drink (+1), a good pick-up line (+1), an excellent line (+2), a mutual acquaintance (+1), suggestive physical contact (+2); For subject — significant other (+1 to +3), a headache (+1), bad mood (+1)

Possible Penalties: For seducer — ugly or inappropriate clothes (-1), bad personal hygiene (-2), unkempt appearance (-1); For subject — drunk (-2), sexually frustrated (-1), recent break-up (-2)

Socialize

The receiving line stretched out past the ballroom and down the mansion hall. Julia stood close to Stapleton near the end of the line. She wrapped her stole around her bare shoulders and tried not to shiver. "How long is this going to take? I'm freezing."

Stapleton smiled. He looked like a picture out of a 1940s fashion magazine, poised and comfortable in his tailored tuxedo. "I don't expect it to take more than half an hour," he said, eyeing the procession. "Everyone wants to get to dinner and start sampling the wine. By the time we get

to Chancellor Martin almost everyone else will be seated, giving us plenty of time for our... conversation. Just make sure you have the amulet ready."

Socialize reflects your character's ability to interact with others in a variety of situations, from talking people up at bars to comporting himself with dignity at state dinners. This Skill represents equal parts gregariousness, sensitivity, etiquette and custom. Knowing how to make friends is no less important than understanding how to treat guests in formal situations. Characters with low dots might be naturally entertaining or approachable, but unschooled in the finer arts of social interaction. Or they could be punctilious with their manners but difficult to approach. Conversely, characters with high dots could have the social graces of a practiced diplomat or raconteur, knowing just what to say and when to say it in any given situation.

Possessed by: Diplomats, entertainers, executives, politicians, salesmen

Specialties: Bar Hopping, Dress Balls, Formal Events, Frat Parties, State Dinners

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character embarrasses himself in such a way that others avoid him if possible or treat him with contempt. All further Social rolls made in the scene fail outright.

Failure: Your character doesn't succeed in winning friends, but he doesn't embarrass himself, either.

Success: Your character blends effortlessly with the crowd and is accepted by his immediate companions.

Exceptional Success: Your character owns the room. Not only does he win over immediate acquaintances, he's the life of the party, the person everyone wants to meet.

Carousing

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Socialize + equipment (carouser) versus Composure + Empathy (subject)

Action: Extended and contested (the task requires a number of successes equal to double the highest Stamina among the character's acquaintances; one roll equals one hour of carrying on)

Sometimes the best way to uncover someone's secrets or to secure their help is to show them a good time on the town — provided your character can keep up with his intended victim. Carousing is an extended and contested action. Roll Manipulation + Socialize + equipment for your character. The subject's Composure + Empathy is rolled in competition (or roll the highest dice pool in a group of companions). The side that accumulates a number of successes equal to double the opponent's Stamina wins the contest. If your character wins, the victim is at his mercy and agrees to any reasonable request your character makes. If your character loses, he's left in the dust by his hard-drinking buddies and can't try again until the following night — provided he doesn't wind up in jail first.

Example: Benoit is eager to uncover the secret behind Mike's financial success, and takes him out for a night on the town, hoping that a few beers will loosen Mike's tongue. Benoit's Manipulation is 3 and Socialize is 3, but he has no special equipment to aid him in his endeavor. Mike's Composure is 2 and Empathy is 2. Benoit's Stamina is 3 and Mike's Stamina is 3, so they begin on an even footing, each requiring six successes to win. On the first roll, Benoit gets three successes and Mike gets one. On the next roll, Benoit gets one success while Mike gets two. On the third roll, Benoit gets three successes and Mike gets only two — Benoit wins with seven successes to Mike's five. Mike tells Benoit (and anyone else within earshot) everything about his financial dealings. Mike will regret it the next day — if he remembers at all.

If both sides achieve the required number of success simultaneously, no advantages are gained and the carouser's efforts go for naught — this time. Another night on the town starts the process all over again.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character can't hold his liquor nearly as well as he thought. He loses the contest immediately.

Failure: Your character keeps up with his partying companions but doesn't gain the upper hand over them.

Success: Your character hangs tough and dares his companions to keep up.

Exceptional Success: Your character pulls out all the stops, leaving his companions reeling in his wake.

Suggested Equipment: High-limit credit cards (+1), running tab at a bar (+1), expensive liquor (+2), knowing attractive bar patrons (+2), various illegal drugs (+3)

Possible Penalties: Poor-quality booze (-1), ugly bar patrons (-1), unappealing bar (-2), limited funds (-3), bad music (-3)

Streetwise

There were four kids playing a pick-up game at the basketball court across the street from the tenements. Lisa eyed the neighborhood warily as Gabriel stepped up to the edge of the court. "How exactly is this supposed to help?" she asked worriedly.

"Chill out," Gabriel said and turned. "Hey, Carlos!" He raised his hand and waved at one of the kids. Carlos stopped and tossed the ball to a friend before trotting over.

Lisa's eyes widened. "Are you kidding me? This kid's 12 years old!"

"It's not him we're dealing with, it's his brother," Gabriel whispered as the boy approached. "Carlos is the cutout. We tell him what we need and he names a price. Watch and learn."

Characters possessing this Skill know how life on the streets works and are adept at surviving by its harsh rules.

Streetwise characters can gather information, make contacts, buy and sell on the black market, and otherwise make use of the street's unique resources. The Skill is also important for navigating urban dangers, avoiding the law, and staying on the right side of the wrong people.

Possessed by: Criminals, gangsters, homeless people, private investigators, police officers

Specialties: Black Market, Gangs, Rumors, Undercover Operations

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character completely misreads the situation, committing an error that could have fatal consequences. He might try to sell guns to an undercover cop, he convinces a real gun dealer that he's a cop, or he flashes the wrong sign to the gangbangers on the corner.

Failure: Your character has no luck hooking up with any of his street associates, or of convincing the locals that he's legit.

Success: Your character hooks up with someone who can provide what he needs.

Exceptional Success: Not only does your character find someone who can help him, that person turns up at just the right time to provide something quick and cheap.

Working the Black Market

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Streetwise + equipment

Action: Extended (2-10 success; each roll represents one day of searching the street)

Black markets thrive in every city across the globe, making money from illegal property such as weapons and stolen merchandise. Practically anything can be had on the black market if a buyer has enough money and time to find the right contacts and to secure a deal.

When your character wants to turn to the black market to buy illegal items (or unload stolen goods), the Storyteller first determines how many successes are necessary to complete the task. That number depends on the size or value of the items sought. Buying or selling handguns might require only three successes, while dealing in stolen cars might demand six. Highly illegal, hard-to-find items such as military hardware might require eight or more successes. A successful series of rolls means your character finds someone able to trade, and a meeting is arranged. All your character has to do is show up with the money (or items to sell) and the deal is done.

Example: Adam is on the run and needs a car to get out of town. He knows a few people on the street who deal in stolen cars, and starts hitting the corners. Adam's Manipulation is 3 and his Streetwise is 2. He's got some Cuban cigars he can offer as gifts, to grease the wheels of industry, which the Storyteller decides is a +1 modifier. The Storyteller also determines that it will take six successes to arrange the deal. The first roll nets Adam two successes — a good start, but a full day passes and he's got a long way to go before he can find someone to sell him a car. Can he do it before his luck runs out?

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character makes a serious mistake in choice of associate. He may deal with an undercover cop or federal agent, or the associate plans to rob him during the meeting.

Failure: Your character has no luck finding an associate who can lead him to the goods.

Success: Your character locates a potential seller or buyer and a meeting is arranged.

Exceptional Success: Your character finds someone who will sell him quality materials at a cost below market value. It probably means the seller is trying to unload some very hot merchandise, but the price is excellent.

Suggested Equipment: Pager (+1), cell phone (+1), gang or prison tattoos (+2), valuable barter items (guns, drugs) (+3)

Possible Penalties: Unfamiliar neighborhood (-1 to -3), foreign country (-4), upscale neighborhood (-1), lack of phone (-1), inappropriate clothes (-2), "You look like a cop" (-3)

Subterfuge

Simon stepped into the lobby, a bored look on his face. He ignored the cameras and the security guards near the elevators. Guards expected people to behave like sheep, unknowing and unaware of what was going on around them. Overly alert, fidgety sorts were the kind of people who drew their attention.

The guard at the reception desk glanced at Simon as he stepped up to the sign-in book. "Can I help you, sir?"

"I'm here to see Mr. Moran in suite 702," Simon said, scrawling a name in the register. He briefly made eye contact with the guard. "Busy day," he said noncommittally.

The guard nodded and reached for a visitor pass. "The third elevator on the left will take you right up."

"Thank you," Simon replied, clipping the badge to his lapel and joining the crowd of other businessmen congregating at the elevators. The worst was over.

Subterfuge is the art of deception. Characters possessing this Skill know how to lie convincingly, and they recognize when they're being lied to. Subterfuge is used when telling a convincing falsehood, hiding one's emotions or reactions, or trying to pick up on the same in others. The Skill is most often used to trick other people, but characters also learn it to avoid being tricked themselves.

Possessed by: Actors, con artists, grifters, lawyers, politicians, teenagers

Specialties: Con Jobs, Hiding Emotions, Lying, Misdirection, Spotting Lies

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character utterly fails to conceal the truth from his subject. If he were any more trans-

parent he'd be a window. No further Subterfuge efforts can work on that subject for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: Your character's deception fails to convince his subject. If the Storyteller agrees, he can still try to lie his way out of the situation through successive attempts (see p. 132).

Success: Your character pulls off the deception without a hitch.

Exceptional Success: Not only does your character pull the wool over his subject's eyes, he wins the victim's trust and esteem.

Disguise

Dice Pool: Wits + Subterfuge + equipment (impersonator) versus Wits + Subterfuge (subject)

Action: Contested

If your character attempts to pass himself off as someone else, roll Wits + Subterfuge in a contested action against the individual whom he tries to deceive. The subject gets the same roll. If your character has supporting documents (passport, driver's license) that help reinforce the disguise, apply a +1 to +3 modifier depending on the quality of the documentation (see below). If the subject knows or is familiar with the person being impersonated, apply a -2 to -5 modifier to your roll (-2 if familiarity is passing, -5 if it's intimate).

If rolls achieve the same number of successes, re-roll.

Example: *Stoe attempts to bluff his way into a corporate office posing as a police officer. Stoe's Wits is 4 and Subterfuge is 2. He has a fake badge and ID that look good enough to pass a cursory inspection, adding a +2 modifier to the roll. The secretary at the front desk has a Wits of 3 and a Subterfuge of 1. Stoe wins the roll handily with three successes to her one, and the secretary hurriedly ushers the "detective" into the vice president's office.*

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's disguise is badly flawed. Not only does the deception fail but the disguise must be abandoned altogether before any other attempt can be made.

Failure: Your character does not pass himself off as someone else.

Success: Your character manages to pass himself off as someone else.

Exceptional Success: Your character so thoroughly convinces his subject that she actively vouches for his assumed identity.

Suggested Equipment: Fake ID (+1), hair dye (+1), professional makeup kit (+2), full set of fake credentials (driver's license, social security card) (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-3 to -5), lack of appropriate clothes (-2 to -4), rushed disguise (-2), no credentials (-1 to -3)



THE VOICES WOULDN'T LEAVE HIM ALONE. THE SHAPES WOULDN'T STOP FOLLOWING HIM. THEY HAD HOUNDED HIM SINCE HE'D WORKED AT THAT CONSTRUCTION SITE OUT IN THE HILLS. EVER SINCE THEY'D UNCOVERED THAT CAVE WITH ALL THE INDIAN ARROWHEADS AND PICTURES PAINTED ON THE WALLS. THEN THE SITE WAS SHUT DOWN WHILE UNIVERSITY PEOPLE TOOK OVER.

AFTER THAT, IT WAS LIKE SOME BAD HORROR MOVIE. THE VOICES. THE SHAPES. AND TED WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD SEE OR HEAR THEM. THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO TALK TO ANYONE ELSE, OR TUG AT THEIR HAIR, OR PRICK THEIR SKIN, OR TRIP UP THEIR FEET. ONLY TED. HE THOUGHT HE WAS GOING CRAZY UNTIL HE FOUND PROOF. BROKEN TWIGS WHERE THEY'D WALKED, BRUISES WHERE THEY'D STUCK HIM, LITTLE ODDS AND ENDS THEY STOLE FROM PEOPLE TED DIDN'T KNOW. PEOPLE HE COULDN'T POSSIBLY HAVE MET. THEY WERE REAL, AND THEY WERE HAUNTING HIM.

HE TRIED TO PLEAD WITH THEM, TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THEY WANTED, BUT THEY WOULD NEVER SAY. THEY'D ONLY LAUGH OR HOWL, SCARING HIM. HE WAS LIKE A TOY TO THEM.

SO HE FINALLY BOUGHT HIS OWN TOY. IT TOOK A WHILE TO GET, WITH THE BACKGROUND CHECK AND ALL, BUT HE GOT IT. FOR SELF-DEFENSE, OF COURSE. THAT'S WHAT HE'D SAID, AND HE WAS RIGHT. IT WAS THE ONLY THING THAT COULD SAVE HIM NOW.

TED FOUND THE BENCH HE WAS LOOKING FOR, THE ONE WHERE HE AND HIS FATHER USED TO FEED THE SQUIRRELS. THEY'D COME HERE WITH PEANUTS. HE WISHED HE'D THOUGHT TO BRING SOME NOW.

HE SETTLED DOWN AND REACHED INTO HIS COAT POCKET, HANDS TREMBLING. THE COLD METAL WAS REASSURING SOMEHOW, SOMETHING TO FOCUS ON AS THE JABBING STARTED AGAIN IN HIS EARS. THEY DIDN'T LIKE WHAT HE WAS PLANNING.

Chapter 4: Advantages

*Here alone I in books
formd of metals*

*Have written the
secrets of wisdom*

*The secrets of dark
contemplation*

*By fightings and
conflicts dire,*

*With terrible mon-
sters bred:*

*Which the bosoms of
all inhabit;*

*Seven deadly Sins
of the soul.*

*— William Blake, “The
Book of Urizen”*

Advantages are aspects of your character that set him apart from his peers, for good or ill. A strong will, an unshakeable moral conviction or a simple talent for ducking are all possible benefits in a rough and uncertain world. As your character develops over time, his advantages can increase to exceptional levels.

Most advantages are derived traits determined by adding two or more Attributes together. Others, such as Morality and Size, have a base value with which all characters begin play. As your character's Attributes increase through the expenditure of experience points, his advantages increase as well. Likewise, as Attributes are temporarily decreased through supernatural curses or other strange events, their linked advantages are similarly reduced.

Defense

Traits: Your character's Defense is equal to his Dexterity or Wits, whichever is lower.

The object of any fight is to knock the other guy out without letting him do the same to you. At the same time that your character throws punches and looks for a chance to land a knockout blow, he bobs, weaves and ducks, making himself as difficult a target as possible for his opponent's counterblows. Your character's Defense trait is applied as a negative modifier to his opponent's rolls for Brawl, Weaponry and thrown-weapon (Dexterity + Athletics) attacks. If he is assaulted by multiple attackers, his full Defense trait is applied to one attacker and then his trait is reduced by one for each subsequent attack. Your character's Defense cannot normally be used against Firearms (gun and bow-based) attacks, unless they're conducted within close-combat range; one to two yards (see “Firearms and Close Combat,” p. 162). Defense does not apply if your character is taken by surprise or is immobilized by some means.

Example: Sims finds himself in a barroom brawl with three bikers. His Dexterity is 4 and his Wits is 2. Taking the lower of the two Attributes, his Defense trait is 2. As the bikers wade in Sims does his best to avoid their swings. The first biker suffers a -2 modifier to his attack roll — Sims' full Defense — while the second biker incurs only a -1 modifier. The third attacker is unaffected, as Sims has no Defense left to avoid the assailant's punch.

Defense is not affected by any wound penalties (p. 171) that your character may have incurred.

For more details on how Defense is used in combat, see Chapter 7, p. 155.

As your character's Dexterity and Wits increase through the application of experience points (or through temporary enhancement during the course of a story), his Defense may change as well. If you increase your character's Dexterity or Wits don't forget to adjust his Defense accordingly.

Health

Traits: Stamina + Size

A character's Health trait reflects his body's capacity to cope with injury and remain functional. As your character suffers damage, whether accidentally or in combat (see Chapter 7 for details), each point of damage inflicted lowers his Health by one. When your character's Health points are reduced to three, he suffers a negative modifier to his dice pools. As his Health points continue to decrease, this negative modifier increases as he is slowly overcome by shock and physical trauma. When all of your character's Health points are marked off as aggravated damage, he is dead. See Chapter 7, p. 152, for more details on types of damage and how they affect a character's Health.

Obviously, the larger and more robust a character is, the more damage he can withstand before dying.

Health is marked on your character sheet and has both a permanent and a temporary rating. Your character's permanent rating is filled in on the dots of your character sheet. His temporary points are recorded in the corresponding boxes. Every time your character loses a Health point to damage, mark off the kind of injury inflicted from left to right. When dots and filled boxes are equal, your character is badly hurt or dying.

Your character regains lost Health points at different rates based on the type of damage inflicted. See Chapter 7, p. 175 for details on recovering Health and healing times for bashing, lethal and aggravated harm. When points are recovered, the Health boxes on your character sheet are emptied from right to left.

As your character's Stamina increases through the use of experience points (or through temporary supernatural enhancements), his Health increases as well. Don't forget to adjust your character's Health dots when his Stamina changes.

Initiative

Traits: Dexterity + Composure

Your character's Initiative trait reflects her reaction time and ability to think on her feet in a crisis, be it a barroom brawl, a shootout or a desperate lunge to stop a child from wandering into a busy street. When the Storyteller calls for an Initiative roll, you roll one die and add the result to your character's Initiative trait. The total determines the order in which your character interacts with all other participants of the scene. Once you roll your character's Initiative the number does not usually change through the course of the scene. She always acts after characters with a higher total, and before those with a lower total. Possible exceptions are applied through use of the Fresh Start Merit (see Chapter 5, p. 112) or by delaying your character's action (see p. 151). In the event of a tie between two characters, she with the highest Initiative trait goes first. If both Initiative traits are the same, roll a die for each with the highest roll going first.

Example: *Diane's character has a Dexterity of 3 and a Composure of 2. Adding the two produces an Initiative trait of 5. During play, Diane's character is approached by a mugger and a fight breaks out. Diane rolls a die and adds the result to her character's Initiative trait. The roll is 7, so her character's Initiative total is 12. The Storyteller rolls a die for the mugger and gets a 4. The mugger's Initiative trait is 4. Adding the two together produces an Initiative total of 8. Diane's character gets the first action, and continues to do so in subsequent turns until the fight is over.*

For more information on Initiative and how it applies to combat, see Chapter 7, p. 151.

As your character's Attributes change through the use of experience points (or through temporary enhancement during the course of a story), her Initiative changes as well. If your character's Dexterity or Composure increases during play, don't forget to adjust her Initiative as well.

Morality

Base Value: 7

Morality reflects a character's sense of compassion for his fellow human being and basic respect for the rule of law. This isn't an absolute value. As people grow and change over time their perspectives on society and morality often shift. Some individuals strive to become more compassionate and virtuous, while others, driven by desperation or embittered by dire circumstances, reject their old convictions and adopt a more callous and selfish approach to existence.

Your character's Morality is not fixed. Depending on his actions it can increase or decrease during play. A starting character has a Morality of 7 — a basic respect for the law and a realistic sense of compassion for other people. He believes in the need to uphold the law, and treats others as he would expect to be treated himself. He has the potential to become more selfless and virtuous, or has a long way to fall into the depths of human barbarity. The course he follows depends entirely on the choices he makes during the course of the chronicle.

Each Morality rating has a threshold of sinful behavior from your character must refrain in order to avoid degeneration to a lower moral state.

Morality	Sin
10	Selfish thoughts. (Roll five dice.)
9	Minor selfish act (withholding charity). (Roll five dice.)
8	Injury to another (accidental or otherwise). (Roll four dice.)
7	Petty theft (shoplifting). (Roll four dice.)
6	Grand theft (burglary). (Roll three dice.)
5	Intentional, mass property damage (arson). (Roll three dice.)
4	Impassioned crime (manslaughter). (Roll three dice.)
3	Planned crime (murder). (Roll two dice.)
2	Casual/callous crime (serial murder). (Roll two dice.)
1	Utter perversion, heinous act (mass murder). (Roll two dice.)

Losing Morality Dots — Degeneration Rolls

If a character commits a sin equal to or worse than the threshold of his current Morality trait, roll the number of dice associated with the sin performed to avoid degeneration. If the roll succeeds, the character's overall sense of compassion remains intact, and his Morality does not change. If the degeneration roll fails, your character's sense of right and wrong is altered by his experience and he loses a point of Morality. His soul hardens to the needs

of others and he becomes inured to greater acts of selfishness or violence.

Example: *Joan has a Morality of 7. Referring to the chart, she does not risk degeneration unless she commits a deliberate act of petty theft or worse. She loses her job during play. Her savings run out and she is about to be thrown out of her apartment. One evening she walks downtown and notices that someone has left their wallet in their open car. Desperate, she reaches through the car window and steals the wallet. This crime (petty theft) is equal to the threshold of her current Morality, so a degeneration roll must be made to determine if Joan loses a Morality point. Petty theft allows for a roll of four dice.*

If Joan had committed an impassioned crime such as manslaughter to get some money (a sin more severe than what Joan's 7 Morality can tolerate), her player would have rolled three dice to see if Joan suffered degeneration.

As a character's Morality slips ever lower, she becomes more deranged and perhaps more of a monster, capable of virtually any depraved act. When a Morality point is lost because of a sin perpetrated, roll your character's new Morality trait as a dice pool. If the roll succeeds, she finds some kind of balance or existence at her new state of spiritual and ethical standing. If the roll fails, she manifests a derangement. Derangements are mental and emotional ailments or conditions, in this case brought on by your character's stress, grief or even remorselessness over acts performed. Derangements are detailed at length later in this chapter.

If your character develops such a condition, you and the Storyteller can decide which is appropriate based on the circumstances. An avoidance condition might set in whenever your character enters a situation that reminds her of the sin she committed. If she decided to harm a child and paid the emotional price, being around children thereafter might cause her to escape. Note that the conditions detailed later each have a mild and severe form. Your character probably starts with a mild ailment in any new derangement, unless something horribly traumatic occurs and you feel that she should descend directly into a severe problem.

On your character sheet, write the derangement gained on the line associated with the Morality trait to which she has fallen. If your character manifests a fixation when she drops from 6 to 5 Morality, write "Fixation" on the line associated with 5 Morality.

Example: *Let's say that the degeneration roll made for Joan's theft fails. The four dice turn up no successes. That means her Morality drops from 7 to 6. A check must now be made to see if she suffers mental or emotional damage for her sin. Her player rolls her new Morality of 6 as a dice pool, with a 1, 3, 3, 5, 6 and 7 as the result. No successes. That means Joan does indeed manifest a derangement. The player and Storyteller decide that Joan exhibits depression, and that's entered on the line next to 6 Morality on her character sheet.*

Repeated degeneration and Morality rolls that fail cause your character to incur more and more or worse and worse conditions. If you want to minimize the diversity of ailments that she manifests, focus on increasingly intense ones, acquiring the mild form of any condition first and

then assigning the severe one the next time your character incurs another problem.

If a character descends so far that her Morality drops to zero, she can no longer be played in any meaningful way. She becomes a true monster, inflicting pain and suffering on everyone around her without the slightest hint of remorse and no hope of redemption. At that point control of the character passes to the Storyteller.

Virtues and Degeneration

It's important to note that Virtues (explored later in this chapter) are not extensions of a character's Morality. Rather, they are ideals that inform his actions and provide a framework by which he interacts with society. Thus, it's possible for a character to commit ostensibly immoral acts in the pursuit of his Virtue. This doesn't excuse the immorality of a particular act, but the character may be able to rationalize the deed as a necessary one in pursuit of a higher purpose, and thus avoid compromising his ethics.

If your character commits an immoral act in pursuit of his defining Virtue, the Storyteller may allow you to add a +1 modifier to your degeneration roll. Higher modifiers are possible if the Storyteller feels that your character is compelled to sin in order to uphold his Virtue, but should never rise higher than +3.

Example: *Raphael is at home one night and hears a fight break out in his front yard. He lives in a dangerous part of town, so he gets his pistol and opens the front door to see what's going on. He sees a car at the curb, its engine running, and a man and woman screaming at one another by his mailbox. As Raphael takes all this in, the man pulls a gun from his waistband and shoots the woman in cold blood. Reacting in shock and outrage, Raphael shoots the man, killing him instantly.*

Raphael's Morality is 6. His defining Virtue is Justice. The act of manslaughter demands a degeneration roll, but the act was mandated by Raphael's Virtue, so the Storyteller decides the roll is made with a +1 modifier.

Regaining Morality

It's possible to reverse your character's slide into damnation and insanity through concerted effort and contrition. The road is long and difficult, though.

A character's Morality trait can be increased primarily by spending experience points, but Morality can be increased by only one point at any given time. See p. 35 for the experience points required to achieve each Morality rating. Storytellers are encouraged to require that characters demonstrate the desire to redeem themselves with concrete acts of contrition before a Morality increase is warranted. A good rule of thumb is to encourage character actions that aspire to the highest level of Morality that the player wants his character to attain. A moral existence is much more about the journey than the destination, after all. Typically, the best time to allow experience points to be spent on increasing Morality is at the end of a story, but exceptions can always be made for significant character actions between chapters or even scenes.

When a derangement is assigned to a Morality point, that ailment is overcome when the next, higher point is gained. The experience spent to gain a Morality dot represents your character's efforts to come to terms with her sin and thus free herself of her condition. She might also undergo treatment or simply forgives herself.

Example: Joan's life has spiraled into a bleak existence of theft, prostitution and drugs. She lives on the street and does what she must to survive. Her Morality trait has sunk to 5, although she has only acquired one derangement, depression. She's willing to lie, cheat and steal to get what she needs, but at the same time she loathes what she's become and wants to fight her way out of the gutter. Joan wants to return to the person she once was, living a (somewhat) normal and decent life. The player decides that a Morality of 7 is Joan's target. Over the course of the next story the character avoids stealing from others and makes a concerted effort to break her drug addiction. At the end of the story, the Storyteller determines if Joan's actions were sufficient to allow buying an increase in Morality with any experience points earned.

Upon eventually rising to 7 Morality once again, the "Depression" entry attached to 6 Morality on Joan's character sheet is erased. She comes to terms with the crime she committed, having paid penance and done good deeds to alleviate her guilt. She returns to being a normal, functioning individual.

Derangement Evolution

When a derangement is overcome by rising to a higher Morality, that ailment can be erased from your character sheet or ignored for the time being. Say, Mike's character's has a phobia assigned to 5 Morality and his character's Morality rises to 6. That phobia is overcome. Mike could erase "Phobia" from his sheet or just leave it there. If in the future a degeneration roll fails, his character falls back to 5 Morality. If a Morality roll also fails, a new derangement can be chosen for him or his old phobia may resurface. The first occurs if "Phobia" is erased from his character sheet. The second occurs if the condition is left there but is ignored — until now.

Erasing old derangements and acquiring new ones to replace them can signify dramatic changes in your character's life. He moves on from old experiences without looking back, and evolves as a result. Keeping but ignoring old derangements — and reactivating them when Morality falls again — suggests that your character is set in his ways. He has a pattern of behavior or some consistent issues with which he wrestles or that he revisits.



Of course, if your character's life is diverse — he defeats some problems for good and struggles with others that just won't go away — you can erase some derangements and keep but ignore others as his Morality rises and falls.

The Storyteller also has the option of awarding a Morality point at the end of a story if your character performs a particularly redeeming, generous or self-effacing act. The deed can't have been performed with the intent to regain Morality, to alleviate a derangement or to gain any personal reward. In fact, the character probably suffers repercussions for the deed, but gains some solace in having done the right thing. A character who commits a theft or murder might turn herself in, for example. Or someone who steals may not keep the rewards, distributing them among the needy instead.

Such a roleplaying-based award should be reserved for the end of a story, not the end of a scene or chapter. Only one Morality point should ever be gained by a character at a time. (If experience points are being spent to regain Morality, an extra play-based extra award should not be doled out at the same time.) A free Morality award can eliminate a derangement if the sickness corresponds to your character's former rating. So, if your character suffers narcissism at 5 Morality, he loses it upon rising to 6 Morality when a free point is gained. A free Morality award can also exceed any previous height that a character's trait has reached. Thus, if he's currently at 7 and has never gone any higher, an appropriate act of charity or purity could take him to 8.

Roleplaying-inspired awards are increasingly hard to come by. They not only become more demanding the higher one's Morality — saintly acts are necessary at high scores (8 and higher) — but new and different acts are required. Donating everything one owns over and over again doesn't keep netting free Morality dots. It does so only once and then the character needs to top even that.

If a character ever loses any Morality points in the course of a story, he probably invalidates himself from the prospect of gaining a free point through sacrifice or benediction. The exception might be if the character's sacrifice or penance far exceeds the weight of any sin that he performs. For example, he might have resorted to theft earlier, but before the story's end he risks death by taking a bullet for an innocent bystander.

Roll Results

When making a degeneration roll, use only the dice pool associated with the sin committed. Likewise, when rolling Morality to check for a derangement, do not add other Attributes, traits or bonuses and do not apply any penalties. You may *not* spend Willpower to gain a +3 modifier on either kind of roll.

Dramatic Failure: Not possible on either kind of roll. At no point is a chance roll made (no penalties or bonuses are applied to degeneration or Morality rolls).

Failure: On a degeneration roll, your character loses the struggle to maintain his standards of behavior when faced with the reality of his sin. He loses one dot of Morality. On a failed Morality roll, he gains a derangement.

Success: Your character emerges from his crisis of conscience with his sense of right and wrong intact. His Morality is unchanged and he remains as sane as before.

Exceptional Success: Your character re-dedicates himself to his convictions in the wake of his sin, learning or growing from the deeds he has committed. Not only does his Morality remain unchanged on a degeneration roll, he gains a point of Willpower (which cannot exceed his Willpower dots). No special bonuses are gained for an exceptional Morality roll when testing for a derangement.

Derangement Immunity

The threat of manifesting derangements because of falling Morality looms for most ordinary people. That is, it applies to people with everyday standards of behavior. More charitable, pious or peaceful individuals gain some protection against derangements. Their behavior is generally altruistic or compassionate such that they're not as likely to suffer excessive guilt or shame. When a character achieves a Morality of 8 to 10, no derangements are incurred if he ever drops from that rating. His degeneration roll can fail and he can lose a dot of Morality, but no Morality roll is made to see if he manifests a derangement. Such Morality rolls and the threat of mental ailments applies only when a character falls from 7 or lower Morality.

The blank character sheet at the end of this book shows where derangements are assigned. You may write your character's conditions on the lines associated with Morality 1 to 6.

Size

Base Value: 5 (adult human)

A character's Size is relative to his species (human) and age. The average adult human's Size is 5. A child's is 3. Size is one of the two component values used to determine your character's Health dots (see above), reflecting her overall capacity to withstand damage. Generally, your character's Size does not change unless she undergoes some strange supernatural transformation.

Here are some sample Sizes for various creatures.

Size	Creature
1	Human infant (up to 1 year old)
3	Human child (5 to 7 years old)
4	Wolf
5	Human
6	Gorilla
7	Grizzly bear

Speed

Traits: Strength + Dexterity + species factor (5 for adult humans, 3 for human children; see below for other examples)

Your character's Speed is the number of yards she can travel in a single turn. This trait is a combination of her Strength (lean muscle mass), Dexterity (coordination and agility) and a species factor that reflects her age, physical configuration, Size and other considerations. Other species such as horses and cheetahs have physical configurations that lend themselves to high travel rates.

Factor	Species
1	Turtle
3	Human toddler
5	Human adult
8	Wolf
10	Caribou
12	Horse
15	Cheetah

So, a being's Strength and Dexterity are added to the above number to determine its Speed.

Your character's Speed represents the number of yards she can move in a turn and still perform an action. She can move and perform an action in a turn, or perform an action and move, but she cannot move, perform an action and move again all in the same turn.

Alternatively, she can run at up to double her Speed in a turn, but can usually take no other action. See Chapter 7, p. 164, for details. Also, when your character suffers an injury modifier based on her current Health, her Speed is reduced as well.

Example: *Katie's character has a Strength of 2 and a Dexterity of 2. The character is a human adult, so her Speed is 9 (2+2+5), meaning she can walk or jog nine yards or run 18 yards per turn. If the character is injured and has only three Health points remaining, she incurs a -1 modifier to dice pools and Speed, reducing the trait to 8.*

If your character's Strength or Dexterity changes through the use of experience points (or through temporary enhancement during the course of a story), her Speed changes as well. If you change your character's Strength or Dexterity, don't forget to adjust her Speed.

Willpower

Traits: Resolve + Composure

Willpower measures your character's self-confidence, determination and emotional resilience. A character with a high Willpower is focused, driven to achieve his goals, and capable of resisting his dark impulses. It would be tempting to call such a character virtuous, but Willpower doesn't equate to altruism. A criminal mastermind or a serial killer could possess an iron will just as easily as could a saint. The first two are ruthless in their ambitions, and determined to see them through.

Willpower is rated on a scale from 1 to 10 and has both permanent dots and temporary points. Your character's permanent score is filled in on the dots on your

character sheet. His temporary points are recorded in the corresponding boxes. When a temporary point is spent, just check off a box. When dots and checked boxes are equal, your character is out of Willpower. When your character regains a Willpower point (see below), a check is erased from one of the boxes on your sheet.

Willpower is not rolled. Points are spent for various effects, mostly representing sheer determination in overcoming obstacles in your character's path. They can also be spent to gain bonuses to resist forces applied against your character.

Characters with no Willpower points left are exhausted—physically, mentally and emotionally. They've used up their reserves of determination and tend to be listless and depressed. Characters can regain Willpower in various ways, but it isn't easy, so consider spending Willpower points carefully.

Uses of Willpower are explained more fully in the Dramatic Systems Chapter, under "Heroic Effort," p. 132.

•	Spineless
••	Weak
•••	Timid
••••	Certain
•••••	Confident
••••••	Resolute
•••••••	Driven
••••••••	Determined
•••••••••	Iron-willed
••••••••••	Implacable

Note: Willpower is not to be confused with Resolve. Resolve is your character's ongoing focus. Think of it as his *long-term* purpose, like a career plan. Willpower reflects your character's *short-term* highs and lows, his ability to dedicate himself in brief efforts to overcome challenges. Resolve does contribute to your character's overall Willpower dots, though.

Spending Willpower Points

Willpower represents the ability to succeed through sheer determination. It's useful for a number of things. Only one Willpower point can be spent per turn to achieve any one of the following effects.

- You can spend a point of Willpower to gain a +3 modifier on a roll during a turn. Only one dice pool can be affected per turn, and the Storyteller may determine that some rolls cannot be modified in this way. You cannot spend a point of Willpower to gain a bonus on a degeneration or Morality roll (see above).

- A Willpower point can be spent to add two to your character's Stamina, Resolve, Composure or Defense to resist mental or social/emotional pressures asserted on him, or to make a concerted effort to avoid being harmed. See "Resistance," p. 133.

Regaining Willpower Points

Your character can recover lost Willpower through any one of four ways, detailed below. Willpower points can never exceed your character's Willpower dots. The only way to increase her Willpower dots is by increasing her Resolve and/or Composure (see Chapter 8, p. 216 for more details).



Recovering Willpower is usually a matter of reaffirming your character's sense of confidence and wellbeing, so certain actions and situations may allow her to recover Willpower. Ultimately, it's up to the Storyteller to decide when characters recover Willpower during a story. Storytellers should tailor recovery to suit the story, keeping in mind that it's a powerful and useful trait. Characters shouldn't be allowed to regain it too quickly, or else players may abuse its effects.

- Your character may regain one Willpower point per scene if her actions play out in a manner appropriate to her Vice (see below). Your character may regain *all* spent Willpower if her actions play out in a manner appropriate to her Virtue (see below). No more than one Willpower point may be regained per scene by fulfilling a Vice. Willpower can be regained by fulfilling a Virtue no more than once per chapter (game session). The Storyteller is the final arbiter as to whether your character's actions are shaped by a Virtue or Vice, and can refuse to award Willpower if your character acts purely for the rules gain and against concept.

- Your character may regain a point of Willpower after she has had a full night's rest or the equivalent opportunity to recharge her batteries and redouble her efforts. This assumes your character rests or relaxes and does not engage in strenuous activities.

- If your character achieves a significant goal or performs a particularly impressive act that affirms her sense of confidence, the Storyteller may choose to award a Willpower point.

- Your character regains all spent Willpower points at the end of a *story*. Not at the end of a game session, but at the conclusion of an overall story. The Storyteller may require all characters to achieve some particular goal or objective or otherwise feel like they succeed (even just a little) in order to regain Willpower. If characters are frustrated or events result in a stalemate, a partial recovery of Willpower may be appropriate.

Storytellers can choose other occasions on which to allow Willpower recovery to suit the needs of the story. Characters may be able to recover Willpower if they find themselves in dire straits and have to push on in order to succeed, for example, or if they refuse to give up despite the odds. Awarding extra Willpower recovery makes things a little easier on the players, while withholding Willpower makes things more challenging.

If for some reason your character's Resolve and/or Composure temporarily increases during a game, perhaps as a result of a mystical spell, he gains one Willpower point per dot increase. Essentially, he has access to one or more free Willpower dots for the duration of the effect. When his Attributes return to normal, your character loses any extra Willpower dots. If they were never spent, he no longer has access to them.

Derangements

Derangements are behaviors that occur when the mind is forced to confront intolerable or conflicting feelings, such as overwhelming terror or profound guilt. When your character is faced with impressions or emotions that he cannot reconcile, his mind attempts to ease the inner turmoil by stimulating behavior such as megalomania, schizophrenia or hysteria as an outlet. People in the World of Darkness, unwittingly tormented, persecuted and preyed upon by incomprehensible beings, often develop these ailments by the mere fact of existing. Alternatively, regret, guilt or remorselessness for inflicting abuses eats away at mind and soul. The night's creatures are not immune to such pressures, either. Existence as an unnatural thing overwhelms what little humanity these beings might have left, driving them mad.

The primary means by which your character may develop derangements is by performing heinous acts and suffering the mental or emotional repercussions. See "Morality," earlier in this chapter, for more details.

Otherwise, the Storyteller may decide that a scene or circumstance to which your character is exposed is too much for him to bear and he breaks under the pressure. A bad drug trip might reveal too much of the monstrous reality of the world for a person's mind to bear. A drug overdose could imbalance a character mentally. Or witnessing a creature in all its horrific glory might make an onlooker snap.

Ailments caused by fallen Morality can be healed through your character's own efforts toward treatment or contrition (by spending experience points). The Storyteller decides if a more spontaneously inspired condition is temporary or permanent. A spontaneous ailment might be temporary, lasting until the character resolves the situation that triggered the condition. It might become permanent if reconciliation is refused, the condition goes untreated or the trigger that caused it is insurmountable. With Storyteller approval, a starting character might have a spontaneously inspired derangement as a Flaw (see p. 217), gaining experience in stories in which the condition or problem is prominent. Spontaneous ailments developed during play might be represented in-game as evolutionary Flaws, not ones established at character creation.

It must be noted that people who are "crazy" are neither funny nor arbitrary in their actions. Insanity is frightening to onlookers who witness someone rage against an unseen presence or hoard rotten meat "to feed to monsters." Even something as harmless-sounding as constantly talking to one's self can be disturbing to observers.

The insane respond to a pattern only they grasp, to stimuli that they perceive in their own minds. To their skewed perceptions, what happens to them is perfectly normal. A character's derangement is there for a reason, whether she committed a crime or saw her own children devoured. What stimuli does her insanity inflict upon her, and how does she react to what happens? Work with the Storyteller to create a pattern of provocations for your character's derangement, and then decide how she reacts.

Each of the following ailments is defined in terms of mild and severe. The first might apply to your character if an action or experience imbalances him, but he remains functional. The second can apply if a previously mild condition intensifies with more irreconcilable behavior or spectacles, or if a single act or scene is so mind numbing that only full-blown insanity and dysfunction can result. If treatment or reconciliation occurs and ailments are alleviated, a severe case of a condition must be addressed and overcome before a mild case of the same derangement.

Mild	Severe
Depression	Melancholia
Phobia	Hysteria
Narcissism	Megalomania
Fixation	Obsessive Compulsion
Suspicion	Paranoia
Inferiority Complex	Anxiety
Vocalization	Schizophrenia*
Irrationality	Multiple Personality*
Avoidance	Fugue*

* Your character must experience a life-altering trauma or supernatural tragedy to acquire one of these extreme derangements. They cannot normally be acquired by failing a Morality roll unless the sin performed is truly gut wrenching or horrific, such as murdering one's own children.

Depression (mild): If your character fails to achieve a goal (not just fails a roll, but fails to accomplish some personal, desired end such as getting a job or saving a friend's life), he might go into a bout of depression for the remainder of the scene. A dramatic failure that occurs in any activity might also bring on a bout of depression. Regardless of the circumstances, make a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll.

Effect: If the roll fails, your character loses one Willpower point and cannot spend any Willpower points for the remainder of the scene.

Melancholia (severe): Severe depression. In addition to the above effects of a failed Resolve + Composure roll, all dice pools suffer a -2 penalty for the remainder of the scene.

Phobia (mild): Your character is scared of a particular type of person, place or thing such as lawyers, heights or spiders. When that trigger is encountered, a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll must be made successfully or your character suffers a bout of fear.

Effect: Your character moves away from the object of her phobia. If she must be near it, she can tolerate being no closer than her Speed in yards. If it approaches her, she must move away at least her Speed in distance in her next action. She cannot easily target the trigger with close combat or ranged attacks. Such attacks suffer a -5 penalty as your character shakes just looking at it. If space or circumstances don't allow her to maintain her distance, she freezes like a deer in headlights until she finds an opening by which to escape. (Her Defense still applies if attacked and she can choose to dodge and can take cover from Firearms attacks, but she can take no other actions while "frozen.")

Hysteria (severe): This condition operates as a phobia, but on a failed Resolve + Composure roll your character cannot be in the same room with the object of her fear. She must run away from it immediately, and cannot tolerate being within sensory range (sight, sound, smell) of it. If the trigger comes within sensory range, she must run away at full running Speed as soon as she can take an action. She cannot target it for an attack under any circumstance. If it touches her, make another Resolve + Composure roll for her to not freak out and run as far away as she can, thinking of nothing else until she's left the subject far behind. (Even if this roll succeeds, your character must still leave the room or area.) If any of your Resolve + Composure rolls suffer a dramatic failure or your character is unable to escape, she faints and loses consciousness for the remainder of the scene. If your character is unaware of the object's proximity until it touches her, your Resolve + Composure roll suffers a -3 penalty. If it touches her where she can't see it but she can feel it — a spider dropping on her neck or in her hair — the penalty is -5.

Narcissism (mild): Whenever your character *succeeds* at a goal (not simply succeeds in a roll, but achieves a desired end such as knocking a challenging opponent unconscious or hacking into a well-protected computer), it might go to his head and pump up his overweening ego. Roll Resolve + Composure to avoid a bout of vanity.

Effect: On a failed roll, your character does not work and play well with others — even if the victory that brings on a bout of narcissism was partly won with their aid. For the remainder of the scene, when called upon to aid in a task your character does so only half-heartedly, unless it's a task focused on him or his own needs or wants. He suffers a -3 penalty when participating in teamwork efforts (see p. 134). And he's such a self-obsessed bore that Social rolls all suffer a -1 penalty.

Megalomania (severe): The effects of Narcissism apply, except that the penalties intensify by one. Your character is also highly competitive. He cannot allow himself to fail a contest (even a contested roll). If he does, he obsesses about it and works to arrange a rematch when it's most beneficial for him. If, for example, he fails to pick a lock while an ally succeeds, he doesn't let it go. He constantly insists that he did the job and that his successor took the glory, and demands that similar efforts be tried again, even under inappropriate circumstances such as at an office or restaurant.

If your character ever loses a contest to someone he feels is socially inferior, he loses one point of Willpower due to shame and self-loathing (which is at the heart of his megalomania; he secretly fears that he's a fraud).

Fixation (mild): If your character fails or succeeds at an important action such as leaping between buildings or making a getaway in a sports car, he might fixate on his loss or victory. Roll Resolve + Composure after such an event for him to avoid this unhealthy obsession.

Effect: If your Resolve + Composure roll fails, roll a single die. The result is the number of scenes in which your character is focused on the offending or inspiring event or task, to the possible exclusion of more important goals. He fixates on what he believes caused him to lose



or win his goal, whether it's an opponent, a broken shoe-lace or the model of car driven. In the case of a defeat, he cannot help but simmer in anger, cursing a circumstance or trying to devise a method of circumventing it in the future. In the case of a victory, he becomes a fanatic, spending much of his time researching, observing or acclaiming an activity or factor that allowed him to succeed.

The Storyteller rules on how this derangement affects your character's dice pools or behavior. It might cause him a -1 on any task not related to his fixation, or he might refuse to engage in an activity if it doesn't somehow tie into his obsession. Since this derangement is potentially active for many scenes, rather than one, its effects should be mild but persistent.

Obsessive Compulsion (severe): The trauma, guilt or inner conflict that causes this derangement forces your character to focus nearly all of his attention and energy on a single repetitive behavior or action. Obsession relates to an individual's desire to control his environment — keeping clean, keeping an area quiet and peaceful, or keeping undesirable individuals out. A compulsion is an action or set of actions that an individual is driven to perform to soothe his anxieties — placing objects in an exact order, constantly checking to make sure a weapon is loaded, praying every few hours to give thanks for surviving that long.

Effect: Determine a set of specific actions or behaviors that your character follows to the exclusion of all else (even if doing so interferes with his current agenda or endangers his life or others'). The effects of obsessive compulsion can be negated for the course of one scene by making a successful Resolve + Composure roll at a -2 penalty. If your character is forcibly prevented from adhering to his derangement, he may lose control among enemies or allies and attack either (or both) indiscriminately.

Suspicion (mild): Anytime your character suffers intentional misfortune at the hands of another, he might become extremely suspicious of *everyone's* motives toward him. He might crash as a result of being cut off in traffic or receive little help from assistants in a teamwork effort (see p. 134). Roll Resolve + Composure for your character to resist the suspicion compulsion.

"Misfortune" is characterized as failing an important task due to the intentional intervention of another person — even if it's a friend or ally. Those people whom your character already mistrusts for good reason can still trigger his suspicious nature if they successfully foil his task — everyone then becomes a suspect, plotting to do him wrong. Combat does not necessarily trigger this derangement. A Resolve + Composure roll is made only if combat is the means by which someone intentionally prevents your character from achieving a goal. (Note: A roll for a task might fail and your character chooses to blame someone else, but that doesn't necessarily trigger this derangement's effect. Only if someone *directly* causes him to fail is a roll made to avoid triggering his suspicious nature.)

Effect: Your character's trust is undermined for the remainder of the scene, regardless of whether or not the person or persons who did him wrong meant any harm.

He questions everyone's sincerity and doubts that anyone tries to help him, even if someone saves his life. He suffers a -1 penalty on all Social rolls. Note that, even though your character is suspicious, he can still be taken in by con men and hucksters. He gets no special bonus to resist their attempts to sway him even though he suspects them of being as bad as everyone else.

Paranoia (severe): Your character believes that her misery and insecurity stem from external persecution and hostility. (That would be an accurate assumption in the World of Darkness, if people actually knew of monsters' existence.) Paranoids obsess over their persecution complexes, often creating vast and intricate conspiracy theories to explain who torments them and why. Anyone or anything perceived to be "one of them" might be subjected to violence.

Effect: A character who suffers from paranoia automatically suffers a -2 penalty on Social rolls. The character is distrustful and wary of everyone, even close friends and family. The slightest hint of suspicious behavior is enough to provoke a Resolve + Composure roll to retain control (made at a -2 penalty). A failed roll indicates that your character flees or attacks an offender.

Inferiority Complex (mild): Whenever your character is subjected to a stressful situation in which the result of a single choice or dice roll can determine success or failure, she might be overcome with such self-doubt that she threatens the outcome. She might need to tell a convincing lie to get out of a dangerous situation or cut a wire to disable a bomb. Roll your character's Resolve + Composure for her to remain composed.

Effect: If your roll fails, the weight of the momentous choice is too much for your character and she is flustered, doubting her ability to choose correctly or to perform adequately. Once in this state, any rolls made for the remainder of the scene — including the momentous act itself — suffer a -1 penalty. In addition, a Willpower point cannot be spent on the singular roll that inspires her bout of inferiority.

Anxiety (severe): As Inferiority Complex, but your character's general anxiety plagues things so badly that she suffers a -2 penalty on all rolls for the remainder of the scene, and Willpower points cannot be spent to bolster any rolls in that period.

Vocalization (mild): Whenever your character is stymied by a quandary and must make an important decision about a course of action, or is under extreme stress, she might talk to herself without realizing it. Roll Resolve + Composure to avoid this disconcerting habit.

Examples of important decisions include:

Trying to figure out which fork in the road to take so that the guerillas don't get to the village first. The wrong choice means arriving precious minutes late and finding innocents killed or kidnapped.

When your character has one bullet but two foes, both of whom prepare to strike lethal blows against two separate friends. Which should be shot?

When the attorney slides a piece of paper with his final offer across the table. Your character has minutes to say "yes" or "no."

Effect: On a failed roll, your character vocalizes her internal monologue but only realizes it if it's pointed out by others, at which point she can stop for one turn per dot of Wits that she has. After that period, she forgets herself and starts doing it all over again. This behavior persists for the remainder of the scene.

Your character vocalizes even if opponents or rivals can hear. It's hard to keep her thoughts and feelings secret when she speaks them aloud. For example, a rival might demand that she reveal the location of a hidden heirloom. She smirks and think to herself (and unwittingly speaks aloud), "You'll never find it in my hidden wall safe."

Schizophrenia (severe; extreme): Conflicting sets of feelings and impulses that cannot be resolved can cause your character to develop schizophrenia, which manifests as a withdrawal from reality, violent changes in behavior and hallucinations. This derangement is the classic sort, causing victims to talk to walls, imagine themselves to be the King of Siam, or to receive murderous instructions from their pets.

Roleplaying this derangement requires careful thought. The Storyteller must determine a general set of behaviors relevant to the trauma that causes the condition. Hallucinations, bizarre behavior and disembodied voices stem from a terrible inner conflict that the individual cannot resolve. Establish a firm idea of what that conflict is and then rationalize what kind of behavior it causes.

Effect: A character with this derangement is unpredictable and dangerous. He automatically suffers a -2 penalty on all Social rolls and may be aggressive or violent toward people who confront him with trauma such as accusations, disturbing truths or heated arguments. Make a Resolve + Composure roll for your character to avoid escaping or attacking the source of trauma.

Irrationality (mild): Whenever your character is threatened with violence or suffers extreme tension by being persecuted, challenged or accused, she might react without logic or reason. Roll her Resolve + Composure to keep her cool.

The persecution, challenge or accusation needs to bear some realistic threat to your character's wellbeing, whether related to finances, emotional security or social standing. A hobo threatening to sue is no real threat, but a rich executive who says he's going to ruin your character qualifies as a threat. Likewise, a society-page gossipmonger who threatens to expose your character's faults is a threat *if* your character relies

on that crowd for social acceptance, but not if he is a bicycle messenger who's never been inside a penthouse.

Effect: On a failed roll, your character's only way to comfortably deal with confrontation is to act crazy or over the top, in wild hopes that she will scare away her oppressor or at least mitigate her own fears. This behavior persists for the remainder of the scene. Ironically, she takes dangerous risks that might harm her worse than the actual threat posed. If a bouncer demands to know what your character is doing in an off-limits part of a club, she might overreact and get in his face. Make a Wits + Composure roll for her to be able to take any action that removes her from the scene or that directly diffuses the situation (such as accepting a hand offered in a conciliatory handshake). The truly ironic

part about this behavior is that during such a bout, your character cannot initiate violence, only respond to it if it occurs. She can threaten or cajole challengers, but can't take the first swing. (That, in fact, is what her crazed behavior tries to avoid.)

Multiple Personality (severe; extreme): The trauma that spawns this derangement fractures your character's personality into one or more additional personas, allowing her to deny her trauma or any actions the trauma causes



by placing the blame on “someone else.” Each personality is created to respond to certain emotional stimuli. An abused person might develop a tough-as-nails survivor personality, create a “protector” or even become a murderer to deny the abuse she suffers. In most cases, none of these personalities is aware of the others, and they come and go through your character’s mind in response to specific situations or conditions.

Effect: A character with multiple personalities can manifest different Skills or perhaps increased or diminished Social Attributes for each identity (the number of dots allocated to your character’s Social Attributes are rearranged by anywhere from one to three).

Avoidance (mild): When confronted with a situation or person associated with a previous, significant failure or trauma (a long-term rival, an ex-wife, the house in which one suffered a painful childhood), your character prefers not to face the situation and might do everything he can to avoid it. Roll Resolve + Composure for him to master his nervousness.

Effect: On a failed roll, your character does everything in his power to avoid the situation, short of harming himself or others. He might escape the scene or disguise himself as a bystander to sidle away. If he must confront (or can’t escape) the situation, any rolls made suffer a -1 penalty.

Fugue (severe; extreme): Victims suffering from fugue experience “blackouts” and loss of memory. When subjected to a particular variety of stress, your character performs a specific, rigid set of behaviors to remove the stressful symptoms. This syndrome differs from multiple personalities in that an individual in the grip of a fugue has no separate personality. Instead, he is on a form of “autopilot” similar to sleepwalking. Decide on the kind of circumstance or exposure that triggers this state, be it the death of a defenseless person by his hand, a confrontation with a specific sort of creature or confinement in a small, dark room.

Effect: Make a Resolve + Composure roll when your character is subjected to his trigger. If the roll fails, roleplay your character’s trance-like state by performing a sequence of behaviors that he performs almost robotically. He might repetitively untie and tie his shoes, walk to the corner of the room and refuse to come out, or curl into the fetal position. If the Storyteller is not satisfied by your character’s reaction, he might take control of your character for the duration of the bout. The spell lasts for the remainder of the scene. At the end of the fugue, your character “regains consciousness” with no memory of his actions. If outsiders (including friends and enemies) interfere with or try to prevent your character’s mechanical activities, he may attack them in order to carry on.

Virtues and Vices

All characters have strengths and weaknesses, noble aspects and dark sides to their personalities. While most people try to cultivate virtues and eschew vices, both are intrinsic elements of identity and both equally reinforce a sense of self, whether we like to admit it or not.

Every character starts play with one defining Virtue and one defining Vice, chosen during character creation. Virtue and Vice may clearly reflect your character’s background and concept, or they can be used to contrast his outward nature to create sources of conflict that make for excellent roleplaying. A character who is a priest might have the defining Virtue of Faith and the defining Vice of Pride. He’s a man of great conviction and belief in his fellow man, but there are times when his beliefs lend themselves to self-righteousness. This is a fairly complementary application of Virtues and Vices based on character concept, as they both stem from the character’s background. A contrasting approach might be to give the character the Virtue of Faith and the Vice of Wrath. He believes in the path of righteousness and the intrinsic worth of mankind, but sometimes the state of the world is such that it fills him with a violent rage to punish those who ignore the tenets of his religion. The result is a source of conflict within the character as he tries to reconcile an essential part of his nature with his dedication to the church.

When a character’s actions in difficult situations reflect his particular Virtue or Vice, he reinforces his fundamental sense of self. If the Storyteller judges that your character’s actions during a scene reflect his Vice, he regains one Willpower point that has been spent. If the Storyteller judges that your character’s actions during a chapter (a game session) reflect his Virtue, he regains all spent Willpower points. Note that these actions must be made in situations that pose some risk to your character, whereby he stands to pay a price for acting according to his Virtue or Vice. Everyday expressions of, say, Faith or Pride are not enough to reaffirm a character’s determination or sense of self.

Example: *Vasquez is a police officer with the defining Virtue of Justice and the Vice of Greed. In the course of an investigation he discovers that a group of detectives is taking a cut from local drug dealers in return for protection. If Vasquez reports the detectives to Internal Affairs he risks being ostracized by his fellow officers as a snitch. If he does so despite the risk, he acts in accordance with his Virtue and regains all spent Willpower. By the same token, if he uses his knowledge to blackmail the detectives into giving him a piece of the action he risks going to jail if he’s caught. Doing that is in accordance with his Vice and allows the character to regain a single Willpower point.*

Fulfilling a Virtue is more rewarding than fulfilling a Vice for two reasons. One, it is inherently challenging to accomplish a surpassing act of goodness in a world that’s rife with selfishness and aggression. Doing so demands sacrifice and perseverance. Two, the temptation to indulge base inclinations and desires is constant and often means taking the path of least resistance, which precludes doing the greater good. Fulfilling Vices therefore offers small rewards that are easy to come by.

Your character does not gain extra Virtues or Vices during play. The fundamental qualities that define him do not change. Nor are they compounded with more such traits.

The seven Virtues and Vices detailed below are ostensibly drawn from Western, Judeo-Christian beliefs (e.g., the

Seven Heavenly Virtues and Seven Deadly Sins), but it's important to note that nearly all cultures value these ethics and revile these sins.

Virtues

When creating your character, choose one of the seven Virtues detailed here as your character's defining quality. This is not to say that she may not have other worthwhile or altruistic qualities, but her defining Virtue is the one that most clearly evokes her basic beliefs.

Charity

True Charity comes from sharing gifts with others, be it money or possessions, or simply giving time to help another in need. A charitable character is guided by her compassion to share what she has in order to improve the plight of those around her. Charitable individuals are guided by the principle of treating others as they would be treated themselves. By sharing gifts and taking on the role of the Samaritan, they hope to cultivate goodwill in others, and the gifts they give will eventually return to them in their hour of need.

Your character regains all spent Willpower points whenever she helps another at the risk of loss or harm to herself. It isn't enough to share what your character has in abundance. She must make a real sacrifice in terms of time, possessions or energy, or she must risk life and limb to help another.

Example: *Deloris could see her dad losing his mind if he knew his little girl was driving around a south-side neighborhood so late at night. But if she wanted to be a top*

investigative reporter, she had to take some risks, even if it meant tracking down clues on a serial killer in a slum.

She'd been the one to dub him "Tommy 10 Tongues" in her first cover story. Now he was up to 12 tongues, and she was determined to catch him before he harvested another. She knew the police had no idea how to decipher the bloody hieroglyphs at the crime scenes, or why the victims were all missing their tongues. But the police didn't have an ex-lover who was a linguistics professor.

