

# TWO-FISTED TALES

*Revised Edition*



**Precis**  
INTERMEDIA

**THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF THRILLING PULP ACTION!**

***ENTER THE WORLD OF  
THRILLING PULP ACTION!***

***THE DANGERS AND EXCITEMENT OF MAGIC,  
MARTIAL ARTS, HYPNOTISM, GADGETS, AND  
TWO-FISTED DUELS AWAIT...***





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## ***THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF THRILLING PULP ACTION***

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Revised Edition (version 2.1)

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*Matthew Stevens*

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# **TWO-FISTED TALES**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

# **Introduction**



## WELCOME TO THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF THRILLING PULP ACTION

The term “Pulp” has many meanings these days. To many, it represents something lurid, sleazy and sensationalist. That is what Quentin Tarantino meant when he called his movie *Pulp Fiction*—a violent and outrageous look at the seedy side of American life. “Pulp” refers to something thrilling yet low-rent—at least, that is a common definition of the term.

“Pulp” can refer to something more specific, however—a certain kind of magazine. The pulps were fiction magazines, printed on rough wood-pulp paper, written largely for working-class readers between the turn of the century and the mid-Fifties. The pulps earned a poor reputation in those years, seen as cheap, lurid, and sensationalist—a connotation that survives to this day. To some extent, their reputation was well-earned, but pulp writing, at its best, had a great deal to recommend it: boundless imagination, quick-paced narrative, and clear, unpretentious, idiomatic prose styles. These are genuine literary virtues, and they were characteristic of pulp writing. The pulps pioneered many of the genres that we take for granted today, such as science fiction and hard-boiled mystery stories. For better or for worse, contemporary popular culture is a direct descendant of pulp fiction.

The pulps were relentlessly capitalistic, with few pretensions of artistic or social value. While the commercial media of today tend to be conservative and shy away from risks, the pulps could be remarkably inventive and experimental. While many of the pulps focused on the most popular genres (westerns, war, romances, mysteries, science fiction and superheroes), publishers also came out with magazines about laughably esoteric subjects. There were railroad and zeppelin stories, ranch and underworld romances, “Weird Menace” and “lucky” tales, courtroom and “spicy” dramas, super-villain epics and countless other genres that never went anywhere, but provide the pulps with some of their eccentric charm.

### PULP HISTORY

The pulps got their start over a hundred years ago, as American cities were filling up with millions of poor immigrants, just arriving from Europe. At the time, there were few reliable sources of fiction for poor or working-class readers. There were no paperback books (the paperback was introduced in the late Thirties) and hardcovers were far too expensive for readers who earned a few dollars

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a day. A number of “slick” magazines, such as *Collier's*, *Cosmopolitan* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, offered fiction to their readers, but the “slicks” were also a little too pricey, and they were written for a largely middle-class and upper-middle-class audience, holding little appeal for the working-class masses.

There was one source of fiction within the reach of the poor—the dime novels. They were cheap (despite their name, often sold for a nickel) and offered the kind of wild adventure and fast-paced action that appealed to juveniles of all classes, featuring larger-than-life heroes such as Buffalo Bill, Nick Carter, Jesse James, and Young Wild West. Unfortunately, they were usually poorly-written and the subject-matter held little appeal for older readers. It was time for a new medium—the pulp magazine.

The first pulp magazine began publication in the late nineteenth century. In 1896, Frank Munsey decided to take his ailing children's magazine, *The Golden Argosy*, and pitch it towards a more adult audience. The new magazine, renamed simply *Argosy*, offered a large selection of fiction for a cheap price. To cut costs, Munsey decided to print the new magazine on low-quality, wood-pulp paper, giving the pulps their name.

The new *Argosy* was a big hit, and it spawned a host of imitators, including *The Popular Magazine*, *All-Story*, *Top-Notch*, *Short Story*, *Blue-Book* and *Adventure*. Specialized pulps also appeared, as Street & Smith converted many of their old dime novels, such as *Nick Carter Weekly* and *Buffalo Bill Weekly*, into the new pulp format (turning them into *Detective Story* and *Western Story*, respectively). By the early twentieth century, the new pulp magazines had completely eclipsed the dime novels; they did so by offering more fiction, of higher quality, and at equivalent prices.

The first pulps offered competent but undistinguished fiction, little different from the “slick” magazines of the period. Soon, the pulps were filled with more imaginative and adventurous material, such as the fantasies of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Abraham Merritt, the romantic westerns of Max Brand, the historical adventures of Talbot Mundy and Howard Lamb, and the costumed crusaders of Johnson McCulley and Frank Packard. It was these authors, and the stories they wrote, that defined the pulps in the decades to come.

## FANTASY & HORROR PULPS

Fantasy and science fiction, broadly defined, were staples of the pulps from the very beginning. Probably the most influential, and certainly the most popular, pulp fantasist was Edgar Rice Burroughs. His first two stories, *Under the Moons of Mars* and *Tarzan of the Apes*, appeared in *All-Story* in 1912, and they established him as one of the most popular writers of the era. His Mars books, in particular, were influential in the fantasy and science fiction fields, helping to found the genre known as swords and sorcery, with its strong-jawed heroes, scantily-clad princesses, and evil priests sacrificing virgins at the altar.

Despite Burroughs' success, relatively few pulp magazines were devoted purely to fantasy, and even fewer were financially successful. The greatest and longest-lived fantasy pulp was *Weird Tales*. It was a pioneer not only in fantasy, but in horror and science fiction as well. It was also the primary market for a number of accomplished authors (including, of all people, a young Tennessee Williams). Among its many discoveries were H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. Lovecraft wrote horrifying stories of the hideous gods and monsters of the Cthulhu mythos, while Howard wrote tales of heroic barbarians in the historical and prehistoric past, such as King Kull and Conan the Barbarian. Both authors wrote in obscurity, and both died long before their prime, but they would eventually be regarded as masters of fantasy and horror.

Other fantasy pulps appeared over the years, but they never lasted very long, including *Ghost Stories*, the *Thrill Book* and *Strange Tales*. Perhaps the best competitor to *Weird Tales* was *Unknown*, published by Street & Smith and edited by Joseph Campbell, the visionary editor of *Astounding Stories*. *Unknown* disdained the archaic style and primitive settings of *Weird Tales*, preferring ironic fantasy stories, set largely in the modern world. *Unknown*, unfortunately, did not fare any better than other fantasy magazines.

By the mid-Thirties, swords and sorcery and other supernatural fantasy stories began to look a bit old-fashioned. “Weird Menace” was the new trend in horror. In the “Weird Menace” pulps, the horrors were very much





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of this world—evil scientists, mad doctors and even bloodthirsty union organizers. There was always a pseudo-rational explanation for the trials and tribulations of the hero or heroine. With their lurid cover art, full of half-naked women threatened with torture and mutilation, the “Weird Menace” pulps were a huge hit, eclipsing the supernatural horrors of H.P. Lovecraft and his ilk. At the same time, readers who sought stories of adventure in new, unexplored worlds could turn to a new and equally exciting source.

## SCIENCE FICTION

Stories about other planets and fabulous inventions, by Burroughs, A. Merritt, Ray Cummings, George Allen England and others, had been a staple of general interest pulps from the very beginning. No magazine, however, had been devoted exclusively to science fiction; the term “science fiction,” in fact, had yet to be invented.

It took a Luxembourg inventor and businessman named Hugo Gernsback to change matters. Gernsback dreamed of teaching readers hard science through the stories in his magazines. At first, Gernsback published stories of scientific prophecy in his non-fiction magazine, *Modern Electronics*. When reader response was favorable, Gernsback launched a new magazine devoted exclusively to “scientifiction”. This was *Amazing Stories*.

*Amazing Stories* started largely as a reprint magazine, republishing work by H.G. Wells, Jules Verne and other classic authors of speculative fiction. Before long, however, Gernsback attracted writers who were willing to specialize in the new field. Most of the “science” in *Amazing Stories* was pretty laughable by today’s standards, and many offerings were little more than descriptions of dry, technical details. This pioneering magazine did offer a few good stories, however, introducing readers to the wonders of larger-than-life “space opera,” including Edmund Hamilton’s *Interstellar Patrol* and E.E. “Doc” Smith’s *Skylark* novels.

A number of science fiction magazines followed *Amazing Stories*—*Wonder Stories*, *Planet Stories*, *Startling Stories*, *Captain Future* and others. Most of them specialized in space opera and otherworldly romance in

the Burroughs tradition, but one magazine, *Astounding Stories*, stood out from the competition. *Astounding’s* editor, John W. Campbell, demanded high-quality fiction with believable science. Under his guidance, *Astounding* published much of the best science fiction of this period, by many of its most esteemed authors (Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and others). It defined science fiction for the decades to come.

## HARD-BOILED MYSTERIES

While Hugo Gernsback was realizing the first science fiction magazine, another innovation was entering the mystery field. Before the mid-Twenties, most pulp mystery authors were little more than meek imitators of the great English pioneers, like Arthur Conan Doyle. Most of their stories featured stereotypical elements, like the brilliant detective, clueless sidekick, narrator, and baffled police, in endless reiterations of the Sherlock Homes formula.

Things began to change in 1923 with a previously undistinguished mystery and adventure magazine named *Black Mask*. Two new authors emerged—Carroll John Daly and Dashiell Hammett. Daly wrote about the two-fisted vigilante name Race Williams, who shot the bad guys to pieces and slept with a gun in his hand. Dashiell Hammett, however, wrote far more realistic stories about a fat, middle-aged detective known as the Continental Op.

While Daly faded into obscurity, Hammett became a national sensation, publishing such novels as *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Thin Man*. Under the editorship of Joseph T. Shaw, a number of popular writers followed in *Black Mask*, including Earle Stanley Gardner (author of the Perry Mason novels), Frederick Nebel, Paul Cain, Raoul Whitfield, and Raymond Chandler, who went on to write *The Big Sleep* and other Phillip Marlowe stories. More than anyone else, Hammett and Chandler, gave us the hard-boiled genre we know today.

After the hard-boiled formulae became popular, *Black Mask* faced competitors from a huge number of imitators, until the tough, wisecracking private-eye became something of a cliché. A few other magazines merit

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distinction. *Dime Detective*, by Popular Publications, was the most popular mystery pulp of the era; it became the home to Raymond Chandler and other *Black Mask* alumni after Joseph Shaw was fired in 1936. *Ten Detective Aces* specialized in mysteries tinged with horror and weird menace. *Spicy Detective* and *Hollywood Detective* featured stereotypical private-eye stories, but charged with erotic content that was considered pornographic in its day. Other magazines, such as *Detective Tales*, shied away from the cool, hard-boiled style, and emphasized a more emotionally intense narrative, characteristic of Cornell Woolrich and other pioneers of noir. Probably the most bizarre detective pulp was *Dime Mystery*, which after pioneering the "Weird Menace" genre, specialized in defective detectives with deformities.

Few of these variations had much long-term impact. In the end, the hard-boiled school survived them all, and became one of the most popular genres in the pulp era and beyond.

## HERO PULPS

Meanwhile, in 1930, Street & Smith broadcast a radio show called *Detective Story Hour*, in which an announcer would read from the latest issue of *Detective Story Magazine*. Harry Charlott, a writer for the show, decided to give the anonymous host of the program a nom de plume—The Shadow. Announcer James LaCurto started each program with a hammy laugh, and in a creepy voice, he ended each segment with the trademark line, "The Shadow knows!"

The new format became a big hit with listeners, who asked their newsdealers for "the magazine with that Shadow guy." No such magazine existed, but Street & Smith editor Henry Ralston decided to take advantage of the character's popularity. He hired William Gibson, a stage magician and journalist, to write the first story for the *Shadow Magazine*. It turned out to be a big hit, and Gibson was the ideal writer for the job. He went on to write two-hundred and eighty-three Shadow novels, and his character, a mysterious, dark robed, hawk-nosed avenger, who was a master of disguise and an expert with a pair of forty-five caliber automatics, became the model for a host of other pulp heroes.

Dozens of characters were created in the Shadow's mold, such as the Phantom Detective, Secret Agent X, the Ghost, the Black Bat, Captain Zero and countless others. Two of them stand out. The Doc Savage stories, written by an inventive telegraph operator named Lester Dent, were about a super-athlete and scientific wizard named Clark Savage, who toured the world and fought evildoers with his five eccentric buddies ("Ham" Brooks, the well-dressed, Harvard-trained lawyer and his ape-like pal, the brilliant chemist "Monk" Mayfair, were Doc's most popular sidekicks). *Doc Savage* magazine was characterized by both a keen imagination and a quirky sense of humor, as Doc traveled to the four corners of the Earth, battling bizarre villains with a seemingly never-ending supply of wondrous gadgets.

The *Spider* stories, on the other hand, were about a costumed vigilante named Richard Wentworth, who shot criminals and left the mark of a spider on their cooling corpses. The Spider was obviously inspired by the Shadow, but his adventures put him in a class of his own. While the Shadow's adventures tended to be cerebral and bloodless, and the its main character was something of an ambiguous, inhuman character, the Spider's saga was distinguished by a driving narrative-style and over-the-top melodrama. The Spider's enemies were probably the most vicious and bloodthirsty in the hero pulps, while Wentworth and his mistress, the lovely Rita Van Sloan, were shot at, captured, tortured, and faced arrest and execution in almost every episode.

By the time of Pearl Harbor, the hero pulps had lost their old exuberance. *The Spider* folded; *The Shadow* became repetitive and tedious; Doc Savage became a more sedate and realistic hero. Comic book heroes, like Superman and Captain America, offered simpler, more fantastic fare, better suited to a juvenile audience. The hero pulps, like the pulps in general, were facing the end of the line.

## THE END

In the late Thirties, the pulps suddenly faced competition from two new sources. Comic books had been around since the late Twenties, but most of them were nothing more than reprints



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of newspaper strips. Quickly, however, they began to print original material, and when the first Superman story was published (*Action Comics*, 1938), comic book sales exploded. The superhero comics, with simple and vivid stories, pulled the juvenile market away from the hero pulps.

At the same time, publishers began to experiment with a new format, namely paperback books. Starting with Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* in 1938, the paperbacks offered novel-length fiction for a cheap price, but without the sleazy reputation of the pulp magazines. During World War II, paperback book drives for soldiers overseas made the new format a favorite of returning troops.

By the end of the war, the pulps were facing a slow but inevitable decline. All but the most

reliable money-makers, the detective, science fiction and western pulps, were canceled. Then even the old cash cows began to lose money. In 1949, Street & Smith abruptly shut down its entire pulp-magazine line (with the exception of *Astounding*, which continued in digest form). After 1950, the rest of the field slowly disintegrated, and by mid-decade, they were all gone.

Nevertheless, the influence of the pulps continued. A few of the science fiction magazines survived in their digest form. Many of the hard-boiled writers moved on to the paperback market, where they founded the new genre known as noir. Superman and Batman carried the lineage of Doc Savage and the Shadow into a new era. The pulps died, but the pulp tradition became central to American pop culture.

## THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ROLEPLAYING

Most readers, in all likelihood, already understand the basics of roleplaying games. A few, however, may be new to the hobby, and might be intimidated just by the size of this book. It is full of charts, tables, and obscure pieces of jargon, and this roleplaying game has fewer charts, tables and jargon than most. Some may think that roleplaying games are incredibly complicated.

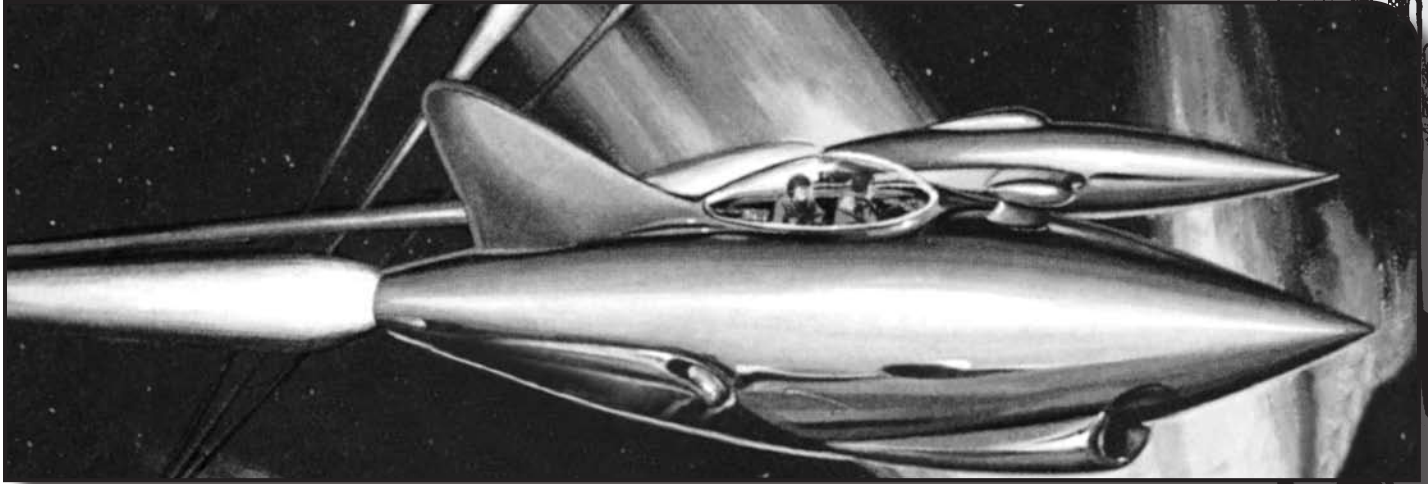
Believe it or not, the fundamentals of roleplaying are actually quite simple. It turns out that none of those intimidating graphs or tables are really necessary; they are provided simply to make the game a little easier to play, and most of them are almost never used. To start playing a roleplaying game, you do not need a single chart or a single pair of dice. You only need to understand a few key concepts.

### PLAYERS AND GAMEMASTERS

There are two kinds of participants in a roleplaying game—players and gamemasters.

Choosing a gamemaster is the first step in any roleplaying game. Gamemasters hold positions that are similar to referees in sporting competitions, but they are far more powerful and important to the game—baseball can be played without an umpire, for example, but a typical roleplaying game cannot exist without a gamemaster. This analogy might help explain the gamemaster's role—if an umpire were like a gamemaster, he would decide what game to play (baseball, basketball or tiddlywinks). He can change the rules at any time, occasionally suspend the rules, and even decide where the story takes place.

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## BOOKS ABOUT THE PULPS

There are dozens of good books on the pulps as a whole, but most of them are sadly out of print. One book that is still in print is Peter Haining's *The Classic Era of American Pulp Magazines*, and for that reason alone it may be the best place to begin. A personal favorite is Lee Server's *Danger is My Business*; while out of print, it is easy to find. Robinson & Davidson's *Pulp Culture* has perhaps the best cover reproductions, along with Robert Lesser's *Pulp Art*. Tony Goodstone's *Pulps* (a collection of stories) and Ron Goulart's *Cheap Thrills* are also quite informative. Another favorite is *Deadly Excitements*, an often-funny collection of essays by the late Robert Sampson, whose five-volume collection, *Yesterday's Faces*, an exhaustive (and often exhausting) catalogue of early series characters, is another invaluable resource. Frank Gruber's book, *The Pulp Jungle*, describes what it was like to write for the pulp market.

Books on the dime novels, the predecessors of the pulps, are hard to find. *Five Dime Novels* is an out-of-print collection of these stories, with a helpful historical introduction. Be warned as dime novel prose can be hard to take in large doses. For the reader who can spare \$100, there is *The Dime Novel Companion: A Source Book*, an encyclopedia by J. Randolph Cox.

There are innumerable books on the history of science fiction: *Explorers of the Infinite*, by Sam Moskowitz, is the classic text. Readers can also turn to the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* by Robert Holstack, and *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* by John Clute. *Those Macabre Pulps*, still in print, is a collection of pulp fantasy stories. *Weird Tales*, by Alistair Durie, is a history of that esteemed magazine, while *Rivals of Weird Tales*, by Weinberg, Dziemianowicz & Greenberg, discusses other horror and fantasy magazines of the period.

There are probably as many books on private-eye fiction as there are on all other pulps put together. One of the best, although it is long out of print, is William Nolan's collection, *The Black Mask Boys*. Another good source is Ron Goulart's *The Dime Detectives*. There are also innumerable collections of short-stories from the era; Herbert Rhum's *The Hard-Boiled Detective* and Goulart's *The Hard-Boiled Dicks* are collections specifically from *Black Mask*, while *The Mammoth Book of Pulp Fiction* and *Hard Boiled*, both edited by Bill Prozini, collect stories from a broader range of magazines (many from after the pulp era).

For many fans, the hero pulps are pulp fiction. The latest book on the hero pulps, Don Hutchinson's *The Pulp Heroes*, is a good place to begin, and it is easy to find. Books on individual heroes can also be found. Check out *The Shadow Scrapbook* by William Gibson and *The Duende History of the Shadow*; *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life* by Phillip Jose Farmer; and *Spider*, by the late Robert Sampson. Finally, for the fan of radio shows, *The Great Radio Heroes*, by Jim Harmon, offers a good survey.

For the good history of the first paperbacks, arguably the best account is *Over My Dead Body* by Lee Server (the author of *Danger is My Business*). There are countless histories of comic books; *The Classic Era of American Comics*, by Nancy Wright, is still in print, as are *The Steranko History of the Comics* and Jules Feifer's *The Great Comic Book Heroes*.

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The players, by contrast, have one privilege that the gamemaster can never take away—if they do not like what the gamemaster is doing, they can quit. This provides players with more leverage than they might realize. A gamemaster without players is no longer a gamemaster. Remember that there is no National Roleplaying League, no stadium owners, no screaming fans and no TV viewers. The players are the gamemaster's only audience, and the only people he has to please, other than himself. A good gamemaster does what he can to satisfy his players. In the end, the goal of roleplaying is for everybody, players and gamemasters alike, to have fun.

## PLAYERS AND CHARACTERS

We have talked a bit about the powers that gamemasters have, as well as the leverage of the players. But what do players do? The answer is simple. Players pretend to be other people. Like an actor in a movie, each player takes on the role of a character (often referred to as a *player character*). Unlike an actor in a movie, however, a player does not follow a script. Instead, the gamemaster presents each player with a situation, and the player describes how his character responds.

In a sense, players are like actors in an improvisational theater troupe, with the gamemaster as the director, standing off-stage. It is important to note several differences, however. Players generally do not wear costumes or move about on stage. Instead, they tend to sit around a table, even if their characters are moving. Sometimes they pretend to be their characters, but in other cases, they only describe what their characters are doing.

For example, there are three players—John, Paul and Mary. John's character is named Carl, Paul's character is named Eric, and Mary's character is named Deirdre. If they were attacking an evil troll, the players might describe their actions like this:

*John: "I'll fire my gun at the troll."*

*Paul: "After Carl fires his arrow, I'll swing at the troll with my custom-built sword."*

*Mary: "Deirdre casts a spell to send the troll to Hell where he belongs."*

Note that John speaks in the first person, while Mary speaks in third person. In John's case, everyone knows from the context that he is talking about his character, Carl, so there is little cause for confusion. Both approaches are perfectly acceptable in a roleplaying game.

Sometimes players not only describe what their characters are doing, but they actually pretend to be their characters. This is common when a player's character is speaking to someone else. For example, if Carl, Eric and Deirdre were confronted by the King's Guard outside the city walls, they might try to talk their way out of a confrontation:

*Gamemaster: (pretending to be the night watchman)  
"What are you three doing here?"*

*John: "We were just going out for a stroll."*

*Mary: "Yes, it was such a lovely evening."*

*Paul: "We were planning on sharing a bottle of wine. Would you like some?"*

In this example, the players are speaking "in character," much as if they were playing a role on a stage. Also note that the gamemaster himself is pretending to be somebody else (the night watchman). The watchman would be referred to as a non-player character, since none of the players control him.

Now that the differences between gamemasters, players, and their characters have been explained, it is time to explain how these elements work together in a game. First, we look at how a roleplaying game begins.

## SETTING THE SCENE

Once the gamemaster has been chosen, and players have selected their characters, the next step is to set the scene. First, the gamemaster describes where the characters are and what they have been doing recently. Then he asks each player to describe what his character is going to do, as in this example:

*"Alfred, you're standing outside the mouth of a cave in the middle of the Dark Forest. You heard the cave was the home of a dragon with a huge hoard of treasure, so you rode out here on your horse, armed with a sword, a knife, a few torches, and wearing a suit of plate-mail. What do you do?"*

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This example gives some insight into roleplaying games. There is no board and there are no playing pieces. The gamemaster tells his players where their characters are, and what they see, hear, smell and taste. It is like listening to someone read from a novel.

Once the gamemaster sets the scene, players describe what their characters do. This is where roleplaying really shines. In a roleplaying game, characters can try to do just about anything. In the previous example, for instance, Alfred could:

- *Walk into the cave.*
- *Flee the forest and the cave.*
- *Build a bonfire and smoke out the dragon.*
- *Climb over the cave, and dig a hole down below.*
- *Go into town and ask the villagers to help him kill the dragon.*
- *Start an avalanche and cover the cave mouth, burying the dragon inside.*
- *Do just about anything else that comes to mind.*

This feature is unique to roleplaying games. Even computer games do not offer as many options. Note, however, that while characters can try to do anything, they do not necessarily succeed every time. For example, if Alfred, the character in the previous example, were to go into the local village and ask for help, he might not get any help at all—why would the peasants want to risk their lives killing some monster? If he built a bonfire, he might accidentally start a forest fire, burning himself in the process. And if he goes inside the cave and attacks the dragon, he may end up as the dragon's next meal.

In any case, whenever the characters do something, the gamemaster describes what happens. For example, if Alfred decided to walk into the dragon's cave, the gamemaster might tell him the following:

*"You walk into the dragon's cave, sword in hand. It's dark, and the cave is covered with cobwebs. In the distance, you see a brightly-lit room, and hear snoring sounds inside. What do you do?"*

The player responds to this question, and the game continues until the character dies, or achieves his goals, or the player and the gamemaster decide to end the game.

## RULE SYSTEMS

While characters can try to do just about anything, they cannot expect to succeed every time. An astute reader might ask, when do characters succeed and when do they fail? A character's success depends on how the gamemaster decides they do. If he says they die fighting the dragon, they die. If he says they kill the dragon with a few, brief sword strokes, then they kill it. If he says it takes a long, dragged-out fight to kill the monster, and many of them suffer third-degree burns in the process, then that is what happens.

Many players feel uncomfortable giving gamemasters such complete and arbitrary power over the lives of their characters, however. Many gamemasters also do not want the responsibility that comes with this power; they have enough decisions to make, after all, and they do not like to alienate players when they (inevitably) have to rule that a character fails.

Although the gamemaster always has ultimate authority to determine what happens, a simple set of standards exist for deciding when a character succeeds or fails. These standards are the rules of the game. Some rules, for example, may tell the gamemaster what happens when someone is attacked with a weapon. There may be rules to determine what kind of magic can be used. Some rules might tell a player how much weight a character can carry. Other rules might determine whether or not a character can move silently through a room of sleeping monsters.

Most rules consider three factors to decide how well a character does something:

- How skilled, or how talented, is the character? For example, a Green Beret is probably pretty good with a gun, and he can usually succeed at shooting something. An old woman in a nursing home, on the other hand, has a good chance of missing everything she targets with the gun.
- What is the character trying to do and how difficult is it? For instance, a Green Beret with a rifle can almost certainly hit a stationary target three feet away. He probably cannot hit someone who is dodging behind cover that is five-hundred feet in the distance.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

- Finally, what do the dice say? In some cases, success or failure might depend on random factors not under the character's control. A random die roll (or some other random process, like a coin flip or a draw from a well-shuffled deck of cards) can stand in for this element of chance.

Note that the rules are not always necessary. Characters may do things that are very easy (like climbing a flight of stairs, flipping a light switch, and saying hello), so there is no point in rolling dice or checking the rules. The gamemaster simply describes that the character is successful and continues with the game. If a character is trying to do something clearly impossible (like leaping to the moon or lifting the Empire State building), the gamemaster simply declares that the attempt is a failure. There may also be cases in which it would be dramatically appropriate for a character to succeed, even though the rules say he should fail—the gamemaster is free to override the rules in the interests of the game.

## BASIC CONVENTIONS

*Two-Fisted Tales* is a set of rules for adventure games in the inter-war years (1920-1940). It was inspired by the pulp magazines, comic strips and the radio shows of the era, as well as by movies such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Mummy* and *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*. When reading these rules, there are a few conventions to keep in mind:

### Dice

This game uses ten-sided dice, referred to as *D*. Most are numbered from 0 to 9. In this game, 0 is treated as a zero, not as a 10—if the die values run from 1 to 10, treat the 10 as a zero.) Ideally, the gamemaster and each player should have at least two ten-sided dice of different colors. When the rules read 2D or 3D, roll two or three dice, respectively, and add the results together. A modifier is also sometimes applied to a die roll. If the rules indicate 2D-3 then roll dice and subtract three from the result, but if they read 1D+2 then roll one die and add two to the result.

Sometimes the gamemaster rolls D% for random encounters and the like. This indicates

a roll of one die for the tens digit and another die for the ones digit, with a result ranging from 0 to 99 (a roll of 5 and 1, for example, is a result of 51, while a roll of 0 and 0 is a result of 0).

### Playing Cards

This game also uses a standard deck of shuffled playing cards, with four suits (hearts, diamonds, clubs and spades) and thirteen values per suit (two through ten, jack, queen, king and ace). Jokers are not used and can be removed from the deck.

### Fractions

Unless stated otherwise, always round fractions to the nearest round number, but halves are rounded up.

## GLOSSARY

### Heroes

The good guys, the stars, the protagonists—heroes is a synonym for “player character” in *Two-Fisted Tales*.

### Power Level

This indicates how powerful the heroes are at the beginning of the story. There are four levels in order from least powerful to most—gritty, escapist, fantastic and amazing.

### Abilities

These are broad indicators of a character's power or competence. There are eight of them—brains, luck, mind, muscle, reflexes, savvy, status and weird. Normal humans have scores between 1 and 20 in each.

### Specialties

An indicator of specialized experience or training, they give characters 4-point bonuses to ability scores in certain situations. Specialties are usually referred to in parentheses after an ability. *Example: Reflexes (Gun Fighting)*

### Masteries

A measure of extremely intense training in a narrow field, they give characters 8-point bonuses to abilities in very narrow circumstances. Masteries are often mentioned in brackets after an ability, or after an ability and a specialty. *Example: Reflexes (Gun Fighting) [Small Pistol]*

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Schticks

These are extremely rare or unusual powers (in humans, at least).

## Target Numbers

The value, or number, that a character has to beat in a check or roll in order for it to be successful is called a target number.

## Ability Check, or Check

The simple comparison of an ability with a target number is a check. The ability may or may not be adjusted with specialties or masteries.

## Ability Roll, or Roll

This is the comparison of a result with a target number, in which the result is an ability plus bonus die rolls and less penalty die rolls.

## Bonus Die

The ten-sided die added to an ability during a roll is called the bonus die. Sometimes more than one is rolled.

## Penalty Die

The ten-sided die subtracted from an ability during a roll is called the penalty die. Sometimes more than one is rolled.

## Combat Roll

This is a reflexes roll which determines the outcome of combat.

## Combat Turn

This is roughly a one-second period in which people try to kill or beat each other.

## Damage

This indicates how much trauma an attack or a hazard inflicts on an ordinary person.

## Wounds

This is a measure of how badly hurt someone or something is.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## A LIST OF PULP AUTHORS...

**Isaac Asimov.** Began publishing science fiction in the pulp era in *Astounding Science Fiction*. Would go on to write the *Foundation* series, among other works.

**Dwight Babcock.** Author of the "Smashing G-Men" stories.

**Robert Leslie Bellem.** So-called King of the Spicys. Wrote the Dan Turner detective stories for *Spicy Detective* and *Hollywood Detective*.

**Robert Bloch.** A disciple of H.P. Lovecraft's, and a regular contributor to *Weird Tales*. Went on to write the *Psycho* novels.

**Leigh Brackett.** Science fiction author and accomplished screenwriter, specialized in space opera stories.

**Ray Bradbury.** Renowned science fiction author, author of *The Martian Chronicles* and other works, got his start in the pulps.

**Max Brand.** Real name Frederick Faust. The most popular author of pulp Westerns. Also wrote the Doctor Kildare stories.

**Edgar Rice Burroughs.** Author of Tarzan, Mars and Pellicidar novels. One of the most popular contributors to the pulps.

**Paul Cain.** Real name George Sims. Considered the "hardest" of the hard-boiled authors in *Black Mask*.

**L. Sprague de Camp.** Fantasy and science fiction author, went on to write *Harold Shea* stories and *Viagens Interplanetarias* novels.

**Hugh Cave.** A prolific writer for the pulps. Wrote horror stories, "spicy" stories, other works.

**Raymond Chandler.** Began his hard-boiled work in the pulps before writing the Phillip Marlowe novels.

**Arthur C. Clarke.** Another great discovery of *Astounding* magazine. Would go on to write *2001, Childhood's End* and other works.

**William Wallace Cook.** The earliest American SF writer for the pulps.

**Stephen Crane.** Great American author. Wrote stories for *Argosy* at the dawn of the pulp era.

**Agatha Christie.** A few of her great detective novels were serialized in the general-interest pulps.

**Carroll John Daly.** Author of the first "hard-boiled" detective stories. A huge influence on Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer novels.

**Norbert Davis.** Author of the tongue-in-cheek Max Latin stories. A favorite of Ludwig Wittgenstein, of all people.

**Lester Dent.** Primary author of the Doc Savage stories (as Kenneth Robeson). Also wrote for *Black Mask* and other magazines.

**Arthur Empey.** Author of the Terrence X. O'Leary war stories. Terrible writer, the Ed Wood of the pulp era.

**George Allen England.** A popular fantasy author in the early pulps.

**Bruno Fischer.** Specialized in "Weird Menace" stories.

**Steve Fisher.** Author of "tough but tender" detective stories.

**Erle Stanley Gardner.** A very popular and astoundingly productive writer, went on to write the Perry Mason novels.

**Walter Gibson.** Primary author of the Shadow novels (as Maxwell Grant), among other stories.

**Zane Grey.** Pioneer Western author; many novels were serialized in the early pulps.

**Edmond Hamilton.** A pioneer in "Space Opera." Author of *Interstellar Patrol* and *Captain Future* stories.

**Dashiell Hammett.** Author of *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Thin Man*; most of his work was originally published in *Black Mask*.

**Robert Heinlein.** Another *Astounding* alumnus, later author of *Starship Troopers*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, other works.

**Robert J. Hogan.** Author of the very popular *G-8 and His Battle Aces* novels, as well as the *Mysterious Wu Fang* series.

**Robert E. Howard.** Published most of his work (including the Conan stories) in *Weird Tales*, but also wrote in other genres.

**L. Ron Hubbard.** Contributor to Western and science fiction magazines, later founded the Church of Scientology.

**Henry Kuttner.** Horror and fantasy author, another protege of H.P. Lovecraft.

**Louis L'Amour.** Author of popular Western novels, got his start in the pulps.

**Harold Lamb.** Author of the "Klimt the Cossack" stories in *Adventure*.

**Fritz Leiber.** Fantasy author, early Fafrd and Grey Mouser stories were serialized in *Unknown* magazine.

**Elmore Leonard.** Renowned author. Began contributing at the tail end of the pulp era, largely to Western magazines.

**Sinclair Lewis.** Renowned author. Worked as assistant editor of *Adventure* magazine and wrote detective stories for the pulps.

**H.P. Lovecraft.** Inventor of the Cthulhu Mythos and author of other horror stories, wrote largely for *Weird Tales* and a few science-fiction magazines.

**John D. MacDonald.** Another late contributor to the pulps. Markets were science fiction as well as mystery magazines. Later to write popular Travis McGee novels.

**Horace McCoy.** Wrote the Jack Frost stories for *Black Mask*; later wrote the "existentialist" novel, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*

**Johnson McCulley.** Author of the Zorro stories, among others.

**Abraham Merritt.** Specialized in exotic fantasy: *The Moon Pool*, *People of the Pit*, other works.

**C.L. Moore.** One of the most popular contributors to *Weird Tales*, author of the "Northwest Smith" stories.

**Clarence Mulford.** Author of the Hopalong Cassidy stories.

**Talbot Mundy.** Author of the Jimgrin and Tros stories, published in *Adventure* magazine.

**Frederick Nebel.** Wrote the tongue-and-cheek Kennedy and McBride stories for *Black Mask* magazine.

**Phillip Francis Nowlan.** Author of the Buck Rodgers stories (in *Amazing Stories*) and early comic strips.

**Frank L. Packard.** Author of the Gray Seal stories in the early pulps.

**Norvell Page.** Author of most *Spider* novels (as Grant Stockbridge), in addition to other material.

**Seabury Quinn.** Wrote the enormously popular Jules de Grandin stories for *Weird Tales*.

**Arthur Reeve.** Author of the Paul Kennedy "scientific detective" stories in early pulps.

Considered "the American Conan Doyle" at the time. (His reputation has slipped over the years.)

**Rafael Sabatini.** Author of the Captain Blood pirate stories for *Adventure* magazine.

**Richard Sale.** Author of the Joe Dill stories, later a television director.

**Upton Sinclair.** Wrote extensively for *The Popular Magazine* and other early pulps before writing *The Jungle* and other muckraking novels.

**Richard Shaver.** Deranged author responsible for the notorious "Shaver Mysteries" in *Amazing Stories*.

**Clark Ashton Smith.** Highly esteemed author of horror and fantasy stories in *Weird Tales*.

**E.E. "Doc" Smith.** One of the pioneers of space opera. Wrote the "Skylark" stories and (later) the *Lensmen* series.

**Theodore Sturgeon.** Science fiction author, went on to write *More Than Human* among other works.

**Jim Thompson.** One of the later masters of *noir*, wrote for the detective pulps.

**Armitage Trail.** A popular author of gangster stories.

**Lawrence Treat.** Wrote for the detective pulps before creating the police procedural novel.

**A.E. van Vogt.** Science fiction author of *Slan* and other surreal science-fiction tales.

**Stanley Weinbaum.** Contributor to romance and science fiction pulps, a pioneer in stories about "realistic" aliens: *A Martian Odyssey*, *Poison Planet*, others.

**Manly Wade Wellman.** Fantasy author of the Silver John stories among others.

**Raoul Whitfield.** Author of the Jo Gar stories in *Black Mask*.

**Tennessee Williams.** Renowned playwright. His first published work was in *Weird Tales*.

**Jack Williamson.** A pioneer science-fiction author, with over seventy years of work.

**Cornell Woolrich.** One of the pioneers of *Noir*; wrote *Rear Window*, *The Bride Wore Black* and other stories.



**CHAPTER 2**

**Heroes  
& Heroines**



# TWO-FISTED TALES

“[The Hero] must be a complete man and a common man and an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in this world and a good enough man for any world...”

The story is the man’s adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in. If there were enough like him, the world would be a very safe place to live in, without becoming too dull to be worth living in.”

—Raymond Chandler

Every player in *Two-Fisted Tales* takes the role of a hero. These are men and women of unusual talents and unusual ambitions, driven to make the world a better place. Heroes may come from wildly different backgrounds, such as cowboys, cat burglars, wealthy playboys, or Tibetan mystics. Every hero must observe a private code of honor, however, and is willing to risk his life to see that justice prevails in the end.



## A HERO'S ABILITIES

Pulp heroes are skilled at many things, far surpassing the abilities of normal people. In a story, the hero may climb a mountain, fight off a dozen gibbering goons, fly an airplane through a ravine, defuse a bomb and solve a murder mystery, all before breaking for lunch. In *Two-Fisted Tales*, the amazing versatility of pulp heroes is captured by giving them ability ratings that are far higher than

average citizens. Abilities describe how well a character does something when it is not his specialty. Characters with particularly high ability ratings can defeat someone with years of experience, just like in the pulps.

There are eight abilities: brains, luck, mind, muscle, reflexes, savvy, status and weird. Each of them are described in more detail below.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## BRAINS

This ability represents how educated, knowledgeable, or well-read a character is. Academics, scientists, inventors, archeologists, and mystics would have particularly high brains ratings

The language column on the chart below indicates how many languages a character can speak (specialties, masteries and defects may modify this value). If the character's brains rating is over eight (8), he can read the indicated number of languages as well as fluently speak them, well enough to pass as a native. These languages do not have to be specified in advance; the player may decide what his character knows during play. Characters may speak additional languages at the gamemaster's discretion, but do so poorly and with difficulty.



### Measuring the Brains Ability

Rating	Equivalent Education	Number of Languages
1 - 4	No schooling at all	1, illiterate
5 - 8	Grade-school education	1, barely literate
9 - 10	Typical high school dropout	1
11	Typical high school graduate	2
12	A bit of college or its equivalent	2
13 - 14	Typical college graduate	3
15 - 16	Superior college graduate	4
17	Typical professor, with a Ph.D. or MD.	5
18	Unusually knowledgeable professor or doctor	6
19	Renowned professor or doctor	7
20	One of the world's most brilliant minds	8
21	Super-human levels of knowledge	10
22		12
23		14
24		16
25		20
26		24
27		28
28		32
29		40
30		48



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## LUCK

This ability describes how lucky a character is, and how often he fumbles. The luck rating also determines how many cards a player may draw randomly from a deck of ordinary playing cards (with the jokers removed) at the beginning of each session. The number of cards a player may draw is indicated on the chart below. Add an additional card for every 2 points above 30.

Optionally, the gamemaster can divide the deck into two piles—one of face cards (jacks, queens, kings, and aces) and one of number cards. Players draw the listed number of face and number cards from the relevant piles. The gamemaster may prohibit the use of face cards in very short or low-violence sessions.

Once used, cards are lost until the end of a game session. The gamemaster may, at

his option, allow players to replenish their hands in the middle of a game. This should only be done during marathon sessions when characters face a lot of dangers, however.