Then Deloris passed the other motorist. A white man with a cast on one arm struggling to change a flat. If Tommy 10 Tongues didn't get him, the locals surely would. And yet, Deloris wasn't born yesterday. The cast could have been a fake. The killer could have used such tricks to lure his victims in. She didn't want to be the next one, but she couldn't bear the thought of writing the morning headline, "Stranded Motorist 13th Victim." So, she pulled over to do the charitable thing.

Deloris gains all spent Willpower for her act of charity. Her willingness to risk herself for someone else validates her defining Virtue.

Other Names: Compassion, mercy

Possessed by: Philanthropists, saints, soup-kitchen workers

Faith

Those with Faith know that the universe is not random, meaningless chaos, but ordered by a higher power. No matter how horrifying the world might be, everything



has its place in the Plan and ultimately serves that Purpose. This Virtue does not necessarily involve belief in a personified deity. It might involve belief in a Grand Unified Theory whereby the seeming randomness of the universe is ultimately an expression of mathematical precision. Or it might be a view that everything is One and that even evil is indistinguishable from good when all discriminating illusions are overcome.

Your character regains all spent Willpower points whenever he is able to forge meaning from chaos and tragedy.

Example: *Kevin stood at a precipice. Images flashed through his mind: his wife's bulging eyes, his son's mutilated body, his daughter's pink pajamas shredded and matted with hair and blood. Despair and rage whirled up from the psychological chasm before him. He had only to take a step into the cold comfort that the world was meaningless, random and violent, that there could be no God if such evil could come to pass.*

No! He didn't believe it. He couldn't believe it. Something had done this. Something sick and twisted. Something inhuman. Kevin would find it. God give him strength, he would find it and stop it.

By dedicating himself to finding the meaning of the crime, knowing that there must be a reason for the madness, Kevin regains any spent Willpower points.

Other Names: Belief, conviction, humility, loyalty

Possessed by: Detectives, philosophers, priests, scientists, true believers

Fortitude

A person's ideals are meaningless unless they're tested. When it seems as though the entire world is arrayed against him because of his beliefs, a person possessing Fortitude weathers the storm and emerges with his convictions intact. Fortitude is about standing up for one's beliefs and holding the course no matter how tempting it may be to relent or give up. By staying the course — regardless of the cost — he proves the worth of his ideals.

Your character regains all spent Willpower points whenever he withstands overwhelming or tempting pressure to alter his goals. This does not include temporary distractions from his course of action, only pressure that might cause him to abandon or change his goals altogether.

Example: *Noel was absorbed in reading the newspaper when the stranger walked in. The town was opening its eyes to the corruption; his campaign to oust the criminal who called himself 'mayor' was working.*

The stranger dropped some photos on the desk, breaking Noel's concentration. They were of Noel 15 years before. The alcoholic years.

"I suggest you drop your high and mighty crusade unless you want these on the front page."

Noel instantly recognized that his political career hung in the balance. Was this how it started? Was this how they got their hooks into you?

"Run them," he said. "I don't care. You can tell your boss he's through. He has more to lose than I do."

By refusing to budge and pressing on in the wake of scandal, Noel behaves in a way that validates his defining Virtue and he regains any spent Willpower points.

Other Names: Courage, integrity, mettle, stoicism

Possessed by: Dictators, fanatic cultists, gumshoes

Hope

Being hopeful means believing that evil and misfortune cannot prevail, no matter how grim things become. Not only do the hopeful believe in the ultimate triumph of morality and decency over malevolence, they maintain steadfast belief in a greater sense of cosmic justice — whether it's Karma or the idea of an all-knowing, all-seeing God who waits to punish the wicked. All will turn out right in the end, and the hopeful mean to be around when it happens.

Your character regains all spent Willpower points whenever she refuses to let others give in to despair, even though doing so risks harming her own goals or wellbeing. This is similar to Fortitude, above, except that your character tries to prevent *others* from losing hope in their goals. She need not share those goals herself or even be successful in upholding them, but there must be a risk involved.

Example: *The activists' anger was palpable as Eva entered the room.*

"I know you see me as the enemy — Trent Thorson's daughter. The truth is, I may own Thorson Lumber, but I don't control it or I'd shut it down. If my uncle has his way, I'll never have that chance.

"I know his lawyers and thugs are pressuring you to stop the protest, but you can't give up. You feel the power of that forest. There's something there, something bigger than any of us that needs to be protected.

"All I came here to say is don't lose hope. I'll feed you what information I can from the inside to keep you one step ahead of them. If you give up now, there'll be nothing left to save."

By supporting the activists at her own personal expense and risk, Eva regains any spent Willpower.

Other Names: Dreamer, optimist, utopian

Possessed by: Anti-globalization activists, entrepreneurs, martyrs, visionaries

Justice

Wrongs cannot go unpunished. This is the central tenet of the just, who believe that protecting the innocent and confronting inequity is the responsibility of every decent person, even in the face of great personal danger. The just believe that evil cannot prosper so long as one good person strives to do what is right, regardless of the consequences.

Your character regains all spent Willpower points whenever he does the right thing at risk of personal loss or setback. The "right thing" can be defined by the letter or spirit of a particular code of conduct, whether it be the United States penal code or a biblical Commandment.

Example: For five years Malcolm watched the bastard parade into court, smiling through appeal after appeal. His gold-plated lawyers ran circles around the district attorney. Then they settled the class-action suit at such a ridiculously low payment that Malcolm had to wonder how far the bribes went. And the bastard was going free.

Hundreds had been driven insane by the drug he distributed. It made him rich even while it made Malcolm's sister a corpse... and then a ghost. It was only then that Malcolm realized why she always appeared outside his hall closet. That's where he kept his gun.

If Malcolm takes the law into his own hands and makes himself a criminal as a result, he acts in a way that validates his defining Virtue and he regains any spent Willpower.

Other Names: Condemnatory, righteous

Possessed by: Critics, judges, parents, role models

Prudence

The Virtue of Prudence places wisdom and restraint above rash action and thoughtless behavior. One maintains integrity and principles by moderating actions and avoiding unnecessary risks. While that means a prudent person might never take big gambles that bring huge rewards, neither is his life ruined by a bad roll of the dice. By choosing wisely and avoiding the easy road he prospers slowly but surely.

Your character regains all spent Willpower points whenever he refuses a tempting course of action by which he could gain significantly. The "temptation" must involve some reward that, by refusing it, might cost him later on.

Example: "Miss Hernandez, you're an intelligent woman — and a beautiful one, I might add. There are so many benefits available to the people who contribute to our family business. The least of them is the considerable fee we're offering for your services in this matter."

"Your offer is generous," Louise replied, "and I thank you for it. But the types of offshore transactions you propose are tantamount to money laundering and tax evasion. It wouldn't be prudent for me to jeopardize my legal career by being party to this."

"You think you know, Miss Hernandez, but I assure you, you have no idea what you're passing up."

If Louise passes on the possibility of riches to preserve her job and name, she acts in a way that validates her defining Virtue and regains any spent Willpower.

Other Names: Patience, vigilance

Possessed by: Businessmen, doctors, priests, scientists

Temperance

Moderation in all things is the secret to happiness, so says the doctrine of Temperance. It's all about balance. Everything has its place in a person's life, from anger to forgiveness, lust to chastity. The temperate do not believe in denying their urges, as none of it is unnatural or unholy. The trouble comes when things are taken to excess, whether it's a noble or base impulse. Too much righteousness can be just as bad as too much wickedness.

Your character regains all spent Willpower when he resists a temptation to indulge in an excess of any behavior, whether good or bad, despite the obvious rewards it might offer.

Example: Michael pressed Ravera to the pavement and cuffed him. For half his years on the force, Michael had been trying to bring Douglas Ravera to justice.

How many kids had died from Ravera's peddled junk? How many times had Michael's family received death threats? How many times had Ravera been collared only to walk on a technicality?

Michael's mind kept turning back to the unregistered .38 stashed in his patrol car. He could fire some rounds into the car door and put Ravera's prints on the weapon. Who would doubt that Michael had to kill him in self-defense?

"No," Michael muttered to himself. He couldn't lower himself to the same level as this criminal, no matter how tempting. He'd be no better. Instead, he hauled Ravera into the back of the car and slammed the door.

By refusing to give in to extreme and compelling impulses, remaining centered instead, Michael acts in a way that validates his defining Virtue and he regains any spent Willpower.

Other Names: Chastity, even-temperament, frugality

Possessed by: Clergy, police officers, social workers

Vices

When creating your character, choose one of the seven Vices detailed below as her defining one. This is not to say that your character may not have other weaknesses or base impulses, but her defining Vice is the one that most clearly evokes her basic behavior.

Envy

An envious person is never satisfied with what she has. No matter her wealth, status or accomplishments, there is always someone else who seems to have more, and it's coveted. Envious characters are never secure or content with their place in life. They always measure themselves against their rivals and look for ways to get what they deserve. They might be considered paranoid or just consumed by a self-loathing that they project onto others.

Your character regains one Willpower point whenever she gains something important from a rival or has a hand in harming that rival's wellbeing.

Example: Hughes watched the reporters, sponsors and women flock to Montgomery like moths to a flame. One-tenth of a second in the 40 meter and a couple slick moves on the field were all that made Hughes the low-paid fullback and Montgomery the star tailback. Now it was the big Monday-night game and the attention was all on Montgomery.

"Drink this and you'll be MVP tonight."

At first, the voice seemed to come out of nowhere, but then there he was, one of the ugliest guys Hughes had ever seen, sitting right there in the locker room, grinning like the Cheshire Cat.

"Who the hell are you? How'd you get in here?"

"Kick-off is in five minutes, Hughes. You want to be the star tonight? Then drink up. You want Montgomery to get the headlines tomorrow, then call security."

Hughes considered a moment, then took the vial and downed it. Salty, thick, warm and powerful — so very powerful. Screw the consequences, he was going to have the game of his life.

By taking the drink, Hughes indulges his defining Vice and regains one point of spent Willpower.

Other Names: Covetousness, jealousy, paranoia

Possessed by: Celebrities, executives, politicians

Gluttony

Gluttony is about indulging appetites to the exclusion of everything else. It's about dedicating oneself to sensual pleasures or chasing the next high. A glutton makes any sacrifice to feed his insatiable appetite for pleasure, regardless of the cost to himself or those around him. He might be considered a junky or even a kleptomaniac (he steals things he doesn't need just for the thrill of it).

Your character regains one spent Willpower point whenever he indulges in his addiction or appetites at some risk to himself or a loved one.

Example: They'd come for his dad. They'd hauled his ass into the bedroom, brought in the power tools, and then the screaming started. James thought about protesting, but what good would it do? He decided to drown it all out, instead. He snorted some coke and tipped back the whiskey. Sure, he'd gotten involved with them, and maybe that was a mistake, but he told his dad to keep out of it. James took another drink. The whiskey trailed fire down his throat and dulled his senses. They didn't tolerate people interfering in their business. And so, James took another drink.

By overwhelming his senses with drugs and booze rather than helping his father, James indulges in his defining Vice and regains a point of spent Willpower.

Other Names: Addictive personality, conspicuous consumer, epicurean

Possessed by: Celebrities, junkies, thieves

Greed

Like the envious, the greedy are never satisfied with what they have. They want more — more money, a bigger house, more status or influence — no matter that they may already have more than they can possibly handle. Everything is taken to excess. To the greedy, there is no such thing as having too much. If that means snatching someone else's hard-earned reward just to feather one's own nest, well, that's the way it goes.

Your character regains one Willpower point whenever he acquires something at the expense of another. Gaining it must come at some potential risk (of assault, arrest or simple loss of peer respect).

Example: Gregor scanned down the list of names. It read like a small-town telephone book. He signed the cover sheet, ending the employment of several hundred people.

"Such is the way of capitalism," he mused. The press wouldn't believe there was synergy to the merger unless the two companies' duplicated human resources weren't eliminated. Progress had its price.

He once again skimmed the magazine list of the world's 500 wealthiest men, and eyed the meager difference between his fortune at number 20 and that of number 19. Then he imagined next year's poll. Progress had its rewards, too.

By engineering the hostile takeover that costs hundreds of jobs, all for petty personal gain, Gregor indulges his defining Vice and regains a point of spent Willpower.

Other Names: Avarice, parsimony

Possessed by: CEOs, lawyers, stock brokers

Lust

The Vice of Lust is the sin of uncontrolled desire. A lusty individual is driven by a passion for something (usually sex, but it can be a craving for virtually any experience or activity) that he acts upon without consideration for the needs or feelings of others. A lusty individual uses any means at his disposal to indulge his desires, from deception to manipulation to acts of violence.

Your character is consumed by a passion for something. He regains one Willpower point whenever he satisfies his lust or compulsion in a way that victimizes others.

Example: For two weeks, Aaron had been holed up with the star witness, "protecting" her. That she was also suspected as an accomplice in the crime hadn't stopped Aaron from banging her seven ways to Sunday, ever since she'd come on to him on the second day. It might have meant compromising the witness and his career, but this chick was worth it. Aaron didn't care that her last four husbands had died or that the precinct had labeled her "Black Widow." The sex just kept getting better. In fact, he was exhausted for hours afterward. If he'd stopped to think about it, the blackouts might have worried him, but he didn't want to think about it.

By using his position and influence to get sexual favors, Aaron indulges in his defining Vice and regains a point of spent Willpower.

Other Names: Lasciviousness, impatience, impetuosity

Possessed by: Movie producers, politicians, rock stars

Pride

Pride is the Vice of self-confidence run amok. It is the belief that one's every action is inherently right, even when it should be obvious that it is anything but. A prideful person refuses to back down when his decision or reputation is called into question, even when the evidence is clear that he is in the wrong. His ego does not accept any outcome that suggests fallibility, and he is willing to see others suffer rather than admit that he's wrong.

Your character regains one Willpower point whenever he exerts his own wants (not needs) over others at some potential risk to himself. This is most commonly the desire for adulation, but it could be the desire to make others do as he commands.

Example: Fabrice stepped out of his car and faced the old mansion. Four centuries of French weather had taken its toll on the once regal place. The setting sun stretched shadows across the façade, highlighting every flaw and crack, and throwing a distorted shadow over the front door like an evil omen.

Haunted indeed.

When the unkempt, ill-mannered student had shown up to his lecture and publicly challenged the professor to spend one night in the mansion, how could the foremost debunker of mystic nonsense decline?

Fabrice was sure he had more to fear from the house collapsing than from evil spirits. Yes, he was quite sure.

By refusing to back down to the challenge, and reveling in his own self-assurance, Fabrice indulges his defining Vice and regains a point of spent Willpower.

Other Names: Arrogance, ego complex, vanity

Possessed by: Corporate executives, movie stars, street thugs

Sloth

The Vice of Sloth is about avoiding work until someone else has to step in to get the job done. Rather than put in the effort — and possibly risk failure

— in a difficult situation, the slothful person simply refuses to do anything, knowing that someone else will step in and fix the problem sooner or later. The fact that people might needlessly suffer while the slothful person sits on his thumbs doesn't matter one bit.

Your character regains one Willpower point whenever he successfully avoids a difficult task but achieves the same goal nonetheless.

Example: Catherine pretended to listen as the fourth tenant that day called to tell her, the superintendent, that the security lights were out. Some asshole had gone and broken all the lights around the apartment building.

Sure, she'd heard stories about the Harcourt building, where the lights were shattered one night and there were break-ins the next. Depending on who was telling the story, some weird shit happened over there.

But the afternoon soaps were starting, and Catherine decided the Harcourt stuff was just rumors. Besides, she had a baseball bat in case any boogey men came calling. She unplugged the phone and let her ass warm the couch. The lights could wait another day.

By avoiding work despite the repercussions, Catherine indulges her defining Vice and regains a point of spent Willpower.

Other Names: Apathy, cowardice, ignorance

Possessed by: Couch potatoes, trust-fund heirs, welfare cheats

Wrath

The Vice of Wrath is the sin of uncontrolled anger. The wrathful look for ways to vent their anger and frustration on people or objects at the slightest provocation. In most cases the reaction is far out of proportion to the perceived slight. A wrathful person cut off on the freeway might try to force another driver

off the road, or a wrathful cop might delight in beating each and every person he arrests, regardless of the offense.

Your character regains one spent Willpower point whenever he unleashes his anger in a situation where doing so is dangerous. If the fight has already begun, no Willpower points are regained. It must take place in a situation where

anger is unwarranted or inappropriate.

Example: As April staggered in, Rebecca surprised her at the door, demanding the month's rent. April had gotten hooked on the new drug that had hit the streets. She had spent most of her time day-tripping and having paranoia attacks about "things eating through the walls of the world." Rebecca didn't care anymore, and when the usual litany of excuses began, Rebecca hit her. Blood ran from April's nose and down her mouth.

"I want... the damn... rent," Rebecca yelled, punctuating each statement with another blow until April was on the ground, balled up and crying.

By beating the money out of April, Rebecca indulges her defining Vice and regains a point of spent Willpower.

Other Names: Antisocial tendencies, hot-headedness, poor anger management, sadism

Possessed by: Bullies, drill sergeants, street thugs





"I didn't sign up for this shit," Corporal Peters said, trying to shake something that looked like shit off his boot.

"You'll do what you're told, Corporal," Sergeant Johannsen responded. "Now zip it and check out that tunnel." He motioned with his assault rifle toward a man-sized opening. "Take Kopacek with you."

Peters grimaced and glanced down the tunnel. It looked like every other part of the sewer in which the soldiers found themselves, built who knows how long ago and coated with years of filth.

Kopacek poked Peters on the shoulder. "We gonna go or what?"

"You in some kind of hurry?" Peters asked. "I don't care what they say. No way is a terrorist living down here. Nobody's that crazy."

"Orders are orders," Kopacek said.

"But why us? This is police shit."

"They say this guy killed someone on the governor's staff. That means it's our job, I guess. You don't fuck with somebody that high up without getting the dogs out on your trail."

Peters sighed. "All right. Goddamn it, let's get this over with."

The tunnel curved for several hundred feet before emptying into a junction, with three more tunnels emptying rivers of sludge into a large drain.

Kopacek flashed his light in all directions. Peters' heart leapt into his throat when he thought he saw a man's shadow thrown against a wall. It lasted for a second and was gone.

"Turn that light back!" Peters said, raising his gun.

"What? You see something?"

Peters looked hard, but saw nothing more. "I guess not."

Kopacek fell silent and absently held the light still. In the reflected glow, Peters watched eddies and whorls steadily appear and disappear in the water, drawing a straight line toward him.

"Weird," Peters said half to himself.

"What?"

"I dunno. It looks like... footsteps."

Chapter 5: Merits

When a man is born with demonic tendencies, his birthright is hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, anger, cruelty and ignorance.

The birthright of the divine nature leads to liberation. The birthright of the demonic nature leads to greater bondage.

— Bhagavad-Gita, translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood

Merits are special capabilities or knacks that add individuality to your character. They're purchased during character creation or with experience points over the course of your chronicle.

The Merits in this chapter are organized alphabetically into three broad categories: Physical, Mental and Social. Some apply to your character's basic traits to enhance them in particular situations. Some have prerequisites that must be met before they can be purchased. For example, a character with the Gunslinger Merit must have a Dexterity of 3 and Firearms of 3 or higher to be able to accurately fire two weapons at the same time. By the same token, some Merits apply drawbacks that balance out their inherent advantages. A character with the Fame Merit, for example, is treated like a star wherever he goes — but has a hard time blending into the crowd when he wants to.

Each Merit has a number of dots (•) associated with it. These dots represent the number of points that must be spent to purchase the Merit. Some Merits allow for a range of dots (say, • to •••). These allow you to purchase a low rating if it's appropriate to your character concept, or you can start with a low level and increase it over time with experience points.

A character is born with some Merits or develops them early in life, while others can be acquired through trial and error, training and effort later in life. The first kind can be acquired at character creation only and are labeled as such. The second kind can be acquired during play with experience points. Merit dots must be purchased sequentially with experience points. You have to buy • and then •• before your character can have ••• or more.

Mental Merits

Common Sense ,(••••)

Effect: Your character is exceptionally grounded and pragmatic, and can usually be depended upon to make sound, straightforward decisions after a few moments' thought.

The Storyteller can make a reflexive Wits + Composure roll once per chapter for your character if he is about to embark on a disastrous course of action, or if you find yourself at a point in the story where you're completely stumped for ideas. If the roll succeeds, the Storyteller may point out the risks of a particular course, or suggest possible actions that your character can take that might get events back on track. Note: While you're free to ask the Storyteller for a Common Sense roll when you're out of ideas, he is under no obligation to comply. It's an aid, not a crutch. *Available at character creation only.*

Danger Sense ,(••)

Effect: You gain a +2 modifier on reflexive Wits + Composure rolls for your character to detect an impending ambush. This kind of roll is typically made prior to the first turn of a surprise attack.

Your character has a well-developed survival instinct that warns him of impending danger. Perhaps he's adept at reading subtle clues in his environment or he possesses an uncanny "sixth sense" when it comes to avoiding trouble.

Eidetic Memory ,(••)

Effect: Your character has a near-photographic memory, being able to recall vast amounts of observed detail with astonishing accuracy. You do not

normally need to make a roll for your character to remember an obscure fact or past experience, unless he is under stress (such as in combat). Under stress, there is a +2 modifier on any Intelligence + Composure or other Skill-based roll (say, Academics, to remember a fact) for memory recall. *Available at character creation only.*

Encyclopedic Knowledge *(•••••)*

Effect: Your character is a veritable font of useful (and sometimes useless) information on a wide variety of topics. Chances are he can come up with an anecdote pertaining to any situation based on something he's read, witnessed or seen on TV.

You can make an Intelligence + Wits roll any time your character is confronted with a situation or phenomenon outside his normal realm of experience. If the roll is successful, he may recall a "factoid" that he's heard at some point that may shed light on matters.

Available at character creation only. Your character has either been soaking up trivia all his life or he hasn't.

Dramatic Failure: Your character "remembers" something about the situation that is completely inaccurate. "Wait! Wait! I saw something like this in a movie once!" The Storyteller might make Intelligence + Wits rolls on your behalf when a dramatic failure is possible.

Failure: Your character wracks his brain but comes up empty.

Success: Your character remembers a detail or fact that sheds some light on the situation. "You said there was an almond odor? Seems to me I read somewhere that's a sign of cyanide poisoning."

Exceptional Success: Your character recalls a number of useful details that provide extensive insight. "Hey, cool — a little candy skull. They make these in Mexico for the Day of the Dead. It's an offering for a loved one who's died. And they say you can't learn anything on TV."

Holistic Awareness *(••••)*

Effect: Your character is skilled in the arts of whole-body healing, promoting health and recovery by keeping a person's entire physiology balanced and strong. The result is that he is able to treat sickness and some injuries (those not requiring surgery, and ones suffered to bashing or lethal damage but not aggravated) with a collection of natural remedies rather than resorting to a doctor or hospital.

Make an Intelligence + Medicine roll once per day when your character spends an hour treating a patient. If the roll is successful, the patient's healing times that day are halved. The worst of a patient's injuries must be treated first. So, if he has suffered a lethal wound and a successful roll is made, the wound heals that day rather than in two days. If the patient has suffered nothing but bashing damage, all wounds are healed in mere minutes (about eight each). See Chapter 7, p. 175, for healing times.

Dramatic Failure: Your character misdiagnoses or mistreats the problem, making it worse. The patient does not heal more quickly (he maintains normal healing

times). He does, however, suffer an additional point of bashing damage. Your character cannot try to heal the patient again for his current injuries.

Failure: The treatment has no effect and normal healing times apply to any bashing wounds or to a single lethal wound. If the Storyteller allows, your character can make a successive attempt to try again that day (see p. 132). If still no successes are gained to heal a single lethal wound or one or more bashing wounds, those must be allowed to heal naturally before another effort can be made. Thus, if no successes are rolled to heal one of a patient's lethal wounds, that wound must heal naturally over two days before your character can try to heal another lethal wound.

Success: Your character's treatment is rewarding and the patient's healing time that day is halved.

Exceptional Success: The patient responds remarkably well to treatment. You can skip tomorrow's roll altogether. It's automatically assumed to succeed. In that case, two lethal wounds can be healed in two days.

Suggested Equipment: Holistic medicines (+1), healing-touch manuals (+1), body-purifying foods and liquids (+1)

Possible Penalties: Lack of remedies (-1 to -4), noisy environment (-1), imminent danger (-3), improvised facilities (-1)

Language *(• to ••••)*

Effect: Your character knows an additional language besides his own. One dot in this Merit means that he can read, write and speak an extra language with minimal fluency. Two dots indicate that he is literate and conversationally fluent. Three dots indicate that he can speak the language like a native and is well-read in it.

You must specify which language your character is familiar with when purchasing this Merit.

Meditative Mind *(•)*

Effect: Your character can effortlessly enter a meditative state when she chooses, and can remain in it for as long as she wishes. All environmental penalties imposed to Wits + Composure rolls to meditate are ignored. Not even wound penalties apply to your character's efforts to focus. See the Meditation Attribute task in Chapter 2, p. 51.

Unseen Sense *(••••)*

Prerequisite: Mortal (non-supernatural); Wits ••

Effect: Your character has a "sixth sense" when it comes to the supernatural. Perhaps his hair stands on end, goose bumps race along his arms, or a shiver runs up his spine. Regardless of the manner, his body reacts to the presence of unseen forces. He can't see or hear anything, and in fact he might not know at first what causes this reaction. It might be a response to a specific type of supernatural phenomenon such as ghosts or vampires, or it might be a general sense that something isn't right. Over

time and with a little trial and error, he might be able to qualify what his body tries to tell him.

The specific type of supernatural phenomenon to which your character is sensitive must be determined when this Merit is purchased. It can be something as vague as a creepy feeling when in the presence of ghosts, or something as specific as a sudden chill when a vampire is nearby. The Storyteller has final say on the exact nature and trigger of your character's sixth sense, and can keep its nature secret if desired, leaving you to figure it out during play.

Only mortal, mundane characters can possess this Merit. The pivotal moment of becoming or being changed into a being with supernatural capabilities eliminates it.

Physical Merits

Ambidextrous (••••)

Effect: Your character does not suffer the -2 penalty for using his off-hand in combat or to perform other actions. *Available at character creation only.*

Brawling Dodge (•)

Prerequisite: Strength •• and Brawl •

Effect: Whenever your character performs a dodge (see "Dodge," p. 156), you can choose to add his Brawl Skill dots to his Defense *instead* of doubling his Defense. He essentially draws on his training in blocking and evading attacks rather than relying on his raw ability alone. While this might provide little benefit to a brawling novice, it can give the advanced fighter an edge.

Brawling Dodge applies against incoming Brawl- and Weaponry-based attacks, against thrown-weapon attacks, and against Firearms attacks made within close-combat range. Your character can move up to his Speed and perform a Brawling Dodge maneuver in a turn.

A character can possess both the Brawling Dodge and Weaponry Dodge Merits, but only one can be used per turn.

Direction Sense (•)

Effect: Your character has an innate sense of direction that instinctively allows him to remain oriented. He can enter unfamiliar territory and always retrace his steps back to his starting point, and can orient himself to any of the compass points (i.e., face north, face south) without references.

Disarm (•••)

Prerequisite: Dexterity ••• and Weaponry ••

Effect: Your character has refined his Weaponry Skill to the extent that he can use a weapon to disarm opponents in close combat. When making a normal attack, compare your successes to the opponent's Dexterity. If you get a number of successes equal to or greater than the opponent's Dexterity, you can choose to have your character disarm him instead of doing damage. A weapon lands

a number of yards away from the opponent equal to your successes rolled.

Disarming is a different activity than specifically attacking or breaking weapons or items carried by opponents. See "Equipment" (p. 139) for rules on doing that.

Fast Reflexes (• or ••)

Prerequisites: Dexterity •••

Effect: +1 Initiative per dot

Your character's mix of sharp reflexes and steady nerves helps him get the drop on adversaries.

Fighting Finesse (•••)

Prerequisite: Dexterity ••• and Weaponry ••

Effect: Your character prefers to fight with a chosen weapon in a manner that favors agility over power. With that one weapon (a rapier or katana, for example), you may substitute your character's Dexterity for Strength when making attack rolls.

This Merit may be purchased multiple times to gain agility with more weapons, one for each purchase.

Fighting Style: Boxing (• to •••••)

Prerequisites: Strength •••, Stamina •• and Brawl ••

Effect: Your character is trained in the art of boxing, able to deliver swift, powerful punches, and to duck and weave away from opponents' attacks. He might have participated in the sport in high school or college, or made a go of it professionally. Or he might have taken some classes at the local health club as a form of exercise.

Dots purchased in this Merit allow access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. So, your character can't have "Duck and Weave" until he has "Body Blow." The maneuvers and their effects are described below, most of which are based on the Brawl Skill.

Body Blow (•): Your character can deliver powerful blows that leave opponents reeling and gasping for air. If successes inflicted in a single Brawl attack equal or exceed a target's Size, the victim loses his next action.

Duck and Weave (••): Your character is trained to instinctively duck and evade an opponent's blows. Use the *higher* of your character's Dexterity or Wits to determine his Defense when dealing with Brawl-based attacks only (not against Weaponry attacks). If a combination of Brawl- and Weaponry-based attacks is focused on your character in the same turn, use his normal Defense against both.

Combination Blows (•••): Your character's training and experience allow him to devastate opponents with a flurry of rapid blows. He can make two Brawl attacks against the same target in a single action. The second attack suffers a -1 penalty. **Drawback:** Your character cannot use his Defense against any attack in the same turn in which he intends to use this maneuver. If he uses Defense against attacks that occur earlier in the Initiative roster,



before he can perform this maneuver, he cannot perform the maneuver in the turn. He is too busy bobbing and weaving out of the way of attacks.

Haymaker (•••••): Your character can deliver powerful, accurate blows capable of knocking an opponent unconscious with a single punch. A single Brawl attack that equals or exceeds the target's Size in damage might knock him unconscious. A Stamina roll is made for the victim. If it succeeds, he is conscious but he still loses his next action due to the Body Blow (see above). If it fails, he is unconscious for a number of turns equal to the damage done. **Drawback:** Your character cannot use his Defense against any attack in the same turn in which he intends to use this maneuver. If he uses Defense against attacks that occur earlier in the Initiative roster, before he can perform this maneuver, he cannot perform the maneuver in the turn. He is too busy bobbing and weaving out of the way of attacks.

Brutal Blow (•••••): Your character's accuracy and power are such that his fists are lethal weapons, able to injure or kill opponents. A brutal blow inflicts lethal instead of bashing damage. **Drawback:** Spend one Willpower point per attack. Note that this Willpower expenditure does not add three dice to the attack.

Fighting Style: Kung Fu

(• to •••••)

Prerequisites: Strength ••, Dexterity ••, Stamina •• and Brawl ••

Effect: Your character is trained in one of the many forms of Kung Fu, conditioning his mind and body for the purposes of focus and self-defense. He may have begun his training at an early age, following in the footsteps of family or friends, or he may have joined a school as an adult for the purposes of exercise or protection.



Dots purchased in this Merit allow access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. So, your character can't have "Iron Skin" until he has "Focused Attack." The maneuvers and their effects are listed below, most of which are based on the Brawl Skill.

Focused Attack (•): Physical conditioning and accuracy allow your character to deliver blows at vulnerable spots on targets. Penalties to hit specific targets are reduced by one. See "Specified Targets," p. 165. Even when a specific part of an opponent is not targeted, armor penalties to your character's

Brawl attacks are reduced by one.

Iron Skin (••): Your character has hardened his body to physical blows, allowing him to withstand repeated hits with minimal effect. He has an effective armor trait of 1 against bashing attacks only.

Defensive Attack (•••): Your character has mastered the ability to fight defensively. When using this maneuver, your character gains +2 to his Defense for the turn, but any attack he makes suffers a -2 penalty. He can move no more than his Speed while performing a Defensive Attack maneuver in a turn.

Whirlwind Strike (•••••): Your character can unleash a storm of blows against an opponent. He can make a number of extra Brawl attacks for each point of Dexterity that he has above 2 in a single action. Each extra attack is made at a cumulative -1 modifier. Thus, he can perform a total of two attacks at Dexterity 3 (the second of which is at -1), three attacks at Dexterity 4 (the third of which is at -2), and four at Dexterity 5 (the fourth of which is at -3). All attacks must be on the same target.

Drawback: Your character cannot use his Defense against any attack in the same turn in which he intends to use this maneuver. If he uses Defense against attacks that occur earlier in the Initiative roster, before he can perform this maneuver, he cannot perform the maneuver this turn. He is too busy bobbing and weaving out of the way of attacks.

Lethal Strike (•••••): By focusing his might and concentration, your character can kill or maim an opponent with a well-placed strike. A strike inflicts lethal instead of bashing damage. **Drawback:** Spend one Willpower point per attack. Note that this Willpower expenditure does not add three dice to the attack.

Fighting Style: Two Weapons

(• to •••••)

Prerequisites: Dexterity ••• and Weaponry •••

Effect: Your character has trained to fight with a weapon in both hands, allowing him to attack and dodge or make two attacks in the same turn. Your character still suffers the -2 offhand penalty when attacking with a weapon in his secondary hand (unless you have also purchased the Ambidextrous Merit).

Dots purchased in this Merit allow access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. So, your character can't have "Deflect and Thrust" until he has "Whirling Blades." The maneuvers and their effects are detailed below, all of which are based on the Weaponry Skill.

Whirling Blades (•): Your character's Dodge trait (Defense doubled; see p. 156) is not penalized by multiple attacks staged against him in a turn until the number of attacks exceeds his Weaponry dots, at which point each attack thereafter reduces his Dodge by -1. So, if your character (with 2 Defense and 3 Weaponry) dodges attacks in a turn, the first three incoming attacks suffer his full Dodge trait as a penalty (-4). The fourth suffers a -3 penalty, the fifth suffers a -2 penalty, and so on. Basically, your character's weapons move so quickly all about him that opponents in close combat have trouble reaching or assaulting him.

The Brawling Dodge Merit (see p. 110) cannot replace normal Dodge (Defense doubled) when this maneuver is performed.

Deflect and Thrust (••): Your character can avoid attacks and strike back in the same motion. When using this maneuver, your character gains +2 to his Defense for the turn, but any attack he makes suffers a -2 penalty. He can move no more than his Speed while performing a Deflect and Thrust maneuver in a turn.

Focused Attack (•••): Your character can attack a single target twice in one turn. The second attack suffers a -1 penalty. **Drawback:** Your character cannot use his Defense against any attack in the same turn in which he intends to use this maneuver. If he uses Defense against attacks that occur earlier in the Initiative roster, before he can perform this maneuver, he cannot perform the

maneuver this turn. He is too busy bobbing and weaving out of the way of attacks.

Fluid Attack (••••): Your character can make a single attack on two different targets in one turn. The targets cannot be a distance apart in excess of your character's Speed trait. The second attack suffers a -1 penalty. **Drawback:** Your character cannot use his Defense against any attack in the same turn in which he intends to use this maneuver. If he uses Defense against attacks that occur earlier in the Initiative roster, before he can perform this maneuver, he cannot perform the maneuver this turn. He is too busy bobbing and weaving out of the way of attacks.

Fleet of Foot (• to ••••)

Prerequisites: Strength ••

Effect: +1 Speed per dot

Regardless of your character's physical build, he can run quickly when he chooses to.

Fresh Start (•)

Prerequisites: Fast Reflexes ••

Effect: Your character dedicates an action to altering his standing in the Initiative order in the following turn and for all subsequent turns, choosing to insert himself at a new point in the roster, even if it means going first when he went last before. For example, if your Initiative roll (see p. 151) resulted in a 9, but a rival whom your character wanted to waylay got a 12, your character can forfeit an action in turn one to get a fresh start and then act before that rival at 13 in turn two and afterward.

Drawback: A character must take an action to change his Initiative ranking in subsequent turns. He can do nothing else in that action except move up to his Speed.

Giant (•••••)

Effect: Your character is seven or more feet tall and over 250 pounds. He is +1 Size (and thus +1 Health). *Available at character creation only.*

Drawback: Your character needs to shop in big-and-tall clothing stores or gets clothes custom tailored. He might also be required to purchase two seats for air travel, depending on the airline.

Gunstinger (••••)

Prerequisites: Dexterity ••• and Firearms •••

Effect: Your character's capability and experience with firearms is such that he can accurately fire two pistols at the same time. Your character still suffers the -2 offhand penalty for shooting with his secondary hand (unless he also possesses the Ambidextrous Merit, above), but he can shoot both pistols as a single action during a turn. The second attack is also at a -1 penalty. Your character may shoot at two different targets if he wishes, but the amount of concentration required negates his Defense for the turn.

The Merit can be used with pistols only.

Drawback: Your character cannot use his Defense against any attack in the same turn in which he intends to use this Merit on two separate targets in the same turn. If he uses Defense against attacks that occur earlier in the Initiative roster, before he can perform this maneuver, he cannot perform the maneuver this turn. He is too busy bobbing and weaving out of the way of attacks.

Iron Stamina ,(● to ●●●)

Prerequisites: Stamina ●●● or Resolve ●●●

Effect: Each dot eliminates a negative modifier (on a one-for-one basis) when resisting the effects of fatigue or injury. For example: A character with Iron Stamina ●● is able to ignore up to a -2 modifier brought on by fatigue. See “Fatigue,” p. 179. The Merit also counteracts the effects of wound penalties. So, if all of your character’s Health boxes are filled (which normally imposes a -3 penalty to his actions) and he has Iron Stamina ●, those penalties are reduced to -2. This Merit cannot be used to gain positive modifiers for actions, only to cancel out negative ones.

Your character can push his body well past the limits of physical endurance when he has to, pressing on in the face of mounting exhaustion or pain. Perhaps he trained himself to go without sleep for days at a time in order to get through college, or a lifetime of sports has taught your character how to play through the pain no matter how bad it gets.

Drawback: When your character does finally rest, he sleeps like the dead. After staying awake for an extended period, your character is extremely difficult to wake until he’s slept for a minimum of 12 hours, regardless of the situation.

Iron Stomach ,(●●)

Prerequisites: Stamina ●●

Effect: Your character can eat almost anything, under almost any conditions. Greasy bacon and runny eggs on a raging hangover? No problem. The green meat in the fridge? No problem. Milk two weeks past its expiration date? No problem. He could be dropped in the middle of the forest and could live off bugs and roots as long as necessary in order to survive — and with no ill effects. Add two dice to appropriate Survival rolls. Add three to Stamina to resist deprivation (see p. 175).

Natural Immunity ,(●)

Prerequisites: Stamina ●●

Effect: Your character gains a +2 modifier on Stamina rolls to resist infection, sickness and disease. His immune system is exceptionally effective at resisting infections, viruses and bacteria. Your character can probably count on one hand the number of times he’s been seriously ill.

Quick Draw ,(●)

Prerequisites: Dexterity ●●●

Effect: Your character can draw a pistol and fire or pull a melee weapon and attack without penalty as a single

action in a turn. If a weapon is hidden on your character’s person (under a coat or in a purse), it can be drawn and used in the same turn without the normal loss of Defense. A separate Quick Draw Merit must be acquired for use with firearms and melee weapons.

Quick Healer ,(●●●●)

Prerequisite: Stamina ●●●●

Effect: Your character’s healing abilities are remarkable, allowing him to bounce back quickly from injuries that would leave most people bedridden for months.

Your character recovers from injuries in half the time that others do. One point of bashing damage is healed in eight minutes. One point of lethal damage is healed in one day. One point of aggravated damage is healed in four days.

Strong Back ,(●)

Prerequisites: Strength ●●

Effect: Your character gains a +1 modifier to actions involving lifting or carrying heavy weights. She can lift and carry much more weight than her build and body type suggests.

Strong Lungs ,(●●●)

Prerequisite: Athletics ●●●

Effect: Your character is practiced at holding his breath for long periods of time. He might be a pearl diver or escape artist, capable of staying underwater without aid for longer than most people believe is possible.

When determining how long your character can hold his breath, add two to Stamina when referencing the Holding Breath chart on p. 49. For example, if your character’s Stamina is 2, he can hold his breath for four minutes before you need to make a roll.

Stunt Driver ,(●●●)

Prerequisites: Dexterity ●●●

Effects: Your character can drive a vehicle and perform an unrelated action (e.g., fire a gun, punch another passenger) in the same turn. Drive rolls may still be necessary for dangerous maneuvers or situations. See “Vehicles,” p. 141.

Toxin Resistance ,(●●)

Prerequisite: Stamina ●●●

Effect: Your character gains a +2 modifier to Stamina rolls to resist the effects of drugs, poisons and toxins. His body is capable of withstanding high levels of chemicals without suffering any ill effects. He’s probably never had a case of food poisoning, much less a hangover.

Drawbacks: Your character’s body can’t tell the difference between recreational toxins and intentional ones. It’s very difficult for him to become intoxicated, whether from alcohol, nicotine or other drugs. Also, painkillers and anesthetics are only half as effective as normal.

Weaponry Dodge ,(•)

Prerequisite: Strength •• and Weaponry •

Effect: Whenever your character performs a dodge (see “Dodge,” p. 156), you can choose to add his Weaponry Skill dots to his Defense *instead* of doubling his Defense. He essentially draws on his training in parrying and evading attacks rather than relying on his raw ability alone. While this might provide little benefit to a fencing novice, it can give the advanced fighter an edge.

Weaponry Dodge applies against incoming Brawl- and Weaponry-based attacks, against thrown-weapon attacks, and against Firearms attacks made within close-combat range. Your character can move up to his Speed and perform a Weaponry Dodge maneuver in a turn.

A character can possess both the Brawling Dodge and Weaponry Dodge Merits, but only one can be used per turn.

Social Merits

Allies ,(• to •••••)

Effect: Allies are people who are willing to help your character from time to time. They may be associates, friends of convenience or people who owe your character a favor. Each acquisition of this Merit is dedicated to one type of ally, whether in an organization, society or circle. Examples include the police, City Hall, criminals, unions, banks, university faculty and hospital staff. In order to have alliances in more than one venue, you need to purchase this Merit multiple times, each trait with its own dots. Thus, your character might have Allies (Police) ••, Allies (Criminals) ••• and Allies (City Hall) •, each acquired separately at character creation or during play.

Each dot that your character has indicates how deep his influence runs in that group. One dot might mean he can ask for minor favors, such as being spared a parking ticket if alliance is among police, or being allowed to see an article before it goes to press if alliance is among reporters. Three dots garner considerable favors, such as a building permit “going missing” at City Hall, or a strike resolution being wrapped up early among union leaders. Five dots allow for dangerous and even overtly criminal favors, such as a stock being sabotaged on Wall Street or the answers to an exam being shared by a university professor.

The kinds of requests made of people in an organization typically have to relate to their sphere of influence. Asking a criminal to slow down the bureaucratic process at City Hall makes no sense, but asking him to pass along word of a drug buy does. Favors might be minor and within the bounds of a person’s job or role, such as processing some paperwork more quickly than usual, or could be significant or dangerous and outside what’s allowed or even legal, such as allowing a civilian access to the police evidence locker.

The Storyteller has final say over what is an acceptable request and what is not. If there’s any doubt, the Storyteller could call for a Manipulation + Persuasion roll, with a bonus equal to your character’s Allies dots. Penalties might also apply based on the importance or danger of the request. Asking someone to do something already in the bounds of their role imposes no modifier, while asking them to do something that could get them suspended imposes a -3 penalty, and asking for something that could get them jailed or killed is -5. Frequent favors asked of the same group also imposes a penalty as group members grow tired of being called upon.

Similarly, a roll of Manipulation + Persuasion + Allies dots could determine how many police answer your character’s call for help, or how many longshoremen turn up when your character needs a show of force (one per success rolled).

Allies doesn’t have to be defined in terms of specific individuals over whom your character has sway. He could simply know a variety of people among city reporters and he can call upon them in general from time to time. You should, however, explain why your character has influence in a particular body. Maybe he worked there himself at one time and still has friends in the organization. Or he has done a group a favor and its members still owe him.

Drawback: Allies are not automatons, waiting for your character to ask for help. They have their own lives and needs. An alliance is a two-way relationship. Calling for favors makes your character indebted to his friends, and they are sure to call such favors in when they need help. The Storyteller can use such debts as inspiration for future stories.

Barfly ,(•)

Effect: No matter what town or city your character is in, he can find his way into the best nightspots with a few quick words and a timely bribe. There isn’t a velvet rope made that can keep him out of a restaurant or club.

Contacts ,(• to •••••)

Effect: Contacts provide your character information in a particular area of awareness. Each dot in this Merit represents one arena or circle in which your character has a web of connections and from which he may draw information. If he has Contacts •••, his dots might be assigned to computer hackers, couriers and big business, respectively. Contacts can include individuals whom you or the Storyteller defines, but more likely they comprise an array of people from whom your character can draw information with a phone call, email or face-to-face query. Contacts is strictly information-gathering. Contacts do not come perform services for your character or rush to his aid. Those actions are the purview of other Merits such as Allies and Retainer.

Gaining information from contacts requires a successful Manipulation + Persuasion or Socialize roll, depending on the relationship between your character and the

people in question. Penalties might apply if the information sought is little known (-1 to -3), confidential (-3), or if sharing it could get people in trouble or harmed (-3 to -5). Success doesn't guarantee exactly the information for which your character looks. Contacts aren't all-knowing, and the Storyteller is perfectly justified in saying that a particular contact simply doesn't know something.

Dramatic Failure: The contact doesn't tell your character the full extent of what he knows, or provides misleading information. Perhaps he's holding out for money or favors, or simply makes an honest mistake.

Failure: The contact doesn't have the information your character needs.

Success: The contact is able to provide some information that's helpful to your character.

Exceptional Success: The contact is able to provide a wealth of information to your character, providing answers to questions that aren't even asked.

Suggested Equipment: Gift (+1), small bribe (+1), large bribe (+2), an outstanding favor (+1 to +3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of bribe (-1), frequent and recent requests (-1 to -2), information confidential (-1 to -3), information scarce (-2), information obscure (-3)

Fame (● to ●●●)

Effect: Your character has a measure of recognition in today's media-saturated society, possibly as a performer, athlete, politician or other sort of public personality. He's frequently identified and can often get star treatment. On the other hand, it's difficult for your character to go places without being recognized, and the media watches him carefully.

Each dot adds a +1 modifier to your character's Socialize (or Persuasion, where applicable) rolls among those who are impressed by his celebrity status.

Drawback: The more famous your character is, the more easily he is recognized by the public. The Storyteller should apply the same +1 modifier per dot to a general Wits + Composure roll to see if he is recognized by anyone on the street. An exceptional success indicates that one or more people are loyal fans who approach him for autographs, pictures and long conversations.

Inspiring (●●●●)

Prerequisite: Presence ●●●●

Effect: Your character is able to rally others in times of great distress, renewing their courage and determination in the face of adversity.

Once per game session, your character can exhort those around him to redouble their efforts in the face of great stress or danger. Make a Presence + Persuasion roll. If the roll succeeds, any individuals who actively assist your character and who are within earshot regain one spent Willpower point (not to exceed their Willpower dots). The character may not use this Merit on himself, and may not use it on the same subjects more than once a day.

Mentor (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: This Merit gives your character a friend and teacher who provides her with advice and guidance. Your character's mentor acts on her behalf, although the Storyteller determines exactly how. A mentor usually offers advice, allowing the Storyteller to use him to help guide your character through tough situations. A mentor may also use his influence or abilities to help your character out, although he probably wants to see his charge do things for herself. A mentor is likely to give up in disgust on a pupil who constantly asks for aid. Mentors may also ask for something in return for their assistance, which can lead your character into some interesting situations.

The number of dots purchased in this Merit determines the relative power, knowledge and experience of your character's teacher. One dot indicates a mentor with one or more specialized Skills and a small amount of experience in your character's field of interest. Two dots indicate a mentor with a wide range of capability and experience in your character's field of interest. Three dots indicate a mentor possessing a broad range of Skills, years of experience and significant influence in your character's field of interest. Four dots indicate a mentor who not only possesses a broad range of Skills and decades (or in some cases, *centuries*) of experience, he is also a preeminent figure with major influence in your character's field of interest. Five dots indicate a mentor with towering influence and power in your character's field of interest. A five-dot patron watches over your character and influences her life in ways both obvious and subtle, and likely has an agenda in which your character is pivotal.

Resources (● to ●●●●●)

Effects: This Merit measures your character's material resources, both possessions and wealth. All characters are assumed to have a job or a source of income (trust fund, parents) that is sufficient to cover their basic needs: food, shelter and transportation. Dots in this Merit represent *disposable* income — wealth and assets that can be liquidated for more money in case of emergency. The number of dots indicates your character's general level of wealth. One dot suggests low disposable income: \$500 a month and approximately \$1,000 worth of assets. Two dots suggest moderate disposable income: \$1,000 a month and approximately \$5,000 worth of assets. Three dots suggest significant disposable income: \$2,000 a month and maybe \$10,000 worth of assets. Four dots suggest substantial disposable income: \$10,000 a month and \$500,000 worth of assets. Five dots suggest significant wealth: \$50,000 a month and as much as \$5,000,000 worth of assets.

Resources can be used to determine if your character can reasonably afford a purchase or expenditure. Equipment, weapons and items throughout these rules are assigned costs in dots. The Storyteller can assign cost dots to other items during play based on what's here. If your character has the same or more dots in Resources, he can

afford the item on his disposable income. That doesn't mean he has a blank check with which to buy everything he sees. He might be able to afford one or two items with a cost equal to his Resources dots in a single month. Items with lower costs can be acquired more often. The Storyteller has final say on what's too much or what's too often.

Your character's Resources dots aren't spent and don't go away. They represent available cash at any given moment. The only means by which your character's Resource dots might decrease is if story events conspire against them. Perhaps your character's fortune is wiped out, he loses his job or his company is subjected to a hostile takeover. The Storyteller therefore influences how your character's dots might decrease, and whether they can be salvaged.

Retainer

(● to ●●●●●)

Effects: Your character has an assistant, aide, indentured servant or fanatical follower on whom she can rely. You need to establish how this trusty companion was acquired. He may be paid exorbitant amounts of money that buy his unwavering loyalty. He might owe his life to your character (or to your character's predecessors). Your character might blackmail this person or threaten his family with harm if services are not rendered. Or your character might have a supernatural hold over this poor person. Regardless of the circumstances, this person is constantly loyal and follows almost any order without question.

A retainer can be called upon to perform many duties without fail. A bodyguard might be willing to hurt other people on a mere command. A dedicated street kid might hang on your character's every word and get her information or contacts without being asked. Unless your character has direct control over a retainer's mind, however, this person can't be made to perform any task. He might not risk his own life unduly or perform a task that violates his own morals. You or the Storyteller should detail your retainer with an identity, background and character sheet of his own. The Storyteller usually plays your character's retainer.

Each acquisition of this Merit grants your character one follower. Dots spent in the trait indicate the training, capability or flexibility of the aide. One dot suggests a child, an automaton or a madman with limited capabilities and free-

dom of thought. Two dots indicate an ordinary person over whom your character has sway. The servant is completely mundane and has no particular training above the human norm (he has two dots in all of his Attributes and Skills). Three dots represent a capable employee with a range of training at his disposal (three or four of his traits have three dots). Four dots represent a valued and irreplaceable assistant (someone with a handful of traits with four dots each). Five dots indicate an extraordinary follower. He is exceptional in many ways (five dots in a couple traits, and four in many others) or he may be capable of supernatural feats.

Retainer is different from Allies in that no roll is ever made to get results from an aide. He performs the task requested, unless subjected to repeated abuse or an utterly intolerable assignment (as decided by the Storyteller based on the assistant's personality).

Drawback: If your retainer is ever hurt he may be incapable of service while recovering. If he is killed, he's lost forever unless supernatural in origin. A retainer who possesses his own will and who is forced to perform a duty that offends his sensibilities or defies his morals may abandon your character, temporarily or permanently. Points spent to acquire a retainer who is killed or driven off are lost.

Status

(● to ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Varies (see below)

Effects: Your character has standing, credentials, authority or respect within an organization, group, company or social body. He might have an official position or title, or might simply be revered and honored within the group and therefore accorded a degree of authority. Your character might be a company vice president, a police sergeant or lieutenant, an army corporal or a nurse at a hospital. Or he could be a lowly member of the group whom everyone likes or who has won some acclaim and is allowed more standing than he is officially entitled.

Each acquisition of this Merit is dedicated to one type of authority, whether in an organization, society or circle. Examples include police, City Hall, criminals, unions, banks, a university faculty and hospital staff. In order to have authority in more than one venue, you need to purchase this Merit multiple times, each trait with its own dots. Thus, your character might have Status (Police) ●●, Status (Crimi-



nals ●●● and Status (City Hall) ●, each acquired separately at character creation or during play. You would need to explain how he reconciles all this authority in the setting. The aforementioned character might be a dirty police sergeant who has paid his dues in civil elections and gained some recognition among city officials.

Status represents the privileges and liberties that your character is authorized to take *within the confines and definitions of his group*. Increasing dots reflect increasing clout. A cop with Status 1 can enter the suspect lockup and interrogation rooms, while a cop with Status 4 can enter the evidence locker without supervision or get involved in a crime-scene investigation without specifically being called in.

The phrase “within the confines and definitions of his group” is emphasized above because Status operates exclusively through official channels. A surgeon might have one patient seen or operated on before another, because that’s within the official confines of his authority. Exceeding the confines of authority or proper channels transcends the limits of the Status Merit. Going above and beyond — to ask for favors rather than give orders or to requisition an official request — enters the realm of the Allies Merit. So, a police detective who gets a lower-ranking officer to investigate a case may do so with Status. That request is conducted through proper channels. Meanwhile, a police detective who asks another officer to overlook some evidence or to delay an investigation does so with Allies. The favor is asked outside official channels.

While Status might allow your character to give orders to underlings, the Merit doesn’t automatically get results. Subordinates or co-workers might resent their assignments, dislike your character or have personal agendas that interfere with your character’s needs. Efforts to get things done through official channels still call for Manipulation + Intimidation, Persuasion or Socialize rolls, whichever Skill is appropriate to the request, circumstances and your character’s standing within the organization. Bonus dice equal your character’s Status dots. Penalties might apply if your character browbeats someone (-1), uses threats (-2), skirts the limits of his authority (-2) or exceeds his authority (-3 to -5).

Some sample organizations and the basic benefits, perks and privileges of standing in them are listed below.

City Police: A patrol officer has legal powers of search, seizure and arrest, is permitted to carry a firearm at all times and has access to a wide range of local databases. High-ranking officers (●●●+) can initiate investigations, coordinate with neighboring county or state police, and call in urban-assault teams.

Clerical Standing: Your character is a licensed minister, gaining access to people and places such as accused criminals, hospital patients, crime and accident scenes, and restricted areas in religious institutions. **Prerequisite:** Academics Skill Specialty: Religion.

Corporate Executive: A low-level corporate executive has access to much of the company’s resources, including corporate credit cards, vehicles, cell phones and computer equipment. Depending on the company, he can

also access sources of information and influence not available to the general public. Executives (●●●+) have larger salaries, expense accounts, and hiring and firing powers, not to mention social perks and access to connected political figures and/or celebrities.

Diplomat: Your character is a registered diplomat for a sovereign country. If he works in a foreign country he has free lodging, access to his country’s embassy and immunity from foreign criminal prosecution. **Prerequisites:** Politics ●● and Persuasion ●●.

Licensed Professional: Your character is licensed in a recognized profession that affords him privileges unavailable to most civilians. He might be a private investigator and authorized to carry a concealed weapon and to have access to restricted databases and government files, or he could be a building contractor and be authorized to own and use explosives for professional applications. **Prerequisite:** Academics Skill Specialty: Law (private investigator), Science Skill Specialty: Demolitions (building contractor).

Medical: Your character is licensed to practice medicine. He can write prescriptions, access medical records and gain access to restricted areas such as crime and accident scenes. **Prerequisite:** Medicine ●●.

Military: An enlisted soldier has a monthly stipend, is permitted to possess military-grade firearms and has access to restricted sources of information and equipment. If he is an active-duty soldier he receives free room and board and medical care. High-ranking soldiers (●●●+) are officers who can command units, requisition military equipment and perhaps even initiate foreign insurgencies.

Rotary Club: A basic member in good standing has access to the local meeting hall and a network of members who can provide club-related information or perform club-related duties. A basic member can also benefit from the organization’s emergency fund in times of need. High-ranking members (●●●+) have access to other clubs around the country, and have sway over connected civic groups and political figures.

Drawback: Your character’s standing in a given organization is dependent on the fulfillment of his duties and on abiding by the regulations required of members.

Striking Looks (●● or ●●●●)

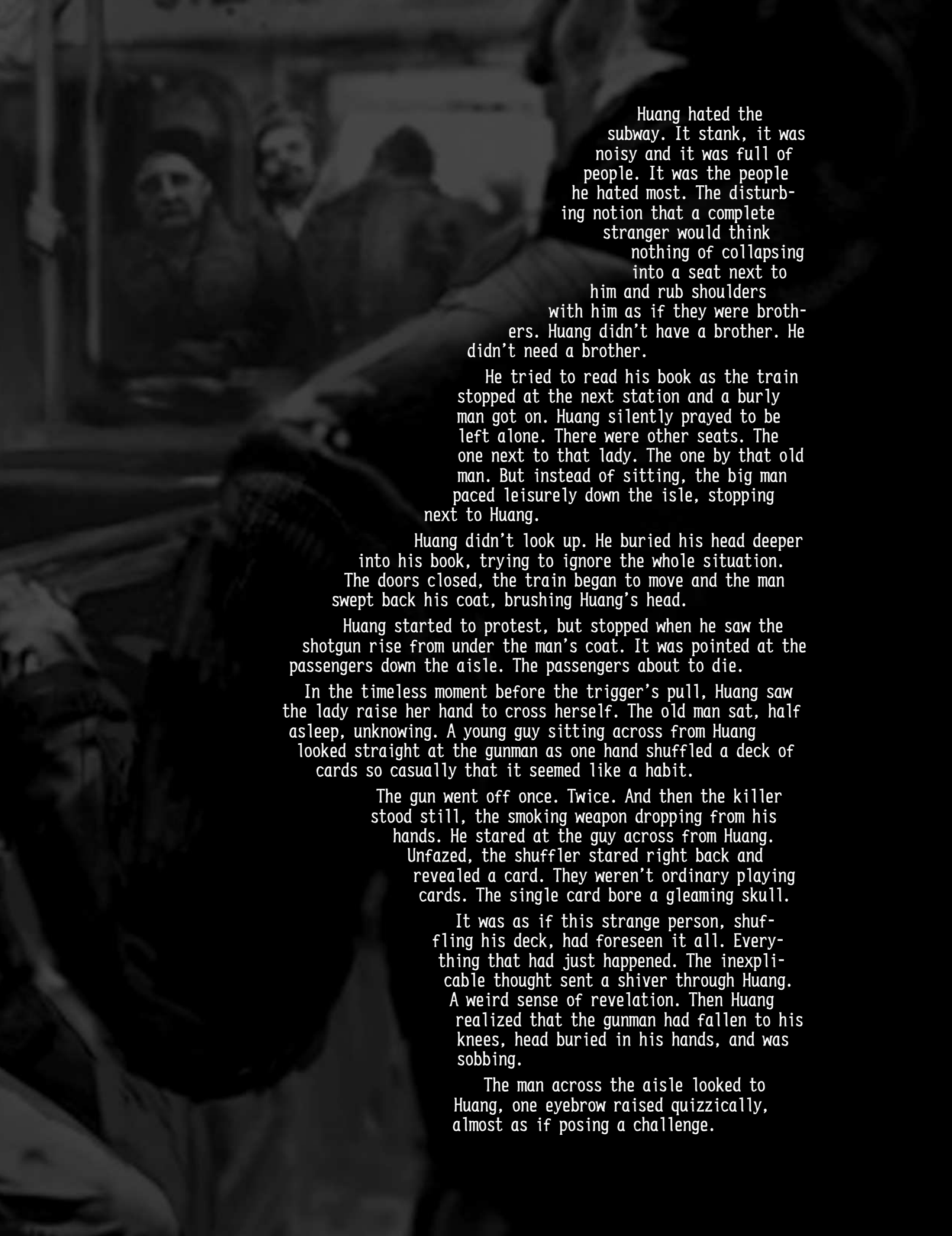
Effect: Your character is exceptionally attractive by modern standards; heads turn and conversations stop when she enters a room.

For two dots, your character gets a +1 modifier to all Presence or Manipulation rolls when she attempts to use her looks to entertain, persuade, distract or deceive others.

For four dots, your character’s looks are angelic; she gets a +2 modifier.

Drawback: The more attractive your character is, the harder it is for her to avoid notice in public. Witnesses to any criminal acts are much more likely to remember your character’s appearance, and easily recognize her in a lineup. Your character is also likely to receive a great degree of unwanted attention in social situations.





Huang hated the subway. It stank, it was noisy and it was full of people. It was the people he hated most. The disturbing notion that a complete stranger would think nothing of collapsing into a seat next to him and rub shoulders with him as if they were brothers. Huang didn't have a brother. He didn't need a brother.

He tried to read his book as the train stopped at the next station and a burly man got on. Huang silently prayed to be left alone. There were other seats. The one next to that lady. The one by that old man. But instead of sitting, the big man paced leisurely down the isle, stopping next to Huang.

Huang didn't look up. He buried his head deeper into his book, trying to ignore the whole situation. The doors closed, the train began to move and the man swept back his coat, brushing Huang's head.

Huang started to protest, but stopped when he saw the shotgun rise from under the man's coat. It was pointed at the passengers down the aisle. The passengers about to die.

In the timeless moment before the trigger's pull, Huang saw the lady raise her hand to cross herself. The old man sat, half asleep, unknowing. A young guy sitting across from Huang looked straight at the gunman as one hand shuffled a deck of cards so casually that it seemed like a habit.

The gun went off once. Twice. And then the killer stood still, the smoking weapon dropping from his hands. He stared at the guy across from Huang. Unfazed, the shuffler stared right back and revealed a card. They weren't ordinary playing cards. The single card bore a gleaming skull.

It was as if this strange person, shuffling his deck, had foreseen it all. Everything that had just happened. The inexplicable thought sent a shiver through Huang. A weird sense of revelation. Then Huang realized that the gunman had fallen to his knees, head buried in his hands, and was sobbing.

The man across the aisle looked to Huang, one eyebrow raised quizzically, almost as if posing a challenge.

Chapter 6: Dramatic Systems

No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.

— Edmund Burke, “A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful”

A Storytelling game is primarily about people getting together with characters, and with a plot to be explored. Your troupe — your gaming group — is prepared to tell a story, and everyone involved works together to do it. But what happens when your character wants to do one thing and another character tries to accomplish something different — or directly opposed? Who wins? Who loses? Who gets his way? In a sense, Storytelling goes back to the games of Cops and Robbers that you played as a kid. Now, as then, you need some means to decide who shot whom. The major difference is, Storytelling games take such questions to complex degrees. Did my character crack the safe? Did she perform the incantation correctly? Can she stab that night-crawling creature in the heart with a stake?

That’s where rules come in. All games need rules. They’re the foundation on which players understand the events that happen. If the complexity of that safe, incantation or attack is true for one character, it’s true for another. About the only factors that may help one character over another are talent and good fortune. The means of attempting the effort and the rules for resolving it remain the same.

All that said, rules can be as subtle or as overt as you like. Some troupes prefer to resolve as many matters as possible through roleplaying alone. If a character’s act seems reasonable or convincing, the Storyteller allows him to do it. The events of the story carry on without game mechanics getting in the way.

Other troupes prefer to resolve most actions through dice rolls and rules references. They ensure that the story unfolds “by the book,” with all tasks performed according to regulation so that all possible factors are considered, from talent to chance. This approach to Storytelling is as valid as the first. It simply defers to rules — the foundation of the game — to determine the legitimacy of story developments.

Ultimately, most troupes fall somewhere between these extremes. Events flow uninterrupted by rules checks when things happen fast and loose. But when events turn high-tension, such as when driving a car at 100 mph down a busy highway or when a bomb is deactivated, rules are referenced to see how well characters fare and how the story unfolds.

Time

Time flies when you’re having fun, or so they say. In a Storytelling game, time not only flies, it slows, crawls and warps. During the course of your game, you’ll find that time does some strange things. How you control the passage of time affects the smoothness of play. You and your players imagine events as they transpire, talking them out and rolling results. Thus, real time and your game’s imaginary time differ. When your characters enter combat, it may take many real-time minutes to roleplay mere seconds of game time. Alternately, you may wish to cover *weeks* of game time in just a few real-time minutes, assuming nothing worthy of attention occurs in that period. As in a novel, the authors of the story — you and your players — can gloss over intervals between important events or slow the progression to a crawl when detailing critical moments.

Six basic units describe the passage of time. Like puzzle pieces, these small units combine to form larger images until you can see the big picture.

- Turn — The smallest increment, and often the most important, a turn is three seconds. It's the amount of time it takes a character to perform a quick action, called an instant action (see p. 126). Turns are mainly observed in combat, when the action is fast and furious, with all characters doing something dramatic in a short timeframe.

- Scene — A scene in a roleplaying game resembles a scene in a theatrical play. Your Storyteller sets the stage, and the players take their roles. The scene evolves in one location and usually encompasses a single, specific event. The flow of time within a scene may vary greatly. It may be played out in turns, it may run parallel to real time, or your Storyteller and fellow players may choose to fast-forward through parts of it, so long as the location and general events do not change.

For example, a scene may begin with combat, which is measured in turns. It may then slip back into real time as your characters discuss what to do with the corpses they've created. After a fast-forward through loading the bodies onto a truck, the scene may return to real time as your characters argue over who will drive. All events occur in the same scene, at the same location, but time warps throughout to focus on the fun and important parts. Your Storyteller determines when one scene ends and when another begins.

- Chapter — For the most part, a chapter represents one game session. From the moment you sit down and assume your role to the moment you pack up your dice, you play out a chapter in the story. Your Storyteller has specific challenges planned for the night's episode. The end of each chapter should leave you wanting more, asking questions, and with a sense of the session's relative completion.

- Story — A story tells one entire tale, whether it comprises several chapters or is completed in a single session. It has an introduction, a plot arc that involves rising conflict, and a climax that brings events to a conclusion.

- Chronicle — In the big picture, the term "chronicle" refers to a collection of stories, a saga. Your Storyteller has a goal in mind for the chronicle, a possible destination for your characters, or a theme or overarching plot line that connects all chapters of the proverbial novel together. As your game progresses, you and your fellow players write your chronicle, linking parts and pieces together and developing a full-blown epic.

- Downtime — When your Storyteller decides to fast-forward and skim over a period of time, he invokes "downtime." You may summarize events that transpire during downtime, but you do not actually play them out. Your Storyteller may say something like, "Okay, you spend the night in the warehouse. At dawn, voices in the alley outside wake you." Nothing happens while your characters sleep, so there's no reason to play it out. Your Storyteller leaps ahead to the next interesting event.

Look for more on chapters, stories and chronicles in Chapter 8: Storytelling.

Rolling Dice

The Storyteller basically has two options when events need to be resolved in your story. He can simply decree that an action succeeds or does not, often based on your character's trait scores. Maybe Strength 2 is required to lift a tire and throw it, and your character has Strength 4. This approach minimizes interruptions to the flow of the narrative, as previously discussed.

The Storyteller's other option in exploring how a story unfolds is to call for a dice roll on your part. Your character seeks to accomplish a feat, there's an element of chance that he could succeed or fail, and the Storyteller asks you to decide your character's fate. Rolls are usually reserved for activities that involve an element of danger or threat if things go badly. You don't have to roll to decide if your character can accomplish ordinary or day-to-day actions such as crossing the street safely. But when you add the unknown factor of trying to cross the street safely during a drive-by shooting, the ordinary becomes extraordinary — and dangerous.

The Storytelling System uses 10-sided dice, also known as "d10's." A handful of such dice rolled to resolve an action is called a dice pool. Ideally, each player should bring about 10 dice to the game so you all have enough.

Forming Dice Pools

As described in the preceding chapters, your character's talents and capabilities are qualified and quantified with traits and dots. These values help measure how effective your character is at different activities. Attributes and Skills are rated 1 to 5 for ordinary people. One Attribute and one Skill are typically combined when your character performs a feat, and the total of the two traits is rolled in dice to decide how well she does.

The Attribute and Skill combined are the ones most appropriate to the task performed. The descriptions of all these traits in Chapters 2 and 3 help you decide which dots should be combined. The Storyteller often dictates which apply, too. So, if your character climbs a cliff, you look to her Strength + Athletics scores. If she seeks to pressure someone to do a favor for her, you use Presence + Intimidation. If your character climbs a cliff and you compose a pool based on 3 Strength and 2 Athletics, you have a total of five dice.

Sometimes various Attributes or Skills could apply to an activity, and there's some gray area on just which two should be combined. If your character needs to climb a cliff quickly more so than safely, you might petition the Storyteller (or he might decide) that Dexterity rather than Strength should be combined with Athletics. If your character seeks to convince rather than pressure someone to do a favor, you might combine Manipulation and one of Persuasion or Socialize instead of Intimidation, *whichever is most appropriate to the manner in which your character seeks to accomplish her goal.*



Emphasis is put on these last words because you shouldn't try to get traits combined simply because your character has several dots in them. The Storyteller shouldn't allow you to roll Dexterity + Athletics to climb every cliff just because your character has a high Dexterity score. That might only apply when your character needs to climb quickly. Each situation should actually call for a specific combination of Attribute and Skill.

Specialties

Chapter 3 also discusses Specialties that your character may possess in Skills. These are areas of expertise that give your character extra capability in an effort. His Specialty in Athletics might be "Climbing." Possession of that Specialty adds one die to your dice pool. Once again, however, a Specialty must apply according to the action being performed, and the Storyteller must agree. If you roll Stamina + Athletics for your character to swim across a lake, his Climbing Specialty really doesn't apply, does it?

Attribute Tasks

Sometimes actions performed require no special expertise to perform. They're activities that anyone can do, such as lifting or resisting poison. These efforts don't necessarily involve any Skills. Indeed, they're often based on your character's inherent capabilities alone. These efforts are called Attribute tasks, many of which are detailed in Chapter 2 under the appropriate traits. When your character performs one of these feats, two Attributes — a primary and secondary — are combined to determine your dice pool. The primary is the one that contributes the most to the effort, such as Strength in lifting. A secondary Attribute plays a support role in the effort, such as Stamina when your character tries to lift something. In some cases, there is no secondary Attribute; only a primary determines success, as with Stamina in holding one's breath.

When your character performs an Attribute task, your dice pool equals his dots in the traits involved. If your character lifts something and has 2 Strength and 2 Stamina, you have a dice pool of four. If he holds his breath and has a Stamina of 3, you make a Stamina roll with three dice.

As a rule of thumb, if an act can be performed without any expertise — without a Skill — it can be handled as an Attribute task.

Qualifiers

For simplicity and game balance, your Storyteller should not usually allow you to combine more than two traits in a single roll. It's probably an Attribute (inherent talent) and a Skill (learned capability), or an Attribute plus an Attribute (raw talent alone). *Two Skills are never combined to form a single dice pool.* Learned capabilities have to be based on some foundation of talent (on an Attribute).

If your character has no dots in an applicable Skill, the Storyteller may allow you to roll a dice pool equal to

your character's relevant Attribute alone. Say your character seeks to install a computer program. He has Intelligence dots, but no Computer dots. Your character's innate Attribute, in this case Intelligence, still offers him a chance to succeed, albeit a small one. If your character attempts an action for which he is not trained (he has no Skill dots), he may attempt the feat, but at a penalty. That penalty is -3 for actions based on Mental Skills, and -1 for actions based on Physical and Social Skills. Thus, if your character has no Medicine Skill but he attempts first aid, you still form a dice pool based on his Dexterity and the roll is at -3. Likewise, if an effort calls for Strength + Athletics and your character doesn't have that Skill, your dice pool is based on Strength alone and you suffer a -1 penalty.

Some traits such as Willpower have maximum ratings of 10, which is higher than individual Attribute and Skill dots go. Your Storyteller should not usually combine these special traits with others to produce your dice pools. For the most part, these high-rated traits stand alone. Often times, they're not even rolled but provide points that are spent to influence other rolls.

Dice Rolling Steps

Step 1: Start with a core dice pool. It's usually Attribute + Skill.*

* For Attribute tasks, roll primary Attribute + secondary Attribute (if any).

Step 2: Apply any dice bonuses or penalties. That is, add appropriate bonus dice to your pool and then subtract dice for penalties. Bonuses include a Specialty that your character might have in a Skill, or equipment that he might use. All bonuses to your pool should be added before any dice are removed for penalties. What remains are the dice you roll. If no dice remain, you're reduced to a chance roll (p. 125).

Step 3: Roll your total dice pool against a target number of 8. (See p. 125.)

Dice Modifiers

If we always knew just how an action was going to turn out, how all factors would apply, and just what events might contribute, we'd never make mistakes. Everything we'd ever try would come out perfect every time.

The world's not like that, though. We don't always foresee the factors that will be involved in an event. Neither does your character. Sure, he can drive to work without undo threat. He might even be an alert driver and adept at avoiding accidents, but when you throw uncontrollable elements such as rain, fog, faulty steering and a violent, fanged passenger into the mix, emerging safe and sound is a challenge.

Sometimes the factors of an action work to your character's benefit, such as using tools that facilitate her effort. Other times, they work to her detriment, as in the case of the atmospheric, car-maintenance and monstrous-passenger problems posed above. As in life, so in the World of Darkness. The conditions that work against your character often seem to outweigh those that work in his favor. When complications arise, they're not usually for the better — at least not as often as we'd like.

In the rules, circumstances apply as dice added to your dice pool before it's rolled. These are called modifier or bonus dice. Modifier dice typically represent the tools, weapons or gear that your character brings to bear in an effort. He might drive a high-performance car, wield a knife or carry a set of precise lock picks. The Storyteller or these rules assign a fixed rating to the tool that your character uses. That rating dictates the number of modifier dice that you add to your dice pool.

So, if your character enters combat with a knife and that weapon is rated +1, you add one die to your combat dice pool.

Circumstances can involve more than just tools used, however. The Storyteller often decides what factors apply to your character's actions. Most times they're self-evident, based on the scene that's set or on the events that have led up to the moment. Your character may be injured and has trouble acting. Weather plays its part. Your character's opponent may be concealed or trying to avoid incoming attacks. Some of these conditions help your character's effort, and add a number of dice to your pool as dictated by the rules or the Storyteller. Other factors impede your character's effort and reduce the dice in your hand.

Just as some factors may be known and obvious, others may be unknown to you and your character, and are announced but not explained by the Storyteller. He may know that your character was drugged in the previous scene, for example, and the effects kick in now. Her vision suddenly blurs and she feels dizzy. The Storyteller may reduce your dice pools for reasons currently unknown to you or your character.

In general, each bonus from a tool or situational factor adds one die to your pool. Each penalty subtracts one die from your pool. Say your character has 3 Dexterity and 3 Drive. He drives a high-performance car at high speeds at night and in bad weather. Your dice pool starts at six (3 Dexterity + 3 Drive). His car is rated +3 for maneuverability, giving you



nine dice in your hand. The Storyteller decides that darkness and bad weather combine to impose a -4 penalty to your rolls, however, so your pool is reduced to five dice.

Chapter 3 details many tools and their bonuses for Skills. This chapter and Chapter 7 list modifiers for weapons and other circumstances.

Adding and Subtracting

Be sure to add all the bonuses that apply to your dice pool before penalties are applied. That is, take your starting dice pool based on your character's traits, add bonuses and then subtract penalties. The dice remaining, if any, are rolled to see if your character accomplishes his intended feat. Yes, it's possible for extreme penalties to reduce your pool to one or no dice. See "The Chance Roll."

Applying Modifiers

These rules — or your Storyteller — decides the value of modifiers applied to rolls. This book strives to detail and codify as many different possible situations and permutations as possible, from the quality of tools used to environmental effects to character disabilities, all with factors that you can apply as bonus dice or penalties during play. Not every contingency can be foreseen here, though, so the Storyteller always has final say on what modifier dice are added to — or taken away from — a player's pool. That combination allows you to play a game that simulates the world as closely as possible, with all kinds of factors taken into account.

Another approach to dice rolling is more freeform. Your troupe can play a fast-and-loose game that doesn't involve counting "official" modifiers to such a degree. The Storyteller simply looks at the overall circumstances of an activity and decrees a challenge rating to it. He essentially eyeballs the situation as a whole and makes a general call, potentially speeding up the pace of the game.

In general, players are quick to calculate all the bonus dice that add to their pools (say, for lock picks used), and may propose others (a lock has previously suffered damage — another +1 bonus). Assuming the Storyteller agrees to all these variables, he can focus mainly on what penalties are levied (say, two deadbolts have been installed by the building's occupants — a -3 penalty).

By this intuitive approach, slight bonuses or hindrances are rated one. Moderate ones are rated three, and exceptional or extreme situations are rated five. The first might apply to a Dexterity + Drive roll in the rain. The second might be for a roll in a flood. The third might kick in when your character tries a hairpin turn during a tornado, when his car's engine is on fire.

As a rule, a single modifier never exceeds five, whether as a bonus or penalty. That means all tools and situational

effects are each rated one to five. A knife may offer a combatant one bonus die, while a halberd might give him five. A light rain might remove one die while a monsoon might remove five. Troupes may look up official values so that modifier dice for, say, tools, weather and character disabilities stack. That is, they're all cumulative.

Or your Storyteller may simply consider *all* the factors at work in terms of a one-to-five range and come up with one total that applies for an effort. He might allow players to calculate some bonuses, but he summarily decrees that weather and character disabilities make an effort "a trying task," and three dice are removed from a player's pool.

Here are some general suggested modifiers.

Bonus Degree of Challenge

- +1 A helping hand
- +2 A walk in the park
- +3 Nothing to it
- +4 Easy as pie
- +5 You can do it in your sleep

Penalty Degree of Challenge

- 1 A minor obstacle
- 2 A hard time
- 3 A trying task
- 4 It's demanding
- 5 Sorely tested

Storyteller Caveat

Sometimes your character tries to do something under conditions with which you and she are unfamiliar — and you're not meant to know what those conditions are. The Storyteller wants to keep you as ignorant as your character is about the circumstances surrounding the effort. Maybe the effects of the aforementioned drug added to your character's drink are gradual and subtle. They kick in before your character even feels them. Or your character tries to do some research, but she doesn't know that the book she uses intentionally provides false information. Under these circumstances, the Storyteller assembles your dice pool for you, applies all modifiers, and makes the roll on your behalf, without showing you the roll or the exact results. You don't know what factors apply or why, and your character is none the wiser. All she knows is that her effort succeeds or fails, and you must abide by the Storyteller's roll. That way, you're as much in the dark about what's going on as your character, and you can enjoy the story just as she does.

A wise Storyteller avoids enforcing such authority too often. “Executive rolls” are best reserved for situations in which characters and players must be kept out of the loop about unfolding events. Yet there’s nothing more frustrating to players than having control of their characters’ actions — and dice rolls — taken away too often.

Target Numbers

Okay, so you have all these dice in your hand. How do you use them? Almost all rolls made in the Storytelling System have a target number of 8. You want to roll 8 or higher on each die.

For each die that turns up 8 or higher in a roll, your character achieves a success at the action he performs. Sometimes the number of successes is counted to determine results, such as in combat. Other times a single success is all that’s required for an action to be fulfilled, such as rounding a corner in a speeding car.

Example: Your character tries to identify the kind of vehicle from which a part comes. His Intelligence + Crafts is 6, and he has a Specialty in engines, offering a +1 bonus. You form a pool of seven dice. The Storyteller decides, however, that the wear and tear that the old part has suffered makes it difficult to recognize (he imposes a -1 penalty). You remove one die and are left with six to roll against a target number of 8.

You get a 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 9, for two successes. Since only one success is required to pull off the feat, your character recognizes the part from a military truck.

10 Again

When you’re hot, you’re hot. Extremely good rolls can lead to extremely positive results for your character. Anytime you get a 10 on a die roll you earn a success and you get to roll that die again. That’s called “10 again.” If the re-roll results in a success, you earn an extra success in the effort. If the result is another 10, you get to keep re-rolling and you add another success to your character’s action for every 10 that you get. If multiple dice in your pool turn up 10’s, you re-roll all of those dice and keep accumulating extra successes and keep making any extra rolls. The results can be exceptional successes, in which your character performs stunning or near-miraculous feats.

Example: Your dice pool consists of seven dice. You get 2, 4, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10. That’s three successes, but one die got a 10, which you get to re-roll. Say you get a 5. That’s not a success, so your total successes for the roll remains at three. If you got an 8 or 9, however, you would have gotten an additional success, for a total of four. Now, if you had rolled another 10, not only would your total successes for the action have risen to four, you would have rolled that die yet again. If it got another success, your total would have increased again. If it resulted in yet another 10, your

successes would have increased by one and you would have kept re-rolling.

The rule of re-rolling 10’s applies to everything from gathering information on the street to determining the effectiveness of a punch.

A 10 rolled on a die always calls for a re-roll, even on a chance roll (see below). Of course, a 10 is required to achieve any success on a chance roll. If you keep re-rolling 10’s, you keep accumulating successes.

The Chance Roll

Any time a dice pool is reduced to zero dice, usually due to penalties applied to your pool, you may still make a chance roll. It’s a “Hail Mary,” desperate, last-ditch effort that your character would seem to have no right to achieve. Maybe he squeezes off what seems an impossible shot or he tries to win the favor of a mob determined to kill him.

Roll one die, called a chance roll. It has a target number of 10. Rolling 10 gets you a success and your character amazingly performs the feat attempted. Almost any roll other than 10 indicates failure. As always, you get to roll 10’s again. You have a chance to perform a stunning success if you keep re-rolling 10’s and accumulate successes.

Example: Your character tries to fire a shot at a target who is concealed and at long range. The penalties for those circumstances reduce your dice pool to zero, leaving you with a chance roll if your character attempts the feat at all. He goes for it. You roll a single die and need a 10 to get a success. You roll 10 for one success. The “10 Again” rule allows you to re-roll 10’s to hopefully accumulate successes, so you get to roll again. Another 10 turns up, so you have two successes and get to keep re-rolling. Your third roll produces an 8, for a total of two successes on the chance roll. Your character hits his target against all odds.

Notice in the example that the roll of 8 was not a success on the chance roll. Whenever you make a chance roll, no matter how many times you roll 10 again, the target number remains 10. Rolls of 8 or 9 do not count as successes, not even on re-rolls.

Dramatic Failure

Sometimes actions go catastrophically wrong. Your character has the best of intentions, but he slips, makes a mistake, something gets in the way or an environment change leads to tragedy. These developments are called dramatic failures. A dramatic failure occurs only when you’re reduced to making a chance roll and you get a 1.

Take the previous example of the unlikely shot. If your character took it and your first chance roll produced a 1, a dramatic failure would have occurred.

For a dramatic failure to occur, no other successes can have been achieved in your chance roll. So, a catastrophic result may occur only on your first chance roll. If you get a 10 on your first roll, which is a success, and get a 1 on your re-roll, your character has one success and you stop re-rolling. No dramatic failure occurs because you’ve already achieved one success on the chance roll.



Dramatic failures do not occur when you still roll any part of your normal dice pool. If penalties to your character's action reduce you to few or as little as one die in a pool, your character is not at risk of suffering a dramatic failure. A roll of 1 here is just an ordinary failure, not an extraordinary one. A dramatic failure occurs only when you are reduced to a dice pool of zero and you get a 1 on a chance roll.

When one of these horrific developments occurs, your character loses control of his own fate. The Storyteller decides how your character's action goes terribly wrong. He may slip and fall or loses self-control. Maybe something goes wrong regarding your character's weapon or tool. His baseball bat cracks or his computer locks up.

The precise nature of a dramatic failure is up to the Storyteller. He could be lenient and decide that your character's gun jams and needs to be cleared, or he could be cruel and decide that the gun explodes and does damage to your character, or that an ally or bystander is hit by the shot. If your character seeks to seduce someone, a dramatic failure could mean that he outrages her, instead. If he conducts research, a dramatic failure can indicate that documents are accidentally lost or de-

stroyed, or that completely erroneous "facts" are taken as truth.

The Attribute, Skill and Combat chapters suggest possibilities when dramatic failures arise. They don't necessarily mean your character has to die, only that fate has thrown a gigantic monkey wrench into the works. A clever Storyteller uses a dramatic failure to raise tension a notch and to introduce new opponents or to provide impetus for character development. How does your character come to terms with accidentally shooting an innocent child, for example? Dramatic failures make for exciting scenes.

If penalties levied against your dice pool reduce you to a chance roll, the Storyteller might allow you the choice of going through with the action or not. You might want your character to make a desperate effort. But if the risks of a dramatic failure outweigh the potential gains of a success, you might not want him to go through with the feat. The Storyteller may allow you to abandon an effort if your character could reasonably assess his situation and recognize that the odds are stacked dangerously against him. Trying to cross a busy highway on an injured leg might be obviously suicidal. If, however, your character is unaware of or couldn't foresee the factors (the penalties) that interfere with his intended effort, the Storyteller may decree that the intended action must proceed.

Actions

Like you, your character can try to do pretty much anything he sets his mind to. He can attempt to jump, read foreign languages or seduce a member of the opposite sex. His relative success is based on his traits, any tools he brings to bear, the number of dice that you get to roll, and how well you roll. Various activities call for different kinds of rolls. Some, like throwing a punch, have immediate effects if any at all, while others such as rebuilding an engine can involve time and energy, being performed over a prolonged period. Yet other activities have either immediate or extended effects, but involve direct competition with someone else. He who does the best job prevails. Examples of the last include arm wrestling (immediate) or trying to win a long-distance race (prolonged).

The following are the actions your character can perform, along with systems for deciding how well he does.

Instant Actions

Many activities take almost no time to achieve. Shooting a gun is an obvious example. Karate chopping a piece of wood is another. These feats are performed and

The possible results from any instant action:

Dramatic Failure	A single chance roll is made and a 1 results
Failure	No successes achieved on the roll
Success	One or more successes achieved on the roll
Exceptional success	Five or more successes achieved on the roll

completed in the moment, usually with obvious results — the attempt fails or succeeds. Basically, any activity that can be performed and completed in the space of one turn — three seconds — is considered an instant action. These efforts are resolved with the roll of a single dice pool.

If you get no successes on the roll, your character fails at the activity. Most likely, no result occurs and he wastes his time. Instant actions usually require only one success to be performed. Sometimes the actual number of successes that you achieve is counted, as in combat to determine damage done to a target.

It's possible to achieve exceptional results when five or more successes are earned with a single dice roll. Your character does even better than hoped. Maybe he not only reaches the other side of the pit, he knocks aside debris on the far side that makes it easier for others to land. Or, he makes it up the banister even faster than his opponent who takes the stairs. The Attribute and Skill tasks described in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest possible results when failure, success and exceptional success occur.

By this system, the challenge of any feat is laid out before you. One success always indicates a positive result. Five or more successes might suggest a great success, but one is always the benchmark. And you always roll against a fixed target number of 8. The relative difficulty of an action is therefore determined by the number of dice added to or subtracted from your dice pool. The more dice you have in hand, the more likely it is that you'll roll a success. The fewer the dice in your pool, the slimmer your character's chances. When your character performs an activity that requires the space of a turn to be accomplished, you compose a dice pool based on his traits, add or subtract dice based on bonuses or penalties, and roll in hopes of getting successes. If you get at least one, your character succeeds in the moment.

Example: *The crook holds hostage the china doll that Travis so dearly needs. If the doll is damaged, the spirit of Travis' deceased grandmother will haunt him forever. Trying to buy time, the crook throws the doll and makes a run for it. Travis races to catch the special toy. The Storyteller calls for a Dexterity + Athletics roll. Travis' Dexterity is 3 and his Athletics is 1. He has no special tools or benefits to apply to the effort. Meanwhile, there's a whole room full of furniture for Travis to navigate to get to the doll in time (the Storyteller imposes a -3 penalty). The result is a dice pool of one (3 + 1 - 3). The roll turns up a 2. Travis dives and falls short as the doll shatters on the floor, just out of reach. Somewhere in the house, a disembodied wail echoes.*



Extended Actions

Some actions demand time and effort to be performed. They can't be completed on the fly or in the moment as instant actions are. Activities such as conducting research into a politician with a shady past, or canvassing a neighborhood for strange sightings are considered extended actions. Rather than require one roll, they demand several rolls before overall success can be determined. Successes earned per roll are accumulated, and the period that passes between rolls varies depending on the activity performed.

Each roll — each step in the process — is a step toward achieving the end goal, such as hacking a computer or hot-wiring a car. A failure on any roll means you accumulate no successes at that stage and your character's time in that period is wasted. The project continues, though.

It's also possible that particularly crippling penalties could be imposed on your dice pool for any stage, reducing you to a chance roll. Say a research effort is made ever more challenging in the wake of a fire in which important documents are lost. (The Storyteller imposes a high penalty to subsequent rolls made.) A dramatic failure on such a roll cancels all accumulated successes and may mean that your character must start the extended action from scratch, but also has to make some change in circumstance (he has to find a new source of information, get new tools, read the automobile repair manual or find new parts). Under delicate circumstances, perhaps when tools or parts are one-of-a-kind, a dramatic failure may indicate that the project ends in utter failure, maybe with harm done to your character.

The Storyteller determines how many total successes are required to complete an extended action. He also decides what period of time passes for each roll that you make, and translates what each stage means for your character.



Chapter 3 indicates likely extended actions, the number of successes they require, and how much time passes with each roll. Relatively easy tasks such as stripping, cleaning and reassembling a gun may demand four successes, and each roll may constitute 10 minutes of time. Early stages involve pulling the pieces apart, intermediate stages involve ordering and cleaning them, and final stages indicate re-assembly of the weapon. A more demanding project such as building an elaborate bomb can demand 15 successes. Each roll can represent hours or days passed. Early stages indicate acquisition of parts. Middle rolls represent the combination of elements. Final rolls indicate that last touches are applied and that the timing mechanism is set just right (or not).

Unless a particular task or roll is described as an extended action, consider it to be instant.

Example: *Marcus barricades himself inside the machine shop while that thing stalks him outside. Marcus realizes that he needs a weapon, but there's nothing but engine parts and tools lying around. Then his eyes fall on the partially disassembled chainsaw on the worktable. He sets to work right away trying to make the saw run again. The Storyteller calls for Wits + Crafts rolls, since so much improvising of parts is involved. The Storyteller also decides that each roll signifies the passing of 15 minutes, and that a total of 10 successes is required. Secretly, the Storyteller knows that the creature outside will grow tired of waiting and smash the door down after an hour (four rolls) of toying with its prey.*

Marcus' Wits + Crafts total is seven, and the Storyteller says he gets three bonus dice per roll thanks to the facilities available. In the first 15 minutes, the 10 dice produce three successes. In the second roll, they net two more. The third roll gets no successes at all. It looks grim for Marcus. But in the fourth roll, an amazing six successes are achieved — one more than the 10 required, and just in the nick of time. When the creature bursts through the door, Marcus whirls around with a screaming weapon in hand.

Increasing Successes

One of the joys of the Storytelling experience is making up events on the fly, in response to characters' actions or to entertain players. A great opportunity to do just that lies with the successes that players roll. In an instant action where one success indicates the completion of a task, and five successes mark an exceptional result, the Storyteller can have fun with everything in between. Take a research effort, where one success means the information sought is found. Perhaps two successes also turn up a link to some affiliated people who don't seem completely on the up and up. Three successes definitely indicate that these folks have their fingers in illegal pies. Four successes show that their circle in-

cludes some movers and shakers in town. And five successes — an exceptional success — reveal that the mayor is involved!

The effects of such increasing results apply primarily to actions that are completed when only one success is needed. Tasks such as combat attacks and extended actions that are specifically measured in terms of successes rolled call for less innovation. The number of successes rolled automatically shows you how well a character does.

So, when a player needs one success but gets, say, three, the Storyteller should feel free to elaborate on what extra accomplishments are made, above and beyond what a character absolutely needs.

Rule of Thumb: Extended Actions

Roll Limitations

Tasks described throughout the Storytelling System involve extended actions. Examples include rebuilding an engine or writing a computer program. By definition, an extended action calls for a total number of successes, which a character tries to meet. His successes from roll to roll are accumulated until they equal or exceed that number. At that point, the project is completed and the time it required is determined by the number of rolls made. If each roll involves an hour and six rolls are made, six hours pass. Simple.

And yet, on its own this system implies that almost any project can be accomplished given enough time. A crook can work on a lock indefinitely until she breaks in. A writer can work for an extended period on a movie script until it's finished. In reality, people rarely have unlimited time in which to accomplish their goals. The crook hears a security guard approach and needs to pick the lock before he spots her. The scriptwriter has a deadline by which the producer wants to see a finished product. The Storyteller can therefore impose a limit on the number of rolls that are allowed in an extended action. He might say that the crook has time for three attempts to break in before the guard arrives in three minutes (each roll takes one minute). Or the writer's deadline is in five days, and one roll in the extended action encompasses one day. Thus, the author's required successes all need to be gathered in five rolls. In these cases, time is the great equalizer.

Time isn't the only limit to an extended action, though. A character's inherent capabilities could be a limit, too. The Storyteller can rule that a maximum number of rolls can be made in an extended action equal to a character's pertinent Attribute + Skill. If he can't get the job done in that number of rolls, the project simply confounds him. Take the would-be burglar above. Say she has 3 Dexterity and 2 Larceny. Assuming she has unlimited

time in which to break in, the Storyteller can still rule that if the required number of successes aren't gathered in five rolls (the total of her Dexterity + Larceny), she simply can't do it. Maybe the lock is jammed, she can't think straight or her hands ache from an earlier accident — whatever rationale the player and Storyteller can apply that explains this turn of events.

Just because this attempt fails doesn't mean the effort eludes the character forever. The Storyteller decides how much time must pass before another stab at the extended action can be made. If the effort itself involves a short period of time, such as overcoming a lock, it might not be picked this scene but the character can try again in a subsequent scene. If a project involves considerable time, such as each roll occupying days or weeks, a new attempt at the project might not be possible for a month.

If the Storyteller does allow a subsequent effort at the project, he may impose a penalty on all its rolls. If this is the second attempt, all rolls might suffer a -1 penalty. If this is a character's third attempt, the penalty might be -2. Such modifiers are akin to those imposed under "Successive Attempts" (p. 132) and are the only case in which such penalties might apply to the rolls of an extended action.

Example: *Marcus attempts to frame in his basement as a shelter, complete with booby traps and secret compartments. The Storyteller rules that it's an extended effort, with each roll demanding one day. A total number of 15 successes is required. Marcus' Intelligence + Crafts is 6, and he has some high-quality tools that offer a +1 bonus.*

If time were of the essence, the Storyteller might decide that Marcus needs all 15 successes in four days — in four rolls. If he doesn't have them in time, the shelter is useless when that thing in his neighborhood comes looking for food.

Alternatively, if time is not an issue but Marcus' own capabilities are, all 15 successes need to be accumulated in six rolls (the total of his Intelligence + Crafts). In six rolls, Marcus has only 13 successes. He hasn't been able to overcome certain snags and his basement is cluttered with boards and gear. The Storyteller lets him try again in the future, though. It's decided that the process can begin again in a week. This time, however, all rolls suffer a -1 penalty because this is a subsequent attempt. Marcus stacks the odds in his favor and gets some self-help books and even better tools. The bonuses this new equipment offers helps him get 15 successes in six rolls, despite the -1 penalty that each roll suffers. Had even this attempt failed, the Storyteller could have allowed a third, but all rolls in it would have incurred a -2 penalty.

It's also possible in some cases that a character really does have unlimited time to work, and his Attribute and Skill dots are not necessarily a limit to how many rolls he can get to finish a project. A character might rebuild a classic car, for example. The old hulk sits in his garage for months as he tinkers on it on weekends. There is no deadline or imminent threat, and the character does it for pleasure rather than out of fear or pressure. The Storyteller decides that each roll represents a week of work, and the character will eventually succeed given enough time and successes.

Here are some guidelines for the amount of time to assign per roll in an extended action.

Pace of Activity	Time per Roll
Quick	1 turn (3 seconds)
Short	10 minutes
Long	30 minutes
Lengthy	1 hour
Consuming	1 day
Exhausting	1 week or month

Target Successes

The extended actions detailed throughout this book all call for a total number of successes required to finish a project. Whenever possible, totals are derived from the traits of the characters involved. A competition between characters might require target numbers equal to the opponents' Speed, Dexterity + Crafts or double Dexterity + Crafts, for example. The goal in choosing these traits and setting a target is twofold:

- 1) Using traits to set targets keeps those targets relevant to the people involved or to the activity performed.
- 2) A target is sought that doesn't allow an extended action to be resolved too quickly, but the task shouldn't drag on and on, either. A target should reflect the overall difficulty of a task, but it should still involve some kind of prolonged challenge. Otherwise, it would be resolved as an instant action.

Ultimately, the Storyteller decides how long an extended action should last, and therefore how many successes it requires. If the prescribed target listed in this book will make for too quick an effort or competition in your game — it will be resolved in a couple rolls when you want it to have dramatic significance — feel free to increase the number of successes needed. A number normally based on Speed or double an Attribute + Skill can be turned into an artificial target of 15, 20 or 25, instead. Whether the number is based on participants' traits is ultimately unimportant. How it's resolved in-game is what really matters. An increased number could allow for a demanding effort or an intense creative process, or could heighten the tension of a competition between characters (in an extended and contested task — see below).

Here are some guidelines for target numbers that you can assign to extended actions. These are based on the complexity or sheer scale of the job, or on the drama that you want to evoke.

Challenge	Target Number
Simple/Relaxed	5
Involved/Trying	10
Elaborate/Demanding	15
Ornate/Daunting	20
Intricate/Epic	25



Contested Actions

Some activities that your character performs are conducted in direct competition with someone else, whether it's another player's character or one of the Storyteller's characters. A race is a good example. Trying to crack the hard-drive protections created by someone else is another. You pit your character's capabilities against someone else's.

Contested actions are easy to resolve. You simply determine your dice pool, apply all modifiers, and roll. The same is done for your character's opponent. He who gets the most successes wins. Exceeding your opponent's successes and gaining five or more of them indicates an exceptional accomplishment. If it's a tie or neither side gets any successes, the effort fails altogether or successive attempts (see p. 132) may be made in subsequent turns, if appropriate. The Storyteller decides if the effort can be attempted over and over until one competitor wins. If both try to grab a fish that swims downstream, they both probably have only one chance before the fish is gone. If one tries to hack into another's computer, the effort might persist as long as the intruder likes or until fail-safes shut him out. If either side of a contested roll gets a dramatic failure, he either fails utterly or his opponent automatically achieves the equivalent of an exceptional success.

In some cases, rolls aren't made for opponents in the moment of the contest. Sometimes one participant sets up a defense or creates a situation that a challenger later tries to overcome. The roll for the defender is made when he creates the object or defense, and any successes achieved are recorded for future reference. Challengers' rolls are made as they approach, and are compared to the defender's original score. So, if an IT manager creates a firewall for a server and four successes are earned for him, a hacker who comes along a year later needs to attain five or more successes to get in.

The Skill descriptions in Chapter 3 indicate when contested actions are appropriate for various tasks. Rolls made are based on the activity performed, as always. Hacking a computer might involve Intelligence + Computer for both sides. Running a race may involve Dexterity + Athletics or Stamina + Athletics.

Note that in a contested action, the total successes rolled for each participant are compared, and he with the higher total wins. The difference between successes rolled is not the "margin of success." So, if one participant gets two successes and the other gets five, the latter of the two wins with five successes. He doesn't win with three, the difference between the two totals.

Contested feats can be based on instant actions or extended ones. Activities that take only a moment — a turn — to perform between competitors are considered instant actions and are resolved with one roll each. Wrestling over a fallen gun probably involves only one action's effort to decide who ends up with the weapon. If rolls tie or neither results in successes, the struggle can continue into the next turn, but it's still considered an instant action because it can once again be resolved in the space of one turn.

More time-consuming or demanding activities that are performed in competition are considered extended actions and use the rules detailed above. These feats are also contested, though. Rolls are still made for each competitor in each stage. He who gets the most successes wins that stage, and successes achieved by each side are added to a running total. The winner is the first competitor who accumulates successes equaling the total required to complete the project. Such competition over a period of time and effort occurs in a long-distance race, a car chase, a debate or in an effort between scientific teams to be the first to find a vaccine. Essentially, any effort that demands more than a single turn's effort to decide a winner involves an extended and contested action.

Example: *At first, Karen and her mugger struggled over her purse, but now that a giant wolf has descended upon them, they both run for their lives. The two race, because the slower of the two will be the wolf's victim. The Storyteller decides that the race is an instant action — decided in the space of a turn. The wolf is satisfied with whoever is closest when it pounces. Dexterity + Athletics rolls apply for both. Karen's Speed trait is two higher than the would-be thief's, so the Storyteller awards two bonus dice, but she wears dress shoes that impose a -1 penalty. Karen's player rolls, and the Storyteller rolls for the mugger. Karen's roll nets four successes while the mugger's gets three. The wolf has its victim, the slow thief.*

Now, if the wolf holds back and allows its victims to run, judging which is the weaker of the two, the Storyteller could decree that the race is a contested and extended effort. He decides that whoever gets six successes first is allowed to escape — the wolf ignores the victor and chooses the loser as its prey. One roll marks a turn's time and the loser is dinner. The Storyteller also decides that since this isn't a measure of pure reaction time, but of endurance, Stamina + Athletics is rolled. Karen's Stamina is 2 and her Athletics is 4, for a total of 6. The same modifiers above still apply, so seven dice are rolled for Karen each turn. The criminal's dice-pool total is five. In the first turn, Karen gets one success to the thief's three. He has the lead. In turn two, Karen gets three successes, while her opponent gets none. Karen is a step ahead now, but neither party has gotten away. In turn three, Karen gets a tragic zero successes while the mugger gets three, for the required total of six. Abject panic gives him a burst of speed, leaving Karen to fend off the beast that howls greedily and leaps in her direction.

If participants in an extended and contested action accumulate their required number of successes at the same time, no winner is determined. They could both finish their separate projects simultaneously with no clear leader. Both scientific teams present their successful findings at the same time, for example. Alternatively, the competition could continue until someone overcomes the other. Rolls continue to be made, perhaps to improve upon efforts that have already been achieved. Say, debaters both make valid points, so they continue their discussion to see who can get the last word.

If an extended and contested action is a tie, the Storyteller could rule that ongoing competition is worthless. Perhaps time has run out or the goal that both sides pursue is no longer available. Debating teams could refuse to quit, but the panel of judges has already decided that neither has won.

Reflexive Actions

In addition to the instant, extended and contested actions that your character can perform are reflexive actions. These behaviors don't qualify as any of the above, because your character doesn't take time to perform them — or even think about them. They're performed automatically, almost like the autonomic functions of your body. Accounting for them in a turn would be like rolling for your character's heart to beat or lungs to take in air.

Reflexive actions are best considered defensive or reactionary activities that don't intrude upon other behavior. They include resisting poison, seeing through a deception, defying social pressure and spending Willpower points. These activities do not preclude your character from taking his normal action in a turn; they are performed *in addition* to that action, and are resolved immediately after the instigating action or attack (when the poison is injected, when the threat is leveled or when your character decides to go for broke).

Various actions discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 7 are termed "reflexive."

Action	Example
Instant	<p>Throwing a punch, controlling a vehicle</p> <p>A one-shot chance of success or failure; success is determined by a single roll.</p>
Extended	<p>Mountain climbing, tracking in woods</p> <p>Task stretches over a period of time and each stage renews the chance for failure or success. You make several rolls with the goal of collecting a stated number of successes.</p>
Contested	<p>Pickpocketing or sneaking by a guard</p> <p>An instant action that pits two characters against each other. The two compare successes. He with the highest total wins.</p>
Extended + Contested	<p>Chasing someone, a pie-eating contest</p> <p>Players roll repeatedly in order to accumulate successes. The first to reach the total set by the Storyteller wins.</p>

Exceptional Success

Sometimes your character performs a feat with amazing ease, flair or grace. In game terms, when you roll your dice pool for an action and get five or more successes, your character achieves an exceptional success. When that happens, the Storyteller is encouraged to elaborate upon your character's accomplishments, allowing for even more than was intended to happen. Maybe an exceptional Drive roll not only allows your character to avoid a hazard, but he manages to swerve around it and resume his previous course without spilling his beer.

The significance of an exceptional success varies according to the kind of roll made and the circumstances of the task. For an instant action that happens in the space of one turn, such as the above driving example, the Storyteller typically decides what happens. Some extra benefit or reward is gained. If an exceptional success is gained in combat, the extra benefit is obvious. Each success rolled inflicts a point of damage on the target. See Chapter 7 for more information.

For a contested action that involves two characters in competition, the winner who has five or more successes — and more successes than his opponent — is the clear and obvious victor. He makes the contest look easy and his opponent look bad. Say, your character and a thug dive for the same gun. You not only roll more successes, but you get five or more. Your character gets the gun and points it in one motion, leaving the thug facedown with a handful of air and a mouthful of dirt.

For an extended action that occurs over a period of time, any single exceptional success catapults your character toward a quick completion of his task. You gain five or more successes toward the total that you need. Your character has a major stroke of luck or moment of inspiration that advances his project considerably.

If, by virtue of some extremely good luck, you accumulate five or more successes than the number required to complete an extended action, the Storyteller may bestow some extra effect or favorable result. Say that you need 10 successes for your character to research a shady councilman's background. You currently have nine successes and make another roll. Incredibly, you get six more successes, for a total of 15. Not only has your character discovered a gold mine of information and wrapped up the investigation, but you have gained five more successes than you needed. The Storyteller decides that your character stumbles upon ledgers that implicate the councilman in blackmail. Normally, the Storyteller might not have allowed your character to have uncovered that much information, but your exceptional number of successes beyond those needed confer the bonus.

Examples of possible exceptional successes are provided throughout Chapters 2 and 3 for different Attribute and Skill tasks.



Successive Attempts

If your character fails an action in a turn, he can try again in the next turn if time and circumstances permit. He can throw darts for fun over and over again until he hits a bull's eye. Other situations don't allow for repeated efforts. Your character might have a limited opportunity to break down a door to get out of an inferno before he's burned alive. When time is a complete luxury and your character is under absolutely no pressure, the Storyteller may allow you to make successive attempts with a full dice pool. No penalties are imposed.

If, however, time is short and/or the circumstances are tense, a repeated effort can be attempted in each subsequent turn, and the Storyteller can choose to levy penalties on successive attempts. Generally, a -1 penalty accumulates with each attempt after the first: -1 for the second try, -2 for the third, and so on. The Storyteller is free to make the penalty more severe if the stress is particularly high. The Storyteller allows successive attempts to break down the aforementioned door, for example, but each roll after the first might be at a -2 penalty.

The nature of the action determines whether second chances are possible. They might be if your character attempts to persuade someone of something, parallel park or wriggle free from ropes that bind her. It does not apply if your character fails an attempt to shoot someone, detect an ambush, catch a baseball, notice a clue or to do anything else at which she has only one chance to succeed.

Example: *Laura struggles to remember the punch-code to the laboratory door as the security guard's footsteps grow closer. The Intelligence + Composure roll made for her comes up with no successes. Laura's player asks the Storyteller if she can try again. The Storyteller allows one more attempt before the security guard appears, but at a -1 penalty because it's a successive attempt. Laura's Intelligence + Composure total is normally five, which is reduced to four due to the -1 penalty.*

Note that successive attempts cannot usually be made in the stages of an extended action. If one roll in an extended action nets no successes, you can't re-roll it in a successive attempt. No progress is made at that stage of the project, the time is wasted, and the next normal roll in the effort is made. If, however, a *whole* extended action fails (the total successes required is not met), the Storyteller may allow another attempt to be made at it. All the rolls in the new attempt may be subject to a penalty. See "Rule of Thumb: Extended Actions," above, for more information.

Heroic Effort

Sometimes just trying to accomplish a feat isn't enough for your character. It's do or die. He has to make a leap or catch a falling child or make his last bullet hit the mark. That's when he puts his all into it. You can have your character make this extraordinary effort by announc-

ing that he "goes for broke" before the activity is performed. You then spend a Willpower point in a reflexive action to gain three dice on your roll.

Willpower should be spent and three dice are added to your dice pool before all penalties for your roll have been applied. So, form your pool, add all bonuses — including your three dice from Willpower — and then subtract all penalties. Yes, that means if penalties are sufficiently extreme, you could be reduced to a chance roll even if you have spent Willpower for three extra dice. Circumstances are stacked so heavily against your character that not even sheer determination can improve his odds of success.

Example: *Your character tries to deactivate a bomb, but he has no tools whatsoever, and he's literally in the dark. His Intelligence + Science total is 3. A spent Willpower point adds three more, for a subtotal of six. The Storyteller decides that darkness imposes a -3 penalty, for a final total of three dice.*

Now, if your character had no Science dots at all and he still tried to deactivate the bomb, your roll would be based on Intelligence alone and would suffer a -3 penalty since Science is a Mental Skill (see p. 63). You therefore decide to spend a Willpower point. If your character has 2 Intelligence, your dice pool starts out at five (2 + 3 for Willpower), but the -3 untrained penalty and -3 darkness penalty reduce your pool to zero dice. You must make a chance roll for your character to succeed, even though you spent Willpower on the task.

If you spend Willpower for extra dice and your pool is still reduced to no dice by penalties, the Storyteller may allow you to reclaim the Willpower point. After all, without those three extra dice you were still going to be reduced to a chance roll. Before making the attempt, your character realizes that the effort is nigh hopeless, with or without all his determination. Alternatively, the Storyteller may insist that your Willpower is spent, even though its benefits are lost due to penalties. He may say that your character must go through with his focused effort once the point has been spent. It's the Storyteller's prerogative to go either way.

It's too late to spend Willpower if you've already rolled for an action. That is, if you compose your pool, remove dice for penalties, roll and get no successes, you can't announce that you spend a Willpower point to roll three more dice. It's too late.

Only one Willpower point can be spent per turn no matter how it's used.

Willpower can be spent on only one roll at a time in an extended action. If your character goes for broke at each stage (for each roll), you have to spend a Willpower point at each stage.

If for some reason your character's Resolve and/or Composure temporarily increases during play, perhaps as a result of a mystical spell, he gains one Willpower point per dot increase. Essentially, he has access to one or more free Willpower points for the duration of the effect. When his Attribute returns to normal dots, your character loses

any extra Willpower points. If they were never spent, he no longer has access to them.

Resistance

Willpower can also be used to reflect your character's efforts to resist influences and dangers imposed upon him. Your character might be determined to resist a poison that depletes his Strength, or to avoid harm through sheer force of determination.

In these cases, you can spend a point of Willpower in a reflexive action to gain a bonus to Resistance efforts. In combat, a point of Willpower spent adds two points to your character's Defense to resist harm against a single attack. You simply announce that you're spending Willpower to resist when the attack is staged. (Your character could even dodge in a turn — see p. 121 — and you could spend a Willpower point to gain a further two points of protection against a *single attack*.) Remember that Defense (and therefore Willpower) does not usually apply against attacks from firearms or bows.

Otherwise, Willpower can be spent to bolster one your character's "Resistance" Attributes — Composure, Resolve or Stamina — against a single roll when he is threatened.

Say, your character is exposed to a supernatural power that diminishes his cognitive capacity. The power steals one Intelligence point per success achieved, and your character's Resolve is subtracted from the dice pool rolled. Spending a point of Willpower increases your character's Resolve by two to resist the power. That is, your character's

Resolve +2 is subtracted from the dice pool of the opponent.

Example: A monster's thrall tries to hit Jefferson, who hopes to get by to save a child. Jefferson stops at nothing to get to the kid, so his player spends a Willpower point to better resist the effects of the thrall's attack. Jefferson's Defense increases from 2 to 4 for the attack, diminishing the minion's dice pool.

In another turn, Jefferson negotiates for the release of the child from the bloodsucking monster. The creature of the night seeks to cripple Jefferson with a magical power that saps Strength. Jefferson fights back with all his might, and his player spends a point of Willpower to resist the power. Jefferson's Stamina is normally 3 but it increases to 5 in this instance, and that number is subtracted from the dice pool rolled for the creature's trick.

Remember that only one Willpower point can be spent per turn, total, no matter how it's used. You cannot, for example, spend one point to gain three extra dice on a roll and another point to increase your character's Resolve in the same turn. Those points must be spent in separate turns.

Wound penalties (see p.171) do not apply to your character's Defense or other Resistance traits when those traits are subtracted from opponents' dice pools.

Storytellers are encouraged to read "Rule of Thumb: Resistance," p. 202, to better understand when Resistance traits such as Stamina, Resolve, Composure and Defense are subtracted from attackers' dice pools in play.



Teamwork

Characters can aid one another to achieve the same goal. They might work together to assemble an engine, break down a door or break a crook's will. Choose which character is the primary actor. A normal dice pool is assembled for him based on the action. Say, Dexterity + Medicine to administer first aid. The same roll is made for each secondary actor. Any successes collected from assistants are added to the primary actor's dice pool as bonus dice. So, contributors' rolls are made before that of the primary actor.

A dramatic failure on a secondary's roll levies a -4 penalty to the primary actor's roll — it hinders rather than helps his chances. The primary cannot decide to abandon his action if a contributor's roll contributes few successes or a penalty. He must proceed.

The Storyteller decides how many secondary actors can participate in teamwork, and can limit the actors however he desires. Three people might find space around a patient in order to provide first aid, for example, while five people might be able to work together to build a house.

Example: Charles works on his broken-down car with the help of Devon. It's a simple repair rather than a diagnostic situation, so the Storyteller decides that Dexterity + Crafts is called for. Charles has 2 Dexterity and 4 Crafts, while Devon has 2 Dexterity and 1 Crafts. Charles is the primary mechanic at work. The Storyteller decides that since the pair has only the ordinary tools kept in the trunk at their disposal, no bonus is gained. In fact, a -3 penalty is imposed because it's late at night and there's only one flashlight.

Devon's dice pool starts at three but is reduced to a chance roll. A 1 is rolled — a dramatic failure. The Storyteller announces that Devon drops the flashlight and it breaks. That means another four dice are subtracted from Charles' effort. Charles starts with a pool of six dice, loses three from darkness, and loses four more from Devon's blundering. He is also reduced to a chance roll. Fortunately, his roll produces a 6, which is just a failure. The Storyteller decides that without light, the two are left stranded.

If Devon's roll could have produced, say, two successes, two dice would have been added to Charles' roll. His pool would have consisted of five dice (6 + 2 - 3).

Systems Permutations

The basic Storytelling System involves rolling a number of dice based on your character's capabilities (Attribute + Skill). Dice are then added to or subtracted from your hand based on the tools used and the circumstances of the action performed. Typically, one success rolled indicates an overall productive effort, while multiple successes can indicate an increasingly rewarding result.

This approach to activities — from driving a car to swinging a sword to smooth-talking a receptionist — can resolve many of the events that might happen in your game. At times, however, you may want to throw a curve

or create a unique situation that bends or breaks the traditional rules. Maybe the weapon your character wields can be used in unique ways, or a supernatural power invoked by an inhuman monster warps reality. In these cases, you can introduce system variations to spice up your game.

The following are possible adaptations of the Storytelling System that your Storyteller can apply when she pleases. Perhaps your character's weapon receives these benefits, and the Storyteller puts the rules in your hands during play. Or she decides that an antagonist's spell has certain advantages outside the normal rules. If you think your character should have access to any of these special systems, petition your Storyteller. She has final say on whether (or when) they can be used.

- **9 Again:** You can re-roll 9's as well as 10's. The result is effectively a "9 again and 10 again" rule. This rule might be applied to a power that brings luck or to a tool or weapon that is particularly potent, such as a hollow-point bullet.

- **8 Again:** You can re-roll 8's, 9's and 10's. Essentially, you re-roll any success in a "8 again, 9 again and 10 again" rule. The power or phenomenon represented with this kind of rule has tremendous potency or pervasiveness. A result either doesn't occur (no successes are achieved) or it's extremely effective, with little gray area in between.

- **Extra Successes:** The trick, tool or power used packs a real wallop. A number of extra successes are added to any rolled for the effect, automatically improving its results. A massive weapon might inflict crippling harm, for example. Its Damage rating (see p. 170) is applied not as bonus dice to your attack roll but as extra successes to your roll. If the weapon's Damage rating is 4, it adds four to any successes achieved. If you roll no successes at all, the extra successes go to waste. They can only be added to any that you achieve. Typically, this modification is reserved for extremely powerful supernatural effects or tools.

- **Modifies Resistance:** The phenomenon has an advantage over its targets not because it overpowers them, but because it undermines them. Targets of the effect lose a certain number of points in any Resistance trait that they can pose (Stamina, Resolve, Composure or Defense). A power to control a victim's mind might reduce his Resolve to maintain control. The target's reduced Resolve is rolled or subtracted from the attacker's dice pool. Or a victim's Defense is diminished in combat by an entangling weapon such as a lasso or rope (see "Defense," p. 155 in Chapter 7).

Alternatively, the effect bolsters the user's own Resistance, giving him bonuses to traits such as Resolve, Composure, Stamina or Defense for countering harm or influence over him. Protective devices might work this way, without encumbering the wearer with actual armor. Or a spell might erect walls in your character's mind that help him resist outside control.