Cards are used to do the following:

- **Add bonuses to checks or rolls.** Cards with numerical values are added directly to the roll. Aces add 10 points in addition to other cards played. Face cards either add 10 points if they are not used with other cards, or they can multiply the values of other cards played. Jacks multiply played cards by 2, queens multiply them by 3 and kings multiply them by 4. The player must decide whether to use a card in this fashion before he makes the roll. See Chapter 5 for more information.
- **Protect against damage.** Damage is reduced by the value of the card. Face cards and aces, however, can eliminate all

### Measuring the Luck Ability

Rating	Description	Cards	Number Cards	Face Cards	Automatic Fumble
1		0	0	0	9 or less
2	Cursed	0	0	0	8 or less
3		0	0	0	7 or less
4		0	0	0	6 or less
5	Accident-prone	0	0	0	5 or less
6		0	0	0	4 or less
7		0	0	0	3 or less
8	Comedic character	0	0	0	2 or less
9		0	0	0	1 or less
10	Average person	0	0	0	0 or less
11 - 12	Somewhat lucky	1	1	0	0 or less
13 - 14	Lucky	2	2	0	0 or less
15 - 16	Very lucky	3	2	1	0 or less
17 - 18	Disgustingly lucky	4	3	1	0 or less
19 - 20	Insanely lucky	5	4	1	0 or less
21 - 22	Inhumanly lucky	6	4	2	0 or less
23 - 24		7	5	2	0 or less
25 - 26		8	6	2	0 or less
27 - 28		9	6	3	0 or less
29 - 30		10	7	3	0 or less

# TWO-FISTED TALES

of the damage inflicted. Cards are played once damage is determined.

- **Discover hints or lucky breaks.** The gamemaster can award a character with a lucky break once a card is used for this purpose. The greater the value of the card, the bigger the break.
- **Stop the clock and call a time-out.** Sometimes the gamemaster might force players to make a decision within a limited time. Players who spend cards can stop the clock if they need more time.

## MIND

Mind represents the character's concentration and mental discipline, as well as his perception and willpower. It indicates his ability to stay cool in difficult situations, but also describes his perceptiveness, ability to identify hidden clues, detect traps or anticipate sneak attacks. An average-to-high mind rating is almost mandatory for pulp heroes.



## Measuring the Mind Ability

Rating	Description	
1 - 3	Completely scatter-brained	The character finds it almost impossible to concentrate on anything. He pursues his whims, regardless of the job at hand.
4 - 7	Absent-minded	A dreamy sort who usually does not notice what is going on around him.
8 - 11	Average Guy	Not completely worthless in a jam, but he often has trouble keeping his cool.
12 - 14	Typical Hero	Fully capable of facing danger to get the things he wants.
15 - 17	Daredevil	Unafraid of dying and capable of sacrificing everything in pursuit of goals.
18+	Tower of Will	Almost completely fearless and single-minded. It is almost impossible to force the character to do anything against his will. The Kaiser's thugs could torture him for months and he would never tell them anything.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## MUSCLE

Muscle indicates a character's physical health and conditioning. Most athletes have a high muscle rating and just about anyone who expects to get in a fight should have a fairly high rating as well. It is an important ability for combat, and a high score is appropriate for any tough pulp hero.

### Resistance

Resistance represents how tough the character is. When he is shot full of holes, bitten by a cobra, or thrown out a skyscraper window, this rating is subtracted from the damage done.

### Damage

Damage represents how much punishment the character can dish out with his fists or with muscle-powered weapons.

Increase *resistance* and *damage* by one for every four additional points of muscle above forty.

### Lifting and Carrying Capacity

You can also determine how much a character can lift or carry, based on his or her Muscle rating. See the Capacities and Speeds table.

The maximum lift indicates how much weight a character can lift off the ground; carrying capacity is how much the character can carry before being encumbered; and quick lift represents the weight which can be lifted quickly (in combat). The values in parentheses refer to item size codes, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and on page 110.

### Speed

Finally, muscle also determines how fast a character can run and swim, or how far he can jump. See the Capacities and Speeds table. Halve all jumping distances if the character does not get a running start.

## Measuring the Muscle Ability

Rating	Description	Resistance	Damage
1 - 4	Not action-hero material	0	0
5 - 8	Wimp	0	1
9 - 10	Average person	0	2
11 - 12	Healthy	1	2
13 - 14	Unusually tough	1	3
15 - 16	Very tough person	2	3
17 - 18	Super-athletic	2	4
19 - 20	Man of Steel	3	4
21 - 22	Super-human ability	3	5
23 - 24		4	5
25 - 26		4	6
27 - 28		5	6
29 - 30		5	7
31 - 32		6	7
33 - 34		6	8
35 - 36		7	8
37 - 38		7	9
39 - 40		8	9

# TWO-FISTED TALES

T refers to tiny • S refers to small • M refers to man-sized

## Capacities and Speeds

Muscle Rating	Maximum Lift	Carrying Capacity	Quick Lift	Sprinting Speed	Swimming Speed	Broad Jump	High Jump
1	80lbs	40lbs (S)	4lbs (T+)	2 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	7 ft	2 ft
2	90lbs	45lbs (S)	4lbs (T+)	3 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	8 ft	2 ft
3	100lbs	50lbs (S)	5lbs (S)	3 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	8 ft	2 ft
4	110lbs	55lbs (2S)	5lbs (S)	3 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	9 ft	2 ft
5	120lbs	60lbs (2S)	6lbs (S)	3 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	9 ft	3 ft
6	130lbs	65lbs (2S)	6lbs (S)	4 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	10 ft	3 ft
7	140lbs	70lbs (3S)	7lbs (S)	4 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	11 ft	3 ft
8	160lbs	80lbs (3S)	8lbs (S)	4 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	12 ft	3 ft
9	180lbs	90lbs (4S)	9lbs (S)	4 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	13 ft	4 ft
10	200lbs	100lbs (5S)	10lbs (S)	5 yds/sec	1 yd / sec	14 ft	4 ft
11	220lbs	110lbs (6S)	11lbs (S)	5 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	15 ft	4 ft
12	240lbs	120lbs (7S)	12lbs (S)	6 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	16 ft	4 ft
13	280lbs	140lbs (8S)	14lbs (S)	6 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	17 ft	5 ft
14	320lbs	160lbs (M)	16lbs (S)	7 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	18 ft	5 ft
15	360lbs	180lbs (M)	18lbs (S)	7 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	19 ft	6 ft
16	400lbs	200lbs (M)	20lbs (S)	8 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	20 ft	6 ft
17	450lbs	220lbs (M)	22lbs (S)	8 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	22 ft	7 ft
18	500lbs	240lbs (M)	24lbs (S)	9 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	24 ft	7 ft
19	550lbs	280lbs (M)	28lbs (S)	9 yds/sec	2 yds/sec	26 ft	8 ft
20	600lbs	320lbs (M)	32lbs (S)	10 yds/sec	3 yds/sec	28 ft	8 ft
21	650lbs	360lbs (M)	36lbs (S)	11 yds/sec	3 yds/sec	30 ft	9 ft
22	700lbs	400lbs (M)	40lbs (S)	12 yds/sec	3 yds/sec	32 ft	9 ft
23	800lbs	450lbs (M)	45lbs (M)	13 yds/sec	3 yds/sec	34 ft	10 ft
24	900lbs	500lbs (M)	50lbs (M)	14 yds/sec	4 yds/sec	36 ft	11 ft
25	1000lbs	550lbs (2M)	55lbs (M)	15 yds/sec	4 yds/sec	40 ft	12 ft
26	1100lbs	600lbs (2M)	60lbs (M)	16 yds/sec	4 yds/sec	44 ft	13 ft
27	1200lbs	650lbs (2M)	70lbs (M)	17 yds/sec	4 yds/sec	48 ft	14 ft
28	1400lbs	700lbs (3M)	80lbs (M)	18 yds/sec	5 yds/sec	52 ft	15 ft
29	1600lbs	800lbs (3M)	90lbs (M)	20 yds/sec	5 yds/sec	56 ft	16 ft
30	1800lbs	900lbs (4M)	100lbs (M)	22 yds/sec	6 yds/sec	60 ft	17 ft
31	2000lbs	1000lbs (5M)	110lbs (M)	24 yds/sec	6 yds/sec	64 ft	18 ft
32	2200lbs	1100lbs (6M)	120lbs (M)	26 yds/sec	7 yds/sec	68 ft	19 ft
33	2400lbs	1200lbs (7M)	140lbs (M)	28 yds/sec	7 yds/sec	72 ft	20 ft
34	2800lbs	1400lbs (8M)	160lbs (M)	30 yds/sec	8 yds/sec	80 ft	22 ft
35	3200lbs	1600lbs (L)	180lbs (M)	32 yds/sec	8 yds/sec	88 ft	24 ft
36	3600lbs	1800lbs (L)	200lbs (M)	34 yds/sec	9 yds/sec	96 ft	26 ft
37	4000lbs	2000lbs (L)	220lbs (M)	36 yds/sec	9 yds/sec	104 ft	28 ft
38	4500lbs	2200lbs (L)	240lbs (M)	40 yds/sec	10 yds/sec	112 ft	30 ft
39	5000lbs	2400lbs (L)	280lbs (M)	44 yds/sec	11 yds/sec	120 ft	32 ft
40	5500lbs	2800lbs (L)	320lbs (M)	48 yds/sec	12 yds/sec	128 ft	34 ft



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## REFLEXES

Reflexes is a particularly important ability, indicating a character's hand-eye coordination and reaction speed. Any action hero worth his torn shirt has reasonably high reflexes, since it is by far the most important ability in combat.

### Measuring Reflexes

Rating	Description
1 - 4	Complete klutz
5 - 8	Clumsy
9 - 11	Average Joe (or Jane)
12 - 14	Fairly well-coordinated
15 - 17	Extremely agile
18+	Super-coordinated

## SAVVY

Savvy indicates the character's "style" and social finesse. The higher a character's savvy, the better his understanding of human behavior. Characters with high savvy ratings cannot only inspire troops and seduce beautiful maidens, but they are also good at detecting lies and are good judges of character.

### Contacts

Contacts are people a character knows, who can pass confidential information or even take small risks on his behalf. A character's Savvy rating determines how many contacts a character knows before play begins; specialties and masteries can raise this value. Additional contacts may be added in the course of play without raising a character's savvy rating.

### Measuring the Savvy Ability

Rating	Description	Number of Contacts
1 - 3	Permanently tongue-tied	0
4 - 6	Inarticulate; possibly very shy	0
7 - 10	Average person	1
11 - 12	Persuasive	2
13 - 14		3
15 - 16	Eloquent	4
17		5
18	Born leader	6
19		7
20	Charismatic; a prophet or world leader	8
21	Superhuman understanding of the human psyche	10
22		12
23		14
24		16
25		20
26		24
27		28
28		32
29		40
30		48

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## STATUS

Status indicates a character's power and influence in the community by determining the class of his contacts and occupation. It is also a rough indicator of his rank in an organization. Additionally, status is also used to calculate two secondary abilities—reputation and wealth.

### Reputation and Wealth

Reputation and wealth are derived from status. At the start of the game, the average of the two must equal the character's status score. So if reputation is status +4, wealth must be status -4; the modifiers must cancel each other.

Wealth indicates how much cash a character can spend. In theory, it represents the amount of money a character has in the bank (or in

his wallet, or under his mattress, or buried in remote locations on Pacific islands). Characters who want to go on globe-trotting adventures or conduct scientific research need high wealth ratings.

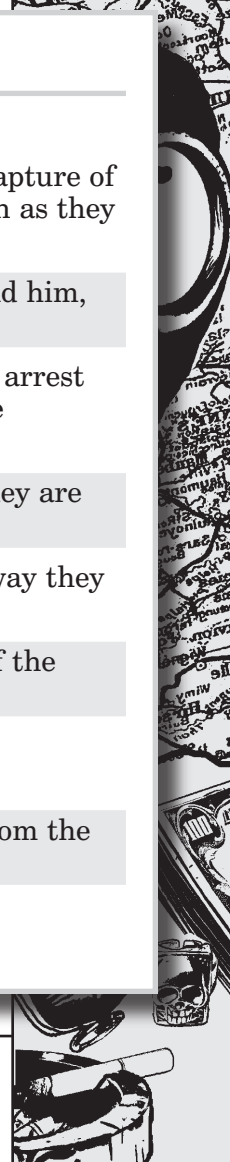
Note that prices during the Depression were about one-tenth of what they are today. Someone with one-hundred million dollars in the bank in 1933 (a wealth rating of 21) would be a billionaire today.

Reputation represents a positive standing with government and law enforcement. Characters with high reputation ratings can expect the police to cooperate with their investigations, while characters with low ratings can expect to be regularly harassed, if not shot on-sight.



## Measuring the Reputation Ability

Rating	Description	
1 - 2	Public Enemy #1	There is an active manhunt out for the capture of the character. The police open fire as soon as they see him.
3 - 4	Hunted Criminal	The police arrest the character if they find him, but only a few are looking for him.
5 - 6	Criminal	The cops do not have enough evidence to arrest the character, but they are itching for the opportunity.
7 - 8	Sleazy Character	The cops do not like the character, but they are not out to get him.
9 - 12	Average Citizen	The police treat the character the same way they would treat anyone else.
13 - 15	Respected Citizen	The cops give the character the benefit of the doubt whenever he is a suspect.
16 - 18	Honorary Officer	The police grant the character their full cooperation.
19 - 20	Respected Authority	The cops grant any reasonable request from the character.
21+	Lionized Figure	The cops go out of their way to grant the character's requests.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Measuring the Wealth Ability

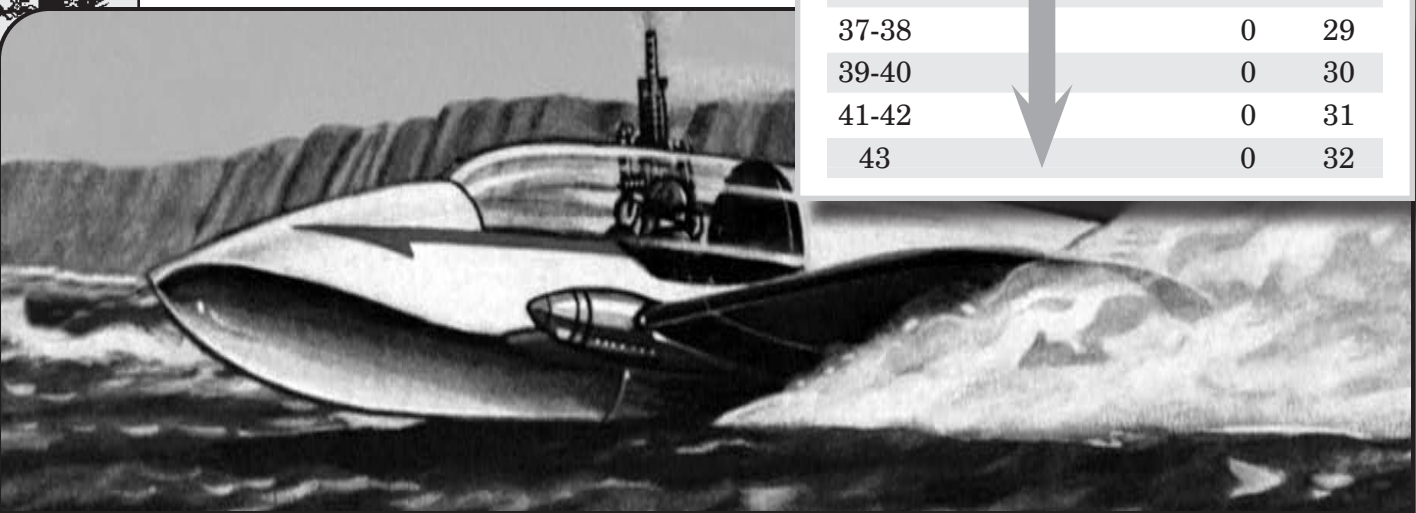
Rating	Description	Savings
1	Destitute	1¢
2		3¢
3	Broke, Homeless	10¢
4		30¢
5		\$1
6	Poor, Unemployed	\$3
7		\$10
8	Working class	\$30
9	Lower-middle class	\$100
10	Middle class	\$300
11		\$1,000
12	Upper-middle class	\$3,000
13		\$10,000
14	Upper class	\$30,000
15		\$100,000
16		\$300,000
17	Millionaire	\$1 million
18	Upper-middle class	\$3 million
19		\$10 million
20		\$30 million
21		\$100 million
22		\$300 million
23	Billionaire	\$1 billion
24		\$3 billion

## WEIRD

Weird measures how unusual and accomplished a character is, and whether he stands out in a crowd. The rating determines the minimum and maximum ability ratings (excluding weird, of course) that a character can possess. Increase the maximum ability rating permitted by 1 for each additional point over 43. Ratings over 20 are only permitted for use in stories involving super-heroic action, and at the discretion of the gamemaster.

## Measuring the Weird Ability

Rating	Description	Min.	Max.
1-4	Undistinguished	6	14
5-8		5	15
9-10	Ordinary	4	16
11-12		4	16
13-14	Unusual	3	17
15-16	Remarkable	2	18
17-18		1	19
19-20	Freak of nature	0	20
21-22	Super-human	0	21
23-24		0	22
25-26		0	23
27-28		0	24
29-30		0	25
31-32		0	26
33-34		0	27
35-36		0	28
37-38		0	29
39-40		0	30
41-42		0	31
43		0	32



## A HERO'S SPECIALTIES

Specialties indicate a focus on a specific subject, including anything from automobiles and stunt flying to magic tricks and hypnotism—something that a character in the Thirties might know. If a character has a particularly strong interest in a subject, it is considered to be a specialty. Specialties are designated in parentheses after the ability. For example, if a character has a specialty in medicine, it is written as “brains (medicine).”

Specialties add a 4-point bonus to the relevant ability rating when appropriate. Specialties are used only in conjunction with the brains, mind, muscle, reflexes and savvy abilities. Some of the more common and useful specialties are described below. Players are encouraged to invent more on their own, but specialties are just that—specialized fields of knowledge, so general and extremely common fields cannot be specialties.

### BRAINS SPECIALTIES

#### Business

Characters with this specialty know how to run a business, and are unusually good at it.

#### Forensics

This specialty is used whenever a character is looking for or interpreting physical evidence.

#### Linguistics

A character with this specialty has an unusual aptitude with languages. Add the specialty bonus to the character's brains rating when determining how many languages he knows.

#### Mechanics

Characters with this specialty are particularly good at evaluating and repairing equipment.

#### Medicine

Characters with this specialty have received extensive medical training.

#### Occult

This specialty indicates an unusual familiarity with magic and the occult. Characters with this specialty may learn magic spell schticks at the discretion of the gamemaster (see page 82).

#### Scholarship

This specialty indicates a deep knowledge of the arts, social sciences and humanities.

#### Science

Characters with this specialty know a great deal about modern science, enough that they can purchase Gadget schticks with the gamemaster's permission (see page 69).

### MIND SPECIALTIES

#### Alertness

This specialty indicates that the character can make particularly good use of his senses.

#### Burglary

Characters with this specialty know how to pick locks, crack safes and deactivate security devices of all kinds.

#### Fear Resistance

A character with this specialty is frightened considerably less than his mind rating suggests.

#### Husbandry

This specialty helps a character domesticate wild animals and teach them exotic skills (exotic, of course, by animal standards).



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Mental Defense

Characters with this specialty are good at defending themselves against hypnotic or psychic attacks.

## Pain Resistance

A character with this specialty is particularly good at resisting pain in pursuit of his goals.

## Stealth

This specialty indicates a remarkable ability to avoid being seen or heard.

## Survival

Characters with this specialty are particularly good at surviving in the wild.

## MUSCLE SPECIALTIES

## Carousing

This specialty indicates an extraordinary ability to consume alcoholic beverages without passing out or getting drunk.

## Climbing

This mastery indicates a special affinity with climbing mountains, walls or other sheer surfaces.

## Jumping

This specialty allows a character to leap greater distances than normal.

## Resist Cold

This specialty increases a character's resistance to cold damage.

## Resist Heat

This specialty increases a character's resistance to heat exhaustion.

## Running

Characters with this specialty can run more quickly and easily than others.

## Swimming

Characters with this specialty know how to swim, keep from drowning and push themselves when in the water.

## REFLEXES SPECIALTIES

## Acrobatics

A character with this specialty can walk tightropes, swing from a trapeze, fire himself out of a cannon or perform any other feat he may have seen at a circus.

## Aircraft

Characters use this specialty whenever they want to pilot flying vehicles, such as airplanes, dirigibles or autogyros.

## Archery

Characters use this specialty whenever trying to shoot someone with a bow and arrow.

## Artillery

This specialty is used whenever a character wants to use or repair any kind of stationary firearm, such as an anti-aircraft gun.

## Boxing

This specialty indicates training in Western boxing traditions. Characters with this specialty do extra damage when they roll great successes in fist-fights.

## Brawling

This is a 'street-fighting' specialty, which can be used both in hand-to-hand combat and when using a number of street-tough weapons.

## Driving

Characters with this specialty are especially good at driving cars.

## Knife-Fighting

Characters with this specialty are particularly adept at fighting with knives. This includes throwing knives, as well as wielding knives in melee.

## Fencing

Characters use this specialty whenever they want to fight with long, bladed weapons, such as swords or fencing foils.

## Gun-Fighting

Characters with this specialty are particularly good at firing guns.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Martial Arts

A character with this specialty has learned exotic hand-to-hand fighting techniques of the Orient. He may also purchase extraordinary martial arts schticks.

## Primitive Weapons

This specialty indicates a special aptitude with 'primitive' weapons, such as spears, hand-axes and boomerangs.

## Riding

Characters with this specialty are particularly adept at riding horses or other draft animals.

## Roping

This specialty indicates familiarity with lassos and whips, and other flexible, entangling weapons used in cattle-ranches.

## Sports

This specialty represents a character's talent for competitive team sports such as football or baseball.

## Thrown Weapons

This specialty represents a special talent for throwing things accurately in combat.

## Watercraft

Characters can use this specialty when operating marine vehicles, including sailboats, steamers and submarines.

## Wrestling

Characters with this specialty are particularly good at unarmed combat maneuvers such as holds, throws, and pins. See *Fighting (Advanced Rules)* for details.

## SAVVY SPECIALTIES

## Art

Characters with this specialty can produce unusually good works of art.

## Deception

This specialty indicates an unusually good "poker face," and the ability to lie quite convincingly.

## Disguise

This specialty is very common among pulp heroes. Disguise works much better in the pulps than in real life; a skilled disguise specialist can look like just about anybody.

## Etiquette

A character with this specialty is particularly good at avoiding social faux pas. He knows how he is expected to behave in a lot of different situations.

## Empathy

A character with this specialty has an unusually keen understanding of how other people think. He is particularly good at determining what someone else is thinking or feeling.

## Intimidation

This specialty indicates that the character is unusually good at scaring people.

## Journalism

This specialty represents extensive experience as a journalist.

## Magic

This specialty indicates a good working knowledge of stage-magic and related tricks.

## Music

Characters with this specialty have a special aptitude for music.

## Performance

Characters with this specialty are good at entertaining audiences on the stage.

## Seduction

Characters with this specialty are unusually appealing to members of the opposite sex.

## Well-Connected

A character with this specialty knows and can get help from an unusual number of people. Add the specialty bonus to his savvy rating to determine the number of contacts he has.



## A HERO'S MASTERIES

Masteries indicate a very intensive knowledge of a narrow subject matter. Each mastery has a “related specialty”—the mastery cannot be taken unless the character also possesses the specialty. Masteries add another 4 points to a character’s ability rating, in addition to the 4 points awarded by a specialty; thus a character with a mastery add 8 points to his ability rating under narrow conditions.

When a mastery is referenced, it is listed in brackets (“[...]”) after the ability and/or the related specialty. Braces (“{...}”) may also be used in the same manner, since brackets are sometimes reserved characters on web sites. For example, if a physics mastery can be used to build a gadget, this is indicated with a reference to “brains (science) [physics]” or simply “brains [physics].”

Masteries are associated with brains, mind, reflexes and savvy. There are no luck, muscle, status or weird masteries.

### BRAINS MASTERIES

#### **Accounting** Business

This mastery helps a character alter financial records to launder money or to uncover such practices.

#### **Aircraft Mechanics** Mechanics

This mastery represents an extraordinary talent to build, repair and jury-rig airplanes and other mechanical aerial vehicles. See *Gadgets and Chases* for more details.

#### **Alchemy** Occult

This mastery indicates a special knowledge of archaic pseudo-science. Characters who desire to build strange devices on the basis of mystical principles should possess this mastery.

#### **Ancient Languages** Linguistics

The character knows many ancient languages. Add the mastery bonus to the character’s brains rating when determining how many languages he knows. Half of these languages must have been first used in writing during Roman times or earlier.

#### **Anthropology** Scholarship

This mastery helps characters understand “exotic” cultures in the world. They can identify a man’s religion or nationality from a handful of hints or cues; they can recall details about exotic cultural practices; and if they discover a new culture, they can make predictions about the culture’s social practices.

#### **Appraise Antiquities** Scholarship

This mastery helps characters identify antiques and ancient artifacts. They can determine where and when an item was made, and how valuable it might be.

#### **Archeology** Scholarship

This mastery helps characters identify ancient artifacts and discover where to look for such items.

#### **Astrology** Occult

This mastery indicates an extensive knowledge of how the heavenly bodies influence human affairs. The gamemaster decides whether astrology has any real prophetic power.

#### **Astronomy** Science

This mastery helps a character identify celestial bodies in the night-sky; know when eclipses, comets and meteor showers occur; and predict conditions on other planets.

#### **Auto Mechanics** Mechanics

This mastery represents a special talent for building, repairing and jury-rigging automobiles and other mechanical land-based vehicles.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Ballistics

Forensics

This mastery represents a special knowledge of firearms, and can help a character determine the direction in which the gun was fired, distance from where it was fired and model of the gun through an analysis of bullets and wounds. This mastery can also be used if a character wants to build his own firearms.

## Biology

Science

Characters with this mastery are particularly familiar with the general science of life, genetics, evolutionary theory and other like studies.

## Botany

Science

This mastery helps a character identify plants, and determine which ones are edible, poisonous and have valuable medicinal properties.

## Chemistry

Science

This mastery help a character identify the chemical composition of an unknown substance. He may also use this mastery when concocting potions, gasses or explosives.

## Counterfeiting

Forensics

This mastery helps a character manufacture counterfeit bills or recognize them through special tests.

## Criminology

Forensics

This is the study of the criminal mind. A successful "brains [criminology]" roll enables the character to predict the actions of a criminal.

## Cryptography

Scholarship

This mastery helps the character decode secret messages.

## Electronics

Science

Characters with this mastery can build and repair electronic equipment especially well.

## Engineering

Science

Characters with this mastery are good at building and repairing gadgets that rely upon mechanical processes to operate.

## Explosives

Mechanics

This mastery can be used when identifying, building, or defusing explosive devices.

## Fingerprinting

Forensics

This mastery represents an unusual knack for discovering fingerprints at crime scenes and identifying from whom the prints came.

## First Aid

Medicine

Characters use this mastery whenever they want to give immediate medical aide to an injured party.

## Forgery

Forensics

This mastery indicates an extraordinary ability to forge signatures and create fake documents. It also improves one's ability to detect forged documents.

## Geology

Science

This mastery can help identify rocks, as well as their age and origin, and also find caves and recognize structurally unstable areas of caves or other tunnels.

## Graphology

Forensics

This mastery indicates an extensive knowledge of handwriting analysis. The character can tell if the same person wrote two or more handwriting samples, and he can compile a psychological profile based on the writing.

## History

Scholarship

This mastery helps characters know a lot about world history, as well as the history of their home country.

## Hypnotism

Medicine or Occult

This is a very useful mastery. In a pulp story, hypnotism is a far more advanced science than it is on Earth. It can be used against unwilling subjects, to send telepathic messages and has a number of other strange properties. Note that characters require hypnotism schticks for more powerful uses.

## Jeweler

Forensics

This mastery helps a character estimate the value of a piece of jewelry, as well as identify and forge fake pieces.

## Law

Scholarship

This mastery helps a character determine when someone is breaking obscure laws, and when he can get away with it. It is also useful in dealing with the police, so he can successfully defend another character in court.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Library Research

Scholarship

Characters use this mastery whenever they search through a library for information.

## Modern Languages

Linguistics

The character knows many contemporary languages. Add the mastery bonus to the character's brains rating when determining how many languages he knows. Half of these languages must be spoken by large numbers of people in the Thirties.

## Ritual Magic

Occult

This mastery indicates a knowledge of "magic" rituals, especially those from ancient times and primitive peoples.

## Parapsychology

Occult

This mastery indicates a special understanding of supernatural phenomena, such as ESP, telekinesis, telepathy and other psychic powers.

## Pathology

Medicine

This mastery helps a character diagnose diseases and even treat them if possible.

## Pharmacology

Medicine

This mastery helps a character recognize and manufacture drugs, as well as understand which drugs are used to treat different ailments and which combinations are dangerous.

## Physics

Science

Characters with this mastery are particularly familiar with the basic laws of the universe, and they may use their knowledge to build fantastic inventions.

## Psychoanalysis

Medicine

This mastery represents an extraordinary talent to cure patients of neuroses by uncovering repressed memories of traumatic events. This form of psychoanalysis is very different from real psychoanalysis; it is based on principles very similar to those developed by Bruer and Freud in the late nineteenth century.

## Site Preservation

Scholarship

This mastery helps characters excavate archeological sites without destroying everything in the process.

## Surgery

Medicine

This mastery helps a character perform sophisticated surgical procedures.

## Toxicology

Medicine

Characters with this mastery know a lot about poisons. They can recognize symptoms of poisoning, identify antidotes (if any), and concoct poisons (or their antidotes) on their own.

## Wiretapping

Forensics

Characters with this mastery are good at tapping phones.

## Zoology

Science

A character with this mastery is especially good at identifying animals and understanding their behavior patterns.

## MIND MASTERIES

### Alarm Systems

Burglarly

This mastery can be used whenever a character wants to build, repair, or deactivate any kind of trap or alarm system.

### Arctic Survival

Survival

This mastery represents extraordinary training in surviving the bitter cold.

### Camouflage

Stealth

Characters use this mastery whenever they attempt to "blend in" and hide in natural surroundings.

### Desert Survival

Survival

Characters with this mastery are good at surviving in hot, arid places. They know how to find water and stay cool.

### Diving

Survival

Characters with this mastery know how to safely use the diving suits of the era.

### Escape

Burglary

This mastery indicates extraordinary skill at untying ropes, unlocking handcuffs, and escaping from other similar devices.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## **Fire Building** Survival

Characters with this mastery have little trouble starting fires without matches or lighters.

## **Guard Duty** Alertness

This mastery helps characters hear suspicious noises or spot sneaky behavior when keeping watch over a camp.

## **Hiding** Stealth

Characters with this mastery know how to hide particularly well, using cover and the shadows for obfuscation before anyone can see them.

## **Listening** Alertness

This mastery indicates an unusual attentiveness to audible clues.

## **Lockpicking** Burglary

This mastery is used whenever a character wants to pick a lock, including those on safes and bank vaults.

## **Move Quietly** Stealth

Characters use this mastery whenever they want to move about silently.

## **Navigation** Survival

This mastery can help a character determine where he is and the direction in which he is traveling by observing the astronomical bodies.

## **Parachuting** Survival

Characters with this mastery are especially familiar with parachutes and know how to land safely when skydiving.

## **Pickpocketing** Burglary

This mastery helps a character steal things from someone's pockets or purse without being caught.

## **Shadowing** Alertness

This mastery represents the unusual talent to pursue a suspect without that person realizing that he is being followed.

## **Sixth-Sense** Alertness

Characters with this mastery are particularly good at anticipating danger before it occurs. The specific danger is not known to them before they face it, however.

## **Spot Hidden** Alertness

Characters with this mastery are particularly observant of visual clues.

## **Tracking** Survival

This mastery helps a character follow the tracks that men, animals or automobiles may leave in soft earth. He can also identify specific people or vehicles by the size and pattern of their shoe or tire marks respectively.

## REFLEXES MASTERIES

## **Weapons** \*

This mastery confers a special aptitude with a specific kind of weapon. It must be purchased separately for each mastered weapon. Consult the table on the next page for the specialties required for mastering particular weapons.

## **Vehicles** \*

This mastery indicates an usual skill with a specific type of vehicle. It must be purchased separately for each type of vehicle. Consult the table on the following page for the specialties required for mastering particular vehicles.

## **Unarmed Combat** \*

Characters with this mastery are particularly good at fighting unarmed, using punches, kicks, body-slams, and other like attacks. One of the following specialties is required for this mastery: boxing, brawling, martial arts, or wrestling.

## SAVVY MASTERIES

## **Acting** Performance

This mastery is used when a character pretends to be someone else. Note that if a character wants to impersonate another person, the mimicry and disguise masteries must be used as well.

## **Connoisseur** Etiquette

This mastery helps a character recognize quality (or the lack thereof) in food, drink, clothing or decorum.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Weapon and Vehicle Masteries

### Weapon (each is a separate mastery, i.e. saber)

	Specialty Required
Bow, Crossbow	Archery
Cannon, Mortar, etc.	Artillery
Brass Knuckles, Black Jack, Billy Club, Garrote	Brawling
Foil, Sword, Cane, Saber	Fencing
Pistol, Bolt-Action Rifle, Shotgun, Tommy Gun, Elephant Gun	Gun-Fighting
Switchblade, Machete	Knife-Fighting
Bull Whip, Lasso	Roping
Nunchuku, Throwing Stars	Martial Arts
Boomerang, Hand Axe, Spear	Primitive Weapons

### Vehicle Masteries (each is a separate mastery, i.e. sedan)

	Specialty Required
Model-T, Coupe, Sedan, Roadster, Limousine, Motorcycle, Truck, Tank	Driving
Zeppelin, Autogyro, Fighter, Bomber, Transport, Seaplane	Aircraft
Luxury Liner, Speedboat, Submarine, Canoe	Watercraft

**Dancing** Performance  
Characters with this mastery are especially good dancers.

**Detect Lies** Empathy  
This mastery helps a character determine when someone is lying, and when they are telling the truth.

**Fast Talk** Deception  
Characters use this mastery whenever they want to persuade a person to either act or let them act in a certain way by speaking in a confusing manner.

**Gambling** Empathy  
Characters with this mastery are more likely to win or be able to choose the winner in card games. It also improves a character's chance to detect cheating.

**High Society** Well-Connected  
This mastery indicates a familiarity with "high-class" social settings. Add the mastery bonus when determining how many contacts the character has; half of these contacts, however, must have status ratings of 14 or higher.

**Impersonation** Disguise  
A character with this mastery is not only good at disguising his appearance, but he can appear and act exactly like someone else (with a high savvy rating).

**Juggling** Performance  
Characters with this mastery can juggle a lot of items in the air.

**Mimicry** Disguise  
Characters use this mastery whenever they want to imitate the sound of someone else's voice.

**Photography** Art or Journalism  
Characters with this mastery are particularly adept at taking clear photographs with dramatic impact.

**Read Emotions** Empathy  
This mastery helps characters recognize the emotional states of the people around them. It should not be confused with the science of psychoanalysis.

**Singing** Music  
Characters with this mastery can sing unusually well.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Sleight of Hand

Magic

Characters with this mastery are particularly good at performing stage-magic.

## Storytelling

Performance

This mastery represents an extraordinary knowledge of interesting and entertaining stories.

## Streetwise

Well-Connected

Characters with this mastery know a lot about criminals. It helps them recognize criminals and know what they have done recently. It is also used whenever a character wants to call upon a criminal contact. Add the mastery bonus when determining the number of contacts the character has; half of these contacts, however, must have a reputation rating below 9.

## Ventriloquism

Magic

This mastery helps characters “throw” their voices, so that it appears as if someone (or something) else is speaking.


## Woman’s Intuition

Empathy

The pulps universally assume that this mysterious talent exists. It is only available to female characters and helps them determine whether someone is trustworthy—it cannot help them detect specific lies, but it does evaluate the character of the speaker.



## A HERO'S DEFECTS



Pulp heroes are not known for their vulnerabilities. The typical hero is good at lots of things, and no worse than average in everything else. Still, some pulp heroes have their share of problems. Gangsters and buccaneers have enemies on the police force; hardboiled dicks are always broke; female sidekicks often faint in times of crisis. There is also a whole pulp sub-genre devoted to detectives with crippling deformities, known colloquially as the “defective detectives.” The following optional rules are designed for characters such as these.

Disadvantages can often be included by giving characters low ability ratings. A clumsy character can have low reflexes, a puny and sickly character can have low muscle, or an illiterate one can have low brains. Some defects, though, are hard to simulate with low ability ratings. The defects described below can be used to more clearly define a handicapped character. Each defect has a point value. If a character selects a defect, this point value increases his hero points (see page 39), which can be spent on ability ratings, specialties, masteries, or schticks.

The gamemaster should not let characters take too many defects, however, since most pulp characters do not even have a single defect. Players should be gently discouraged from choosing defects.

Unless otherwise noted, characters may have a single defect of any value, or they can take multiple defects if their total point value is less than 5. When fractions of point values are indicated, round to the lowest whole number.

### **Absent Minded** 1/4 Mind

The character tends to forget things, and is often oblivious to his surroundings. Treat his mind as half the normal rating for memory checks and for detecting sneak attacks.

### **Amnesia** 2

This is a common defect for noir characters—he does not know who he is or from where he comes. The character may not even know where he was last Tuesday—the gamemaster decides how far his memories go. There is nothing stopping the character from gaining new memories, of course.

### **Blind** 1/2 (Mind+Reflexes)

The character cannot see. His mind rating is zero for detection checks that depend entirely on sight. All opponents are “invisible” for combat purposes: the character must rely on his other four senses to determine their position and to hit them.

### **Bum Leg** 2

The character runs and jumps at half the usual distance for his muscle rating.

### **Cowardly** 1/4 Mind

The character is very easily scared, and hates to risk life or limb. Treat his mind as half the normal rating when making fear checks, but his condition should be roleplayed in other situations.

### **Crippled** 1/2 Muscle

The character may get around in a wheelchair or crawl around like a crab, but he cannot walk. Regardless of his mode of locomotion, he can only move at one yard per second.

### **Deaf** 1/2 Mind

The character can understand people by reading lips or using sign language, but he cannot hear. Deaf characters can also have the mute defect—this is an exception to the limit of having only one high-level defect.

### **Distinctive Looks** 1

The character looks so unusual that people always recognize and remember him.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Friendless 1/5 Savvy

The character does not start the game with any contacts. This defect can only be chosen if the character's savvy rating is 7 or higher.

## Funny Voice 1/4 Savvy

The character might look impressive, but as soon as he opens his mouth, taking him seriously becomes extremely difficult. Treat his savvy as half the normal rating when he speaks.

## Heavy 2

The character is a big, heavy guy (or gal), and runs or jumps at only half the usual distance for his muscle rating.

## Hemophilia 6

Each time the character receives a single wound, he risks bleeding to death and requires immediate medical attention (see page 117 for details; normal humans are only at risk if they receive five or more wounds from a single attack).

## Monolingual 1/5 Brains

The character can only read, write, and understand a single language, probably English. This defect can only be chosen if the character's brains rating is 10 or higher.

## Mute 5\*

The character cannot speak, but can communicate using written notes or gestures. He might have been born mute, but some nefarious villain may have cut out his tongue. This defect has a point value of 2 if the character also possesses the deaf defect.

## Nearsighted 1/4 Mind

The character sees just fine at less than five yards (short range), but beyond that, he is effectively blind.

## Old Fashioned 1/4 Brains

The character cannot understand modern science or technology. Treat his brains as half the normal rating when dealing with science or technology. In addition, the character does not know how to drive or operate a technologically-advanced vehicle unless he possesses the relevant specialty.

## One Hand 2

The character only has one hand—there is a hook, claw, or stump where the other one ought to be. He cannot fight with two weapons, his maximum lifting capacity (but not carrying capacity) is half the normal value, and many other physical activities are especially difficult for him.

## Outlaw ID 1/2 Reputation

This is a common defect for costumed vigilantes—the character is a law-abiding citizen as himself, but he is a wanted criminal when in costume (his reputation rating is 0 when in costume).

## Periodic Blindness 1/4 (Mind+Reflexes)

The character becomes blind on occasion. The gamemaster decides when he is blind and when he can see. *Note: this may seem like an odd defect, but it is actually taken directly from the pulps—John Kobler's detective, Peter Quest, suffered from this defect.*

## Ugly 1/4 Savvy

As an old junk-dealer once said, "he could stick his face in dough and make gorilla cookies." The character's savvy is half the normal rating in all social situations. When trying to intimidate someone, however, the character adds 2 to the roll rather than applying this penalty.

## Woman Shy 1/4 Savvy

The character may be a "Master of Men," but he is hopeless when it comes to women. The character gets so flustered around good-looking members of the opposite sex that he sounds like a fool, reducing his savvy to half the normal rating.



## BUILDING A HERO

The process of building a hero is performed by completing the following steps.

### SETTING & POWER LEVEL

The gamemaster chooses a setting for the story and determines what kind of team (if any) the characters should join. This directly affects which templates may be available in the game.

Some pulp stories feature ordinary people who are trapped in dangerous situations; other stories feature characters who are as tough and colorful as any superhero in the comic books; and still other stories feature characters who are tough and competent, but realistic.

This variation of power for characters can be simulated by setting the game at a specific power level. The gamemaster should choose a level based on the type of material he wants to imitate and the level of realism he expects from the story. When in doubt, it is always safest for the gamemaster to run escapist stories, but the choice is entirely his.

### CHOOSING TEMPLATES

There is a bewildering variety of pulp characters. Pulp heroes include hobos and millionaires, buccaneers and G-men, swordsmen and scientists, cripples and supermen—far more than the stereotypical masked avengers and private eyes. Nevertheless, many character types are more popular than others, and these are widely imitated. The most popular archetypes are provided as templates from which to design custom characters.

Each player chooses a single template for his character (see pages 44-64). There is no need to worry about one template being more powerful than the others, since there are opportunities to adjust elements of a character in a later step.