- **Rote Actions:** Sometimes the steps or work involved in a feat has been laid out by those who preceded your character. He follows in their footsteps or follows

instructions to achieve a result. The plans make success easier than if your character tried the effort under his own power or inspiration. When you make a roll for your character, the blueprints available allow you to re-roll any dice that result in failures. You get one re-roll as a whole, and add up all successes achieved to see how well your character does.

Say your character wants to build a bomb and he downloads intricate, authentic plans from the Internet. The Storyteller decides that it's a rote action. You make an Intelligence + Crafts roll (with modifiers imposed by the plans, tools and other factors). If three dice turn up successes but the rest fail, you get to re-roll all those that failed and add any more successes to the previous three. Only one such collective re-roll is allowed.

If for some reason you're reduced to a chance roll on a rote action, a dramatic failure (a "1") on your first roll indicates that something has gone horribly wrong from the outset. No re-roll is allowed. If your first roll results in a success (a "10"), keep re-rolling for more successes based on the "10-again" rule. When you stop getting successes, you get to make another chance roll for the rote effect, and may keep re-rolling that die if 10's turn up.

- **Advanced Actions:** Your character has amazing speed at his disposal such that others seem to move in slow motion. He exists outside the normal flow of time and can perform feats while others are essentially "frozen." Or maybe he has the luxury of trying an action over without repercussions for failed results. Whatever the case, you get to make the roll for an effect twice and choose the most beneficial one.

- **Extra Talent:** Your character can bring extra faculties to bear in an effort. An additional Attribute is added to your character's dice pool for an action. Perhaps a supernatural power allows his Intelligence to be added to his Strength + Skill roll; the force of his mind literally bolsters his muscles. Or a blessed weapon has its own preternatural speed that's added to your character's own martial prowess. The weapon has a Dexterity rating that's added to your Strength + Weaponry rolls.

Objects

It's inevitable that people in traumatic, tense situations turn their attention to objects. They wield weapons, grab tools or they need items such as cars to make getaways. Objects are often the tools with which we get things done, and characters in your game use tools to fulfill their goals. It's therefore important to know how difficult it is to break loose a chair leg, shatter a lock or forcibly bring another car to a stop.

If your character ever seeks to do damage to an object by striking it unarmed (he smashes his shoulder into a door, punches through a wall or kicks a steel gate), he suffers a bashing wound in the attack. This injury can be negated with appropriate armor worn (see p. 166).

Inanimate objects have three traits: Durability, Size and Structure. These qualities typically encompass whole objects, such as statues, couches or cars.

Durability: A factor of the object's material hardness. Successes achieved in an attack roll against an object must exceed the item's Durability before any damage is actually inflicted. Thus, if a door has 1 Durability, any successes achieved in excess of one are counted as damage to the target.

The Durability rating of supernaturally enhanced items can reduce any aggravated damage done to them (see Chapter 7: Combat). If an object is mundane or ordinary, its Durability is considered zero against attacks that inflict aggravated damage.

Durability Rating	Material
1	Wood, hard plastic, thick glass
2	Stone, aluminum
3	Steel, iron
+1	per reinforced layer

Size: Objects smaller than Size 1 can fit entirely in one's palm; they have negligible Size.

Structure: An object's Structure is the equivalent of its Health and equals its Durability + Size. An object suffers "wounds" due to damage. Once its Durability is exceeded in total Structure damage suffered, it mal-

functions and incurs a -1 penalty when it operates or is used by a wielder. So, if a chainsaw has 2 Durability and 3 Size, it has 5 Structure. If the item suffers one or two Structure damage, it's still functional. When it suffers three or four Structure damage — anything in excess of its Durability — using it imposes a -1 penalty on a wielder. At five damage it cannot function at all.

When all of an object's Structure is lost to damage the item is destroyed. Bashing and lethal damage are considered the same for objects. It doesn't matter what kind of wound is inflicted. If Structure drops to zero, the object is destroyed. The exception applies to a more severe kind of harm called aggravated damage that inhuman entities can inflict. The Durability of mundane objects is reduced to zero against aggravated attacks, as discussed above. And while ordinary damage inflicted on an object can be repaired by conventional means, harm done through aggravated damage cannot be repaired without some sort of supernatural agency.

An object's lost Structure points cannot be healed; they must be repaired. Doing so usually requires the Crafts Skill. The Attribute combined with the Skill depends on

Size	Object
1	Pistol
2	Sword
4	Spear
5	Door
10	2-seat sports car
15	SUV
20	Dump truck

the task performed. Dexterity applies for delicate clockwork. Intelligence is applicable for innovation or design changes. Bonus dice may be gained depending on the quality of any tools or the workshop used for the project. Repair is usually an extended action. Each success gained on a roll repairs one Structure point. Once sufficient Structure points are repaired, the object is back in working condition. The Storyteller declares the amount of time that passes per roll, based on the complexity of the task. Fixing a gun might involve rolls made every half-hour, while repairing an engine could call for rolls made every hour or even day. At the Storyteller's discretion, some broken objects may be declared irreparable.

Sample Objects

Baseball Bat: Durability 1 (reinforced to 2), Size 2, Structure 4, Damage 2

Board, 2"x4": Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4, Damage 1

Cabinet, Wooden: Durability 1, Size 4, Structure 5, Damage 1

Chair, Wooden: Durability 1, Size 4, Structure 5, Damage 1

Coffin: Durability 1, Size 6, Structure 7, Damage 1

Crate, Wooden: Durability 1, Size 4, Structure 5, Damage 1

Door, Bank Vault: Durability 3 (reinforced to 10), Size 8, Structure 18, Damage 8

Door, Wooden (Exterior): Durability 2, Size 5, Structure 7, Damage 2

Door, Wooden (Interior): Durability 1, Size 5, Structure 6, Damage 1

Door, Metal (Security): Durability 3, Size 5, Structure 8, Damage 3

Fence, Chain-link: Durability 2, Size 4, Structure 6, Damage 2

Fence, Steel: Durability 3, Size 6, Structure 9, Damage 3

Lamppost, Steel: Durability 3, Size 8, Structure 11, Damage 3

Manhole Cover: Durability 3, Size 3, Structure 6, Damage 3

Steel Bars: Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 5, Damage 2

Tempered Steel: Durability 3, Size 2 (variable), Structure 5, Damage 2

Window: Durability 1, Size 3 (on average), Structure 4, Damage 1

Damage: Indicates how dangerous the item is when used as a weapon or to do harm. Damage is the lower of the item's Durability or Size. This rating is added to attack rolls in bonus dice to inflict harm. If the weapon is improvised, it suffers a -1 penalty.

Improvised Weapons

Combatants invariably grab whatever items come to hand to use as weapons against each other, especially when they come to a fight unarmed and opponents proved to be well armed. Improvised weapons (bottles, chairs, candlesticks) are helpful, but generally less accurate and dangerous than items designed to be weapons (knives, swords, axes). Impromptu weapons tend to be unwieldy or awkward. The Damage rating of an improvised weapon (see the "Sample Objects" chart) is usually the lower of its Durability or Size. This rating is added to attack rolls in bonus dice to inflict harm (see the Combat Chapter). Because improvised weapons are so awkward, however, they generally suffer a -1 penalty on attack rolls.

The result in the case of relatively weak and small items is that their bonuses are offset by their inherent flaws (low Damage bonuses are reduced or eliminated by the automatic -1 penalty). Say, as in the case of a bottle rated Damage 1. The -1 penalty for an improvised weapon eliminates any bonuses for swinging the weapon. And yet, if the bottle is broken any damage inflicted changes from bashing to lethal, so the weapon still proves effective.

Items designed as weapons are made to inflict harm and suffer punishment. They incur no inherent penalties when used in combat, and may have Damage ratings unrelated to their Durability or Size traits. The Damage ratings of weapons are listed on the Weapons Chart (see p. 170).

Note that any item used as a weapon has a Strength requirement for it to be wielded effectively. For weapons used in close combat, the Strength requirement usually equals the item's Size. Having insufficient Strength imposes a -1 penalty on attacks made with that item. This rule applies to improvised weapons, too. So, if an improvised weapon has a Size and therefore Strength requirement of 3, and a wielder has 2 Strength, his attack pools are reduced by one for not meeting the Strength requirement, and by another one for resorting to an improvised weapon.

Breaking Objects

It's easier to destroy than to create, and your character will probably want to destroy things relatively often if he ever gets into scrapes, or if he confronts things that humanity was never meant to face. The following are some examples of breaking items.

If an attack is staged on an object, successes achieved on the attack roll must exceed the Durability rating of the item to cause any Structure damage. So, if a wall has 1 Durability, any successes achieved in excess of one remove Structure points from the target.

Note that damaging and destroying an object isn't necessarily an all-or-nothing endeavor. Attacks on an item aren't always a matter of instant actions alone. Damage can be inflicted to a target over time through an extended action, if one can scratch the surface at all. Doing so assumes the attacker has the time to beat, batter or abuse



the object. Points of Structure damage inflicted are accumulated until the item buckles and then breaks completely. If the attacker inflicts harm through unarmed attacks, remember that he incurs a single bashing wound per attack made on the target. Explosives and demolition gear are an excellent means to damaging and destroying objects instantaneously, if they're available.

Breaking down a door: Roll Strength + Stamina. Each success gained in excess of the door's Durability is a point of Structure damage inflicted. Overcoming all of the door's Structure points breaks it down completely. Exceeding Durability in damage done breaks the lock; the door remains on its hinges, but can be opened.

Holding back a door: Your character seeks to hold a door closed against others who want it open. Roll Strength + Stamina. Successes earned are added to the door's Durability rating (which also increases its Structure). A holding character suffers half of any damage that exceeds the door's total Durability rating (that from the door itself and from the reinforcing character; fractions are rounded down). So, if your character holds a door with 1 Durability and two successes are achieved on your Strength + Stamina roll, the door's total Durability is 3. If an attack staged on the door nets five successes, the door suffers two damage and your character suffers one Health. These rules can also be applied to breaking and holding windows, cabinets and coffins. No more than two people can work together to break down or reinforce a normal-sized door.

If damage done to the door ever exceeds its total Durability (its own rating, plus points added by characters holding it), the door is forced open. If damage done ever exceeds the door's total Structure, the door is destroyed altogether.

Blowing up an object: Explosives must be acquired before they can go boom. Roll Intelligence + Science to configure explosives correctly, or Dexterity + Athletics to throw them where intended. Explosives have an inherent Damage rating that is inflicted automatically, and also rolled to do additional harm. See "Explosives," p. 178 in Chapter 7. That damage must exceed the target's Durability for the object to be harmed in the explosion.

Kicking out a grille: Roll Strength + Stamina. Successes gained must exceed the grille's Durability score to do it harm. Overcoming all of the grille's Structure points knocks it out completely. Exceeding Durability rating in total damage done bends the grille. In order for someone to crawl through a bent grille, Structure damage done to the target in excess of its Durability must also exceed the person's Size. Say a grille has 3 Durability and 10 Structure. Seven damage has been inflicted to the grille, which exceeds its Durability by four. Anyone who is Size 3 or lower may crawl through.

Smashing one object into another: Your character rams one object into another with the intent to break the target. It's possible that either object could break, however. If the effort is made under stressful circumstances or the target resists, the Storyteller calls for a Strength +

Weaponry roll as per normal combat (see Chapter 7), with any situational penalties applying to the attack. If there's no stress involved, the attack may be rolled without situational penalties. Add the Damage rating of the item wielded to your attack pool (-1 if the weapon is improvised — see above). Any successes achieved in excess of the target's Durability are suffered as damage and are subtracted from the target's Structure.

If insufficient successes are achieved in an attack roll to do a target harm (successes rolled are less than the target's Durability rating), the object used to make the attack may be broken, instead. Compare the successes rolled to the attacking item's Durability score. Any successes in excess of the item's Durability are incurred as damage by your character's tool.

Example: *Stack's character swings a baseball bat to break down an industrial-strength door. The door has 3 Durability. The bat has 2 Durability. Stack's attack roll nets three successes — not enough to do any appreciable harm to the door. The bat is damaged, though. The three successes rolled exceed the bat's Durability by one, so the bat loses one Structure point. It normally has 4 Structure and is now reduced to 3, but the bat can still be used normally. So, Stack's character keeps swinging. In a subsequent attack, Structure damage done to the bat rises to 3, which exceeds its Durability rating. The bat cracks and imposes a -1 penalty on Stack's remaining dice pools. If four Structure points are ever incurred, the bat breaks altogether.*

Were Stack to get one or two successes to damage the door, the door would be unaffected (it's Durability is 3). And yet, the bat would also go undamaged. One or two successes do not exceed the bat's 2 Durability.

Targeting items: Sometimes combatants use items such as swords in combat to defray attacks. Such weapons are used to deflect and redirect blows, rather than be the specific targets of them (see the “Weaponry Dodge” Merit, p. 114). That is, an attacker doesn't usually aim at an opponent's sword when trying to hurt that opponent. Thus, parrying weapons generally stand up to the abuse inflicted on them in combat. It's when they're the specific targets of attacks that they may be broken. In this case, an attacker specifically focuses on the item carried by his opponent. That might be a sword, but could also be something carried in hand such as a videocassette. A normal attack dice pool is formed, but the Storyteller imposes a penalty based on the size of the target (see “Specified Targets,” p. 165). Any successes rolled are compared to the Durability of the item, with excess successes removed from the target's Structure. The target item might be damaged or destroyed as a result. Remember, if a tool or weapon is used to make the attack, and successes achieved do not exceed the target item's Durability, the attacking weapon may be the one to be damaged or broken (see above.)

Falling objects: If one object falls into another, determine the damage done in the fall to both objects equally (see “Falling,” p. 179). Add the Damage score of the opposing item to the falling damage suffered by each. Any total damage suffered in excess of an item's Durability is

subtracted from the object's Structure. Thus, if a chair with Damage 1 falls on a statue with Damage 2, both take the same damage from the fall, but the chair suffers an additional two and the statue suffers an additional one. These totals are compared to the objects' respective Durability scores to see if they lose any Structure points.

When an object falls and lands on a person, treat the lowest of the person's Size or Armor rating (if any protective gear is worn) as his “Damage” score. That number is added to the abuse incurred by the falling item. So, if the aforementioned chair falls on a person (5 Size, 0 Armor), each party suffers the same falling damage (say, three points for a fall of nine yards). However, the person incurs an additional one damage from the chair's Damage rating, while the person adds no extra points to the chair's total. The person therefore suffers four damage and the chair suffers three.

Piercing Durability

No matter how many layers of protection are built into an item — say a tank or vault door — some invention can overcome them. It might be an armor-piercing bullet or a diamond-bit drill. Tools created to bypass Durability demand their own special rules. They ignore points of Durability equal to their rating, but do no extra damage. Thus, a diamond-bit drill rated 3 eliminates three Durability points in a vault door. Successes rolled to overcome the door are therefore compared to a diminished Durability score. In combat, the rating of an armor-piercing bullet diminishes the rating of any armor worn by a target.

Neither of these tools increases the damage done to the target, however. Their ratings are not added to dice pools for attack rolls. They simply make the effort easier to accomplish.

Example: A vault door with a 10 Durability (reinforced steel) is the focus of intruders wielding a diamond-bit drill rated 3. The door's Durability is automatically reduced to 7. Successes achieved on a Dexterity + Larceny or Intelligence + Science roll must now exceed seven to do any damage to the door. At no point, however, is the drill's 3 rating added as bonus dice to a dice pool.

In combat, an armor-piercing bullet rated 2 automatically reduces a target's armor by two for the purpose of making an attack roll. Two bonus dice are not added to your attack pool. If a target wears no armor, your character's shot gains no special effects or bonuses from the ammunition used (the gun itself still applies a dice bonus, though). See “Armor Piercing,” p. 167 in Chapter 7 for more information.

In general, objects and vehicles are considered to have Durability ratings (which must be

exceeded to cause damage to them). People and sentient targets who wear protective gear have armor ratings that are subtracted from attackers' dice pools (see "Armor," p. 166). A person wearing a flak jacket is not considered to have a Durability rating, for example. The rating of his armor imposes a penalty to an attacker's dice pool (see Chapter 7: Combat).

If you want to determine if someone beyond a barrier or inside an armored vehicle can be hurt, see "Cover," p. 162.

Equipment

The following items are indicative of just some of the gear that your character may acquire or use when dealing with the mysteries of the unseen world. The creatures that haunt the shadows may have miraculous capabilities, but modern technology can be used to even the odds somewhat. Sometimes beings in touch with humanity turn to these items to ply them against rivals, and some shepherd the way to new innovations that are *eventually* shared with the masses.

Die Bonuses

Using equipment and tools to accomplish feats generally improves your character's chances of success. Gear is typically rated 1 to 5 in terms of quality, and that number of dice is added to your dice pools when pertinent actions are performed. For example, an attempt to break into a car involves Dexterity + Larceny. Your character can try it without any tools or devices, but the effort is difficult and probably crude (he busts out a window to get in). But if your character uses a crowbar to help the effort, the Storyteller might grant a +1 bonus. You add one die to your dice pool. Now, if your character has a high-quality, precise set of tools designed specifically for breaking and entering, the Storyteller might grant you as much as a +3 or higher bonus. The better tools brought to bear are simply more effective than a crowbar.

Most conventional equipment offers a +1 to +3 die bonus. These items are commercially available and not necessarily unusual. The most basic, rudimentary or improvised of tools may add nothing to your character's efforts. A bent coat hanger isn't really so useful in giving your character a bonus at breaking into a car, for example.

Indeed, some activities require tools or devices to be attempted at all. In these cases, bonuses are gained for using good-quality equipment. You can't play in an orchestra without a violin, for example. Possessing any old violin doesn't grant your character an immediate bonus to Expression rolls. The instrument needs to be special to confer bonuses. A finely crafted antique piece might be +2, while a Stradivarius is +4 or +5. Likewise, you can't drive without a vehicle. A beat-up old sedan may offer no

bonuses to Drive rolls, while a new sports car can offer four.

Generally speaking, useful but simple items and tools offer a +1 bonus. Most specially made gear that's designed and fabricated for a particular purpose is rated +2. Say, a slimjim for auto theft. Tools at +3 are reliable and precise. Tools rated +4 and +5 are top-of-the-line, craftsman-made and probably expensive devices. Add one dot to the listed costs for items rated +4, and two for items rated +5. Thus, if your character has a set of lock picks (which normally have a cost of 3) with a dice bonus of +4, his tools have a cost of 4.

Equipment created or altered by supernatural or advanced means can be rated +4 or +5 (or higher!), but is probably always assigned an equal cost — if available for purchase at all. An inventor who works beyond the realm of ordinary human technology might design a universal lock set, for example. One tool can open doors of any kind. It confers a +5 die bonus to B&E efforts, and costs five dots to be acquired. Of course, cost has little bearing if someone can steal or barter for an item rather than buy it.

The relative costs of items are listed in dots. Compare these to the dots in your character's Resources Merit (if any) to see if he can afford them with disposable cash. See "Resources," p. 115, for more information.

The items listed here tend to be somewhat unconventional — things you might not see everyday, but that your character might intentionally seek out. It's assumed that you can assess the utility (and die bonuses) of ordinary items such as computers, household tools and handy items such as Swiss Army knives.

Dice bonuses can apply to instant actions — feats performed in the space of one turn. They can also apply to rolls made in extended actions. A project occurs over a period of time, with rolls made at intervals to gauge progress. Having tools (getting dice bonuses) definitely improves your character's chances of success at an extended action, and may help him accomplish it more quickly than without the gear.

When a dramatic failure occurs, something may have gone horribly wrong with the tools used. The Storyteller decides just what has happened. One of your character's picks could be broken, lost, hopelessly jammed in a door, or simply dropped making enough noise to draw attention. In the case of damaged or broken tools, consider their bonus ratings to diminish by one thereafter, along with their cost dots if they're sold.

Cost dots for equipment are ultimately relative assignments. In the free world where commerce is largely open, costs are as listed. In a politically or religiously oppressed locale, forbidden items are rare and more expensive. Illegal items in any region are certainly expensive and must be acquired through underground channels. Consider any illegal or black-market purchase to be at least one dot more expensive than indicated in these rules. There could also be a cost to life, limb and liberty, but that's for the Storyteller to decide in your story.

Automotive Tools

Durability 2-3, Size 1-5, Structure variable, Cost • to ••••

Function: Tools useful for working on vehicles and engines can range from handheld wrenches and pliers that can be used to perform minor jobs such as changing oil, to hydraulic lifts, diagnostic computers and complete garages. The Storyteller may rule that no tool that offers a bonus of +2 or less is any help on a significant repair job such as rebuilding an engine. A fully stocked machine shop is required for that (rated 3, 4 or 5). Otherwise, efforts to repair busted hoses or punctured radiators might be made with lesser tools. Bonus dice are added to Dexterity or Intelligence + Crafts rolls.

Climbing Gear

Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 4, Cost ••

Function: Ropes, bungees, pitons, hammers and clamps — the tools helpful in climbing a sheer surface, whether it's a mountainside or building. Bonus dice are added to Strength + Athletics rolls.

Demolitions Kit

Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 4, Cost •••

Function: The tools needed to create and deactivate explosives. They include cutters, pliers, switches and chemical agents. Explosives themselves are not included. Those must be acquired or created separately. Legal acquisition of explosives requires that your character is a licensed contractor or that he has prerequisite military credentials. (See the Status Merit, p. 116.) A kit typically adds bonus dice to Intelligence + Science rolls.

First-Aid Kit

Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Cost • or ••

Function: Anything from your standard bandages-and-alcohol kit to an advanced set owned or carried by people such as EMTs who work in the medical profession or who anticipate serious work-related injuries. The kit's rating in bonus dice is added to Dexterity + Medicine.

Flashlight

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost n/a

Function: Unlike most tools, flashlights don't offer dice bonuses. They simply diminish the effects of darkness, reducing the penalties of "Fighting Blind" (p. 166). Using a flashlight while performing actions makes the feats possible, but still challenging. Rather than be reduced to a Storyteller-controlled chance roll, you are still able to make your own rolls, only at a penalty of -3 or -4 depending on the degree of darkness. So, if your character tries to shoot a target by flashlight, and he has 2 Dexterity, 3 Firearms and a gun rated 3, your dice pool might be composed of four dice (2 + 3 + 3 - 4).

Alternatively, the Storyteller might decree that performing a task in the dark imposes a standard penalty of -3 and having a flashlight diminishes that penalty to -2.

No Resource dots are required to be able to afford a flashlight.

Gasmask

Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Cost ••

Function: A device worn over the face and/or head that filters air, hopefully saving the wearer from airborne poisons or toxins. Bonus dice (as many as four or five) can be added to Stamina-based rolls to resist such threats.

Gunsmithing Kit

Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 4, Cost ••

Function: The tools helpful in cleaning, maintaining and repairing firearms, from pistols to machine guns. Bonus dice are added to Dexterity + Crafts rolls. Clearing a gun jammed after a dramatic failure usually requires an action rather than a Crafts roll, unless the Storyteller decrees that a serious jam has occurred. That probably means the weapon is useless until it is taken apart and reassembled.

Lock Picks

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3, Cost •••

Function: A set of tools used to trip locks and open doors and windows. One kind could be intended for vehicles and another for buildings. The tools typically add dice to Dexterity + Larceny rolls.

Mace or Pepper Spray

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1, Cost n/a

Function: Contained in spray bottles that fit in the palm of the hand, these devices debilitate targets who are sprayed in the face. A Dexterity + Athletics roll is made at a -1 penalty to hit a target. Range is one yard maximum, and the target's Defense applies. If it is successful, all of the target's actions suffer a -5 penalty for the remainder of the scene as his senses are overwhelmed and breathing is made extremely difficult. A chance roll is not made to use a spray on a target over one yard away; the effort fails automatically. Beings that are no longer alive but that walk and talk are not affected by such devices. A single spray canister can be used three times before it's empty.

No Resource dots are required to be able to afford a spray.

Nightvision Goggles

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost ••

Function: This headgear allows a wearer to see in darkness, eliminating penalties for operating blind. See "Fighting Blind," p. 166. Exposure to any light source while wearing the goggles actually causes blindness, imposing the Fighting Blind rules.

Silencer

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4, Cost ●●●

Function: Killers who try to work discretely can add silencers to their guns. These devices muffle (but do not eliminate) the noise made. Bystanders might hear a shot fired with a successful Wits + Composure roll, with a penalty equal to the rating of the silencer. Some weapons such as revolvers and shotguns can't be fitted with silencers. Note that silencer ratings are not added to Dexterity + Firearms rolls.

Surveillance Equipment

Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4, Cost ●●●

Function: Wire taps, long-range cameras, listening devices — the things your character needs to spy on someone without being noticed. Small sets offer small bonuses, while large ones (that fill vans) have higher scores. Dice can be added to Stealth-based rolls to trail someone.

Sights. Laser

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost ●●●

Function: An aiming device that can be built into almost any kind of firearm that literally draws a light bead on a target. A laser sight improves accuracy, but the device is useless with autofire (see p. 160). Laser sights are only useful for hitting targets up to a weapon's medium range; the normal -2 penalty to hit a target at medium range is negated. A laser sight is ineffectual against targets at long range or farther; the -4 penalty for targets at long range still applies. If your character aims (see p. 162) and uses a laser sight, a successful Wits + Composure roll allows the intended victim or someone around him to spot the bead. Initiative is rolled as a result, and your character retains his full aim bonus only if his shot is fired before the target acts in order of Initiative. If the target acts first, he presumably reacts and seeks cover and your character's aiming bonus is lost. It's also possible for someone to tackle or move the intended victim before the shot is fired, in which case the aiming bonus is lost.

Sights. Telescopic

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost ●●●

Function: Mounted on a firearm, usually a rifle, a telescopic sight lowers the penalty for firing at long range from -4 to -2. A scope offers no bonus for firing at targets at short or medium range.

Survival Gear

Durability 1-3, Size 1-4, Structure variable, Cost ● to ●●●

Function: Your character can be trapped or lost in the wilderness with a handful of tools such as a canteen and a sleeping bag (+1 bonus). Or he can bear an array of cutting-edge survival gear from a GPS receiver to a four-season tent to freeze-dried meals (+3 or more). Bonuses

can be applied directly to Survival-based rolls. Such equipment also forestalls penalties or damage normally inflicted upon your character by exposure (see "Temperature Extremes") for an additional hour per point of the equipment's rating. Thus, gear rated 2 spares your character action penalties for two hours before the effects of the environment kick in. Gear rating is also added to your character's Stamina + Resolve to determine how long he can go before suffering harm from exposure. Indeed, the Storyteller might decree that survival equipment rated 3 or higher might preserve your character from harm completely for days on end, assuming conditions aren't too severe. Gear rated 3 can keep a person active and alive for a few days under freezing conditions, for example. In general, assume that the rating of survival gear equals the number of days of food and water that the kit provides. After that period, your character must forage for food and water or go without (see "Deprivation," p. 175).

Vehicles

Planes, trains and automobiles. The stories you tell rarely remain fixed in a single setting. They probably range across a city, between towns or involve activities country- or worldwide. Whether characters need to get across town or across the globe, they need vehicles. Storytelling games being about intrigue, tension and action, it's inevitable that characters will use vehicles as weapons against opponents, or be the targets of attacks while traveling. But just how challenging it is to drive at 80 mph and fire a gun out a window? How much abuse can a sports car handle before it's wrecked? These kinds of questions beg rules for handling vehicles during play.

The following information covers vehicles that characters are likely to have or gain access to — ordinary cars, trucks and motorcycles. If you need information on anything more exclusive or unusual such as private jets, yachts or surplus military tanks, feel free to extrapolate rules from what's offered here, and search for anything else you need online.

The Basics

Vehicles are typically made up of a variety of parts fitted together to make a whole. For simplicity's sake, these rules quantify the general toughness of an entire vehicle to determine how much punishment it can suffer before being disabled and made inoperable. Damage done to a chassis isn't differentiated from that to an engine, for example. It's all considered harm to the same object. And yet, damage done to specific vehicle parts such as the tires or doors influences how well the machine performs, or how well protected passengers are.

Comprehensive traits for various vehicles are provided under "Sample Vehicles," p. 146. The following are traits and rules for the "vulnerable" parts of most vehicles that can be targeted specifically.



Window: Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4

Targeting a window specifically imposes a -1 penalty to the attacker's dice pool.

Door: Durability 3, Size 3, Structure 6

Targeting a door specifically imposes a -1 penalty to the attacker's dice pool. When a door's Structure rating has been exceeded, it's blasted off or is so battered as to offer no more protection. Passengers' protection is diminished when doors are lost. Passengers who previously had full cover in a car become substantially concealed when a door is removed. Whereas shots fired had to hit and penetrate metal before, they now simply suffer a -3 penalty (see "Cover in a Vehicle," below). Each additional door lost diminishes concealment by one, so a second missing door makes targets partially concealed (-2 penalty to be hit). Missing doors can diminish the penalties that outside attackers suffer, but they do not offer *bonuses* to hit. That is, passengers' protection can be reduced to zero at best; pedestrians firing guns never get *bonuses* to hit due to missing doors.

Of course, for a gunman to benefit from a missing door, he has to be firing at the correct side of the vehicle. A gunman on the opposite side still fires at targets under full cover.

Tire: Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3

Targeting a tire specifically imposes a -3 penalty to the attacker's dice pool. Attacks must inflict lethal damage in order to damage a tire; attacks that inflict bashing damage have no effect. Each blown tire imposes a -2 penalty on Drive rolls, and decreases speed by one-half. Thus, a car can no longer travel (faster than a crawl, anyway) with two blown tires.

Gas Tank: Durability 6, Size 2, Structure 8

Shooting a gas tank imposes a -3 penalty to the attack roll, and involves penetrating the vehicle's frame and the tank itself, which is addressed with a Durability of 6. Even one point of damage done in excess of that might trigger an explosion in the tank, assuming there's an open flame or spark. If you want a cinematic game, go for it. Rate an exploding car as a likely entry on the Explosives Chart (p. 179). Just assign a blast area and damage rating — say, six yards and four lethal damage. If you're telling a more realistic story, you might stipulate that at least three Structure must be lost by a gas tank in a single attack for an explosion to occur.

Durability

As with objects, successes achieved on attacks against a vehicle must exceed the vehicle's Durability trait to do damage. So, if a vehicle has 3 Durability, four or more successes must be rolled in an attack to do any Structure damage. Vehicles can be reinforced and armored. Doing so essentially adds points to Durability based on the degree of extra protection sought. Reinforcing adds one to three points to Durability rating. Cost for this extra protection is a number of Resource dots equal to the Durability added, plus two. Thus, one extra Durability requires 3 Resources. Two extra Durability requires 4 Resources. And

three extra Durability requires 5 Resources. Reinforcing only part of a vehicle — say, windows and/or tires — can reduce the Resources dots required by one. So, protecting only the tires and windows of a car with +2 Durability demands only 3 Resources.

A car can endure only so much abuse before it malfunctions and makes driving a challenge. Whenever accumulated Structure damage exceeds Durability, a -1 penalty is imposed to Drive rolls thereafter. So, if your character's car has a Durability of 3 and it's accumulated four points of damage, all Drive rolls suffer a -1 penalty.

In general, damage done specifically to a vehicle's "vulnerable parts" — tires, windows, doors and/or gas tank — are not counted against the car's overall Durability, Size or Structure ratings. Attacks staged against those parts simply invoke their own special rules and opportunities to impede a vehicle.

Cover in a Vehicle

A car's driver and passengers are considered under full cover (unless windows are open, in which case they're substantially concealed; -3 to be hit). Shots aimed at a passenger must first penetrate a window or door. The former applies if the target sits upright or drives the vehicle. The latter applies if the intended target hides in the back seat or on the floor.

Shots fired must pass through the window or door before the target can be hurt. A typical vehicle window has Durability 1, Size 3 and Structure 4, and an attack to hit a window specifically suffers a -1 penalty. A typical door has Durability 3, Size 3 and Structure 6, and targeting it also imposes a -1 penalty. Any successes rolled in excess of the window or door's Durability are then rolled as a new dice pool to hit a hiding target.

See above for the affects of cover when doors are blown off. For full rules on "Concealment" and "Cover," see pp. 162-164.

Acceleration

Vehicles can accumulate or lose speed over time (as opposed to people who generally walk or run at constant speeds). Acceleration is measured in yards per turn, as is a character's Speed. Each turn, add a vehicle's present Acceleration to last turn's Acceleration until the driver stops accelerating and cruises at his present speed. A vehicle's Maximum Speed depends on its model. Sports cars can go faster than station wagons, for example.

A vehicle can typically slow down safely at up to triple its Acceleration in one turn. Trying to stop more quickly calls for a Dexterity + Drive roll. Modify the roll by -1 for every full 10 yards per turn over the vehicle's Acceleration for which the driver seeks to stop.

For Example: A SUV has an Acceleration of 13 yards per turn, it currently travels 39 yards per turn, and the driver tries to stop. He can do so safely. But if the vehicle was traveling 59 yards per turn, a Dexterity + Drive roll would be required at a -2 penalty. A failed roll or dramatic



failure indicates loss of control or a tragic accident. See “Crashes,” below.

Skill Tests

A driver’s ability is tested whenever unusual circumstances arise, or when the limitations of a vehicle are exceeded. The Storyteller has final say on when Drive rolls are required, but they’re usually appropriate whenever caution is thrown to the winds — or denied the person behind the wheel. Driving at Safe Speed or slower and under ideal conditions probably calls for no roll.

Tests usually involve Dexterity + Drive + the Handling rating of the vehicle as bonus dice (see “Sample Vehicles,” below). Instances when a roll is necessary may include:

- When a tire blows (each roll is made at -2 per lost tire).
- When difficult maneuvers such as a controlled spin or sharp turn are attempted.
- Slamming on the breaks when going fast (see “Acceleration”).
- When conditions are unsafe — wet road, driving off-road, passing through wreckage, busting through a roadblock. Penalties under these circumstances may range from -1 to -5.
- Whenever any attack on the vehicle exceeds Durability and does Structure damage. When *total* Structure

damage incurred by a vehicle exceeds its Durability rating, all Drive rolls suffer a -1 penalty thereafter.

- When driving in excess of Safe Speed. Penalties when driving fast might be -1 for every 30 yards per turn (20 mph) that your character exceeds Safe Speed.
- When ramming a target.
- Under any circumstance dictated by the Drive Skill (see p. 69).

Unless your character has the Stunt Driver Merit (see p. 113), he cannot perform other actions such as firing a gun or punching a passenger and maintain control of the vehicle at the same time. Each is considered a separate action. When a character without that Merit attempts such extra feats, the Storyteller makes a chance roll to determine if the vehicle loses control or crashes (which happens on a dramatic failure). So, if your character is behind the wheel and performs a drive-by shooting, you make the Firearms attack. In that turn, however, the Storyteller makes a chance roll to determine if the car crashes or some other mishap occurs. On a roll of 1, it does.

Jumping from a Moving Vehicle

Jumping from a car is usually a vertical drop of only about one to three yards, but the speed at which your character travels can be a killer. Every 10 miles per hour (or portion thereof — round up) that the vehicle travels is the equivalent of three yards for the purposes of suffering falling damage (one point of bashing damage per three

yards fallen; see “Falling,” p. 179). Thirty miles per hour therefore inflicts three bashing damage (the equivalent of nine yards fallen), while 100 miles per hour (the equivalent of 30 yards fallen) is terminal velocity — 10 lethal damage.

You can make a Dexterity + Athletics roll for your character to try to roll with the impact. As with falling damage, each success diminishes the damage by one, although there is no limit to how many points that can be shaved off this way (unlike a vertical drop).

The nature of the surface impacted might aid or hinder your roll. Hard pavement is the standard (no modifier), but falling onto grass might provide +1 and falling onto snow might be +3. Falling onto a rocky trail might be -1, while falling on broken glass might be -3 (and automatically inflicts lethal damage, no matter the speed).

Example: Luke, driving his pickup truck at night, stops for a winsome hitchhiker on a lonely road. He gets a little too fresh and freaks out when she transforms into a snarling she-wolf. He flings open his door and leaps from the cab, even though the truck is hurtling along at 75 miles per hour. He takes eight points of bashing damage — one point per 10 mph, rounded up.

Luke has 3 Dexterity and 3 Athletics. Since he lands on asphalt, there’s no modifier to the roll. Six dice are rolled: 3, 4, 4, 6, 8, 9 — two successes. He manages to absorb the impact slightly but he still suffers six points of bashing damage.

When he finally rolls to a halt, grimacing in pain, Luke sees his pickup truck peeling away down the road, a hirsute shape behind the wheel.

Crashes

Whether by intent or accident, vehicles crash into objects, each other and pedestrians. To determine if an intentional collision is performed successfully, roll your character’s Dexterity + Drive + the Handling rating of the vehicle.

If the target is a resisting person, his Defense is subtracted from your dice pool. A single success indicates that your character manages to strike the pedestrian. Damage is determined with a separate dice pool. Roll the vehicle’s Size rating, with a +1 bonus for each full 10 mph (14 yards per turn) that the vehicle travels. The victim’s armor, if any, is subtracted from that pool. Each success on the resulting roll inflicts a point of bashing damage to the target. If contact is made with the pedestrian, regardless of the amount of damage done, the victim is also subject to a knockdown effect (see p. 168)

Example: Taylor tries to run down Vaughn. Taylor drives a compact car with Durability 3, Size 9, Structure 12 and Handling 3. Taylor’s Dexterity is 3 and Drive is 3. The dice pool to make contact with Vaughn starts with nine dice (3 Dexterity + 3 Drive + 3 Handling). Vaughn is on foot and trying to get out of the way. His Defense is 3. Three dice are subtracted from the Drive roll due to Vaughn’s Defense,

reducing it to six dice. Taylor gets two successes, so contact is made. Now damage from the collision is determined. The car’s Size is 9, so that number of dice is rolled, with one bonus die for every 10 mph (14 yards per turn) that Taylor’s car travels. In this case he’s going 40 mph, so that’s a +4 bonus. A total of 13 dice is rolled to determine damage against Vaughn. Vaughn has no armor, so no dice are subtracted. Taylor gets four successes, which are inflicted on Vaughn as bashing wounds. He is also subjected to a knockdown effect.

Had Taylor’s Dexterity + Drive roll achieved no successes, Vaughn would have been missed altogether. Alternatively, had Taylor’s Size roll resulted in no successes, Vaughn would have escaped harm but would still have been subject to knockdown. Vaughn could also have dedicated the turn to dodging (see p. 156) and made it considerably harder for Taylor to make contact.

If the target rammed is an object such as a mailbox or steel door, the same combination of rolls is made: Dexterity + Drive + the Handling rating of the vehicle to see if your character makes contact, and the vehicle’s Size +1 for each 10 mph (14 yards per turn) traveled to determine damage. In this case, successes achieved on the Size roll that are in excess of the target’s Durability are incurred as Structure damage by the object. The ramming vehicle smashes through the target, but could also suffer some damage of its own. Compare the successes achieved on your Size roll to the Durability of your character’s vehicle. If successes exceed its Durability, your character’s vehicle suffers half (rounding down) those excess successes as Structure damage. Damage to your character’s vehicle is halved to account for his effort to minimize harm by hitting the target just right.

If the successes on your Size roll do not exceed the object’s Durability, the object is hardly damaged. Your character’s vehicle may be severely damaged, though. In essence, the vehicle hits the object and comes to a dead halt. Compare the successes from your Size roll to the vehicle’s Durability rating. All excess successes there are inflicted as damage to your character’s own vehicle.

Example: Taylor rams a storefront in order to plow inside. A Dexterity + Drive + Handling roll (in this case nine dice) is made to see if Taylor makes contact as intended. The roll gets two successes. Taylor’s 13 dice of damage (from his car’s 9 Size and 40 mph speed) are then rolled and successes are compared to the Durability of the object. The Storyteller decides that the brick-and-glass storefront has an overall Durability of 2. The damage roll gets five successes, which exceeds the storefront’s Durability by three. The wall suffers three Structure. Taylor’s car is also damaged, though. The five successes on Taylor’s damage roll exceed his car’s 3 Durability by two. That excess number is halved, for one point of Structure damage inflicted on Taylor’s car.

Now, if Taylor had rammed a steel-reinforced door with a 6 Durability, the door’s Durability would have exceeded the successes achieved on the damage roll. Taylor’s car would

have been stopped on impact. His five successes would then have been compared to his car's own Durability (3). The successes rolled would have exceeded his car's Durability by two, so the car would have folded up against the door like a tin can, suffering two Structure points.

Notice that the rules for hitting pedestrians call for no damage done to the ramming vehicle. It's assumed that a normal-sized person does minimal harm to the vehicle that hits him. If, however, the "pedestrian" is big or heavy, like a deer or man-wolf, the Storyteller may decide that the ramming vehicle can be harmed. Damage successes rolled against the target are compared to the vehicle's Durability. Any excess points are halved (rounding down) and that many points of Structure are suffered. So, if seven successes are rolled to damage a man-wolf, a truck with 3 Durability suffers two points of Structure.

When one vehicle rams another, make separate Dexterity + Drive + Handling rolls for each driver in a contested roll. The ramming driver seeks to make contact and the defending driver probably seeks to get out of the way. If the defender gets more successes, he manages to steer or gun his engine to safety. If an equal number of successes are rolled for each side, the charging vehicle misses. In either case, the ramming car passes by and another Dexterity + Drive + Handling roll must be made for the attacker to retain control of his vehicle.

If the ramming driver gets more successes in the contested action, the attacker hits the target. Roll the ramming car's Size +1 for every full 10 mph traveled. If successes achieved on this damage roll exceed the target vehicle's Durability, that excess number is applied as Structure damage to the target. The ramming vehicle may also suffer some damage.



Compare successes from the Size roll to the ramming car's Durability. Any excess successes are halved (rounding down), and that number is suffered as Structure damage by the ramming vehicle. The ramming vehicle also passes over or under the target, or spins the target and keeps moving past.

If successes on the rammer's Size roll do not exceed the target's Durability, compare them to the ramming vehicle's own Durability trait. All extra successes there are inflicted as damage to the ramming vehicle. In this case, the ramming vehicle hits the target and comes to a dead halt.

A person inside a crashing vehicle can suffer damage, too. Determine the number of Structure points lost by the vehicle. A passenger automatically suffers half that amount (rounded down) in bashing damage. Taking safety precautions such as wearing seat belts or activating an air bag can reduce damage by another one to three. Armor worn also automatically reduces damage incurred in a crash (it does not reduce dice pools).

Example: Taylor spots Vaughn driving down the road and intends to ram Vaughn's car. Taylor's Dexterity + Drive + Handling remains nine dice. Vaughn only barely hears Taylor coming (Initiative is rolled and Taylor wins it). Vaughn's Dexterity + Drive + Handling pool is 10. Taylor gets four successes and Vaughn gets three in the contested action, so Taylor manages to ram Vaughn's car. The 9 Size and 50 mph speed of Taylor's car makes for a damage dice pool of 14. Taylor gets six successes, which exceeds the Durability of Vaughn's sedan by three. Three Structure are therefore done to Vaughn's car. Taylor's car is damaged, as well. Its Durability is also 3. The three excess damage rolled are halved (rounding down) for one point of Structure done to Taylor's car. After making contact, Taylor's car speeds on by.

Vaughn would normally suffer one bashing damage (half that done to his car, rounded down), but he's wearing his seatbelt, which the Storyteller decrees reduces his damage by one. If Vaughn weren't wearing his seatbelt but wore armor rated 1, instead, the armor would have eliminated the single wound automatically. The one Structure that Taylor's car suffers isn't enough to do Taylor harm.

Had Vaughn won the contested action, Taylor would have had to make a second Dexterity + Drive + Handling roll to maintain control after missing his target. Or had Taylor achieved only three successes on his Size roll — not enough to do damage to Vaughn's car with 3 Durability — Taylor's car would have come to a halt on impact. Those three successes would have been compared to his car's own 3 Durability, indicating that no appreciable damage would have been done.

If two vehicles ram each other head-on with no intention of turning, there is no contested Dexterity + Drive + Handling roll. You can assume that both make contact and go straight to Size rolls for each vehicle to see how much damage is done to the other. The damage roll for

each also gets a +1 bonus for each full 10 mph (14 yards per turn) that the vehicle travels. Combine the successes achieved on both damage rolls and compare them to the Durability rating of each car. Any excess points are inflicted as Structure damage.

Say two cars collide head-on. One driver gets four successes on the damage roll and the other gets three. That's seven successes total. The Durability of both cars is 3, so each car loses four Structure. That also means each driver suffers two Health to bashing damage unless armor or seatbelts are worn.

If a Drive roll ever results in a simple failure, the maneuver fails or the stressful situation overcomes the driver's ability. The Storyteller may allow a successive roll to regain control (see "Successive Attempts," p. 132), assuming that no immediate dangers such as other cars, guard rails or pedestrians are around. Unless the vehicle was moving at a crawl before the Drive roll failed, only one extra roll may be allowed. A failed roll can mean something as simple as the vehicle spins out or comes to a screeching halt. If traffic is heavy, conditions are extreme or the situation is desperate, the Storyteller may rule that a single failed Drive roll results in a crash, with no successive attempts allowed. Use the above rules to determine damage done to the vehicle and/or anything hit.

A Drive roll that suffers a dramatic failure often indicates that a crash or some other harm occurs. The Storyteller decides what based on the situation, whether it's a blown tire from a sharp turn or an overturned vehicle.

Repairing a vehicle after a crash demands time and money. Your character needs sufficient Resources to pay for new parts and a technician's time. The Storyteller decides what Resources dots are needed based on the make of vehicle and the severity of any damage suffered. One dot is enough to replace a fender on a low-end car, while three may be needed to repair the radiator on a high-end car. Efforts to fix a vehicle involve extended Crafts rolls.

Sample Vehicles

The following are profiles of some common rides that your character may own, borrow or steal. Acceleration, Safe Speed and Maximum Speed are measured in yards per turn (three seconds) so that you can pace a vehicle from turn to turn. Understand that Maximum Speeds can probably be reached only under ideal circumstances — on a straightaway with no obstructions. Safe Speeds can be managed in average highway traffic. City driving, pedestrians, other cars, turns and other factors can diminish even Safe Speeds to one-half or less. Trying to weave among such obstructions at higher speeds can call for Dexterity + Drive rolls every game turn or every maneuver.

Handling indicates how maneuverable a vehicle is. Some cars turn on a dime, while many trucks have massive turning circles. This rating is typically added to Dexterity + Drive rolls in bonus dice to determine your dice

pool. Handling ratings can vary slightly with Storyteller permission. The scores provided here are averages. A touring motorcycle might be a point lower, for example, while a racing bike might be a point higher.

Note that Handling bonuses do not apply to all efforts attempted with a vehicle. A sports car might have a 4 Handling, offering four extra dice on a Drive roll, but those dice aren't added in an effort to, say, follow someone subtly. In that case the Storyteller might impose a penalty to Stealth rolls for your character's car, because it's so obvious.

Motorcycle: Durability 2, Size 7, Structure 9, Acceleration 22, Safe Speed 132 (90 miles per hour), Maximum Speed 235 (160 mph), Handling 4-5

A motorcycle has no frame; it's an engine and chassis on wheels. Bike and rider take separate damage. Damage successes rolled are compared to the bike's Durability to see if it suffers harm. Armor worn by the rider is automatically subtracted from damage successes rolled (as opposed to being subtracted from the damage dice pool). Say four points of damage are inflicted to bike and rider in a collision. The bike has 2 Durability, so it suffers two Structure. The rider, meanwhile, has armor rated 1. He suffers three Health.

If damage done to a bike in a collision does not exceed its Durability, assume that the rider goes unharmed, too. So, if a Bike with 2 Durability suffers two damage, neither bike nor rider is harmed.

Sports Car: Durability 2, Size 10, Structure 12, Acceleration 20, Safe Speed 161 (110 mph), Maximum Speed 235 (160 mph), Handling 4

Compact Car: Durability 3, Size 9, Structure 12, Acceleration 15, Safe Speed 103 (70 mph), Maximum Speed 191 (130 mph), Handling 3

Mid-Sized Car (Sedan): Durability 3, Size 12, Structure 15, Acceleration 14, Safe Speed 110 (75 mph), Maximum Speed 183 (125 mph), Handling 2-3

Full-Sized Car (Family Vehicle): Durability 3, Size 14, Structure 17, Acceleration 12, Safe Speed 103 (70 mph), Maximum Speed 176 (120 mph), Handling 1

SUV/Pick-up Truck: Durability 3, Size 15, Structure 18, Acceleration 13, Safe Speed 103 (70 mph), Maximum Speed 169 (115 mph), Handling 0

18-Wheeler (rig only; no trailer): Durability 3, Size 18, Structure 21, Acceleration 10, Safe Speed 103 (70 mph), Maximum Speed 161 (110 mph), Handling -1

Bus: Durability 3, Size 21, Structure 24, Acceleration 10, Safe Speed 88 (60 mph), Maximum Speed 147 (100 mph), Handling -2





“That’s it, asshole!” Jerry stood up and threw his bottle at the wall. It shattered against a neon sign, spilling beer and shards of glass. **“Outside! We’re settling this now!”**

The tall, broad man had been sitting back with his feet propped up on the pool table. Hearing the challenge, he shrugged and stood up, brushing the peanut shells he’d been cracking from his jeans. He followed Jerry out the door and into the parking lot, where they were surrounded by big rigs and pickup trucks.

Jerry spun around. **“Right here. Right now.”** He pulled off his jacket and tossed it aside.

The stranger shook his head as if he were dealing with a child.

“You sure this is what you want?”

“You can’t come here and say all that shit about my brother without dealing with me!” Jerry couldn’t believe this guy. **“I don’t know who you are or how you know my brother, but I’m going to teach you a lesson. We stand by our own around here.”**

“Oh, I know how you stand around here. Bent over with your pants around your ankles, waiting for daddy.”

Jerry saw red. He screamed with rage, pulled his knife and launched himself at the stranger. Before he even knew what he’d done, he felt the knife sink nearly to the hilt into the man’s stomach.

The stranger laughed.

Jerry yanked the blade free, as clean as when he’d unsheathed it. He looked at the stranger, who grabbed him by the shoulder and clamped down with the pressure of a vice. Jerry sank to his knees, whimpering.

“Your brother done me wrong,” the stranger said. “And now the punishment falls to his kin.”

Chapter 7: Combat

*While Cadmus, victor,
stared at his great prize,*

*The conquered beast,
a voice came to his ears,*

*From whence he did
not know, but heard it
say,*

*“O son of Agenor,
why look at ruins*

*Of monsters you’ve
destroyed? You too shall
be*

*A serpent in men’s
eyes!” Cold terror came*

*At him, he pale and
trembling stood with hair*

As stiff as frost.

*— Ovid, *The Metamorphoses**

What would a Storytelling game be without conflict? Storytelling is predicated on dramatic and entertaining events. The essence of drama is conflict, whether it’s a struggle with one’s own flaws or an outward competition between characters. The most extreme form of conflict is combat. Two or more characters fight, seeking to do harm or to kill each other. In the World of Darkness, a bleak place where the health and happiness of others is taken for granted or utterly dismissed, violence is pervasive. All too often problems are solved with violence. It might be a random mugging, a simple argument gone out of control, the result of road rage, or the frustration of an unfulfilling life vented on whomever gets in the way. Add to that reality the existence of strange and hidden beings that prey upon an unsuspecting humanity and violence is a fundamental part of life.

This chapter is dedicated to rules for combat, from throwing punches in a bar to drawing a knife in an alley to opening up with a shotgun in a boardroom. While people certainly struggle with each other in the World of Darkness, some fight back against the things that stalk them. In turn, those creatures almost certainly wage secret wars among themselves.

Describing the Scene

Part of the Storyteller’s job is to make sure that players have an accurate mental picture of the environment and events surrounding their characters. The Storyteller describes the setting, weather, time of day, lighting and the actions of any supporting characters involved in the scene. This responsibility is crucial to combat situations, when players need to know the dangers their characters perceive and the options from which they may choose.

During combat, the Storyteller describes the changing environment after each turn. Once all players have acted, the Storyteller explains what each character sees and feels. They may all have access to the same information or each may have his own perspective on events. These descriptions should be as detailed and creative as possible. This is the Storyteller’s chance to show off her narrative talents and to turn a series of dice rolls into a dramatic, amusing and entertaining story for the benefit of all.

Combat Turns

Combat scenes can sometimes be extremely confusing, because so much goes on at one time. Keeping all the actions and repercussions straight is a challenge. Combat almost always progresses through a series of three-second turns. The system for handling combat turns is further divided into two basic stages: initiative and attack. This division helps the Storyteller track characters’ actions and their results. (For the other measurements of time that can pass in your game, see “Time” on p. 120.)

Initiative

In order to determine who gets to act before whom in combat, and to resolve combatants' actions, you use a system of Initiative. At the beginning of combat, roll a die for your character and add his Dexterity and Composure scores to the result. The total is his standing in the Initiative for the entire fight (from the first turn when the action commences till the last turn when only one side is left standing).

The Storyteller rolls and records Initiative for all of the characters she controls. All of the players' totals are intermixed in that roster, in order from highest to lowest. He with highest has the best command of what's going on; he acts quickly or doesn't lose his cool. She with the lowest Initiative total struggles to keep up with events or loses precious time trying to decide what to do.

If there is ever a tie between players' characters and/or those controlled by the Storyteller, the combined Dexterity and Composure scores of the competitors are compared. He with the highest total breaks the tie. If there's still a tie — Dexterity + Composure is equal, too — a die is rolled for each rival, the highest roll winning. If more than one character is ever tied in Initiative order, die rolls are made all round, the highest roller winning. If even die rolls tie, continue rolling until a pecking order is established.

Example: Carson's character has 3 Dexterity and 2 Composure. Carson rolls a 6 for Initiative, for a total of 11. One of the Storyteller's thugs also gets an Initiative total of 11. Their Dexterity and Composure scores both add to 5, so no winner can be resolved there. A die is rolled for each. Both get a 3. Another die is rolled for each, this time with a 4 for Carson and an 8 for the Storyteller. The thug acts before Carson's character throughout the combat scene.

The Fresh Start Merit (see p. 112) allows a character to gauge a struggle once it's begun and change his tactics or focus. He can reposition himself in the turn-by-turn roster as a result.

Optional Initiative

The Storyteller may choose to take an alternative approach to Initiative if she likes. She may call for Initiative rolls at the beginning of each turn in a fight, rather than one roll per character that applies for the whole fight. The standard approach focuses on the narrative of a battle, minimizing rolls and reaching a conclusion quickly. Introducing Initiative rolls at the beginning of each turn captures the moment-by-moment ebb and flow of a fight, but interjects a lot of dice rolls and bookkeeping, especially when multiple player- and Storyteller-controlled characters are involved.

If you choose this optional approach in your game, inform the players in advance. A character with the Fresh Start Merit might get two Initiative rolls at the beginning of each turn and his player can choose the best.

Delaying Actions

Your character doesn't have to act in the order of his Initiative standing in any given turn. He could refrain from acting until something happens in his environment. Maybe he waits till an opponent shows his face, or wants to sprint across an open street during a lull in the shooting. In this case, your character delays his position in the Initiative roster, activating it when you choose. His Initiative rank resets to one that best reflects the time of his action.

Example: If Mitch's character originally had an Initiative rank of 10, but he holds his action, the Storyteller slots him into the sequence at a rank closest to when an action is taken. If Larry's character has an Initiative rank of 6 and Mitch acts immediately after him, the Storyteller slots Mitch in at 5.

If Mitch had prepared an action and said, "My character hits Larry's if he attacks," then Mitch's character goes on 7, right before Larry's character.

If two or more characters delay their actions till the same moment in a turn, resolve their order as if their Initiative totals are tied.

A delayed action can be held over into the next turn for a temporary benefit. The delaying character sacrifices his action in the first turn (he can do nothing except move up to his Speed) in order to act any time he chooses in the next turn. Afterward, the character's Initiative ranking returns to normal.

Example: Sanders and Washington are in a fight. Sanders has an Initiative of 12 and Washington has an Initiative of 8. From turn to turn, Sanders will always act before Washington. If he wants to, however, Washington can forfeit his action in turn one. He can do nothing but move up to his Speed in that turn. In turn two, he can act at any point in the Initiative roster that he likes — say, on Initiative 13 to precede Sanders. In turn three, Washington's Initiative ranking returns to 8. If he wants to "get the jump" on Sanders again, he has to forfeit an action again.

A character might delay an action from one turn to the next in order to trigger an attack on a specific opponent. A gunman might wait for a target to cross a street, for example, even when the target knows the gunman awaits and there's no element of surprise.

Surprise

A fight doesn't always start with two or more would-be combatants standing face to face, with full knowledge that they're all about to throw down. Sure, that occurs when tensions rise through dialogue. A stand-up fight is

the very foundation of a duel, showdown or an invitation to step outside. All participants realize that a physical struggle is about to commence, and all can react.

Other times, a fight gets started with at least one party caught by surprise. Someone arranges an ambush for a victim or enemies encounter one another by accident. Under those circumstances, only the quick and the alert react in time to act or defend themselves. When your character walks into an ambush or unexpectedly stumbles into an opponent, you must check to see if he can respond. Roll Wits + Composure. If you get no successes your character is taken unawares and cannot act in the first turn of combat. Initiative is rolled for him in the next turn. One or more successes allow your character to behave normally and respond to the encounter.

Obviously, ambushing attackers get to act normally when they spring their trap; no Wits + Composure rolls are made for them.

A character taken by surprise has no Defense in the first turn of combat. His Defense trait is not subtracted from attackers' dice pools. His armor (if any) still is, though.

Targets already involved in combat cannot be ambushed.

Attack

An attack roll determines if your character manages to strike and harm his intended target. The type of attack he launches determines the dice pool that you roll, as follows.

- **Close Combat:** Up close and personal, this includes unarmed combat (Strength + Brawl) and melee (Strength + Weaponry). Unarmed combat includes something as raucous as a barroom fight or something as organized as a boxing match. Opposing characters use their bodies to fight and must be within reach of each other (one yard). During melee, opponents use hand-held weapons, which may include knives, broken bottles, tire irons, swords or hastily snatched chairs. Maximum melee distance ranges from one to two yards.

Another option to armed combat is the Fighting Finesse Merit (see p. 110). Depending on the weapon or style of attack used and your character's particular proficiency, Dexterity instead of Strength is combined with Weaponry. Your character uses precision rather than brute force to strike home. The intent is still to inflict harm, though.

- **Ranged Combat:** This type of armed combat involves projectile weapons (Dexterity + Firearms) such as guns, crossbows or spear guns. Or it involves thrown objects (Dexterity + Athletics). Range for firearms varies based on the weapon. Range for thrown weapons depends on the attacker's capabilities. (See "Throwing," p. 67.) In either case, the target must be in sight.

Attack Dice Pools

All combat actions — close or ranged — require a successful roll to hit home and do harm. As with any other roll, your character's Attribute and Skill dots are combined as the basis for your dice pool. For example, a Strength of 3 and Brawl of 2 adds to five dice. This pool represents your character's raw combat potential.

Other factors apply, however, such as any weapons he wields or special effects that he attempts or initiates. That is, a number of bonus dice are added to your pool equal to the rating of the tool or effect used. So, a sword rated 3 adds three bonus dice to your pool. A mysterious supernatural trick that benefits your character's attack may add four dice. These modifiers increase the total number of dice in your hand.

Meanwhile, your character's target more than likely tries to avoid being harmed, and may wear protective gear of some kind. In close combat, the target's Defense trait and the rating of any applicable armor worn is subtracted from your attack dice pool. If penalties imposed on your character's attack exceed your character's Attribute + Skill + any bonuses involved, the action is exceptionally challenging. The only way to accomplish it at this point is to make a successful chance roll (see p. 125).

Example: *The aforementioned character brings a sword into close combat. His 3 Strength and 2 Weaponry grant five dice. His sword, rated 3, adds three bonus dice to that pool. His opponent has a Defense total of 4 and wears armor rated 1. That means five dice are removed from the attacker's pool. The attacker is left with three dice.*

In ranged combat, dice pools for attacks are composed in much the same way. The attacker's Dexterity and Firearms (or Athletics for a thrown weapon) are combined. The rating of the gun or weapon used is then added to that pool.

Example: *If your character has 2 Dexterity and 1 Firearms, you have three dice in your pool. If she fires a gun rated 4, four more dice are added for a total of seven.*

In the case of Firearms attacks, however, a target's Defense does not usually apply. It's not subtracted from the attacker's pool. People don't try to avoid arrows or bullets like they do punches or sword swings. They run and look for protection, instead (see "Avoiding Getting Shot," p. 164). The exception is if Firearms-based attacks are staged within close-combat range; within a yard or two (see "Firearms and Close Combat," p. 162).

A target's armor does apply against ranged attacks.

Example: *Continuing from above, the Defense score of the target is not subtracted from the dice pool of your character's Firearms-based ranged attack. His 1 point of armor is, however. Assuming the target stands stock still, without diving for cover, your dice pool loses only one die. You're left with six dice in your hand.*

A target's Defense does apply to thrown attacks made by rolling Dexterity + Athletics, such as with a rock or spear.

Circumstance Factors

Beyond a target's Defense and/or armor rating, other conditions can affect your character's efforts in combat. Extreme weather might make it difficult to stand or draw a bead on an enemy. Darkness obscures vision. The Storyteller decides what "ratings" these environmental conditions have, which are subtracted from attack rolls. This chapter, Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 discuss a variety of circumstances that might diminish attack dice pools. It's possible for some conditions or events to be extremely debilitating, inhibiting your character's very capacity to function. The effects of wounds, poisons, drugs, diseases and vicious supernatural powers may apply, too.

It's also possible for situational conditions to improve your character's chances of making a successful attack. You already gain bonus dice for your character's use of a weapon or special effect. In addition, the Storyteller can announce extra benefits. Maybe your character's hand is guided by a supernatural spell or he has a scope on his rifle. These conditions grant you additional dice, the number usually being stated in these rules or decided by the Storyteller.

The Rule of Five

As stated in Chapter 6, each tool, weapon or circumstance does not normally add or subtract more than five dice from any pool. Such ratings range from one to five. Only truly impressive phenomena or devious supernatural tricks may increase or decrease modifier dice by more than five, and the Storyteller usually dictates when that happens.

Damage

The harm that your character inflicts in an attack is determined by the number of successes that you get with your attack roll. Each success inflicts one Health point of damage.

Example: You roll five dice for your character to stab an opponent and get 1, 4, 8, 8 and 9. You get three successes. Your character's opponent therefore loses three Health points.

The type of damage done in a successful attack is determined by the weapon used or the nature of the attack (see "Damage Types").

If you get no successes on your attack roll, your character does no harm to his target. The attack misses altogether or is ineffectual.

After you determine the damage that your character inflicts upon her target, the Storyteller portrays the damage in descriptive terms, narrating the outcome of the attack. Rather than simply say, "Okay, the guy loses four Health," the Storyteller makes events interesting. He

might announce, "You plunge your knife into the guy's dead flesh and pull upward, wrenching until the blade hits bone. The bastard screams in agony, but there's no blood. You watch as his chest collapses and begins to decay at an accelerated rate." By being evocative, your Storyteller creates atmosphere, entertaining you and lending a sense of narrative continuity to what would otherwise be a series of dice rolls.

Damage Types

Each success gained on your attack roll inflicts one Health point of damage to the victim. Based on the nature of the attack, one of three different types of injury result.

• **Bashing:** Your character punches, hits with a blunt instrument or otherwise pummels her victim. This type of damage probably doesn't kill the target instantly, though repeated application could. Bashing damage heals fairly quickly (see p. 175 for more details).

• **Lethal:** Gunshots, blades and even crushing damage may prove fatal. Lethal injuries take quite a while to heal for ordinary people.

Note that firearm attacks that normally deliver lethal damage do only bashing damage to vampires. The creatures are undead; their organs are inert, their blood is congealed. Their bodies simply don't suffer harm like those of the living.

• **Aggravated:** Different beings are vulnerable to different forms of attack, such as vampires to fire or werewolves to silver. Such assaults inflict aggravated damage, which those beings heal very slowly. Humans are not necessarily vulnerable to certain kinds of attacks — fire or a silver dagger does lethal damage to them, for example — but some supernatural effects can inflict aggravated harm on ordinary folks. Wizards' spells or vampires' blood-based powers can cause injuries to normal people that take extensive time to heal. Any person or being who is so badly injured that she is comatose, bleeding to death or fading altogether also incurs aggravated wounds. So, all denizens of the World of Darkness are subject to aggravated damage under one circumstance or another.

Zero Attack Dice

If a target's Defense, armor or other factors reduce your attack dice pool to zero, you still get to make a chance roll to pull off a long-shot attack. Any successes gained inflict Health points of damage on the target, as usual. See "The Chance Roll" in Chapter 6 for complete details.

It's therefore possible to get a dramatic failure in an attack, too. A result of 1 on a chance roll imposes a dramatic failure. See "Dramatic Failure" in Chapter 6 for full details. The Storyteller may invent the results of a dramatic failure based on the circumstances.

Combat Summary Chart

Stage One: Initiative

• Everyone rolls Initiative: The result of a die roll + Dexterity + Composure. The character with the highest Initiative performs her action first. Or you may yield your character's action until later in the Initiative queue or into the next turn.

Stage Two: Attack

- Unarmed close combat: Strength + Brawl, minus target's Defense and armor
- Armed close combat: Strength + Weaponry, minus target's Defense and armor
- Ranged combat (guns and bows): Dexterity + Firearms, minus target's armor
- Ranged combat (thrown weapons): Dexterity + Athletics, minus target's Defense and armor

Add bonus dice based on weapon used or effect performed, and then subtract penalties for circumstance conditions. Roll your remaining pool. Each success equates to a Health point of damage inflicted, the type of which is determined by the nature of the attack.

The Storyteller describes the attack and wound in narrative terms.

Possible Modifiers

- Aiming: +1 per turn to a +3 maximum
- All-Out Attack: +2 with Brawl or Weaponry attack; lose Defense
- Armor Piercing: Ignores amount of target's armor equal to item's own rating
- Autofire Long Burst: 20 or so bullets at as many targets as the shooter wants, pending Storyteller approval. A +3 bonus is applied to each attack roll; -1 per roll for each target if there's more than one
- Autofire Medium Burst: 10 or so bullets at one to three targets, with a +2 bonus to each attack roll; -1 per roll for each target if there's more than one
- Autofire Short Burst: Three bullets at a *single* target with a +1 bonus to the roll
- Concealment: Barely -1; partially -2; substantially -3; fully, see "Cover"
- Dodge: Double target's Defense
- Drawing a Weapon: Requires one action (one turn) without a Merit, and could negate Defense
- Firing from Concealment: Shooter's own concealment quality (-1, -2 or -3) reduced by one as a penalty to fire back (so, no modifier, -1 or -2)
- Offhand Attack: -2 penalty
- Prone Target: -2 penalty to hit in ranged combat; +2 bonus to hit when attacker is within close-combat distance
- Range: -2 at medium range, -4 at long range
- Shooting into Close Combat: -2 per combatant avoided in a single shot (not applicable to autofire)
- Specified Target: Torso -1, leg or arm -2, head -3, hand -4, eye -5
- Surprised or Immobilized Target: Defense doesn't apply
- Touching a Target: Dexterity + Brawl or Dexterity + Weaponry; armor may or may not apply, Defense does apply
- Willpower: Add three dice or +2 to a Resistance trait (Stamina, Resolve, Composure or Defense) in one roll or instance



Close Combat Factors

The basic combat system is easy, with the simple stages discussed previously. Any complication comes from determining the factors that increase or decrease the dice in your pool. That might mean the weapon wielded, the type of armor worn or, say, the likelihood of hitting a target underwater. What follows is an address of the various mitigating circumstances that can arise in close combat — conducted through Brawl and Weaponry attacks. Some of these circumstances are also addressed as Fighting Style Merits (see pp. 110-112). Ranged and General Combat factors are discussed on p. 159 and 164.

Defense

Only someone caught completely by surprise, a fool, a masochist or a martyr stands still and takes whatever an enemy has to dish out. Most combatants seek to avoid getting hit and hurt.

A target is automatically allowed a degree of evasion when an opponent uses a Brawl, Weaponry or thrown attack against him. Such a response is a reflexive action and applies even if your character is attacked before his place in the Initiative roster. This reaction is called your

character's Defense, a trait equal to the lowest of his Dexterity or Wits. Your character's Defense is subtracted from an attacker's dice pool. In essence, your character bobs and weaves to avoid the blow.

This automatic Defense does not normally apply against Firearms attacks. (See p. 164 for how they may be avoided.) The only instance in which Defense does apply against Firearms-based attacks is when the attacker shoots within close-combat range; within a yard or two of the target. (See "Firearms and Close Combat," p. 162, for more details on guns used in close-combat range.) Defense does apply normally against thrown weapons, such as rocks, knives and spears.

A target who is tied up, unconscious or simply unmoving does not receive Defense as protection. Nor does one who's taken by surprise or who is unaware of an incoming attack (say he has his back turned). That is, the attacker's dice pool is not modified by the target's Defense trait.

A completely dormant target — a person who is tied up so that he cannot move at all, or who is unconscious — is a sitting duck for a killing blow (see p. 168). The attacker need not make a roll; he delivers damage equal to his dice pool. If the target wears armor, its rating is automatically subtracted from the damage inflicted.

If multiple close-combat attacks are directed at your character in the same turn, he may try to evade each of

them, but doing so becomes progressively more difficult. Each attack after the first diminishes your character's Defense modifier by one. So, if three attacks are staged against your character who has a 3 Defense (his Dexterity is 3 and his Wits is 4), the first attack suffers a -3 penalty, the second suffers a -2 penalty and the third suffers a -1 penalty. A fourth attack would suffer no Defense penalty. Basically, your character's Defense is subtracted from incoming attacks, but it gets progressively harder to avoid them.

If you elect, your character doesn't have to apply his Defense modifier until a specified attack comes in. Maybe he singles out the foreseen attack of a specific opponent over all others. You declare one attack as the primary. Your character gains his full Defense against that attack and you can apply a reduced Defense to any attacks that come *after* that prime attack. You cannot, however, use any of your character's Defense against attacks that take place *before* the primary. Your character tries to weather any attacks that come first, reserving his evasiveness for one in particular and then any that follow.

A further option is to spend a Willpower point to increase your character's Defense by two against a single attack. If his Defense is normally 2 it increases to 4 for the incoming attack. If he has already evaded other attacks in the turn and his Defense is currently reduced to, say, one, a spent Willpower point increases it to 3 to avoid a single attack. Basically, your character puts special effort into avoiding a particular assault. See "Resistance," p. 133 for more information.

At the start of each new turn, your character's full, normal Defense trait is restored.

Your character's automatic Defense does not interfere with any actions that he performs in the turn.

Defense is not reduced by your character's wound penalties (see p. 171).

Dodge

Sometimes your character knows that he's in over his head. Too many opponents are arrayed for him to hope to defeat them all. Or he's been hurt badly and needs to avoid any further injury. In such cases, he can dedicate himself to avoiding harm by dodging. Your character's action for a turn is spent anticipating attacks and moving out of harm's way. Double his Defense trait. Thus, if the lowest of your character's Dexterity or Wits is 2, his Dodge trait for the turn is 4. That number is subtracted from incoming close-combat and thrown attacks.

Dodge operates somewhat outside the normal Initiative order of the turn. You can declare a dodge for your character at any time in the turn, even before his place in the roster, assuming he hasn't acted yet. Your character's action for the turn is dedicated to dodging for the whole turn. Say you get an 8 Initiative and your character's opponent gets a 10. He attacks your character. You can declare a dodge at "10" in the turn, even though it precedes your "8," and your character is assumed to spend the whole turn evading.

As with Defense, above, if multiple attacks are directed against your character, his Dodge total is reduced by one for each attack after the first. Thus, if his Dodge total is 6, your character's first attacker suffers a -6 penalty. The second suffers a -5, the third suffers a -4, and so on.

Assuming your character hasn't acted yet in a turn, you can declare a dodge for him late in the turn. Maybe your Initiative is 6, but you know that a dangerous foe has an even lower standing. Other characters have already acted in the turn, but your character has done nothing thus far. Your Dodge applies to incoming attacks for the remainder of the turn.

And yet, if your character announces a dodge late in a turn, he has been the target of attacks and his Defense has been applied against them, Defense penalties incurred for multiple incoming attacks carry over to your Dodge. Say your character's Defense is 3. He's attacked early in the turn and his Defense is applied in full against it. At your character's stage of Initiative, you declare a dodge for the remainder of the turn. Normally his Dodge total is 6 (3 Defense doubled). Since his Defense has already been applied against one other attack this turn, his Dodge total is reduced to 5. If Defense had been applied against two other attacks earlier in the turn, his Dodge total would be 4 when it is used.

Your character can do nothing else in a turn in which he dodges except move up to his Speed trait. He can make no attacks. Dodging does not apply against incoming Firearms attacks (unless they are staged within close-combat range; one or two yards — see p. 152).

As with Defense, you can spend a Willpower point to add two to your character's Dodge against a single attack. So, if your character's Defense is 3 and his Dodge is 6, his Dodge increases to 8 against that single attack. If his Dodge is normally 6 but he has already evaded three attacks this turn (reducing his Dodge to 3), spending a Willpower point increases it to 5 against a single incoming attack.

Your character may also possess one or both of the Brawling Dodge (p. 110) and the Weaponry Dodge (p. 114) Merits. These traits elaborate on the possibilities of dodging. They cannot both be used in the same turn.

Other Complications

- **Offhand Attacks:** If your character makes attacks with his offhand (say, he's right handed but is forced to use his left), they suffer a -2 penalty. The Ambidextrous Merit (p. 110) negates this penalty.

- **Drawing a Weapon:** Pulling, sheathing or otherwise preparing a weapon takes one action. Thus, if your character draws a knife in a fight, he spends an action doing so. Having a weapon in hand before a fight breaks out allows your character to start swinging without delay, but brings with it the social implications of walking around with a potentially deadly instrument. If a weapon is hidden on your character's person (under a coat or in a purse),

an action is spent drawing it and your character loses her Defense for the turn. The Quick Draw Merit (see p. 113) allows your character to draw and attack in the same turn.

- **All-Out Attack:** Your character foregoes all pretense of self-preservation. He gives his all to do his opponent harm. You gain two bonus dice on your character's attack for the turn, but lose his Defense trait for the turn. Thus, he's easier to be hit and harmed, but he can deliver more damage, too. An all-out attack can be performed with any close-combat attack, armed or unarmed. If your character's Defense is applied against any incoming attack in a turn, he cannot perform an all-out attack in that turn.

- **Touching an Opponent:** An option of close combat is *intentionally* making contact with a target, whether by hand or with a hand-held item, but without doing harm. This effort is considered touching, and might be performed to plant a bug on someone, to count coup, to deliver the effect of an occult incantation or to knowingly spread an infection. It's assumed that a target doesn't want to be touched. If there's no resistance involved, the Storyteller can decree that a touch is performed automatically. Otherwise, Dexterity + Brawl or Dexterity + Weaponry is rolled to perform a touch. No damage is delivered through an intentional touch, even if multiple successes are rolled.

If actually making contact with the target's skin is not an issue — any part of him or his person can be contacted to achieve an effect — armor does not apply to efforts to touch. Armor rating (see p. 170) is not subtracted from dice pools to make a touch. If making contact with skin is necessary, a target's armor applies normally.

A resisting target's Defense always applies against a touch, subtracting dice from your Dexterity + Brawl or Dexterity + Weaponry pool.

No successes rolled in an effort to touch a target means your character misses altogether.

Unarmed Combat

Not all fights between combatants involve knives and clubs. In fact, bringing a weapon to a fight implicitly states that the struggle is serious. One or more people will not only be hurt, but possibly killed. The alternative is to go into a fight unarmed, using only one's body as a weapon. Unarmed combat applies the Brawl Skill and usually inflicts bashing damage. Going unarmed into battle doesn't have to put one at a disadvantage over opponents. Training in this style of combat can make your character fully capable of disabling others.

There is a variety of options possible in Brawl combat. The fundamentals available to anyone include punches, kicks and grapples. More versatile and even exotic maneuvers — throws, nerve pinches — are learned by studying the martial arts. See the Boxing and Kung Fu Fighting Style Merits (pp. 110 and 111) for examples of such training. The average guy on the street with no martial training can perform any of the following basics.

Strike: The basic unarmed attack — a blow with a fist, knee, head, foot or elbow. Roll Strength + Brawl without any bonus dice.

Bite: Your character's teeth — whether human-sized or gigantic fangs — clamp down on a target. Roll Strength + Brawl, with a number of bonus dice based on the size of attacker's jaws and teeth. An ordinary human's offer no bonus. A large dog's offer +1. A wolf's confer a +2 bonus. A great white shark gets a +4 bonus. Generally, a bite from a person inflicts bashing damage, while that from an animal or supernatural creature inflicts lethal harm. The Storyteller may decree that a human combatant can bite an opponent only after successfully grappling (see below).

Grapple: Your character gets a hold of or tackles a target and may apply a clinch with various effects, from immobilizing the victim to crushing him. Roll Strength + Brawl to achieve a hold. The target's Defense is subtracted from your attack pool, as normal. If you get at least one success, your character has a hold of the target.

If the victim has yet to act in the turn, he may try and break loose at his stage of Initiative. Alternatively, the target may try to turn the tables on his attacker and perform an overpowering grappling maneuver of his own. In either case, roll Strength + Brawl, but the attacker's Strength is subtracted from the dice pool. Even one success breaks the hold or allows a maneuver to be performed, as explained below. If the attacker's hold is broken, the grapple is over (although the attacker can attempt to grapple again). If the victim's roll fails, he does not free himself or does not accomplish a maneuver. The attacker still has a grip on him. The victim of a grapple can try to free himself or perform a maneuver in subsequent turns, unless he is immobilized (see below).

If in the next turn the attacker still has a hold, he can try to overpower his opponent. A Strength + Brawl roll is made. The target's Strength rather than Defense is subtracted from the attacker's dice pool. If no successes are gained, the attacker still has a hold, but accomplishes nothing more in the turn (he does not overpower his victim). If even one success is gained, one of the following overpowering maneuvers can be accomplished in the turn.

- **Render opponent prone** — Both combatants fall to the ground. Either party must break the hold in order to stand again in a subsequent turn. Rising is considered an action in a turn. (See "Going Prone," on p. 164.) If one combatant manages to rise, close-combat attack rolls to hit the prone opponent gain a +2 bonus.

- **Damage opponent** — Successes achieved on this turn's Strength + Brawl roll are applied as points of bashing damage inflicted on your character's opponent. Your character crushes, squeezes, bends or bites his victim.

- **Immobilize opponent** — Your character seeks to interfere with his victim's actions. Even one success renders the target immobile. The victim's physical actions are restricted to breaking free (he cannot attempt any overpowering maneuvers of his own), although he could bring mental or some supernatural capabilities to bear (Storyteller's discretion). Furthermore, the victim's De-



fense does not apply against attacks from opponents outside the grapple. So, if your character immobilizes a victim, attacks on him from your character's allies are not penalized by the victim's Defense.

Once an opponent is immobilized, he remains so from turn to turn until he breaks the hold. You do not need to make further overpower rolls from turn to turn to keep the victim immobilized. He is automatically considered immobile thereafter. Your character can do nothing except maintain the hold, however. If he dedicates an action to any other effort, the target is no longer immobile. Your character still has a grip, but a successful overpower effort is required in a subsequent turn to immobilize the opponent all over again.

Trying to break free from immobilization is handled like a contested action between grapplers. A Strength + Brawl roll is made for the victim, and it's penalized by the holder's Strength. Successes rolled are compared to those that were gained by the holder when he applied the immobilization maneuver. If more are gained, the hold is broken and the victim is free again. Say that Greer manages to immobilize Sloan and gets three successes in the effort. To break free in subsequent turns, rolls made for Sloan (Strength + Brawl - Greer's Strength) must achieve four or more successes.

- Draw weapon — With one or more successes, your character reaches a weapon on his person, on his opponent or nearby. Drawing or acquiring the weapon is an entire turn's action. The weapon has to be small, such as a knife or small gun (a pistol), in order to be brought to bear in grappling combat.

- Attack with drawn weapon — An attack is made with a drawn weapon. Each success achieved on your Strength + Brawl roll inflicts a point of damage. The kind of damage is appropriate to the weapon used — bashing for brass knuckles or lethal for a knife or pistol. A Weaponry or Firearms roll is not made under these circumstances, because it's your character's ability to overpower his opponent in grappling combat that dictates how well the weapon is used. The advantage of bringing a weapon to bear manifests in bonus dice to your Strength + Brawl roll for the attack, and in the severity of damage that might be done (say, lethal for a knife).

- Turn a drawn weapon — If your character's opponent has a weapon drawn in a grapple, your character may seek to turn the weapon on her enemy. Her action is dedicated to gaining control of the weapon and turning it, even while it's still in her opponent's hand. Your character's action in a subsequent turn must be a successful attack in order to turn the weapon completely. If your character's opponent manages to regain control of the weapon in his action, before your character's attack is completed, no attack can be made in a subsequent turn. Thus, control of a weapon can be wrestled over from turn to turn in a grapple, with each combatant seeking to gain control and then make an attack.

- Disarm opponent — If you get one or more successes, your character manages to pry an object from his

opponent's hand. Taking possession of the item thereafter (in another turn) is the equivalent of drawing a weapon (see above). No damage is inflicted.

- Use opponent as protection from ranged attacks — see “Concealment” on p. 162.

If multiple people seek to grapple a single target, and they get a hold, the target can try to break free of all holds simultaneously. Roll Strength + Brawl and subtract the highest Strength among the grapplers, with an additional penalty for each grappler after the first. So, if Anton tries to break out of a hold imposed by three opponents, and the highest Strength among them is 4, Anton's breakout roll suffers a -6 penalty.

Grappling with an opponent has its drawbacks. Grapplers lose the capacity to dodge (see “Dodge,” p. 156) and can perform only close-combat attacks. Ranged attacks are not allowed. (Wrestling over and using a small gun in a grapple is not considered a ranged attack for our purposes here.) Also see “Shooting into Close Combat,” p. 162, and “Autofire,” p. 160. The “All-Out Attack” technique (p. 157) cannot be used to attempt overpowering maneuvers or to break out of a grapple. All-out attack negates the user's Defense in close combat, while grapplers already ignore each other's Defense once a hold is achieved.

Example: *Drew seeks to grapple with Anderson. Drew first needs to get a grip on Anderson in his part of Initiative. Doing so requires an action and a successful Strength + Brawl roll, penalized by Anderson's Defense. If Anderson's order in Initiative comes later in the turn, he can try to break out with a successful Strength + Brawl roll, in this case penalized by Drew's Strength. Or Anderson can immediately try to perform a maneuver on Drew since the two are already locked. The same roll (Strength + Brawl - Drew's Strength) is applied and any successes rolled allow Anderson to perform a task, from doing damage to prying an object from Drew's free hand.*

If in the next turn Drew still has a hold on Anderson, a Strength + Brawl roll, penalized by Anderson's Strength, is made to see if Drew can perform any maneuvers on Anderson.

Anderson can keep trying to break free each turn, or he can attempt maneuvers on Drew each turn. Until Anderson breaks free, the grapple continues and Drew may continue to inflict his own maneuvers.

Grappling Summary

- Roll Strength + Brawl - opponent's Defense for attacker to get a grip on target.
- Target's next action can be dedicated to breaking free. Roll Strength + Brawl - attacker's Strength. Any successes indicate breaking free.

Or, the target can attempt to apply an overpowering maneuver to the attacker, participating in the grapple rather than trying to break

free. Roll Strength + Brawl - attacker's Strength. Any successes allow for a maneuver (see below).

- If the attacker's grip on the target persists, and he is free to do so, the attacker can try to apply an overpowering maneuver to the victim. Roll the attacker's Strength + Brawl - opponent's Strength. Any successes allow a maneuver (see below).

- Possible maneuvers. Choose one:

Render opponent prone

Damage opponent

Immobilize opponent

Draw weapon

Attack with drawn weapon

Turn a drawn weapon

Disarm opponent

Use opponent as protection from ranged attacks

Attempting to break free is always an option instead of performing an overpowering maneuver.

Ranged Combat Factors

Ranged combat factors apply specifically to thrown weapons and guns, the latter of which being the most common.

People in tense, potentially violent situations often resort to guns to defend themselves or to kill enemies. Anyone from soldiers to police to government agents to criminals to homeowners carry or own guns, whether they're trained and licensed or not. Depending on the country concerned, guns can be bought at the corner pawnshop or through dealers, with the formality of some paperwork and a waiting period. Personal arms such as pistols are acquired this way, while rifles, shotguns and bows can be acquired at sporting-goods stores. In other countries, gun possession is unheard of outside of the authorities. And in some nations, going unarmed is more dangerous than going armed, be it with a pistol, rifle or automatic weapon. Finally, no matter what part of the world you look at, guns are always available illegally. They're quicker to get than through conventional channels, but definitely more expensive. Acquiring pistols and street guns through the black market can demand Resources dots of anywhere from 3 to 5, depending on what your character wants.

People with the Firearms Skill have spent time learning to use and understand guns — anything from pistols to machineguns to maybe even bows. Owning a gun and knowing how to use it are two different things. Homeowners can possess but may have never fired a weapon, and could be as much a threat to themselves as

to intruders. Attacks with guns are made by rolling Dexterity + Firearms, but if the Skill is not possessed, Dexterity alone can still be rolled with a -1 penalty (the standard for untrained Physical Skills). A dramatic failure indicates anything as minor as a jam to something as severe as shooting one's self in the foot or shooting an innocent bystander, at the Storyteller's discretion.

A Firearms attack pool is penalized by any mitigating factors such as range, the target's concealment and the shooter's ability to see, all of which are explored below.

Autofire

Each action in a turn allows for one squeezing of the trigger. For most weapons such as a pistol or rifle that means one shot. For automatic weapons, that means autofire — one of a short burst, medium burst or long burst.

Short burst: Your character fires three bullets at a single target, with a +1 bonus to the roll. A short burst cannot normally be directed against multiple targets.

Medium burst: Your character fires 10 or so bullets at one to three targets, with a +2 bonus to each attack roll. If he fires at more than one target, he suffers penalties that mitigate this bonus (see below).

Long burst: Your character fires 20 or so bullets at as many targets as the shooter wants. A +3 bonus is applied to each attack roll (but with penalties for multiple targets; see below). The Storyteller says how many targets are too many. The shooter could unload at a single target, a crowd or at targets spread out from each other. If intended targets are simply too spread out to realistically be hit, the Storyteller can designate who is a valid target. If, for example, three intended targets stand approximately in front of the shooter and a fourth is behind him, the Storyteller may decree that the fourth cannot be targeted in the attack.

Autofire is resolved with a single Dexterity + Firearms roll for each intended target. If your character directs autofire at more than one target in a single attack, a penalty equal to the number of targets is applied to each dice pool. So, if your character directs autofire at three targets, the dice pool for each suffers a -3 penalty. If he fires at only one target, he suffers no penalty.

If a clip or gun is reduced to insufficient ammunition, autofire may not be possible until the weapon is reloaded. Dice bonuses conferred by autofire are in addition to bonus dice granted by guns themselves — see the Firearms Chart. So, if a small SMG (+2 equipment bonus) is used to fire a long burst (+3 bonus), a total of five extra dice is gained.

Example: Carter fires a medium burst at Farrow and Sykes, who stand out in the open. Carter's Dexterity is 3 and his Firearms is 3, for six dice. A +3 bonus is also gained for the kind of gun he uses, and a +2 bonus is gained for a medium burst. That makes for 11 dice. And yet, because Carter fires at two targets, the dice pool rolled against each suffers a -2 penalty, for a total of nine dice. Carter's gun

holds 30 bullets when fully loaded, 10 of which are used in this attack.

The dice pool assembled for each target of a burst is also subject to any factors that apply to the individual target. For example, one intended target might be concealed while another is at long range and prone, or one of them could wear armor while the other doesn't. These factors modify the dice pool rolled to attack each target.

Example: In the next turn, Carter fires again but this time with a long burst (that's 20 more bullets, so Carter spends all his ammunition). A long burst offers a +3 bonus, which means 10 dice in the attack pool. This time, Sykes dives behind a trash can and is concealed, but Farrow remains standing in the open. All 10 dice are rolled against Farrow, because he has no special protection and does nothing to save himself. The dice pool rolled against Sykes is reduced by three, because Sykes is behind substantial concealment (a -3 penalty, explained under "Concealment," p. 162).

Distance from shooter to target can impose penalties and is discussed under "Range," below. In our above example, if Farrow were considered close range, no penalties would be applied to him. If Sykes were at medium range, Carter's dice pool to hit him would suffer a further -2 penalty.

While firing a single shot (a single bullet), your character can try to avoid allies or bystanders near the intended target (see "Shooting into Close Combat," below). It's not so easy to avoid friends and bystanders with autofire. When a medium or long burst is fired at multiple targets, an attack roll is made against anyone standing near (within one yard) or between all intended targets. So, if your character fires a medium burst at two people, but a bystander is between them, an attack roll is made against all three people. Each bystander counts as a full target. That means an additional -1 penalty to the dice pool rolled against each person. Bystanders may also require a shooter to use a larger burst to hit everyone he wants. As with any autofire attack on multiple targets, modifiers for each target are applied separately.

Example: Carter intends to fire a medium burst at Jones, Sykes and Farrow, but a bystander is amongst them. An attack roll must be made against each person. Since that means there are four targets, Carter's dice pools each suffer a -4 penalty rather than a -3. Carter also needs to make a long burst instead of a medium one (a medium burst affects up to three people, while Carter now needs to hit four). Carter starts with 12 dice for a long burst (3 Dexterity + 3 Firearms + 3 equipment bonus + 3 for long burst). That pool is immediately reduced by four for all the targets involved, leaving eight. Farrow is also at long range (a -4 penalty), so four dice are rolled against him. Sykes is substantially concealed (a -3 penalty), so five dice are rolled against him. Jones wears armor rated 3, so five dice are rolled against him. The bystander is out in the open and at short range, so all eight dice are rolled against him.

If a shooter decides not to “upgrade” the size of a burst to hit all intended targets, the number of people affected is limited by the size of burst fired. In the case of a medium burst, only three targets can be hit. They must be side by side or in a row. The shooter cannot hit one target, skip a second and hit a third, for example. He must decide who remains a target and who does not.

If autofire (even a short burst) is directed at a single target, and that target is in close combat with someone (or anyone is within a yard of the target), an autofire roll is made against each person. Even though a short burst normally applies against only a single target, anyone nearby is targeted as well. Bullets might miss or pass through the target or ricochet to hit bystanders. The attack is treated like autofire against multiple targets; a -1 penalty is applied for each person who could be hit. Further modifiers unique to each target also apply to the pool rolled against each.

Example: Carter fires a short burst at Farrow while Farrow and Sykes are in close combat with each other. Even though Farrow is the intended target of Carter’s attack, a separate autofire roll is made for both Farrow and Sykes. In this case, Carter starts with 10 dice (3 Dexterity + 3 Firearms + 3 equipment bonus + 1 for short burst). Since two people are possible targets, a -2 penalty is applied to the dice pool against each. That lowers each pool to eight dice. While Farrow wears armor rated 2, Sykes wears none. A total of six dice are therefore rolled against Farrow, and eight are rolled against Sykes.

The power and accuracy of guns is rated under “Damage” on the Firearms Chart. That number is added to your attack dice pool as bonus dice.

Range

Each firearm and thrown weapon has various ranges to which it is accurate. The Firearms Chart lists these, broken out as short, medium and long range. Your character suffers no penalties when firing up to short range. A target at medium range imposes a -2 penalty. Long range applies a -4 penalty.

Each range category is twice the previous one. For instance, a 9mm has a short range of 20 yards, a medium range of 40 yards and a long range of 80 yards.

Example: Your character wants to shoot at somebody who stands 25 yards away, and your character uses a 9mm pistol. The target is at medium range. Hence, your roll suffers a -2 range penalty.

The ranges of thrown weapons are addressed in Chapter 3, p. 67. For a non-aerodynamic item, its Size is subtracted from your character’s Strength + Dexterity + Athletics to indicate short range. Medium and long range can be extrapolated from there, as double the previous distance. So, if your character has 3 Strength, 2 Dexterity and 1 Athletics and he throws a laptop (1 Size), short range for the weapon is five yards, medium range is 10 yards and long range is 20 yards.

Aerodynamic objects such as footballs and spears can be thrown double the above distances. So, if the above item was a football instead of a laptop (still Size 1), short range would be 10 yards, medium range would be 20 yards and long range would be 40 yards.

Thus, distance is relatively fixed while the accuracy of a thrown object is determined by a Dexterity + Athletics roll.

An object with a Size that equals or exceeds your character’s Strength simply can’t be thrown far enough to constitute a ranged weapon, even if it’s an aerodynamic item. It’s simply too heavy or bulky to be thrown.

By no means is long range the limit to which a gun can fire or a thrown weapon can be hurled. Most firearms, for example, can shoot a bullet much farther than the weapon can reliably hit a target. If your character tries to shoot a target beyond long range, he can still make the attempt. Make a chance roll to determine success (see p. 125), regardless of what your character’s dice pool might normally be. Any target that’s more than double a weapon’s long range away is considered completely out of range and no shot can hit it.

Firearms Summary

Type of Shot	Roll	Modifier Bonus
Single	Dexterity + Firearms	—
Autofire (short burst)	Dexterity + Firearms	+1†
Autofire (medium burst)*	Dexterity + Firearms	+2†
Autofire (long burst)*	Dexterity + Firearms	+3†

* -1 penalty for each target when more than one is fired at. Separate dice pools are rolled against each target in the attack. Modifiers for each target’s range, armor and/or concealment apply to individual dice pools.

† Dice bonuses for using autofire are in addition to the equipment bonuses offered by guns themselves. Thus, a gun with 3 Damage that’s used to fire a short burst grants a total of four bonus dice.

Aiming

For each full turn that your character aims a ranged weapon at a target, add one bonus die to your attack pool to a maximum of three. Your character loses any Defense while aiming; he must remain still. If an opponent attacks him in close combat before his shot gets off, and your character's Defense is applied to the incoming attack, he loses all of his accumulated aiming bonus. In order for your character to retain his accumulated aiming bonus, he needs to weather any incoming close-combat attacks by not applying his Defense. Attackers do not suffer your character's Defense as a penalty.

If your character's weapon has a scope, it can diminish any range penalties that might apply to an attack. Your character must focus on aiming and can perform no other actions. Taking his eye off the target — even to sneeze — cancels the benefits of any time spent.

Aiming cannot be combined with the Gunslinger Merit. Nor can your character gain the aiming bonus and use autofire.

Shooting into Close Combat

Sometimes your character is put in a dilemma. Allies are involved in close combat with an enemy, while your character stands outside the fray. He has a gun or other ranged attack and can try to shoot opponents in the fight, but he might hit his allies. Is squeezing the trigger worth the risk?

If a single shot is fired (or a single ranged weapon such as a knife is thrown), subtract two dice for each combatant whom your character tries to avoid hitting. (Subtract four dice for each combatant who is grappled — see p. 157 — and whom your character wishes to avoid.) If the attack succeeds, your character hits his intended target. If the attack fails, it misses everyone. On a dramatic failure, the Storyteller may decide that one of the combatants whom your character tried to avoid is hit. The ally hit is chosen randomly.

Example: Green is in a melee with Tyler and Swanson, both of whom are friends of Gibbs. Gibbs tries to fire his pistol at Green from 15 yards away, and hopes to avoid hitting anyone else. Four dice are subtracted from Gibbs' attack dice pool to avoid hitting Swanson and Tyler, and a roll is made for the ranged attack. It succeeds with one success. If no successes had been rolled, no one would have been hit. If a dramatic failure had been rolled, one of Swanson or Tyler would have been hit, as chosen randomly by the Storyteller. Had Green, Swanson and Tyler all been grappling, Gibbs' shot would have suffered a -8 penalty.

Note that these shooting into close combat rules apply to single shots or thrown items. They do not apply to autofire conducted with guns. Rules for hitting bystanders are covered under "Autofire," above.

Firearms and Close Combat

It's inevitable that a character with a gun or bow tries to use it in close combat. That is, he uses a Firearms-based weapon while other combatants use Brawl or Weaponry attacks, and everyone is within reach of one another. Such close proximity is not the forte of Firearms attacks; they're best used from afar where clubs and fists can't reach.

If the Storyteller decides that your character is using a gun or bow in what's otherwise a close combat, a target's Defense applies against your character's attack. Intended targets have an opportunity to knock a gun aside or jostle the shooter, as represented by their Defense scores. So, if your character is close enough to two opponents that they can wield knives at him, and your character fires a gun, the targets' Defense scores are penalties to your Dexterity + Firearms rolls. Their Defense scores apply against single shots or autofire from your character.

If an intended target dodges, his full Dodge trait applies against a gun used in close combat. The Brawling Dodge and Weaponry Dodge Merits also apply against guns used in close combat.

Using a gun in a Brawl-based grapple is handled differently than as presented here. See "Grapple," above, for details.

Concealment

The old adage "You can't hit what you can't see" is true. Visibility and an opponent's efforts to hide make it difficult to target someone with a ranged attack. Anything that makes a target difficult to see in ranged combat — fog, mist, darkness, obstructions — offers concealment. There are four degrees of concealment to consider, and the penalties associated with each may be applied to ranged attack rolls. (Concealment does not apply when opponents are engaged in Brawl or Weaponry combat. They're too close to hide from one another.)

Barely concealed: -1 (Example: crouching behind an office chair)

Partially concealed: -2 (hiding behind the hood of a car, but with upper body exposed)

Substantially concealed: -3 (crouching fully behind a car, or poking up out of a foxhole)

Completely covered: Completely protected by an intervening barrier (all shots hit the cover automatically; see "Cover," below)

Cover

Cover provides protection for targets hiding behind it. Cover doesn't usually apply to close combat; opponents are within a yard or so of each other. In a ranged attack against a covered target (someone behind a closed door or inside a closed car), the cover is hit automatically (the bullets hit into the door or car).

A powerful gun or other ranged attack might penetrate cover to hit a protected opponent. Follow these steps

to find out if an attack passes through. Note: These rules don't apply to hitting barely, partially or substantially concealed opponents (see above). Penalties (-1, -2 and -3) already apply to hitting them. These rules apply to targets that are fully protected by a barrier between them and the shooter.

- Deal damage normally to the full cover. (See Chapter 6 for objects' traits.)

- If successes achieved in a single ranged attack exceed the cover's Durability, the ranged attack passes through the cover and hits the first target behind it. Any successes rolled in excess of the cover's Durability are also taken by the object as Structure damage. Damage that exceeds the cover's Durability is then rolled as a new dice pool against the target, but any armor worn by the target is subtracted from the pool. It is possible that the new damage pool might thus be reduced to a chance roll. Once cover's Structure has been exhausted, the object provides no more protection.

Example: Cross hides completely behind a wood door. Drake can still shoot at the door in hopes of hitting Cross beyond. The door's Durability is 1. Drake's attack roll nets five successes. The shot passes through the door, with an excess of four. Those four dice are re-rolled as a direct attack against Cross, who wears armor rated 2. That reduces Drake's pool to two dice for the purposes of doing harm directly to Cross.

Since Drake got four successes in excess of the door's Durability, and the door has a Structure of 6, two more points of damage done to the door will destroy it and make it useless as cover thereafter.

Someone in a closed car or room who can be seen through a window is still considered to be under full cover for the purposes of conducting ranged attacks against her. Shots fired must pass through the window before the target can be hurt. All the rules discussed here for being behind full cover apply. A typical window has Durability 1, Size 3 or 4 and Structure 4 or 5, and an attack to hit a window specifically suffers a -1 penalty. Any successes rolled in excess of the window's 1 Durability are then rolled as a new dice pool to hit the hiding target.

Firing from Concealment

Being concealed helps protect your character, of course, but it also makes it difficult to conduct ranged attacks back at an opponent. Your character must pop up, fire, and then duck down again. If he fires back from shelter, the penalty to your roll is one less than the concealment rating of your character's protection. Thus, if he's substantially concealed (-3 to be hit) and fires back while maintaining that protection, your attack roll suffers a -2 penalty.

If both combatants are concealed, modifiers are cumulative. If your character is substantially concealed (-3)



and his target is partially concealed (-2), your attack roll suffers a -4 penalty (-2 for firing at a partially concealed target, and -2 for his own protection). The opponent's difficulty is also modified by -4 (-3 for firing at a substantially concealed target, and -1 for firing from her own protection).

A character who is completely covered (under full cover) cannot stage ranged attacks at opponents. Doing so would compromise his cover and reduce him to substantially concealed, instead (attacks made against him would then suffer a -3 penalty).

Avoiding Getting Shot

Since your character doesn't normally get to apply his Defense against Firearms attacks, his best method to avoid being shot is to seek protection and go prone. These actions levy penalties against the attacker.

Example: Comer is about to fire his shotgun at Smith. Smith, who acts first in Initiative, decides to run for the concealment of a nearby car. It is within double his Speed range, so he can make it there in one action by running. When Comer's action comes, he suffers a -3 on his attack roll (-3 for the car's substantial concealment). In the next turn, Smith goes prone, hoping the cops will arrive to chase Comer off. Comer's penalty becomes -5 (-2 for Smith being prone and -3 for the car's concealment). Comer needs to close the distance or flush Smith out if he wants to get rid of those penalties.

See "Going Prone," below.

Other Complications

- **Drawing:** Unholstering or otherwise preparing a gun takes one action. Thus, if your character draws his gun in a fight, he spends an action doing so (unless he has the Quick Draw Merit — see p. 113). Having a gun in hand before a fight breaks out allows your character to start firing without delay, although it carries the possible social implications of brandishing a deadly weapon publicly. If a weapon is hidden on your character's person (under a coat or in a purse), an action is spent drawing it and your character loses her Defense for the turn.

- **Reloading:** Your character must spend one action to reload her empty gun. A gun that must be loaded with individual bullets also costs your character's Defense for the turn. That is, Defense can't be applied against incoming close-combat attacks. A weapon that's reloaded with a clip or magazine does not cost Defense for the turn.

- **Offhand Attacks:** If your character makes attacks with his offhand (say, he's right handed but is forced to use his left), they suffer a -2 penalty. The Ambidextrous Merit (p. 110) eliminates this penalty.

- **Clear Jam:** Your character's gun jams, probably because of a dramatic failure achieved in a Firearms roll. It can take as little as an action to clear a jam, unless the Storyteller rules that the gun must be disassembled and cleared later, when time permits.

General Combat Factors

Some battle conditions apply to both close and ranged combat, or to circumstances of each.

Movement

Your character's Speed trait indicates how many yards he can travel in a single turn by walking or jogging. He can travel that many yards and still perform an action, all in the same turn. He can move and perform an action, or perform an action and then move. He cannot, however, move, perform an action and then move again all in the same turn.

If he moves more quickly, he can travel up to twice his Speed trait in a turn by running. Doing so is considered a full action and no other feats can usually be performed while running. A special Merit or supernatural power is required to accomplish such combined tasks, or your character charges (see below).

Charging

Your character can charge an opponent in close combat — in a Brawl or Weaponry attack. Essentially, he closes a considerable distance with a target and is able to attack. Your character can move up to twice his Speed and stage an attack at the end of his movement, all in the same turn.

Your character's Defense score is not subtracted from any attacks made against him in the turn. He makes a relatively easy target of himself by making a beeline to a specific opponent.

Your character cannot charge and make an "All-Out Attack" (see p. 157) in the same action. Nor can he charge and perform any other special attack that requires him to give up his Defense as a drawback to the maneuver. He can perform one maneuver or the other.

If your character's Defense is applied against any incoming attacks in a turn, he cannot perform a charge in the same turn. If incoming attacks precede his position in Initiative, he has to suffer those attacks without the benefits of Defense in order to conduct a charge at his place in Initiative.

Going Prone

Sometimes there's no cover to be found when your character comes under fire, and he dives to the ground as a last resort. Or your character has been crawling to avoid

being spotted, or he simply just lies on the ground. Regardless of the reason, it all boils down to going prone.

Ranged attacks suffer a -2 penalty when the target is prone.

A standing attacker who uses a Brawl or Weaponry attack gets a +2 dice bonus to hit a prone target in close combat. If an attacker approaches a prone target such that he is about a yard away (within range to be considered in close combat), and conducts a ranged attack at the target, the attack receives the +2 bonus. The ranged attack is also subject to the target's Defense, though, even if it's a Firearms attack. See "Firearms and Close Combat," p. 162, for more details.

Your character can willingly drop to prone as a reaction to ranged attacks or other events in his surroundings. Doing so constitutes his action for the turn.

He may even go prone before his rotation in Initiative, if he has not yet acted in the turn.

Thus, if an opponent draws a gun and starts firing on Initiative 12, your character with Initiative 8 can go prone at the same time that the shots are fired (on 12). Your character loses all other actions for the turn, however. If he goes prone before his normal stage of Initiative, your character cannot move up to his Speed. He must "hit the dirt" where he stands. If he goes prone at his normal stage of Initiative, he may move up to his Speed and go prone in the same turn.

If your character has already acted in a turn, he cannot go prone thereafter. Say he acts on Initiative 11. On Initiative 7 in the same turn, someone with a gun and starts firing. Your character cannot go prone, because he has already acted in the turn.

Rising from prone is an action and must be performed in its own turn. Your character could therefore rise from prone and remain stationary or rise from prone and move up to his Speed in the same turn.

Flank and Rear Attacks

If your character attacks from the side or rear of an unsuspecting target, a reflexive Wits + Composure roll is allowed for the target to recognize the imminent attack

(see "Surprise," p. 151). If the roll fails, the victim doesn't respond and his Defense is not applied to the attack. If your character intends to use a ranged attack against the target, the reflexive Wits + Composure roll is still allowed at the Storyteller's discretion. Perhaps the target could see the sniper out of the corner of his eye or in a reflection. If the intended target's Wits + Composure roll succeeds, Initiative is rolled between combatants and Defense applies against close-combat attacks.

If your character attacks from the side or rear of an opponent in an established fight (Initiative has been rolled all around), the attacker's angle or vantage point offers no bonus. The combatants are aware of each other and/or on their guard from all angles.

Specified Targets

Sometimes your character wants to direct an attack at a particular part of an opponent, or at an object carried by an opponent in order to achieve a specific effect. Your character might want to shoot a gun-wielding robber in the hand, for example, or swing a tire iron to specifically hit an opponent in the head. The Storyteller imposes penalties to your attack roll based on the size of the intended target. A torso might be at -1, a leg or arm -2, a head -3, a hand -4 and an eye (or the "off" button of a machine) -5. If no successes are gained, the attack misses altogether.

The results of a successful attack are determined by the Storyteller. A successful Strength + Athletics roll might be required for a victim to hold onto a held object, with a penalty to the effort equal to the damage done in the attack. A successful attack staged on a body part might ignore armor (see p. 166), because none is worn there. A blow to the head with a blunt object that normally inflicts bashing damage might inflict lethal damage, or cause the victim to be stunned (see p. 167).

Stake through the Heart: Ordinary people can rarely identify the supernatural creatures they encounter, let alone know their weaknesses. And yet, there are the classic Hollywood solutions to monsters: fire, garlic, religious symbols — and a stake through the heart. Whether the last actually works or has any bearing on the heart is unknown without extensive research or occult knowledge.



After all, wouldn't a stake through the heart kill just about anything?

To stake an opponent, an attacker must target the heart. Wielded in hand, a stake calls for a Strength + Weaponry roll. Fired from some kind of projection device or thrown, a stake demands a Dexterity + Firearms or Athletics roll. The damage that your character inflicts is lethal and must also be sufficiently high to pierce muscle, bone and organ. All totaled, efforts to stake a resisting target are at -4 and a minimum of three points of damage must be inflicted in a single attack. If less than three points of damage are done, the stake sinks in but doesn't reach the heart. Damage is done, but not enough to have any special effect on a monstrous target.

Armor

Your character's primary protection against harm in combat is armor. Any form of protective clothing can classify as armor, from heavy work gear to a knight's outfit. In the modern World of Darkness, armor is functional. Anything that's worn for an extended period, such as reinforced clothing, is designed to be light and sturdy. Soldiers, police and anyone else who can get their hands on bulletproof vests wear them for bodily protection. Those who want to resort to metal plates can do so, but the bulk of the equipment interferes with mobility.

The rating of any protective gear is automatically subtracted from the dice pool of an incoming attack. If your character wears armor rated 3, three dice are removed from an attacker's dice pool. Armor is rated in terms of the kinds of attacks against which it protects: ballistic and all other kinds. Thus, protective gear has two ratings separated by a slash on the Armor Chart (p. 170): general/ballistic. The first applies to most attack types. The second applies to those made with attacks involving the Firearms Skill. So, a flak jacket rated 2/3 imposes a -2 penalty on, say, punch and sword attacks, and a -3 penalty on gun and bow attacks.

Types of armor designed to be "bulletproof" on the Armor Chart (a kevlar vest, flak jacket and full riot gear) have additional effects against Firearms attacks. They downgrade damage done in such an attack, turning it from lethal to bashing. This is in addition to diminishing the number of dice rolled in an attack. So, if a target wears a kevlar vest and a shot is fired at him, the attack roll suffers a -2 penalty for the armor. Any successes rolled in the attack do damage, but it's bashing instead of lethal.

Attacks of a magical nature that inflict aggravated damage might not be hindered by armor; it depends on the type of attack. A sorcerous bolt of energy might pass right through armor. Mundane objects are simply not designed to withstand pure mystical assault. A silver letter opener stabbed at a werewolf, however, must still overcome armor to affect the creature (assuming it wears any armor). The werewolf's legendary Achilles' heel against silver doesn't give a letter opener a supernatural ability to ignore armor, only the power to blight a werewolf's flesh

(if it can reach it). The Storyteller decides if an attack that inflicts aggravated damage also ignores armor.

Attackers may make specified-target rolls (see above) to hit unprotected portions of a defender and thus ignore armor. The Storyteller assigns the attack's penalty, depending on the size of body part targeted. In the case of bulletproof armor, an attack to an unprotected body part not only ignores the target's armor rating, but damage done remains lethal rather than being downgraded to bashing.

Ordinary people must wear armor to gain protection, but some supernatural creatures are naturally armored by virtue of tough hides, or they bear or prepare magic enchantments that help protect them like armor.

Cumbersome gear imposes Defense penalties, and some armor penalizes Speed and even efforts involving Strength. The Armor Chart (p. 170) provides stats for various forms of gear.

Fighting Blind

Sometimes circumstances arise when your character cannot see, but he still needs to defend himself or seek out a threatening opponent. Maybe he's in pitch darkness, dense smoke fills the area or he's suffered vision damage. Such situations make your character easy prey for the things of the world that stalk him. All the more reason for him to try to fight back, even blind.

Characters who cannot see at all must attack enemies almost as if those opponents are fully concealed. They cannot be targeted at all; shots are taken in the dark, literally. Your character chooses a direction in which he stages his attack — whether close or ranged combat — guessing where his intended target might be.

To even have a hope of hitting, your character must direct his attack at the target's location. If he's not even pointing in the right direction (he fires to the right, but the target is behind him), there is no chance to hit. The Storyteller rolls some dice anyway and ignores the result, to keep you from deducing the target's true location.

The Storyteller knows where the target actually is, and secretly makes a chance roll (see p. 125) for you if your character attacks in approximately the right direction. A success means your character hits and does one or more Health points of damage, depending on how many 10's come up. Of course, if a 1 comes up a dramatic failure occurs, the circumstances of which are left to the Storyteller's discretion.

There are, however, ways to try to sense where a target is rather than stage attacks aimlessly. Ordinary people have some chance of bringing their other senses to bear. Supernatural creatures with inhuman capabilities may have stronger senses, may be able to function unimpaired without vision, or might be able to see in the dark.

Listening

Your character can attempt to listen for a target. The subject must be making noise, no matter how slight, to be heard (walking or breathing heavily makes *some* noise).

Your character must spend an action listening and the Storyteller makes a Wits + Composure roll for you, keeping the result secret (or he may substitute Survival for Composure if the situation applies). Modifiers are based on how noisy the target is (+3 if he walks on dry twigs, +1 if he walks on a leaf-strewn lawn, -5 if he stands perfectly still and does nothing but breathes lightly), and on how noisy the environment is (no modifier if the area is eerily quiet, -3 if heavy traffic passes by).

Dramatic Failure: Your character is convinced that he knows the target's location, but is completely off base.

Failure: Your character cannot locate the target but can attack blindly where he believes her to be. The Storyteller may make a secret chance roll, as per the rules above, assuming your character attacks in the right direction at all.

Success: Your character can attack the target as if she is substantially concealed (-3 penalty).

Exceptional Success: Your character can attack the target as if she is partially concealed (-2 penalty).

Once your character has succeeded on an attack, a roll must be made for him by the Storyteller each turn to keep an *ear* on the target. This is a reflexive Wits + Composure roll (although Survival might substitute for Composure if the Storyteller agrees). The Storyteller can decide whether or not the same listening modifiers apply from turn to turn.

Smelling

Characters with a heightened olfactory sense (or more likely bestial creatures) can try to sniff a target out by taking an action to smell. The Storyteller makes a Wits + Composure roll for your character, keeping the result secret (or he may substitute Survival for Composure if the situation applies). He may apply factors based on the strength of the target's odor (+3 if the subject has gone unwashed for days, +1 if she wears strong perfume, -3 if she has showered recently and put on clean clothes), or based on surrounding odors (-1 at a gym, -3 near a paper mill).

Dramatic Failure: Your character is convinced that he knows the target's location, but is completely off base.

Failure: Your character cannot locate the target but can attack blindly at where he believes she is. The Storyteller may make a secret chance roll, as per the rules above, assuming your character attacks in the right direction at all.

Success: Your character can attack the target as if she is substantially concealed (-3 penalty).

Exceptional Success: Your character can attack the target as if she is partially concealed (-2 penalty).

Once your character has succeeded in an attack, a roll must be made for him by the Storyteller each turn to keep a *nose* on the target. This is a reflexive Wits + Composure (or Survival) roll. The Storyteller can decide whether or not the same smelling modifiers apply from turn to turn.

Other Complications

Combat can be complicated by numerous possibilities, some of which are addressed below. These are often special features of weapons or attack types that confer unique bonuses or rules variants. Your Storyteller should feel free to come up with others as a situation warrants.

- **Armor Piercing:** A weapon or ammunition type that is capable of overcoming targets' armor or protective layers. The item is typically rated 1 to 3 and that many points of armor are ignored in an attack. Armor piercing rating is not usually added to attack pools as dice. It simply reduces the number of dice removed from an attack pool due to a target's armor. (See "Piercing Durability," p. 138, for more information.) The Damage rating of a gun from which an armor-piercing bullet is fired is still added to a Firearms roll as bonus dice.

If armor-piercing ammunition is fired at a target wearing "bulletproof" armor (a kevlar vest, flak jacket or full riot gear), the bullet might penetrate that armor. If the rating of the ammunition (1 to 3) exceeds the armor's rating against Firearms attacks, the armor is ignored altogether in the attack. No dice are lost due to armor in the attack roll and damage inflicted is not downgraded from lethal to bashing (see "Armor," p. 166).

If a target wears no armor, your character's shot gains no special effects or bonuses from the ammunition used (the gun itself still applies a dice bonus, though).

- **Wound Type:** The power or weapon delivers a different type of damage than normal: bashing, lethal or aggravated. A sword with a silver blade does lethal damage against an ordinary person, but does aggravated harm against a werewolf, for example.

- **Attribute Damage:** A poison, drug or supernatural power doesn't cause Health points of damage, but reduces a victim's Attribute dots. The kind of Attribute is probably specific, such as Physical or even Strength. Attributes may be recovered as if they were Health points lost to bashing damage (see "Healing," p. 175). So, one is regained every 15 minutes. More harmful Attribute loss would be recovered as if it were lethal damage (one point every two days). Crippling Attribute loss would be recovered as if it were aggravated damage (one point a week). See the "Attribute Dots" sidebar on p. 43 for the effects of an Attribute that falls to zero dots.

- **Continuous Damage:** A mystical power or cruel weapon continues to deliver damage over successive turns, like a continually burning flame. It might be a fixed number, such as three. So, an attack roll is made normally with successes determining damage done, but every turn thereafter an additional three damage is done automatically, ignoring the victim's Defense and armor. Damage is ongoing until a time limit such as two turns is passed, or until some recovery action such as cleaning the wound is performed.

- **Stun:** Some weapons pack such a wallop that if damage successes inflicted in a single attack equal or exceed the target's Size, he loses his next action.

• **Knockout:** A single blow delivered to the head (-3 penalty to hit) that equals or exceeds the target's Size in damage might knock him unconscious. A Stamina roll is made for the victim. If it succeeds, he behaves normally. If it fails, he is unconscious for a number of turns equal to the damage done.

• **Knockdown:** A power, weapon or effect forces a target off his feet. A successful Dexterity + Athletics roll allows him to maintain his footing as a reflexive action. If the roll succeeds, the character behaves normally. If the roll fails, the character is forced to go prone (see "Going Prone," p. 164). If he has not performed an action in the turn, he loses his action that turn. He cannot perform any tasks and cannot travel that turn; he just hits the ground. He can rise again as an action in a subsequent turn. Or once he lands, he always has the option of remaining prone.

In case of a dramatic failure on the Dexterity + Athletics roll, a character falls hard or at an odd angle and suffers one Health point of bashing damage (which may be absorbed automatically if armor is worn).