### Power Level

Level	Description
Gritty	The heroes are a little more competent than the average man on the street. Heroes have to be very smart or very careful, or they could easily get themselves killed; combat should be avoided as much as possible.
Escapist	The heroes are tough, and they can easily handle themselves in a fight with a few thugs, but they are still very mortal, and can easily get hurt.
Fantastic	The heroes are so close to perfect that they strain credibility. A fantastic character can fight a small battalion and still win.
Amazing	The heroes have, as the saying goes, powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## USING HERO POINTS

Hero points are used to improve abilities or gain specialties, masteries, and schticks. They can also be saved so that the character can learn new abilities more quickly at a later stage in the game.

Each template is assigned a number of hero points, depending on the power level chosen for the game. The weaker a template is, the more hero points it receives—someone relatively weak like the Spunky Kid gets 7 hero points in a gritty story, while someone powerful like the Tough Scientist does not get any hero points. These differences in hero points work to keep the templates balanced, so that no player is handicapped by her choice of template.

### Modifying Ability Ratings

Some players may feel that the ability ratings listed for their chosen templates are not appropriate for their characters. For this reason, a character's ability rating may be increased by spending hero points. Alternatively, an ability rating may be decreased, in exchange for receiving extra hero points. Each increase or decrease of an ability rating is worth one (1) hero point. In other words, to raise a character's brains rating from 10 to 14, four hero points are spent. On the other hand, to lower his brains rating from 10 to 8, two (10 minus 8) hero points are received. No ability rating may be raised above the maximum or below the minimum scores, as defined by the character's weird rating.

### Modifying Reputation or Wealth

For every point added to the status rating, one point is also added to both reputation and wealth. In other words, if a character's status rating is increased from 9 to 12, three points are also added to both his reputation and wealth ratings, bringing both up to 12 as well. Points may also be shifted from the reputation or wealth ratings. So rather than just raising the reputation and wealth ratings to 12, for example, two points can be shifted from reputation to wealth, giving the character a wealth rating of 14, but a reputation rating of only 10.

### Modifying Specialties and Masteries

New specialties can also be added to or removed from characters; each new specialty costs one hero point, while each dropped specialty adds one hero point. Note that in order to add a specialty, the sum of the character's brains and mind ratings must equal 16 or higher.

Masteries can be added or dropped in the same fashion, spending one hero point for a new mastery and gaining one hero point for dropping a mastery. Every mastery also requires certain specialties, however—the character must first possess these specialties in order to gain a related mastery. Masteries can only be added if the sum of the character's brains and mind ratings equals 24 or higher.

### Schticks

Some characters have unique powers or skills that require special aptitudes or lots of experience. This includes magical spells, martial arts, and building gadgetry. Schticks are used to represent knowledge of these narrow, but unusual subjects.

Templates do not possess schticks by default, so they must be added to characters by expending hero points. There are six kinds of schticks:

- Gadgets
- Martial arts maneuvers
- Hypnotic disciplines
- Magic spells
- Animal schticks
- Special Powers

Schticks are further described in the next chapter. In addition to their cost in hero points, some schticks also require characters to have a certain rating in specific abilities. If this rating is not met, the schtick cannot be used by the character. If the character's ability rating is greater than the minimum required by the schtick by five, the cost in hero points is reduced by one. If the character's ability rating is greater than the minimum required by the schtick by ten, the cost in hero points is reduced by two. The cost for a schtick cannot be reduced to less than zero.

### Remaining Hero Points

It is possible that a few hero point may be available even after all the modifications to the character. These points can be saved for future experience. They can be later spent to improve the character's abilities, or purchase new specialties, masteries, or schticks.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## CHARACTER BACKGROUND

Like characters in a television program or novel, heroes in *Two-Fisted Tales* can start out simple, and accumulate interesting details as the story progresses. New characters do not need much more than a name and set of statistics, because additional details can be added after the first game. For this reason, it is fine for a hero's family life, hobbies, or life story to not be immediately defined. These details can be filled in later.

A well-designed hero is more than just a bunch of numbers, however. He is a vivid character, with a personality, memorable appearance, unique style, web of interesting relationships, and back-story—or he is at least given some of these elements. Some factors to consider when building a character are described below.

### Name or Title

A name, nickname, or title should be chosen for the character. "Pulp" names are distinctive or dramatically appropriate, but not necessary for play. A few ways to create them are provided below.

- A thesaurus can provide synonyms for strong, manly attributes that can be used for these names.
- Using the same name as a historical figure or organization with similar traits invokes a sense of irony and epic struggle. *For example, Simon Templar gets rich in pursuit of a chivalrous calling, just like the original Knights Templar; Nero Wolfe is a hedonistic glutton who fiddles about, while the world around him [figuratively] burns to the ground, just like the Roman Emperor of the same name.*
- The name of an object with similar characteristics can suggest that the character possesses specific qualities of the object. *For example, a spade is a hard digging instrument, similar to a tough sleuth like Sam Spade. A hammer is a heavy, bludgeoning instrument that makes a lot of noise, just like Mike Hammer.*

- Characters of foreign nationalities can be named after foreign cities, rivers, mountains, or any other geographical features.

Use any of these guidelines to create a distinctive last name, and choose a given name that either rhymes with it, or is alliterative with it.

A proper name is not necessary. Many pulp heroes are anonymous—Dashiell Hammett's first Hard-Boiled private eye, the Continental Op, is probably the most famous example. "Mystery men" of this stripe should be given an official code name or nom de guerre for identification purposes. *For example, the character could be referred to as Special Agent Z-2, The Crimson Crab, Dime-Novel Dick, or anything else if his player is uncomfortable with a proper name.*

### Physical Description

Players should describe their characters with details, such as height, weight, eye color, hair color, and clothing style. Each player should also draw a picture of his or her character. The player's artistic ability is not important; it is more important for the gamemaster and other players to have a visual image of how the character looks.

### Tags

Tags are the habits and quirks that make a character memorable, including, but not limited to, hobbies, social practices and nervous ticks. *For example, Philip Marlowe plays chess in his spare time; Doc Savage makes a trilling sound in moments of stress; The Shadow laughs, mockingly, while gunning down crooks; and Monk and Ham insult and play practical jokes on one another, while Renny loves to bash down doors.*

Players are not required to create tags for their characters, but they should be encouraged to do so. Tags are fun, and they add a lot to the game.

### Character History

Players should write brief biographies for their characters. While this is not required and is not as important as a physical description, it does add a great deal to the enjoyment of the game as a whole. Some common themes that may appear in the biographies of pulp characters are provided below.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

- **Abandoned at Birth**

The character's parents died when he was a child, and he was forced to live as a feral child in the wilderness (or the city streets).

- **A Lifetime of Training**

The character's parents rigorously trained him from birth. Their purpose for him was to achieve physical and intellectual perfection, and become a powerful force for Good.

- **Witness to a Crime**

Someone the character cared about, such as a parent or a friend, was either killed or the victim of a grave injustice. Since then, he has been committed to fighting crime.

- **Joined the Circus**

As a child, the character ran away from home to join a traveling carnival. There he learned how to perform magic, crack whips, or walk tightropes.

- **Academic Life**

The character spent a good number of years at a university, studying complex academic subjects.

- **In the Army**

The character served in the Armed Forces, and exhibited such bravery that he was awarded dozens of decorations and promoted to a high rank.

- **Around the World**

The character has traveled extensively. In his travels, the character picked up a number of exotic talents, possibly even some amazing powers.

- **Behind a Badge**

The character spent time working for the police or district attorney's office. Because he found the experience disillusioning, the character began a new career as a private investigator or masked vigilante, which has been much more rewarding.

- **A Life of Crime**

The character led a life of crime for many years, until he was reformed by the love of an honest woman. Today, the character fights crime to make himself "worthy" of his paramour.

- **Just a Game**

One day, the character was bored and decided to try his hand at solving (or committing) crimes. He found that he was good at it, and the character's hobby has now become a full-time obsession.

## Style

A player is expected to roleplay the style of his character's speech. In exchange for this, characters receive hero points for performing particularly difficult styles. The following styles may be chosen for characters, but players can also create their own.

- **Colloquial**

The character peppers his speech with colorful slang.

- **Corny**

The character speaks in a goofy dialect, full of old-fashioned expressions. He uses a trademark goofy curse in moments of surprise or stress.

- **Impaired**

The character suffers from some kind of speech impediment. He may speak very loudly, with a lisp, stutter, or mutter quietly in a hoarse whisper.

- **Lyrical**

The player, expressing the thoughts of his character, should narrate the action of the adventure using colorful similes or metaphors.

- **Pompous**

The character speaks like William Buckley all the time, so the player also has to speak like him when roleplaying the character.

- **Primitive**

The character is from a technologically primitive culture (such as Native American or African tribes), and he uses a stereotypically crude speech, with a very simple, monosyllabic vocabulary. *Also see Vaudeville Ethnic, below.*

- **Spooky**

The character does his best to strike fear into the hearts of evil-doers by imitating a sinister wraith from the silent screen or Victorian melodrama. He may have a sinister laugh, speak like a vaudeville ghost, or have some other hammy gimmick.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

- **Terse**

The character does not believe in wasting words. He never uses compound sentences or unnecessary words, such as articles, adjectives, and pronouns. Nor can he abide small talk, jokes, slang, or other useless chatter.

- **Vaudeville Ethnic**

The character has a mischievous sense of humor, and behaves like a caricature of the Thirties' ethnic stereotypes. The player, speaking for his character, should either speak with an accent or recite made-up "proverbs" in appropriate situations. Note that most members of ethnic minorities are not Vaudeville Ethnics.

## Codes

Most pulp heroes follow some sort of code of behavior. A few examples are provided below, but players may create their own.

Characters are expected to observe their codes in all but the most severe circumstances. If a character does not follow his code, he loses the hero point bonus that is normally received at the end of the adventure (see Chapter 6).

Characters without codes are not necessarily immoral—they simply believe in "situational ethics," in making moral decisions without a rigid code.

- **Chivalric**

The character goes out of his way to save a damsel in distress. He is reluctant to believe that a beautiful woman is capable of wrong-doing, and if he does admit that an attractive woman has done wrong, he is quick to forgive her.

- **Domestic**

The character's first priority is to support his wife and kids, and protect them from danger. He never willingly puts his family in danger, and only risks his own life if it is absolutely necessary to protect or support his them. He risks his life without hesitation, however, if it is required of him for his family's safety.

- **Heroic**

The character must always do what he can to thwart "evil", however it is defined, and help the innocent, even if he must risk his own life in order to do so. The character does not abandon someone in danger.

- **Joker**

The character enjoys making a fool out of people that he does not like, such as wrongdoers or foolish police officers. He can never pass up an opportunity to play a trick on his adversaries, and the more elaborate the trap or the scam, the better.

- **Messianic**

The character is a paragon of virtue. Like the hero and the vigilante, he devotes his time to helping people in need. Unlike those characters, however, the messiah never willingly takes human life. He actually does whatever it takes to prevent anyone, including villains, from being killed.

- **Pacifist**

The character must always try to avoid violence and danger. He does not willfully participate in a violent confrontation, and may not kill under any circumstances.

- **Patriotic**

The character fights for the good of his country and the downfall of her enemies. He is loyal and respectful towards legitimate political leaders, and is always ready and willing to die or kill for his country.

- **Prideful**

The character refuses to be humiliated or played for a sucker. The character always talks back to his rivals and enemies, including those who threaten him, in a sarcastic manner, even if it puts him in danger. The character must also do what he can to ruin people who have done him wrong—he does not "play the sap" for anyone.

- **Primitive**

The character follows the code of a "primitive" warrior. He only kills for his own survival, and never for sport. The character lives by his word and never breaks a promise. He also never shows fear or backs down from a fight.

- **Professional**

The character likes his job and has very little life outside of it. He cannot be bribed and always follows official, company policy to the letter.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

- **Vengeful**

Either the character or a loved one was the victim of a hideous crime by an evil, powerful villain. The character is now obsessed with the thought of revenge and spends most of his time pursuing this public menace.

- **Vigilante**

The character has decided to devote his life to fighting crime. He is expected to investigate serious crimes if the police are unable to arrest those who are responsible. The character does not kill police officers or innocent civilians. The vigilante feels an obligation to kill criminals, however, and leaves a calling card that identifies his work. He may sometimes apprehend them instead.

## Motivations

Characters are expected to risk life and limb in almost every adventure, but realistically, they should not take such risks without very strong motivation. The player should specify which causes motivate the character to risk his life. A list of motivations are provided below, but players may create their own.

Players are free to specify more than one motivation for their characters. All characters are motivated by threats to their survival, but other motivations can make the gamemaster's job easier and add some variety to the game.

- **Greed**

The character is willing to do just about anything if he is well-compensated.

- **Duty**

The character holds a regular job and is almost willing to do whatever it takes to meet its demands.

- **Sympathy**

The character quickly comes to the aid of people in trouble, no matter the dangers involved.

- **Renown**

The character does almost anything that improves his reputation.

- **Whimsy**

The character does almost anything that promises to be fun or exciting.

- **Love**

The character does just about everything he can to protect people for which he cares, including lovers, friends, and family members.

- **Revenge**

The character does almost anything to ruin his enemies.

- **Survival**

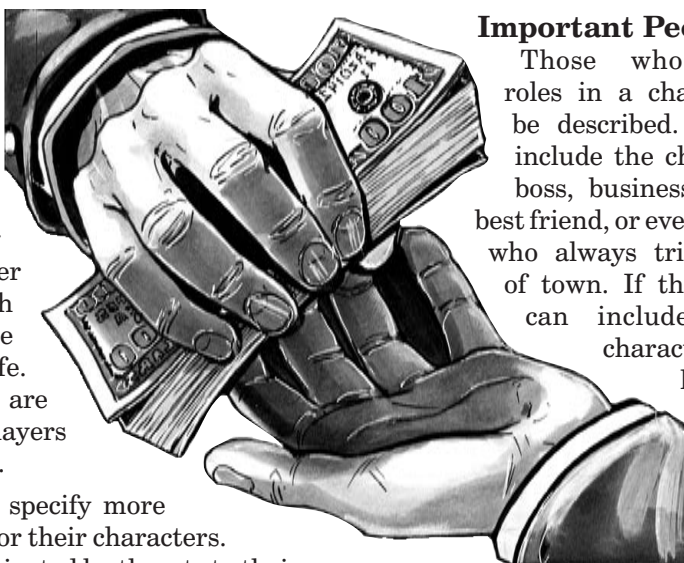
The character risks his life only if it is absolutely necessary for avoiding even greater dangers.

## Important People

Those who play important roles in a character's life should be described. These people may include the character's girlfriend, boss, business partner, secretary, best friend, or even the police detective who always tries to run him out of town. If the player wishes, he can include another player-character in this list, as long as he describes the relationship between them in detail.

## Comments from Other Players

After a player has fully worked out his character's background, he should pass a description around to the other players. They can then ask questions about the character or offer suggestions for additional background details. Possible relationships between characters can also be described at this point. *For example, a description of how their characters met in a prisoner of war camp, on a trip to Tibet, or at the district attorney's office; what they think of each other; how they treat one another; and how they spend their time together.*



## Amateur Detective

After retiring from the police force (or detective agency, etc.), you expected to spend the rest of your life enjoying tea time or cocktail parties. Unfortunately, wherever you go, people have a tendency to get murdered. People also expect you to find the killer—you were a star detective in the old days. And while you hate to admit it, you really do enjoy a little mystery now and again.



“All right, dear, I’ll solve the murder mystery for you. If that’s what you really want...”

### EXAMPLES

- Miss Marple
- Nick Charles

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	12
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	16
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	14
Status .....	14
Reputation.....	14
Wealth .....	14
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Brains (Forensics)
- Savvy (Empathy)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	6
Escapist .....	16
Fantastic.....	26
Amazing .....	36

## Brawler

You are a working class Joe (or Jane). You held an ordinary, blue-collar job until you saw something you were not supposed to see. Before the gang of thugs managed to throw you in the river, a masked man appeared from nowhere and shot the mob to pieces. Now you work in his crime-fighting organization—your quick fists come in awfully handy when it comes to fighting crime.

### EXAMPLES

- *Captain Easy*
- *Flash Gordon*
- *Reggie York*
- *Jackson*
- *Moe Schevritz*

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	14
Muscle.....	16
Reflexes .....	16
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	10
Reputation.....	10
Wealth .....	10
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Brains (Mechanics)
- Reflexes (Brawling or Boxing)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	6
Escapist .....	16
Fantastic.....	26
Amazing .....	36



“Put ‘em up, Pal!  
Let’s settle this man-to man...”

# Buccaneer

You grew up in a wealthy family, but found life as a rich young playboy unbearably dull. So you decided to take up a life of crime, just for the fun of it. You only steal from people who really deserve it—swindlers, sweatshop owners, munitions manufacturers, and other vermin. You also donate most of the loot to charity. Crime sure is more fun than debutante balls.

## EXAMPLES

- *The Lone Wolf*                      • *The Gray Seal*
- *The Saint*                              • *Ed Jenkins*

## ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	14
Muscle.....	14
Reflexes .....	15
Savvy .....	15
Status .....	10
Reputation (-4).....	6
Wealth (+4) .....	14
Weird.....	10

## SPECIALTIES

- Mind (Burglary)
- Mind (Stealth)
- Reflexes (Fencing)

## HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	3
Escapist .....	13
Fantastic.....	23
Amazing .....	33



“Hee-hee! You don’t honestly think I stole that necklace, do you, Inspector?”

## Costumed Vigilante

You have a healthy contempt for the Law—gangsters take over cities, hoodlums get away with murder, and you may have seen them kill someone you loved. You cannot take anymore and are ready to fight back. The skills you learned as a spy in the Great War helped you organize an army of agents and assume a series of secret identities. During the day, you are a wealthy, lazy man-about-town, but when night falls, you are a sinister dark avenger who guns down crooks with his twin forty-fives. You have made yourself an enemy of both the police and the underworld, but are not worried, because you are willing to do whatever it takes to prove that Crime Does Not Pay.

### EXAMPLES

- *The Shadow*
- *The Spider*
- *The Green Hornet*
- *The Phantom*
- *The Phantom Detective*

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	12
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	14
Muscle .....	14
Reflexes .....	15
Savvy .....	14
Status .....	12
Reputation .....	12
Wealth .....	12
Weird .....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Muscle (Climbing)
- Reflexes (Gun-Fighting)
- Savvy (Disguise)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	0
Escapist .....	10
Fantastic .....	20
Amazing .....	30



“I know the evil that dwells in men’s hearts!  
Yah-hah-hah-hah-hah!”



## Cowboy

You are not a violent, young man. Sure, you can be a little hot headed, and you love a saloon brawl as much as anyone. But it is not as if you set out to shoot hundreds of people. No, the problem is that you live on a ranch in a lawless, violent frontier town. An endless parade of rough characters seem determined to shoot up your ranch, steal your cattle, kidnap your girl and, worst of all, treat you with disrespect. You certainly cannot abide that. You are a proud man, and you know that you are one of the best shots in the West. The ground is littered with enough dead bodies to prove it.

### EXAMPLES

- *Hopalong Cassidy* • *Billy West*
- *Hashknife Harley* • *Jim Hatfield*
- *“Doc” Long*

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	14
Muscle.....	15
Reflexes .....	16
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	10
Reputation .....	10
Wealth .....	10
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Reflexes (Roping)
- Reflexes (Gun-Fighting)
- Reflexes (Riding)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	6
Escapist .....	16
Fantastic.....	26
Amazing .....	36



“Hoo-wee! I ain’t had this much fun since the hogs ate mah grandmother!”

## Ethnic Sidekick

You were either the strongest man in your native village or the brightest student of a martial arts master. You thought you were the best fighter in town, until a Yankee came along and beat you at your own game. Once you met a worthy opponent, you became a friend of his for life. Today, you double as his valet and bodyguard. You use your extraordinary strength (or the martial arts) of your homeland to protect your friend and defeat his foes. *Note that it is not an absolute requirement for ethnic characters to be based on this template, as characters built from other templates can also be of ethnic descent.*

### EXAMPLES

- Kato
- Ram Singh
- Jerico
- Sallah

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	14
Muscle.....	17
Reflexes .....	14
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	9
Reputation.....	9
Wealth .....	9
Weird.....	14

### SPECIALTIES

Reflexes (Martial Arts)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	5
Escapist .....	15
Fantastic.....	25
Amazing .....	35



“Don’t worry, my good friend!  
We shall smite them like the ants they are!”





## Feisty Heroine

You are beautiful, rich, and tough as nails. You look dainty and fragile, but you can take most men in a fair fight. Unfortunately, most tough guys do not take you seriously. They expect you to stay at home and raise a family, and tell you that a woman has no place on an adventure. You know better. And they are going to have to put up with you, whether they like it or not. *Note that it is not an absolute requirement for female characters to be based on this template, as characters built from other templates can also be girls or women.*

### EXAMPLES

- Jane
- Margo Lane
- Pat Savage
- Nita Van Sloan
- Muriel Havens
- Wilma Deering
- Dale Arden
- Marion Ravenwood

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	12
Luck .....	12
Mind .....	12
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	16
Status .....	14
Reputation.....	14
Wealth .....	14
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Savvy (Seduction)
- Savvy (Empathy)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	7
Escapist .....	17
Fantastic.....	27
Amazing .....	37



“I don’t care what you say, Joe Packer.  
I’m going with you!”

## Flying Ace

You flew a plane in the Great War, shooting down countless Germans and earning more medals than you could carry on your chest. You became a national hero, but fame was fleeting and peacetime has been a bit of a letdown. Today, you are a barnstormer, stunt-flyer, or the type of crazy guy who would try to fly across the world just to set a few records. But you know what you really want to do—shoot at bad guys again.



### EXAMPLES

- Jerry Frost
- G-8
- Dusty Ayres
- Bill Barnes

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	15
Muscle.....	15
Reflexes .....	15
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	10
Reputation .....	10
Wealth .....	10
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Brains (Mechanics)
- Reflexes (Aircraft Piloting)
- Reflexes (Gun-Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	6
Escapist .....	16
Fantastic.....	26
Amazing .....	36

“A thousand Fokkers are headed this way, General! Don’t worry, me and my Spad will take care of them!”

## G-Man

You are a tireless champion of law and order. The Bureau hired you for your patriotism, clean-cut appearance, and vigor to bring lawbreakers to justice (this included just about everybody during Prohibition). You are willing to take on the suicidal jobs that the other agents avoid. As long as you get a chance to blast away at the spies, counterfeiters, terrorists, bootleggers, and bank robbers that terrorize your city, you feel as if you have done a decent day's work.

### EXAMPLES

- *George Trevor*
- *Operator 5*
- *Secret Agent X*
- *Dan Fowler*
- *Dick Tracy*

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	12
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	14
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	14
Status .....	14
Reputation (+4) .....	18
Wealth (-4) .....	10
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Brains (Forensics)
- Savvy (Empathy)
- Mind (Alertness)
- Reflexes (Gun-Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	6
Escapist .....	16
Fantastic.....	26
Amazing .....	36



“Let this be a lesson to you, Prune Face.  
Crime does not pay!”

## Gangster

You are not such a bad guy. Sure, you have done a little bootlegging here and there, and perhaps a little extortion. But you do not kill anybody who does not deserve it. You may be a crook, but you still have principles, and you are still a patriotic American. If only the cops would understand that.

### EXAMPLES

- *Hoppy Uniatz*
- *Joe Harper*
- *Hawkeye*
- *Cliff Marstrand*

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	13
Muscle.....	15
Reflexes .....	13
Savvy .....	13
Status .....	10
Reputation (-4).....	6
Wealth (+4) .....	14
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Brains (Business)
- Savvy (Intimidation)
- Reflexes (Gun-Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	7
Escapist .....	17
Fantastic.....	27
Amazing .....	37



“Come and get me, coppers!”

# Hardboiled Detective

You spent several years as a policeman, but you were too outspoken and too quick to criticize your superiors when they ignored corruption on the force. After you were fired for insubordination, you set up your own private detective agency. Today, you work in a run-down office building, complete with a beautiful blonde secretary and a bottle of hooch in your desk drawer. You are willing to take any job, as long as it is legal and makes sense. Once hired, you do just about anything and take any amount of punishment (from the crooks or the cops) to see the truth come out in the end. You usually speak in a colloquial voice, although you have a fondness for purple prose and colorful metaphors.

## EXAMPLES

- *Race Williams*
- *The Continental Op*
- *Sam Spade*
- *Philip Marlowe*
- *Dan Turner*

## ABILITIES

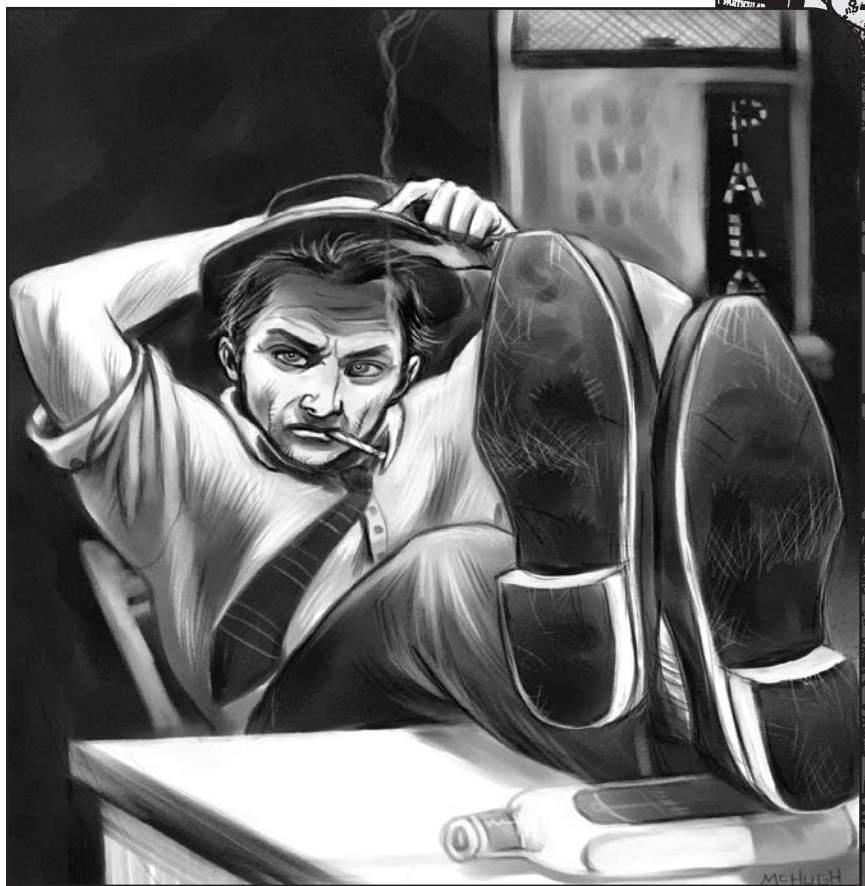
Brains .....	10
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	16
Muscle .....	15
Reflexes .....	13
Savvy .....	13
Status .....	9
Reputation .....	9
Wealth .....	9
Weird .....	10

## SPECIALTIES

- Savvy (Empathy)
- Mind (Alertness)
- Reflexes (Gun Fighting)

## HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	5
Escapist .....	15
Fantastic .....	25
Amazing .....	35



“I won’t play the sap for you, sweetheart!”



# Magician

When you were a kid, you ran away from home to join the circus. You learned every trick in the book from an old hand in the magic business. But bitter experience taught you how tough life on the road could be, as you had run-ins with mobsters, killers, and crooked cops. One day, you used your magic tricks to dispatch a killer. It was fun, and you decided to make a hobby of it. Since then, you have put away dozens of crooks, made yourself a reputation in the underworld, and had a hell of a good time in the process. Who could complain—other than the crooks, of course?



WHOP! “And now, for my next trick...”

## EXAMPLES

- *Mandrake*
- *The Ghost*
- *Norgil the Magician*

## ABILITIES

Brains .....	13
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	16
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	16
Status .....	10
Reputation.....	10
Wealth .....	10
Weird.....	10

## SPECIALTIES

- Mind (Disguise)
- Savvy (Magic)

## HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	5
Escapist .....	15
Fantastic.....	25
Amazing .....	35

## Professor

All that you ever cared about has been research and science. Your obsession has taken priority over a lot of other things in life, such as eating, sleeping, and changing your clothes, but you made some amazing discoveries. Besides, you probably have a beautiful daughter who looks after you (*how you raised a daughter is one mystery that still remains*). Unfortunately, it seems as if everyone is trying to steal your secret inventions or uncover your findings—you probably need help from a group of real adventurers to keep you out of trouble.

### EXAMPLES

- Professor Brownlee • Jonny
- Long Tom • Doctor Zarkon
- Doctor Huer • Marcus Brody

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	18
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	10
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	12
Reputation.....	12
Wealth .....	12
Weird.....	15

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Science)

### MASTERIES

Brains [Physics]

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	7
Escapist .....	17
Fantastic.....	27
Amazing .....	37



“Hmm... where did I put my slide rule... oh, yes—over there, by the death ray...”

## Psychic Investigator

You have leafed through dusty, forgotten tomes, and uncovered things that man was not meant to know. You recognize the evil creatures that walk the earth, and realize that you must battle the forces of darkness. Luckily, through your research, you have discovered their weaknesses. Armed with wooden stakes, silver bullets, chicken blood, and really big guns, you are prepared to fight the monsters and save the world. Hopefully it is not too late.

### EXAMPLES

- *John Silence*
- *Semi-Dual*
- *Randolph Carter*
- *Jules de Grandin*
- *The Green Lama*

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	16
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	16
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	12
Reputation.....	12
Wealth .....	12
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Brains (Occult)
- Reflexes (Gun-Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	6
Escapist .....	16
Fantastic.....	26
Amazing .....	36



*“Parbleu!*  
I detect zee tremor in zee astral vibrations!”

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Reporter

You are a typically cynical, hard-drinking, wisecracking newspaper reporter. You worked your way up from copy boy to cub reporter, laboring over obituaries and society column. Then you were assigned to the police beat. You have seen the seamy side of life, where all the action is—you know that it is where you belong. You are willing to go to any trouble and take any risk just to get your story and scoop the competition. If it makes powerful people uncomfortable, so much the better.

### EXAMPLES

- “Flashgun” Casey • Kennedy
- Joe “Daffy” Dill

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	12
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	16
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	15
Status .....	13
Reputation (+3) .....	16
Wealth (-3) .....	10
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Savvy (Empathy)
- Savvy (Journalism)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	4
Escapist .....	14
Fantastic.....	24
Amazing .....	34



“Holy tomato! What a scoop!  
Wait ‘till my editor hears this story...”

## Scientific Detective

Crime, as you have discovered, is a fascinating subject. Some crimes are so interesting that they can pull you away from your orchids, opium, or microscope and really engage your attention. Especially interesting are those crimes too tough for the police to handle. You keep telling them that if they really looked carefully at those broken twigs, dust particles, or teeth marks on the cigar, everything would be perfectly clear to them. But the police do not understand your methodology, and nor does your faithful, clueless sidekick. Not everyone can be as brilliant as you are, of course.

### EXAMPLES

- *Dr. Thorndyke*
- *Craig Kennedy*
- *Hercule Poirot*
- *Sherlock Holmes*

### ABILITIES


Brains .....	17
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	17
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	12
Reputation .....	12
Wealth .....	12
Weird.....	13

### SPECIALTIES

- Brains (Forensics)
- Savvy (Empathy)
- Mind (Alertness)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	2
Escapist .....	12
Fantastic.....	22
Amazing .....	32



“As you can see, my dear Jones, this leaf is from the *Chondrodendron Tomentosum* plant, which is used to manufacture the deadly poison known as...”

## Spunky Kid

Abandoned as a baby and raised in an orphanage, you have had a tough life. Then you were adopted by a millionaire, chief of police, detective, secret agent, or whomever. Now you have a heck of a great time solving crimes, fleeing kidnappers, and saving your dad from hoodlums and death traps. If only he did not send you to bed at nine-o'clock every evening. It is just not fair—after all, you know that you are just as tough as he is.

### EXAMPLES

- *Chip Dorlan*
- *Tim Donovan*
- *Nancy Drew*
- *The Hardy Boys*
- *Little Orphan Annie*

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	16
Mind .....	10
Muscle.....	9
Reflexes .....	15
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	9
Reputation (+2) .....	11
Wealth (-2) .....	7
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

- Mind (Stealth)
- Reflexes (Sports)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	14
Escapist .....	24
Fantastic.....	34
Amazing .....	44



“Gee whiz! Vampires! Wait ‘til the other kids hear about this one...”



# Tough Scientist

You have done just about everything and learned as much as you can know. You were a football star, earned a Ph.D., fought in a world war, and traveled around the world. You eventually became the top practitioner in your field, an honorary police officer, and a confidant of world leaders and businessmen. Yet somehow, you still do not feel as if you have done enough. You crave even more excitement. Not only are you eager to fight wrongs, but you also seek to make the world a better place. After all, if you are not qualified for the job, then who in the world is?

## EXAMPLES

- *Doc Savage*
- *The Avenger*
- *Captain Fury*
- *Buck Rodgers*

## ABILITIES

Brains .....	16
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	15
Muscle.....	14
Reflexes .....	14
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	12
Reputation.....	12
Wealth .....	12
Weird.....	10

## SPECIALTIES

- Brains (Science)
- Reflexes (Boxing)
- Reflexes (Gun-Fighting)

## HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	0
Escapist .....	10
Fantastic.....	20
Amazing .....	30



“Bucky, you pack the gas-guns. Hank, you start the rockets. Doctor Sin, you load the tractor beam. Margot and Jimmy, put on your parachutes and come with me...”

## Wild Man

Your parents died when you were a baby, whilst the family was travelling through uncharted wilderness. You miraculously survived in the wild after being found and raised by wild animals. Explorers eventually discovered you, but that only meant that you had to protect them from fiendish cannibals, ferocious tigers, and sinister lost civilizations. You either speak in a crude, primitive style or are equally at home in both the ballroom and the jungle.

### EXAMPLES

- *Tarzan*

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	11
Mind .....	17
Muscle.....	17
Reflexes .....	17
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	5
Reputation (+5) .....	10
Wealth (-5) .....	0
Weird.....	13

### SPECIALTIES

- Mind (Stealth)
- Mind (Survival)
- Reflexes (Acrobatics)
- Reflexes (Knife-Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	1
Escapist .....	11
Fantastic.....	21
Amazing .....	31



“I am Grekor, Lord of the Jungle!  
None have challenged me and lived!”



## Everyman

Some players want to play very clearly-defined and unusual characters. For example, a player might want to portray a crime-fighting jazz musician who is also a master of hypnotism. None of the templates resemble him very well, and while the player could customize one of the templates to get the results he wants, it would take a lot of unnecessary trouble. In these circumstances, players can always use the Everyman template to create the character they desire. The Everyman template is the only one that cannot be played as-is—players must first customize their characters when choosing the Everyman.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	10
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	10
Reputation .....	10
Wealth .....	10
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

none by default

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	25
Escapist .....	35
Fantastic.....	45
Amazing .....	55

## SAMPLE CUSTOMIZATION

Brian is about to play in a one-shot game, and he is the only player. The gamemaster tells him that this story is a mystery, the power level is gritty, and Brian's character should be a detective. He starts with the Hardboiled Detective template, and names his character Brad Christopher. Brad is new to the business, and just got his detective license through a correspondence course. He shares an office with Mr. Wizzo, a stage-magician, who has taught him a few tricks over the years. Another detail is that when Brad was a kid, he memorized the entire Encyclopedia Americana, except for Volume *i* which was missing from his collection.

He starts out with 5 hero points. Since Brad is new to the business, Brian reduces his mind rating from 16 to 13 (he is good, but not as observant as he should be) and his status rating from 9 to 8, raising his total hero point value to 9. He spends them to raise brains to 14 (to reflect his unusual education), get the *savvy (magic)* specialty (to reflect Mr. Whizzo's influence), and increase luck to 13 (which means he is given two cards to use in tough situations.) This leaves Brad with 2 hero points, which he saves for future experience.

### The Character Sheet

A character sheet has been provided in the back of this book, and it can be photocopied for personal use. One side is meant to not all of the character's background information, such as his name, habits, style and the like. The other side is for rules-related information—abilities, specialties, masteries, schticks, etc.

On the left side of the back page, enter the character's ability ratings and their derived values, such as for resistance and reputation. Below that, information about the character's specialties, masteries, and schticks (along with point values) should be noted.

The top-right part of the page is for listing how hero points were spent, and the character's current total. Start with the initial points; deduct points for abilities, specialties, masteries, and schticks; and add points for defects. The entries for Cool Ideas, Experience, roleplaying, and virtue can be left blank for now. The total remaining is the result of this calculation.

Below the section for hero points is where all defects are listed. The box below that is for listing all the character's weapons and their damage values. Note that the character's unarmed combat damage is equal to his base damage, defined by his muscle rating. And the box at the bottom-right is for listing the character's armor. Any vehicles that the character possesses can also be noted on the far left of the page.

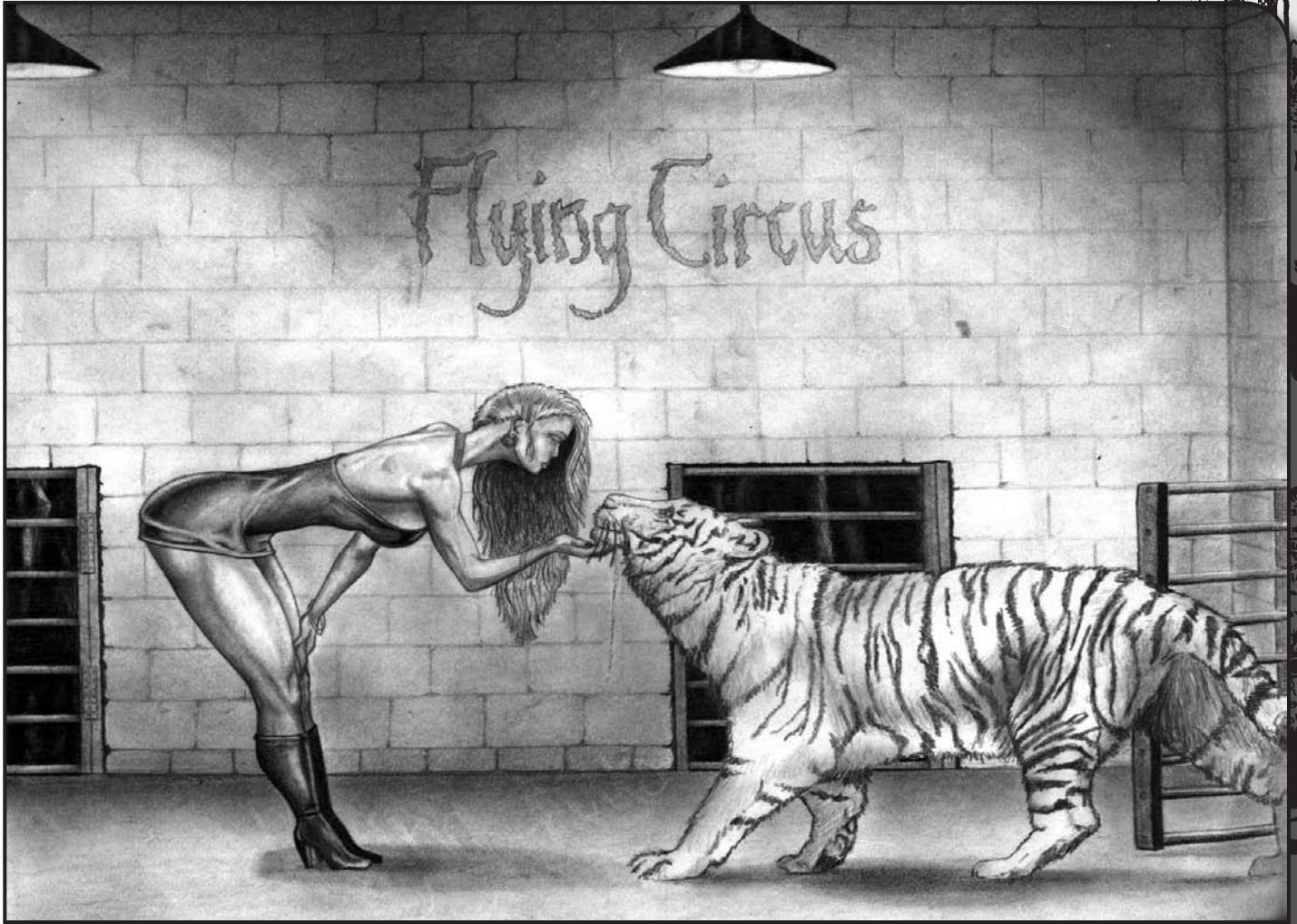
On the bottom-middle of the sheet, a box is provided to record wounds; this can be left blank for now.

The front page is for detailing the character's background, contacts, physical description, and any other information that is desired to make the character seem real.

Once the information on the character sheet has completed, the player has everything he needs to begin play. The gamemaster, on the other hand, must familiarize himself with the rest the rules contained herein.







**CHAPTER 3**

**Schticks**

**& Gadgets, Magic,  
& Other Powers**



# TWO-FISTED TALES



Schticks are the strange and bizarre powers and talents—arcane magic spells; flashy martial arts maneuvers; mastery of exotic hypnotic disciplines; and the ability to build weird, super-scientific gadgets.

Schticks may only be chosen with the gamemaster's permission. The gamemaster may choose to exclude whole categories of schticks from a story—He can exclude magic spells in a “proper” pulp story, exclude the hypnotism rules, believing that they unbalance the game, ignore martial arts schticks since they do not fit the period. The gamemaster may even exclude all schticks if he feels the need to do so.

In order to add a schtick to a character, two requirements must be met:

1. The character must possess a combined ability rating (with specialty or mastery) greater than that listed with the schtick. *For example, a target of Brains [Hypnotism] 24 requires the character to possess Brains [Hypnotism] at a combined rating of 25 or greater.*
2. The character must expend the listed number of hero points (the following rule applies to all schticks except for weird-based ones). The cost is reduced depending on the difference between the listed combined ability and that of the character—subtract the required rating from the character's actual rating and consult the table below. The cost may never be reduced below zero.