• **Immobilization:** When your character attacks someone involved in a grapple (see p. 157), the target's Defense applies against the attack. For example, your character approaches two people who are grappling. If he makes a close-combat attack on one of them, the target's Defense penalizes his attack.

If, however, the target is immobilized in the grapple (see p. 158), the target's Defense is lost against outside

attacks. So, if your character's intended target has been immobilized in the grapple, your attacks on him do not suffer a Defense penalty.

Killing Blow: A target who is tied up, unconscious or paralyzed not only gets no Defense, he can be felled by a single blow. A roll need not be made for an attacker; the damage points he inflicts equal his dice pool, modified by any armor worn by the target. Damage done is automatic, as is armor's protection. No attack roll is required.

Weapons

Anyone who enters a violent confrontation is quick to resort to weapons. One's own body can be used as a weapon, but far more effective are tools such as bats, bottles, knives, swords, axes and guns. When dealing with mysterious creatures, sometimes wielding weapons is absolutely essential to survival — or completely useless. Weapons are generally classed as melee and ranged.

Each weapon has a Strength requirement to be used effectively. A sword or shotgun might be too powerful for a weak or frail person to use properly. For melee weapons, compare a wielder's Strength to the item's Size. For ranged weapons, a Strength requirement is stipulated on the Ranged Weapons Chart. If your character's Strength is lower than that required for a weapon, attacks suffer a -1 penalty.



Ranged Weapons Chart

Type	Damage	Ranges	Clip	Strength	Size	Cost	Example
Revolver, Lt.	2	20/40/80	6	2	1	••	SW M640 (.38 Special)
Revolver, Hvy.	3	35/70/140	6	3	1	••	SW M29 (.44 Magnum)
Pistol, Lt.	2	20/40/80	17+1	2	1	•••	Glock 17 (9mm)
Pistol, Hvy.	3	30/60/120	7+1	3	1	•••	Colt M1911A1 (.45 ACP)
Rifle†	5	200/400/800	5+1	2	3	••	Remington M-700 (30.06)
SMG, Small*	2	25/50/100	30+1	2	1	•••	Ingram Mac-10 (9mm)
SMG, Large*†	3	50/100/200	30+1	3	2	•••	HK MP-5 (9mm)
Assault Rifle*†	4	150/300/600	42+1	3	3	•••	Steyr-Aug (5.56mm)
Shotgun†	4***	20/40/80	5+1	3	2	••	Remington M870 (12-Gauge)
Crossbow**†	3	40/80/160	1	3	3	•••	

Damage: Indicates the number of bonus dice added to your dice pool for using the weapon. Firearms deliver lethal damage against ordinary people. The type of damage may vary against supernatural enemies such as vampires, which suffer only bashing damage from conventional firearms.

Ranges: The numbers are short/medium/long ranges in yards. Attacks at medium and long range suffer a -2 and -4 penalty, respectively.

Clip: The number of shells a gun can hold — a “+1” indicates a bullet can be held in the chamber, ready to fire.

Strength: The minimum Strength needed to use a weapon effectively. A wielder with a lower Strength suffers a -1 penalty on attack rolls.

Size: 1 = Can be hidden in hand, 2 = Can be hidden in coat, 3 = Cannot be hidden on one's person

Cost: The minimum dots in the Resources Merit usually required to purchase the weapon.

† This weapon requires two hands. If used one-handed, the Strength requirement increases by one. You need a Strength of 4 to wield a shotgun one-handed without penalty, for example.

* Indicates that the weapon is capable of autofire (short bursts, medium bursts and long bursts — see p. 160.)

** Crossbows require three turns to reload. A character may use a crossbow to attempt to stake a creature with a targeted shot (-4 penalty and a minimum of three points of damage must be inflicted in a single attack).

*** 9 again (see p. 134)

Melee Weapons Chart

Type	Damage	Size	Cost	Special
Sap	1 (B)	1	•	Knockout (p. 168)
Brass Knuckles	1 (B)	n/a	•	Brawl*
Club (wood)	2 (B)	2	n/a	
Mace (metal)	3 (B)	2	••	
Knife	1 (L)	1	•	
Rapier	2 (L)	2	••	Armor piercing 1 (p. 167)
Sword	3 (L)	2	••	
Katana	3 (L)	2	•••	Durability +1**
Greatsword†	4 (L)	3	•••	
Small Ax	2 (L)	1	•	
Large Ax†	3 (L)	3	••	9 again (p. 134)
Great Ax†	5 (L)	4	•••	9 again (p. 134)
Stake***	1 (L)	1	n/a	
Spear†	3 (L)	4	•	+1 Defense****

Type: Your character may use many other types of weapons (meat cleavers, halberds, hammers). Use the traits from the above lists that best approximate those weapons. See p. 136 for determining the traits of improvised weapons. Note that improvised weapons automatically suffer a -1 penalty.

Damage: The number of bonus dice added to dice pools when using the weapon. The type of damage inflicted is also indicated: aggravated (A), lethal (L) or bashing (B).

Size: 1 = Can be hidden in hand, 2 = Can be hidden in coat, 3+ = Cannot be hidden. Size is also used to indicate the minimum Strength needed to use a weapon effectively. A wielder with a lower Strength suffers a -1 penalty on attack rolls.

Cost: The minimum dots in the Resources Merit usually required to purchase the weapon. The “n/a” entry indicates that the item can be created rather than purchased.

† This weapon requires two hands. If used one-handed, the Strength requirement increases by one. You need a Strength of 4 to wield a greatsword one-handed without penalty, for example.

* This weapon uses the Brawl Skill instead of Weaponry.

** Katanas are well-crafted swords. They do not break easily. See “Targeting Items,” p. 138.

*** The attacker must target the heart (-4 penalty) and do a minimum of three points of damage in a single attack.

**** The spear-wielder gains a +1 Defense bonus when fighting unarmed targets due to his weapon's superior reach, allowing him to keep a greater distance from a foe.

Armor Chart

Class	Rating	Strength	Defense	Speed	Cost
<i>Modern</i>					
Reinforced/thick clothing	1/0	1	0	0	n/a
Kevlar vest* (thin)	1/2	1	0	0	•
Flak jacket*	2/3	1	-1	0	••
Full riot gear*	3/4	2	-2	-1	•••
<i>Archaic</i>					
Leather (hard)	1/0	2	-1	0	•
Chainmail	2/1	3	-2	-2	••
Plate	3/2	4	-2	-3	••••

* This type of armor is bulletproof.

Rating: Armor provides two kinds of protection: against general attacks and against Firearms attacks. The number before the slash is armor rating for most kinds of attacks (for close combat and thrown ranged attacks, whether bashing, lethal or perhaps aggravated). The second number is for Firearms attacks — guns and bows. Bulletproof armor (kevlar vest, flak jacket and full riot gear) also downgrades damage done in Firearms attacks from lethal to bashing.

Strength: Armor is often heavy and cumbersome. If your character does not have sufficient Strength to wear it, she cannot perform at peak efficiency. If your character's Strength is lower than that required for armor worn, her Brawl and Weaponry attacks suffer a -1 penalty.

Defense: The penalty imposed on your character's Defense trait for the armor worn.

Speed: The penalty imposed on your character's Speed trait for the armor worn.

Cost: The minimum dots in the Resources Merit usually required to purchase the armor.

States of Being

Combat is about hurting and killing opponents. You therefore need a means of gauging your character's physical condition during and after a fight, whether he's simply bruised and battered or crippled or dead. But there are other states of being (and forms of injury) beyond those resulting from combat. The World of Darkness is a dangerous place. All forms of harm may befall your character, from fire to disease to electrocution. And yet, when he's faced with the horrors that lurk in the night, and supernatural creatures threaten his very existence, he may dismiss the pain as best he can and forge ahead against the unknown.

Health

Chapter 4 quickly captures your character's vigor with the Health trait, which is determined by adding Stamina and Size. Typically, the bigger and more resilient your character, the more punishment he can endure before he goes down for the count. The average person is 5 Size and has 2 Stamina, for a total of 7 Health.

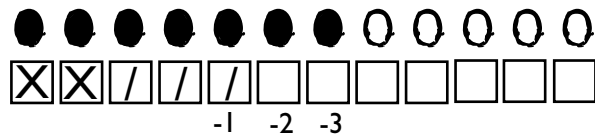
Your character sheet offers a chart for keeping record of your character's changing state of being. The dots are filed in from left to right, one for each Health that your character has. The squares shown are used to gauge his current condition — his Health points. If he has no injuries at all — no squares are checked off — your character is in perfect condition. Each time he suffers damage, mark a square from left to right across the row. Multiple points on a damage roll inflict extensive harm. For example, if your character's opponent achieves one success on an attack roll and your character is currently in perfect condition, that damage is marked in the leftmost box on your sheet. If in a subsequent turn he suffers two more damage, you mark off the second and third boxes.

The more injuries your character suffers, the more impaired his actions are. Penalties are imposed on your dice rolls thereafter. The more damage your character takes, the more difficult it becomes for him to act at full capacity, as follows. Remember that wounds are marked off from left to right on your character's Health chart, so the wounds on the right of your character's chart indicate whether he suffers any penalties from injuries.

Health Boxes Marked	Penalty
Third-to-last	-1
Second-to-last	-2
Last	-3

Subtract the dice penalty listed for your character's current Health from your dice pool for every action he performs (including Initiative rolls, but excluding Stamina rolls to remain conscious — see "Incapacitation," below) until the wounds heal.

So, if your character starts with 7 Health and suffers five points of damage (there's a wound mark in his third-to-last box), his actions suffer a -1 wound penalty until that fifth Health point is recovered.



Should your character take more damage, he suffers a -2 and then a -3 penalty as the second-to-last and the last of his boxes are checked off.

Wound penalties also affect movement, reducing your character's Speed trait by the amount listed for the rightmost box filled on your character's Health chart. Wound penalties do not apply to your character's Defense or other Resistance traits — Stamina, Resolve or Composure — when those traits are subtracted as penalties from opponents' dice pools.

Marking Health

The injuries that your character suffers are recorded on your character sheet by filling in the squares of his Health chart. Bashing wounds are marked with a "/", lethal wounds are marked with an "X," and aggravated wounds are marked with an "*." As injuries of different severity are suffered, lesser wounds shift right. You don't have to erase and re-draw every wound on your Health chart, though. You can transform a bashing mark into a lethal one by drawing an criss-crossing line to create an "X." You can turn a lethal wound into an asterisk by drawing a horizontal and vertical line through the center of the "X." Just be careful not to "lose" any wounds in the translation.

When your character heals and recovers from wounds, you do need to erase those marks.

Applying Damage

Three different types of damage can be inflicted: bashing, lethal and aggravated. Bashing damage includes any wounds inflicted by blunt instruments, punches, kicks or other similar trauma. Lethal damage comes from knives, bullets or any type of attack that actually pierces or cuts flesh. Aggravated damage is usually reserved for supernatural sources — forms of harm that exceed the mundane or even reality as people know it. Anyone can incur aggravated harm, however, when bashing and lethal injuries turn so grievous that a victim falls into a coma and/or bleeds to death.

All types of injuries are cumulative and the resulting total determines your character's current Health points. Specifics on each type of damage are provided below.

When marking your character's damage in the Health chart on your character sheet, record a "/" for bashing, an "X" for lethal and an asterisk ("*") for aggravated damage. The last is best described as drawing a cross ("+") on

top of an “X,” for an eight-pointed star. These marks go in the boxes of your character’s Health chart.

When it comes to your character’s long-term survival, lethal damage is crippling and aggravated damage is ultimately fatal. If your mortal character’s Health chart is filled with X’s, he’s on death’s door. He’s horribly beaten and in a coma, barely holding onto this mortal coil. Any subsequent injuries upgrade boxes with X’s in them to asterisks. Once all boxes are filled with asterisks, your character is dead and gone.

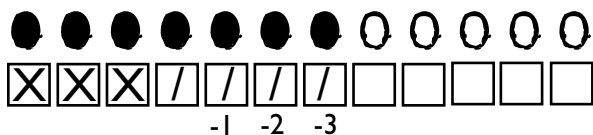
When your character acquires a mixture of bashing, lethal and/or aggravated damage, mark the most severe damage at the left in his Health chart; it pushes any lesser damage right. For example, if you mark that your character has taken a point of bashing damage in the leftmost box, and she then takes a point of lethal damage, mark the leftmost box with an “X” for the lethal damage and move the bashing damage right one square by putting a “/” in that box. Any further bashing damage goes in the third box and keeps going right. Any further lethal damage pushes the entire thing right again until all the boxes are marked with either an “X” or “/.”

Aggravated damage works the same way. Say your character has already suffered a point of lethal damage (first box) and a point of bashing damage (second box). He then suffers a point of aggravated damage. As the most severe injury that he’s incurred, the aggravated goes in the leftmost box, the lethal moves right to the second box and the bashing moves to the third. Any more aggravated points suffered continue to push those lethal and bashing injuries right.

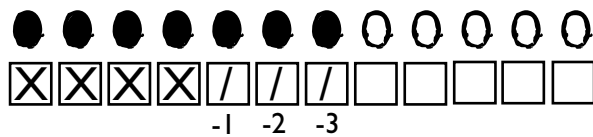
And that’s the first rule of tracking your character’s Health: A more severe wound always “pushes” a less severe wound to the right. Wounds that are “pushed off” the right edge of the Health chart as a result are ignored.

Tracking your character’s Health may seem complex at first, but it’s easy to learn once you try it out. The system also makes recovery from injuries easy to record. While wounds are taken from left to right, they’re healed from right to left. That way, your character’s least severe, fastest-healing wounds are always healed (erased off your character sheet) first. The system also makes supernatural effects that temporarily grant extra Health easy to record (see the “Temporary Health Dots” sidebar).

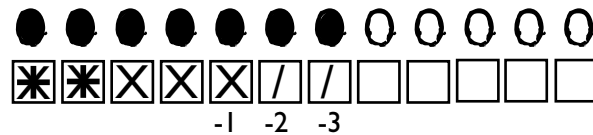
Say your character with 7 Health is in bad shape with a chart that looks like this:



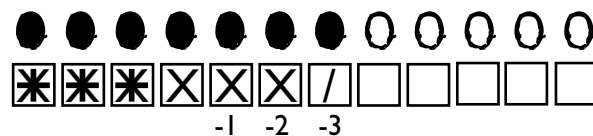
He takes another lethal wound. The new injury pushes his bashing wounds to the right. Since your character’s seven Health boxes are all full of injuries, one of his bashing wounds is essentially pushed off the right edge of the chart and is ignored. Your character’s Health chart becomes:



Or, if your character’s Health chart looks like this:



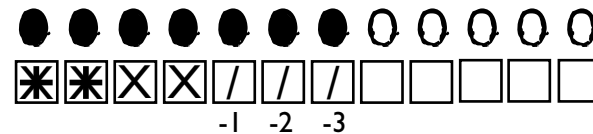
and he suffers another point of aggravated damage (*), his Health chart changes to this:



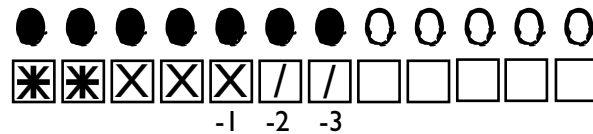
His less severe lethal and bashing wounds are pushed to the right by the newest aggravated one, and one bashing wound is pushed off the chart and ignored.

Once all the boxes on your character’s Health chart are filled and there are no less severe wounds to push right, any new injury upgrades the least severe wound that he already has. These upgrades occur from left to right. That’s the second rule of tracking your character’s Health.

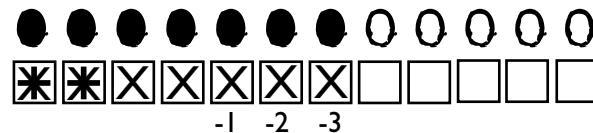
So, say your character’s Health chart looks like this:



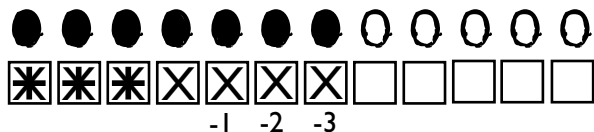
He then takes a point of bashing damage. There are no empty wound boxes left to fill, and there are no less severe wounds to push to the right (your character’s least severe wound is bashing and the new one he incurs is bashing). The new point of bashing damage therefore “upgrades” his leftmost, least severe injury by one kind. In this case, it means the bashing wound in his fifth Health box is upgraded to a lethal wound and his Health chart looks like this:



If your character then suffers three more points of bashing damage, the first two of those points upgrade his two existing bashing wounds like this:



The third point upgrades the leftmost, least severe wound that he has remaining. In this case, the lethal injury in his third Health box is increased to an aggravated wound, like so:



If your character continues to take more bashing or lethal damage, another lethal wound is upgraded to aggravated for each new point of damage. If he incurs any more aggravated injuries, they push his lethal wounds right, as stated by the first rule of tracking Health.

With bashing and lethal injuries being upgraded as more harm is suffered, it's possible to be beaten to death — even by suffering repeated bashing damage alone. All boxes of your Health chart are filled with slashes. When they're full, you go back and upgrade each to an "X" from left to right as your character continues to take a beating and suffers more bashing injuries. Once all the boxes are full of X's, he's utterly overcome, comatose and dying. Suffering even more harm upgrades each lethal wound to an aggravated one. X's change into asterisks.

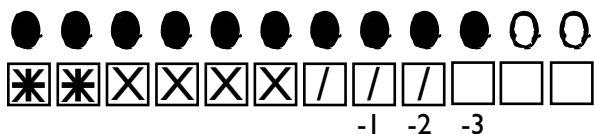
Remember that before any wounds are "upgraded" in severity, all of your character's Health boxes must be filled and there can be no less severe injuries to push to the right.

Temporary Health Dots

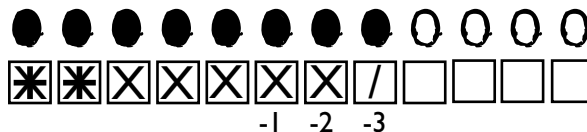
It's possible that your character might acquire extra Health dots that make him more robust for a temporary period of time. A spell or supernatural effect might increase his Stamina, Size or even his Health trait directly. These bonus Health dots are added to the right side of your character's Health chart, and each also has a corresponding box where any wounds are recorded.

The question arises, though, if he incurs wounds in such extra Health and then the spell wears off, what happens? While his extra Health dots are lost, any wounds in them are not. Your character returns to his normal Health dots. Any wounds that were assigned to his bonus points now upgrade the least severe wounds that he already has, from left to right on his Health chart.

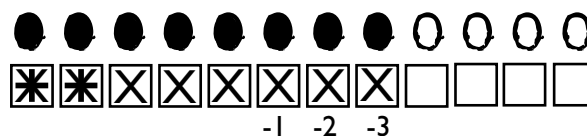
Imagine that your character gets two extra Health dots from a supernatural effect applied to him. His normal Health of 8 increases to 10. He now has 10 Health dots and boxes in his chart. He's been beaten up pretty badly, and has wounds in nine of his 10 boxes, as follows:



When the spell wears off, he loses his right two bonus Health. That means all of his normal Health boxes have injuries attributed to them. Since a bashing wound was assigned to one of his bonus Health, it upgrades the least severe wound that he has remaining among his normal Health boxes. In this case, that would be the bashing wound in his seventh box, which becomes a lethal wound. His Health chart then looks like this:



If he had suffered a bashing wound in both of his two bonus Health, his chart would have been filled with aggravated and lethal wounds when the two extra dots were lost, as follows:



In the first case, your character could fall unconscious (see "Incapacitation"). In the second case, he would be dying.

Incapacitation

Anytime all of a character's Health boxes are marked, regardless of damage suffered, and he has a bashing slash remaining in his rightmost box, a reflexive Stamina roll is made each turn for him to remain conscious. This roll does not suffer your character's -3 wound penalty. It's made at the beginning of your character's action each turn. So, if your character's last Health box is filled with a slash, you must make a Stamina roll when he acts next, whether in this turn or the next.

A failure means he falls unconscious. A success means your character is conscious and can continue to act in that turn. The standard -3 wound penalty *does* apply to any action he performs.

These Stamina rolls continue from turn to turn until your character passes out completely or is healed and his rightmost Health box is emptied. Of course, if that last box gets marked with lethal or aggravated damage, your character is on death's door or leaves this mortal coil.

A character who falls unconscious from a failed Stamina roll remains incapacitated until he regains at least one Health (his rightmost box is emptied again — see "Healing," below).

Of course, the danger of putting one's self in harm's way is getting hurt or killed. A mortal being who has lethal marks in all of his Health boxes is utterly overwhelmed



and dying. Maybe he's bleeding internally, his lungs are punctured and he can't breathe, or he has suffered burns over most of his body — whatever is appropriate for the kinds of injuries sustained. Each *minute* thereafter in which your character receives no medical attention — mundane or supernatural — he suffers one more injury. One Health box currently marked with an X is upgraded to an asterisk for aggravated damage, from left to right on your character's Health chart. Once all boxes are filled with asterisks, he's dead.

If a dying character receives successful medical attention before he fades completely — first aid, supernatural healing, treatment at an emergency room, a magical elixir — he can survive. (See "Healing Wounds" in Chapter 3, p. 61.) He's still a wreck, though. He requires ongoing medical or supernatural attention for the time it takes him to heal his rightmost wound. He's surely in a coma or is bedridden throughout the period. After at least one Health point has been healed completely, he can safely leave intensive care and recover on his own. See "Healing," below.

Bashing Damage

Any kind of damage that does not pierce the body but that batters against it is considered bashing damage. This includes most harm from brawling combat, punches, kicks, beatings with a blunt instrument and even falling or being thrown into a brick wall. Certain targeted bashing attacks may cause lethal damage, at the Storyteller's discretion (see "Specified Targets," p. 165). Use a "/" when marking bashing damage on your character sheet.

Once all your character's Health boxes are full and the rightmost is occupied with a slash, begin making Stamina rolls to see if he remains conscious. (Remember that your character's -3 wound penalty does not apply to these rolls.) If he suffers any more harm, mark any further damage over your character's existing injuries (using X's or asterisks this time), from left to right. Once your character loses all Health from lethal damage, he's comatose. Once all is lost to aggravated damage, he's dead.

Lethal Damage

Attacks made with piercing or cutting weapons — knives, guns, crossbows or swords — deliver lethal damage. Fire also causes lethal damage to ordinary people. Mark lethal damage on your character sheet with an "X." Lethal damage is "upgraded" to aggravated once a mortal being's rightmost Health box is occupied by an X.

Optional Rule: Large Fights

Your Storyteller may introduce nameless and faceless supporting cast members to beef up a combat scene and make it more challenging. These people, called extras, may work for the chronicle's main antagonist or may simply be thugs whom your character encounters. The

Storyteller uses extras as a plot device to provide information, to give your character a combat challenge or to deliver a message. Extras don't usually appear individually in more than one scene and interact very little with your character on a personal basis.

To simplify large fights, the Storyteller may assign only four Health to extras. That is, these people can incur one Health point of damage before they start to suffer from wound penalties. These diminished points make combat quick and enjoyable for players, and still offer an acceptable representation of events.



Aggravated Damage

The creatures that lurk in the world's shadows work in ways that most people cannot comprehend. They have their own mysterious agendas and miraculous capabilities. Among the latter is the capacity to inflict crippling harm on other beings and mortals. These otherworldly attacks sometimes prey upon enemies' inherent weaknesses, such as silver for a werewolf. Or they involve dark magic and unfathomable might, inflicting horrifying injuries.

A character's Health points lost to aggravated damage are marked with an asterisk. As the most severe harm a being can suffer, they always appear in the leftmost squares on your character's Health chart. If some boxes are already marked with asterisks from previous injuries, you continue filling the remainder in, from left to right. All lesser injuries — lethal or bashing — are pushed right as more and more aggravated damage is taken, until your character's Health chart is full of aggravated marks.

Once the rightmost Health box on your mortal character's chart is filled with lethal damage, all subsequent injuries are upgraded to aggravated, from left to right. He also bleeds to death or simply fades from life and one box, from left to right, is upgraded to aggravated damage per minute that passes without medical attention. Once your character's Health chart is full of asterisks, he's dead.

Healing

Characters who face danger and who live to tell the tale still need time to recover physically. They need to heal their injuries. Short of being fatally injured or falling unconscious (see "Incapacitation," above), your character can continue to act while any of his Health boxes remain empty. If any of his last three Health boxes show injuries, he is debilitated with penalties to his dice pools, but he can still be up and around.

Wounds recover at the following rates.

Bashing: One point is regained in 15 minutes.

Lethal: One point is regained in two days.

Aggravated: One point is regained in a week.

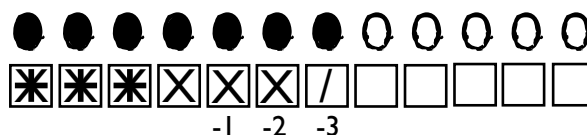
Note that some supernatural beings can recover from injuries at abnormally fast rates, even regenerating them

automatically or healing them at will. Humans, of course, do not have that luxury.

Your character doesn't have to rest or receive special attention to clear Health squares. They are cleared automatically as the prescribed amount of time passes. The exception is if he is ever reduced in Health such that he is dying (see above); this requires intensive medical care.

Lost Health is recovered on your character sheet from right to left — in the reverse direction in which wounds are recorded on your sheet. Your character's least severe injury (that in the rightmost box) is recovered first. The damage marked in each box is erased as your character becomes progressively healthier, until his last (leftmost) box is empty and he is fully healthy again.

Example: Your character's Health chart looks like this:



His rightmost wound is healed first. It's from bashing damage, so is recovered in 15 minutes. (If your character had been unconscious from this wound, he regains consciousness upon healing it.) His next three lethal injuries each heal over two days. One is erased from right to left as each two-day period passes. All lethal wounds are gone after six days. Finally, each of your character's three aggravated wounds is healed after one week. It takes three weeks for them all to heal, each asterisk being erased from right to left.

Of course, receiving medical attention increases your character's recovery time. See "Medicine" (p. 60) in Chapter 3 for the Skill's effects on wounds. Supernatural treatments such as spells, powers or ointments might restore lost Health at one point per success achieved on an Occult or other roll (according to the Storyteller's discretion).

Deprivation

People go hungry and without proper drinking water everyday in the World of Darkness. They might eke out a meager existence in poor or war-torn countries, or could struggle to survive in inner cities where brown water drips from corroded pipes. Or a person might fall ill, be unconscious, or be imprisoned and starved for days on end. He could even send his spirit on an incorporeal journey during which his body languishes. Regardless of the circumstances, denied proper food and water for an extended period, a mortal being suffers.

Your character can go a number of days equal to his Stamina before being inhibited by lack of water. Once that threshold is exceeded, he suffers one point of bashing damage for each day that passes. He can go without food for a number of days equal to his Stamina + Resolve. After that point, he suffers another point of bashing damage a day. Denied both food and water, he suffers two bashing wounds a day.



Without food and/or water over an extended period, your character becomes susceptible to disease. Any rolls made to resist disease suffer normal wound penalties when your character's Health falls to 3 or lower. The Storyteller might also call for rolls to fight off disease where he would not have done so when your character was healthy and immune.

The Survival Skill (p. 76) may allow your character to forage for sustenance for himself and any companions. The Iron Stomach Merit (p. 113) may also help him to persevere by drinking and eating substances that do not normally have any nutritional value.

Health points lost due to deprivation cannot be healed until your character gains access to a sustained supply of food and/or water. If he has gone without both and comes upon a water supply alone, the Health he has lost to thirst heals normally. Still denied food, however, he continues to lose Health to starvation and cannot heal damage lost to it until he gets a steady food supply, too.

Using the Survival Skill to find food and water for one day — or even a few consecutive days — doesn't constitute a "steady supply." It only suspends the loss of Health for those days, after which points are lost again.

Disease

Diseases ravage the World of Darkness. Sadly, normal people are their primary victims. Beyond the threats that nature poses, such as Ebola, cancer and even the common cold, a creature that feeds on people might transmit ailments. Other beings might even control the spread of disease to keep humanity cowed and afraid.

The Storyteller can use the threat of infection as a plot device to increase tension and introduce socially relevant topics to a story. She could introduce biological warfare or serial killers using disease as a weapon to take danger to new heights. Moral issues could arise as characters face unwitting disease carriers, or they deal with the infection of a friend, family member or ally.

Characters with appropriate training can research antidotes and cures for diseases. Perhaps the "disease" that drives people to drink blood or that keeps their bodies alive after natural death can be undone. Although finding a cure for HIV should not occur within the framework of your game, an Intelligence + Medicine roll can allow your character to detect the presence of HIV, hepatitis or other diseases, assuming he has access to the appropriate equipment and a sample of a subject's blood. Developing a cure can take hours, days or years. Developing an antidote is an extended action (Intelligence + Medicine), with a goal of 20 or more successes depending on the elusiveness of the ailment.

If your character suffers from a disease, she may take damage over time based on her rate of decline, on her Attributes or on the nature of the illness. The Storyteller determines how often your character must face damage from the disease — every hour, day or week. Each period typically imposes a number of Health points of damage

that are suffered automatically. Stamina + Resolve (see "Resisting Poison or Disease," p. 49) might be rolled to resist harm from illness in a contested action. A number of successes must be achieved in excess of the damage incurred per period. If insufficient successes are rolled, the full damage for that period is suffered.

Damage from illness can be treated as bashing or lethal (or aggravated if the ailment is supernatural in origin). The effects of the ailment might also pose penalties to Stamina + Resolve rolls — say from -1 for a cold to -3 for tuberculosis. These penalties might apply to all other dice pools as well. Or, the Storyteller could decide that symptoms can be ignored until damage suffered from illness reduces your character to three or fewer Health points, and wound penalties are imposed. It might also be impossible to heal damage from illness until the disease itself is overcome.

Beating an illness can involve extended or even extended and contested Stamina + Resolve rolls. A common cold might call for a total of three to five successes, with one roll made per day. Fighting cancer might demand 30 or more successes, with one roll made per month. Bonuses gained might reflect medications taken (+1) or extensive medical treatments (+1 to +3).

Drugs

People take drugs all the time to escape the hardships of their lives. In the World of Darkness, where humanity has a subconscious, ingrained awareness that it is prey for monstrous predators, drugs are a frequent means of short-term happiness and oblivion.

It's impossible to discuss every drug that your character might take or be exposed to, but the list below offers directions on how to handle various kinds. The intent here is to address the effects of recreational and habitual drugs taken in tolerable doses. An overdose, whether self-induced or inflicted upon a victim, is covered under "Poisons and Toxins" (p. 180). The former use simply alters a character's perceptions and ability to function normally. The latter leaps straight to threatening to kill the character.

A tolerable dose of a drug alters a character's awareness and capacity to function. Your character might take the drug willingly or it might be slipped to him, but the application is not immediately life threatening. It could be possible to fight the effects of a drug by making Stamina + Resolve rolls. See "Resisting Poison or Disease" (p. 49) for details. The potency or dosage of drug taken can influence such rolls. A potent drug imposes a -2 to -3 penalty. A mild drug or small dose can impose a -1 penalty to ignore the effects.

The Storyteller might rule that a drug's effects are a genuine challenge to overcome; contested and extended rolls are required to do so. Rolls might be made every hour, and successes gained in that period suggest how well your character resists for the period of the roll. A drug might be assumed to have a standing number of successes against

which you roll each time. Say, three for a mild substance and six for a potent one. If your roll nets more successes, your character fights off the effects for an hour. If your roll gets fewer successes, your character suffers the drug's effects for an hour. Rolls are made from hour to hour until the effects of the drug wear off or you accumulate a number of successes set by the Storyteller. At that point, your character beats the drug completely. The total number of successes required to overcome once and for all is dependent on the strength of the drug, perhaps from five to 12.

- **Alcohol:** Subtract one die from any Dexterity-, Intelligence- and Wits-based dice pools for every drink your character consumes in excess of his Stamina in an hour. (Defense is also reduced accordingly.) Meanwhile, Social rolls can gain a +1 bonus per drink (maximum +3). If your character is a mean drunk, turn this modifier into a Social penalty. These effects fade at the rate of one die per hour until all the alcohol is purged from your character's system.

- **Marijuana:** Lose one die from any Dexterity-, Intelligence-, Resolve- and Wits-based dice pools for every hit your character takes from a joint or bong within an hour. (Defense is also reduced accordingly.) This effect fades completely an hour after the last toke, unless your character continues to "medicate" himself.

- **Hallucinogens:** All dice pools lose one to three dice and traits such as Defense lose one to three points depending on the strength of the hallucinogen. Your character may experience confusing, frightening or enraging

hallucinations, although he may manage to realize that they exist only in his drugged mind. (Roll Intelligence + Streetwise or Empathy, with the -1 to -3 penalty in place, to gain any such "clarity," after which Stamina + Resolve rolls can be made to resist the effects.) Composure is likely to be affected by a "trip," with a bonus or penalty depending on whether your character hallucinates when he sees anything, or he assumes that anything he sees is a hallucination. He might see an ordinary person and interpret her as a monster, or see a monster and interpret her as an ordinary person. The effects of hallucinogens persist for (8 minus Stamina) hours.

- **Cocaine/crack/speed:** Your character may gain a bonus die in Strength- or Stamina-based rolls, although he may also become edgy and paranoid (-1 to Social rolls). The Storyteller bases the effects of the drug on the volume that your character takes, on how pure it is and on your character's state of mind.

- **Heroin/morphine/barbiturates:** Pain subsides (wound penalties are ignored), but your character enters a dreamy state for (8 minus Stamina) hours. All dice pools and Resistance traits such as Defense are reduced by two during that time.

Electrocution

Lightning strikes, a live wire hits your character or he touches a conducting item. Some supernatural beings even possess mastery over electricity and can direct it at



your character. Electrocution automatically causes bashing damage per turn of exposure. No attack roll is made.

If harm from electricity is more than just instantaneous — there's a constant flow such as through power cables — a victim may not be able to escape. His muscles contract, which can prevent him from pulling away. Roll Strength as a reflexive action in each turn of contact. Failure means your character is still connected to the source and suffers its damage each turn until a successful roll is made.

Source	Damage
Minor; wall socket	4 (B)
Major; protective fence	6 (B)
Severe; junction box	8 (B)
Fatal; main line feed/subway rail	10 (B)

Worn armor provides no protection against electrocution. A magical kind conjured up by supernatural beings might at the Storyteller's discretion.

Explosives

The best way to do a lot of damage in a short amount of time is with an explosive. They're often used commercially to clear rock or to demolish buildings, or by the military to take out resilient targets such as tanks, bridges or enemy installations. Explosives in the hands of anyone else in the world usually suggests one thing: desperation. The user is prepared to go to extreme lengths to destroy something or someone. Assuming your character can even lay his hands on and use explosives properly, he probably seeks to lay waste to an enemy, be it human or inhuman, or to destroy something important to that foe. Alternatively, he may be desperate to get through a door or to gain access to a safe.

The Storyteller must remember that these weapons aren't widely available, and many of them are strictly illegal. The Status Merit (p. 116) is required to have personal access to explosives. The Resources, Allies or Streetwise traits might also be applied to acquire these weapons. Of course, characters can always steal what they need.

Your character may throw explosives, such as grenades or pipe bombs, or set them in a stationary location and wait for a target to pass, as in the case of a timed or triggered bomb.

See "Throwing," p. 67, to determine how far an explosive can be thrown. Items marked with a "+" on the Explosives Chart are considered aerodynamic. Those without the symbol are not aerodynamic and cannot be thrown as far (or at all). If your character throws an explosive, roll Dexterity + Athletics to determine whether she gets it where she intends. Some thrown explosives such as grenades offer bonus dice to your attack roll, while clumsy ones such as Molotov cocktails can impose penalties. Any successes on your throwing roll indicate that your character lands the explosive where she intends. On a failed roll, the explosive doesn't land where your character intends. The Storyteller decides where it lands, and the blast area

(see below) may not reach the intended target. A dramatic failure may put the grenade at your character's feet or in the lap of an ally. Note that if an explosive has a large blast area and the item isn't thrown far, the thrower could be caught in the explosion.

If your character sets a bomb in a strategic place such as on a bridge support or in a mailbox, and the bomb has a timer or trigger, roll Intelligence + Stealth to actually put it in place without it being detected. The relative subtlety of the explosive may apply modifiers to this roll (+2 if it's small, -2 if it's homebrewed and clunky). Then roll Intelligence + Science to determine whether your character locates, sets and detonates the bomb correctly. Modifier dice based the explosive's reliability are applied to your pool (+1 if the technology is proven, +3 if the item is almost foolproof, -1 if it's homebrewed and -3 if it's jury-rigged). On a failure, the bomb is mistriggered, its explosion is muffled or its placement is flawed. A dramatic failure while using a set explosive may detonate the bomb at the wrong time or the device proves a dud.

A grenade or bomb has a Blast Area and Damage rating as indicated on the Explosives Chart. Blast Area is the diameter in yards in which the explosion takes effect. Anyone in that area suffers the listed Damage automatically. The same number of dice is also rolled, with any successes being added to the total damage done. So, an explosive with a Damage of 4 inflicts four Health points automatically, and four dice are rolled. Each success adds another point of damage to the total. If three successes are rolled, total damage in this case is seven.

Damage can be bashing or lethal, depending on the item used. (Someone who jumps on an explosive to save others nearby might be the only one to suffer harm, but he could take aggravated damage. An ordinary person might muffle a grenade this way, but larger explosives cannot be smothered.)

As with most Firearms combat, a target's Defense is useless against explosives. A potential target can, however, go prone as a reaction to the threat of an explosive. See "Going Prone," p. 164. Doing so automatically decreases damage inflicted by two. (A prone target does not impose a penalty to a roll to throw an explosive at him. The attack isn't necessarily aimed at the target, but at his vicinity. If at least one success is rolled, the explosive lands where intended and the prone target could suffer damage.)

Armor automatically protects against explosive impact and burning with its rating against gunshots. So, a flak jacket provides three points of protection. These points are automatically subtracted from the explosive's damage, rather than subtracting from any dice pool. Thus, if your character wears a flak jacket and a bomb does four damage, your character suffers only one Health. ("Bullet-proof" armor such as a kevlar vest, flak jacket or full riot gear does not downgrade damage from explosions like it does damage from Firearms attacks. See "Armor," p. 166.)

Anyone who is concealed behind a barrier or object or who is fully covered when an explosive goes off also

receives automatic protection. The rating of their concealment (1 to 3) is subtracted from the damage that the explosive inflicts. So, someone who is substantially concealed when a bomb goes off suffers three less damage than normal. Full cover needs to be penetrated by an explosion to affect anyone behind it. See “Cover,” p. 162.

The Explosives Chart details a few weapons. Many variables play into the effects of an explosive, so the chart offers only broad suggestions regarding these devices.

Falling

Your character tries to jump between buildings, but doesn't make it. He tries to scale a ladder but someone above pushes it away from the wall. Or your character is simply thrown from a height by a powerful opponent. Regardless of the reason, your character plummets and may be hurt on impact. Falling damage is bashing, unless your character lands on a fence spike or broken glass, or hits the ground at terminal velocity. A person suffers one bashing wound for every three yards fallen. Terminal velocity is achieved in a fall of 30 yards or more; damage is lethal at that point. So, if your character falls 30 yards, he loses 10 Health points to lethal damage.

Once your character reaches terminal velocity, the damage he suffers remains 10 Health no matter how far he actually falls. Thus, falls from 30 yards and 100 yards both inflict 10 lethal damage.

The Storyteller may allow armor to be subtracted automatically from damage taken, assuming it can absorb the kind of damage incurred, and if it makes sense. Gen-

erally speaking, no protective clothing helps once someone reaches terminal velocity.

The Storyteller may allow your character to try to break his fall by some means, perhaps by grabbing for awnings or twisting to strike soil rather than concrete. A single Dexterity + Athletics roll may be called for, with each success gained diminishing damage taken. There may be a limit to how much damage can be shaved, though — say, three. There's only so much that desperate flailing and grabbing can do when someone falls from a significant height. Efforts to slow one's fall are usually useless at terminal velocity.

Falling into deep water, snow or a pile of pillows might diminish damage taken automatically, if the Storyteller allows it. No such “soft” landing is possible once terminal velocity is achieved. At that speed, hitting water is like hitting concrete.

Fatigue

Sometimes the demands of dealing with the world and the threats it poses do not allow for such luxuries as sleep. Your character may need to remain vigilant or on guard over a person or item. He may need to get across country as soon as possible, but an airplane ticket is out of the question. So, just how long can he remain awake, and to what effect?

Your character can push himself beyond normal limits, but exhaustion soon impairs his abilities. Almost anyone can go without rest for 24 hours, but to continue on is challenging. For every six-hour period that your charac-

Explosives Chart

Type	Throwing Modifier	Blast Area	Damage	Size	Cost	Example
Incendiary*	-1	2	2	1	n/a	Molotov Cocktail
Concussion**	+2	3	4	1	•••	Concussion Grenade†
Shredding	+2	3	4	1	•••	Shrapnel Grenade†
Single Destructive	+1	4	4+	1	•••	Stick of Dynamite
High Explosive***	n/a	20+	6+	1-3	••••	Plastique

Blast Area: The diameter in yards in which an explosion occurs.

Throwing Modifier: The attack-roll bonus to throw an explosive at a chosen target. Explosives marked “n/a” cannot normally be thrown.

Cost: The minimum dots in the Resources Merit usually required to purchase the explosive. The “n/a” entry indicates that the item can be created rather than purchased.

* Incendiary devices ignite the target (see “Fire”). Damage delivered by the explosion is bashing, while damage caused by the fire is lethal.

** Concussion explosives deliver bashing damage and knock the target down (see “Knockdown,” p. 168).

*** Timed or triggered bombs that hold a variable amount of dynamite, plastique or other explosive cause damage to surrounding structures and ignite flammable materials, which complicates damage. The figures listed are suggestions only.

† Explosives that are aerodynamic when thrown.

ter persists beyond 24 hours, make a Stamina + Resolve roll. If it fails, he falls asleep. If the roll succeeds, your character remains alert and active. Spending one Willpower on a roll adds three dice to the effort. No more than one Willpower point can be dedicated to a single roll to remain awake.

Burning the candle at both ends impairs your character's performance. For each six-hour period in excess of 24 hours in which he foregoes sleep, his dice pools suffer a cumulative -1 penalty. He has trouble focusing and might suffer mild hallucinations. This penalty also applies to successive Stamina + Resolve rolls to remain awake.

If your character performs physically demanding activities such as running, conducting combat or performing a magical ritual while he stays awake, the Storyteller can impose an additional -1 to -3 penalty on your rolls to remain awake.

The longest a person can go without sleep is a number of days equal to the lowest of his Stamina or Resolve, at which point he passes out.

Once your character does sleep, it's for eight hours, plus one hour for each six-hour period (in excess of 24 hours) that he forced himself to remain active.

Fire

Your character comes in contact with a candle or an inferno. Either way, he gets burned. Fire automatically inflicts lethal damage per turn of exposure (no attack roll is required). The larger the flame, the more harm that's inflicted. The hotter the flame, the greater the injury.

Size of Fire	Damage
Torch	1
Bonfire	2
Inferno	3

Heat of Fire	Damage Modifier
Candle (first-degree burns)	—
Torch (second-degree burns)	+1
Bunsen burner (third-degree burns)	+2
Chemical fire/molten metal	+3

So, a fire the size of a bonfire (2) and with the intensity of a torch (+1) inflicts three damage per turn of contact.

In general, if exposure to fire persists for more than a turn, it catches anything combustible. Your character continues to take full damage, even if he escapes the original source of the flame.

Depending on the accelerator involved, the size of a fire can be reduced by one point per turn. Your character might stop, drop and roll or be targeted with a hose or fire extinguisher. The Storyteller might rule that a fire goes out immediately under some circumstances (local oxygen

is removed with a controlled explosion or your character is completely immersed in water). Or, a fire could continue to burn despite efforts to put it out, such as with a grease fire when water is poured on it.

Most armor can block its rating in fire damage automatically for a number of turns equal to the gear's rating. Damage that exceeds armor rating in that period is transferred directly to your character. Once exposure exceeds armor's rating in turns, all fire damage is inflicted directly to your character.

So, armor rated 2 against most harm eliminates two points of damage in the first two turns that your character is on fire. As of turn three, your character gets no protection from his armor.

Characters who are reduced to zero Health by fire but who still manage to survive (through first aid or mystical healing) might suffer a permanent impairment (reduced Physical Attribute), nerve damage (reduced Mental Attribute) or severe and disfiguring scars (reduced Presence), at the Storyteller's discretion. Such impairment can be defined as a Flaw (see p. 217) gained during play.

Poisons and Toxins

While some poisons or toxins might affect behavior and awareness as drugs do, most simply inflict lethal damage. These substances threaten a character's very existence. Indeed, drugs can do so too when overdosed. Poisons, toxins and drug overdoses must be delivered to a victim by a required means: injection, ingestion, inhalation or touch.

Injection: The substance is introduced directly into the bloodstream, by a needle or through injury such as by a sword coated with venom. At least one success is required on an attack roll to deliver the injection on a resisting target. Unless the poison is designed to damage or destroy the blood itself, vampires are probably immune.

Ingestion: The poison is administered in food or drink; these substances usually take longer to activate than others (say, an hour as opposed to immediate effects). Vampires are immune to most ingested poisons.

Inhalation: The poison is breathed in as a gas. Vampires are immune to most inhaled poisons.

Touch: Mere skin contact is all that's required to activate the poison. A touch is often sufficient to deliver



the toxin (see p. 157), and a target's armor may apply as a penalty to the roll.

Once delivered, the poison automatically deals damage (usually lethal, but a knockout gas could cause bashing) equal to its toxicity level. Some substances inflict damage only once. Others might inflict it for a number of turns or once per hour until purged or until the effect runs its course. It could be possible to resist the effects of such substances by rolling Stamina + Resolve in a reflexive and contested action. If more successes are rolled than damage is inflicted by the toxin, damage is ignored completely. If damage is equal to higher than success rolled, all damage is delivered as normal. Such a contested roll might occur once or in each period in which a toxin causes harm.

Poison/Toxin	Toxicity
Ammonia (inhalation)	3
Bleach (ingestion)	4
Cyanide (ingestion or inhalation)	7
Drug/Alcohol Abuse (ingestion, inhalation, injection)	3 to 7
Salmonella (ingestion)	2
Venom (injection or ingestion)	3 to 8

Temperature Extremes

Extreme heat or cold has an adverse effect on your character. It may impose penalties on Dexterity- and/or Strength-based rolls, or even affect his mental acuity by penalizing rolls involving Wits. (Defense might be reduced, too.) Penalties could be a cumulative -1 per hour of exposure. If dice pools are reduced to zero as a result of exposure, your character is physically exhausted and immobilized, or delusional. An Attribute point could even be lost permanently for prolonged exposure. Frostbite, hypothermia and heat exhaustion have dire consequences.

The Storyteller can also represent extreme weather conditions through the accumulation of damage. Such damage may be resisted for a number of hours equal to your character's Stamina + Resolve. Every hour after that inflicts a point of bashing damage that can't be healed until your character is no longer exposed to the extreme condition.



Example of Play

David's investigation into local mob boss Raymond Diodati has made the PI a target. Little does David know that when he leaves his office one night, a hired assassin awaits. David locks the door and prepares to turn down the hallway out of the building when the killer emerges from around a corner behind him.

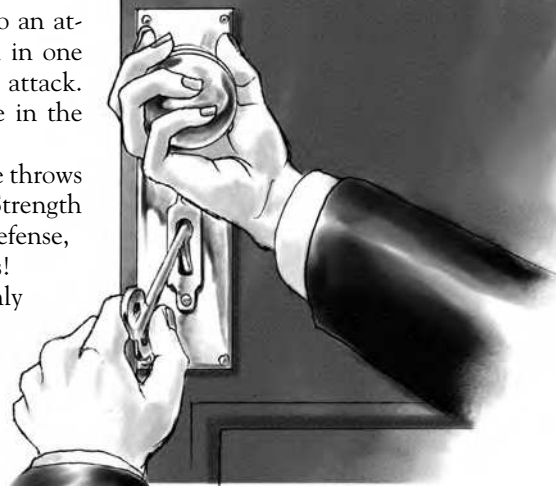
It's a surprise attack, but the Storyteller allows David a chance to recognize the danger. She calls for a Wits + Composure roll. David has 4 Wits and 3 Composure, for dice pool of seven. No special modifiers offer David any bonuses. The roll turns up 1, 3, 4, 7, 7, 8 and 9 — two successes, more than enough to realize that something is wrong. The Storyteller decides that David sees the reflection of the killer in his office window.

With David alert, Initiative is rolled. David's 3 Dexterity and 3 Composure make for an Initiative trait of 6. His player rolls a 7, for a total Initiative of 13 for the scene. The Storyteller gets a total of 9 for the assassin. David acts first in the turn. The hallway offers no cover. He could go prone, but that would still leave him a target. His only exit is further away than is his intended murderer, so he decides to rush the killer rather than run away. David's Speed is 10 (2 Strength + 3 Dexterity + 5). The killer is more than 10 yards away, so David has to run to close the distance in one turn. Normally, that means he can perform no other action in the turn. David charges, though, so an attack can be added at the end of his run, all in one action, as long as it's a Weaponry or Brawl attack. (David also loses the benefits of his Defense in the turn for charging.)

David has no weapon on his person, so he throws a punch at the assassin. David's player rolls 2 Strength + 3 Brawl, but loses a die for the target's 1 Defense, and gets no successes on the four dice. A miss!

David's assailant, meanwhile, must suddenly contend with a charging target. The Storyteller rolls the killer's 3 Dexterity + 4 Firearms, with a +2 bonus for his gun. Normally in a Firearms attack David's Defense wouldn't apply. But under these circumstances, the gun is used when the opponents are in close combat. That means David's Defense could apply, expect that he charged in the turn, which negates the trait as a drawback of the maneuver. David's Defense is therefore a wash.

David doesn't wear any armor, either. If he did, its rating against Firearms attacks would be subtracted from the attacker's dice pool. The Storyteller's nine-dice roll produces two successes. That means two points of lethal damage. David has 8 Health and has not been hurt previously, so his player draws an "X" in his two leftmost Health boxes. The Storyteller decides that David suffers a nasty graze across the shoulder.



Both participants have acted, so the second turn begins. David gets to go first again and targets the shooter's gun hand with a kick. The Storyteller decides that a -4 penalty applies for the small target, along with the killer's 1 Defense. David's player decides that something has to happen now. At the moment, all he'll be able to do is make a chance roll because his dice pool will be reduced to zero (2 Strength + 3 Brawl - 4 penalty - 1 Defense). The player therefore spends a Willpower point for three bonus dice. A 2, 9 and 10 result — two successes, but the 10 is re-rolled. Another 10 comes up, for three successes and another roll of the die is made. This time an 8 is pro-

duced for an astounding four successes. The killer suffers four bashing damage and, the Storyteller announces, a nearly broken hand.

If David's player had not spent a Willpower point, he would have made a chance roll alone. A success would have been possible only on a 10 (which would have been re-rolled as per the "10 again" rule). But he would also have faced the prospect of a dramatic failure if a 1 turned up. In that case, the Storyteller might have decided that David fell down rather than kicked his target.

The gun hand having received a vicious kick, the Storyteller decides to roll the assassin's Strength + Athletics to hold onto the weapon. Since the man had only 7 Health to start with, he has only three unmarked Health boxes left. That means he's close to suffering wound penalties. No successes are achieved on the Strength + Athletics roll, so the gun goes

flying (the Storyteller decides) four yards (a distance equal to the damage done in the attack).

Dismayed by this turn of events, the killer pulls a knife, which counts as his action for the turn.

In turn three, David quickly deliberates what to do. He doesn't want to wind up on the business end of that knife, so he could dodge. He wouldn't be able to perform any other actions in the turn, but he could bob and weave to avoid the blade. That would double his Defense for the turn. David recognizes that he has his opponent on the ropes, however, so decides to press the attack. He takes another swing. This time, the player rolls 2 Strength + 3 Brawl - 1 for the assassin's Defense. The four dice produce one success, which is one more bashing wound for the killer. Stars burst before the man's eyes from a blow to the head. He now has a bashing wound penalty (a "/") in his third-to-last Health box, so all of his actions suffer a -1 penalty. If he suffers two more points of damage, the gangster may fall unconscious. At that point a reflexive

Stamina roll (in this case, two dice) would be made for him each turn to remain conscious and any action that might be possible would suffer a -3 penalty. (Stamina rolls to remain conscious do not suffer wound penalties.)





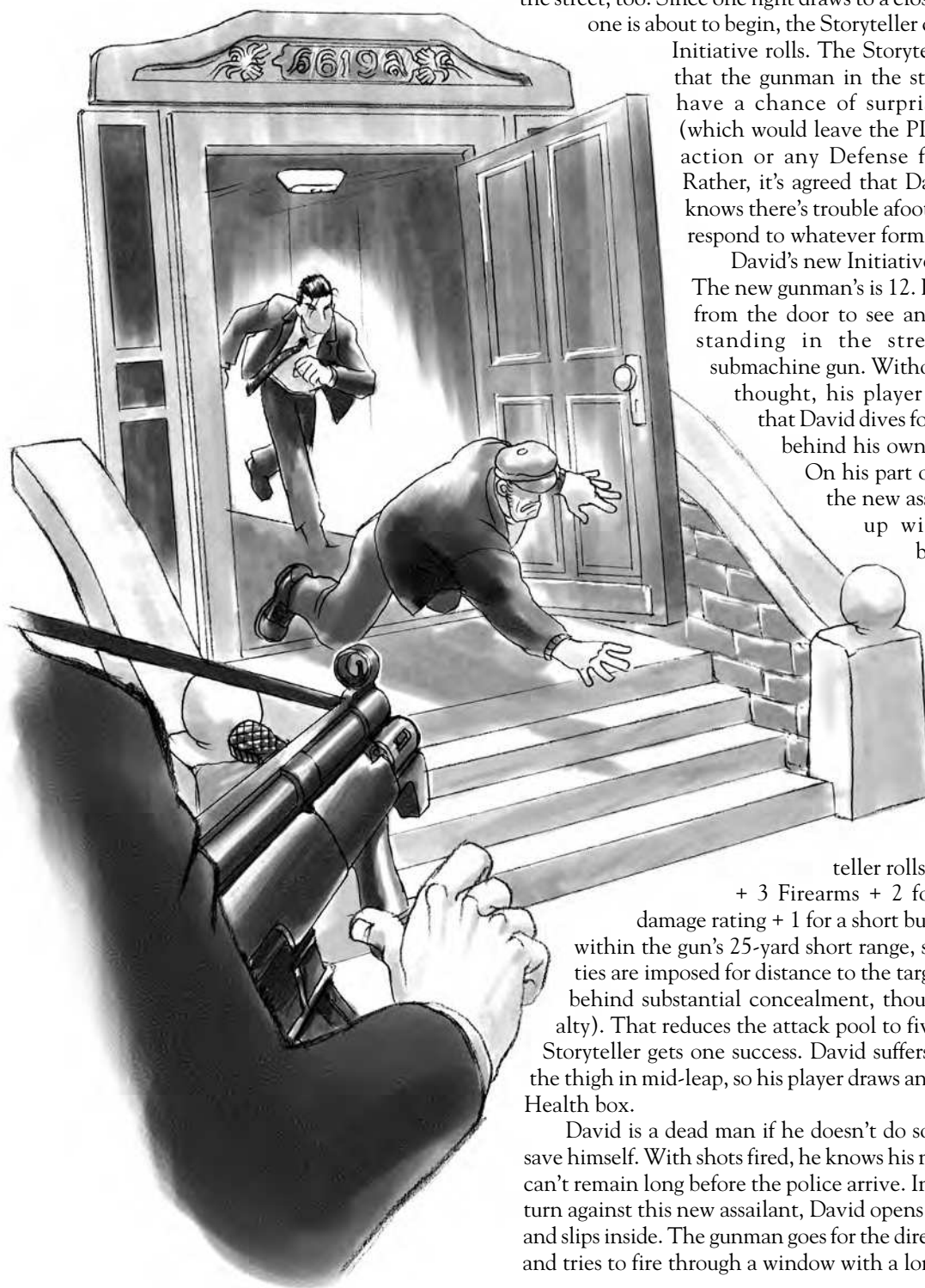
Rather than be finished off, the would-be killer decides to turn and run. He gets a whole turn's head start on David. His Speed is normally 10, but it's reduced to 9 due to his injuries. The thug runs, so he travels 18 yards. That's far enough to get through a rear door and out of the building. Since David has already acted in the turn, he cannot give chase yet.

In turn four, David goes after his would-be assailant. Little does he know that Boss Diodati has a gunman in the street, too. Since one fight draws to a close and a new one is about to begin, the Storyteller calls for new Initiative rolls.

The Storyteller decides that the gunman in the street doesn't have a chance of surprising David (which would leave the PI without an action or any Defense for a turn). Rather, it's agreed that David already knows there's trouble afoot and he can respond to whatever form it takes.

David's new Initiative total is 13. The new gunman's is 12. David bursts from the door to see another killer standing in the street with a submachine gun. Without a second thought, his player announces that David dives for protection behind his own parked car.

On his part of Initiative, the new assassin opens up with a short burst of autofire.



The Storyteller rolls 2 Dexterity + 3 Firearms + 2 for the gun's damage rating + 1 for a short burst. David is within the gun's 25-yard short range, so no penalties are imposed for distance to the target. David is behind substantial concealment, though (-3 penalty). That reduces the attack pool to five dice. The Storyteller gets one success. David suffers a bullet to the thigh in mid-leap, so his player draws an X in a third Health box.

David is a dead man if he doesn't do something to save himself. With shots fired, he knows his new attacker can't remain long before the police arrive. In the second turn against this new assailant, David opens his car door and slips inside. The gunman goes for the direct approach and tries to fire through a window with a long burst. In-



side his car with the windows closed, David is under full cover. In order for the shots to harm David, the gunman must first hit the window and penetrate it.

The Storyteller's dice pool starts with 2 Dexterity + 3 Firearms + 2 for the gun's damage rating + 3 for a long burst. Targeting the window imposes a -1 penalty, for a total of nine dice. The attacker's pool produces a 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 10! That's three successes. The two 10's are rolled again. One turns up a 3 and the other a 9. That's four successes, total.

The car window has a Durability of 1 (and Size of 3 and Structure of 4). The four successes exceed that Durability score by three. That means three dice are rolled as a second dice pool to see if David suffers harm in the attack. (The window also loses three of its four Structure points, so is all but completely shattered.)

The Storyteller rolls the three dice and gets three successes! David suffers three more damage to lethal injuries, reducing him to two unmarked Health boxes. (Six of his 8 Health boxes have lethal damage marks in them —

X's.) He's a mess and now incurs a -1 wound penalty on all his actions.

In the next turn, David turns over the ignition and floors the gas pedal, wracked by pain the whole time. The Storyteller requires a Dexterity + Drive roll for David to avoid a mishap. His 3 Dexterity combines with his 2 Drive and the 2 Handling of his car, but his player also loses a die for injuries and the Storyteller imposes a -1 penalty for laying low in the driver seat. One success results on the five dice, and David screeches away from the shooting gallery. The remaining thug curses as police sirens sound in the distance and he has bad news to report to his employer.

David has received the "message" to back off, but he doesn't plan to do so for long. As soon as he recuperates (it will take him 12 days to recover from all his wounds at two days each), he'll go public with the evidence that he has. If, however, Boss Diodati can find him in that time — or better yet gets to David's loved ones — the PI may be encouraged to disappear altogether.



David turned off the car radio in disgust. Nothing but crap these days. Not like when he was growing up. That was a time of great music, what they now called "classic" rock.

He drove on in silence. The road would have been pitch-black but for the glow of the moon. There weren't any streetlights this far out on the back roads. He'd be at the turn-off soon, where asphalt would turn into gravel, and then miles of logging road would lead him deep into the forest. But he wasn't interested in trees.

He still smoldered with anger over the remarks that girl had made back at the gas station. She had seemed so nice at first, clearly bored and looking for conversation. She'd asked him what he did for a living; he hadn't volunteered it. When he told her, she broke out laughing. That was to be expected. But when he explained how serious it was, she just kept laughing. He dropped a bill on the counter, took his drink and stormed out.

Then there was the old Indian, standing by his car with that stone-faced-chief look. He told David to turn around and go home, that what he was looking for was a hoax. That, more than anything else so far, convinced David that he was on the right trail.

He had only two grand of his advance left, and still no confirmed sightings of Sasquatch. He couldn't turn in a book full of conjecture. The market was crowded by those already. He'd sold his book to the publisher with the promise that he'd have eyewitness reports. Now, after six months of travel and interviews, he'd come up dry. He had to turn to the only reliable witness he had left: himself.

All the clues, legends and lore pointed to this stretch of woods. If he couldn't get a sighting within a month, he'd have to call it quits. But he was sure this was it, that he was on to something. The old man only confirmed it.

David was so lost in thought that he nearly missed his turnoff. He suddenly saw it ahead and hit the brakes, hydroplaning on the rain-slick road. Before he could grasp what was happening, a giant, furred shape leapt in front of his car. The front end slammed into the thing, hurtling David forward. Before the airbag exploded and blocked his view completely, he saw a long snout and green eyes. Then the car flipped, sending David into oblivion.

Chapter 8: Storytelling

You hear the faint clack of something hard hitting the concrete behind you. The sound is rhythmical, as if something is following you, its claws scraping with every step. You turn, but see nothing. Only the empty street, your own shadow cast by the light of the full moon. You suddenly feel hot breath on your neck, sending a shiver down your spine.

What do you do?

What Is Storytelling?

Storytelling is a type of roleplaying game, a game of make-believe in which each participant pretends to be somebody else, or pretends that he's really something he's not, such as an astronaut or spy. The most familiar form of roleplaying is the sort of freeform acting we did as children when we played Cops and Robbers or Cowboys and Indians. From these humble roots was born the roleplaying-game hobby.

Modern roleplaying games grew out of wargames and boardgames when players wondered what it would be like to play a single individual rather than a whole army. That was in the late '60s and early '70s. Then, the most successful roleplaying games were based on fantasy and science-fiction themes.

Roleplaying games evolved as more and more people entered the hobby. Today's games are more sophisticated than Cops and Robbers, but are based on the same principles of make-believe. There are various rules to prevent arguments and to better define your pretend character, and everyone strives for a sort of immersive, imaginative experience that's more detailed and believable than anything we played as kids.

And that brings us to Storytelling. Many roleplaying games are more concerned with rules and statistics than the drama created within the game. Some people call those *roll*-playing games, since they're more focused on dice rolling than *role*-playing. Storytelling certainly provides for a simple and consistent set of rules, but it seeks more than just dice rolls and character sheets. Storytelling is about drama, the wonder of a make-believe tale told by the players. Good Storytelling is always surprising, taking unexpected twists and turns, and players often find their characters speaking and acting in ways that are strange and novel, taking on a life of their own.

Unlike child's play or corporate roleplaying, Storytelling can strive to be an art form. This might sound pretentious, but anybody who's played roleplaying games long enough has experienced more than one epiphany, a moment when the game seems to become a living entity, a Muse dictating strange and wonderful things to the players. These moments are worth striving for.

Throughout this chapter are tips and hints that will hopefully lead to these epiphanies. But it's not a recipe that, if followed exactly, will always produce the same result. It takes active work on everyone's part, and a desire to achieve more than the mundane.

Just don't get lost in the Ivory Tower. Don't deride those who see gaming as a fun hobby (which it is), or those whose roleplaying stories don't aim higher. Instead, *encourage* and *persuade* players to stretch their boundaries. Storytelling is about achieving something great through an interactive tale, but not at the expense of fun.

*I fear sleep, never knowing
where it may lead,*

*A mineshaft of vague
horror with no end to it.*

*Every window I see opens
on the infinite,*

*And my mind, still haunted
haunted by this vertigo,*

*Probes and probes at the
unanswering void.*

— Baudelaire, "The Abyss"

Telling Tales

Storytelling isn't about standing before an audience and reciting memorized lines. It's a shared experience in which every player is involved in creating the story as it unfolds. Unlike interactive computer games, there is no prewritten script — players don't just stumble along triggering occasional video playbacks. They *create* events as they go, in competitive cooperation with the Storyteller. The only limit is your imagination. This has been said many times before about many different media, but roleplaying is the truest example of it. Since Storytelling takes place in a collaborative imagined space, uninhibited by the limits of screen pixel count or broadband connection speed, anything can happen as long as it's agreed upon by the players and Storyteller. There are certainly some rules, but they're intended to aid consistency and believability. They can always be thrown out if the Storyteller thinks they impede the actual story.

The majority of this book presents information for both players and Storytellers. This chapter is aimed at the Storyteller alone, the single player most responsible for forming the shape and scope of the story. Players fill in valuable details, and can take the game in interesting directions, but the Storyteller, like a film director, ultimately decides what parts of the collaborative script are made a part of the story. He does so not in the editing room, but on the fly as the game is played.

There are a number of tools and structures that writers traditionally use to create stories, novels, plays and films. Some of them can be quite handy for organizing the Storytelling experience, to keep a session from becoming a random series of events. The most useful of these are presented below. Storytellers are encouraged to experiment with their own techniques and crafts.

The Parts of a Story

Most long-form stories are divided into segments of one sort or another, to allow actors and the audience a breather between major plot points. Storytelling games are no different.

The different units of time within a story — a turn, a scene — are covered in the Dramatic Systems chapter (see p. 120). Below we introduce the concepts by which we enhance the sense of connection between game sessions. With the real-world pressures of job and family, you might be able to get your friends together only once a week, making it easy to lose the big picture of your tale. By dividing your games into chapters, stories and chronicles, you can better maintain a sense of cohesion and purpose over time.

Chapters

A chapter is the shortest part of a story, and most stories are made up of many chapters. A single chapter typically represents one game session or night of play. Like a chapter in a novel or an episode in a matinee serial, a

chapter is long enough to establish one or more key events in the story. The players' characters discover that their rival is smuggling black-market goods through a warehouse by the river, and go to investigate. If exploring that discovery takes too long to resolve (perhaps the players spend a lot of time preparing for their outing), the chapter might end on a cliffhanger, leaving the characters' situation unresolved at a point of danger or uncertainty.

Basically, a chapter comprises whatever events can take place within the span of a single game session. This can be handled rather loosely and chaotically, or the Storyteller can attempt to weave the disparate threads of player activity into what appears, by the end of the night, to have been a tightly plotted tale. Doing so requires guiding the players as they go, keeping them from veering in directions incidental to the plot. Tips on doing so are given below, in the section "How to Tell Stories" (see p. 192).

Stories

A complete story introduces and resolves a single plot (see p. 191). A simple plot might unfold in a single game session, or 10 sessions might be required for a grand, epic plot. There can be many subplots within a story, but overall a story has a single, major focus, such as a mystery to uncover or a death to avenge.

To continue with the example of the rival's warehouse, perhaps the story is about discovering and shutting down the business. The first chapter is spent seeding clues for the players' characters to uncover. The second chapter involves their discovery of the warehouse and its location. The third and final chapter sees them shut it down — or fail to do so.

Chronicles

A chronicle is a series of stories, most often interrelated or that build toward a grand plot. But a chronicle can also be identified by its cast of recurring characters. It's like a television series made up of individual stories (episodes) all about a group of characters or their mission. Some series strive for complicated plots spread out over a season of episodes (such as *The Shield*), while others prefer self-contained episodes whose plots have little effect on successive episodes (such as *The Simpsons*).

Perhaps your chronicle is about toppling the warehouse owner's crime empire. Discovering and shutting down the warehouse is only one stage of that quest. There are many more cesspools of crime to expose before the boss can be hauled off to jail.

The Meaning of a Story

The *parts* of a story help to organize the roleplaying experience and give it cohesion over a series of game sessions. The *meaning* of a story reveals what the story is about — not what happens in it (that's the plot, described below), but how events matter.

Theme

Stories and chronicles have themes (sometimes chapters can also have themes). A theme sums up what a story is about, the so-called moral or lesson it tells. It might be “Crime never pays,” “Violence begets violence,” or “A hero shall rise.” Theme is useful in reminding the Storyteller where he stands as events unfold. The wild give and take of ideas and events in a game can often be overwhelming, and the Storyteller might find that his story takes a direction he didn’t anticipate or doesn’t even understand. The best way to get back on solid ground is to remember the theme and steer events back to it. It doesn’t matter what happens, as long as events illustrate the theme.

For example, in our crime-fighting chronicle, the theme might be “Crime corrupts even the just.” In other words, it’s about the characters’ struggle to remain moral when confronting corruption. They’ll be tempted to resort to all sorts of expedient but unjust (even sadistic) methods of overcoming their enemies. The bottom line is they must follow the law lest they risk becoming as bad as their rivals. If they destroy the crime empire but tarnish their own reputations and souls through violence, lying and theft, do they really win?

This theme gives the Storyteller a tool by which to focus any scene on the overriding purpose or vision of his story. Perhaps he expects the players’ characters to be tempted to mete out their own style of justice, but to ulti-

mately take the thugs they capture to jail. Instead, the characters succumb to temptation and take the thugs out to the desert and bury them up to their necks in sand, leaving them to bake, ripening for a confession. The Storyteller didn’t expect this, but, remembering his theme, he knows just how to run with it. When the players return, they find one thug dead of exposure, another half-dead from scorpion poison, and the third delirious and raving out of his mind. The characters’ own actions have led them into the trap of being corrupted by their own crime-fighting zeal.

Mood

Just as important as theme for organizing a story is mood, or atmosphere. Keeping a story cohesive over the course of many different sessions is made easier if a consistent mood is evoked. Each scene, chapter, story and chronicle can have its own mood. Mood isn’t the atmosphere of the actual gaming environment (that’s covered below under “How to Tell Stories”). It’s the key images, symbols and even tension that the Storyteller consistently invokes to set the stage for the story. Mood reinforces theme.

Our crime-fighting chronicle might have a mood characterized as “dark and gritty” or “film noir.” Things are described in blurred contrasts, in grays rather than in black and white. For example, the night is often fog-bound and full of shadows rather than clear. This mood implies



that answers never come easily and that choices are never simply right or wrong. Or the Storyteller might go for something more subtle, such as “ominous significance,” wherein everything hints at a darker meaning beneath the surface, much like the mood evoked in the *Twin Peaks* television series. Threats lurk everywhere. Nothing and no one can be trusted. Even the swish of pine trees in the wind seems to forebode a sinister revelation.

Mood isn't as easy to orchestrate as theme. It's more ephemeral and requires some off-the-cuff creativity to implement, especially when players surprise you by taking their characters to places you weren't ready to introduce. But don't sweat it. Consistent mood is just a tool, not a requirement. It's there to help you focus on the theme through imagery and other sensory data — sounds (moaning wind, piercing screams), tactile sensations (greasy, sharp) and even smell (peppermint, rotten eggs). If your mood is “film noir,” you might avoid describing smells or tactile sensations and concentrate solely on sight and sound, to reinforce the stark nature of the story, devoid of any real human touch.

Ultimately, mood makes it seem like your story's theme pervades every part of the world. Not even the night sky, wind or the shadows appear to escape the significance of the story's events or meaning.

What Happens in a Story?

Apart from the meaning you impart in a story, you must consider what happens in a story. Everything is tied together; meaning and the events that evoke it. Considering the events of your story as separate units is a useful means of getting a handle on them. In the end, they form an unbroken continuum.

Plot

Plot is what the characters *do*. They act out a series of events that, considered as a whole, tells a story from beginning to middle to end. No Storyteller is completely in charge of his plot; the players provide many twists. However, a basic plot is helpful when presenting a story, even if it's doomed to be derailed, hijacked or shanghaied into new lands of development.

The simple plot of a crime-fighting chronicle might be broken down like so:

- First Act (Beginning): The characters are made aware of the problem: the city's crime boss.
- Second Act (Middle): The characters work to overthrow the boss.
- Final Act (Conclusion): The characters win (but at what cost?), or the crime boss wins.

Plots don't have to be confined to three acts; they can have many. But three is a nice, easy way to keep to a thread simple without confining events than inevitably veer in new directions during play. The above plot could be complicated as follows.

- First Act: The characters are attacked by thugs.

- Second Act: The characters investigate who the thugs are and why they attacked. The characters find out about the crime boss.

- Third Act: The characters work to overthrow the boss' empire.

- Fourth Act: The crime boss threatens a character's loved one, and cruelly kills her even if the character capitulates to his demands.

- Fifth Act: The characters win, or the crime boss kills them or sends them packing to a new city.

The fourth act is a bit tricky (the characters might rescue the loved one and send her far from harm), so it might be amended: “If thwarted, the boss takes out his ire on an innocent and makes sure the character's know they're to blame.” Otherwise, none of these acts is too hard to achieve, even if the players have different ideas about what to do. (For example, even if the players' characters refuse to investigate the thugs who attacked them, they can still be drawn into the crime war in other ways, willingly or not.)

Another complication might be that the crime boss is really a supernatural being, wielding sorcery to maintain his empire. This secret could be discovered in any of the acts, depending on character ingenuity. Or the characters could win without ever really knowing what they were up against. Or maybe by destroying the boss, the characters unwittingly release a ghost whose restless soul was appeased by the boss' sacrifices. Now it wants revenge against those who thwarted its servant.

The bottom line is that plot is merely an outline of what the Storyteller wants to have happen, a series of events that helps to illustrate the theme.

Conflicts

It's been said before and it's worth repeating: Conflict is the essence of drama. Conflict does not have to be physical (although it quite often is in roleplaying games). It can be as simple as a character striving to discover the location of a store in downtown New York. The conflict is represented by the obstacles he encounters, even if they're merely other shoppers or the temptations of other, easier-to-find stores. This is perhaps the most boring example possible, but it shows that conflict is simply about setting an obstacle before the characters, giving them some challenge that bars their way to easy victory.

Of course, the most popular and ready conflict for a story involves action and adventure. In other words, combat. Scenes of physical prowess and daring-do, clever escapes and close misses are the gold in the treasury of Storytelling. They rarely get tiresome, although it's still wise to vary them as much as possible. Too many bold swings on frayed vines and the schtick gets repetitive.

The best form of conflict is characters themselves, both Storyteller-controlled and player-controlled. Stirring up the hornet's nest of envy and pride among the players' characters is often enough conflict to fill an entire chapter. Think of D'artagnan's first meeting with the Three Musketeers. A series of misunderstandings results in a

grand sword duel. But that encounter forges an alliance of heroes whose like has rarely been seen since.

Storyteller-controlled characters are the ultimate paragons of conflict. What fun is it destroying a crime empire if you never get to take on the boss himself? Would we know the name of Elliot Ness without his rival Al Capone? Robin Hood without the Sheriff of Nottingham? Woodward and Bernstein without Nixon? Encountering a Storyteller rival is one of the most memorable events in any story.

To sum up, conflict — overcoming obstacles, whether they are people, things or even one's own conscience (think of Hamlet) — provides drama.

Setting

The locales in which your stories take place are characters, too. They may not walk and talk, but they still communicate messages, whether it's the safe vibe of a sanctum or the bone-chilling fear of a tomb.

The World of Darkness is our world as seen through a gloomy and twisted lens. This perspective allows you to mine inspiration for stories from your own neighborhood, or to even set your stories there. You can re-imagine the gas-station attendant as the servant of a vile, unseen monster, or the college dean as the thrall of some otherworldly horror.

There are strange legends in real life that we've all heard, places around town that seem tailor-made for supernatural stories. You know that old barbershop supply store downtown with the creepy owner who doesn't like customers? Some say he sells black-magic supplies in the back — just ask him and he'll show you. This kid went back there once, but he won't talk about what he saw. What's really going on there?

Providing an interesting and believable setting relies on balancing the real and unreal. Urban legends mixed with real places — actual houses you've walked past at dusk, the alley near your workplace that nobody wants to go down, the old lagoon in the woods that everyone's afraid to swim. In a sense, this is a re-enchantment of the world, although in the World of Darkness the effect is more often chilling and terrifying than awe-inspiring.

Thinking Mythically

Storytelling games are about amazing things happening to characters in interesting places, described with passion and intensity by players. The details of a particular villain or an ominous graveyard are vital to evoking a scene. But don't get too caught up in the literal. Events resonate on deeper levels, the levels of myth and poetry. In other words, events can be *metaphors* for powerful ideas.

Storytelling allows us to make the metaphorical literal, to take what would otherwise be fantastic or unreal and make it seem real within

the context of the story. For example, spirits and ghosts are very real in the World of Darkness. In our world, however, they seem to exist only in the imagination, as metaphors or dream-like images signifying truths we can't grasp consciously, but truths important to us nonetheless. The great advantage of a Storytelling game is that we can bring these metaphors to life, to confront them and interact with them in the guise of Storytelling characters. Moments of epiphany come when the Muse speaks through us — a spontaneous encounter with art. This is *myth*, metaphor come to life. The literal or imagistic means used to convey it are just props and stage decorations.

This doesn't mean Storytellers should artificially construct their stories and characters around cardboard archetypes and prefigured "hero quest" templates, following some formula set forth in a screenplay-writing book. It means you should be aware of the power of myth — living metaphor — to greatly enhance a story, to add depth through resonance with mythic themes. To this end, think mythically, not literally.

How to Tell Stories

Now that you know the basic elements that make up a story, you should know the best methods for telling one. Just as with any art or craft, Storytelling techniques are innumerable. Everyone has his own style or methods. Here are the few of the most basic and useful ones that you should be aware of.

Inspiration

Perhaps the most often-asked question of any writer is, "Where do you get your ideas?" Perhaps the best answer is that given by Neil Gaiman: "I make them up." But how exactly do you do that? Anyone has the creative power to make up stories, but the best stories have ideas or events that appeal to others, that communicate something the audience can grasp. There are various means of finding inspiration — the creative spark — for stories that can enchant others. Some good sources are:

- **Current events and history:** Read about what's going on in the world or what happened in the past (since we seem doomed to repeat history). Feel free to steal ideas directly from actual events. Television shows about lawyers do this all the time, with stories "ripped from today's headlines," focusing on the legal implications of various social conflicts. Even if your game is set in our times, his-

torical events can provide inspiration for current ones. Could, say, the Salem witch persecutions happen today?

- **Literature and movies:** We're all inspired by other people's stories, whether in fiction or movies. We read *Dracula* and want to play a more modern version of that vampire lord's tale. We see *Princess Mononoke* and wonder what it would be like to witness nature spirits in our own neighborhoods. We read or watch *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and want to play wizards. Stories feed on themselves, sparking new ideas in readers, who tell their own stories, which in turn spark new ideas in a whole new generation of readers. The key here is to let these sources *inspire* you to come up with your own fresh ideas, not to rip them off in every detail.

- **Games:** Besides other roleplaying games, there are numerous PC, console and arcade games from which to gain inspiration. If you like running through a government laboratory while being stalked by extra-dimensional aliens, then you might want to do something similar with your friends in a Storytelling game, but this time in an environment all of your own creation.

The Gaming Environment

Where you game can be an important part of the experience. Gathering around a table where the players can see each other and the Storyteller is the most common method — so common that it's often underestimated. If you choose to scatter around a room in plush, comfy chairs with no central table on which to roll dice or display sketches of the story's various settings (buildings, graveyards, sewers), don't be surprised if the game becomes unfocused and people are easily distracted by out-of-game discussions about movies or TV shows. A central table, whether round, square or rectangular, is the Storyteller's best ally in maintaining the players' focus.

Live-action roleplaying games don't require a table. They're more freeform than the style of Storytelling recommended by this book. The Storyteller is not as central to a LARP, and the players are expected to bear more of the burden of creating the story.

Regardless of whether you're playing tabletop or live-action, the environment in which you play is important. Is the lighting sufficient? Is it too bright, making it hard to imagine gloomy alleys and gas-lit rooms? Is the noise level sufficient, or are the neighbors always running their leaf blower? Is it too hot or cold? All of these sorts of considerations should be taken into account. Sometimes it's not possible to control every aspect of the environment, but make do as best you can.

Music

Playing music during a game can greatly heighten the story's mood. In fact, it's probably the single best means to convey mood, even more so than relying on description or Storytelling characters' behavior.

If the players' characters go to a nightclub to make contact with an ally, play music appropriate to the club. Is it a rave, or maybe retro '80s night? Or is it a heavy metal

head-banger's ball? If the characters meet the local aristocrat at the opera, play some opera music in the background.

Even if nothing specifically musical is happening in the story, mood music can lend a scene a sense of significance. Do the characters search the woods for clues to an occult crime? Play the soundtrack from *Twin Peaks*. Do they heroically fight their way through an army of foes to rescue a loved one? Play the soundtrack from *Conan the Barbarian*.

Don't confine yourself to music, either. Sound effects and nature recordings can build mood. Perhaps the search through the woods is best accompanied by the sound of wind through the trees, or the trickling of a stream. Or a fight in gangland might best be evoked with industrial noises in the background. Sound effect CDs are readily available at most music stores.

To play music you of course need a CD or tape player. A small boom box is fine, but a full surround-sound stereo system is divine.

Props

Many players don't use props, preferring to let their imaginations fill in scenes. But props can be a fun way to focus on certain aspects of a story. Candles or lanterns to light an otherwise dark gaming room really set the stage for spooky events. If the characters strive to find a rare artifact such as a sword, having a replica of it might give weight to the quest.

This can even be taken to truly theatrical extremes, in which players wear clothing suitable for their characters. The player with the surly punk character wears a torn-up t-shirt and a beat-up leather jacket. The guy playing the antiquated aristocrat wears an Edwardian suit, or even a medieval cloak.

A word of caution: If using candles or other flames, have a fire extinguisher handy. And never, ever swing a real — or even fake — sword or other weapon at another player. Leave the action to the imagination and use props to help evoke the images described by the Storyteller.

Pacing

One of the hardest skills to master in Storytelling is a good sense of pacing. The Storyteller's got to know just when to cut away from a scene and move time forward. If he does it too soon, he might rob the game of some roleplaying scenes that will never take place. If he waits too long, the game drags and everyone gets bored.

The best way to hone this skill is through perception. Be sensitive to what the players try to achieve. If they clearly enjoy their roleplaying banter, let it continue. But if it only becomes an excuse for grandstanding, as one or a few players take over the game while others twiddle their thumbs, shift the scene to one where everyone can participate.

Be alert and allow for sidetracks only as long as they seem to promise good drama and don't lead too far away from the main thrust of the story. Likewise, don't let Storyteller characters spend too much time hogging scenes.

Their purpose is to get the players going, to make the players' characters act. Supporting cast members are the best tools for shifting the pace of events. If things are slow, the arrival of a new character can perk things up. If things are too complicated, a character's sudden departure can create the space players need to figure out their next step.

In the end, don't sweat over pacing. Just play it by instinct.

Coaxing Performances

Some players are more outgoing than others. These types tend to overpower the game and hog the limelight. Sometimes this is a good thing, especially if such individuals are entertaining, enlightening or liked by all. They might just provide the axle around which the wheel of the other characters spins; they're the focus and spur for all actions.

But if one player doesn't do a good job of it, the Storyteller needs to step in and drag others on stage, even if it means forcing the roleplaying hog off for a while. Some players are very quiet and nervous, and don't like to express themselves often. That's okay; try to recognize whether or not they still enjoy the game. Maybe they like it that way, and simply prefer to watch others and be a part of the whole zoo. Don't drag them on stage if they don't want to go. At least, don't do it too often.

The players are in a sense the actors in a Storytelling play, and you're the director. It's your job to coax the best performance possible out of your actors, whether they're prima donnas or wallflowers.

The 10 Commandments

• **Involve Players Whenever Possible:**

Incorporate their ideas and backgrounds into your city and chronicle. Doing so interests them *immediately*, gives them a voice in your story, and can go a long way toward forestalling unpleasant surprises. The players' characters should be the most important — though not necessarily the most powerful — ones in your chronicle. It's well worth your time to work with players to develop their characters, even between game sessions.

• **Be Aware of Players' Expectations:**

Giving players the general kind of challenge they want is a good thing. Being predictable is not. If the characters think vampires are sleek, powerful predators, you can change it up on them by presenting one of the recently undead who's psychologically co-dependent on his living girlfriend. Or you can introduce a vampire with little brainpower and impulse control, but with lots of wicked powers. Or something that looks like a vampire but that's really a creature of a different kind entirely.

• **Work Things out in Advance:** Every erg of effort you spend preparing saves you 10 ergs of desperation during an actual game. If you know in advance what's in a place, or what motivates an important character, you pay more attention to *describing* what you know instead of making things up on the spot.

• **Story First, Rules Second:** Rules are tools. Use them, but don't let them trap you. If you make the odd change here or there to encourage the flow of the story, no one will notice (or at least care).

• **Description, Dialogue and Action:** Intense, well-imagined description creates a sense of immediacy. It makes people pay attention to the story. Interesting, consistent, frequent action *keeps* them interested. Hook them by making it feel real. Reel them in by making them want to know how things turn out.

• **Avoid Stereotypes:** Perfect examples of type are rare. People who *try* to fit into a stereotype usually do so to cover up some secret insecurity, and may not be able to carry it off on close examination. People who naturally tend toward stereotypes often rebel against being just like everyone else, and may go to great lengths to show that they're unique.

• **Be Fair to Your Setting:** If the players work hard and make smart decisions, their characters' success must be in proportion to the challenges faced or the players will feel cheated. Conversely, don't reward characters if they don't earn it or the reward will be hollow.

• **Don't Tell Them Everything:** Much of the challenge of a game is in the mystery, the parts of the story that you hold back for the players and their characters to discover on their own.

• **Don't Abuse Your Power:** Remember that you're there to provide entertainment for the players, as well as for yourself. Respect your control over their characters. You both initiate and arbitrate events. Use your power to prolong the story, not to force your friends to play out *your* vision of how their characters should act.

• **Don't Panic:** If the players pull the rug out from under you, don't be afraid to call a break and take some time to collect your thoughts. It may happen a lot at first, but after a while you'll be able to handle anything they throw at you.

Advanced Techniques — Time

There are a number of special Storytelling tools available to you, some of them best used once you're comfortable with the dynamics of telling a collaborative story with



a group of players. Some of the more interesting of these involve fooling around with time.

Flashbacks: Events that took place before the present can be played out to dramatic effect by using flashbacks, short scenes that take place in the past and which greatly inform the players' understanding of present conditions. These flashbacks might involve their characters before they became aware of the supernatural world — or they might even involve characters' ancestors! The players can temporarily take the roles of other characters — their own ancestors or just some unfortunate people who accidentally discovered the curse of the tomb. Flashbacks are like short scenes in a movie. Keep them short. If they're too long, they detract from the modern story. As soon as flashbacks veer from the main purpose — to more fully reveal a present predicament — end them and cut back to the now.


Cutaways: Events that take place at the same time but in a different location can add dramatic effect. This is more than simply cutting back and forth between two groups of characters. It can be used to witness Storyteller characters conniving against the players' characters, or striving to aid them. It's fun to let the players take the roles of these cutaway characters, whether it's a crime boss chortling with his captains about a death trap into which a character just fell, or disciples trying to understand a clue that will allow them to rescue the players' charac-

ters. These cutaways serve to embolden the main characters. They hold the fort, waiting for reinforcements that players know will arrive. Or cutaways get characters to change tactics before they wind up dead.

Foreshadowing: Events from a potential future can be foreshadowed by actually playing them out. The scene shifts to next week, where the characters attend the funeral of one of their own. This really wakes the players up! How did the character die? How do they stop it from coming to pass? Everything they do will be measured against the scant clues this glimpse into the future provides. For this reason, it's best to make these visions short, cutting away before too many details are revealed. It's sweet agony watching the players try to avoid — or accomplish — the fate they witnessed. One important point: These must be glimpses of a *possible* future, not a preordained one. Character actions should be allowed to change (or fulfill) it.

Bottom Line: Have Fun

In the end, don't worry about whether you're playing the game "correctly." There's no wrong way to do it, there's just the way everybody wants to. If you're the only one who wants to turn out the lights and use flashlights whenever a ghost appears, maybe you should rethink it. If nobody else enjoys it, what good is it? The only real failure is to keep making mistakes once you know they're mistakes.



It's every player's job to be lenient and patient with other players and the Storyteller. If mistakes are made, point them out (if necessary) and move on. Don't belabor the point. It's impossible not to occasionally make a decision you regret — you're making this up as you go. Just don't mock someone mercilessly for a mistake. What goes around comes around. You'll make your own mistakes soon enough.

The point to remember is that you all create a spontaneous story experience. That's an amazing thing. Many professional actors, directors and writers would be scared to death to even contemplate the idea. Unlike the millions of dollars that can be lost by screwing up a film, there are no consequences to screwing up in Storytelling. It's a game, and in the end you produce a work of imagination that outshines any blemishes that go into its making.

Preliminary Story

Any first story for a character or group in the World of Darkness is a dread initiation. Characters go from ordinary, everyday people struggling with hardship and oppression to people who get a glimmer that something more is at work out there. All the turmoil of the world that was taken for granted before now gains some context. Hints and allusions suggest that a previously unknown force may be at the root of it all. Hidden beneath the everyday world, inexplicable activities are underway and strange beings ply schemes. Something or someone is there that gains from humanity's suffering, and those forces may or may not be of this world. Making these discoveries is an initiation into the real World of Darkness.

Your first story ideally does not catapult previously ordinary folks into vampire havens, werewolf packs or wizard covens. That immersion may be too much, too soon for your players, and certainly for the comprehension of their characters. Driving to work one morning and knowing unequivocally that vampires exist that night is probably too extreme a transition for anyone to handle. The result is not motivation to explore further, but to run for one's life, and that doesn't make for very enjoyable Storytelling games.

Instead, your first game ideally introduces the characters to the unknown slowly. They get hints and glimpses of the truth — that things stalk the shadows, that people are not necessary in control of their own fate, that humanity is not at the top of the food chain. At first, someone or something in a character's life is strangely upset or not as it should be. The problem could be rationalized away, but the character notices that there's a bigger, mysterious problem at work. His wife's behavior is not only out of the ordinary, it borders on the inexplicable or impossible. Further exploration reveals cracks in reality. Things that should not or could not happen are underway. His wife seems to have dedicated herself to something he can't understand or see, but it definitely has a hold over her.

Finally, determined to know what's happening and to potentially save someone or himself, a character exceeds the boundaries of logic in order to understand what's really going on. The character suspects his wife's every act and sneaks into the building where he saw her go the night before.

By stepping outside the bounds of ordinary existence, a character begins to see past the illusion of everyday life to understand that another reality exists beyond. He is exposed to the barest facts of the supernatural, that something is wrong in the world, that the life he leads is a lie and that he has willingly participated in it — until this moment.

So, what is the truth? What goes on in the shadows and places where humanity is not meant to see? The characters in your game probably don't get to know just yet. That's the stuff for books such as **Vampire: The Requiem** in which characters discover the undead by *becoming* them. But the characters can get a taste of the truth now, enough so that they search voraciously for more. In so doing, they get to know more and more and leave their former ignorant bliss behind.

Thus, characters' first story in the World of Darkness doesn't involve dead giveaways of what reality actually is. They don't discover fang marks on loved ones' necks and immediately get to conclude "Vampires!" Rather, you should allude to the impact of monsters on humanity and allow characters to see those allusions for what they are, rather than as the coverup they're meant to be. A loved one may indeed be fed upon by a vampire, but bite marks aren't the evidence of it. The truth is far more insidious. A wife is increasingly distracted; glassy-eyed. She needs more and more sleep for no apparent reason. She loses interest in her husband and spends more and more time out after dark "with friends." On the surface, her activity seems mundane (if adulterous). The truth of something more going on only emerges when she goes from acting unlike herself to becoming someone altogether different, the plaything of a monstrous, hidden force. The characters of your troupe should witness this kind of subtle transformation, and as a result grasp that the world is not as it seems.

The Premise

Before you can suggest to players' characters that the world is inherently wrong, you need a premise for the bizarre circumstances that arise. What freakish, disturbing or alarming developments suggest to characters that there's more to the world than they know? These plot hooks are typically odd events, strange behaviors, circumstances that can't be explained easily, or encounters that simply linger in the mind and won't let characters rest. Like a scratch that can't be itched, these events motivate characters to act, investigate and try to comprehend. By doing so, characters scratch the surface of reality.

You can organize such initial stories with a group or with individual characters. A group of ordinary folks needs a reason to be together in the first place, such as employ-

ees at work, members of a gang, friends camping or simply unrelated commuters on a train. They all get insights into the unreal together. The advantage of working with a group is that you coordinate the characters from the beginning, regardless of what form their immersion into the supernatural takes.

Alternatively, you can introduce each character to the unknown individually. Each character and player gets a first story on his or her own, with characters meeting later, perhaps before or after each truly grasps what the supernatural is. This approach means more work on your part, ushering each character into the otherworldly by a separate approach, but the results can be very satisfying, giving each character his own feel for and take on what reality might truly be.

The following are various premises for supernatural forces that could interfere in characters' lives. One can afflict all players' characters, or each character can face his own terrifying dilemma.

- A loved one is repeatedly fed upon by a vampire, becoming enthralled with his/her abuser. The victim is not consciously aware of the feeding, but unconsciously seeks out the creature and submits. The victim could be a character's girl- or boyfriend, spouse or child.

- A friend or loved one has the inherent makeup or fate to become an otherworldly being, but doesn't know it. All he knows is that something is wrong with him. He doesn't sleep well at night. Bad things happen to people around him. He claims to hear voices. Others tend to avoid him, whether instinctively or by intent. Sympathetic characters feel compelled to help, assuming they can bring themselves to be near him at all.

- Beings play cat and mouse with a character, perhaps for fun or to test him to see if he has the right stuff to become one of them. Bizarre mishaps occur around but never directly to him. He suffers painful losses, yet may find a certain pleasure or liberty in them. For example, his spouse may have a fatal accident, yet he finds a strange relief in her passing. He can finally "be himself."

- A character's life coincidentally intrudes upon the activity of the supernatural and he witnesses only a glimmer of what's really going on. A boss might be enthralled by or be the pawn of a monster. The character's home might be in the neighborhood of a being's lair. He witnesses the creature's depredations, which are hidden, but not always well enough. Or a ghost haunts the character's apartment building.

- A character runs afoul of a creature's agent and interrupts its schemes. The being then targets the character for revenge or as a replacement for its agent. A cop might arrest a monster's proxy. A good Samaritan might save a woman victimized by "criminals" when she was actually intended as food for the master. The character wins an auction for an antique that's also sought by another bidder. The opponent is the pawn of a ghost seeking to restore its scattered collection from life, and now the ghost wants that last piece.

Initial Encounters

Once you know the nature of a character's passing contact with the supernatural, you need to decide how that contact unfolds from the character's perspective. You may decide that a vampire repeatedly preys upon the character's daughter, but how does the parent recognize that something is wrong?

Initial encounters with the unknown should start out small, as discussed previously. These are characters' first forays into the hidden world, and you don't want to overwhelm their senses and minds with the blinding truth. They should get hints and suggestions that something more is at work than meets the eye. From there, a personal compulsion to act drives them toward an inkling of understanding.

The following ideas are clues about something sinister going on. Alone, these observations might be overlooked or dismissed, but if they accumulate they suggest something truly wrong. Nothing inherently supernatural is implied just yet, but further investigation might suggest it.

- A loved one repeatedly turns off or doesn't answer phones. He leaves his cell phone behind at certain times. The household or business phone rings and the person at the other end hangs up or a strange, somehow foreign caller asks for the subject.

- A friend keeps strange hours, coming and going at any time of day or night with forced or half-hearted explanations.

- Neighborhood pets go missing.

- Important meetings and plans are missed.

- A co-worker avoids the character and apparently most others.

- If the character himself is the subject of strange events or weird changes, others avoid him. He seems to rub them the wrong way or makes them uncomfortable without explanation.

- Instances of random crime increase, suggesting that they're not so random. A loved one is arrested more than once, or break-ins or thefts occur at home or work.

Exploration

Having put together enough pieces of the puzzle to recognize that something strange is going on with a friend or family member, the character explores further. Rather than simply recognize that odd events occur as before, he now goes in search of them, trying to understand what's really going on. The fine point here is that he gets only hints of anything unusual, never a direct view of any creatures of the night. Most likely, he witnesses the results of their activities.

- It seems that pets have gone missing in a several-block area. Indeed, the character notices that very few birds are around.

- The boss, co-worker or friend hasn't been home very much lately. His family has noticed and is concerned,

too, suspecting an affair, mid-life crisis or drug addiction, each of which seems unusual for the subject.

- The loved one's life seems to be falling apart in all aspects. Co-workers call looking for him. Teachers wonder why their student has had such poor attendance. Dinner isn't on the table for the third night in a row. The family member is subject to fits of depression, anger or bizarre — even violent — sexual appetite.

- A friend goes to strange places for no apparent reason. He drives to a downtown parking lot and sits in his car for hours on end, as if awaiting a rendezvous that never happens. A child lingers around the school grounds well after classes are over and other students have gone home. A brother goes to a coffee shop and stares blankly at an alley across the street.

- If the character himself is the focus of strange events, little direct explanation can be found for the seeming plot being hatched against him. Others claim no reason for being distant — or don't recognize that they have been. Possessions are moved from where he left them. His bank account is inexplicably low.

Hints of the Supernatural

While bizarre and frightening events occur to someone in the character's life (or to himself), and no direct insight into the supernatural is gained, the character gets hints that something larger and more sinister is at work. It's the sense that his life is not his alone. That someone

or something influences him or those around him. On the surface, strange events or behavior can be rationalized away in mundane terms, such as a loved one having an affair, suffering an addiction, undergoing a collapse or even planning a surprise. But further investigation shows that events are stranger than that. Perhaps the change in a loved one is so rapid or sweeping that it can't just be job stress. A husband's activity is simply too extreme or bizarre to be chalked up to something as simple as a secret rendezvous.

Here are some possible signs of supernatural involvement or activity that suggest the truth, without dragging it fully into the light.

- There is a small amount of blood on a wife's (or the character's) clothes, yet she shows no sign of injury. Nor does she remember being hurt or of anyone around her suffering an injury. (And in a related development, more pets go missing or a manhunt rages across the city for an unknown assailant.)

- A friend goes missing altogether for a night and is found slumming in an urban development or among the homeless, with no explanation for why he's there or how he got there.

- The character knows that a loved one is secure (perhaps a child grounded and sent to her room or a wife sleeping in the middle of the day — again). Yet, that person is gone a short time later, with no explanation and no means of sneaking past or getting out a window.



- A co-worker suffers a serious cut or injury, but isn't impaired or doesn't bleed.
- The investigating character finds a box hidden in a place a son thought was secret. Perhaps it's a hollowed out book or under a floorboard. The box contains dozens of human baby teeth or something similarly freakish.
- A small shrine composed of rocks, photos of strangers and chicken bones is found in a broom closet or crawlspace.
- A red stain emerges on a ceiling. The family cat is found hanging upside-down in the attic, its throat cut and its blood pooling on the plywood floor.
- A veritable infestation of roaches, ants or flies afflicts the house or building.
- Every few days, the children wake up and are missing locks of hair.

Confrontation

Having found such disturbing or horrifying evidence, the character is likely to be confrontational. The subject's reaction depends on where you want the story to go. A wife might claim complete ignorance. Indeed, she may not consciously remember or believe she was involved in any such activities. A character who discovers strange events surrounding himself may need to examine his own life, perhaps to draw out a suspected bipolar identity of which his conscious mind was unaware.

If a sister ardently claims ignorance of wrongdoing or innocence in bizarre events, it's difficult to pin any offenses on her. The evidence is sufficiently alarming, but may not be damning. For example, the missing hair of otherwise happy, healthy children isn't enough to get someone locked up. So, what sort of justice or retribution can be sought? Can the investigating character take matters into his own hands when neither he nor his "adversary" grasps what's going on? Is vigilante justice warranted, or would it be even worse than the apparent offense committed?

Maybe the perpetrator or victim of supernatural activity simply needs to be guarded or overseen. The investigator stands vigil to protect his friend or to ensure that she doesn't continue her bizarre behavior. Maybe that's enough. The character's direct intervention is sufficient to encourage a monster working behind the scenes to move on and seek easier prey. Or it's possible that an unwitting perpetrator of cult-like activity can be video taped in the act and shown the footage. Such direct evidence might be enough to break the spell over her. Yet, it doesn't answer the bigger question of who cast the spell, how and why?

Another response to a confrontation with a subject is violence. The perpetrator of stunning or inexplicable acts knows what she's doing. She conducts rituals at an altar to gain some arcane result. She may not know specifically to what she prays. Perhaps she identifies it as something she understands from ordinary life, such as the Devil or a ghost, when in fact the being is nothing of the kind. In truth, it's a witch or vampire duping her into service.

Regardless of why the subject acts in league with otherworldly forces, she doesn't take confrontation well. She knows her worship is anathema and seeks to keep it hidden. Or she doesn't want to give up her satisfying relationship with the being that "fulfills" her, even while it draws the life from her. A hostile subject may attack an investigating character outright. Or, if she recognizes that she has been found out, she could turn her attention on the character. He becomes the target of her master's efforts, or her own. Horrible events occur to the character. His pets die. His children fall ill. His stock portfolio collapses. These attacks can be warnings at first, discouraging the character from any further interference. But if his investigation continues, discouraging tactics intensify. The character's children are put on their deathbeds. His wife's sudden, inexplicable carnal needs are satiated with other men.

Setting the Trap


If something proves to be the real force behind a loved one or friend's activity, the investigating character can seek to draw it out. He uses his infected or altered wife or daughter as bait for the creature. She might be willing or unwilling. In the former case, the character may have gotten through to her and made her see the error of her ways, or subjected her to the shame of them. In the latter case, he uses her as bait against her will. He restrains her or secretly stalks her in anticipation of a meeting. He hopes to show her (and possibly see for himself) whatever it is that has won her over.

Resolution?

In a preliminary story set in the World of Darkness, a character should not actually witness the true creatures of the night. He should not get to face the vampire or shapechanger that influences a friend. He should not get to look upon or understand the beings that call him into their fold. In such an initial story, the character merely comes away knowing that there is more to the world than he ever knew before. Perhaps he's always subconsciously understood that something made the world dismal, but he could never point to it. Nor should he be able to now.

If the investigator searches or sets a trap for the thing that he suspects is at work, his efforts are in vain. He literally sets out to know the unknown. He's had glimmers and suggestions so far, but that's all he gets. If beings exist that lurk in the hidden places and ply their will from afar, surely they're capable of eluding an unwitting humanity. Doing so is inherent to their existence. So, even a marginally informed person lacks the awareness or guile to draw the supernatural from hiding. The character still lacks the tools and capabilities to turn the tables on whatever forces are at large. Any creatures recognize his efforts and move along. They give up the subject over whom they contend with the character, cutting their losses. Or they arrange for the character to suffer an accident of his own, whether he understands the supernatural source of his fate or not.





This first story merely plants a seed for future discovery and terror; the character is gradually indoctrinated into the true realm of the supernatural. He may eventually prove to be one of the monsters himself, when he's ready to "evolve" into one of them or by being turned forcibly. Or he may see just enough to make him obsess over the truth and finally immerse himself into a reality that he was not meant to know. Whether he welcomes the other side or declares war on it is his decision. What is certain is that his former, unenlightened, uninformed existence is gone forever.

Sample Story

Having shown you the possibilities of a first story, it's time to give an example of how such a story might work. This sample takes the ideas previously discussed and opens the door to the World of Darkness.

Bill is running a game in which a character named Dan is the focus. Dan is a completely ordinary guy — a college student with a girlfriend — who is exposed to the hidden truth. Bill decides that Dan's girlfriend is a source of blood for a vampire. The creature returns to her over and over and ensnares her in a perverse pseudo-sexual relationship of which she is only barely aware. That's the premise for Dan's first story of discovery.

In the initial encounter phase of the story, Bill relates various instances in which Dan notices strange behavior in his girlfriend. She sleeps with the window open in the middle of winter. She misses dates and grows distant. Her grades decline and she loses interest in studying. She slows and then stops attending parties and student functions. Essentially, she half-knowingly pines for the invasive predator that feeds upon and satisfies her.

Taken individually, none of the girlfriend's behavior would be terribly alarming, but taken as a whole it points to something wrong. From his limited perspective, Dan suspects that his girlfriend is cheating on him. In the exploration phase of the story, he inquires after his girlfriend's behavior with her friends. They agree that she's been acting odd and some say they've found her wandering the dorm or campus late at night. In truth, her tormentor's visits have declined and she has taken to looking for him, although she can't precisely identify what she seeks.

After a confrontation and argument with his girlfriend, Dan decides to observe her. He follows her as she leaves her building late that night and he seeks to catch her in the act. Before he can, however, she disappears down a walkway and is gone, as if vanished. Dan searches in vain and returns to her dorm. He finds her half-conscious in bed, naked, the window open and blood on her sheets. Enraged, he moves to vent his jealousy when he is thrown across the room by an unseen hand. Before Dan knows what's happening, he's forced out of the room and across the hall, his mind reeling. And that is the last thing he remembers. He comes back to his senses in his own dorm room, curled in the fetal position, with no idea how or when he returned.

In the end, Dan has no idea what's going on, but he knows that something inexplicable has happened to his girlfriend and now to him. The question is, what? And what can he do about it? And most importantly, what was that *thing*?

Dan has glimpsed through the veil that conceals the World of Darkness, and he can never be the same again. Terrified, yet unable to fully deny what he has discovered, he investigates further, being drawn in deeper. That, or he flees and tries to block out what he knows, subjecting himself to nightmares for the rest of his life.

Regardless of Dan's response, there is another, larger question: Has he piqued the interest of the *thing*, and will it let him escape what he knows?

Story Ideas

Once you've run your preliminary story, you can move on to new stories and even begin a chronicle of interconnected tales. Here are some ideas you can use to get started, but feel free to create your own. All these stories involve mortals who just begin to realize that their world is more sinister and ominous than previously imagined. If they become fully inducted into the supernatural world, use the story ideas provided in **Vampire**, **Werewolf** or **Mage**.

- **The Mysterious Benefactor:** The characters come to realize that someone is looking out for them, someone they don't know. Their debts are paid off by this unknown agent. Job offers appear from nowhere. Invitations to important social events show up in the mail. They might even find that this person has warded them from danger of one sort or another, such as by having a rival arrested before he can take vengeance on them. Who is this person and why does he help them? Does he want something from them, or is he an immortal who swore to their ancestors centuries ago that he would protect their descendants? Even if the characters never uncover their benefactor's identity, investigating him is enough to draw them into many mysteries.

- **The Strange Happenings in the Abandoned House:** The characters hear many urban legends about an old house near their neighborhood (or perhaps it's an abandoned warehouse or penthouse apartment). These stories involve disappearing children and strange, animal-like howls from the basement. If they investigate, no sign of any missing children can be found; it's a hoax. Or is it? Closer inspection might reveal a few parents, bereaved but unwilling to talk about the loss of their children. What are they so afraid of that they would remain silent about their kids' disappearance?

- **The Recurring Nightmare:** The characters suffer a series of nightmares, all around the same theme — something horrible glimpsed at night, a flash of teeth or claws, blood and screams, but nothing else. Why do these images recur? And why do they all share the same dream? Investigation reveals that none of them can account for their activities on a certain night last week, as if their memories have been erased. Further investigation reveals



that someone they know went missing that night, and still hasn't been seen. If they ask too many questions, they might raise the curiosity of the police, who ask where they were that night. The characters' inability to answer (at least, not truthfully) might make them primary suspects.

- **The Ominous Heirloom:** The characters inherit a weird artifact from an eccentric relative, something brought back from overseas travels. It might be worth something, but the will forbids the item from being sold. Over the coming weeks, the characters suffer setbacks and bad luck. Investigation into the heirloom reveals that it is a religious idol of an obscure, forgotten cult, and that folklore claims it's cursed. Even more ominous, the characters are being followed, and someone tries to break in and steal the heirloom — only to fall to his death on the characters' property. This brings the scrutiny of the police. Who wants the heirloom bad enough to steal it? And how can its curse be lifted?

- **The Irresistible Urges:** The characters suffer from radical mood swings and emotional outbursts, finding it hard to control their spontaneous feelings. Worse, they get strange urges, from odd food cravings to the desire to run naked through the woods. What's going on? Is this a sign of an unknown heritage, a mental illness, or did that old woman speak true when she cursed them for refusing to aid her?

- **The Lost Love:** One of the character's loved ones — a significant other or close family member — acts strangely, as if involved in a secret affair. Attempts to give advice or intervene are rebuffed. Closer scrutiny reveals that she only meets her paramour at night. Who is this person? Or more correctly — *what* is he? This supernatural creature steals the loved one away, transforming her into his own kind. She might become the undead, a werewolf or a witch. Dare the characters follow where she has gone, even if it means their own lives?

Antagonists

The following sections contain profiles for a number of sample human (and inhuman) Storyteller characters. You can use these as quick references when narrating your stories, or as ideas for your own characters. The amount of detail provided in each profile depends on the section. Animals are listed with only a basic description of their pertinent abilities (plus relevant dice pools). Non-combatant characters are individuals who fill minor or "walk-on" roles in your game. They answer questions, sell equipment or become victims. These supporting cast members have basic descriptions, Storytelling hints to help you portray them as distinct people, and quick descriptions of their pertinent abilities. Combatant characters are individuals who, as the name implies, could pose a threat to

the main characters of your story. They can be cops, gangbangers, mafia thugs or militia types. In addition to basic descriptions and roleplaying hints, they include detailed profiles of their relevant abilities. The final section presents supernatural antagonists in the form of restless and angry spirits. These ghosts are profiled with basic descriptions, Storytelling hints, and details of their unique capabilities.

Rule of Thumb: Resistance

As you read this book and play a few games, you probably recognize that there are two basic ways in which characters can resist efforts applied against them. That is, two systems are used to allow characters to fight back when pressures and attacks are directed against them. It's important for you to see how these systems are used throughout this book so you can apply the same rules on the fly in your games.

The first type of resistance involves a contested roll. Say a creature intends to ply its will over a character, and a contested roll is made for both target and aggressor. The target's roll is probably based on a Resistance trait such as Stamina, Resolve or Composure, or even on a combination of two of them, such as Resolve + Composure. In these cases, the target's contested roll is typically reflexive. The effort to fight the influence applied against him is automatic and doesn't interfere with the character's own action in a turn (unless he loses the contested action).

In general, "contested" resistance is called for when the effect being used takes full effect if as little as one success is rolled for the aggressor. A monster's attempt to use mind control over a character is a good example. A contested roll is called for because it gives the target a reasonable fighting chance; successes rolled for him are compared to those rolled for the monster. Whoever gets the most wins.

So as a rule of thumb in your game, if a supernatural power or other phenomenon can have a sweeping effect on a character if even one success is achieved, allow the target a contested (and reflexive) resistance roll.

The second type of resistance is more "automated." A target's Resistance trait is subtracted from an aggressor's dice pool before the roll is made. The best example is in close combat. When an attacker tries to strike an opponent, the target's Defense is subtracted from the attacker's dice pool before a roll is made.

In general, "automated" resistance is called for when the effectiveness of the effort is measured in successes rolled. Under these circum-

stances, one success doesn't invoke a sweeping result. Rather, successes rolled are added to determine the final result. Again, the best example is combat. Successes achieved in an attack roll each inflict a wound on the target. The overall degree of effectiveness achieved is therefore incremental based on successes gathered, rather than being "all or nothing." Automated resistance is applied against these kinds of effects, because it puts aggressor and target on relatively equal footing game-systems wise.

So, as a rule of thumb in your game, if a supernatural power or other phenomenon has incremental effect on a character based on each success achieved, allow the target automated resistance. One of his Resistance traits is subtracted from the dice pool of the aggressor before a roll is made.

A character's wound penalties are not applied to his Defense or Resistance traits when those traits are subtracted from opponents' dice pools.

For more information, see "Resistance" in Chapter 6, p. 133.

Animals

The following specimens are animals commonly found in urban or rural environments. Note: Unlike humans, Defense traits for animals are determined by whichever dots are *greater* between Dexterity and Wits.

Skill Specialties are listed in parentheses following their associated Skills. Add one die to a pool whenever a Skill Specialty comes into play. Each animal's attack is listed with a total dice pool (including natural weapon modifiers) for your convenience.

Bat

Description: Bats are small, generally nocturnal animals that hunt for food using a sophisticated means of echolocation. Though unintelligent, they are swift, agile fliers. While most bats feed on insects or fruit, a few species in Latin America are known to feed on the blood of animals.

Attributes: Intelligence 0, Wits 1, Resolve 0, Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 1, Presence 1, Manipulation 0, Composure 1

Skills: Athletics (Flight) 4, Brawl 1, Survival 3

Willpower: 1

Initiative: 5

Defense: 4

Speed: 15 (flight only; species factor 10)

Size: 1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	3
Health:	2	

Cat

Description: Cats are feline carnivores that stalk and pounce upon prey, killing it by snapping its neck with their jaws. Cats are intelligent animals and clever hunters, but difficult to train. They have exceptionally sharp hearing and keen night vision, plus well-developed senses of taste and smell.

The following traits are typical for a medium to large cat (9 to 12 pounds).

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 8

Defense: 5

Speed: 13 (species factor 7)

Size: 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	0 (L)*	3
Claw	0 (L)*	3

Health: 5

* A cat's attacks receive no damage bonus, but still inflict lethal damage.

Dog

Description: Dogs are pack-oriented carnivores that are capable of hunting and killing prey many times their size through teamwork and persistence. Dogs come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and intellect, and are generally loyal and can be taught a wide variety of tasks. Dogs have highly acute senses of smell and taste, powerful jaws, and are tireless runners.

The traits listed below are representative of a large guard dog (80 to 100 pounds).

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 4, Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 4, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics (Running) 4, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 1, Survival (Tracking) 3

Willpower: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 14 (species factor 7)

Size: 4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	9

Health: 7

Horse

Description: Horses are large herbivores with a long history of domestication by humans, serving as draft ani-

mals, farm workers and fighting mounts for thousands of years. Horses vary considerably in size, weight and temperament, but are generally intelligent and easy to train.

The traits listed below represent a medium-sized riding horse (725 to 1000 pounds).

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 1, Survival 2

Willpower: 5

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 19 (species factor 12)

Size: 7

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	6
Hoof	3 (B)*	8

* Special: Knockdown (see p. 168)

Health: 12

Raven

Description: Ravens are large, omnivorous birds related to crows, and are common in rural areas (particularly farmlands). They are very intelligent, inquisitive animals that possess a penchant for stealing small, brightly colored objects such as earrings or other pieces of jewelry. Hand-raised ravens can be domesticated and trained, and are capable of mimicking human speech.

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 4, Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Intimidation 2, Survival 3

Willpower: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 14 (flight only; species factor 10)

Size: 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Beak	1 (L)	3

Health: 4

Non-combatants

The following are examples of non-combatant characters commonly encountered over the course of a typical story.

Club-goer

Quote: "C'mon man, let me in! The manager's a friend of mine! Seriously!"

Background: Club-goers haunt the streets and alleys downtown, cruising the hip locales or hitting their usual

hangouts and looking to get lost in a haze of music, smoke and booze.

Description: These characters fit a wide range of descriptions depending on the local culture and the kind of club in question. They can range in age and appearance from teenage poseurs to middle-aged iconoclasts, from ostentatious goth attire to flannel shirts and jeans.

Storytelling Hints: Club-goers are people out looking for a good time, or at least a distraction from their troubles. They aren't generally interested in long, deep conversations or answering detailed questions about the local nightlife. They're often good sources of local gossip relating to the club scene, and can provide useful information on local personalities, but quickly excuse themselves after more than a couple of questions.

Abilities:

Carousing (dice pool 5) — Club-goers know how to party, and most are well-versed in the art of drinking the night away. These characters are adept at dragging others along on their club-hopping escapades, often to the detriment of their hangers-on. (See "Carousing," p. 85.)

Homeless Guy

Quote: "Man, you wouldn't believe some of the shit I've seen out here at night. Let me have one of those smokes and I'll tell you about it."

Background: The homeless can be found in almost every large city or town around the world, wandering the streets and back alleys in search of a meal, a fix or a warm place to sleep. Many times their disheveled appearance hides a sharp mind and the capabilities of a practiced confidence man or thief, or a proud, good-hearted individual who's simply fallen on hard times.

Description: Dirty, tangled hair, cracked lips, raw complexion. Most homeless people are thin and in poor health, and wear layers of dirty and ragged clothing. They often carry their possessions in a trash bag or threadbare duffel bag.

Storytelling Hints: Homeless people are often beggars, looking for some money to feed their addictions or just their bellies. These individuals can be eager to perform a simple job in return for a handout, like posing as a lookout or sharing information about the local area. In some cases, however, these people are experienced con artists who try to swindle as much as they can out of the gullible or overly compassionate.

Abilities:

Awareness (dice pool 4) — Many homeless people have learned to be acutely aware of their environment and are quick to take advantage of whatever opportunities fate tosses their way.

Streetwise (dice pool 5) — Homeless people develop an intimate knowledge of who and what goes on in their territory, mostly as a matter of survival. With the right incentive they can be persuaded to share what they've observed with others.

Sales Clerk

Quote: "Let's see... four stakes, a mallet and a mirror. Wasn't Halloween like, last month?"