## Hero Point Cost Reduction

Target Difference (Actual - Required)	Reduce Cost by this Amount
5-9	-1
10+	-2

## GADGET SHTICKS

Death rays... rocket ships... time machines... the World of Tomorrow in the stories of today! That was the promise of the science fiction pulps of the Thirties. For many people, the pulps just would not have the same charm without wondrous gadgets and marvelous super-science. These gadget rules are designed to capture the exuberant spirit of pulp science. As always, these shticks are optional, with the gamemaster able to exclude them from the game for any number of reasons.

There are two kinds of gadget shticks—those used to invent gadgets and those used to find gadgets that someone else invented.

Inventing a gadget requires hero points to be expended. The character must also possess a brains rating (modified by the science specialty and appropriate masteries) greater than the listed target number for the gadget. In cases like this, heroes can easily replace gadgets they have invented—if one is stolen, lost, or broken in combat, the character can always return to his laboratory and build another.

*For example, if a character wanted to invent an Aircar, his brains (science) [physics] rating would have to be over 20. That is, his brains +4 (for the specialty) and +4 (for the mastery) would need to be greater than 20 to invent the gadget; if it is 25 or higher, the cost in hero points is reduced to one; and if it is 30 or higher, the cost becomes zero.*

It is also possible that a character uses a gadget that he did not invent himself. It might have been found in an abandoned warehouse, at a crash site, or in a villain's secret hideout. A kindly, old professor may have even given it to the character before being murdered by Nazi agents. In cases like this, the character is at a distinct disadvantage—if the gadget is lost, stolen, or destroyed, he cannot simply go to a laboratory and build another one. All of the powers provided by the gadget are effectively lost forever should this occur.

If a gadget falls under the category of being “found” rather than invented, the target for the shtick is considered zero. Put simply, any character can find the gadget, no matter what his brains rating is. Hero points must still be expended for the shtick and this cost is fixed (characters with high brains ratings do not get discounts on the hero point cost).

Ω

### AIRCAR

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 20

**Hero Points:** 2

**Size:** Large

This device looks a little like a conventional automobile, although it lacks wheels and is smaller and more aerodynamically-designed than the big cars of the Thirties. Unlike conventional cars, however, the Aircar can fly through the air at speeds of up to three-hundred miles per hour (a movement rating of 55). It also has vertical take-off and landing capabilities, and can travel up to nine-hundred miles on a full tank of gasoline.

### ANSIBLE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 21

**Hero Points:** 1

**Size:** Small

The ansible allows people to communicate almost instantaneously across interstellar distances. Ansible waves travel up to one-hundred million times the speed of light. There are no noticeable delays when communicating with nearby star systems. Delays of up to six hours or more are possible when communicating with nearby galaxies.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## ANTI-ELECTRIC RAY

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 20

**Hero Points:** 2

**Size:** Large

**Range:** Long

This gadget prevents an electric device from working. Radios go dead, light bulbs flicker out, cars stop dead, and planes crash from the sky. The device holds enough charge for one use, and takes one turn to recharge.

## ANTI-GRAVITY HARNESS

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 22

**Hero Points:** 3

**Size:** Small

This is just a conventional harness, worn around the torso, and attached to a piece of anti-gravity metal. It reduces the wearer's effective weight to as little as ten percent of its original, allowing characters to leap through the air up to ten times further than normal. *This effect cannot be combined with the super-leap martial arts maneuver.*

## BRAIN CASE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Biology] 20

**Hero Points:** 1

**Size:** Small

The brain case looks like an oversized glass jar with dials and wires on the bottom. The seemingly-glass material is actually almost indestructible. If somebody is about to die, he can be saved by removing the brain and placing it in this portable case. Not only can it keep the subject's brain alive, but it also allows him to communicate through an intercom on the base. Getting the brain back into another body requires a separate schtick, however.

## BROADCAST POWER STATION

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 25

**Hero Points:** 2

**Size:** Gigantic

**Range:** Extreme

This looks like a conventional power plant and generates the same amount of electricity.

What makes it special, however, is that it can transmit electricity without wires—any device that is within range and fitted with a tiny adapter can receive power from this station.

## BULLET-PROOF UNDERWEAR

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Chemistry] 17

**Hero Points:** 3

**Size:** Tiny

This chain-mesh union suit reduces damage from bullets by 4. It leaves the head, hands, and feet uncovered, but protects the rest of the body. This armor is no more bulky or uncomfortable than an ordinary union suit.

## DE-EVOLUTION MACHINE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Biology] 23

**Hero Points:** 4

**Size:** Huge

This huge, stationary ray-gun reverts its victims to earlier evolutionary states, turning people into Neanderthals, ape-men, dinosaurs, or other supposed ancestors (the gamemaster can be as loose with his evolutionary chronology as desired). After five seconds (or five turns), this ray reverses five-hundred-thousand years of evolution, turning a man into a Neanderthal. For every additional five seconds, multiply this time by ten—ten seconds reverses five-million years of evolution, turning a man into an ape-like creature. Fifteen seconds reverses fifty-million years, turning a man into a vaguely-humanoid dinosaur. The ray can also reverse its own effects (turning a devolved human and back into his original form), although it cannot turn anyone into something more-advanced than it originally started.

## DISINTEGRATOR

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 21

**Hero Points:** 3

**Size:** Large

**Range:** Short

**Damage:** 20

When the rays from this deadly, giant gun hit a target, its molecular structure is directly attacked, reducing it to its component atoms.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

In practice, a killed target instantly evaporates into a greasy gas and floats away, leaving some black dust on the ground. The weapon holds enough charge for one shot, and takes one second to recharge. This weapon should be always be used responsibly.

## EARTHQUAKE MACHINE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Geology] 18

**Hero Points:** 2

**Size:** Huge

This dastardly device generates terrible earthquakes in a ten-mile radius when close to a fault line. The earthquakes last for about an hour. The device holds enough charge for one use, and takes one day to recharge.

## ELECTRIC RIFLE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 23

**Hero Points:** 3

**Size:** Small

**Range:** Medium

**Damage:** 8

This rifle fires a bolt of electricity at a target. If the bolt inflicts 5 or more wounds it can burn the target, knock him out, or even paralyze him—the choice is up to the person firing the weapon. It holds enough charge for twenty shots, and can be recharged by plugging it into a light socket.

## ELECTRO-MACE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 24

**Hero Points:** 3

**Size:** Tiny

**Damage:** 8 (Bruising)

Upon pressing a button on this metal cylinder, a number of electrically-projected studs extend from one side, instantly providing a useful weapon.

## ELECTRONIC BRAIN

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Electronics] 18

**Hero Points:** 2

**Size:** Huge

The electronic brain is what the modern world would call a sentient computer. It has a brains

rating of about 20, but does not understand human emotion or intuition, and may, at the gamemaster's discretion, find it impossible to lie, tell jokes, or do other human-like things. It has been programmed to either serve mankind or a specific master. It may interpret those commands, however, in unexpected ways. The electronic brain communicates through a speaker, in a mechanical male voice.

## GAS GUN

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Chemistry] 21

**Hero Points:** 3

**Size:** Tiny

**Range:** Medium

**Damage:** 7 (Bruising)

This pistol fires a concentrated cloud of knockout gas that typically affects a single person at a time (unless two or more people are very close to each other). The device holds enough gas for ten uses. Gas guns are ideal weapons to stun opponents rather than harm them.

## GLASS-STEEL

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Chemistry] 23

**Hero Points:** 2

**Size:** Tiny

This substance has the full transparency of glass, but it is as tough as the hardest steel. It is ideal for the construction of rocket ships, underwater lairs, and even mammoth skyscrapers.

## HYPNOTIC RADIO TRANSMITTER

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 20

**Hero Points:** 4

**Size:** Large

This device can be a great asset to anyone with the *hypnotic suggestion* schtick (see Hypnotic Disciplines). It allows the hypnotist to use his power on anyone listening to the broadcast. Listeners can be affected even if they do not see the hypnotist, although they can still resist by making a mind (Mental Defense) roll that beats the hypnotist's skill rating.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## INERTIALESS DRIVE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 25  
**Hero Points:** 3  
**Size:** Huge

As the name implies, the inertialess drive can reduce the inertia of a space ship (i.e., the ship's resistance to being pushed) to zero. Within an atmosphere, the ship can only travel at conventional rocket speeds. In inter-galactic space, however, it can travel up to 300,000 times the speed of light (*its movement rating is 410*). Relativistic time-dilation effects can be ignored when using the inertialess drive.

## INFRA-RED TRACER

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Chemistry] 18  
**Hero Points:** 1  
**Size:** Tiny

This chemical, invisible to the naked eye, can be sprayed on just about anything. It leaves a trail that can only be seen by someone with an infrared light.

## INVISIBILITY POTION

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 22  
**Hero Points:** 6  
**Size:** Small

This potion turns the drinker invisible for one full hour. This is handy when a hero wishes to sneak inside a villain's hideout or get past adoring fans.

## MACHINE PISTOL

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Engineering] 21  
**Hero Points:** 2  
**Size:** Tiny  
**Range:** Medium  
**Damage:** 8

This gun is the size of a conventional pistol, but has much greater capacity. It is also capable of fully-automatic fire., and requires a minimum muscle rating of 12 for use. The weapon holds 100 shots, and takes one second to reload.

## MAGNETO-RAY

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 20  
**Hero Points:** 3  
**Size:** Small

This ray gun uses magnetic force to either attract people or repel them. A muscle check of 12 or higher is required to resist the magnetic force, and even then, movement in the opposite direction of the force is at one half of the normal speed.

## MERCY BULLETS

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Biology] 17  
**Hero Points:** 2  
**Size:** Tiny

These bullets come in a variety of caliber sizes, and can be used in any type of hand-held gun, although they are traditionally used in machine pistols. They do the same amount of damage as conventional bullets, except that it is bruising instead of conventional damage.

## MIND TRANSFER MACHINE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Biology] 21  
**Hero Points:** 5  
**Size:** Large

This device can transfer the mind of one character to another. It could transfer the mind of an old crone to the body of a beautiful woman, for example. The effect is so unsettling that the transferred person must check for the effects of fear (against a target of 20).

## MOLE DRILL

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Geology] 19  
**Hero Points:** 2  
**Size:** Huge

This is the ideal device to use for tunnelling underground, say to the Lost Worlds beneath the surface of the Earth. It can tunnel through just about anything less dense than refined steel (which stops it dead in its tracks), at a rate of about thirty miles per hour (*a movement rating of 25*). It also has almost unlimited range, traveling up to eight-thousand miles before needing to refuel.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## NIGHT-VISION GOGGLES

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 18  
**Hero Points:** 2  
**Size:** Tiny

These goggles give the user access to the ultra-violet spectrum, making it possible to see in pitch darkness.

## ORGANIC ACID

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Chemistry] 23  
**Hero Points:** 1  
**Size:** Tiny

Each small vial of this acid looks and tastes like sweat, but can slowly eat through and destroy plant-fibers and other plant-based materials, such as cotton or hemp fabrics. It does not affect human or animal flesh.

## PERSONAL ROCKET-PACK

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 20  
**Hero Points:** 2  
**Size:** Small

This handy device, worn on the back, allows a character to fly. He can reach speeds up to one-hundred miles per hour (*a movement rating of 41*), and can travel up to fifty miles on a full load of fuel.

## POCKET RADAR

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 16  
**Hero Points:** 1  
**Size:** Tiny

As its name implies, this is a tiny device that can detect approaching objects using RADAR.

## PORTABLE CANOE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Chemistry] 20  
**Hero Points:** 1  
**Size:** Tiny/Large

This handy device easily fits in a pocket, looking like a folded, paper bag. Once unwrapped and dropped in water, however, it turns into a sturdy canoe.

## RAY DERRINGER

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 24  
**Hero Points:** 5  
**Size:** Tiny  
**Range:** Medium  
**Damage:** 8 (Bruising or Conventional)

This weapon can inflict either bruising or regular damage at the user's choice discretion. It can be fired up to one-hundred times before being recharged.

## ROBOT

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Engineering] 25  
**Hero Points:** 5  
**Size:** Man-Sized

Robots are like electronic brains, except that they are slightly less intelligent (*with a brains rating of 15 rather than 20*) and they are given their own, mechanical bodies. These bodies are slow (*a reflexes rating of 3*), but quite strong and tough (*a muscle rating of 15, plus an armor that reduces wounds by 2*).

## ROCKET SHIP

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 23  
**Hero Points:** 5  
**Size:** Huge

This is a typical futuristic space ship. It requires two pilots to operate and can carry up to six passengers with dining and sleeping areas. It can also reach a top speed of about 1,000,000 miles per hour in interplanetary space (*a movement rating of 160*) and can travel at this speed for about one-hundred hours before needing to refuel.

## SPACE HELMET

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Chemistry] 18  
**Hero Points:** 1  
**Size:** Small

This round, transparent helmet is worn over the head to survive in the vacuum of space. A full space suit is not required except under really extreme circumstances. *This is what all those scantily clad women on old science fiction magazine covers are using.*



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## SYNTHETIC INSECT PHEROMONE

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Biology] 22

**Hero Points:** 5

**Size:** Tiny

If a character sprays himself with this in the presence of an insect swarm, the insects recognize him as their queen. After that moment, the creatures (and their descendents) obey the character's every command. The character can only be the queen of one swarm at a time—they also eventually eat the Queen if they are not kept well-fed.

## SYNTHETIC MAN (OR WOMAN)

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Biology] 19

**Hero Points:** 3

**Size:** Man-Sized

This concoction creates an actual adult human-being. This person is unique, does not resemble any other specific person, and does not have any unusual powers or abilities. He is not guaranteed to feel any special loyalty for his creator. The gamemaster should use the *everyman* template with only 15 hero points to spend, and without spending any points on specialties or masteries. For each additional 10 hero points used to create the character, increase the both the hero point cost and target rating by 2.

## WATER-BREATHING PILL

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Chemistry] 17

**Hero Points:** 2

**Size:** Tiny

When swallowed, this pill allows a character to breathe underwater for one full hour as if he was surrounded by air.

## WEATHER CONTROL RAY

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Physics] 21

**Hero Points:** 3

**Size:** Large

With this device, a character can increase or reduce the amount of precipitation or alter wind speeds to anything less than the strength of a hurricane.

## WRIST-RADIO

**Target:** Brains (Science) [Engineering] 17

**Hero Points:** 1

**Size:** Tiny

This is a conventional ham radio in just about every sense, except that it fits around the wrist. Characters can use this device to communicate with each other.





## MARTIAL ARTS MANEUVERS

Very few Americans in the Thirties were trained in the martial arts of East Asia, and it is unlikely that any genuine pulp heroes actually used them. There is no reason why characters with Far-East backgrounds cannot learn these skills, however. Since players tend to enjoy martial arts, they should be part of the arsenal for the ubiquitous ninja assassins.

In order to use any of these martial arts maneuvers, characters must possess the reflexes (Martial Arts) specialty. As with other schticks, hero points must be spent to gain a maneuver, and a character's mind rating must exceed the listed target rating.

Martial arts maneuvers are given fairly generic names. Players who wish to use more colorful names (such as *The Crimson Blade of the Silver Sun*) may do so—the gamemaster can also allow Cool Idea challenges for particularly evocative names.

### ADRENALINE CONTROL

**Target:** Mind 17

**Hero Points:** 2

A character can push himself farther than normally possible with this maneuver. When a character takes a self-inflicted wound to push his muscle (see page 126), he temporarily adds 2D to the ability rating instead of 1D.

### ALL-AROUND SIGHT

**Target:** Mind 18

**Hero Points:** 3

This maneuver allows a character to see behind him or to the side, without having to turn around.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## ATTACK AT A DISTANCE

**Target:** Mind 13

**Hero Points:** 1

This maneuver allows a character to inflict normal damage on a target within point blank range. The character uses his hand as if striking the target, but does not physically touch him. A standard attack roll is still made.

## BIOFEEDBACK

**Target:** Mind 17

**Hero Points:** 3

This maneuver allows a character to control his own bleeding. He does not need medical attention, nor does the character die from blood loss, when sustaining 5 or more wounds in a single attack. This maneuver does not cure the character—it merely prevents him from bleeding to death. Characters can still die if they receive 10 or more wounds from a single attack or a total of 20 wounds.

## BLINDING STRIKE

**Target:** Mind 19

**Hero Points:** 4

Characters with this maneuver can make special attacks against man-sized humanoid. The use of this attack must be declared before the combat roll is made. If the result is an ordinary success, no damage is inflicted. If the result is a great success, however, the opponent is temporarily blinded for one full minute. While blinded, the opponent has to rely on hearing or smell to direct attacks, and his effective reflexes is half the normal rating when making combat rolls.

## BODY EQUILIBRIUM

**Target:** Mind 18

**Hero Points:** 4

Characters with this maneuver can substantially reduce their weight. The character can walk on water, silently across creaky floors, or perform other similar feats.

## CAT FALL

**Target:** Mind 16

**Hero Points:** 3

A character can avoid sustaining damage from falling by slowing his fall using nearby surfaces and adjusting his center of gravity with this maneuver. Consider the character to be wearing armor that only protects against falling damage, reducing wounds by 5.

## DANGER SENSE

**Target:** Mind 20

**Hero Points:** 5

This maneuver gives the character a weak, precognitive power that can alert him when some kind of danger lurks around the corner. The character must actively use this maneuver, and he does not necessarily recognize the source of the danger.

## DEATH STRIKE

**Target:** Mind 20

**Hero Points:** 5

Characters with this terrifying maneuver can make special attacks against humanoid targets. The use of this attack must be declared before the combat roll is made. If the result is an ordinary success, no damage is inflicted. If the result is a great success, however, the opponent is temporarily paralyzed and sustains an amount of wound damage (rather than bruising) equal to the character's base damage + 8. If the opponent receives 5 to 9 wounds from this attack, he is slowly strangled to death, sustaining 1 additional wound every ten minutes until receiving sufficient medical attention (*a successful Brains [Medicine] roll against a target number of 25*). If the opponent receives 10 or more wounds from this attack, he dies instantly.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION

**Target:** Mind 16

**Hero Points:** 3

This maneuver allows a character to resist damage from extreme heat or cold, reducing wounds by 5.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## IMMOBILE STANCE

**Target:** Mind 15

**Hero Points:** 1

Characters with this maneuver can make an all-out defense (defending for a full turn), increasing his effective muscle score by 10 points against the tackle and throw attacks. In addition, the Judo throw maneuver cannot be used against the character.

## IMMORTALITY

**Target:** Mind 21

**Hero Points:** 1

Characters with this maneuver are immune to the effects of aging and disease.

## JUDO THROW

**Target:** Mind 14

**Hero Points:** 2

A character can use this maneuver to throw an opponent without having to beat him in a *muscle vs. muscle* contest. The character only has to beat his opponent's combat roll.

## KNOCKOUT STRIKE

**Target:** Mind 17

**Hero Points:** 3

This maneuver only works if the character rolls a great success against a foe in combat. If he does this, 6 points is added to his hand-to-hand damage, instead of the usual 2 points.

## LIGHT-SLEEPER

**Target:** Mind 15

**Hero Points:** 1

Character with this maneuver are just as alert while asleep as they are during waking hours.

## MIND OVER BODY

**Target:** Mind 18

**Hero Points:** 2

This maneuver allows a character to live without food, water, or sleep for up to one week without ill effects.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## MISSILE DEFLECTION

**Target:** Mind 15

**Hero Points:** 1

This maneuver allows a character to parry bullets and other small missiles. He adds 2 bonus dice (rather than the standard 1 bonus die) whenever launching an all-out defense (defending for one full turn) with a metal weapon in combat.

## PARALYTIC STRIKE

**Target:** Mind 19

**Hero Points:** 4

Characters with this maneuver can make special attacks against man-sized humanoids. The use of this attack must be declared before the combat roll is made. If the result is an ordinary success, no damage is inflicted. If the result is a great success, however, the opponent is temporarily paralyzed and cannot perform any actions either during this or the subsequent turn. The opponent also receives an extra penalty die on all subsequent combat rolls for up a full minute.

## POWER ATTACK

**Target:** Mind 15

**Hero Points:** 1

This maneuver adds 2 points of damage to a single hand-to-hand attack. The character also receives 2 points of bruising damage every time he uses this power, however.

## ROUNDHOUSE ATTACK

**Target:** Mind 13

**Hero Points:** 1

A character can use this maneuver to hit up to ten targets with a standard hand-to-hand attack, provided they are all standing right next to the character.

## STANDING JUMP

**Target:** Mind 13

**Hero Points:** 1

This maneuver allows a character to leap the full distance allowed by his muscle rating, even if he lacks a running start.

## SUPER JUMPING

**Target:** Mind 15

**Hero Points:** 2

A character with this maneuver can leap four times greater than normally possible, effectively adding 18 to his muscle rating for the purposes of jumping.

## SUSPENDED ANIMATION

**Target:** Mind 18

**Hero Points:** 2

This maneuver enables a character to escape death or discomfort through a form of hibernation. During this hibernation period, the character does not need food, water, or even air to sustain himself. The body does not decompose, even if it does appear to be dead, lacking a pulse and signs of breathing.

## WATER BREATHING

**Target:** Mind 16

**Hero Points:** 2

This maneuver allows a character to breathe underwater as if it were air for one full hour.





## HYPNOTIC DISCIPLINES

Sinister hypnotists were a staple of pulp stories and radio dramas. Even stories that prided themselves on their realism portrayed hypnotists with powers far more advanced than in the real world. For that reason, the gamemaster may want to make the following disciplines available to their players.

A player character must follow the usual procedures to learn hypnotic disciplines. His Brains [Hypnotism] ability must exceed the listed target number and hero points must be expended in the normal fashion.

Unless otherwise specified, these disciplines only affect another character if the hypnotist can first place the subject into a hypnotic trance. In combat situations, this requires an *enthrall* action, followed by a number of *hypnotize* actions equal to the cost of the hypnotic discipline.

### CONTROL BLEEDING

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 16

**Hero Points:** 1

**Duration:** 1 Day

When a character receives five or more wounds from a single attack, he normally bleeds to death without the necessary medical treatment. This discipline allows a character to stop the victim's bleeding so that he does not die or suffer additional wounds via blood loss unless receiving 20 or more wounds, or 10 or more wounds from a single attack. This discipline should only be used on a subject after he has suffered a major wound. Using it on an unwounded subject is futile, although it can, at the gameaster's discretion, cause circulatory problems





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## DEATH-LIKE STATE

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 19  
**Hero Points:** 2  
**Duration:** Up to 1 Week

When used on a subject, this discipline reduces his heart and breathing rates to the point of appearing to be dead. Only the most careful and skilled investigation reveals otherwise—a *brains (Medicine) roll over 24*. The subject is unconscious, but wakes after a specified length of time or condition is met. The condition must be something that would normally wake an unconscious character (a mind link message would do it).

## EMOTIONAL TRIGGER

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 23  
**Hero Points:** 4  
**Duration:** 1 Year

This discipline changes a subject's emotional state, making him angry, confused, despairing, or the like. The change takes place after a triggering event, specified by the hypnotist. *As an example, a hypnotist might say, "Whenever you commit a crime, you will have overwhelming feelings of guilt."* The gamemaster can decide what effect this might have—whether it discourages the subject from committing crimes (or not) or is less effective in some way (perhaps he receives a penalty die on certain actions).

## HYPNOTIC AGENT

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 24  
**Hero Points:** 5  
**Duration:** Permanent

This discipline allows a hypnotist to put his subject into an instant trance state after a specified triggering event. *As an example, a hypnotist might say, "Whenever you hear the word 'Kimoto' you will fall into a trance."* When combined with the *hypnotic suggestion* discipline, the subject can be easily forced to follow a series of changing commands.

## HYPNOTIC SUGGESTION

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 24  
**Hero Points:** 5  
**Duration:** 1 Week after Trance

With this discipline, a character may order a subject to do one specific thing. It must be an action that takes a limited amount of time (no more than one week). Once the action is completed, the power no longer affects the subject.

The subject can resist his commands if he is told to kill himself or would rather die than do what he is told. In those cases, the subject should make a mind (Mental Defense) roll, with a bonus die, against the hypnotist's brains [Hypnotism] rating. If he beats the target, he feels a strong desire to do what he's been told, but is horrified by it and resists. He must keep rolling to resist at least once per day afterwards (or even more often if he is presented with strong temptations) until the duration ends.

## INVISIBILITY

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 25  
**Hero Points:** 7  
**Duration:** as Desired

This discipline can prevent a hypnotist from being seen. Unlike other hypnotic powers, this does not require the hypnotist to put anyone into a trance state.

## MENTAL ILLUSIONS

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 23  
**Hero Points:** 4  
**Duration:** 1 Day after Trance

A character can use this discipline to make his subject believe that he sees and hears things that do not exist (or the subject does not see or hear things that do exist). The hypnotist must specify what the subject does or does not see or hear during the trance phase. *Some examples would be: A lion is sleeping in the living room, your friend Charlie speaks in gibberish, or you don't see me or my companion Margo.*

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## MIND LINK

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 24  
**Hero Points:** 5  
**Duration:** 1 Day after Trance

This discipline allows a character to mentally communicate with his subject without anyone else hearing the conversation. The subject must have been put under a trance within the last day and be within three miles of the hypnotist for communication to be possible.

## MIND READING

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 25  
**Hero Points:** 5  
**Duration:** While in Trance

This discipline allows a character to read his subject's thoughts while in a hypnotic trance. The character simply gazes into the subject's mind and roots around it. Thoughts that are close to the surface may take no more than a few seconds, while deeper memories can take a few minutes to locate. The character cannot recover information that the subject would not remember, unless the he also possesses the *recover memories* discipline.

## MINDWIPE

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 23  
**Hero Points:** 4  
**Duration:** Instantaneous

This discipline allows a character to erase specific memories (or even all of them) that belong to the subject. Memories gradually return (at the discretion of the gamemaster) or they can be recovered immediately using the *recover memories* discipline.

## MUSCULAR CONTROL

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 23  
**Hero Points:** 4  
**Duration:** While in Trance

This discipline allows a character to control a subject's gross body movements during a trance period, as if a puppet. The character can tell his subject to do anything, but the subject shows no initiative, nor does he actually attempt anything he is not told to do.

As with *hypnotic suggestion*, the subject can resist his commands if he is told to kill himself or would rather die than do what he's told. In those cases, the subject should make a mind (Mental Defense) roll, with a bonus die, against the hypnotist's brains [Hypnotism] rating. If he beats the target, he stops and refuses to do anything. The hypnotist can ask him to perform the action again, at which point another roll can be made to resist. This is repeated until the hypnotist stops asking or the subject succumbs.

## RECOVER MEMORIES

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 19  
**Hero Points:** 1  
**Duration:** Permanent

This discipline allows a character to restore a subject's memories. It can either reverse the effects of the *mindwipe* discipline or restore memories that have been lost through a natural form of amnesia.

## SIGHT LINK

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 21  
**Hero Points:** 3  
**Duration:** 1 Hour after Trance

This discipline allows a character to see everything that his subject sees. The subject must be within three miles of the character for the image to be clear.

## SLEEP

**Target:** Brains [Hypnotism] 17  
**Hero Points:** 2  
**Duration:** Instantaneous

This discipline knocks a subject unconscious. The character simply tells the subject that he is getting sleepy, and he falls asleep (the gamemaster can determine just how long the sleeping period lasts).





## MAGIC SPELLS

Real magic was rare in the pulps of the Thirties. Pulp stories may have been wild and over-the-top, but most of them took place in a rational, scientific world—even if the “weird science” of the pulps bore little resemblance to that of our world. Magic is far more common, however, in pulp-inspired motion pictures like *The Mummy* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Magic spells should not be readily available to player-characters, except at the discretion of the gamemaster.

There are two kinds of spell schticks—memorized and library spells. Memorized spells can be cast at any time, and are fairly reliable. Library spells, on the other hand, are contained in a book, scroll, or tablet back at home—they have not been memorized and it is unlikely that the character is able to lug around such items. Library spells require fewer hero points, but cannot be cast without access to the library (being stuck under the ice in Antarctica clearly prevents a character from utilizing his library). Even if it were possible to cast one of these spells without access to the library, this often leads to devastating

consequences. When casting a library spell, a fumble causes a backlash (see the *backlash* information provided with each entry).

A player character must follow the usual procedures to learn magic spells. His Brains (Occult) ability must exceed the listed target number and hero points must be expended in the normal fashion. The given costs are for memorized spells; library spells require only half as many hero points (adjusting for a reduction in cost for a high brains rating after the calculation).

### ANIMAL FORM

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 23

**Hero Points:** 4

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell allows the caster to take the form of an animal of his choice.

**Backlash:** The character changes into animal form, but he cannot change back completely. He must live with a feature of the animal (bird's foot, cat's fur, dog's tail, etc.).

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## ANIMATE GOLEM

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 20

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** Permanent

This spell creates a creature, called a golem, that follows the character's every command. He cannot animate more than a single golem at any one time. The golem cannot be knocked unconscious and does not bleed to death. It also possesses the following ability ratings: reflexes 10, muscle 20, weird 20, and all others are 1. The character can raise these ratings or teach the golem specialties or schticks; increase the cost by 1 for every 10 additional hero points given to the golem.

**Backlash:** The golem is created, but it does not follow the caster's orders. It lashes out at the first human it sees, and then goes on a rampage across the countryside.

## ANIMATE UNDEAD

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 20

**Hero Points:** 3

**Duration:** Permanent

This spell animates a group of corpses and makes them perform a single, simple task. Typical tasks are "kill those people over there" or "kill anyone who enters this room." Undead creatures cannot be given new commands. The spell animates up to twenty zombies or ten skeletons.

**Backlash:** The animated corpses immediately attack the caster.

## ANIMATE TATTOO

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 23

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** Permanent

Characters who wear a magical tattoo can animate them telepathically with this spell. When activated, the tattoos are transformed into one or more flying, paper-thin creatures that follow their master's telepathic commands. Their total surface area cannot be more than double the surface area of their corresponding tattoos. They attack by biting or smothering their victims; use the swarm rules (see page 164) if appropriate for these creatures.

**Backlash:** The tattoo attacks the wearer when first activated.

## ASTRAL TRAVEL

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 21

**Hero Points:** 3

**Duration:** 1 Hour

When a character uses this spell, his soul or spirit leaves his body, able to travel through walls and float through the air. When freed, the spirit cannot be harmed by physical means, nor can it harm others.

**Backlash:** The character comes to the attention of a hostile otherworldly being.

## ATAVISM

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 23

**Hero Points:** 4

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell allows a character to contact the spirit of a dead person, and ask it questions.

**Backlash:** The character contacts the spirits of the dead, but they lash out for being disturbed.

## AUGURY

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 14

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** Permanent

The caster discovers whether a specific course of action results in a good or bad outcome. This spell takes an hour to cast, and the gamemaster provides one of three different answers: *good*, *bad*, or *unknown*. The result is *unknown* on a roll of 1 to 5 on a single die. Otherwise the gamemaster provides his best guess.

**Backlash:** none

## BIND MAJOR SUPERNATURAL BEING

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 25

**Hero Points:** 5

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell binds a major supernatural being into service for the character for the duration of the spell. This being can be a demon lord



# TWO-FISTED TALES

or a powerful deity—the choice is up to the player, with the gamemaster's approval. The being must be specified when the schtick is chosen for the character. This spell is unusually powerful magic, and the being has no resistance against it.

**Backlash:** The being seizes the caster's soul, and takes it back with him.

## BIND MINOR SUPERNATURAL BEING

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 19

**Hero Points:** 3

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell functions like *bind major supernatural being*, but it only works against a lesser creature. The type of creature must be specified when the schtick is chosen for the character.

**Backlash:** The creature seizes the caster's soul, and takes it back with him.

## CONTACT POWER

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 20

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** 1 Hour

A character can use this spell to contact an otherworldly being. This being can be any spirit, demon, or deity, but characters must possess this schtick separately for each individual being. This spell does not ensure that the being is cooperative when contacted.

**Backlash:** The caster contacts another (malevolent) power by mistake.

## CREATE PROTECTIVE CHARM

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 18

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** 1 Week

This spell allows the caster to create a small amulet that protects the wearer against attacks from a certain type of supernatural being (reduce wounds by 4). The specific being must be specified when the schtick is chosen for the character.

**Backlash:** none

## CURSE

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 22

**Hero Points:** 3

**Duration:** Permanent

This spell can only be used once—each additional use must be another schtick chosen for the character. It enables the caster to exact punishment on a victim. This can be any punishment, from being killed by his horse or eaten by crocodiles in the New York City sewers—whatever is said eventually comes true unless the victim gets the curse removed (or unless the gamemaster vetoes the curse for some reason). For this spell to function, the caster must see his victim and verbally announce the curse with the specifics. There is no resistance to this spell, but the gamemaster can opt to allow a combination of certain rituals and ordeals to release or ease the curse.

**Backlash:** The caster has cursed himself, suffering effects much like those that he tried to inflict on his victim.

## DOWSING

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 17

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell allows the caster to detect a specific substance, such as water or gold. The substance must be specified when the spell is cast. The character walks around with a stick or a metal rod, and vibrations within it tell him whether a substance is present within medium range (fifty yards), as well as the direction in which it can be found.

**Backlash:** The caster receives 2 wounds.

## EXORCISM

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 19

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** Instantaneous

If someone has been possessed, this spell can expel the occupying spirit.

**Backlash:** The exorcised being takes control of the caster.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## INVISIBILITY DUST

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 20

**Hero Points:** 6

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell creates a dust that turns a target invisible when sprinkled over it. This spell only creates a single dose of the dust, enough to make a single person invisible for an hour.

**Backlash:** The dust turns a person invisible permanently.

## LOVE POTION

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 23

**Hero Points:** 3

**Duration:** Permanent

This spell allows the caster to create a love potion. If someone drinks this potion, he falls passionately in love with the first person of the opposite sex he sees.

**Backlash:** This spell creates a hate potion, rather than a love potion. Whoever drinks the potion feels a passionate hatred for the first person he sees.

## OPEN GATE

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 24

**Hero Points:** 3

**Duration:** 2 Minutes

This spell opens a gate to another location. This location can be another dimension, planet, or position on the Earth. Gates can only be opened at very specific times, such as the night of the full moon, exactly midnight, or some other time selected by the player.

**Backlash:** The gate opens and something very unpleasant steps through it.

## POSSESSION

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 23

**Hero Points:** 4

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell allows the caster to take over someone else's body. While it has unlimited range and it cannot be resisted, the spell does require an extensive ritual and something from the body of the victim—blood, hair,

fluids, or the like. The caster leaves his own body when he takes over that of his victim.

**Backlash:** The caster's soul is locked out of his own body.

## PROPHECY

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 25

**Hero Points:** 5

**Duration:** 1 Hour

A character can see into either his future when using this spell, or that of a person or place in front of him.

**Backlash:** The caster sees an image of his own death, and must make a fear resistance roll of 40.

## PSYCHOMETRY

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 23

**Hero Points:** 4

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell allows the caster to see everyone who has ever touched an object he is holding. He can see when, what they were doing, and where they were when they held it.

**Backlash:** The caster receives 2 wounds.

## RE-ANIMATE DEAD

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 25

**Hero Points:** 5

**Duration:** Permanent

This spell allows the caster to bring a dead body back to life. The character must be in possession of the body, or at least the ashes of the body. The reanimated character loses a number of points of luck equal to the roll of one die (1D) when brought back to life.

**Backlash:** Annoyed that the caster is trying to take away one of his subjects, Death appears and seizes the caster instead.

## RETROCOGNITION

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 25

**Hero Points:** 5

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell allows a character to see into the past of any person or place that he touches.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

**Backlash:** The caster gets amnesia, and forgets everything in his past.

## RETROGRESSION

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 19

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell allows a character to channel one of his past *selves*, so that others can ask that person questions.

**Backlash:** The character permanently regresses to one of his past *selves*; an exorcism is necessary to retrieve his current *self*.

## REVEAL INVISIBLE

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 17

**Hero Points:** 1

**Duration:** Permanent

The spell, when cast, makes all invisible things within the caster's line of sight visible.

**Backlash:** The caster receives 2 wounds.

## SCRYING

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 22

**Hero Points:** 3

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell requires a pool or crystal ball, and can only be cast on someone whom the character has met in person. The chosen target becomes visible, as do hazy images of his immediate surroundings.

**Backlash:** The caster is knocked unconscious.

## SEE INTO SPIRIT WORLD

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 2

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell allows a character to see any desired location from other planes of reality.

**Backlash:** The character is blinded for a number of turns equal to the roll of two dice (2D).

## SUMMON DEMON SWORD

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 21

**Hero Points:** 2

**Duration:** Permanent

When this spell is cast, a demon-possessed weapon is sent to the caster. The demon possesses a rating of 0 in all abilities. The weapon increases both the wielder's effective muscle and reflexes ratings by four. Every time the weapon kills an opponent, the gamemaster rolls a die and the attacking player makes a mind roll. If the gamemaster's result is zero or greater than the demon's current mind rating, increase the demon's mind rating by one. If the character's mind roll is less than the demon's mind rating, the wielder is possessed by the demon. Possessed characters never let go of the weapon. When a possessed character dies, his body is re-animated as an undead creature. If the weapon is somehow separated from its possessed wielder, the character dies.

**Backlash:** The spirits angrily curse the caster.

## TRAVEL INTO SPIRIT WORLD

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 25

**Hero Points:** 5

**Duration:** Instantaneous

This spell allows a character to travel from one dimension to another.

**Backlash:** The character is lost in the spirit world, but may be recovered by another character using this spell.

## WARD [AGAINST BEING]

**Target:** Brains (Occult) 20

**Hero Points:** 1

**Duration:** 1 Hour

This spell creates a circular wall that surrounds the caster, protecting him from a specified group of beings—they must be chosen when the character gains the schtick. The wall can withstand blows of up to 100 points of damage, and has a radius of about three yards.

**Backlash:** The caster receives 2 wounds.



## ANIMAL SCHTICKS

There are two types of animal schticks—animal speech and animal companions. Both are ideal for *Wild Men*, but animal companions can also be appropriate for just about any sort of character.

### ANIMAL SPEECH

Many *Jungle Lords* of pulp fiction had the miraculous ability to talk to animals. The gamemaster should decide whether animals speak specific languages in their stories, and if so, whether this schtick can be used by player characters. It may be completely inappropriate in gritty stories, but in more far-fetched adventures, it can add a lot of fun to the game.

Animal speech is treated like a regular schtick, except that there are three different levels. Each level requires the expenditure of a certain number of hero points. In addition, the character must have a weird rating of

14 or higher. Unlike other schticks, the hero point cost is not modified by a high ability rating, however.

The gamemaster should portray animals as animals, rather than wild humans. Most are dim-witted, with simple needs and uncomplicated lives. Only relatively intelligent animals, such as elephants, gorillas, tigers, and wolves, can have any sort of language. For example, the average frog would have little to say. Treating animals as something they are not can turn a game into a cartoon.

### ANIMAL COMPANION

Each animal companion requires a separate schtick. The target number and cost both depend on the animal's training. In order for a character to get a companion, his Mind (Husbandry) rating must exceed the listed target number, and hero points must be expended.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Animal Speech Schtick

Hero Points	Known Animal Languages
2	Those of a small group of animals (primates, cats, etc.)
3	Those of a large group of animals (fish, birds, jungle animals, etc.)
4	All

As with other schticks, a high ability rating can adjust the cost. The hero point cost can also be adjusted for the following factors:

- If the character can speak the language of the animal, reduce the cost by 1 point.
- Large creatures (approximately more than five-hundred pounds) increase the cost by 2 points.
- Huge creatures (approximately more than three tons) increase the cost by 3 points.

Statistics for various animals are provided later in this book for the gamemaster (see page 164). As a general rule, animals have luck ratings of 10, brains and savvy ratings of zero, and effective mind and reflexes ratings of 14.

## Animal Companion Schtick

Hero Points	Target	Connection	Description
0	none	Friendly	The animal feels genuine affection for the character, but it has only been sporadically trained—housebroken and knows its name, but has not learned much else.
1	6	Trained	The animal can follow a number of simple commands (must be a bird or mammal).
2	10	Well-Trained	The animal can follow a large number of complex commands (must be a reasonably intelligent animal, like a cat or dog).
3	14	Super-Pet	The animal not only does what it has been told, it can also use an almost-human canniness and cunning in order to serve its master. (must be a primate or other highly-intelligent animal).

## OTHER SCHTICKS

Some of these schticks can be found among humans in our own world. Others almost qualify as superpowers. They are acquired at birth or through some freakish circumstances; no one can teach them to a character.

Each schticks requires the expenditure of a certain number of hero points, but this cost is not modified by a high ability rating. In

addition, the character must have a weird rating higher than the listed target number to acquire the schtick. Most of these schticks are not available to player characters, except in the most exotic or high-powered stories. They are intended for non-player characters and villains rather than for run-of-the-mill pulp heroes.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## APPEARANCE CHANGE

**Target:** Weird 30

**Hero Points:** 4

This power allows a character to change his appearance at will. He can look like anyone with roughly the same size or shape.

## CLINGING

**Target:** Weird 25

**Hero Points:** 4

The character can climb a vertical surface as well, and as quickly, as he can travel on a horizontal one.

## CLONE

**Target:** Weird 25

**Hero Points:** 8

Touching a target's head continuously for one hour allows the character to create a clone of the target. The cloned body has all the memories, ability ratings, specialties, masteries, and schticks of the original. The clone is sterile, and remains so until it devours the original host body. It also possesses the *plant* schtick, described below.

## DARKVISION

**Target:** Weird 22

**Hero Points:** 1

The character can see in the dark by sensing heat patterns, or possibly through some kind of sonar (player's discretion).

## DOUBLE JOINTED

**Target:** Weird 14

**Hero Points:** 2

The character rolls an extra bonus die when he is tied up, handcuffed, or grappled and trying to escape.



## EIDETIC MEMORY

**Target:** Weird 15

**Hero Points:** 1

The character remembers everything he reads or sees with perfect accuracy. He does not need to make mind rolls to remember details.

## ENHANCED DIRECTIONAL HEARING

**Target:** Weird 18

**Hero Points:** 1

The character use his full reflexes rating (rather than half the rating) when using sound to target an opponent in combat.