Background: They are the faceless masses that man every counter at every store and institution across the world. Most are young men and women earning minimum wage and working long hours while going to school, or trying to make ends meet with a second job. Frequently sullen and sarcastic, these characters have seen all manner of strangeness while working the graveyard shift at the local Mini-Mart.

Description: Sales clerks come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, largely depending on the kind of store or institution at which they work. Late-night convenience store clerks are usually young men or women with pasty skin and red-rimmed eyes. A car salesman might be artificially tanned, with bleached-white teeth and an off-the-rack business suit.

Storytelling Hints: Sales clerks can be sullen and sarcastic, distant and withdrawn, or outgoing chatterboxes eager to share the latest bizarre episode of their workaday lives. Longtime clerks are often keen observers, able to tell a lot about the people who come into their stores just by watching. Clerks can be a useful source of information with the right kind of motivation.

Abilities:

Awareness (dice pool 4) — Sales clerks spend a lot of time watching people and gauging their moods. They can often discern a great deal about a person's intentions by observing what she wears and how she acts.

Empathy (dice pool 5) — Successful clerks are adept at reading a customer's mood and manipulating it to make a sale.

Security Guard

Quote: "Who's there? Come on out where I can see you!"

Background: Often derided as "Barney Fifes" or "rent-a-cops," security guards are a ubiquitous presence at most medium or large institutions, from schools to warehouses to hospitals. Most times they're poorly trained and paid only minimum wage to walk a long, boring beat or to sit at a desk and stare at cameras all night long.

Description: Often middle-aged and overweight (many security guards are retired cops), with a sharply pressed uniform. Security guards carry a large flashlight, a set of keys, and sometimes wear a radio. They are frequently unarmed, though some carry non-lethal weapons such as pepper spray or a collapsible baton.

Storytelling Hints: Most security guards are tired, grumpy and bored out of their minds. When confronted with signs of trouble they typically have one of two reactions: try to pawn off the problem on someone else (calling the cops or hunkering down in their golf cart and calling for backup), or charging headlong into the situation, eager for some action.

Abilities:

Awareness (dice pool 6) — Security guards are paid to pay attention to their surroundings and be alert for trouble.

Brawl (dice pool 5) — The most action that many security guards ever see is manhandling the occasional drunk or shoplifter, and some are experienced in dealing with fistfights.

Intimidation (dice pool 3) — In many situations, security guards are used to present an intimidating presence to deter troublemakers. Sometimes guards like to throw their weight around and abuse their authority out of boredom or frustration.

Student

Quote: “I can’t believe I let you talk me into this. I’ve got an exam tomorrow!”

Background: When they aren’t going to class or sleeping in their dorm rooms, students can be found wandering campus grounds or haunting the bars, clubs or café’s around town. Usually young and often night owls, students tend to look for out-of-the-way places to study — or to avoid studying altogether.

Description: Students are generally in their mid- to late teens, and typically wear whatever clothes they happen to find on the floor each morning. Nearly all carry bags overflowing with papers, books and snacks.

Storytelling Hints: Students are often bored with college life and look for ways to blow off steam, usually by partying or hitting the local clubs, or hanging out with friends and watching movies. Full of new-found freedom after a lifetime under their parents’ control, some students get involved in hare-brained stunts that no sane adult would ever consider, just because it sounds like a good idea.

Abilities:

Academics (dice pool 4) — If a student can’t recall something he’s learned in class, he has ample facilities with which to go look it up.

Carousing (dice pool 3) — When not studying or going to class, most students spend their nights hitting the bars.

Science (dice pool 4) — Some students (like Engineering or Biology majors) possess this ability instead of Academics. Occasionally, some students possess both.

Combatants

The following are examples of combatants whom your principal characters may encounter one time or another during a story. These people are arranged in an increasing order of competence, skill and rarity.

Gangbanger

Quote: “Step off, bitch!”

Background: The most common member of any gang, this person is the enforcer and “soldier” who fights and

dies in turf wars and drive-bys. Most gangbangers are teens or young men or women who have learned that violence is the only path to respect and power on the street. What they lack in finesse they make up for in ignorance and bravado.

Description: Gangbangers wear the “colors” of their gangs — sometimes a literal hue, sometimes a particular article of clothing or tattoo. Most bear scars from numerous fights, and sport ostentatious rings or other types of jewelry.

Storytelling Hints: Gangbangers are thugs. Their standing in the gang is determined by how tough they act and how vicious they can be when provoked. Most fight at the slightest provocation. The others go and get 10 of their friends and look for the guy who pissed them off. Most times, they prefer to ambush their opponents with a flurry of (mostly inaccurate) gunfire and then escape to safety. When faced with well-armed or capable opponents, they run and look for opportunities to even the score when their enemy least expects it.

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 2, Weaponry 2

Merits: Allies 2, Fleet of Foot 2, Status 1

Willpower: 4

Morality: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 11 (13 with Fleet of Foot)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Shots	Dice Pool
Glock 17 (light pistol)	2 (L)	20/40/80	17+1	6

Armor: None

Health: 7

Police Officer

Quote: “Please step out of the car, sir.”

Background: Many people become police officers out of a desire to protect others. Some, often former soldiers, join the force looking for a chance to use their capabilities against live opponents. Police officers are generally well trained in criminology, investigative procedures, armed and unarmed combat, and basic lifesaving techniques.

Description: Most police officers are tall and broad-shouldered, with close-cropped hair (many have military-style haircuts) and muscular physiques. They actively cul-



tivate an intimidating persona, an attitude they have a hard time letting go of when not in uniform.

Storytelling Hints: Police officers are trained to be polite but detached when dealing with civilians. They can't afford to make friends or appear to favor one person at the expense of another. They tend to assume people are guilty until proven otherwise, and cops with many years' experience can be sarcastic and cynical when dealing with the public.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Skills: Academics (Criminology) 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Drive 3, Empathy 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Investigation (Crime Scenes) 3, Larceny 2, Medicine 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2, Weaponry 2

Merits: Allies 2, Fast Reflexes 2, Status 2, Stunt Driver

Willpower: 7

Morality: 7

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7 (9 with Fast Reflexes)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Baton	1 (B)	1	Knockout (p. 168)	6

Type	Damage	Range	Shots	Special	Dice Pool
Glock 17 (light pistol)	2 (L)	20/40/80	17+1	—	8
Remington 870 (shotgun)	4 (L)	20/40/80	8+1	9 again (p. 134)	10

Armor:

Type	Rating	Defense	Penalty
Kevlar vest (thin)	1/2	0	

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 8

SWAT Officer

Quote: "Get down on the ground and put your hands behind your head! Do it now!"

Background: SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) officers are police who receive special training in commando-style assaults when faced with hostage situations or when dealing with heavily armed suspects such as terrorists or militia members. These officers are generally more fit than their peers and receive extra training in guns

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Throw Modifier	Blast Area	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Concussion grenade	+2	3	4 (B)	1	Knockdown	9
Type	Damage	Range	Shots	Dice Pool		
Glock 17 (light pistol)	2 (L)	20/40/80	17+1	10		
HK MP-5 (large SMG)	3 (L)	50/100/200	30+1	12		
Armor:						
Type	Rating	Defense Penalty				
Flak jacket	2/3	-1				

and combat tactics. They are not typically activated except in extreme situations, and operate more like soldiers than police. When confronted with an armed individual they are likely to shoot to kill.

Description: SWAT officers wear specialized uniforms, usually black, with heavy ballistic armor and a web harness to carry equipment. Their faces are typically hidden behind shields or balaclavas.

Storytelling Hints: SWAT officers are much more gung-ho than their peers on the force. They often consider themselves an elite squad, and behave that way to civilians and fellow officers. When in action they perform like soldiers or commandos, operating with flawless teamwork and precise shooting.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Skills: Academics (Criminology) 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Drive 3, Empathy 2, Firearms (Submachine Guns) 4, Intimidation 3, Investigation (Crime Scenes) 2, Larceny 2, Medicine 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2, Weaponry 2

Merits: Allies 3, Fast Reflexes 2, Quick Draw (Firearms), Status 3

Willpower: 7

Morality: 7

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 8 (10 with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 4 (3 with flak jacket)

Speed: 12

Health: 8

Monster Hunter

Quote: “They’re out there, hiding among us, preying on the innocent and defenseless. I’m going to make them pay for what they’ve done.”

Background: A “monster hunter” is a man or woman who has witnessed firsthand the terrors that plague the modern world, be they ghosts, vampires or werewolves. Some hunters have lost loved ones to these creatures. Others may be victims themselves who survived only by luck or the cruelty of their tormentors. But rather than shrink from the horror of what they’ve experienced, these individuals devote

themselves to finding and destroying creatures. Monster hunters generally operate alone. Many don’t want to put people at risk, while others are too consumed with paranoia to trust anyone. They often lead secret lives, working by day and stalking the streets by night.

Description: Monster hunters come in all shapes and sizes. Some, unhinged by their experiences, are dirty and disheveled. Others appear perfectly respectable until they pull a stake and a mallet from a briefcase. Like the creatures they hunt, these people work hard to blend in with the crowd.

Storytelling Hints: Most monster hunters are mentally disturbed to one extent or another by what they’ve experienced. They are frequently paranoid and suspicious of even close friends, whom they constantly fear might become “one of them.” Some take to their mission with a sense of holy zeal, likening themselves to modern-day crusaders, while others consider monsters with the same dispassionate regard that a big-game hunter brings to his prey.

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 5, Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Skills: Academics 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Computer 1, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Occult (choose a specific monster) 4, Science 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2, Survival 2, Weaponry 4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool	
Machete	2 (L)	2	—	9	
Stake	1 (L)	1	Must target heart (p. 165)	4	
Type	Damage	Range	Shots	Special	Dice Pool
Colt .45 ACP (heavy pistol)	3 (L)	30/60/120	7+1	—	10
Remington 870 (shotgun)	4 (L)	20/40/80	8+1	9 again (p. 134)	11
Armor:					
Type	Rating	Defense Penalty			
Reinforced/thick clothing	1/0	0			

Merits: Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Iron Stamina 2
Willpower: 9
Morality: 7
Virtue: Justice
Vice: Wrath
Initiative: 8 (10 with Fast Reflexes)
Defense: 4
Speed: 12
Health: 8

Ghosts

Ghosts are the spirits of mortals that linger in the physical world. Some are mere echoes of the dead, the residue of a soul repeating a simple pattern of actions over and over again like a looping videotape. Others are true spirits that have become “lost” after death. Unable to continue on into the spirit realms, they haunt their old homes or workplaces, growing ever more lonely and frustrated with each passing decade. Still others cling to the physical realm through sheer force of will, unable to leave behind unfinished business or an unsolved crime.

This section provides basic rules for including these different kinds of ghosts in your stories, detailing their natures, goals, abilities and powers. The methods that mortals can use to combat these spirits or lay them to rest are also covered, as well as a selection of sample spirits ready for use.

The following rules for handling ghosts are written with mortal, living people — like the players’ characters — as spirits’ enemies or rivals. Yet these rules could also apply to other supernatural beings whom players can portray, such as vampires, werewolves and mages. Ghosts can turn their powers and tricks on those character types, too, often using the very same rules presented here. Each of **Vampire: The Requiem**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and **Mage: The Awakening** also posits other systems and relations that can apply between ghosts and supernatural characters.

Ghost Traits

Ghosts have Attributes similar to living characters, but they are abbreviated to the three general categories of Power, Finesse and Resistance. Power represents a ghost’s ability to affect its environment, from throwing objects to opening and slamming doors. Finesse represents a ghost’s capability in interacting with or manipulating elements of its environment, from noticing the intrusions of trespassers into its “home” to terrifying someone with horrifying illusions. Resistance represents a ghost’s ability to withstand forces that could banish or destroy it, from prayers to exorcisms to physical attacks with blessed objects. These Attributes can potentially range from 1 to 10, although only very old and powerful ghosts have traits higher than 5.

Ghosts do not have Skills or Merits unless they possess a living body (see “Numina,” below). Nor do they have a Size trait in the conventional sense. A ghost is a being of ephemera, a sort of spiritual matter. As such, it has a “body” of sorts, but one that is insubstantial to material beings and things. For the purposes of forming this spiritual body, or Corpus, a ghost’s Size is the same as it was at the time of death (5 for an adult human). Rather than Health, a ghost has Corpus dots that represent its spiritual essence. Corpus dots equals a ghost’s Resistance + Size.

The only weapons with which a mortal can affect a ghost’s Corpus are blessed or enchanted. Blessed items, bearing holy power, deliver aggravated damage to ghosts (see “Blessed Items,” below). Some enchanted items (such as an ensorcelled baseball bat) might inflict bashing wounds, while others (a bewitched sword) could inflict lethal.

A ghost’s Defense is applied against another ghost’s assault. Its Defense trait is equal to its Power or Finesse, whichever is *higher*.

When ghosts or other spirits engage one another in combat, they deliver bashing damage (unless they have Numina that allow them to inflict lethal or aggravated damage). Roll Power + Finesse. Each success delivers one point of bashing damage to the target’s Corpus. A ghost’s Defense is applied against another ghost’s assault.

Ghosts regenerate Corpus in the same amount of time that mortals heal damage (see p. 175). If a ghost suffers as many points of aggravated damage as it has Corpus dots, the ghost is destroyed.

Ghosts have other traits similar to a mortal’s. A ghost’s Initiative is equal to its Finesse + Resistance. Its Speed is equal to its Power + Finesse + 10 (species factor).

Ghosts have a Morality score and Virtues and Vices just like living characters do, reflecting spirits’ sense of morality at the time of death. Ghosts are subject to degeneration just like mortals are (see Chapter 4: Advantages, p. 91), but unlike mortals, they cannot increase their Mortality scores. A ghost cannot grow or improve, only decline over the course of time.

Ghosts also possess a Willpower score (Power + Resistance) and Willpower points may be used for them just as they are for mortals. Ghosts regain Willpower by acting in accordance with their Virtues and Vices, just as living characters do. Additionally, they automatically regain one point of spent Willpower at the start of each day.

Finally, ghosts have Essence points that are spent to activate their Numina. Most ghosts can have up to 10 Essence points (truly old ghosts can have even more). Ghosts regain spent Essence at the rate of one per day when near their anchors. They can also regain Essence whenever they are remembered by the living, such as when someone lays flowers on their graves or — even more potent — if their ghostly form is identified by a living person. The Storyteller awards Essence whenever he thinks an appropriate instance of *momento mori* occurs.

The Nature of Ghosts

A ghost is an intangible spirit that exists in the physical world. A ghost with Finesse 1 or 2 is only aware of the area around its anchor (see below), while those with Finesse 3 or more can perceive the rest of their surroundings much as a mortal does.

Ghosts cannot be seen or felt by mortals unless a spirit makes a special effort to manifest (see below). Even when manifested, a ghost is an ethereal, insubstantial presence. Ghosts with a Power of 1 to 3 often appear as little more than an eerie, glowing mist or ball of light. Ghosts with a Power of 4 or 5 might seem as real and substantial as a living mortal — until someone tries to touch them. Ghosts pass effortlessly through solid objects, even when manifested. By the same token, they can't physically touch or manipulate physical objects unless they possess a specific power to do so (see "Numina"). They are immune to all types of mundane damage, and can see and hear clearly regardless of environmental conditions, whether in total darkness, fog or a raging storm.

Anchors

Ghosts linger in the physical world because something anchors them there, preventing them from continuing on to the spirit realm. Every ghost has at least one anchor rooting it to the physical world. Some powerful spirits may have more. The number and nature of a ghost's anchors depends on the individual and the circumstances surrounding its death. In most cases, an anchor is a physical place or object that held great emotional significance to the ghost during its mortal existence. An elderly woman who spent her last years largely confined to her bed might be anchored to the bedroom or to the bed itself. A man who carried a valuable pocket watch wherever he went might be a ghost anchored to the watch, haunting those who come to possess it. Occasionally, ghosts can be anchored to *people* rather than to objects. A father whose last thought was for the welfare of his children may be anchored to them, watching over them in death as he did in life. Or a woman murdered by a jilted lover may find her ghost anchored to him, sustained by a bitter desire for revenge.

Ghosts must remain close to their anchors at all times, whether they manifest or not. A ghost can travel up to 10 yards from its anchor per point of Power that it has. Thus, a ghost with 3 Power can travel up to 30 yards from its anchor. Ghosts anchored to a place instead of a person or object measure this distance from the spot where they died or from where a structure ends. A ghost with 3 Power whose anchor is a mansion can travel anywhere within the mansion, but only up to 30 yards away from the exterior of the building.

Anchors also make it easier for a ghost to manifest in the physical world. If a ghost is within one yard of its anchor it can manifest automatically with no roll required (see "Manifestations," below).

If a ghost has multiple anchors it can jump from one anchor to another with the expenditure of a single Willpower point, regardless of the distance between anchors. So, the father who lingers in the physical world to watch



over his kids can jump from one child to another, even if they are on opposite sides of the world.

If a ghost's anchors are altered (subjected to sanctification or exorcism — see “Dealing with Ghosts”) or destroyed, the ghost can no longer remain in the physical world. It passes on into the spirit realm and cannot return.

Manifestations

When a ghost wishes to interact with mortals or the physical world it must manifest, focusing its energies into a form just substantial enough to allow it a discernible presence. A ghostly manifestation doesn't necessarily have to be visible. A sentient ghost can choose to manifest invisibly if it wishes, but its presence still leaves traces that mortals can detect. Examples of invisible ghostly manifestation include cold spots, strange or intense odors and heightened magnetic fields.

Some areas are more conducive to supernatural energies than others. A graveyard is an extremely easy place for a ghost to manifest, while a laboratory often isn't. As a rule of thumb, locations where mortals frequently express powerful emotions — love, anger, sadness, fear — create conditions that allow a ghost easier access to the physical world. Sterile, emotionless places, or remote areas that have experienced little or no human emotion make it very difficult for a ghost to appear.

Curiously, the presence of mortals creates a cumulative effect that actually inhibits the manifestation of ghosts. This is apparently a phenomenon unique to the modern, scientific era, in which adults are conditioned to disbelieve instances of supernatural activity. The more people gathered in a particular location, the harder it is for a ghost to manifest.

Manifestation requires a successful Power + Finesse roll. Positive or negative modifiers may apply, depending on the location (see chart). If there is more than one mortal present, each person after the first imposes a -1 modifier to the roll. (This last penalty does not apply to other supernatural beings or creatures in the ghost's locale. Their numbers do not affect a ghost's ability to manifest.) If the roll succeeds, the ghost can manifest for the

duration of the scene if it wishes. It can make itself visible or invisible at will, and can de-manifest at any time. If the roll fails, the ghost does not manifest and loses one Willpower point. The ghost can continue to attempt to manifest as long as it has at least one Willpower point remaining. If it exhausts all its Willpower it cannot attempt to manifest again until the following day.

Once a ghost has manifested it can attempt to interact with the physical world by communicating with any mortals present (see “Communication,” below), or by drawing on its Numina.

Communication

Interaction with the living is difficult for ghosts, even under the best of conditions. Without the proper Numina, a manifested ghost has no voice. It can form words with its mouth and hope a mortal witness can read lips, or it can try to get its message across with gestures. Complicated gestures like sign language are very difficult for ghosts to perform, as they have a hard time translating their thoughts into physical motion. Make a Finesse roll for any such attempt with a -1 modifier for each decade that a ghost has been dead. If the roll fails, the spirit is simply unable to envision the right signs and gestures to get its point across. Simple gestures (motioning a mortal to follow, pointing to a hidden object) do not require a Finesse roll.

Ghosts with the proper Numina can communicate with mortals in a variety of ways, from speaking directly to writing on objects to imparting visions.

Numina

Ghosts have a number of powers at their disposal to interact with or manipulate the physical world. These powers, called Numina (singular: Numen), range from terrifying auras to outright possession of living bodies. The type of Numina a ghost has depends on its nature and personality, its goals and on the circumstances of its death. The number of powers it has depends on its age. As a general rule, a ghost has one Numen per 10 years since its death. Thus, a ghost that's been dead for 30 years can have up to three Numina. Of course, exceptions are possible in the case of exceptionally potent or willful spirits. When designing your own ghosts, assign whatever Numina you feel are appropriate to a spirit and to the kind of story you want to tell.

The following are examples of Numina that ghosts can have, along with their costs and effects. Feel free to use these as guidelines to create your own, or alter them as you see fit to suit the needs of your game.

Animal Control

The ghost is able to exert its will over an animal, controlling it completely. Spend one Essence and roll Power + Finesse, subtracting the animal's Resolve from

Manifestation Modifiers	
Location	Modifier
Graveyard	+3
Battlefield	+3
Church	+2
Hospital	+2
Historic building (100+ years old)	+2
Old building (50-100 years old)	+1
Handmade structure (wooden bridge, shed)	+1
Parking lot	-1
Modern commercial building (grocery store, mall)	-1
Modern industrial building	-2
Modern laboratory	-3

the dice pool. Success means the ghost is able to command the animal to perform any task the spirit desires, to the limit of the animal's physical abilities. The ghost can control the animal for the duration of the scene if desired. A ghost can control a number of animals simultaneously (so long as it has sufficient Essence) equal to its Finesse trait.

Clairvoyance

The ghost can speak to mortals through the body of another living person. Roll Power + Finesse, with the subject's Resolve subtracted from the dice pool as a penalty. If the victim is a willing participant, no roll is made. If the ghost fails, no communication is possible. If the ghost wins, it can speak using the victim's vocal cords for a single turn. At the end of the turn the victim suffers a single point of bashing damage due to the strain of contact. If the ghost wishes to continue speaking through the medium, a further Power + Finesse roll must be made each turn. The medium continues to suffer an additional point of bashing damage at the end of each turn of communication. If the medium is rendered unconscious, no further contact is possible.

Compulsion

The ghost is able to exert its will over a living person, commanding him to perform actions like a puppet. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll versus the victim's Resolve + Composure. If the ghost fails or ties the roll (or the mortal wins), the victim is unaffected. If the ghost wins the roll, it seizes control of the victim and can command him to perform any acts the spirit desires, within the victim's capabilities. The victim can attempt to throw off the ghost's control each successive turn with another contested roll. Use the victim's own dice pools to determine the outcome of his actions. The ghost can compel a number of victims simultaneously (so long as it has sufficient Essence) equal to its Finesse trait.

Ghost Sign

The ghost is capable of creating messages or images in malleable forms of media. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. If the roll fails, nothing happens. If the roll succeeds, the ghost can create a single message or image. A sentence can be written in the steam condensed on a mirror. A ghostly statement can be heard amid the static of an audio tape. Or an image can be superimposed on a frame of camera film or videotape.

Ghost Speech

The ghost is capable of speaking directly to mortals when it manifests. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. If the roll succeeds, the ghost can utter a single sentence.

Magnetic Disruption

The ghost's manifestation causes electronic equipment to malfunction due to an intense magnetic distortion. No



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roll is required. If the ghost manifests successfully it disrupts electronics within a number of yards equal to its Power trait. Radios, TVs and telephones emit static. Appliances stop working. Lights go out. Videotapes and camera film is erased/exposed, ruining any captured images.

Phantasm

The ghost has the power to create illusory images. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. A negative modifier may be applied to the roll depending on the size and complexity of the illusion. Mimicking a person's voice alone or creating a distinctive smell (like perfume) doesn't incur any negative modifiers, but creating the illusion of a person might be subject to a -1 penalty. Creating the illusion of a specific person (down to patterns of speech and mannerisms) that a witness knows might call for a -2 penalty. Creating a complex illusion that seems to have physical substance (the witness is convinced that he can "touch" the illusion and it feels solid) incurs a -3 or more severe penalty. Small, subtle illusions are generally much more effective than large, overt ones. This power can work on only one victim at a time. Other mortals in the subject's vicinity do not see what he does. When a subject witnesses an illusion, roll Wits + Composure (or the Storyteller may allow Composure to be replaced by Occult if your character is aware of ghostly activity). If the roll generates as many or more successes than were achieved in the phantasm roll, the victim recognizes that the image can't be real. If the phantasm roll wins, the subject believes the illusion is genuine, but another Wits + Composure (or Occult) roll is made for him in each successive turn to attempt to see through the power. A ghost can maintain only one illusion at a time, and each illusion remains for the duration of the scene unless dispelled.

Possession

The ghost may attempt to possess a living human being and control his or her body for a short time. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll versus the victim's Resolve + Composure. If the ghost wins, it gains control of the victim's body for the duration of a single scene. Use the victim's available traits (except Willpower points, which are equal to the ghost's current Willpower points) and dice pools for any action the ghost wishes to take. If the mortal wins or ties the roll, the spirit fails its possession attempt. As long as the ghost has Essence points remaining it can continue to make possession attempts against a target. If a possessed body is killed or knocked unconscious, the ghost is forced out and must possess another victim if it still wishes to act.

Attacks using a blessed object against a ghost in possession of a living body damage the ghost's Corpus instead of its physical host. (For more information see "Blessed Items," below.)

Telekinesis

The ghost can manipulate physical objects as though it had a pair of physical hands. It can pick up objects, throw them, open and close doors and windows, write messages — basically anything a mortal can do with his hands.

Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. The number of successes rolled determines the ghost's relative Strength when attempting to lift and/or move an object (see Chapter 2: Attributes, p. 47, for more details on lifting/moving objects). If the successes rolled are equal to the Strength needed to lift an object, the ghost can move it up to one yard. Each extra success allows the ghost to move the object an additional yard. If the ghost wishes to hurl an object at someone and enough successes are rolled to lift the object (and reach the target), the total number of telekinesis successes is rolled as a dice pool in an attack against the target. Alternately, the ghost can make a direct attack on a victim, using its raw power to inflict cuts, bruises and bites on the victim's body. Treat this as a normal attack with a -3 modifier. The attack ignores the target's Defense trait, any available cover and any armor worn (unless the armor is supernatural in nature).

Terrify

The ghost has the power to strike terror in the hearts of mortals who witness its manifestation. Roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll against the Resolve + Composure of each mortal who witnesses the ghost's manifestation firsthand. (If a crowd witnesses it, roll the highest Resolve + Composure in the crowd for the whole group.) If the ghost loses or ties, mortals in the area are unaffected and are immune to uses of this power for the remainder of the scene. Perhaps their subconscious minds won't allow them to recognize the spirit, or they mistake the intended frightening image for something else such as a hallucination or trick of the light. Mortals who lose flee from the spirit and will not return to the haunted area for at least one day.

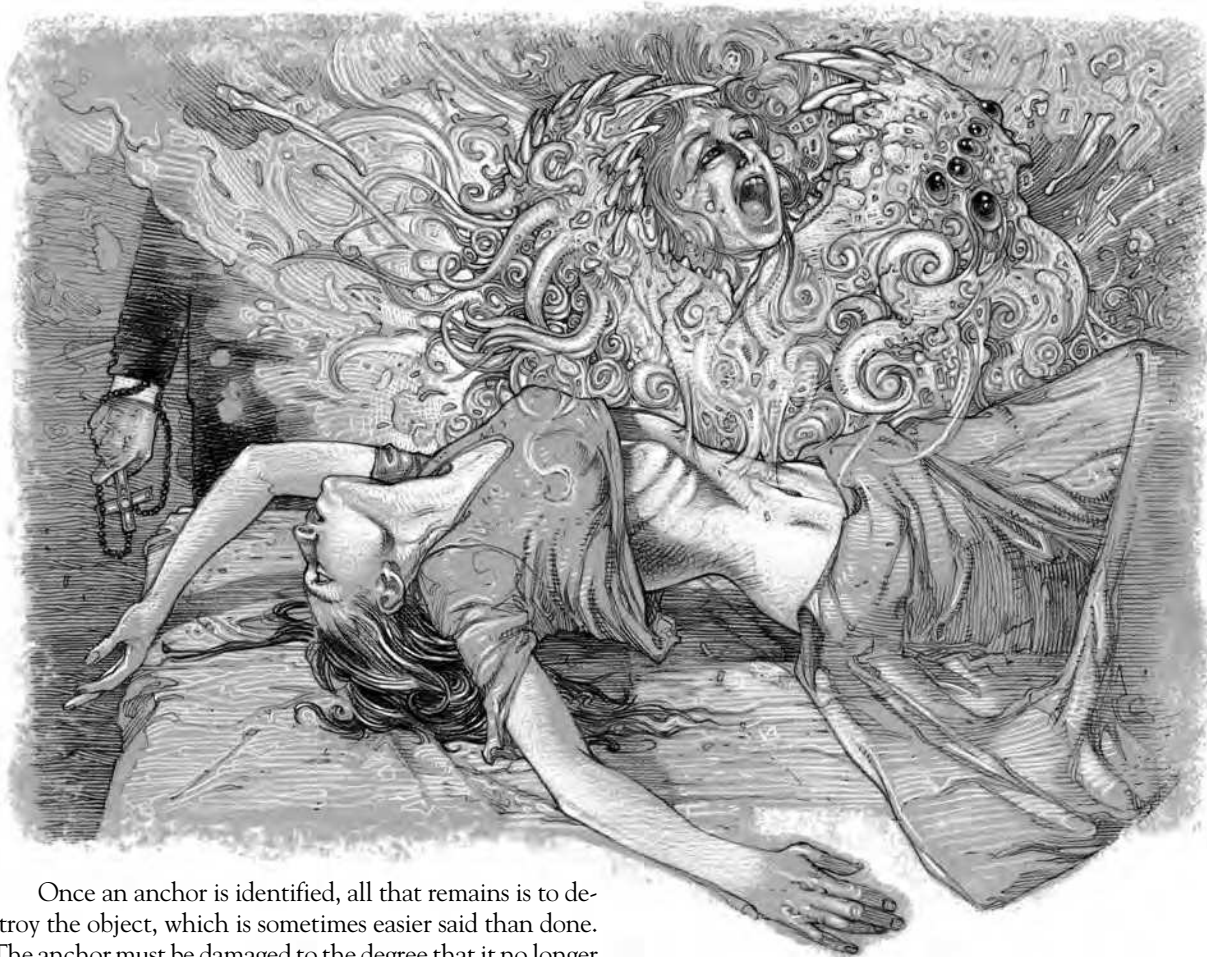
Dealing with Ghosts

As antagonists, ghosts are difficult beings to confront or thwart. They are immune to virtually all forms of physical damage, can travel through solid objects and if pressed can literally de-materialize beyond mortal reach.

Generally speaking, the only way for mortals to deal with ghosts is through the people, places and things that anchor them to the physical world. By addressing the ties that bind ghosts to the Earth, it's possible to lay them to rest — or send them to the judgment they richly deserve.

Severing Anchors

The simplest (but not necessarily easiest) method of dealing with a ghost is to locate its anchor(s) and destroy them. The trouble is, anchors are not immediately obvious. Oftentimes, a ghost itself isn't aware of what ties it to the physical realm. Discerning what object or objects anchor a spirit requires observation, research and careful investigation. Determining the identity of the ghost is the first step. Then comes investigating the circumstances of its death. If the ghost's death does not provide sufficient clues to suggest its anchor, more research is required to identify any personal effects that could possibly act as a tie.



Once an anchor is identified, all that remains is to destroy the object, which is sometimes easier said than done. The anchor must be damaged to the degree that it no longer exists in the form that the ghost knew it. The stone of a diamond ring has to be separated from the band, the band melted down, and the stone split. For more details on damaging objects, see Chapter 6: Dramatic Systems, p. 135.

If a ghost's anchor is a physical location rather than an object, the destruction process can be difficult or even impossible. If the spirit haunts a particular hotel room, how can one completely destroy a single room and leave the surrounding building intact? Such situations require extraordinary measures such as an exorcism.

Fulfilling Unfinished Business

If a ghost exists to fulfill some obligation or desire that it couldn't complete in life, it's possible to lay the spirit to rest by identifying what the ghost wants and resolving the situation. Doing so can involve considerable detective work, identifying the ghost and researching its past, or it might require attempts to communicate directly with the spirit to learn what it wants. Once the ghost's needs are met, its anchors disappear and it departs the physical world forever.

Abjurations

Abjurations are prayers or rites meant to banish a ghost from the presence of the faithful, disrupting its manifestation and keeping it at bay for a short time. Abjura-

tion calls for a contested Resolve + Composure roll versus the ghost's Power + Resistance.

Characters can acquire the specifics of an abjuration prayer or rite with a little time and research. What's most important is the knowledge and focus of the person performing the prayer. To perform an abjuration without suffering any penalties, a character must have a minimum Morality of 8 and a minimum Occult or Academics (Religion) of 3. The Morality score reflects the character's purity of thought and intent, while the Skill dots reflect a minimum degree of experience and training in the performance of the rite. For every dot of Morality below 8 or Skill below 3, the abjuration roll suffers a -1 penalty. By the same token, every dot of Morality above 8 or Skill above 3 offers a +1 modifier, reflecting the character's extraordinary focus and experience.

Dramatic Failure: Your character is utterly overwhelmed by the sheer force of the ghost's drive and determination. He loses one point of Willpower and can perform no further abjurations for the rest of the day.

Failure: Your character's faith or capability is found wanting, and the ghost is unmoved by the prayer. Your character can attempt the abjuration again if he wishes.

Success: Your character's faith or capability drives the ghost from his vicinity. The ghost is forced to de-manifest and cannot manifest again within the character's line of sight until the following day.

Exceptional Success: The ghost is completely overawed by your character's faith or capability. The ghost is forced to de-manifest and cannot manifest again anywhere until the following day.

Exorcisms

Exorcisms are special rites of sanctification that popular myth has relegated to cases of demonic possession, but they in fact can be used to uproot and banish any form of spirit from the physical world. Like an abjuration, an exorcism is more about the person who performs the rite than the words spoken, and is primarily a contest of wills between mortal and spirit. A character who performs an exorcism wants a minimum Morality of 8 and a minimum Occult or Academics (Religion) of 3 to avoid incurring penalties on the exorcism roll. For every dot of Morality below 8 or Skill below 3, a -1 penalty is suffered. For every dot of Morality above 8 or Skill above 3, a +1 bonus is gained.

An exorcism is a contested and extended action, with each roll representing five minutes of incantation and prayer. Roll Resolve + Composure for the character performing the exorcism, and the ghost's Power + Resistance. On each roll, the side with the most successes (regardless of total successes achieved) causes the other to lose one point of Willpower. The exorcism rolls continue until the character voluntarily abandons the attempt or one side runs out of Willpower. If the character runs out of Willpower, he falls into a catatonic state, ravaged both physically and emotionally. If the ghost runs out of Willpower, it is unable to maintain its hold on its anchor(s) and is banished from the physical realm, never to return.

If neither side gets any successes or both sides get the same number of successes in a roll, the battle continues for another five minutes with no one losing Willpower.

If multiple people participate in an exorcism, treat the effort like teamwork (p. 134). One participant is the primary, and all secondaries may or may not contribute bonuses to the primary's roll in each stage of the rite. The primary loses all Willpower for his "side."

Dramatic Failure: Your character (or the ghost) suffers a terrible shock that reverberates to the core of his being. A -2 penalty is imposed on his next roll.

Failure: Your character (or the ghost) comes up short in the battle of wills.

Success: Your character (or the ghost) has energy and determination. The opponent loses one Willpower point if you get the most successes.

Exceptional Success: Your character (or the ghost) likely inflicts a crippling blow against the opposition's faith or conviction. If you get the most successes, the opponent loses two Willpower points instead of one.

Blessed Items

Like prayers or rites, blessed or sanctified objects that are infused with faith can be used to physically disrupt a ghost, damaging or destroying it utterly. Blessed or en-

chanted items are among the only means by which a physical attack can harm a manifested spirit. Damage comes from the faith invested in the object rather than from the force of the swing.

A blessed or sacred object can be anything from an ancient wooden cross to a well-worn Qu'ran to a set of Buddhist prayer beads. Blessed items have a ranking from 1 to 5, representing the weight of belief imbued in them. Truly blessed items in the modern world are almost always relics from older, more superstitious times. Such relics cannot be crafted intentionally. Their blessing is a mysterious power afforded by faith. It is entirely up to the Storyteller to determine if an item is blessed or not. A cross that was carried for years by a saintly missionary might come to possess an aura of faith, while a book used by a popular preacher on a nationally televised show might never acquire such resonance. It is impossible to predict where faith will flower into physical manifestation. Likewise, it's hard for mere mortals to know whether or not a holy relic is infused with faith until it's tested against the supernatural. Certain supernatural creatures can sometimes sense a divine aura, but mortals have no such capability.

To use a blessed item on a manifested ghost, make a normal attack roll as you would with a mundane weapon, but instead of adding a damage rating as bonus dice, add the item's blessing rating to your dice pool. If the attack hits, each success inflicts a point of aggravated damage.

Example: *Father Thomas wields a blessed rosary (3 dots), with which he lashes out at an apparition. His player rolls Strength 2 + Weaponry 1 + three dice for the blessed power of the item. The apparition's Defense of 2 is subtracted from the dice pool, leaving four dice. The result is 4, 6, 8, 9 — two successes, inflicting two aggravated wounds to the apparition.*

Blessed items that aren't made to be used in combat do not suffer the usual -1 penalty that improvised weapons normally do (see p. 136). Their power comes from the faith they project, not from their sturdiness or utility.

Types of Ghosts

The following are examples of general types of ghosts that you can include in your stories. Each profile has its own unique set of abilities. They're listed in general order of power and rarity.

Apparition

Background: Apparitions are the most common form of spirit, encountered in haunted places across the world. Typically the spirit of someone who met a sudden or violent death, or a lost soul that has become trapped in this world, an apparition has the power to terrify any mortals who encounter it.

Description: Apparitions can come in many forms, from shifting wisps of light to human forms nearly indistinguishable from the living. These spirits can bear tell-

tale signs of death. The apparition of a murdered man might have bloodstains on his shirt. The victim of a plane crash may be burnt nearly beyond recognition.

Storytelling Hints: Apparitions are generally bound to their places of death, and may appear only when the time of their demise reoccurs (say, sundown each night). In many cases they don't interact with mortals at all, simply going through the motions of their previous existence, but some particularly angry ghosts vent their rage on the living if they can. In rare cases these spirits are capable of communicating with mortals, often trying to impart dire warnings or to prod an individual into solving the circumstances of their death.

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 1, Resistance 2

Willpower: 4

Morality: 7

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 3

Defense: 2

Speed: 13 (species factor 10)

Size: 5

Corpus: 7

Numina: Choose one of Clairvoyance (dice pool 3), Magnetic Disruption (no roll required) or Terrify (dice pool 3)

Poltergeist

Background: The poltergeist, or “noisy ghost,” is a spirit that makes its presence known by causing inexplicable sounds (footsteps, slamming doors) and by moving objects, sometimes violently. Plates fly across the room. Pens scrawl messages on notebooks or walls. In rare cases, mortal victims manifest bite marks or scratches all over their bodies. Sometimes these spirits are angry ghosts who have learned to use their powers to manipulate the physical world. Other times poltergeist activity seems to focus on an adolescent (usually a pre-teen or teenage girl) in a household, possibly suggesting a form of latent psychic power.

Description: Poltergeists are invisible entities that make their presence known by moving physical objects. Mortals occasionally witness glowing balls of light or glowing wisps of smoke, or more rarely see these beings on video recordings as fuzzy, humanoid shapes.

Storytelling Hints: Poltergeists can interact with the physical world only by acting on objects — almost always inanimate objects such as plates, glasses and furniture. Powerful poltergeists can affect living beings directly, punching or biting or hurling them across a room. These ghosts are capable of leaving messages written in a number of ways, but they are rarely interested in communication. Anger and violence are common hallmarks of the poltergeist, which can point researchers to signs of adolescent turmoil in the vicinity of the haunting.

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 3, Resistance 2

Willpower: 5

Morality: 6

Virtue: Justice



Vice: Wrath
Initiative: 5
Defense: 3
Speed: 16 (species factor 10)
Size: 5
Corpus: 7
Numina: Ghost Sign (dice pool 6), Magnetic Disruption (no roll required) and Telekinesis (dice pool 6)

Deceiver

Background: A deceiver is a powerful, sentient spirit capable of terrifying (and even injuring) mortals by tricking them with potent illusions. These spirits can be the remnants of an older, more primitive time when human worship lent the beings greater power and insight into manipulating mortal thoughts. In rare cases, deceivers are the malevolent souls of powerful mortals bent on revenge for an injustice committed against them.

Description: Deceivers can assume any appearance they wish, taking the form of a mortal's loved one in one moment and appearing as a nightmarish monster the next. They typically prefer not to reveal themselves at all, relying on indirect illusions that range from the grossly obvious (blood running down walls) to the subtle (the victim fails to see the *Out of Order* sign as he steps into the elevator shaft).

Storytelling Hints: Deceivers are excellent antagonists for a classic ghost story, being able to create any image they wish in order to communicate with (or eliminate) their victims. Unlike apparitions, deceivers can communicate directly with mortals if they wish, through written messages or freakish illusions (a crosswalk sign flashes from "walk" to "run"), or simply by speaking through an illusory form. In many cases these ghosts are malicious entities, delighting in terrorizing or harming victims in retaliation for some past wrong. Others use their power to seek vengeance against specific enemies. The ghost of a boy murdered by local police might visit his own form of justice on those who killed him. Occasionally these spirits are benevolent entities, using their power to shield the innocent and coming to their aid with overt or subtle messages.

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 4, Resistance 3
Willpower: 7
Morality: 4
Virtue: Fortitude
Vice: Envy
Initiative: 7
Defense: 4
Speed: 18 (species factor 10)
Size: 5
Corpus: 8
Numina: Ghost Sign (dice pool 8), Phantasm (dice pool 8) and Terrify (dice pool 8)

Skinrider

Background: Skinriders are rare and very powerful spirits that can possess the bodies of living people. These spirits

are nearly always malevolent (some say demonic). They use their power to sate physical urges denied them by their intangible forms, or to inflict suffering on victims.

Description: Skinriders occasionally appear as glowing, insubstantial forms that flow like smoke over or into the bodies of their victims. Possession victims can show clear signs of being under supernatural control. Their eyes turn gray and milky or their skin takes on an unearthly pallor. Sometimes a ghost is powerful or subtle enough to operate without revealing itself, unless it is angered or frustrated.

Storytelling Hints: Skinriders are almost always evil spirits that force their will onto defenseless mortals to fulfill their desires. They enjoy taunting victims, and choose vessels who will suffer the greatest from the consequences of forced actions. A vengeful spirit could also attempt to possess a mortal body if the object of its revenge is nearby.

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 4, Resistance 5
Willpower: 10
Morality: 3
Virtue: Justice
Vice: Wrath
Initiative: 9
Defense: 5
Speed: 19 (species factor 10)
Size: 5
Corpus: 10

Numina: Animal Control (dice pool 9), Compulsion (dice pool 9), Ghost Speech (dice pool 9), Possession (dice pool 9) and Terrify (dice pool 9)

Experience Points

Characters grow and change over time, getting better at what they do. The more they undergo, the more they grow. This phenomenon is represented in the game by experience points, a measure of how quickly a character improves his traits or learns traits in which he didn't have competence before. Experience points are very important over the course of a chronicle. They allow characters to become more capable and trained at what they do, allowing the protagonists to take on greater and more difficult challenges.

Awarding Experience Points

The Storyteller is the sole decision-maker on how much experience to award each character at the end of a chapter or story. He judges awards based on a variety of factors, from how well a character performed to whether he truly learned anything from his encounters to how well the player roleplayed his character.

After a Chapter

At the end of each game session, the Storyteller awards between one and five experience points to each character. Every character who took part in the chapter

gets one point just for being there, no matter how poorly he fared. Use the following guidelines when determining how many points to hand out to each character thereafter, adding one point for each category that applies. Some characters might be awarded more points than others. Extra points should be based on merit, not favoritism.

1 point — Automatic. Each player gets one point for participating in a chapter.

1 point — Learning Curve. Ask the player what his character learned during the chapter's events. If you agree with his response, award his character one point.

1 point — Roleplaying. The player did a good job of portraying his character, either entertainingly, appropriately, or both. If he veered too far from his character's concept, he might not deserve this reward, but don't be stingy here. Indeed, superlative roleplaying might be worth two points.

1 point — Heroism. Characters who rise to the occasion with truly heroic actions or feats of survival and sheer persistence deserve a point. Do not reward characters who act in stupid or suicidal ways just so they can gain the accolades of the hero.

After a Story

Once a story has come to a conclusion, its aftermath provides moments of reflection or self-awareness that might warrant extra experience points, beyond those awarded for the final chapter.

1 point — Success. The characters achieved all or part of their goals.

1 point — Danger. The characters survived against harsh odds and grave dangers.

1 point — Wisdom. The player, and thus his character, devised a brilliant plan or came up with a spontaneous solution that enabled the group to survive or succeed when it might have failed.

If you want the characters to advance in talent more quickly, feel free to award extra points to get them to the desired level of competence.

Spending Experience Points

The costs for increasing existing traits or gaining new ones are listed in the "Experience Point Costs" chart on p. 35.

Learning New Traits

It takes time and study to learn new things. If a character does not already possess some basic competence in a Skill, he must spend time training in it before any dots can be purchased. The Storyteller decides just what he needs to do to qualify. It might take days of study in a library, or enrolling in a semester-long night course at the local college. It could be a simple matter of days spent in the wilderness, or a week's worth of repetitive practice. Most Skills can be self-taught with time and effort, if a character is smart and diligent. Otherwise, a teacher might be required.

Learning a new Merit requires either training or time spent achieving whatever goal is most appropriate to that Merit. A Kung Fu Fighting Style requires training and a teacher, and time spent at a dojo with a *sensei* and other students. Political Contacts require time spent at City Hall or in whatever smoky backroom local conspiracies are hatched. The Storyteller judges new Merit acquisitions on a case-by-case basis.

Raising Attributes requires periods of self-training, or with the aid of a personal trainer. Strength might require regular visits to a gym, while Wits might need nothing more than a marathon week of playing video games to hone the ability to react to fast-acting stimuli. Again, the Storyteller can determine whether or not extra measures are required before a trait can be raised, but Attributes are less stringent than Skills in requiring specific conditions. As long as some activity can justify increased competence, spending experience points should be allowed.

Raising Morality through experience points is discussed under "Regaining Morality," p. 92.

Optional Rule — Character Flaws

Most people are flawed in one way or another, but some people have truly tragic flaws, hindrances that make it a real challenge for them to achieve certain goals.

With the Storyteller's permission, a player can select one Flaw for his character during character creation from the list below. If that Flaw hinders the character adversely during a game session, the Storyteller can choose to award the character one extra experience point for that chapter.

A Flaw only awards an experience point if it adversely affects its bearer. If a character is crippled and requires a wheelchair to get around, but spends the entire game session hacking into a corporation's computer database, he does not gain an experience point for his affliction. It didn't affect his hacking in any way. Flaws reward a character for overcoming adversity. If there's no adversity to overcome, there's no special excuse for growth or betterment.

Flaws might be temporary or permanent, depending on the nature of the trait and the player's wishes. If the Storyteller deems that a Flaw has been sufficiently overcome, he can declare that a character no longer has it and no longer suffers from its effects (and thus no longer gains an extra experience point now and then). For example, a character who undergoes an experimental operation that heals his crippled legs no longer gets an experience bonus for being wheelchair-bound. Likewise, a character who suffers from Notoriety and who publicly clears his name in a dramatic manner (perhaps catching the one-armed man who was the real killer) no longer suffers social stigma, and so no longer gains extra experience points.

Events in the game might also inflict a Flaw. A character who has been reduced to dying (losing one Health point per turn to aggravated harm) twice in one game session might



develop a condition associated with his injuries, if the Storyteller thinks it's appropriate. Perhaps he is now *Lame* or has *Poor Sight*. If a fight is particularly traumatic, he might become a *Coward* or develop *Amnesia*. In all cases, only the Storyteller has the power to inflict Flaws (or to not inflict them), and he should do so only if a player agrees.

The ultimate key to Flaws, however, is roleplaying. A player must fully roleplay his character's Flaw. He can't pretend it's not there and demand an extra experience point. If his character is in a wheelchair, he needs to act like it, roleplaying all the frustration that entails. The Storyteller might tell the player that his character can't be in the same room with the rest of the characters, because he had to take the elevator to get there while the rest vaulted up the stairs. His character can arrive in the next turn. If the *player* whines about it, he's not in the spirit of his flawed character. If his *character* whines about it, grumbling about the horrible *Muzak™* in the elevator when he arrives, then the player is doing his job.

For the most part, Flaws act as carrots rather than sticks, rewarding roleplaying rather than enforcing it. If a player doesn't incorporate a Flaw into his character's actions, he should not be made to do so. His only punishment is that he does not gain the extra experience point. If he ignores his Flaw too often, the Storyteller can declare him cured of it, and thereafter refuse to award extra experience points even if the player later attempts to play the Flaw and claim the points. Even a man with *One Arm* can be given an effective prosthesis.

The Storyteller is free to devise new Flaws not represented here, or to allow players to create their own.

Mental Flaws

In addition to the mental conditions below that can be incurred by a character, he may have a derangement as a Flaw. Derangements are explored on p. 96 in Chapter 4. It's suggested that it be a mild case rather than a severe one. Unlike mental ailments developed through losses of *Morality*, derangements taken as Flaws cannot be eliminated by spending experience points. Indeed, the Storyteller may decide they cannot be cured at all (unless he concludes that such a Flaw is not being honored during play and he lifts it from your character).

Addiction: Your character is hooked on a certain substance or behavior. If he doesn't get it regularly, he gets anxious and goes out of his way to satisfy his need, even neglecting more important duties. If he goes three or more game sessions without indulging this addiction, he is assumed to have beaten it (your character loses the Flaw). The Storyteller is free to inflict harsh withdrawal symptoms, however. Note: Satisfying this particular addiction does not count as indulging a *Vice* such as *Gluttony*. No *Willpower* points are gained for doing so.

Amnesia: Your character cannot remember a certain period of her life. This might have been caused by physical or psychological trauma, and memories might come back at the most unexpected or inopportune moments. In addition, she might not remember allies or enemies from her past. This seeming disregard might insult others, make

them abandon your character, or drive them to make her remember. For all she knows, there might be a warrant out for her arrest in a distant county or state.

Coward: Your character is afraid to confront unknown situations, and hesitates when he should act boldly.

Forgetful: Your character doesn't have amnesia, but she does have trouble remembering particular details. *What was the name of that cursed book I was supposed to rescue from the library?* The player should avoid relying on her own memory or asking for memory rolls for her character. The character doesn't forget *everything*, especially not truly important details, but she should forget enough to make things frustrating for her companions.

Physical Flaws

Crippled: Your character cannot walk. He has no natural Speed trait, and must rely on a wheelchair or vehicle to travel. A manual wheelchair's Speed is equal to your character's Strength, but he must spend an action to move or suffers a -2 penalty to both Speed and any other action performed (he uses one arm to spin a wheel). An electric wheelchair has a Speed of 3 and allows for other actions in a turn without penalty (your characters' hands are largely free).

Dwarf: Your character is much shorter than the average person. His adult Size is 4. This Flaw awards points only if the character's short size causes him physical or social problems (besides the obvious problem of having a low Health score).

Hard of Hearing: Your character's hearing isn't so good. Subtract two dice from any hearing-based perception rolls. Even though he suffers this penalty on all hearing rolls, you get an experience point at the end of a session only if this Flaw caused him notable trouble.

Lame: Your character has a leg or foot condition that impedes his movement, slowing him down. His basic Speed factor is 2 (instead of 5). Add this to his Strength + Dexterity to determine his Speed trait (see p. 95). You get an experience point at the end of a session only if this Flaw causes your character notable trouble.

Mute: Your character cannot speak and must communicate through hand signs, gestures or by writing.

One Arm: Your character is missing an arm, which makes it hard to perform certain tasks. At the Storyteller's discretion, tasks that normally require two hands take twice as long to perform or are impossible. If your character attempts to perform a challenging task in the normal amount of time, he suffers a -3 penalty.

One Eye: Your character is missing an eye. He has no real depth perception, so all penalties for ranged attacks are doubled. If he attempts to drive in heavy traffic, any 1's rolled on any die cancel out successes on a one-to-one basis, and you may not re-roll 10's.

Poor Sight: Your character's sight isn't so good. Subtract two dice from any sight-based perception rolls. Even though she suffers this penalty on all seeing rolls, you get an experience point at the end of a session only if this Flaw causes your character notable trouble.

Social Flaws

Aloof: Your character is uncomfortable in social settings and avoids crowds and interaction as much as possible. She dislikes being the center of attention and recoils from center stage. Experience is gained when she avoids attention or social environments and misses out on potential rewards as a result. Maybe she doesn't get the job that she "deserves," because the boss is looking for a people-person rather than a hard worker.

Behavior Blind: Your character doesn't really understand human behavior and is blind to common social cues that communicate other people's basic feelings. Maybe he was raised by wolves or terrible parents, but he is socially maladapted. He can't tell when others use sarcasm or innuendo, or if he's boring them. An experience point is awarded only if this Flaw is directly related to a setback that delayed or prevented your character from achieving his goals. Perhaps an important contact or ally refused aid due to being insulted or disgusted by your character's behavior. Note: This Flaw does not preclude your character from having the Empathy Skill, but barring successful Skill rolls, he cannot figure out other people's moods.

Deformity: Your character has a misshapen limb, a terrible visible scar or some other physical affliction that might cause revulsion in others. You suffer a -2 penalty on Social rolls when your character makes new acquaintances.

Embarrassing Secret: Your character has a secret about her past that she must hide or else suffer shame and ostracism from her peers. An experience point is awarded only if your character harms her other causes by working to keep her secret. Perhaps she misses an important meeting with an ally so that she can distract a reporter from looking into her past. Extra experience can be awarded if the secret gets out, at which point this Flaw might be exchanged for Notoriety at the Storyteller's discretion.

Notoriety: Your character, like O.J. Simpson or Michael Jackson, is renowned for some heinous deed, regardless of whether he committed it or not. This Flaw could derive from his infamous family or from his association with a scandalous organization such as the Mob or a company known for environmental infractions. If recognized, he inspires a negative reaction in others. An experience point is awarded only if the negative reaction causes some harm to your character's goals.

Racist/Sexist: Your character has biased opinions of other races, genders, gender-preference groups or cultures. Unfortunately, he also has trouble keeping those opinions to himself, even in the presence of such people. Experience is gained when your character acts on his biases and is confronted, dismissed, ignored or even attacked for them.

Speech Impediment: Your character has trouble speaking properly. This might be due to a lisp, stutter or wound. This Flaw should be roleplayed whenever your character speaks. If you consistently forget to do so, the Storyteller may warn you that your character's condition is improving and might soon be cured.

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the World of Darkness

Name:

Concept:

Chronicle:

Age:

Virtue:

Faction:

Player:

Vice:

Group Name:

ATTRIBUTES

POWER	Intelligence ●0000	Strength ●0000	Presence ●0000
FINESSE	Wits ●0000	Dexterity ●0000	Manipulation ●0000
RESISTANCE	Resolve ●0000	Stamina ●0000	Composure ●0000

SKILLS

Mental

(-3 unskilled)

Academics _____ 00000
 Computer _____ 00000
 Crafts _____ 00000
 Investigation _____ 00000
 Medicine _____ 00000
 Occult _____ 00000
 Politics _____ 00000
 Science _____ 00000

Physical

(-1 unskilled)

Athletics _____ 00000
 Brawl _____ 00000
 Drive _____ 00000
 Firearms _____ 00000
 Larceny _____ 00000
 Stealth _____ 00000
 Survival _____ 00000
 Weaponry _____ 00000

Social

(-1 unskilled)

Animal Ken _____ 00000
 Empathy _____ 00000
 Expression _____ 00000
 Intimidation _____ 00000
 Persuasion _____ 00000
 Socialize _____ 00000
 Streetwise _____ 00000
 Subterfuge _____ 00000

OTHER TRAITS

Merits

_____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000
 _____ 00000

Health

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
 □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Willpower

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
 □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Morality

10 _____ 0
 9 _____ 0
 8 _____ 0
 7 _____ 0
 6 _____ 0
 5 _____ 0
 4 _____ 0
 3 _____ 0
 2 _____ 0
 1 _____ 0

Flaws

 Size _____
 Speed _____
 Initiative Mod _____
 Defense _____
 Armor _____

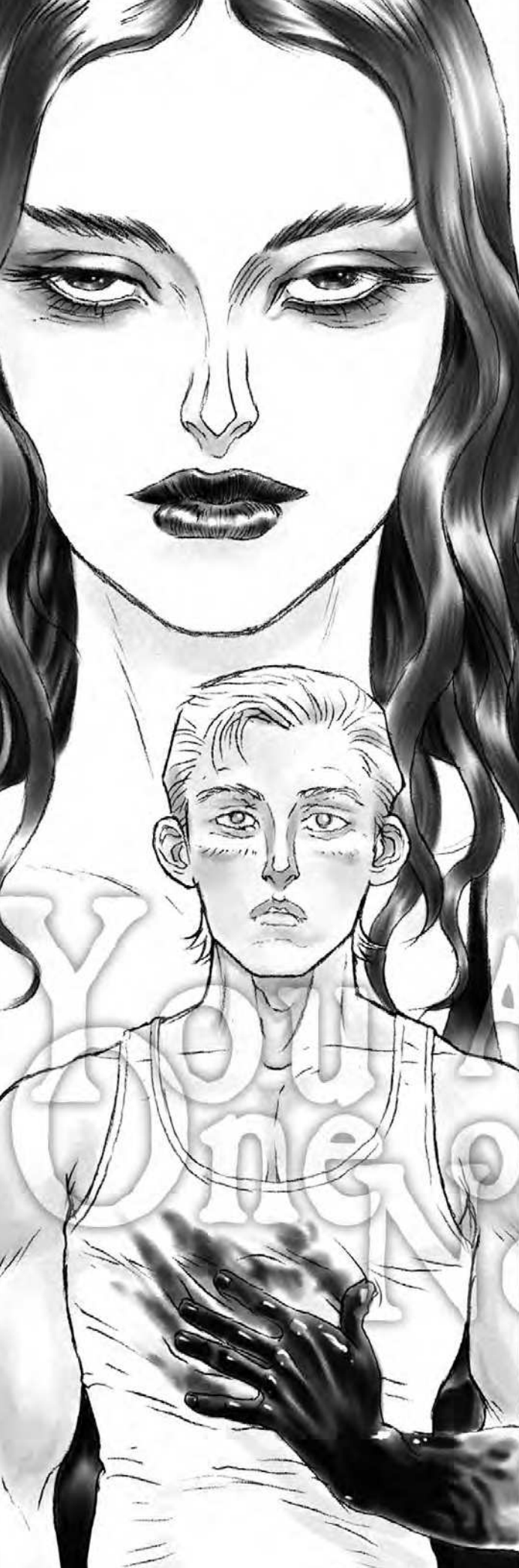
Experience _____

Weapons

Dice Mod.

Equipment

Dice Mod.



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the human throng,
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stalk you,
and prey upon
your body and soul.

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