## GIANT FISTS

**Target:** Weird 17

**Hero Points:** 1

The character's fists are unusually large. He adds 2 points to damage when making unarmed attacks, but takes an extra penalty die when attempting anything that requires fine dexterity (picking locks, for example).

## IMMUNITY

**Target:** Weird 15

**Hero Points:** 1

The character is immune to a specific disease, poison, or one of the following martial arts maneuvers: *blinding strike*, *death strike*, or *paralytic strike*.

## PLANT

**Target:** Weird 25

**Hero Points:** 1

The character does not need to eat—he gets nourishment from sunlight and can drink directly through his skin.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## PLASTIC FACE

**Target:** Weird 18

**Hero Points:** 1

The character's face is unusually malleable, making it easier to change his appearance. The gamemaster rolls an extra bonus die on the character's behalf when making Brains (Disguise) rolls.

## PERIODIC INVISIBILITY

**Target:** Weird 25

**Hero Points:** 3

The character always becomes invisible at the same time of day (typically, but not necessarily, at night). The player must decide when this power takes effect in advance. It cannot be turned off during that time.

## PERMANENT INVISIBILITY

**Target:** Weird 25

**Hero Points:** 4

The character is always invisible—the effect cannot be stopped. He has to cover himself with masks or bandages to be seen by ordinary people.

## POISON GAS

**Target:** Weird 21

**Hero Points:** 2

Once per hour, the character emits enough of an aerosol poison to fill a large room. This poison does 2D-4 damage; initial effects occur within one second, and the full effect is felt after five seconds.

## PRODIGY

**Target:** Weird 15

**Hero Points:** 1

The character possesses a brains or savvy mastery even without required specialties as pre-requisites or having to expend hero

points. As with other masteries, the character receives a bonus of +8 in the appropriate field. This mastery, however, must be an extremely narrow field with limited applicability to an adventure game. Some examples include chess, mathematics, music composition, or specific musical instrument.

## SCREECH

**Target:** Weird 21

**Hero Points:** 1

A character with this schtick can emit a high-pitched squeal that breaks ordinary glass and severely weakens reinforced glass, cutting its effective resistance in half.

## SKELETAL

**Target:** Weird 30

**Hero Points:** 3

When a character with this schtick is successfully attacked with a piercing weapon, such as a fencing foil or a bullet, determine the difference between the attacker's roll and the character's defense. If the difference is odd, no damage is inflicted.

## THICK SKIN

**Target:** Weird 21

**Hero Points:** 2+

Creatures with this schtick are considered armored and add 1 to their resistance ratings. Add an extra point to resistance for each additional 2 hero points spent on this schtick.

## X-RAY VISION

**Target:** Weird 28

**Hero Points:** 2

By taking a second to concentrate, the character can see through solid objects. He cannot see through more than one-foot of solid material without additional time to concentrate. This schtick does not affect the distance at which the character can see. Solid lead blocks the effect of this schtick.



**CHAPTER 4**

**Money  
& Equipment**



# TWO-FISTED TALES

If a character wishes to purchase something, the gamemaster should calculate the expense level of the purchase. This can be determined by cross-referencing the cost of the item in 1930 U.S. Dollars (\$) on the table below. If a character's wealth rating is greater than the expense level, he can make the purchase painlessly. If the character's wealth rating is equal to the expense level, however, his rating is reduced by 1 once he completes the transaction. No character can purchase an item if its expense level is greater than his wealth rating.

If a character purchases multiple identical items, the expense level for the purchase is increased, as shown on the table at right.

## Duplicate Items

Duplicates	Expense Level Increase
2 - 3+1	
4 - 10	+2
11 - 30	+3
31 - 100	+4
100 - 300	+5

## Expense Levels

Expense Level	Approximate Cost
1	1¢
2	2¢ or 3¢
3	4¢ to 10¢
4	11¢ to 30¢
5	31¢ to 99¢
6	\$1 to \$3
7	\$4 to \$10
8	\$11 to \$30
9	\$31 to \$100
10	\$101 to \$300
11	\$301 to \$1,000
12	\$1,001 to \$3,000
13	\$3,001 to \$10,000
14	\$10,001 to \$30,000
15	\$30,001 to \$100,000
16	\$100,001 to \$300,000
17	\$300,001 to \$1 million
18	\$1 million to \$3 million
19	\$3 million to \$10 million
20	\$10 million to \$30 million

## EQUIPMENT

During the game, a player can decide that his character is carrying a minor piece of equipment, even if it is not listed as part of his gear. For example, a player may decide that his character is carrying cigarettes and matches, although he never mentioned this before. This is perfectly acceptable, as long as the following conditions are met:

- The item is *tiny* and therefore concealable.
- The item's expense level is lower than the character's wealth rating.
- Either the item is commonly available or the character has used a gadget schtick to invent it beforehand).
- The item is not a weapon or armor component.
- The item is appropriate for the character.

Matches, flashlights, film, handkerchiefs, Swiss army knives, magnifying glasses, etc.—these items can be available at any time, unless the character has an extremely low wealth rating or they are inappropriate for the character's personality. The following items are not appropriate for most characters: ham radios, sticks of dynamite, vials of morphine, and portable typewriters. If a character is going to carry such items, this must be disclosed to the gamemaster before beginning play.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## EARNING WEALTH

A character's wealth rating can increase substantially during the game without the expenditure of hero points. If a character gets his hands on a huge stash of valuables, the gamemaster should do the following:

1. Determine the value of the stash.
2. Convert this value into an expense level using the table on the previous page.
3. Compare the result with the character's current wealth rating.

If the result is less than the character's current rating, his wealth ability remains unchanged. If it is equal to his current rating, however, it increases by 1. If the value is greater than his wealth rating, his wealth ability is raised to the value of the stash's expense level.

### Jobs and Wealth

Some characters have jobs, while others live off their wits or past savings. Jobs come with both disadvantages and advantages. The former is that characters have to spend time at their jobs. This can seriously hinder their adventuring potential—a character can only fight bad guys when his boss tells him to do so, or whenever he has the free time.

The advantage that comes with a job is that a character who spends his wealth can eventually regain it. Each character receives a *stash* every month. This stash has an expense level equal to the character's original wealth rating minus two. The rules for *Earning Wealth*, above, are used to determine whether or not this raises the character's wealth rating.

### Blowing Dough: An Optional Rule

Suppose two characters, Playboy Dan and Hobo Joe, stumble upon the fabulous Siamese Pigeon and sell it to a museum, splitting the reward. This may not be a problem in game-world terms, but Dan's player may feel cheated. After all, he spent plenty of points for a high status, and thus a high wealth rating. On the other hand, Joe, with a low status, got to spend those points on reflexes and martial arts schticks. Joe has a better chance of increasing his wealth as per the *Earning Wealth* rules.

The following option is used to better balance the amount of wealth gained in such cases. Whenever a character's wealth increases suddenly, roll one die, treating tens as zeros) and add it to his wealth rating before gaining the stash. If the total is higher than his current wealth rating, the character saves the money for a rainy day—his wealth remains at the current high level. Otherwise, his wealth is reduced to this sum (previous rating plus roll)—it is assumed that the character blew most of his windfall on booze, hookers, classy duds, and other items with little real value.

## RESTRICTED EQUIPMENT

Some pieces of equipment are illegal for civilians to own or may require special licenses that are difficult and time-consuming to acquire. If an item is restricted, it is noted in its description (a list of items appears later in this chapter).

A character needs a high status rating to obtain a restricted item for personal use or access to a fence who can get it illegally. Characters can purchase restricted items legally if their reputation rating is greater than the cost of the item or 12 (whichever is higher). For example. A reputation of at least 13 is required to purchase a Tommygun and a reputation of at least 17 is required to acquire a submarine.

Going through a fence (treat as an underworld contact) requires that the his wealth rating is greater than the cost of the desired item. For example, the character must deal with a fence who has a wealth rating of at least 9 to get his hands on a Tommygun or one with wealth of at least 17 to find a submarine.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## EQUIPMENT DESCRIPTIONS

The following definitions may be used to describe the various types of equipment.

### Damage

This is the amount of damage that the weapon can inflict with each strike. In some cases, this is noted as *Base+X*, where *X* is typically from one to six (*Base+2* means that the maximum damage is the base damage plus two). The base damage depends on the attacker's muscle rating (see page 22).

### Resistance

This is like a character's resistance rating, describing how much damage a vehicle can sustain or how much protection armor provides. If the value is preceded by a plus sign (+), it adds to the character's resistance rating when determining damage.

### Move

This is a vehicle's movement rating, and functions like a character's muscle ability.

### Muscle

This is the minimum muscle rating required to use the item without suffering a penalty on combat rolls (see page 109).

### Range

This represents how far a character can fire a projectile with this weapon. There are several range codes.

### Range

Range Code	Distance
Short	5yds or less
Medium	6 to 50yds
Long	51 to 500yds

### Shots

This represents how many projectiles can be fired before having to reload the weapon.

### Size

This represents how large the item is. There are several codes for size (similar to range

### Size

Size Code	Description
Tiny	concealable <5lbs
Small	non-concealable but portable 5 - 40lbs
Man-Sized	can be carried with difficulty 41 - 400lbs
Large	cannot be carried 401 - 4,000lbs
Huge	cannot be carried 4,001 - 40,000lbs
Giant	> 40,000lbs

codes). Tiny items are sometimes listed with a plus (+) or a minus (-) sign. *Tiny-* weapons are particularly light and easy to conceal. *Tiny+* items, on the other hand, either weigh close to four pounds or are particularly bulky, making them difficult to conceal.

### Cost

This represents the item's expense level, as described in detail above.

## WEAPONS

### Brass Knuckles

**Damage:** Base+2 (bruising)

**Muscle:** —

**Size:** Tiny-

**Cost:** 6

When Big Bruiser Louie decides to lock someone in the basement and use him as a punching bag, he might bring these along. They are terrific for pounding someone to oatmeal without dusting a manicure.

### Black Jack

**Damage:** Base+3 (bruising)

**Muscle:** 4 (one-handed)

**Size:** Tiny+

**Cost:** 6

# TWO-FISTED TALES

As standard police issue, expect to find wisecracking characters on the receiving end of them from time to time. These are also popular with muggers. Use the same specifications for any bludgeoning weapon of the same approximate size.

## Billy Club

**Damage:** Base+4 (bruising)

**Muscle:** 6 (one-handed)

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 6

Cops carry these when they are really eager to crack some heads. Use the same specifications for baseball bats and large clubs.

## Switchblade

**Damage:** Base+2

**Muscle:** —

**Size:** Tiny-

**Cost:** 6

This is a common weapon for teenage delinquents who, in the pulps, are just begging for a manly hero to slap some sense into them.

## Fencing Foil

**Damage:** Base+3

**Muscle:** 4 (one-handed)

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 8

This is the perfect weapon to fight Errol Flynn on top of a burning Nazi dirigible.

## Sword Cane

**Damage:** Base+5

**Muscle:** 8 (one-handed)

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 9

A great fashion accessory as well as a serviceable weapon, the sword cane is perfect for debonair jewel thieves and the like.

## Machete

**Damage:** Base+5

**Muscle:** 10 (one-handed)

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 8

No badge needed when a long knife like this can be had. It is great for slicing through jungles or arrogant yanqui.

## Saber

**Damage:** Base+6

**Muscle:** 12 (one-handed), 6 (two-handed)

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 8

This sword is used largely for Marine drills and cavalry exercises. Use the same specifications for other really big swords, such as katana and scimitars.

## Bull Whip

**Damage:** Base+2

**Muscle:** —

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 7

No college professor should leave home without a bull whip. It can be used for grappling and disarming, or for a straight whip attack. It can also be used as an improvised grappling hook with the roping specialty—without this specialty, a fumble occurs on a roll of 10 or less (rather than on a 0 or less).

## Lasso

**Damage:** Base+2

**Muscle:** —

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 5

Lassos are used to rope cattle, bank robbers, or that daughter-kissing city-slicker. Without the roping specialty, a fumble occurs on a roll of 10 or less (rather than on a 0 or less).

## Garrote

**Damage:** Base+2

**Muscle:** —

**Size:** Tiny-

**Cost:** 7

Garrotes are popular with super-evil assassins who want to feel their victims die. The choke-hold action (see page 110) comes into play when using this weapon.

## Spear

**Damage:** Base+6

**Muscle:** 12 (one-handed), 6 (two-handed)

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 6

Angry Zulu tribesmen are particularly handy with these weapons. Use the same specifications for other sharp, pointy sticks.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Nunchuks

**Damage:** Base+4

**Muscle:** 6 (one-handed)

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 7

Ninja use these weapons to look really cool and threatening before the characters grow bored and blow them away. Without the martial arts specialty, a fumble occurs on a roll of 10 or less (rather than on a 0 or less).

## Hand Axe

**Damage:** Base+5

**Muscle:** 8 (one-handed)

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 7

This intimidating weapon can be found near any woodpile or suburban tool-shed.

## Boomerang

**Damage:** Base+2

**Muscle:** 7 (one-handed)

**Range:** Short

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 6

The boomerang is only common in the Australian outback. If the attack fails, the attacker can catch the weapon by making a successful reflexes roll against a target of 10. Without the primitive weapon specialty, a fumble occurs on a roll of 10 or less (rather than on a 0 or less).

## Throwing Star

**Damage:** Base+2

**Muscle:** —

**Range:** Short

**Size:** Tiny-

**Cost:** 7

Another favorite of those wacky ninja assassins, this weapon is a lot less dangerous than it looks.

## Hand Grenade

**Damage:** 9

**Muscle:** —

**Range:** Short

**Size:** Tiny

**Cost:** 8 (restricted)

Hand grenades are great in a game context, because they do not explode on impact. They

provide that split second in which the victims have a number of options.

- Run for cover—a reflexes roll with a target of 10; success allows a character to subtract the resistance of the cover from the damage rating.
- Throw the grenade back from where it came—a reflexes roll with a target equal to 10 plus the original attacker's reflexes rating; this can only be performed once per grenade.
- Most heroically of all, throw oneself on the grenade, making the ultimate sacrifice for a character's comrades.

## Stick of Dynamite

**Damage:** 11

**Muscle:** —

**Range:** Short

**Size:** Tiny+

**Cost:** 6

Perfectly legal for landscaping and building demolition, dynamite can also be used to blow up people, although that is slightly less legal. Add 1 to the damage rating for two sticks, 3 for three sticks, and 4 for four to five sticks.

## Blowgun

**Damage:** 3

**Muscle:** —

**Range:** Short

**Shots:** 1

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 7

Standard issue for angry cannibals, blowgun darts do not inflict a lot of damage, so they are often dipped in poison (see page 123) for maximum murderousness.

## Bow

**Damage:** 6

**Muscle:** 6 (two-handed)

**Range:** Medium

**Shots:** 1

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 7

This archaic projectile weapon may be used by primitive tribesmen in out-of-the-way regions. It must be used with two hands; the muscle value above represents the minimum muscle rating needed to pull the string effectively.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Crossbow

**Damage:** 6  
**Muscle:** 6 (two-handed)  
**Range:** Medium  
**Shots:** 1  
**Size:** Small  
**Cost:** 8

This archaic weapon can come in handy when fighting vampires in the New York subways. The muscle value above represents the minimum muscle rating needed to load the weapon.

## Puny Pistol

**Damage:** 6  
**Muscle:** 8 (one-handed), 2 (two-handed)  
**Range:** Medium  
**Shots:** 7  
**Size:** Tiny-  
**Cost:** 8

Sexist pulp authors call this .22 or .25 caliber peashooter a woman's gun, due to its low minimum muscle rating. Its small size, however, makes it highly concealable, as well as deadly in the hands of skilled shooter.

## Typical Pistol

**Damage:** 7  
**Muscle:** 10 (one-handed), 4 (two-handed)  
**Range:** Medium  
**Shots:** 7  
**Size:** Tiny  
**Cost:** 8

Preferred by weak characters who do not want others laughing at them, this typical, almost generic pistol is usually a .32 caliber.

## Big Pistol

**Damage:** 8  
**Muscle:** 12 (one-handed), 6 (two-handed)  
**Range:** Medium  
**Shots:** 6  
**Size:** Tiny+  
**Cost:** 8

Another standard police weapon, this is typically a .38 caliber. Pot-bellied sheriffs who have a grudge against city-slicker characters usually carry these weapons.

## Monster Pistol

**Damage:** 9  
**Muscle:** 14 (one-handed), 8 (two-handed)  
**Range:** Medium  
**Shots:** 6  
**Size:** Tiny+  
**Cost:** 8

If a character is strong enough, he can fire one of these .45 caliber guns in each hand, just like Kent and Richard. This is a weapon that only real men carry.

## Bolt-Action Rifle

**Damage:** 11  
**Muscle:** 12 (two-handed)  
**Range:** Long  
**Shots:** 5  
**Size:** Small  
**Cost:** 9 (restricted)

This military weapon is specifically designed for hypnotized sharpshooters, who are programmed to assassinate major political figures. It comes with a telescopic sight that reduces effective range by 1 code (down to a minimum of short range).

## Shotgun, 20-Gauge

**Damage:** 7  
**Muscle:** 10 (one-handed), 4 (two-handed)  
**Range:** Medium  
**Shots:** 2  
**Size:** Small  
**Cost:** 8

These ever-popular home-defense weapons inflict 2 additional wounds at point-blank range, and 2 fewer wounds at medium range.

## Shotgun, 12-Gauge

**Damage:** 9  
**Muscle:** 14 (one-handed), 8 (two-handed)  
**Range:** Medium  
**Shots:** 6  
**Size:** Small  
**Cost:** 8

This weapon also inflicts 2 additional wounds at point-blank range, and 2 fewer wounds at medium range. It is a common tool for taking out those nasty aliens and zombies.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Tommygun

**Damage:** 10

**Muscle:** 15 (one-handed), 9 (two-handed)

**Range:** Medium

**Shots:** 30

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 9 (restricted)

This is the preferred weapon of gangsters everywhere. It is fully automatic.

## Elephant Gun

**Damage:** 12

**Muscle:** 12 (two-handed)

**Range:** Medium

**Shots:** 2

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 9

This is the perfect weapon for killing elephants, and is absolutely gratuitous against anything smaller.

## Machine Gun

**Damage:** 12

**Muscle:** 13 (two-handed), 7 (on tripod)

**Range:** Long

**Shots:** 50

**Size:** Man-Sized

**Cost:** 10 (restricted)

Designed for battlefield use, this big, noisy death machine is sometimes unpacked by the police when a gang war really heats up the neighborhood.

## Artillery

**Damage:** 15

**Muscle:** —

**Range:** Long

**Shots:** 1

**Size:** Large

**Cost:** 15 (restricted)

This is a catchall category for any huge firearm that can blast through a tank or a battleship hull, anything from a bazooka to an anti-aircraft gun. Unless it is being fired at Superman or Godzilla, a direct hit blows the target into itty-bitty pieces.

## ARMOR

### Leather Jacket

**Resistance:** +1 (against slashing attacks)

**Muscle:** —

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 8

Leather jackets look cool and can save your butt in style. They add 1 to the character's resistance rating against slashing attacks—knives, swords, and the like.

### Bullet-Proof Vest

**Resistance:** +3/+1 (against gunshots)

**Muscle:** —

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 9

When a character wearing this vest under his ordinary clothing is shot and does not fall down dead, the villain gets to curse and scream in frustration. In the real world, of course, gunshots are painful, even when wearing a vest—this is a pulp game, however. The vest adds 3 to the character's resistance rating against gunshot attacks to the torso and 1 for other locations.

### Flak Jacket

**Resistance:** +3 (against ballistics)

**Muscle:** —

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 10 (restricted)

The standard issue protection for military air crew and pilots, it is similar to a bulletproof vest, but cannot be worn under clothing and is slightly more bulky. It protects the torso, groin, and upper-leg, adding 3 to the character's resistance rating against bullet and grenade damage in those areas.

## VEHICLES

### Bicycle

**Move:** 20 (20mph)

**Resistance:** 2

**Size:** Small

**Cost:** 8

This can definitely not strike fear into the hearts of evildoers—not to be ridden to crime scenes.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Motorcycle

**Move:** 36 (70mph)  
**Resistance:** 4  
**Size:** Man-Sized  
**Cost:** 11

Just watch for Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape* to understand why anyone would want a motorcycle.

## Model-T

**Move:** 31 (50mph)  
**Resistance:** 4  
**Size:** Large  
**Cost:** 10

Obsolete by the Thirties, a poor farmer might drive one of these automobiles to the big city for his daughter's orthopedic operation.

## Coupe

**Move:** 37 (75mph)  
**Resistance:** 6  
**Size:** Large  
**Cost:** 11

This standard, inexpensive two-door automobile has room for a driver and four passengers. It can even accommodate a few extra passengers should they wish to hang on for dear life from the riding board.

## Sedan

**Move:** 38 (80mph)  
**Resistance:** 6  
**Size:** Large  
**Cost:** 12

The rear doors of this common four-door vehicle are convenient should the passengers in the rear wish to leap to the villain's car and sock the driver in the jaw.

## Roadster

**Move:** 41 (100mph)  
**Resistance:** 6  
**Size:** Large  
**Cost:** 13

Nothing screams "rich, young playboy" like one of these cars. It is perfect for chasing down hooded fiends in style, but only has room for one additional passenger.

## Limousine

**Move:** 37 (75mph)  
**Resistance:** 6  
**Size:** Large  
**Cost:** 13

This is a good choice for the wealthy who have extra cash to spend and the desire to be chauffeured while fitting on a mask. While this is a cheap limousine, more expensive versions (up to a cost of 15) use the same specifications but come with added goodies, such as a wet bar, umbrella rack, or intercom for the driver.

## Truck

**Move:** 38 (80mph)  
**Resistance:** 4  
**Size:** Huge  
**Cost:** 13

Villains often use trucks to transport poison gas, mystical artifacts, and packs of crazed killers across state lines. These specifications are for heavy duty cargo carriers—a standard pickup truck may weigh and cost a little less.

## Tank

**Move:** 26 (32mph)  
**Resistance:** 12  
**Size:** Huge  
**Cost:** 14 (restricted)

This is the ideal vehicle with which to create havoc. It comes complete with a machine gun turret and requires a crew of four. Note that the heavy artillery did not become a standard tank accessory until World War II.

## Zeppelin

**Move:** 38 (80mph)  
**Resistance:** 2  
**Size:** Giant  
**Cost:** 16

Considered more glamorous than airplanes at one point, this giant bag of gas has plenty of room for passengers and cargo, but is a rough ride in stormy weather. It is a lot more fun when filled with hydrogen rather than helium for maximum explosive effect. A zeppelin has living quarters for sixty-four people, of which forty-four are reserved for the crew. Red-blooded pulp heroes who acquire zeppelins of their own can dispense with all but a dozen crew members.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Autogyro

**Move:** 41 (100mph)

**Resistance:** 2

**Size:** Large

**Cost:** 14

This is a favorite of gadgeteering pulp heroes. It is like a small, two-person helicopter, although vertical take-offs or landings are a little tricky (requiring reflexes roll of 16 or more).

## Fighter Plane

**Move:** 50 (200mph)

**Resistance:** 10

**Size:** Large

**Cost:** 14 (restricted)

This small, one-person fighter comes complete with a machine gun turret. It is small enough for characters to keep in the garage.

## Bomber

**Move:** 48 (170mph)

**Resistance:** 10

**Size:** Huge

**Cost:** 15 (restricted)

More likely to be used by Nazis than the characters, bombers are armed with two machine guns and can carry up to half a ton of explosives. They usually requires a crew of four people—pilot, bombardier, and two gunners.

## Transport Plane

**Move:** 47 (160mph)

**Resistance:** 8

**Size:** Huge

**Cost:** 15

Ideal for flying a dozen gibbering savages from the Amazon to the Governor's charity ball, this plane requires a pair of pilots and can seat up to fourteen savages or passengers.

## Seaplane

**Move:** 47 (160mph)

**Resistance:** 10

**Size:** Huge

**Cost:** 16

The standard method for trans-Atlantic or Pacific air travel, it seats up to thirty-two passengers. If the characters ride a seaplane,

the gamemaster should draw a red line on a map while the players hum a popular theme song.

## Luxury Liner

**Move:** 14 (14mph)

**Resistance:** 10

**Size:** Giant

**Cost:** 17

The characters may take a luxury cruise as part of a well-deserved vacation. The gamemaster should make sure that the liner is filled with pirates, anarchists, mad cultists, and Japanese secret agents, all contributing to the romantic atmosphere.

## Speedboat

**Move:** 39 (90mph)

**Resistance:** 6

**Size:** Large

**Cost:** 13

This is a favorite mode of transportation among bootleggers fleeing from Coast Guard cutters and mad-scientists fleeing from our heroes.

## Submarine

**Move:** 30 (25mph)

**Resistance:** 10

**Size:** Huge

**Cost:** 17 (restricted)

Just about the only way to get to the lost city of Atlantis, this craft includes a nifty torpedo (treat as artillery) for extra-explosive fun. It requires a crew of twenty.

## Canoe

**Move:** 12 (12mph)

**Resistance:** 2

**Size:** Man-Sized

**Cost:** 9

This is the archetypal open boat that is manually propelled with paddles. Use the same specifications for any small rowboat.



**CHAPTER 5**

**Resolving  
the Action**



## BASIC GAME MECHANICS

Suppose a character wants to do something—beat up a stooge, leap across a chasm, break down a door, decipher a code, or seduce a beautiful blonde. Such a thing is referred to as performing an action. It is the gamemaster's job to determine the outcome.

Sometimes the outcome is obvious. A routine action, like opening an unlocked door, walking down a flight of stairs, lighting a cigarette, or ordering a cocktail, results in an automatic success. Likewise, an impossible feat, such as shooting down the moon, leaping to the nearest star, or walking on the rain, results in an automatic failure.

Many actions, however, cannot be considered routine or impossible. These are considered chancy actions that could succeed or fail, and which are resolved through a basic mechanic. Two numbers are compared, and if the first number is higher than the second, the action is a success. Otherwise, it is a failure. The specifics of the system are detailed below, including how to know which numbers to compare and how to interpret the results.

### THE CHECK

The simplest form of comparing numbers is with the *ability check*, or simply *check*. The gamemaster compares the character's relevant ability rating with a target number, also called a difficulty rating. If his ability rating is higher than the target number, the check is successful. Otherwise, it is not successful, but not necessarily a failure, as is explained later.

The player has the option to use a card to help him succeed at the action (see below). This is something that must be declared before the check is made, however. When a card is used, its value is added to the character's ability rating for that single action. Used cards are discarded.

### THE ROLL

Highly talented and skilled characters can succeed at an easy check and beat another character with less skill every time. Conversely, a character with little ability fails at difficult checks and loses to more able characters in every single case. This may sometimes be appropriate, but the gamemaster may decide to add a bit of uncertainty to a situation with a die roll.

The gamemaster can ask a player to roll two ten-sided dice (if the die has a 0 or 10 on it, it is treated as a 0). This procedure is known as an *ability roll*, or simply a *roll*, and it serves as the primary method for resolving actions in the game.

Before rolling the dice, one should be designated as the *bonus die*, while the other as the *penalty die*. It is a good idea to use two different colored dice to help differentiate the two. The bonus die is added to the character's relevant ability rating (plus specialty or mastery), while the penalty die is subtracted from that value.

If the bonus die results in a 9, roll an additional bonus die and add it to the result—additional bonus dice are rolled if each of them too result in a 9. Similarly, if the penalty die results in a 9, it too is re-rolled, with the result subtracted from the total.

*For example: Master Magician Mark Merlin has been tied up by a pair of thugs, and poison gas is spilling into the room. He tries to slip out of the ropes, with the player making a reflexes roll. Mark Merlin's skill rating is 15. He rolls a 9 on his bonus die and a 4 on his penalty die. He rolls the bonus die a second time (because he rolled a 9) and it results in a 2. The final total is  $15 + 9 - 4 + 2 = 22$ . Mark Merlin easily slips out of the ropes.*

# TWO-FISTED TALES

The gamemaster should announce the target number for an action after the dice have been rolled. Bear in mind that the dice are used to add suspense to an adventure, adding uncertainty to a character's activities. It is not necessary to roll dice in this manner when characters perform pedestrian or routine activities, or if the action is not essential to the progress of the story.

In some cases, players will be asked to roll extra bonus or penalty dice, especially when the gamemaster wishes to increase or decrease a character's chance of success. The results of additional bonus dice are added to the character's ability total, while subtracted for extra penalty dice.

## USING CARDS

Players may use cards to temporarily increase a character's check or roll. The decision to play a card must be made before the actual check or roll is made. When a card is used, its value is added to a single check or roll.

*For example: Mark Merlin is trying to slip out of his ropes, and he decides to play a "Nine of Hearts" to improve his roll. The dice result in a bonus of 2 and penalties of 9 and 5. Normally he would get a total of 3 (15 for the ability, plus 2 for the bonus die, minus 14 for the penalty dice), but after adding the 9 for his card, the roll results in a 12.*

Face cards (Jacks, Queens, and Kings) can either add 10 points or modify the values of other cards that are played.

- Jacks double card values (x2).
- Queens triple card values (x3).
- Kings quadruple card values (x4).

Aces not only add 10 points like face cards, but they can also be combined with other cards when modified by a face card. For example, a Ten, Ace, and King together, would add  $(10+10) \times 4 = 80$  points to a roll.

*For example: Mark Merlin, having untied the ropes, now tries to pick the lock on his cell door. He plays two cards—the "Ace of Diamonds" and "Four of Spades." His roll results in a 6, but the cards bring it up to 20 (6 + 10 + 4).*

The suit of a card can also be important.

- Diamonds can be used to improve another character's roll. *For example, a character*

*holding a "Six of Diamonds" could play the card to add 6 points to an ally's roll.*

- Spades can be spent to subtract points from a non-player character's roll. *For example, if an "Ace of Spades" was played, it could subtract 10 points from an enemy's roll; another spades card can also be played to reduce the roll further.*
- Hearts and clubs cannot modify another character's roll, but they can alter the amount of damage inflicted on another character (see page 117).

## TARGET NUMBERS

The most basic way to determine a target number is with a contest between two characters. Contests come into play when a character tries to block another character's actions. In such cases, there is typically an active character (who performs an offensive action) and a passive character (who performs a defensive action). The active character must beat a target number equal to the passive character's relevant ability rating in order to succeed. When both characters are active, or attempting offensive actions, each must roll a target number equal to the other character's total rolled value.

For other situations, a target number can be assigned based on the difficulty described in the table below. There may be other circumstances in which the rules do not offer clear guidelines—the gamemaster can calculate these numbers using his best judgment.

When in doubt, assume the target number is 15—the average hero can beat a 15 about half of the time.

## ADVANCED OPTIONS

Sometimes the basic mechanics may not describe a character's actions with the amount of desired detail. These advanced options are designed for such cases—the character's dice roll is compared to the target number, and one of the results specified on the Outcome Table is applied. The exact definition of the outcome should be improvised based on the context of the action. The rules attempt to define them out in more detail when possible.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Target Numbers

Rating	Description	
5	Very Easy	Anyone, but the the severely-handicapped, can do it easily.
10	Easy	While the average person may have a little trouble, a hero does not ( <i>running through a littered room without tripping</i> ).
15	Tricky	The average person usually fails at this type of action, but heroes may only find it difficult ( <i>climbing a sheer cliff</i> ).
20	Very Tricky	Unless specifically trained, heroes usually fail at this type of action ( <i>cracking a safe</i> ).
25	Difficult	Only well-trained characters have any serious chance of success.
30	Very Difficult	Even highly trained characters normally fail at this type of action ( <i>hitting a tin can from fifty yards away</i> ).
40+	Almost Impossible	Even the most highly-skilled people in the world normally fail at this type of action ( <i>leaping across the Grand Canyon</i> ).

## Automatic Close Calls

If a player rolls *doubles* (both the bonus die and penalty die are the same, or the highest bonus die is the same as the highest penalty die), the action becomes an automatic close call. In this case, dice are not re-rolled when resulting in a 9, since the outcome is a close call, limiting the success. A close call can also be achieved when the difference between the roll and target number is equal to the target number.

*For example: Mighty Joe is firing his pistol at King Kruger. He took his fifth wound last turn, so he has to roll an extra penalty die. His reflexes rating is 14, and rolls a 9 on his bonus die and a 9 and 3 on his penalty dice, for a total of 11 ( $14 + 9 - 9 - 3 = 11$ ). Since the highest bonus die and the highest penalty die were both 9, however, the result is a close call, regardless of the target number.*

## Automatic Fumbles

When a close call is achieved by a character with a luck rating below 10, and the result is greater than or equal to his luck rating, the action becomes a fumble.

## Outcome

Roll – Target Number	Result	Outcome
0 or less	Fumble	The character fails in just about the worst possible way. The result is disastrous or, at the very least, highly embarrassing. Skilled characters with average or better luck ratings rarely fumble.
Less than Target Number	Failure	The character fails, in an unspectacular way. A disappointing result, but not an unusual one.
Equal to Target Number	Close Call	The character just barely makes it. Neither a failure nor an unmitigated success; sometimes a success with serious complications.
Greater than Target Number	Success	A good, satisfying result.
More than Target Number +10	Great Success	The character performs perfectly, succeeding with remarkable ease, and gets just about the best outcome for which he could hope.

# TWO-FISTED TALES



## THE BASICS OF FIGHTING

These simple rules are designed to simulate both the descriptions and the pacing of combat in the pulp magazines. The intention is to create combat situations that are quick and resolved in a few die rolls.

The basic system of fighting works best with certain narrow conditions as listed below:

- Everyone in the combat exchange should be attacking somebody else, but also making some effort to defend themselves.
- All attacks should be made at a relatively close range.
- No one should be hiding behind cover or aiming for a specific location on a target's body.

Most fights should fulfill these conditions, so the basic system should serve most needs. If the characters do anything other than attack each other, however, or if they attack under unusual conditions, the advanced system, presented later in this chapter, can be used. Both the basic and advanced systems are compatible with each other, so the gamemaster should feel comfortable switching from one to another as the situation requires.

### THE COMBAT ROLL

Action occurs in one-second turns. Each player declares what his character is doing in a turn, and then makes a reflexes roll, hereafter referred to as the combat roll. This dice roll is the core element of two-fisted action.

When attacking another character, both parties make a combat roll, comparing results:

- If the attacker's combat roll is 0 or less, not only is the attack not successful, but it results in a fumble, and the attacker either hurts himself or hits someone other than the intended target.
- If the attacker's combat roll is less than the defender's roll, the attack is not successful (it misses or is deflected).
- If the attack results in a close call (the combat roll is tied, or the attacker's bonus and penalty dice are identical), it is still successful, but inflicts less damage (see *Inflicting Wounds* on next page).
- If the attacker's combat roll is higher, the attack is successful (it hits the target).



# TWO-FISTED TALES

- If the attacker's combat roll is greater than the defender's roll by 10 or more, not only is the attack successful, but it also inflicts additional damage (see below) as this is a great success.

## INFLECTING WOUNDS

Every weapon possesses a damage rating, which reflects the amount inflicted upon an opponent if the combat roll is an ordinary success. This value is halved on a close call, while a great success adds 2 to the rating (or 4 if using an automatic weapon or attacking barehanded with the boxing specialty).

To determine the actual amount of damage sustained by a character in combat, the target's resistance rating is subtracted from the damage value (determined as per the previous paragraph).

If a character sustains 5 or more points of damage from a single attack, he begins bleeding uncontrollably or is knocked unconscious (from attacks that cause bruising damage). If he sustains 10 points from a single attack, the character is killed.

If a character accumulates more wounds over a series of attacks than one half of his mind rating (rounded up), he receives an extra penalty die on all combat rolls. If he takes more wounds than his full mind rating, he falls unconscious. Finally, if the character sustains 20 or more total points of damage, he dies.

*See page 117 for more details about wounds.*

## USING CARDS IN COMBAT

Cards can often save a character's life in combat. Not only can they modify combat rolls, they can also directly reduce damage from a single attack.

When a card is played, its value is subtracted from the damage inflicted on the player by a single attack, to a minimum of zero. For example, a Four of Diamonds reduces damage by 4 points. When a Face Card or Ace is played, it completely negates all damage sustained by the player from a single attack, no matter how successful the attack was.

Hearts cards may be played to reduce damage inflicted against another character, rather than the character actually playing the card. Likewise, Face Cards or Aces of Hearts can negate all damage received by another player in a single attack.

As long as a card was not played to reduce a non-player character's damage, the attacker may play a Clubs card to increase the damage inflicted by the card's value. Face Cards and Aces add 10 points. This is only applicable for non-player characters.

## BASIC COMBAT EXAMPLE

Two boxers named Vinnie and Big Lou are squaring off in the ring. Vinnie has a reflexes rating of 14, mind of 10, and muscle of 10, so his Resistance is 1 and his fists inflict 2 points of damage. Big Lou, on the other hand, has a reflexes rating of 10, mind of 10, and muscle of 15, giving him a resistance of 2 and a damage rating of 3. The bell rings and the two fighters come out swinging.

The first step is for both players to make combat rolls for their characters. These are very important, as the outcome of the fight depends largely on combat rolls. Their rolls are based on their reflexes ratings. So the players each roll one bonus die and one penalty die, adding the former and subtracting the latter from their reflexes rating. Vinnie rolls a bonus die of 6 and a penalty die of 2, resulting in a total of 18 ( $14 + 6 - 2 = 18$ ). Big Lou rolls a bonus die of 3 and a penalty die of 7, resulting in a total of 6 ( $10 + 3 - 7 = 6$ ).

The combat roll determines who hits their opponent, and it helps determine how much damage is inflicted as a result. If one character attacks someone with a lower combat roll, he hits him; if he attacks someone with a higher combat roll, he misses. So in this example, Vinnie hits Big Lou, but Lou misses Vinnie—the order does not usually matter. If it is important to determine who hits first, assume the character with the higher roll strikes first.

If one character manages to hit another, the next step is to determine damage, as described on page 117. The following guidelines can be used:

# TWO-FISTED TALES

- Close calls (the combat rolls are equal or doubles are rolled) inflict only half the normal amount of damage.
- Great successes (one roll is greater than the other by ten) inflict two extra points of damage. A great success, in some situations, inflicts 4 extra points (see page 110).
- If none of the above conditions are met, damage is applied unchanged from its base value.

In this example, Vinnie's roll was more than 10 points over Big Lou's roll, so it is a great success—his attack inflicts 4 points of damage (a base damage of 2 plus an extra two for the great success). Big Lou's resistance rating of 2 is then subtracted from this result, leaving a value of 2 ( $4 - 4 = 2$ ). This is the number of wounds that Louie sustains from the attack.

While the effects of wounds are discussed at a later point, these are the basics:

- If Big Lou receives more wounds than half of his mind rating, he becomes weary and must roll an extra penalty die for his combat rolls.
- If Big Lou receives more wounds than his full mind rating, he finds it hard to remain conscious.
- Once Big Lou receives 20 wounds, he is pushing up the daisies.

The rest of the fight goes as follows. On the second turn, both Vinnie and Big Lou make combat rolls after declaring their actions. Vinnie rolls a 7 and 7, for a total of 14 ( $14 + 7 - 7 = 14$ )—that is a close call. Big Lou rolls a 5 and 4, for a total of 11 ( $10 + 5 - 4 = 11$ ). Vinnie wins again, but his blow only grazes Big Lou. A close call reduces damage to half the normal value, so it inflicts 1 point rather than 2. Since Big Lou's resistance rating is 2, he takes no wounds ( $1 - 1 = 0$ ).

On the third turn, Vinnie rolls a 1 and 8, for a total of 7 ( $14 + 1 - 8 = 7$ ). Big Lou rolls an 8 and 0, for a total of 18 ( $10 + 8 - 0 = 18$ ). Since Big Lou wins with the higher combat

roll, he hits while Vinnie misses. Big Lou's roll also results in a great success, since it is greater than Vinnie's total by more than ten. As a result, he inflicts two additional wounds. Louie does 5 points of damage (the base of 3 plus 2), but Vinnie's resistance rating is 1, so he only sustains 4 wounds ( $5 - 1 = 4$ ). This is a devastating blow—two more wounds, and Vinnie must roll an extra penalty die on his combat rolls.

On the fourth turn, Vinnie rolls a 4 and 9, for a combat total of 9 ( $14 + 4 - 9 = 9$ ). Big Lou rolls a 3 and 2, for a total of 11 ( $10 + 3 - 2 = 11$ ). Big Lou hits Vinnie for the base damage value of 3, inflicting 2 wounds (again, the resistance rating of 1 reduces the damage by 1 point). Now that Vinnie has sustained 6 wounds (4 from last turn and 2 from this one), he must roll an extra penalty die on all combat rolls.

On the fifth turn, Vinnie rolls a bonus die of 8, penalty die of 6, and penalty die of 9. Since he rolled a 9, he has to roll another penalty die, this time rolling an 8. His total is -1 ( $14 + 8 - 6 - 9 - 8 = -1$ ), which is a fumble, so Vinnie unexpectedly hits someone else. The gamemaster decides that Vinnie, swinging wildly, accidentally punches out the referee. Big Lou only rolls a 6 ( $10 + 4 - 8$ ), but it is good enough to land another punch. As a result, Vinnie receives two more wounds for a total of 8.

On the sixth turn, Vinnie, is on his last legs, and rolls a 5 ( $14 + 4 - 8 - 5$ ). Big Lou, increasingly confident, rolls a 16 ( $10 + 8 - 2$ ) for a great success. He pummels Vinnie for 4 wounds—a base damage value of 3, plus 2 for a Great Success, less Vinnie's resistance rating of 1, increasing his total wounds from 8 to 12. Vinnie collapses, and Big Lou wins the fight.

While the system may seem complicated at first, it can move very quickly with a little practice. If desired, pick a few templates from the end of Chapter 2 and stage a mock battle between them, with each player running a different template character. It should familiarize everyone with the system.



# TWO-FISTED TALES



## ADVANCED FIGHTING

There are few tactical options in the basic version of the rules. It is assumed that everyone attacks someone else whilst trying to defend themselves at the same time. In the advanced mechanics, however, more choices are available to characters, and those with high mind ratings have a much better chance of choosing the correct actions.

Before the actual combat sequence begins, all characters make mind rolls to determine the order in which they act (those with lower rolls declaring actions first)—this is called initiative. This roll is only made once per fight—the only exception is if a character performs the *re-roll initiative* action, described below.

Characters are surprised if they were not expecting an attack at that moment; the gamemaster decides if the characters are surprised, based on the situation and needs of the story. Note that if a character is surprised, his roll suffers a penalty of 10 points (subtract 10 from the roll).

The gamemaster should take note of values rolled by the characters. Once the initiative order is determined, combat is divided in turns, each approximately one second in length (this is only a rough guideline, so the gamemaster is free to stretch this period whenever it is convenient). As long as one character is fighting or threatening another, the following steps constitutes a turn—*declare actions*, *make combat rolls*, and *resolve actions*.

### DECLARING ACTIONS

Characters who rolled a high initiative are said to have *the initiative* over those with lower rolls. The character with the lowest roll declares his action for the turn first, followed by the character who rolled second lowest and so on, until the character who rolled the highest declares his action. Thus, characters with high initiative rolls get to see what everyone else is doing before they choose a course of action.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

In the basic combat mechanics, it is assumed that all characters are performing two actions—attacking and defending. This is not necessarily the case when using the advanced rules, as a character might choose to perform different actions, concentrate on a single action, or try to perform multiple actions. These are the most common actions that can be performed during combat:

- Attack
- Special Attack\*
- Defend
- Move
- Re-roll Initiative
- Enthrall\*
- Use Hypnotic Power\*
- Perform Ritual\*
- Reload Weapon\*
- Driver Actions\*

Unless a player states otherwise or is performing a third action, it is assumed that a character is always defending himself. The actions listed above that are marked with an asterisk (\*) are treated as two actions, rather than a single action, for the purposes of combat rolls (see below).

## PERFORMING ACTIONS

Once every character has declared his actions, each one makes a combat roll for the relevant action. While actions are declared in a specific order, they are all performed simultaneously during a turn. As is normal with the system, bonuses from combat specialties, weapon masteries, and other relevant specialties and masteries are applied if appropriate to the action. The combat roll is then adjusted according to the number of actions being attempted, and by any additional circumstances, as follows:

- **Bonus die** for performing only one action during the turn.
- **Bonus die** for defending (with no other actions) if both the character and his opponent are using fencing weapons, such as swords, rapiers, or sabers (this bonus die is in addition to the one for taking a single action).
- **Bonus die** for performing a driver action if the vehicle is faster than all other vehicles in the chase.

- **Penalty die** for performing three actions, rather than two, during the turn.
- **Penalty die** for attacking with insufficient muscle for the weapon (see *Chapter 4: Money and Equipment* for more details about minimum muscle ratings).
- **Penalty die** for sustaining more wounds than half the character's mind rating.
- **Penalty die** for performing a driver action if the vehicle is slower than all other vehicles in the chase.

The next few pages describe the different forms that actions can take.

## ATTACK

If a character is only holding one weapon, he can only attack one target. The exception to this rule is an automatic weapon (like a tommygun), which can target up to ten adjacent people. Characters wielding two weapons can attack two targets. Note that, regardless of the number of weapons a character has, he cannot attack any one target more than once in a single turn.

The attacker announces who he is attacking, and has the option of declaring where he intends to strike the victim. In order for the attacker to succeed, his combat roll (typically a reflexes roll) must beat the target number, which is equal to the opponent's combat roll (if the opponent is defending himself). If the target is not aware of the attack upon himself, he cannot defend, and the target number is zero. As in the basic rules, if the attack results in a close call, it automatically succeeds, but inflicts less damage.

Both the distance between the combatants and the size of the target modify the target number (these modifiers can be ignored when the opponents are man-sized or large, or the range is short or point-blank, since they would be zero in such cases). Consult the Size and Range Table to determine the modifier.

Since specific distances are only listed as guidelines, the gamemaster should rely on his instincts when determining distances (when unsure if the target is five, six, or seven yards apart, just assume that the range is short). Targets are assumed to be man-sized, weighing between forty and four-hundred



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Size and Range Modifiers

Target Size	Point Blank <i>less than 1yd</i>	Short .5 – 5yds	Medium 6 – 50yds	Long 51 – 500yds	Extreme 501yds+
Tiny	0	+10	+20	+30	+40
Small	0	+5	+15	+25	+35
Man-sized	0	0	+10	+20	+30
Large	-5	0	+5	+15	+25
Huge	-10	0	0	+10	+20
Giant	-15	-5	0	+5	+15

pounds, in almost all cases (targeted attacks is the only exception, and described below).

Once the character has made his combat roll and the target number has been established, consult the Attack Outcome Table to determine the result of the attack. If the attacker hits his target, he inflicts damage, as described in the Wounds and Healing section, later in this chapter.

## SPECIAL ATTACKS

Several special attacks that can be performed in combat are described below. Each of these special attacks requires the use of two actions.

### Arm-Twist

This action is used to twist an opponent's arm behind his back, forcing him to drop any weapon in that hand and putting the attacker in a position to pin his opponent on the following turn (see the pin special attack, below). Arm-twisting requires that the attacker's combat roll is higher than that of

his opponent, and a muscle roll must also be made with the opponent's muscle rating as the target number. In addition, either one of these rolls must be a great success. Once these conditions are met, the attacker successfully completes this action; the target drops any weapons held in the relevant hand, and a pin can be attempted on next turn.

### Choke-hold

This action is performed by wrapping something, like a hand, arm, or garrote, around an opponent's neck and squeezing. A great success is required in combat to actually get someone in a hold such as this. This is obviously much easier when attacking from behind, since the victim cannot defend himself against an opponent he does not see—thus the target number is 0. If successful, the choke-hold automatically inflicts 1 wound plus the attacker's base damage, every turn until the hold is broken. A choke-hold can be broken with a successful disarm or throw attack, unless the choke-hold occurred from behind, in which case only successful throw attack can break it.

## Attack Outcome

Result	Outcome
Fumble	The attacker hits an ally or himself (if no allies are present), inflicting full damage.
Failure	The attacker misses his opponent.
Close Call	The attacker only grazes his opponent, inflicting half the usual damage.
Success	The attacker hits his opponent, inflicting the standard amount of damage.
Great Success	The attacker hits the target exactly as planned, inflicting two additional points of damage (four additional if using the boxing specialty or an automatic weapon).

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## Disarm

This action is intended to knock a weapon out of an opponent's hand. This requires that the attacker's combat roll is higher than that of his opponent, and a muscle roll must also be made with the opponent's muscle rating as the target number. Once these conditions are met, the attacker successfully completes this action; the opponent drops his weapon. A successful disarm attack can also be used to break a choke-hold that was initiated from the front of the character. A great success allows a character to actually take his opponent's weapon, provided his hands are otherwise free to do so.

## Pin

This action works to pin an opponent to the floor or even up against a wall. A pin can only be performed if the character was successful at an arm-twist or throw attack on the previous turn. This action requires that the attacker's combat roll is higher than that of his opponent, and a muscle roll must also be made with the opponent's muscle rating as the target number. Once these conditions are met, the opponent cannot move his arms or legs, preventing him from attacking or defending.

## Sweep

This action is designed to knock an opponent off his feet. A sweep requires that the attacker's combat roll is higher than that of his opponent, and a mind roll must also be made with the opponent's mind rating as the target number. In addition, either one of these rolls must be a great success. Once these conditions are met, the opponent falls to the ground.

## Tackle

This action consists of crashing into an opponent, knocking both the attacker and defender to the ground. Success requires that the attacker's combat roll is higher than that of his opponent, and a muscle roll must also be made with the opponent's muscle rating as the target number.

## Throw

This action works by grabbing an opponent and throwing them to the ground. Success requires that the attacker's combat roll is higher than that of his opponent, and a muscle

roll must also be made with the opponent's muscle rating as the target number. In addition, either one of these rolls must be a great success. Once these conditions are met, the opponent is successfully thrown to the ground. A successful throw attack can also be used to break a choke-hold.

Alternatively, an opponent can be shoved against a wall (or other upright structure), inflicting bruise damage equal to the attacker's base damage plus 1. The type of throw action (throw or shove) being performed must be declared beforehand.

## DEFEND

This action is an attempt to dodge bullets, parry attacks with swords, or do anything else to protect oneself. A character can defend himself against an unlimited number of attacks per turn with only a single declaration of this action per turn. A character can only defend against attacks of which they are aware, however. No character can defend against a sneak attack, regardless of whether they choose the defend action.

## MOVE

This action is used to run, crawl, swim, climb over a surface, swing from a vine, or perform any other maneuver to cover a distance. It is assumed that characters make small movements all the time—a few steps forward when lunging at an opponent or leaping sideways to dodge a sword blow, for example. Characters are not required to declare the move action for small steps such as these. Only substantial movement in a purposeful direction requires this action.

Characters who move and attack in the same turn, gain an increase to their base damage for muscle-based attacks—multiple the base damage by 1.5. For example, if a character with a muscle rating of 13 charges his opponent with a spear, his base damage increases from 3 to 5 ( $1.5 \times 3 = 4.5$ , rounded up to 5), so his spear inflicts 11 points of damage ( $\text{base} + 6 = 5 + 6 = 11$ ).





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## REROLL INITIATIVE

This action allows a character to take a moment to *find his bearings* and acclimate himself to the conditions of the fight. All participants in the fight must roll again for initiative. The character performing this action may not act further in the turn, but all other characters may do so in the new initiative order.

## ENTHRALL

This action, is performed to capture an opponent's attention, distracting him from whatever action was declared, and putting him under the character's *spell*. This action must first be used in order to place an unwilling opponent in a hypnotic trance. This action can also be used as a feint, throwing an opponent off-balance in order to deliver a devastating attack in the following turn. Entrhall requires the use of two actions during combat.

To enthrall an opponent, the attacker's combat roll must be higher than that of his opponent, and a savvy (magic) or brains (hypnotism) roll must also be made with the opponent's mind (mental defense) rating as the target number. The latter roll must also result in a great success. A penalty die is applied when attempted at medium range, increasing to two penalty dice at long range. If successful, the target can take no action this turn. The target also cannot perform an action on next turn unless snapped out of the trance in some way, such as being injured—the wound snaps his mind back to the reality of the situation.

## USE HYPNOTIC POWER

This action allows a character to hypnotize a subject. It requires the use of two actions during combat, and typically takes several turns for success. As a guideline, hypnotic programming requires a number of turns to complete equal to the base cost (in hero points) of the relevant schtick. This action can only be attempted against a willing subject, enthralled opponent, or otherwise disabled character.

## PERFORM RITUAL

This action focuses on a character casting a spell. It requires the use of two actions during combat, and unless otherwise stated, takes a number of turns to complete equal to the base cost (in hero points) of the relevant memorized spell schtick. During this time, the character concentrates on the ritual. Memorized spells are activated when the ritual ends. Library spells, however, require a further brains (occult) roll, adjusting for the relevant masteries, and subtracting an extra penalty die if the character does not know the spell language (and is just sounding the words). The result is compared with the spell target number (provided with each spell) and the outcome can be determined by consulting the Spell Outcome Table.

## RELOAD WEAPON

At some point, characters are going to run out of ammunition if they are using projectile-based weapons. Players do not need to keep track of every bullet used, unless the

### Spell Outcome

Result	Outcome
Fumble	The caster suffers from a backlash. The exact nature of this backlash is specific to the spell.
Failure	The spell does not work.
Close Call	The spell works, but the caster takes damage equal to its base cost.
Success	The spell works, and without complications.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

gamemaster decides otherwise. Instead, the gamemaster may announce that a character (both player-controlled and gamemaster-controlled) runs out of ammunition whenever it is dramatically appropriate. While automatic handguns can be reloaded within a single turn, most other weapons require two turns, and a few (such as archaic firearms) even take up to three or more turns.

## DRIVER ACTIONS

Whether galloping after bank-robbers on horseback, dogfighting with the Red Baron over war-torn Belgium, ramming a truck full of Nazi gold, or blasting across space in pursuit of the aliens, chases are an integral part of pulp fiction. If handled in the proper daredevil spirit, they can enliven a game greatly.

The actions described below can be used to simulate some of the excitement in a classic pulp chase scene. They require the use of two actions during combat.

When a crash occurs, the driver must make a reflexes roll, with a target number equal to the move rating of the slowest vehicle involved. If the roll succeeds, the driver loses control of his vehicle and the vehicle is forced to stop, but no damage is inflicted. Otherwise, the vehicle crashes.

When a vehicle crashes, both the vehicle and the obstacle with which it collides take an amount of damage equal to one-eighth of the vehicle's move rating. If a vehicle takes more damage than 10 plus the obstacle's resistance rating, it is wrecked. In the case of gasoline or steam-powered vehicles, this spells disaster as they burst into flames, inflicting an amount of damage to all inside equal to the roll of two dice (2D).

### Evasion

This action encompasses running around corners, taking sharp turns onto side streets, and even flying through the caverns of an asteroid. The point of evasion is making enough quick turns, so that the pursuer does not see the turn and cannot follow. Successful evasion requires that the evader's combat roll is higher than that of his opponent, and a mind roll must also be made by the pursuer (and fail). The target number for the pursuing character's mind roll ranges from 5 to 20,

depending on the terrain and how many places there are to hide. For example, an open road in the desert would be 5, while a narrow, winding street with lots of alleys would be 20 or even higher. The roll is modified as follows:

- **Bonus die** for pursuing a huge or giant vehicle.
- **Bonus die** for pursuing a vehicle at short range
- **Penalty die** for pursuing a vehicle at long range or greater.

### Stunt

This action consists of a jaw-dropping maneuver—gunning a car across a raised bridge, flying a biplane through a closing hangar-door, or speeding along a tight-wire on a motorcycle. The driver must describe the stunt being performed, and then make a combat roll based on the relevant vehicle skill. The target number can range from 10 (for a simple sharp turn) to 30 or more (for a stunt that seems to defy the laws of physics). The consequences of a failed roll are typically a loss of control (which may lead to a crash) or an immediate crash. A successful roll means that the stunt was performed just as intended.

In order to follow a vehicle using this action, the pursuer must also perform the same stunt (or think of some other way to catch him). This requires a similar combat roll using the same target number as the character being pursued. Add 10 to the target number if the size of the pursuing vehicle is larger than the second vehicle. Subtract 10 (to a minimum target number of 5) if the pursuing vehicle is smaller.

*For example: Jonny Deacon, on a motorcycle, is being chased by a couple of police cars (the cops want his stolen necklace). As Jonny drives along a cliff-side road, he sees a steamboat chugging along the river below. He revs up, crashes through the guardrail, and tries to land on the deck of the steamboat. The gamemaster decides that the stunt has a target number of 20, and that the consequence of a failed roll is a loss of control. Jonny makes a reflexes roll for a result of 21, which is just good enough. His motorcycle lands safely.*

*One of the cops tries to pull off the same stunt; the target for him would be a 30, since his car is one size-category larger than Deacon's motorcycle. The cop rolls an 11, meaning that*



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he loses control of the vehicle. Another roll is required, this time resulting in a 14, which is still not good enough. The police car slides off the deck and crashes in the river.

## Pushing

This action consists of a character slamming his vehicle against another with the intent to push it off its path. The target number for this action is equal to the opposing driver's combat roll; add 10 to the target number if the target vehicle is larger and subtract 10 if it is smaller. If the character's combat roll is higher than that of the target's driver, the vehicle loses control, as described below. Otherwise, the pushing attempt fails and both vehicles stay on their chosen paths.

## Ramming

This action relies on one vehicle crashing directly into another. The target number for this action is equal to the opposing driver's combat roll. If the ram is successful, both vehicles take damage equal to one-fifth of the move rating of the faster vehicle. Neither vehicle can take more damage than the lowest resistance rating of both vehicles plus 10.

*For example: Jonny Deacon decides to crash his sedan into a punk's motorcycle. He beats the motorcycle driver's combat roll, so he hits him. His vehicle's move rating is 38, so he also inflicts 7 points of damage on the motorcycle.*

## Run over a Pedestrian

This action is performed by ramming a pedestrian with the vehicle. This requires that the attacker's combat roll is higher than that of the target. The gamemaster may choose to give the pedestrian a bonus die for the attempt. Consult the table below to determine the amount of damage inflicted. Add one-eighth of the vehicle's move rating to this value.

Vehicle Size	Damage
Man-sized	4
Large	8
Huge	12
Giant	16

## OTHER ACTIONS

This covers all other actions not described above. Those that normally take less than one second to perform are completed before the end of the turn. In all other cases, the character is occupied by the action and effectively out of the fight for its duration. Regardless, a normal combat roll is required to determine the action's outcome, either during the same turn or the turn in which it is completed.

## SPECIAL SITUATIONS

For the sake of simplicity, these rules assume that everyone is fighting on open ground, without cover, and in clear visibility conditions. If combat occurs in the dark or targets are behind cover, these factors need to be taken into account when making combat rolls. Luckily, it is not hard to do so with a little roleplaying and common sense.

## Targeted Attacks

When one character attacks another, it is typically assumed that the attacker is aiming for the torso, the center of his opponent's body. Sometimes, however, an attacker may choose to aim for another part of the body, like shooting the gun out of an opponent's hand, kicking an opponent in the shin, or poking his opponent's eye out with a dagger. In such cases, the target is considered smaller than man-sized, since the attacker is aiming at a small part of his opponent's body, the target itself is harder to hit (see the Targeting Size Table).

## Fighting Behind Cover

Shooting an opponent that is behind cover leaves two options: shoot through the cover or shoot the opponent in an area that is exposed. In the first case, the cover acts like armor, providing a temporary boost to the target's resistance rating for the purpose of resisting damage (see page 106 for details). The gamemaster can determine what this bonus is using the table on the next page, as well as standard armor components (see page 98).

When shooting someone in an uncovered area, the attacking player must specify what the area is. For example, if an opponent is firing over a small stone wall with only his

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## Cover Resistance Bonus

Thin Wood	+2
Thick Wood	+4
Brick/Stone	+6
Steel	+8

head and arms exposed, a character must aim for his head or arms in order to hit him. When targeting these areas, the targeted attacks rule must be used.

## Fighting in Poor Visibility

As long as a character can see the target, it can be fired upon. There are no special penalties for fighting at night, in a dark room, or even against an invisible target, so long as an attacker knows exactly where his opponent is located. Players should resort to roleplaying if they want to locate an opponent (for example, spinning a flashlight around a dark room or covering an invisible opponent with flour). If a character only has a vague idea of the location of an opponent (by voice rather than by sight, for example), his reflexes rating should be reduced by half for the purposes of the attack roll.

## Firing into a Melee

Two characters are fighting barehanded or with melee weapons. One of them has an ally, armed with a gun, who would love to shoot his friend's opponent. How likely is it that he actually hits the correct target rather than his friend, in such a situation?

For cases like this, assume that the gunman is aiming at a small-sized part of his target's body, while his ally, who is fighting hand-to-hand, blocks the rest of the body. This means that the target number is increased by 5.

**Optional:** If the roll fails, but would still succeed without the penalty, the character's ally is hit instead.

*For example: Joe Packer and Doctor Death are in a boxing match. Doctor Death's assistant, Igor, picks up a pistol and fires it at Joe, whose combat roll is 12. Igor rolls a 14. Normally, Igor would hit, but in this case, the target number required is 17 rather than 12 (12 + 5 = 17). Not only does Igor miss Joe, but he hits his beloved boss instead!*

## Targeting Size

Location	Effective Size
Face	Small (or one size less)
Skull/Brain	Small (or one size less)
Eyes	Tiny (or two sizes less)
Arms/Hands/Feet	Small (or one size less)
Legs	Man-Sized (or no change)
Major Veins/Arteries	Tiny (or two sizes less)
Vital Organs	Tiny (or two sizes less)

## Hostage Situations

Facing a group of heroes, the villain grabs a helpless bystander and puts a gun to her head. The hero, being the reckless type, decides to ignore the threat and fires at the villain anyway. Does he hit the villain, and does the hostage survive in the process?

Someone with an arm around a woman's waist and a gun to her head is incapable of effectively defending himself. Even if it were possible, there should be extreme penalties on his part. That means that the target number is zero, plus any size or range penalties. With the villain's *human shield*, however, the hero must aim for a tiny-sized part of the villain's body to hit him. Because of this, the target number is increased by 10. If the hero rolls and misses, but would still succeed if the penalty was not applied to the target number, he hits the hostage instead.

Another complication is that the hero must shoot his target before the villain pulls his own trigger, killing the hostage. This means that the hero's combat roll must be higher than that of the villain. Otherwise, the hero may still hit the villain, but the hostage dies in the process. A situation like this poses a real problem for heroes. The gamemaster should always discourage players from taking aggressive action when hostages are involved.

## OPTIONAL RULES

The following rules are provided to make combat a little less deadly for player characters, especially when they are outnumbered by non-player characters. The gamemaster can



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suspend these rules at any time, or decline to use them altogether, as they see fit.

## Fighting Multiple Opponents

Half a dozen thugs spray machine-gun fire at the masked-avenger. In real life, at least one of the thugs would have almost certainly hit the costumed crusader, but that is not the way it works in the pulps, where the masked man has no trouble dodging the bullets and escaping to safety. You can simulate this *pulp reality* by observing the following rule:

- Player characters can never be hit more than once in a single turn. Essentially, if more than one non-player character is attacking a single player character, the player character is only hit by one attack. In most cases, only the non-player character with the highest combat roll hits, although the gamemaster can decide otherwise.

This rule should not be used if the player character is defenseless and has no opportunity to dodge or block the attack. For example, if the player character is tied to a pole and facing a firing squad, there is no reason why the character could not be hit with more than one bullet. Common sense should still be heeded.

## Rolling Once for Multiple Non-Player Characters

These guidelines work especially well with the *Fighting Multiple Opponents* option. If a number of non-player characters with identical specifications are present, combat can be simplified significantly by only rolling once for all of them. Just make a combat roll for a single non-player character (called the *benchmark*) and make the following assumptions:

- The benchmark's roll is the typical roll made by most of the non-player characters.
- One of the non-player characters performs the attack better than the others. His roll is equal to the benchmark plus the number of non-player characters (a maximum of ten) involved in the combat.
- One of the non-player characters performs the attack more poorly than the others. His roll is equal to the benchmark less the number of non-player characters (a maximum of ten) involved in the combat.

## Using Checks rather than Rolls

The combat rules presented here assume that player characters are generally tougher than their non-player opponents. Even when a player character has the advantage, however, it is possible that a non-player character can make a high roll and beat them with a single, well-aimed blow. This makes combat particularly dangerous for player characters. In order to make the action a bit safer for them, player characters determine their combat values by making reflexes rolls, just as described. Non-player characters, however, make reflexes checks instead of rolls, limiting the outcome of such a task, thereby protecting player characters.

This rule should only be utilized sparingly and only when player characters are facing minor opposition. Normal combat rolls should still be made for major non-player characters.

## A NOTE ON TACTICS

This system has been designed so that the character with the highest combat roll in the first turn is the likely winner of the fight. If their opponents have the jump on them, they probably should not even attack. Instead, the player characters can surrender, and wait for a more precipitous time to attack.

Until this time comes, they can keep themselves alive by talking to their adversaries. A player character can explain why it would be unwise to kill him—"I'm the only guy who knows where the diamonds are." He can ask the villain to confess, something the villain is very likely to do, since the hero is going to die anyway. He can even try to stall the villain with wisecracks or threats.

Regardless of the method, the player character can regain the advantage, while the villain is flapping his gums. Outside help can arrive, the heroes can surreptitiously reach for their weapons, or they can perform a distraction to surprise the villain or otherwise gain the advantage. There is no rule that pulp heroes have to behave like fools, and the same goes for pulp villains.



## WOUNDS & HEALING

The methods for inflicting damage from attacks was presented in the previous sections of this chapter. Now, we turn the focus to the consequences of this damage, as well as some of the other dangers a pulp hero might face.

### DAMAGE & WOUNDS

Damage represents the effects that an attack has on an ordinary, unarmored person. Wounds, on the other hand, represent the damage that a character actually receives.

- Wounds are equal to the damage inflicted by an attack, less the target's adjusted resistance rating.
- The target's resistance rating is determined by his muscle rating (see page 22).
- If the character is wearing armor, and this armor protects against the specified attack, his resistance rating is adjusted by the armor's protective value—this is an increase in the character's resistance rating.

A character can reduce the wounds he takes by playing a card, either *healing* a number of wounds equal to the card's value or eliminating all wounds with an ace or a face card. Another character can also reduce his wounds by playing a *hearts* card—either reducing the wounds inflicted by the value of the hearts card or eliminating all wounds with an *ace of hearts* or a *hearts face* card. If a card is not played to alleviate the character's wounds, the attacker can play a *clubs* card to increase the amount inflicted—the value of the card is added to the damage inflicted, treating *face cards* and *aces* as a 10 for this purpose. Increasing damage in this manner can only be done against non-player characters.

*For example: Billy Sox has a muscle rating of 14 (and a resistance rating of 1), and he wears a leather jacket (+1 resistance against slashing attacks). A punk with a muscle rating of 10 and a switchblade attacks Billy. The attack results in a close call, inflicting only one-half the normal amount of damage. The switchblade has a damage rating of 3, but*



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the close call reduces the damage to 2 points. After subtracting Billy's resistance rating of 1 and his leather jacket's armor value of 1, the damage is further reduced to 0 wounds. Billy effectively ignores the attack.

If the punk rolled a great success, it would have inflicted 5 points of damage, less 1 for Billy's resistance rating and another 1 for the leather jacket, for a total of 3 wounds. Billy can eliminate these wounds by spending a card (of any suit) or another player can eliminate these wounds with a Hearts card. If no one plays a card to help Billy, the punk can increase the damage with a Clubs card.

## WOUND EFFECTS

All wounds are cumulative. This means that if a character receives a wound from one attack and then two wounds from a second, he is left with three wounds total. Consult the Wound Effects Table for a list of effects resulting from cumulative wounds.

Uncontrolled bleeding is one possible result of injury (see the Wound Effects Table). In such a case, the character receives an additional wound every ten minutes, until someone binds his wounds with a successful brains (medicine) roll with a target number of 15.

The character sheet provided in the back of this book provides space with which to record a character's wounds. When doing so, it is a good

idea to use different symbols to distinguish between bruising damage (from fists, kicks, brass knuckles, etc.) and wounds (gunshots, sword slashes, etc.). It is recommended that the following symbols be used:

- Bruising Damage: /
- Wound Damage: ×

### Targeted Attacks

It is assumed that all attacks are aimed at an opponent's torso area, but characters may choose to attack other parts of the body. It is harder to hit these areas, but the side-effects can be severe.

A common targeted attack is aimed at someone's limbs. Attacks to these areas cause two less wounds than normal, but a non-bruising attack to a limb also produces these side-effects:

- If **two** or **three wounds** are sustained, the character receives an extra penalty die whenever he tries to do something with the limb.
- If **four** or **five wounds** are sustained, the limb cannot be used—it cannot support any weight, lift objects or use weapons (arms and hands), or walk or jump (legs and feet).
- If **six** or **more wounds** are sustained, the character suffers permanent damage—the limb is severed or destroyed in some way (chopped off, vaporized, crushed, etc.).

## Wound Effects

### Wounds from a Single Attack

#### Effect

More than Five

Bruising weapons knock the character unconscious, while other weapons cause uncontrolled bleeding (*see description in text*).

More than Ten

The character is killed instantly.

### Total Wounds Suffered

#### Effect

Half of Mind Rating

No extra effect

More than Half of Mind Rating

The character is exhausted and in pain.

An extra penalty die is applied to all combat rolls.

More than Mind Rating

The character is completely incapacitated, incapable of moving on his own, and slipping in and out of consciousness at the gamemaster's discretion.

20 or more

The character dies.

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Attacks to the brain, neck, vital organs, or major veins or arteries cause two more wounds than normal.

Attacks to the face result in normal damage, but any attack that inflicts two or more wounds of non-bruising damage can leave a permanent scar. This scar can reduce a character's savvy rating to half its normal value under certain circumstances, and also makes the character easier to recognize.

Attacks to the eyes result in normal damage, but cause either permanent or temporary (for some bruising attacks; for one turn) blindness in the relevant eye.

## Recovering from Damage

If a character survives a fight and receives all necessary medical attention, he eventually recovers from his wounds. Every ten minutes of rest heals one wound caused by bruising damage. Ice-packs can also be used to heal one additional wound caused by bruising damage. For each day of rest a character is able to take, he heals one wound caused by non-bruising damage.

## THE QUICK KILL

This optional *pulp reality* rule can give player characters an edge in combat. With it, minor non-player characters are easier to take out compared to player characters. They are knocked out for the extent of the combat if they receive three or more bruising wounds from a single attack. These non-player characters are also instantly killed if they receive five or more wounds from a single non-bruising attack. These rules should only apply to very unimportant and nameless non-player characters—they are essentially cannon-fodder.



## VEHICLES

Vehicles take damage if they crash or are struck by gun-fire. Wounds to vehicles are calculated in the same fashion as for human targets. The damage to the vehicle by a weapon or a crash is determined, and the vehicle's resistance rating is subtracted from it. The effects of wounds on vehicles are as follows:

- If **five or more wounds** are sustained in a single attack, either the vehicle stalls for a second and must be restarted, or it begins to *leak* (water leaks into a ship or fuel leaks from an airplane or automobile). After the vehicle leaks for a time (as seen fit by the gamemaster within the confines of his story), it sinks, crashes, or explodes.
- If **ten or more wounds** are sustained in a single attack, the driver must roll to avoid losing control of the vehicle (see page 113) and it is forced to stop.
- If **twenty or more total wounds** are sustained, the vehicle falls to pieces and crashes or possibly even explodes.

Passengers receive the same amount of damage as the vehicle, less the vehicle's resistance rating, from this amount. Halve this amount for crashes if the passengers are strapped securely.

## Repairing Vehicles (and other equipment)

Equipment is bound to get damaged, whether from falling in the Amazon or being struck by a death ray. The repairman has to decide whether to buy replacement parts or (if these parts are not available) *jury rig* temporary parts out of improvised materials (chewing gum, laundry detergent, or even his girlfriend's panty-hose). Parts are purchased using hero points. The cost of repair parts is equal to the average of the original item price (in hero points) and the number of wounds inflicted.

Repairing equipment requires a brains roll. The target number for repairing a device is equal to twice the wounds sustained by it. If the character is using *jury-rigged* materials, an extra penalty die is added to the roll.





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## A NOTE ON DESIGN

Analytical readers may note that it is very easy to get killed in this system, which is true. Others may note, indignantly, that major characters were almost never killed in the pulps, which is also true. Nevertheless, it is the author's belief that this system accurately simulates the action of the pulps faithfully.

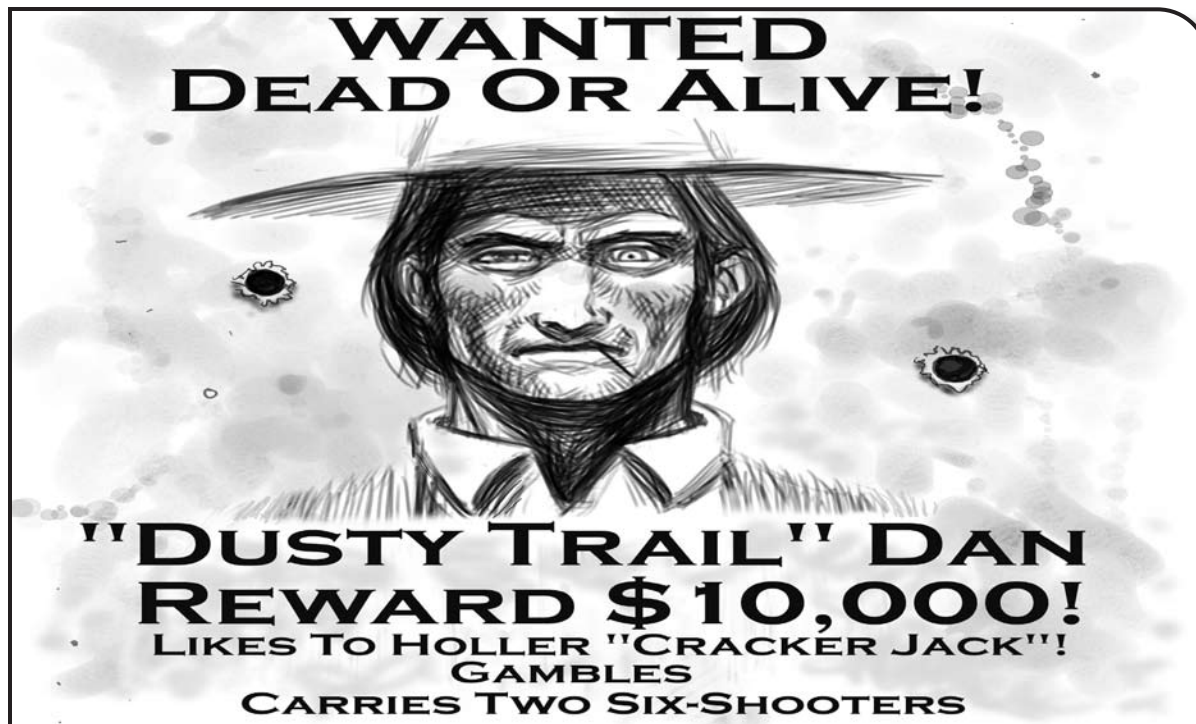
Very few pulp heroes were confident of their ability to dodge bullets. Even fewer were confident that they could survive a bullet wound through the chest. Even the toughest heroes, like Doc Savage, held up their hands in surrender when confronted with a well-aimed pistol at short range. Classic comic-book scenes, in which superheroes bounce bullets off their chests, or leap merrily into a room of gun-toting thugs, are inappropriate in a pulp setting. Characters who enter through the front door, with their guns blasting, are likely to end up in the morgue.

In the best of the pulps, the heroes outsmart their adversaries. These characters use tricks, guile, and tactical skill to win the advantage. They wait for the best possible moment to strike, that which they have the greatest possible chance of survival. Even the most righteous hero in the pulps is happy to fight dirty if it means victory.

The gamemaster should encourage their players to follow these examples. They should use cunning and charisma to avoid a fight, rather than blindly reaching for the dice. Not only can they enjoy themselves more, but they will also be imitating the source material more faithfully.



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## HAZARDS

There are many different ways to die in a pulp game; knives and guns are only two of the weapons in a killer's arsenal. A few additional threats to life and limb are provided in this section. Unless otherwise stated, a character's resistance rating reduces the damage value provided when inflicted upon him.

### COMMON SOURCES OF DAMAGE

#### Fire and Smoke

A character who is engulfed by flames sustains damage every turn. The amount of damage is dependent on the size of the flames. If a character receives five or more wounds from fire, his body becomes covered with ugly burns. In addition, if a character is trapped in an enclosed space engulfed by flames, he also receives an amount of damage due to smoke inhalation equal to the roll of one die less three (1D-3) each turn in which he does not hold his breath.

- A common household fire inflicts damage equal to the roll of one die less three (1D-3).
- A blowtorch inflicts damage equal to the roll of one die less one (1D-1).
- A blast furnace inflicts damage equal to the roll of two dice (2D).

#### Acid

Like fire, acid inflicts an amount of damage equal to the roll of one die less two (1D-2) per turn until it is washed from his body. If the character sustains five or more wounds, his body is covered with ugly burns. Armor may protect against acid (with the gamemaster's approval), but each point of damage negated by the armor's resistance degrades the armor by reducing its protective value by one.

#### Electricity

A character who suffers from an electric shock receives *bruising* damage every turn. This value is halved for well-insulated characters, but multiplied by 1.5 for well-grounded ones.



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- A common household outlet inflicts damage equal to the roll of one die less three (1D-3).
- A lightning bolt inflicts damage equal to the roll of two dice (2D).

## Climbing

Result	Outcome
Fumble	The character falls.
Failure	The character slips—he falls unless he can succeed at a duplicate roll.
Close Call	The character is stuck—his descent/ascent is delayed for ten minutes.
Success	The character does not face any problems.

## Tightrope

Result	Outcome
Fumble	The character falls.
Failure or Close Call	The character wobbles—he falls unless he can succeed at a duplicate roll.
Success	The character does not face any problems.

## Swinging

Result	Outcome
Fumble	The line breaks, and the character falls the maximum possible distance.
Failure	The character slams into a tree or wall, sustaining bruising damage.
Close Call	The character swings a little farther than desired, but only falls a few feet.
Success	The character does not face any problems.

## THE RISKS OF FALLING

If a character falls from a height, he suffers an amount of damage equal to six plus the number of yards fallen plus the roll of one die (6 + yards + 1D). This value is halved if the character falls on something that reduces the force of impact, such as a large body of water or a mattress.

### Climbing

Characters who are climbing structures move one foot per turn, regardless of their reflexes rating. The character must make a reflexes roll with a target number of 10 for every ten minutes in which he climbs. Consult the Climbing Table to determine the outcome. The roll is modified as follows:

- Climbing a structure with plenty of handholds (such as a ladder or tree) adds a bonus die to the roll.
- Climbing a sheer cliff or wall adds a penalty die to the roll.

### Walking Tightropes

Walking a tightrope is much the same as climbing. A character moves a distance of one foot per turn, but must make a reflexes roll upon stepping on the rope and every minute thereafter. The target number is 10. Consult the Tightrope Table to determine the outcome.

### Swinging

One of the coolest ways to get across a room, city street, or jungle is to swing from a chandelier, rope, or vine respectively. This is an easy and straightforward way to get from one place to another in a pulp world. The target number for such a swinging attempt is 10, and the character should make a reflexes roll every minute. Consult the Swinging Table to determine the outcome.

## THE RISKS IN THE WATER

When a character first leaps into a body of water, he must make a reflexes roll with a target number of 5. If unsuccessful, he receives one wound, ignoring his resistance rating, and

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## Water Effects

Depth	Pressure	Pressure Damage	Ascent Damage
11yds or less	1 atmosphere	none	none
110yds or less	10 atmospheres	1D-3 per turn	1D-1
1,100yds or less	100 atmospheres	2D-6 per turn	2D-2
11,000yds or less	1,000 atmospheres	3D-9 per turn	3D-3

must also make an additional roll after ten turns. If that roll is also a failure, he receives an additional wound (also ignoring resistance), and must continue to make a reflexes roll once every ten turns until he succeeds. Once the roll is successful, he does not have to make another one until an additional hour has passed in the water (or after every ten minutes if the water is particularly turbulent).

If a character descends deep underwater, the tremendous water pressure becomes an issue. Damage is sustained after every turn, based on the depth underwater; a diving suit provides a resistance rating of 2 against this pressure damage. Consult the Water Effects Table to determine the amount of damage sustained.

Characters who ascend to the water's surface too quickly after a deep-sea dive receive damage determined by the depth of descent. This situation is called "the bends," and the amount of damage sustained is shown on the Water Effects Table. Characters can make a mind (diving) roll with a target number of 10—a success indicates that they are aware of the unhealthy speed at which they are ascending, and can slow themselves accordingly.

## POISON

Every poison is unique in the real world, but to keep things simple, they all have similar effects in this game. All poisons are defined by at least four characteristics—vector, initial effect period, full effect period, and damage inflicted. These are described below.

### Vectors

The vector represents the medium through which the poison affects the victim. There are four kinds of vectors for poisons.

- **Gastric** poisons must be ingested to produce their full effect.
- **Aerosol** poisons must be inhaled.
- **Subcutaneous** poisons must be injected into the bloodstream.
- **Contact** poisons affect anyone who touches them.

Some poisons can affect potential victims through multiple vectors. In such cases, the damage and reaction times possess different values for each vector.

### Initial Effect Period

The initial effect period represents the length of time it takes before the first symptoms appear. This time can vary; some poisons, like as cyanide, manifest symptoms in as short a time of one minute, while others, such as arsenic, manifest in as much as several hours.

### Full Effect Period

This represents how long it takes before the poison inflicts its maximum damage. If the poison's effects are fatal, this is the length of time required for the victim to die.

### Damage Inflicted

When rolling for damage, treat it as a single attack. The character's resistance rating is subtracted from the damage total before applying it to the character. The victim is incapacitated if he receives five or more wounds, and killed if he sustains ten or more wounds. If the character survives this ordeal, he recovers from these wounds at the standard rate (one wound per day of rest).

Characters who survive a poisoning attempt may acquire an immunity to the drug, although this only applies to a select number of poisons. Also note that listed damages are for a few



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drops of a liquid poison. The more poison that is administered, the greater the damage is.

Dose	Damage Bonus
A few drops	—
A spoonful	+2
A full cup	+4
A gallon or more	+8

When a character is poisoned, a doctor may be able to identify the poison used and prescribe an antidote (if it exists and is available). A successful brains (medicine) [toxicology] roll is required with a target number of 20 unless suggested otherwise. Success indicates that the poison is identified and the antidote is known if it exists.

**Author's Note:** If you want to describe a poison's effects in loving detail, perhaps as background for a murder mystery, look through toxicology manuals for specific symptoms. These sources may describe such features as the physical appearance of the drug, its symptoms, and its antidotes.

The gamemaster is encouraged to turn to *Deadly Doses: A Writer's Guide to Poisons*, by Serita Stevens and Anne Klarnet, for a detailed look at a huge number of poisons. To find the damage for each poison in that book, start with 2D and subtract 2 from each point of toxicity below 5.

## DISEASE

Diseases are treated in much the same way as poisons as far as game mechanics are concerned. Each disease possesses a vector, initial effect period, full effect period, and damage rating. Treatment is handled much as it is for poisons.

Diseases should not come into play as much as poisons; they rarely play a role in murder mysteries. They are probably only present when a criminal mastermind wants to spread a dreaded plague. Therefore, the details of diseases are left to the discretion of the gamemaster who wishes to use them.

## INTOXICATION

An aviatrix is working undercover in the Kaiser's Germany, trying to get classified information out of a lecherous colonel. She takes him to a bar in an attempt to get him drunk, promising more fun and games as the evening progresses. How long does it take to get the colonel drunk, and does this help?

To determine whether a character is drunk, multiply his resistance rating by ten. If the character possesses the muscle (carousing) specialty, increase his resistance rating by one for the purpose of determining whether or not he is drunk. The result represents how many minutes he can drink heavily without suffering ill effects. He receives one wound for every ten minutes of heavy drinking past this point. With each wound sustained, the character's effective mind rating is temporarily reduced by one. As the character becomes more intoxicated, he is more likely to reveal key plans or act on his baser emotions.

## Poisoning

Name	Vector	Damage	Initial Effect	Full Effect
Arsenic	Gastric	2D-2	30 minutes	6 hours
Cyanide	Gastric	2D	1 turn	15 minutes
	Aerosol	2D	1 turn	5 turns
Strychnine	Gastric	2D	5 minutes	30 minutes
Curare	Subcutaneous	2D	1 turn	15 turns
Digitalis	Gastric	2D-2	5 minutes	30 minutes

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## SURVIVING IN THE WILDERNESS

The character is trapped in the Amazon, shipwrecked on a glacier, or wandering across the Sahara. The character is tough, but can he handle extreme conditions without provisions or the necessary gear? Not necessarily—the jungles of South America, ice fields of Antarctica, and deserts of North Africa can be just as dangerous as a mad scientist's death trap.

### Finding Water

The first danger is dehydration. Characters need to drink fresh water every day. This should not be a problem in most settings, as all the character has to do is find a stream or lake, or melt some snow. In a desert, however, it can be hard to find enough drinking water to survive. The character should make a mind (desert survival) roll with a target number of 10 to see if he can extract water from some source (plants, underground wells, or even an oasis). Consult the Water Discovery Table for the result.

If a character does not drink enough water, he is in severe danger of dehydration. A half-gallon, or a gallon per day in hot climates, should be enough. For every day the character goes without water, he sustains one wound (ignoring his resistance rating). These wounds fade as soon as the character drinks the daily requirement in one sitting.

### Finding Food

The second danger is starvation. Characters need to eat a decent-sized meal, or a number of light meals, every day. The character receives one wound for every two days he goes without food (resistance is ignored when calculating damage); double this rate (to one point per day) in extreme cold. As with dehydration, these wounds are removed as soon as he eats a full meal in a single sitting.

Characters can find food by hunting game or gathering edible plants. A single character can hunt or gather in a single day, but cannot do both effectively. Characters who gather must make a mind roll with a target number of 10, increasing it to 20 in desolate areas (deserts, tundras, or barren mountain peaks). If successful, the character collects enough food for a single, substantial meal.

Characters who hunt must make both a mind (tracking) and a reflexes roll—the first roll is to find the animal, while the second is to sneak up within range and kill it. The reflexes roll has a target number of 10; the target number of the mind roll is 10, increasing it to 20 in desolate areas. If both rolls are successful, the hunt provides three substantial meals. Otherwise the character goes hungry.

### Staying Warm

The third danger is death from exposure to the cold. Characters suffer one wound for every hour exposed to extreme cold (ignoring resistance), but these heal once the character has been in a warm place for eight hours.

## Water Discovery

Result	Outcome
Fumble/Failure	The character does not find any water.
Close Call	The character finds enough water to temporarily delay dehydration. He can ignore all dehydration-based fatigue for one day (do not count this day towards future dehydration damage).
Success	The character finds a great deal of water, eliminating all accumulated fatigue by dehydration (do not count this day towards future dehydration damage).
Great Success	The character finds an enormous amount of water—an oasis. This eliminates all accumulated fatigue by dehydration (the character does not have to worry about dehydration for quite a while).



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Characters can protect themselves from exposure, but the actual protection required varies with the environment. Cold-weather clothing is sufficient in temperatures slightly below freezing, but shelter and a fire are necessary for truly frigid weather. Finding shelter and starting a fire both require separate mind (arctic survival) rolls with a target number of 10 (or even higher).

## PUSHING ONESELF

Whenever a character is attempting an amazing feat of physical strength, endurance, or agility (lifting a rock or leaping over a chasm), no die roll is made. The character's raw muscle rating is compared to the target number, and success or failure is determined by the comparison. This rule has been adopted to institute some degree of realism in the game; human beings can only jump so far or carry so much weight.

In some cases, however, the gamemaster may wish to give his players a chance to perform superhuman stunts. In such circumstances, they can use this special rule:

- Whenever a character wants to *push* his muscle, he takes a self-inflicted wound and rolls a single die which is added to his muscle rating for a single action. This bonus does not affect the character's resistance rating, only his muscle.

## FRIGHT

Whenever a character sees something that is particularly frightening or horrifying (a ghost, space alien, dead body of a loved one, or even just a threatening man with a gun) he may panic or even go insane. The character's reaction can be determined by comparing his mind rating with a target number. To determine the target number, add the following values together:

- Add 10 points if the character's life is threatened; reduce this to 5 if the character has any kind of combat specialty or a lot of combat experience (gamemaster's discretion).
- Add 10 points if the life of a loved one is threatened.

- Add 10 points if the character has seen something unbelievable or that calls his sanity into question; reduce this value to 5 if the character has an occult specialty or has experienced a lot of supernatural occurrences (gamemaster's discretion).
- Add 10 if the character encounters an evil being of immense size and/or power.
- Add 10 if the character is surprised by any of the above.

If the target number is equal to or less than the character's mind rating, nothing unusual happens, and the character keeps his cool (he may be scared, but he does not show it, nor does it affect his judgement).

If the target number is greater than his mind rating, roll a single die and add it to his mind rating. If the target number is higher than this total, roll another die and add it to the result. Continue rolling until the total is higher than the target number. Then see how many dice were rolled:

- 1 Die**—The character loses his cool. He screams, runs away, attacks indiscriminately, or does something equally pointless, but only for a moment. After that, he behaves normally.
- 2 Dice**— The character faints.
- 3 Dice**—The character goes berserk for quite a while. He flees or attacks indiscriminately until someone calms him down, the danger is clearly passed, or a whole day has passed.
- 4 Dice**—The character goes insane, completely losing touch with reality.
- 5 or More Dice**—The character is so scared that he dies of fright.

The exact details of insanity are up to the gamemaster—catatonia, amnesia, delusions, phobias are all possible depending on the circumstances. In all cases, however, the character should not have any memory of what drove him insane. These memories must be “recovered” through psychoanalysis before the character can be cured. This can take a long time as the therapist has to make a brains (psychoanalysis) roll with a target number of 25 every session before he can cure a patient. The time required for the character to be cured is up to the gamemaster, but such problems can take years to overcome.

# TWO-FISTED TALES



## INVESTIGATIONS

There was more to the pulps than just endless violence, and there is more to a pulp hero than a square jaw and a pair of itchy trigger fingers. Most pulp heroes were detectives, or at the very least investigators. They would hear about something mysterious, like a dead body, haunted house, or even fresh dinosaur footprints, and try to figure out what was really happening. This section focuses on both sides of an investigation—gathering information, and hiding it.

### PLAYING SMART

In a pulp universe, heroes are often brilliant men, who triumph against overwhelming odds with a combination of tenacity, luck, and clever decision-making. Very few players, however, are as brilliant as the heroes they portray. Because of this, *Two-Fisted Tales* offers a number of rules to nurture thoughtful play.

### Inter-Player Advice

When making decisions for his character, a player can accept advice from another, even if it is from a player whose character is not present in the scene. While characters may not learn concrete information about the game world from this kind of advice, they can accept ideas and be reminded of facts that their characters may not already know. A character may also not act on the basis of information that he does not know. Player and character knowledge must be kept separate, but the imagination of the character is not bound by the imagination of the player.

### Remembering Things

Players often forget information that their characters would remember. In such cases, the player can be reminded of the information if his character makes a mind roll with a target number of 10 (or 20 if the information seemed trivial at the time).





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## “Oops! I Didn’t Mean That!”

*Two-Fisted Tales* is not all about combat. Sometimes, heroes have to be diplomatic if they want to get information, ask for help, or seduce a beautiful, young heiress. Unfortunately, not all players speak eloquently or understand tact. When players’ heroes talk to non-player characters, the conversation is typically performed as a representation of the characters’ personalities. That is the way it should be, but it does make it especially hard for a socially-inept player to portray a suave character.

To help ease this problem, *Two-Fisted Tales* provides the gamemaster with a tool—whenever a player says something foolish or inappropriate, the gamemaster can ask him to make a savvy roll with a target number of 10. If successful, he can tell the player to try again. The gamemaster can assume that the character did not actually say the original words, and that they were merely what the character was thinking.

## Common Sense

As an extension of the above tool, the gamemaster can extend the roll to also cover actions that seem like a bad idea given the obvious circumstances. A successful roll indicates that the gamemaster should ask the player whether he believes it to be a good idea or not. At the gamemaster’s discretion, he may explain why he thinks the action to be a foolish one.

## SCIENCE

In some cases, characters may need to answer certain questions about the world in which they live. Whether a character actually possesses this knowledge depends upon their ability ratings and the type of question that they would like to answer.

These questions can be divided into three categories—general, specific, and obscure. General questions are those that are answered in schools or encyclopedias; any well-read person has a good chance of answering them. The answers to Specific questions can be found in higher-level college textbooks or professional manuals; the average specialist can answer them easily, but laymen are much less likely to be able to do so. Obscure questions can only be answered by the most knowledgeable figures in a field; these answers might be found in more obscure and hard-to-find books that are hidden away in the larger libraries.

Determining if a character can answer a question requires a brains roll with one of the following target numbers (interpret the results by consulting the Science Outcome Table):

Question	Target Number
General	10
Specific	15
Obscure	20

## Science Outcome

Result	Outcome
Fumble	The character does not know the answer, but he thinks he does, providing an incorrect answer to the question.
Failure	The character does not know the answer.
Close Call	The character does not know the answer, but he knows where he can find it (book, professional colleague, or the like).
Success	The character knows the answer to the question.

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## IDENTIFYING THINGS

As the characters travel throughout the world, they encounter strange and wonderful things—amazing treasures, unknown chemicals, bizarre wildlife, and other forms of exotica. It is likely that players will want to know if their characters recognize what they see.

Whenever a character sees something, the gamemaster should make a brains check, comparing the rating with one of the target numbers listed on the Identification Table. If the character's ability is greater than the target number, he either recognizes the subject or can immediately identify its nature or purpose. If it is equal to or less than the target number, he does not know what it is nor can he figure it out under the current conditions.

## UNDERSTANDING GADGETS

Characters are bound to discover gadgets invented by other people—alien artifacts, weird technology from Atlantis, or the latest invention from a fiendish mad-scientist. Two

different challenges await them. They must first discover how to operate the gadget, and then they may need to understand how the gadget actually works and what its purpose is.

Understanding how to operate a gadget typically requires a brains roll. If the characters have seen the gadget being used, the target number is 0. Otherwise, the target is equal to half the target number that was required to invent the gadget. If it is necessary for more than one person to operate the gadget, the target number is increased by 5. If the gadget needs more than a single turn to function, increase the target number by 5 yet again.

Add 5 if the gadget takes more than a single person to operate, and add another 5 if the gadget takes more than a single second to operate. Consult the Gadgets Outcome Table to interpret the results.

Understanding how a gadget works, however, can be more difficult. The character must make a brains (science) roll. The target number is equal to the original target number that was required to invent the gadget. Put simply, understanding the scientific principles behind the gadget's operation is much more difficult than simply trying to figure out how to operate it.

### Identification

Rating	Description	
5	Common	Something about which every schoolkid has seen or read.
10	Uncommon	Something that a well-educated person would know, and is commonly seen by specialists.
15	Rare	Something that is almost never seen, although specialists know about it.
20	Exotic	Something that has never been seen before, although it has been frequently speculated about by professionals.
25	Unknown	Something that no one has ever seen or seriously considered, although it is potentially explained by current theories.
30	Inconceivable	Something that has never been seen, and cannot be explained by current science.



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## Gadgets Outcome

Result	Outcome
Fumble	Either the gadget breaks or someone gets injured (the details are left to the gamemaster).
Failure	The character does not figure out how to operate the gadget.
Close Call	The character partly figures out how to operate the gadget, but each additional attempt to use it requires another roll.
Success	The character fully understands how to use the gadget—no further rolls are necessary.

## HIDE & SEEK

Dice rolls should almost never be made for hide and seek situations. If a roll is required, the gamemaster, rather than the player, should do it—if a player is told to make a mind roll, he knows that there is something present, even if he fails the roll. While some players can separate their knowledge from that of their characters, some find this extremely difficult. By the same token, if a player character is trying to sneak past someone, it should not be obvious whether or not he was successful.

When there is a definite need for such a roll, the gamemaster makes a mind roll in secret for the non-player character, comparing the result to the player character's mind rating to determine success.

In some cases, however, it may be better for both the story and the game if actions are resolved with ability checks rather than rolls. Use checks if the player characters are looking for clues or if they must locate or detect something in order for the adventure to progress in a direction conducive to their success. It may only require a decision rather than a check—just assume that the characters found the information necessary to the story.

### Disguises

Many pulp heroes and villains were masters of disguise, and could do things that are impossible in the real world. The following rules try to simulate pulp conventions.

There are two different types of disguise—attempting to hide the character's identity and attempting to look like someone else. Any

character can try to hide his identity, requiring no roll. A savvy (disguise) rating of 18 or higher is required to impersonate a specific person, and a rating of 21 or higher is required to impersonate someone of a different race or sex.

A disguised character risks being discovered whenever meeting someone looking for him. The risk of being discovered is even greater if impersonating someone that a non-player character actually knows. In either case, a mind roll is made for the non-player character at the beginning of the encounter, and additional rolls are made every hour during which the non-player character spends with the disguised character. If the mind roll exceeds the disguised character's savvy (disguise) rating, the ruse is discovered.

### Locating Hidden Items

Whenever a character attempts to find a hidden person or item, he makes a mind check (not a roll) against a target number. The target number is based on both the distance between him and the object for which he is looking and the size of the hidden object (consult the Spotting Target Numbers Table).

If the target of the search is covered, the size is calculated by only considering the area that is not covered. For example, if a dead body is lying prone on the ground, far away from the character, it is treated as small rather than man-sized. Darkness increases the target number by 10, unless the target's color is brightly contrasted with the background, in which case, the target number is decreased by 10.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Moving Silently

At some point, characters will try to sneak past people without being heard. This requires a reflexes roll. The target number is equal to the mind rating of the person they are trying to avoid. The target number is further modified by the value listed on the Spotting Target Numbers Table by size and distance. A penalty die is added to the roll if the character is walking through leaves, across a creaky floor, or some other noisy surface.

## Hiding Whilst Moving Silently

Another way to sneak up on or past someone is to hide behind cover (a door, under a table, or even in a shadow) before anyone can see the character. If someone is about to turn around and look in the character's direction, he has time to dodge behind cover with a successful reflexes roll with a target number of 10, or 20 in an open area with little cover.

## Hiding Objects

Sometimes a character wants to smuggle a small item in his jacket or coat pocket past non-player character. This item could be a weapon, string of pearls or cigarette lighter engraved with a spider image. The gamemaster should make a mind roll for the non-player character to see if he notices the bulge in the jacket or the glint of metal up the character's sleeve. Add a bonus die if the object's size is *tiny+* or a penalty die if its size is *tiny-*. The roll can be further modified depending on how much clothing the character is wearing. If the roll is higher than the mind (slight of hand) rating of the character hiding the object, the non-player character notices that something is wrong. Otherwise, the character gets away with hiding the object.

## Shadowing

Shadowing means following a suspect as if one were that suspect's shadow, in such a way that he does not realize. The person performing the shadowing makes a mind [shadowing] roll every hour. If the roll is lower than his suspect's mind rating, the suspect figures out that he is being followed.

## Lying

Successfully lying to someone requires a savvy roll, adding a penalty die if facing imminent physical danger and a bonus die if romantically involved with or otherwise highly-trusted by his victim. The roll is then compared to the victim's mind rating.

If the roll is 10 or more points below the victim's mind, he can tell that the character is lying. Otherwise, the victim does not realize that the character is lying, unless circumstances would lead him to believe otherwise. For example, the victim can still recognize a lie if it is particularly outlandish or if he knew that the character was a habitual liar.

## PICKING LOCKS

If a character wants to pick a lock, he makes a mind roll with an appropriate target number listed below. If his roll is greater than the target number, he succeeds in opening the lock. Otherwise, he fails. A lock typically requires about one minute to pick, but if a character spends five minutes working on it, he can add a bonus die to the roll. Conversely, if he only spends thirty seconds or less on the lock, he must add a penalty die to the roll. A stethoscope also add a bonus die to the roll when trying to pick combination or vault locks.

## Spotting Target Numbers

Target Size	Point Blank <i>less than 1yd</i>	Short .5 - 5yds	Medium 6 - 50yds	Long 51 - 500yds	Extreme 501yds+
Tiny	0	10	20	30	40
Small	0	5	15	25	35
Man-sized	0	0	10	20	30
Large or more	0	0	5	15	25



# TWO-FISTED TALES

If a lock-picking attempt does not succeed, the character can still try to break down or rip open its door (or rip the lock off, in the case of a combination lock). Damage should be determined by the character's muscle and the weapon used. If the damage exceeds the resistance rating (shown below) of the lock or door, the character forces open the barrier. Note that guns can also be effective in shooting apart locks.

Lock Type	Target	Resistance
Key/Pad Lock	15	4
Combination	20	3
Vault	25	10

## PICKING POCKETS

If a character wants to filch a small object from another person's clothing, the character makes a mind roll with a target number equal to his victim's mind rating—a bonus die is added if it is attempted in the middle of a large crowd. If the roll is higher than the target number, the item is lifted without the victim noticing. Otherwise, the victim notices or senses something is amiss and takes action.

## RECOGNIZING PEOPLE

Whenever a character meets a non-player character, the player should make either a brains or status roll—whichever is lower. If the non-player character shares the same field of knowledge or training as the character, a bonus die is added to the roll. If the player character is from another culture, one or more penalty dice (at the discretion of the gamemaster) are added to the roll.

The target number for the roll depends on the status and weird ratings of the non-player character. Subtract his status rating from 25; if his weird rating is at least ten more than his status rating, subtract another 5 from the result. If he has a distinctive appearance (like being a midget, wearing a turban in New York, or having a face covered with scars), subtract another 5 from the result. A success indicates that the player character recognizes the non-player character.

## DEALING WITH THE POLICE

Most pulp heroes are crime-fighters of one sort or another, whether they are detectives, reporters or gun-wielding vigilantes. Their relationship to the police, therefore, can be very important. Some pulp heroes were honorary policemen, so they could expect the local force to rush to their aid whenever they asked for it. Others were treated with suspicion, while still others were total outlaws, perhaps even wanted for murder and with warrants for their arrest. The gamemaster should have some idea about how the police deals with any given player character.

A character's relationship with the police is summarized by his reputation rating, describing how easily a character can get information from the force and how quick they would consider him a suspect in a crime.

If a character wants something from the police, consult the Police Request Table. If the character's reputation rating is higher than the indicated target number, someone on the force does what the character asks.

When a crime is committed, and there are a number of suspects, the police begin by investigating those with the lowest reputation ratings. If they can clear him, they release him and move on to the suspect with the next-lowest reputation rating. Otherwise, they continue to investigate him until they either find evidence implicating another suspect or they give up for lack of evidence, continuing until all suspects are cleared or the investigation is closed.

Suspects with reputation ratings of 0 to 2 are considered outlaws, and are arrested regardless of the evidence. Those with reputation ratings over 13 are almost never arrested, unless the evidence is overwhelming.

### Police Request

Target	Request
10	Obtain confidential information from investigating officers.
13	Accompany officers on an investigation.
16	Be treated as one of the investigating officers.
19	Take command of an investigation.



**CHAPTER 6**

# Developing Characters



# TWO-FISTED TALES

Characters in fiction rarely seem to grow more experienced as time progresses. They are typically no more powerful at the end of a series than they are at the beginning. This is especially true in the pulps. In fact, many pulp super-heroes grew significantly weaker as their series progressed and a more “realistic” style of storytelling became fashionable.

As the story progresses in *Two-Fisted Tales*, characters gain new specialties, masteries, and schticks (referred to collectively as *talents*). In game-world terms, however, the character is not actually gaining anything new at all. Instead, it is assumed that the character has always known these things, but the player never got around to mentioning it. When a player buys new specialties or schticks for his character, it is as if they are abilities and experience that the character never knew he possessed or has simply never had recourse to use them during the story.

For example, we learn that Jack Method is big and tough in Episode One, and throws a mean punch. By Episode Two, it is evident that he speaks French without an accent. Three more sessions into the story, and Jack can fly a biplane, create a cunning disguise, and defuse a bomb without breaking a sweat. Jack did not pick up all these skills in between adventures, but neither were they listed on the character sheet at the beginning of the story. Rather, Jack’s player filled in a lot of the background as the story progressed, adding more skills to the character sheet along the way.

Because of these assumptions, it is easier to gain a new specialty, mastery, or schtick for a character (especially if it never came in handy before) than it is to improve one the character already has.

## GAINING HERO POINTS

Players earn hero points for their characters whenever they contribute something that substantially makes the game more enjoyable for the group as a whole. Players who ham it up in their characters’ styles, remain true to their characters’ codes and the traditions of the pulp magazines, tell funny wisecracks or parables, and come up with imaginative schemes are going to receive more hero points

than players who keep aloof. This system is designed to promote the spirit of the pulps and encourage active participation.

### Challenging a Bonus

The *Two-Fisted Tales* character sheet has entries labeled *Cool Ideas*, *Experience*, *Roleplaying*, and *Virtue*. These indicate special bonuses that increase the character’s number of total hero points. All of these bonuses begin at zero, but can be *challenged* at the end of a session if a player performs well in one of these areas. A successful challenge indicates that the relevant bonus is increased by one. Since these bonuses represent hero points, they can be used to add new talents or increase abilities, following the rules in this section.

To challenge a bonus, a single die is rolled. If the result is greater than the character’s current bonus value, the challenge is successful and the bonus is raised by one. At the gamemaster’s discretion, a roll of 0 always succeeds regardless of the current value.

The gamemaster decides when his players get to challenge their *cool ideas*, *experience*, *roleplaying*, and *virtue* bonuses, but some guidelines are presented below.

### Cool Ideas

Players can challenge this bonus if they did something *above and beyond the call of duty* to make the game more exciting. A few situations deserving a cool idea Bonus challenge are provided below:

- A character builds an invention that is original, interesting, and scientifically plausible to the setting.
- A character conceives and implements a particularly clever or poetically-just scam on one of his enemies.
- The character performs a particularly original or awe-inspiring stunt.
- The character uses period slang in a particularly funny or eloquent fashion, or he uses authentic slang that no one else has heard before.
- The character recites a really evocative spell incantation.
- The character makes a funny wisecrack to someone who threatens him.
- The character uses a particularly funny or eloquent simile or metaphor.

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Players should also get a cool idea challenge if they “act out” a number of the character’s actions rather than relying on die rolls. Here are some examples:

- The player cracks the secret code of his enemies without relying on brains rolls.
- The player interprets forensic evidence, such as blood-stain patterns, bullet trajectories, or other information, without relying upon relevant mind specialties.
- The player explains how a villain’s gadget works, using real science, without making brains rolls.
- The player sings a song when his character gives a performance.
- The player actually writes an article that his character was going to publish.

## Experience

If any of the following questions can be answered with a “yes,” the player gets to challenge his character’s experience bonus.

- Did the character do what he set out to do? If not, did he at least do some good along the way?
- Did he do far more than anyone would have expected him to do?
- Did the character do something he has not yet done, or face a challenge that was tougher than others he has faced?
- Did someone try to train him in a new skill, or did he face an opponent who was far more skillful than any he had fought in the past?
- Did he see strange people, places, or things that no one else has ever seen in the past?

## Roleplaying

*Roleplaying* refers to the activities of the player as much as the character. Players who remain *true to character*, but not at the expense of the other participants, (the typical definition of “good roleplaying”) throughout the game, receive a roleplaying bonus. In *Two-Fisted Tales*, this often means remaining true to the character’s code even in the face of danger, or at least providing proper justification for actions that seem to break it. Players who speak in the character’s style throughout the adventure should also be allowed this challenge.

In addition, roleplaying challenges can be made if the player risks his character’s life to remain true to the conventions of the genre. Some examples of this include:

- Ignoring all else to recklessly rescue a loved one from a villain’s clutches.
- Solving a mystery and meeting with all of the suspects before revealing the true perpetrator.
- Falling in love with a woman he suspects to be a dangerous killer.
- Wandering through an abandoned mansion, tomb, or unexplored Pacific island when the player knows that it is haunted.

In other words, a roleplaying challenge is justified when the character does something that is both risky and dramatic in pursuit of justice.

## Virtue

A player can challenge his virtue bonus when his character acts like one of the good guys—behaving like a hero, taking risks and making sacrifices to help others. This does not mean that player characters have to be “goody-two-shoes” all the time. There is nothing wrong with playing a cynical, selfish, or ruthlessly violent character, so long as the character has a heart of gold underneath his rough exterior. Virtue bonuses should go to the reluctant hero, one who transcends his fear, greed, or cynicism to do the right thing, just as often as it goes to the moral paragon. Transcending weaknesses as well as not showing any weaknesses in the first place are worthy of such challenges.

## REVEALING NEW SPECIALTIES, MASTRIES, AND SHTICKS

Characters may gain new specialties, masteries, or shticks at any time, even during play, by expending hero points, provided that it is possible for the character to have always possessed the talent, but never got around to using it. Additionally, it must be the first time during a game in which the talent comes in handy. If the talent would have been convenient during a previous game, but





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was not used, the character may not possess it, since it would otherwise have come into play previously. For example, if a character was attacked by Fungi from the planet Pluto in an episode, causing him to run away, it is clear that he did not possess the Destroy Pluto Fungi, because he would have just used it. Likewise, if the character fought ineptly with a sword in one session, it would not be accurate to later find that he possesses the fencing specialty.

If the conditions described above are met, the player may expend one hero point to gain a new specialty or mastery. He can also gain a new schtick if he meets the necessary requirements and expends a number of hero points equal to its cost, as listed in the next chapter.

## IMPROVING DURING THE GAME

It is also possible for a character to acquire a totally new specialty (but not a mastery) at the end of an adventure, one that they have not already possessed. In order to do so, the following conditions must be met:

- The character had a lot of practice with the relevant subject during stressful situations in the game.
- The character successfully challenged his experience bonus at the end of the game.
- The character expends one hero point.

*For Example: Percival Humberton is a mild-mannered archeologist who was captured by the lost civilization of Rome on a trip through the Congo. He and his companions had a number of adventures while they tried to escape, requiring Humberton to use a sword on many stressful occasions. If Humberton successfully challenges his experience bonus and spends a hero point at the end of the game, he can gain the fencing specialty.*

Characters can also increase a single ability by one point during the game, at a cost of 1 hero point. As usual, no rating can be raised above the maximum imposed by the character's weird ability.

One exception to the above rule is the character's status ability. Status can only be improved by raising the character's reputation

(by performing good deeds) or wealth (by coming into some money) ratings during the game. Hero points are not required to gain money or good publicity earned during the game, nor can those qualities be bought with hero points.

## TRAINING & RESEARCH

Characters can also learn new specialties and masteries through training. Any sort of instruction from a friend, tutor, or university professor can be considered training. The instructor must have a higher relevant ability rating than his student, and must also possess the relevant specialty or mastery. The student must spend at least ten hours per week studying the subject, with a minimum training time of one month. At the end of the training period, the character can gain new specialties or masteries, or improve any ability rating by as many points as desired, so long as the necessary hero points are expended—the number of points required are the same as if creating a character.

Gaining a new schtick is slightly more complicated. Special Powers cannot be gained without some sort of freakish, and notoriously hard to replicate, accident. In addition, schticks for gadgets that are found cannot be bought with hero points, since they rely on actually finding the gadget. Other schticks can be acquired, but the method to do so depends on the type of schtick (these methods are described below).

Type of Schtick	Method
Gadget (invented)	Scientific Research
Martial Arts	Training
Hypnotic	Training
Magic Spell	Library Research
Animal Speech	Training
Animal Companions	Training

Note that research is not necessary if the character can find a teacher. Any character can learn a spell or build a gadget if someone is teaching him to do so.

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## Research Outcome

Result	Outcome
Fumble	The would-be inventor is injured, sustaining damage equal to one-half the target number of the gadget.
Failure	The experiments result in failures, and the invention cannot be made.
Close Call	The experiments are successful, and the invention can be made, but it is marred by a mystery flaw (see Step 5).
Success	The experiments are successful, and the item can be built.

### Scientific Research

Follow these steps whenever a character wants to invent a new gadget once the game has already started.

#### 1. Purchase the Schtick

A character's brains (science) rating must exceed the schtick's target number to gain a new gadget schtick. A number of hero points equal to its cost must also be expended. If his brains rating is greater than the target number by five to nine, the cost is one less. If the difference is ten or greater, the cost is two less.

#### 2. Determine Research Costs

In a Weird Science world, it is entirely possible to build a time machine with common household materials—it is not easy though. If a character spends very little money working on a gadget, then the difficulty for inventing it increases.

The base expense level (see page 92) for research is equal to the target for building the gadget (up to a maximum of 20). If the character wants to reduce the expense level of his research, he may do so. For every point that reduces the expense level, however, the target number is increased by one for the invention roll (see below).

#### 3. Conduct Research

Inventing a gadget requires a number of weeks equal to the final cost in hero points (if the cost is 0, research only takes one day). This time can be reduced, down to a minimum of zero (which indicates it can be invented in a couple of hours). There are consequences for doing so, however, as shown in the next step.

#### 4. Make a Brains Roll

The character must make a brains (science; plus an appropriate mastery) roll. If the financial cost of research was reduced in Step 2, add the change in expense level to the target number. Add a penalty die to the roll for every week by which the research time is shortened in Step 3. Then compare the adjusted roll with the target number for the item, and consult the Research Outcome Table.

#### 5. Determine Mystery Flaws

If applicable, the gamemaster must determine the mystery flaws of an invention—the inventor does not know the flaw until after he uses the device in the field. The flaw can be determined randomly (if preferred)—roll a single die, adding the cost of the schtick to the result, and consult the Mystery Flaw Table. If the outcome does not properly fit the nature of the gadget, roll again or create a custom flaw.

#### 6. Continue Research

*(in Case of Failure, Fumble, or Mystery Flaw)*

If the character failed (or fumbled) his research roll, or if he wants to eliminate a mystery flaw, it is possible to still invent the gadget. Hero points do not need to be expended for the schtick again (Step 1), but the cash (Step 2) and time (Step 3) still need to be reinvested, and a new brains roll must be made (Step 4). If the new roll is more favorable, it takes precedence over the first.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Mystery Flaw

Result	Description
0	No actual flaw; the inventor just has the ominous sense that something is wrong with his device.
1	Use of the device is accompanied with annoying special effects, such as loud noises, bright flashing lights, or changes in temperature.
2	The gadget does not function under certain conditions.
3	The gadget does not function on certain targets.
4	The gadget's efficacy is reduced; it may have limited range, area of effect, duration, or some other flaw.
5	The gadget does not always work when activated; the character must toggle the switch repeatedly or kick it a few times before it begins to work properly.
6	The invention often overheats or jams after use, requiring extensive repair work.
7	The gadget often activates accidentally or at random intervals.
8	The gadget often affects the wrong target.
9	The effects of the gadget are sometimes the reverse of what they should be.
10	The gadget sometimes refuses to deactivate.
11	Repeated use of the gadget can drive the character insane.
12	Use of the gadget can draw attention from psychics, extra-terrestrials, or extra-dimensional beings.
13	There is a small chance that using the gadget causes it to explode.
14	The gadget leaks toxic emissions that inflict damage to everyone around it.
15+	The gadget can tear the fabric of space-time, sending users to other planets or dimensions.

### Library Research

Spells are recorded in musty old tomes, ancient scrolls, or even as engravings on stone walls of long-forgotten tombs. The trick for a would-be spell-caster is to identify them. Characters must conduct library research to locate more spells and add them to their repertoire. Follow these steps whenever a character wants to locate a new spell once the game has already started.

#### 1. Determine Location of Spell

The gamemaster secretly rolls 1D, adding the base cost (in hero points) of the spell, and consults the Spell Origins Table to determine where the spell can be found.

#### 2. Determine Language of Origin

The gamemaster determines the language in which the book (or scroll, tablet, or inscription) containing the spell is written. He should make an informed judgment or add 1D to the previous roll and consult the Language of Origin Table.

#### 3. Conduct Research

The character must spend the greater part of the day in the library, and make a brains (occult) roll. The target number for the roll is the same as the target number for the schtick (see page 82). A success indicates that the character either finds the spell (in some form) or its location.

## Spell Origins

Result	Description
0 - 2	The spell can be found in any library with an occult section.
3 - 4	The spell can be found in any library with a large occult section.
5 - 6	The spell book can only be found in a specific public library.
7 - 8	The spell book can only be found in a specific private library.
9	The spell book can only be found in a specific public library, and one needs special permission to read it.
10	A roll of 1D on this table describes where a poor translation or transcription of the spell can be found. Another roll of 1D added to the previous roll describes where the original can be found.
11	The spell can be found in a single, unique book. Roll 1D. 0 - 4 It is in a large public library 5 - 9 It is in code in a private collection, and requires a second lost book to decode it.
12	A roll of 1D on this table describes where an incomplete fragment of the spell can be found. Another roll of 1D added to the previous roll describes where the rest of the spell is located.
13+	The spell has been forgotten, but it is inscribed on a wall, stone tablet, or scroll somewhere. An archeological expedition could uncover it.

### 4. Purchase the Schtick

Once the spell has been found, the character must expend a number of hero points equal to the cost of the spell, and also possess a sufficiently high brains (occult) rating to cast it.

### Hypnotism and Martial Arts Training

Hypnotism and martial arts schticks are learned through training instead of research. In order to even begin such training, the character must find someone who already possesses the desired schtick. If the character already possesses other schticks that have greater target numbers and costs, it is assumed that his teacher possesses the desired schtick and can teach it. Otherwise, a new teacher must be found.

Finding a teacher for the schtick requires travel to an exotic location. The character makes a savvy (well-connected) roll, adding a number of penalty dice equal to the cost of

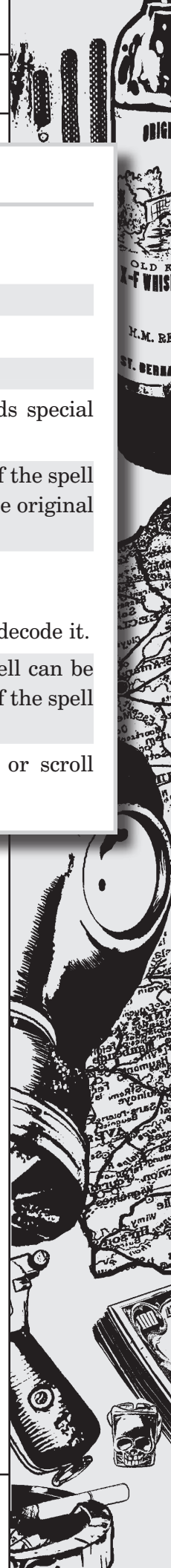
the schtick. The target number is equal to the target of the desired schtick (see pages 75 to 81). A fumble indicates that the character's teacher is a fraud and cannot teach the schtick. A failure or close call means having to spend another day looking for a teacher.

Once found, a teacher demands some form of payment for training the character—the gamemaster decides on the form of payment (cash, services, etc.). After it has been paid, the character is taught the schtick after a number of days equal to its cost.

### Learning and Teaching Animal Schticks

A character can only learn animal speech schticks if he can find someone who already possesses them. This is highly improbable, but takes a number of months equal to the schtick's cost.

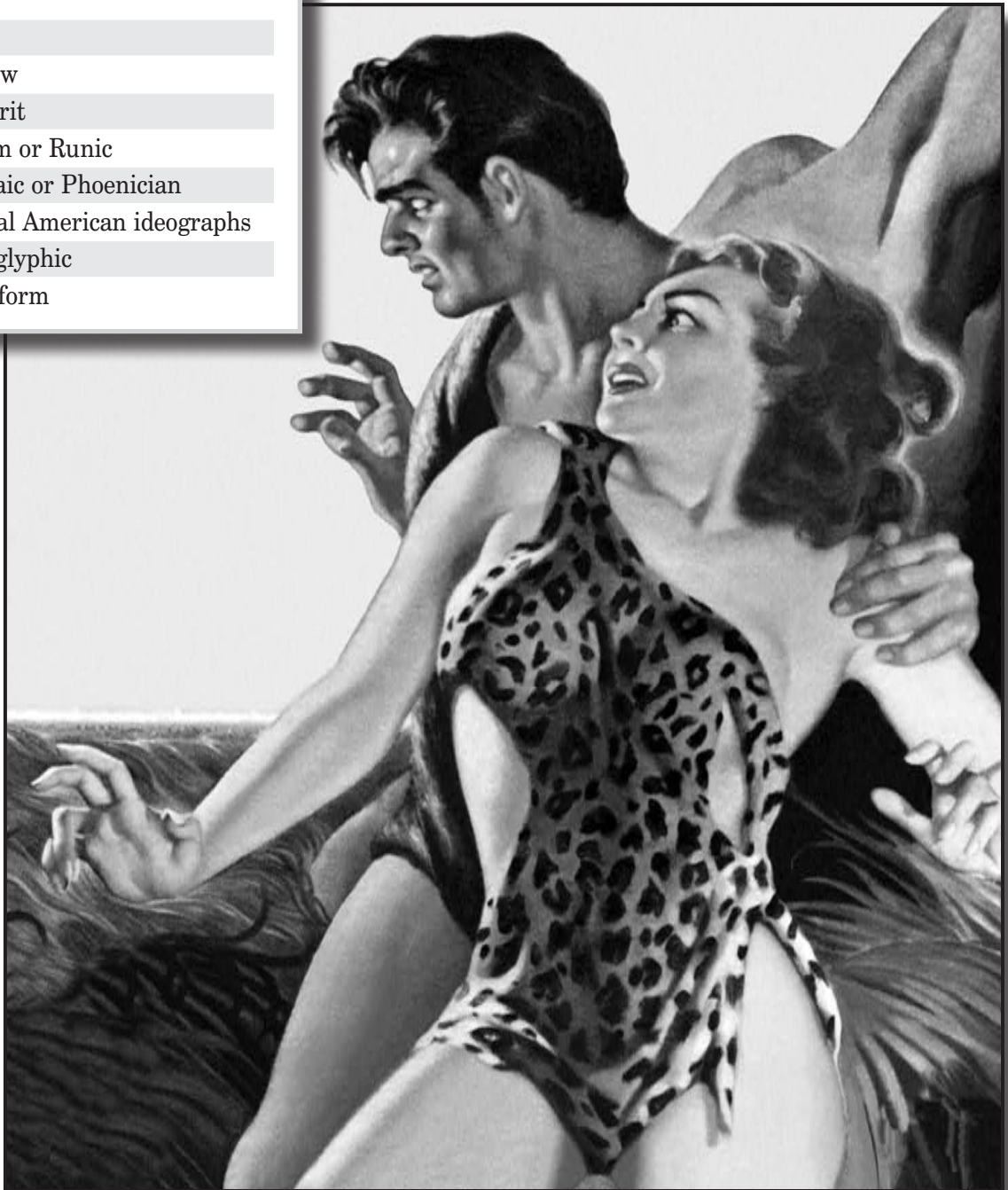
Training an animal requires a number of weeks equal to the schtick's cost.



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## Language of Origin

Result	Language
1 - 5	English
6 - 7	French
8	German
9	Italian or Spanish
10	Chinese or Tibetan
11	Arabic or Farsi
12	Latin
13	Greek
14	Hebrew
15	Sanskrit
16	Ogham or Runic
17	Aramaic or Phoenician
18	Central American ideographs
19	Hieroglyphic
20+	Cuneiform





**CHAPTER 7**

**Driving  
the Stories**



# TWO-FISTED TALES

Telling good stories takes a lot of work, time, and creativity. The first part of this chapter is devoted to designing them, while the rest is intended to make the gamemaster's job easier by saving time and filling in some of the details of an adventure. Many random tables are included to help the gamemaster outline adventures, describe settings, and create unique non-player characters. Adventures should not be generated in a completely random fashion, however. Whenever possible, the gamemaster should rely upon his own judgement (and imagination) when outlining plots and creating non-player characters. The tables merely provide a list of options for the gamemaster when in need of some quick inspiration.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide "training wheels" for the apprentice gamemaster or a "crutch" for one that is at a loss for inspiration. Help is offered in answering questions such as these:

- How do I get the player-characters involved?
- What do I do to keep the action moving?
- How can I personalize my non-player characters?
- What should the setting look like?
- How can I provide a strong atmosphere?

The first decision that a gamemaster must make is to choose which kind of story he wishes to tell. Some questions that need to answered include:

- What is the setting? Where does the story begin, and what is the time period?
- Are the heroes part of a team? What kind of team is it?
- How powerful are the heroes at the start of the game?
- What kind of shticks are available? Are the laws of the universe based on *weird science*, *magic*, or rules closer to those of our own world (more realistic)?

## SETTINGS AND TEAMS

The game setting can be placed anywhere on Earth or in an alternate world that looks a lot like Earth. These rules are focused for adventures in the Thirties, but they can also

be used for other time periods—just create a list of new equipment for the setting, and possibly alter the exchange rate for dollars (or other currency) to the game's expense levels.

Once the gamemaster decides on the setting, he informs the players of acceptable character templates. While players can select inappropriate templates, they should explain the reasoning behind such a choice in a way that makes sense within the setting. Any template is acceptable if a player makes a convincing argument for its behalf.

*For example, if the first adventure takes place in a large American city, cowboys and wild men probably do not belong there. If the characters are in the African jungle, G-men and hard-boiled detectives might not fit. If a G-man is used in the jungle, he may be tracking down a fugitive across the Congo; maybe the cowboy is staring in a movie.*

The gamemaster may also decide that the player characters are part of a team. Stories like this are easy to write, since the gamemaster does not have to worry about complicated reasons for getting the characters to work together. In a team-based story, every hero is a member of an association, whether it is a business, government agency, social club, or even a collection of friends. A few examples of pulp teams and their relevant templates are provided below:

- The characters have been sent into an unexplored jungle to search for hidden treasure: *Brawler*, *Ethnic Sidekick*, *Explorer*, *Feisty Heroine*, *Flying Ace*, *Professor*, *Spunky Kid*, *Tough Scientist*, *Wild Man*
- The heroes are partners in a small detective agency: *Amateur Detective*, *Feisty Heroine*, *Hardboiled Detective*, *Psychic Investigator*, *Scientific Detective*
- They work together for the FBI or the Secret Service: *G-Men*
- The characters form a squadron of fighter pilots: *Flying Ace*
- The player characters are mercenaries, fighting together in the Orient: *Brawler*, *Ethnic Sidekick*, *Flying Ace*
- They are members of a club for pulp writers: *Brawler*, *Cowboy*, *Explorer*, *Feisty Heroine*, *Hardboiled Detective*, *Magician*, *Professor*, *Reporter*

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- The characters are traveling together through the Wild West, fighting crime as they encounter it: *Amateur Detective*, *Costumed Vigilante*, *Cowboy*, *Ethnic Sidekick*
- The characters work together on a ranch: *Cowboy*, *Ethnic Sidekick*, *Feisty Heroine*, *Spunky Kid*
- All of the characters teach at a local university, and they solve crimes together as a hobby: *Explorer*, *Professor*, *Psychic Investigator*, *Scientific Detective*, *Tough Scientist*
- The characters are members of a crime-fighting organization, led by a mysterious masked avenger: *Brawler*, *Costumed Vigilante*, *Ethnic Sidekick*, *Feisty Heroine*, *G-Man*, *Gangster*, *Hardboiled Detective*, *Professor*, *Reporter*
- The characters are members of a criminal organization, stealing from the undeserving rich: *Brawler*, *Buccaneer*, *Gangster*

## POWER LEVEL

Some pulp stories featured ordinary people who were trapped in dangerous situations, while other stories featured characters who were just as tough and colorful as any superhero in the comic books. Still other stories featured characters who were tough and competent, but in a realistic manner.

Because everyone has different views on what constitutes a pulp game or how exciting the game should be, *Two-Fisted Tales* stories can be adjusted by using different power levels. There are four possible power levels for a *Two-Fisted Tales* story—*gritty*, *escapist*, *fantastic*, and *amazing*.

The gamemaster should choose one of these power levels based on the type of material that he wishes to imitate, along with the level of realism that he expects the stories to follow. When in doubt, an escapist game is simplest.

### Gritty

The characters are slightly more competent than the average man on the street. Heroes either have to be very smart or very careful, or they could easily get themselves killed; combat should be avoided as much as possible.

Examples include Cornell Woolrich's noir thrillers, H.P. Lovecraft's horror stories, or a typical "cozy" mystery.

### Escapist

The heroes are tough and can easily handle themselves in a fight with a few thugs, but they are still just human and can get their butts kicked if not possible. Examples include most western, aviation, or hard-boiled pulp stories.

### Fantastic

The characters are so close to perfection that they strain credibility. A fantastic character can fight a small battalion and still come out ahead. Examples include famous pulp-heroes like *Tarzan*, the *Shadow*, or *Doc Savage*.

### Amazing

The heroes, as the saying goes, have powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. Examples include the weaker super-heroes of the Golden Age comic books and the heroes of E.E. "Doc" Smith's *Skylark* and *Lensman* books.

### Superhero and Sidekick Stories

The gamemaster can also assign different power levels to different characters. For example, one player might portray a fantastic character, while another portray an escapist, possibly as a sidekick. In cases like this, it is recommended to offer a player the choice of portraying multiple low-level characters or a single high level character—while one player uses a fantastic character, the others each role-play *two* escapist characters. In any event, all the player characters in a story should not differ by more than a single power level.

## WEIRD SCIENCE VS. MAGIC

Yet another decision for the gamemaster is the very nature of the universe—are the physical laws pretty much like our own or is science capable of far more, and does everything have a scientific explanation or does magic play a part? The decisions made here determine the schticks that players can choose for their characters, as well as the type of villains they may face.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Magic

One could argue that magic does not belong in authentic pulp stories. In the Twenties and Thirties, it appeared as if science would solve all of the world's problems. The rationalist faith in science was accompanied by contempt for superstition, a contempt which was even stronger in the Thirties than it is today. Supposedly supernatural events more often than not turned out to be elaborate hoaxes or con-jobs. If a haunted house was present in a pulp story, for example, it was more likely to be haunted by a crook wearing a sheet than any kind of poltergeist (while this trope is often identified with the *Scooby Doo* cartoon from the 1970s, it was actually inspired by *I Love a Mystery*, a great radio series of the Forties). Skeptics were vindicated far more than "open-minded" believers were. For this reason, the gamemaster may wish to keep magic out of his games completely.

Even if magic is present in the story, the gamemaster may choose to keep most of it out of the hands of the players. As rare as magic was in the pulps, magic-wielding heroes were even less common. Sorcerers, wizards, and witches were typically the villains in pulp stories, rather than the heroes, who were the big, sword-swinging barbarians that killed the magic-wielding people. Many pulp spells were nasty, involving necromancy, demonology, the worship of eldritch deities, and other sinister disciplines that the average righteous, red-blooded hero assiduously avoids.

Nevertheless, rules for magic are included here for more varied and exciting stories, and the few fantasy-based pulps that became popular.

## Science and Weird Science

As previously noted, the science-fiction genre was invented to teach people science. The best science-fiction pulps, such as *Astounding*, prided themselves on scientific plausibility, and there is no reason why *Two-Fisted Tales* stories should not be plausible as well. The question, however, is how plausible does it have to be. If the players do not believe that scientific accuracy is necessary in the story, the science can be justified as using the laws of weird science (otherwise known as balonium or bat-science). These laws are similar to, but are more flexible than, the scientific laws of our own universe. In a weird

science universe, scientists can do things that are all but impossible on our Earth. This includes traveling faster than the speed of light, shrinking a man to sub-atomic sizes, or turning a woman into a chicken.

When using weird science in the story, it should be a mix of different elements:

- Genuine scientific phrases, such as "relying upon the moon's gravitational pull," "bombarding the material with negatively-charged ions," and "cooling the battery to absolute zero."
- Nonsensical expressions like: "using the power of the Z-force," "splitting the eighth dimension," and "transforming thought into vibration."

Scientific phrases that are legitimate today, but unknown in the Thirties should be avoided. In other words, do not use "chaos theory" in monologues, unless "chaos theory" is a nonsensical term that has no relation to today's usage. Just about anything else, however, is fair game.

One common device that helps a science fiction story is creating new forces, elements, sub-atomic particles, or dimensions, so far undiscovered by modern science. A brief and simple summary of the knowledge on the subject of the time should be provided, along with a description of the new discovery.

*For example, the Theory of Relativity claims that there are four dimensions, but there is also a fifth dimension that is filled with malignant crab-like creatures that lust for our women. This technique was commonly used in Amazing Stories and other Gernsback magazines, offering little lessons in basic science along with a heavy dose of fantasy melodrama.*

## DESIGNING ADVENTURES

Designing an adventure for a group of players is a lot different than writing a book—an author decides what all of his characters are going to do, while in a roleplaying game,

# TWO-FISTED TALES

the players decide what their characters are going to do. In some ways, this makes running a game much easier; the gamemaster does not need to write most of the dialogue, nor does he have to worry about the characterization of his heroes. The players do that work for him. The player characters' freedom can still provide plenty of headaches for the hard-working gamemaster, however.

*For example, an author is going to send his hero off to an archeological dig in Egypt, near Cairo. The author does not know much about Egypt, so he goes to the library and does a little research, picking up a few Arabic phrases, a bit of modern Egyptian history, and even finds a few landmarks in Cairo. Confident that he knows enough to write convincingly about the setting, he goes ahead and writes the next chapter.*

*A gamemaster that expects his player characters to take a trip to Egypt, could do the same amount of research, but there is no guarantee that it would do him any good. The players may want to know all sorts of things about Cairo that the gamemaster never considered:*

- *How strict are the gun laws?*
- *How good are the local universities?*
- *Is there a lot of local hostility towards Westerners?*
- *How much would a decent hotel room cost per night?*

If the gamemaster does not have the answers to these questions, he is not going to get a chance to research them; he must make up an answer, and hope it satisfies the players.

*We are assuming that the characters actually go to Cairo, but they may decide to stay in Chicago instead, making all of the gamemaster's research superfluous. Even worse, they may decide to go to Jakarta without any warning to the gamemaster, and unless he is familiar with life in the Dutch East Indies in the early Thirties, he will not know any details about the region at all.*

What should the gamemaster do? He cannot plan for every possible choice made by the players. One solution is to force them down a single path:

*The characters wake up to find an army of thugs pointing guns at them. These thugs force*

*them to go to Cairo, and steal Queen Nefertiti's necklace. If they do not, they and their loved ones will be killed. On the other hand, if they do steal the necklace, they will be paid fifty-million dollars and receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. The player characters, no fools, decide to do as they are told.*

It is generally a bad idea to use heavy-handed coercion in this fashion. That is, forcing the characters through a pre-designed plot. It may make the gamemaster's job easier, but players want some control over their characters. Without any control, roleplaying is not much of a game—it is a travel monologue, narrated by the gamemaster with occasional comments from the players. An illusion of freedom (if not the reality) is essential to keep players interested and invested in the game.

A gamemaster can direct his players in far more subtler ways, using *hooks* suited for each individual character. A hook is simply a plot element designed to pull a character into an adventure.

*Revisiting the example of an adventure planned in Egypt. The reporter character could be sent to Cairo to cover the King's coronation; the archeologist could find a map to a long-forgotten crypt; the private detective could be sent to Egypt to find a tycoon's missing daughter. All of these hooks are specifically designed for each player character; all of them are fairly plausible situations; and every character has a good reason to travel to Egypt, meet each other, and get involved in the adventure. Once the gamemaster comes up with a few decent hooks, most of the work is already done.*

Another priority for the gamemaster is creating well-rounded, colorful non-player characters—the villains, henchmen, friends, employers, other miscellaneous figures. The gamemaster does not have to describe every single person, from the hotel bellboy to the beggars in the street; that would take far too much work for few benefits. Instead, these minor characters should be treated as extras in a movie, nameless and faceless, without any lines. The gamemaster should devote his attention to the major figures in the adventure.

Once the gamemaster has created well-developed non-player characters, he can introduce them wherever needed and ensure they meet the player characters.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

For example, the gamemaster creates a gambling playboy named Rick, who is intended to draw the characters into all sorts of dangerous schemes. He might expect the characters to meet Rick at the local nightclub, but to his chagrin, they instead decide to go to a local coffee shop. What can he do? The answer is simple—after a night of highballs, Rick decides to sober up by stopping by the coffee shop for a few cups of joe. The players do not know the difference, and the adventure moves as smoothly as before.

Once the gamemaster has created his non-player characters, he should decide what they are going to do. It is not enough to just think about their actions in the characters' presence, as they should have real agendas that are pursued when the player characters are not with them. The gamemaster can even give the players plenty of clues as to what the non-player characters' are doing. The point is that important non-player characters should have lives of their own, rather than thinking of them as *encounters* who vanish as soon as the player characters leave the scene. If the players do anything unexpected, the gamemaster has some idea of what can happen and what those around them are likely to be doing at the time.

To recap, the gamemaster can usually survive a game session with his reputation intact and without having to spend a huge amount of effort if he concentrates on three main concepts:

- hooks to get player characters involved
- well-developed non-player characters
- an idea of what the non-player characters are doing at any given time

## SCENARIO CREATION SYSTEM

Most of the *pulps* paid their authors a cent a word or less. It was difficult for a pulp writer to make a living unless he produced dozens of short stories or novelettes every year; an enormous amount of material. Typing all of these stories was hard enough. It was even more difficult to come up with effective, original story lines.

In desperation, many pulp authors turned to plot formulas for their ideas. These plot formulas were systematic, abstract outlines of a wide variety of story lines, and were often quite helpful. Many high-quality stories were constructed with plot formulas, and they were even used by such talented writers as Lester Dent, the primary author of the *Doc Savage* novels.

The gamemaster is expected to produce as many stories, in the form of game scenarios, as pulp authors were, so the following system is provided for pulp roleplaying games. It is designed to provide skeletal frames for scenarios, complement the gamemaster's imagination, and provide him with ideas during a creative slump. There are three steps.

### 1. Determine Player Character Motivations

The characters' motivations should be specified in detail if this was not already done while creating characters.

### 2. Determine Player Character Hooks

There are four main types of hooks, as described below.

**Solicitation:** someone asks, orders or hires the characters to do something.

**Disaster:** The characters stumble into a situation in which innocent people are threatened by natural or man-made disasters, or the direct attack of a villain.

**Rumor:** The characters discover or are informed of useful information.

**Attack:** Someone decides to make life miserable for the characters by following, assassinating, kidnapping, or doing something else to the them or to their friends/loved ones.

The types of hooks used depend upon the motivations of the characters. First select the appropriate motivation on the Hooks Table. Then roll two dice and compare their sum along the chosen motivation's row. This value determines the hook to be used as well as a modifier that is applied to subsequent rolls.

### 3. Describe Situations

Once the hook has been selected, consult the appropriate section (for the type of hook) to determine the exact situation that awaits the player characters.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## A. Solicitations

Describe the basics of a solicitation by randomly choosing the type of mission that the characters are asked to perform. Roll two dice, modifying their total with the hook modifier, and consult the Solicitation Table.

Next, roll for complications—information that the patron does not tell the characters, whether out of ignorance, carelessness, or malice. The number of complications is equal to one-third the roll of one (1D/3), rounding down. Roll two dice and compare their sum on the Complications Table.

## B. Disasters

Roll a die, subtracting 1 if the power level is *fantastic*, and consult the Disasters Table to determine the nature of the disaster that threatens innocent people.

If the characters manage to save innocent lives from the disaster, roll a single die and compare the result with the Saved Innocents Table.

Finally, if any character has a dependent, roll another die; on a roll of 1 to 6, that dependent is one of the victims of the disaster.

## C. Rumors

Roll two dice, modifying their total with the hook modifier, and consult the Rumors Table to determine the information that the players are given.

Then roll for the source of the information. For unsolved crimes or information about an enemy, roll one die and consult the Source of

Information Tables. For all other information, consult the table using half of the die roll (round down).

Another die roll is then made for each rumor. A result of 1 indicates that the information is completely false, while a 2 indicates that it is misleading.

## D. Attacks

Roll two dice and consult the Attacks Table to determine how someone tries to make life difficult for the characters.

Alternatively, attacks may be selected by the gamemaster according to both the actions of the characters and capabilities of the enemies in previous encounters.

Finally, roll two dice, subtracting 3 if the power level is gritty and consult the Motivation Table to determine why the villain is attacking the characters.



## Hooks

### Motivation

### Hook and Modifier are at bottom

Duty	0 - 6	7	8 - 11	12	13	14	15	16 - 18
Greed	0 - 6	7	8	9	10 - 12	13	14	15 - 18
Sympathy	0 - 1	2	3 - 7	8 - 11	12	13	14	15 - 18
Renown	0 - 1	2	3 - 5	6 - 9	10	11	12 - 14	15 - 18
Whimsy	0 - 3	3 - 4	5	6 - 7	8	9 - 12	13 - 14	15 - 18
Love	0 - 1	2	3 - 5	6 - 8	9	10	11	12 - 18
Survival	0 - 1	2	3	4 - 6	7	8	9	10 - 18
Revenge	0 - 4	5	6	7	8	9	10 - 11	12 - 18

-3      0      +3

**Solicitation**

**Disaster**

**Rumor**

**Attack**



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## A. Solicitations

Result	Description
0 - 2	<b>Kill or Capture:</b> The characters are asked to assassinate an important figure, capture a criminal, or hunt a dangerous or valuable monster.
3 - 4	<b>Steal Goods:</b> The characters are asked to steal something that could be acquired through a raid against enemies (human or monster), grave robbery, or a search for hidden treasure or shipwreck.
5 - 6	<b>Spy:</b> The characters are asked to infiltrate an organization, or stake out a person's home and report on their activities.
7	<b>Investigate:</b> The characters are asked to confirm a rumor or serve as an eyewitness to an important event.
8 - 9	<b>Solve Crimes:</b> A crime has been committed, and the characters must find out who is responsible, possibly by the person currently accused.
10	<b>Locate Persons:</b> Someone is missing, and the characters must find him.
11	<b>Protect/Escort:</b> The patron, or a dependent of the patron, expects to be attacked by a villain; or he is travelling through dangerous terrain, and looking for guidance or protection from anticipated hazards.
12	<b>Diplomacy:</b> The characters are asked to send a message, or to mediate between feuding parties for a peace mission.
13 - 15	<b>Rescue:</b> The characters must rescue someone from kidnappers, rescue someone from a dungeon/jail, or rescue someone from a natural disaster.
16 - 18	<b>Sabotage/deactivate:</b> A villain's plan to kill many innocent people needs to be foiled. In most cases, a powerful tool, weapon, or explosive device of the enemy needs to be destroyed.

## A. Complications

Result	Description
0 - 2	The patron deceives the characters about his identity.
3 - 4	The patron deceives the characters about his motives or goals; they are far less ethical than was originally thought.
5	The patron's enemies have been tipped-off.
6	The patron is killed, captured, or otherwise silenced.
7	The patron finds a way to avoid paying or otherwise rewarding the characters.
8 - 9	The characters encounter more opposition than was planned.
10	The target of the mission is not who he appears to be.
11 - 18	There are certain mysteries that must be solved for a successful mission. The patron probably does not know the answers to these mysteries (unless another complication leads one to believe that he does). The type of mystery depends on the solicitation: <b>Kill/Capture</b> (roll a die) 0 - 5 The identity of the target is unknown. 6 - 9 The location of the target is unknown. <b>Rescue:</b> The location is unknown. <b>Find/Steal:</b> The location is unknown. <b>Protection:</b> The identity of the threat is unknown. <b>Sabotage</b> (roll a die) 0 - 4 The location of the enemy's attack must be identified. 5 - 6 The timing of the attack must be specified. 7 - 9 The techniques for disarming the enemy's trap are unknown.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## B. Disasters

Result	Description
0	<b>Natural Disaster:</b> Roll another die and consult the Terrain Table, referencing the region through which the characters are travelling.
1 - 3	<b>Man-Made Disaster:</b> Roll two dice and consult the Man-Made Disasters Table.
4 - 9	<b>Violent Crime:</b> Roll one die and consult the Violent Crime Table.

## B. Violent Crime

Result	Description
0 - 1	Assassination
2 - 3	Bombing or Arson
4 - 5	Robbery
6 - 7	Assault or Rape
8 - 9	Hijacking or Hostage-Taking

## B. Man-Made Disasters

Result	Description
0 - 1	Plague
2 - 3	Apparent supernatural menace
4	Monster or wild animal allowed to run loose on violent rampage
5 - 8	Vehicle capsizes, crashes, or is about to crash
9 - 14	A fire or some kind of industrial accident threatens innocent lives
15 - 18	People are in danger of falling to their deaths, either out of a building, in an elevator, or off of a bridge

## B. Saved Innocents

Result	Description
0 - 1	No immediate consequences
2 - 4	The innocents include a patron of some importance <i>(roll on the Solicitation Table)</i>
5 - 9	The villain decides to take revenge on the characters <i>(roll on the Attacks Table)</i>

## B. Natural Disasters

Result	Plains	Desert	Mountains	Seacoast	Forest	Other
1 - 2	Earthquake	Earthquake	Earthquake	Earthquake	Earthquake	Earthquake
3 - 4	Earthquake	Flood	Avalanche	Earthquake	Forest Fire	Flood
5 - 6	Tornado	Storm	Avalanche	Tsunami	Forest Fire	Volcano
7 - 8	Tornado	Sandstorm	Volcano	Storm	Forest Fire	Other
9 - 10	Storm	Sandstorm	Storm	Storm	Storm	Storm

*Storms refer to hurricanes, blizzards, hailstorms or any other form of precipitation that threatens lives or property.*

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## C. Rumors

Result	Description
0 - 4	Reports of places that are filled with treasures; roll one die and consult the Treasure Location Table.
5	Reports of persons or places that may answer important secrets.
6 - 8	Reports of weird sightings or events; roll one die and consult the Weird Sightings Table.
9 - 12	Reports of unsolved crimes; roll one die and consult the Unsolved Crimes Table.
13 - 18	Information about a villain. First select the villain and then roll one die and consult the Villain Information Table.

## C. Treasure Location

Result	Description
0 - 3	Ruins or tombs
4 - 6	Crash-sites or shipwrecks
7 - 9	Stash-sites for thieves

## C. Weird Sightings

Result	Description
0 - 2	Strange monsters, beings, or someone who is supposed to be dead.
3 - 4	Bizarre, supernatural weather.
5 - 6	Hidden cities, palaces, islands, etc.
7 - 9	Mysterious deaths or disappearances, or the loss of contact with an outpost.

## C. Unsolved Crimes

Result	Description
0 - 2	Robberies of precious items
3 - 7	Murders
8	Kidnappings
9	Other crimes, probably violent

## C. Villain Information

Result	Description
0 - 2	His latest activities, such as travel plans, purchases, and meetings with other villains
3	His personal history and other background information
4	His relationships with enemies, allies, or other associates
5	His motives or goals
6	His powers and/or secret methods
7	His identity if previously anonymous
8	The location of his hideout, if previously unknown
9	Other information

## C. Source of Information

Result	Description
0 - 1	Innocent observer
2	Another investigator or informant
3	Newspapers or radio announcements
4 - 5	Personal research
6	Villain's pawn; someone who worked for him without understanding his goals
7	Villain's henchman or accomplice
8	Villain's rival
9	From the villain himself, perhaps through riddles or other deliberate clues

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## D. Attacks

Result	Description
0 - 1	The characters are monitored and possibly followed.
2 - 3	The characters' reputations are attacked.
4	The villain may steal something that is cherished by the characters, or burglarize their homes or headquarters.
5	The villain asks the characters to visit him; roll one die and consult the Deal Table.
6	The villain sends an agent to befriend the characters; roll one die and consult the Agent Table.
7	The villain sends an anonymous threat to kidnap or kill the characters.
8 - 9	The villain tries to kidnap the characters, and possibly torture them for information (or even just for pure sadistic pleasure).
10	The villain tries to assassinate the characters.
11 - 13	The villain tries to kidnap the characters' dependents, possibly as part of a trap to capture them.
14 - 16	The villain tries to assassinate the characters' dependents.
17 - 18	The villain sends an anonymous threat to kidnap or kill the characters' dependents.

## D. Agent

Result	Description
0 - 2	The agent attempts to assassinate the characters after befriend them.
3 - 6	The agent gathers information about the characters and sends it to his employer.
7 - 9	The agent feeds the characters misleading information.

## D. Deal

Result	Description
0 - 1	The villain tries to befriend the characters.
2 - 3	The villain offers to hire the characters, or asks them to join him as partners.
4 - 5	The villain tries to persuade the characters that his cause is just, and their actions will do more harm than good.
6 - 7	The villain threatens the characters or their dependents to carry out a task for him.
8 - 9	The villain challenges one of the characters to a contest or duel.

## D. Motivation

Result	Description
0 - 3	The characters possess an object or information that one or more villains desire.
4	One of the characters has powers or a position of which he is unaware, making him a threat to one or more villains, and a possible asset to others.
5 - 6	The villain sees crime as a sport or game, and the characters as "worthy adversaries" for a violent contest.
7 - 10	The villain knows that the characters want to ruin him or destroy his plans, and he takes measures to stop them.
11 - 13	The characters have already ruined the villain's life or plans, so he has decided to take revenge on them.
14 - 18	The villain wants to complete his master plan, but expects the characters to interfere, so he wishes to eliminate them.



## CREATING NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

One of the duties of a gamemaster is to develop non-player characters for the story. The following guidelines provide a quick and easy method for doing so, saving much time.

- It is not necessary to determine the game statistics for a non-player character, unless he is likely to participate in a contest or fight with a player character.
- A non-player character's savvy and status ratings are generally unimportant—a vague idea of the character's wealth and social standing is enough in most cases
- Many non-player characters are interchangeable, nameless cannon fodder (cops in the bank, Nazi soldiers guarding the Ark of the Covenant, mobster's gunmen hiding out in the speakeasy). These characters are called *extras*. A single generic set of game statistics can be generated that applies to each member of a group of extras (for example, one set of details for all cops in the bank).
- Hero point values are not an issue for non-player characters. They should possess ability ratings that are appropriate rather than based on a total amount of points. Most non-player characters should not be too tough, however, especially if they are going to fight the player characters.

The following pages contain information on generic extras, and templates for major villains and henchmen can be found starting on the next page.

### Extras

Generic extras only require a few specific ability ratings. Assume the rating of any abilities not listed to be 10.

If the gamemaster is unsure how to create a specific extra, roll two dice for each ability rating and add an appropriate specialty. If any rating is higher than the maximum allowed by the character's weird ability, reduce it to the maximum value. Conversely, if any are lower than the minimum allowed, raise it to the minimum value.

### Villains and Henchmen

Villains and their most important henchmen require more attention than extras. A good villain should be built with as much care and imagination as a player character. A villain can be created by modifying any of the templates provided.

While Hero Points have been provided for each template, the gamemaster should not feel the need to stick to them. If a gamemaster feels the needs to allocate 25 points, rather than 11, for a Femme Fetale that he wants in an escapist story, he should do so. It is not necessary to balance hero points when designing non-player characters. Hero points have been provided for these villains as reference only—the gamemaster can use the values to compare the capabilities of non-player characters with player characters.

### Cards and Non-Player Characters

Villains should only be able to use cards in certain circumstances. They should not be used to kill player characters; only to defend themselves from attack, escape from the heroes, capture the player characters, or possibly even knock them unconscious.

# Villainous Templates



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Assassin

In the Middle East, he is called an assassin; in the Far East, a ninja. The names do not matter. For the player characters, the important issue is that he is dressed in black, armed with a sword, and trying to kill them. He is dangerous as hell, and does not work for nothing. Heroes have to kill him before he kills them.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	13
Muscle.....	13
Reflexes .....	16
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	10
Weird.....	12

### SPECIALTIES

Reflexes (Martial Arts)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	10
Escapist .....	20
Fantastic.....	30
Amazing .....	40

## Big Bruiser

He is big, strong, and ugly, and likes to beat up people, especially heroic characters. He does not talk much (if he talks at all) and should not have much more personality than that.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	9
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	14
Muscle.....	18
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	10
Weird.....	16

### SPECIALTIES

Reflexes (Boxing)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	5
Escapist .....	15
Fantastic.....	25
Amazing .....	35



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Bug-Eyed Monster

They may want our women, iron, and water, but we can be sure that they do not want to be our friends. It is too bad that they are armed with deadly super-science, far in advance of our own. Their appearance may be frightening, but they are even more deadly than they look, and only the toughest group of heroes can tackle them and live.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	22
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	10
Muscle.....	22
Reflexes .....	9
Savvy .....	1
Status .....	1
Weird.....	24

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Science)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	5
Escapist .....	15
Fantastic.....	25
Amazing .....	35

## Butch Crime Queen

This woman has learned to survive in the rough world of crime by acting like a man. She is large, covered with burly muscles, and has a low, loud voice,. Plus she can drink any man under the table. Be careful around her—the hard exterior masks an even tougher, and harder, interior. Underestimate her and a hero can wind up dead.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	13
Muscle.....	16
Reflexes .....	14
Savvy .....	8
Status .....	10
Weird.....	12

### SPECIALTIES

Savvy (Intimidation)  
Reflexes (Gun Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	10
Escapist .....	20
Fantastic.....	30
Amazing .....	40



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Crime Lord

Mobsters may run the country, but they are not the buffoons portrayed in the papers. The real masters of crime are not a bunch of flashy, illiterate thugs. They are crafty, even brilliant, and only a few people know they exist. The mirror image of the Masked Avenger, crime lords often wear elaborate costumes, and their true identities are a closely guarded secret. True masters of evil, they are perfect rivals for pulp heroes.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	14
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	13
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	13
Savvy .....	12
Status .....	18
Weird.....	16

### SPECIALTIES

Savvy (Intimidation)  
Reflexes (Gun Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	n/a
Escapist .....	7
Fantastic.....	17
Amazing .....	27

## Crooked Cop

As Raymond Chandler once said, “this is the kind of cop who shines his blackjack every night instead of saying his prayers.” He breaks more laws than he enforces, only *serves and protects* himself, and certainly is not one of *New York’s Finest*. He may be on the take, an independent operator, or looking out for a crooked woman he loves. Whatever the reason, he does what he can to frame the characters and get them off his case. Luckily, he is not always that bright, relying on bluster and beatings when a subtle approach may be more suitable.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	9
Mind .....	14
Muscle.....	14
Reflexes .....	14
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	14
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

Savvy (Intimidation)  
Reflexes (Brawling)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	8
Escapist .....	18
Fantastic.....	28
Amazing .....	38



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Cult Leader

He promises spiritual enlightenment, nirvana, emotional fulfillment, or even eternal salvation. All that is required is blind obedience and a simple donation—everything a person owns. Hundreds, even thousands of gullible, rich, poor, and desperate people have fallen into his hands, and received nothing but poverty, madness, and death. The Cult Leader may have genuine psychic powers, but it is more likely that he is just a clever con-man, maybe with a talent for hypnotism or a fondness for mind-altering drugs.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	13
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	13
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	17
Status .....	13
Weird.....	14

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Hypnosis)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	4
Escapist .....	14
Fantastic.....	24
Amazing .....	34

## Deadly Doctor

He seems respectable and well-mannered, a perfect choice for a routine operation or some psychiatric care. The patients who step into his office rarely come out in one piece, however. Perhaps he turns them into zombies, implants their brains into other men's bodies, puts cyanide in their fillings, or turns the women into beauty queens for a chorus line. Who really knows? Until the heroes descend into the Doctor's lair, the killings and experiments continue unabated.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	16
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	12
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	13
Status .....	13
Weird.....	13

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Medicine)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	7
Escapist .....	17
Fantastic.....	27
Amazing .....	37



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Degenerate

This villain runs a filthy racket—prostitution, pornography, or stealing little black birds. Not much of a fighter, perhaps a bit of a wimp, but very well-read and often quite clever, the degenerate is a fine opponent for gritty-level characters. The Degenerate can have a disgusting appearance (extremely fat, glass eye, etc.) or he may be a handsome dandy.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	16
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	13
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	8
Status .....	12
Weird.....	15

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Appraise)  
Reflexes (Gun Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	7
Escapist .....	17
Fantastic.....	27
Amazing .....	37

## Evil Dictator

Like many villains, this character aims for world conquest. Unlike most villains, however, this one has an entire imaginary country at his disposal. With vast wealth, a ferocious army, and legions of scientists developing fantastic super-weapons, the dictator's dreams of world domination may very well become a reality.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	10
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	18
Status .....	19
Weird.....	18

### SPECIALTIES

Savvy (Inspire Others)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	n/a
Escapist .....	9
Fantastic.....	19
Amazing .....	29



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Femme Fatale

She was born poor, but through good looks, cleverness, and a steely determination, she managed to claw her way up in the world. Now she is rich, having married into money, but things are not quite right. She is caught in a loveless marriage or someone knows the secret of her shady past, and is ready to talk. Regardless, with her brains, body, and her itchy trigger-finger, she is deadly, especially to anyone who stands in her way.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	15
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	16
Status .....	14
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

Savvy (Deception)  
Savvy (Seduction)  
Reflexes (Handguns)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	5
Escapist .....	15
Fantastic.....	25
Amazing .....	35

## Mad Scientist

As brilliant as this villain is, no one has ever taken him seriously. Loneliness and obsession have finally driven him mad, just as his experiments have finally borne fruit. Now, armed with the most hideous super-science, the Mad Scientist is ready to unleash revenge on the world that scorned him.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	18
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	10
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	12
Weird.....	16

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Scientist)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	8
Escapist .....	18
Fantastic.....	28
Amazing .....	38



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Mystic

The cult leader is just a phony, but the mystic is the real thing. This little old man has amazing powers and a lousy temper. Cross him and he inflicts terrible curses upon his enemies, transfers their mind into other men's bodies, summon demons to devour them, and perhaps even turn them into frogs. Whether the mystic really has magic powers or is just a clever con-artist is a question only the gamemaster can answer.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	14
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	17
Muscle .....	10
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	10
Weird .....	15

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Occult)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	6
Escapist .....	16
Fantastic .....	26
Amazing .....	36

## Nazi General

Nazi generals in the pulps often spoke in guttural English, filled with German interjections ("Gott ein Himmel!"). As a rule, they are generally not too bright, blindly loyal to a greater (evil) cause, and usually need a mad scientist or sleazy archeologist to tell them what to do.

### ABILITIES

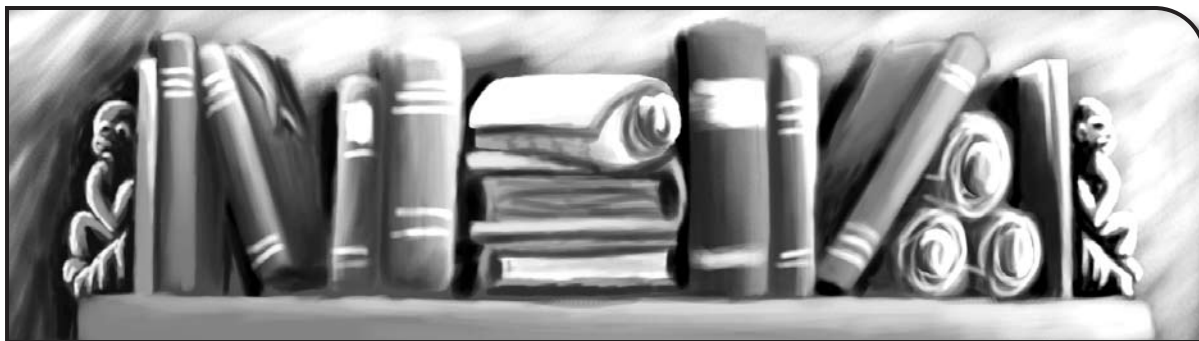
Brains .....	10
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	12
Muscle .....	12
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	14
Status .....	14
Weird .....	10

### SPECIALTIES

Reflexes (Gun Fighting)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty .....	10
Escapist .....	20
Fantastic .....	30
Amazing .....	40





## Oriental Mastermind

Few villains are more terrifying than this one. With cunning intelligence, limitless reserves of cruelty and ruthlessness, an aptitude for exotic poisons and fiendish deathtraps, and possibly even the powers of eastern mysticism, the Oriental Mastermind is a deadly, but honorable foe. He may learn to respect the characters over time, but that does not stop him from trying to kill them.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	18
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	16
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	12
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	14
Weird.....	16

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Medicine)  
Brains [Toxicology]

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	n/a
Escapist .....	7
Fantastic.....	17
Amazing .....	27

## Pirate

It is commonly thought that privateers died out along with the galleon and the flintlock musket, but they did not. Pirates continue to raid ships on the seven seas, but they are smart enough to keep their activities secret. Today, their ships use motors rather than sails, steel rather than wood, and field guns rather than cannon. They usually kill their victims outright, rather than holding them for ransom. They are just like the pirates of the Spanish Main, but more deadly.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	14
Muscle.....	15
Reflexes .....	15
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	12
Weird.....	13

### SPECIALTIES

Reflexes (Watercraft)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	8
Escapist .....	18
Fantastic.....	28
Amazing .....	38



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Robber Baron

This villain is rich beyond words, employing thousands, owning several politicians, and living a life most of us would envy. For the Robber Baron, however, the quest for money and power never ends. This villain's mad ambition should never be underestimated. He does anything, no matter how ruthless, to get what he wants, and is not satisfied until there is nothing left to conquer.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	10
Mind .....	10
Muscle.....	10
Reflexes .....	10
Savvy .....	10
Status .....	18
Weird.....	19

### SPECIALTIES

Brains (Business)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	7
Escapist .....	17
Fantastic.....	27
Amazing .....	37

## Sleazy Investigator

Not all private investigators or archeologists are single-minded pursuers of truth and justice. A lot of them are crooked to the core, and interested only in themselves. They steal from old widows, blackmail anyone with a secret to hide, and bully the meek while they hustle the well-heeled. The characters will despise them, and for very good reasons.

### ABILITIES

Brains .....	10
Luck .....	9
Mind .....	15
Muscle.....	14
Reflexes .....	13
Savvy .....	13
Status .....	10
Weird.....	10

### SPECIALTIES

Savvy (Read People)

### HERO POINTS

Gritty.....	1
Escapist .....	21
Fantastic.....	31
Amazing .....	41



# TWO-FISTED TALES

The pulps contained a lot of villains who were ridiculously eccentric, yet the templates provided here are blandly generic. Should the gamemaster wish to make his villains more memorable, he can use the same kind of outrageous tags as for a pulp hero.

## Habit, Verbal Style, & Appearance Tags

If the gamemaster cannot think of tags of his own, the following tables can be used. Simply select whichever tags stand out, or make a D% roll (roll two dice, using one as the tens digit and the other as the ones digit) and consult the Habits, Verbal Styles, and Appearance Tables, ignoring results that do not fit.

## Villains Motivations

The gamemaster can also use a random method to determine a villain's motivations, although this is only recommended on occasion. Roll two dice and consult the Motivations Tables. Subtract two from the roll for *gritty* games.



## Habits

Result	Description
00 - 02	Plays with a yo-yo, baseball, or similar object incessantly
03 - 05	Fiddles with string, origami paper, or something similar
06 - 10	Expressive with his hands
11 - 16	Always eating
17 - 25	Falling-down drunk
26 - 35	Chain-smokes continuously
36 - 38	Always chewing gum
39 - 43	Always making wisecracks
44 - 47	Always telling jokes
48 - 50	Plays practical jokes
51 - 54	Always smiling
55 - 58	Always frowning
59 - 67	Always complaining
68 - 71	Whistles or hums continuously
72 - 78	Laughs at everything
79 - 85	Serious & humorless
86 - 88	Has disgusting habits
89 - 94	Very friendly & effusive
95 - 99	Quiet & expressionless

## Verbal Style

Result	Description
00 - 02	Stutters when he talks
03 - 06	Talks very loudly
07 - 11	Talks in a hoarse whisper
12 - 17	Uses corny expressions
18 - 21	Wheezes while he talks
22 - 26	Speaks in short, terse sentences
27 - 30	Talks very slowly
31 - 34	Talks very quickly
35 - 37	Speaks in an archaic style
38 - 59	Speaks with a thick accent
60 - 65	Likes to use very long words
66 - 68	Uses a lot of slang
69 - 73	Curses continuously
74 - 77	Talks to himself a lot
78 - 81	Mumbles his words
82 - 85	Crude vocabulary
86 - 89	Has a very high-pitched voice
90 - 91	Has an unusually low-pitched voice
92 - 93	Speaks in verse all the time
94 - 99	Has a showy, grandiloquent manner

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Appearance

Result	Description
00 - 01	Wears very loud clothing
02 - 05	Clothes do not fit
06 - 08	Clothes are out of date
09 - 12	Sloppily dressed
13 - 15	Hair is uncombed
16 - 19	Smells extremely bad
20 - 22	Rotted Teeth
23 - 24	Extremely eccentric dress
25 - 29	A "swell" dresser (very fancy)
30	Has a glass eye, or unusual eye color
31	An albino
32	Unusual hair color
33	Looks like a gorilla
34 - 35	Walks with a limp
36 - 37	Wears an eye-patch
38	Has a hook for a hand
39 - 40	Covered with scars
41 - 42	Covered with pock-marks
43 - 50	Enormously fat
51 - 57	Painfully thin
58 - 64	Outrageously tall
65 - 71	Very short
72 - 74	Baby-faced
75 - 77	Unusually long nose
78 - 80	Usually long moustache or beard
81 - 83	Unusually big ears
84 - 86	Usually big hands
87 - 89	Unusually big feet
90 - 91	Wart-covered nose
92 - 93	Cross-dresser
94 - 95	Unusual skin-color
96 - 99	Perfect appearance—strikingly handsome

## Motivation

Result	Description
0 - 2	<b>Pleasure</b> The villain likes to do horrible things for the pure joy of doing them.
3 - 4	<b>Love/Lust</b> The villain likes to seduce men or women, and then do horrible things to them. He may even be doing these things to impress a loved one, or is forced to do these things in order to protect the people he loves.
5	<b>Knowledge</b> The villain's curiosity is what compels him to do horrible things to people.
6 - 9	<b>Money</b> The villain is in pursuit of a vast fortune, and willing to do rotten things to get it.
10 - 11	<b>Political Power</b> The villain wants to rule the world, or perhaps a more modest (or more grandiose) tract of real estate.
12 - 13	<b>Revenge</b> The villain wants to punish someone (or everyone) for some pain or indignity that he suffered in the past.
14	<b>Fame</b> The villain wants the public to either love or fear him, so he does horrible things to make a name for himself.
15 - 18	<b>Superhuman Power</b> The villain wants to discover the secret of immortality, power to turn invisible, or science to travel through time, or the like.

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## BEASTS AND MONSTERS

Sometimes an adventure calls for mindless violence involving a giant-jawed creature. A few such foes to pit against the pulp heroes are provided below.

### Animals

The table below provides specifications for a few animals, selected because they either make good companions or dangerous foes. Animals have effective mind and reflexes ratings of 14 unless there are mitigating factors that suggest altering them. Animals have brains, savvy, and wealth ratings of 0.

### Swarms

One of the most terrifying group of creatures is the swarm. Alone, each creature in the swarm is a nuisance; but together, the swarm is an unholy terror. When characters are fighting a swarm, the gamemaster should treat it as a single entity for the purposes of combat. The entity's specifications depend on the number of insects attacking a given character, as indicated on the table below.

Rather than using the standard method for determining damage, roll a number of dice as indicated on the table below. For every die rolled that is greater than the victim's resistance rating, one wound is inflicted. Halve this number if the attack results in a close call, but add four (4) if it is a great success.

### Animals

Animal	Move	Resistance	Damage	Size
Ape	7 yards/sec	2	3	Man-sized
Bear	8 yards/sec	3	5	Large
Cat	10 yards/sec	0	1	Small
Cheetah	30 yards/sec	2	4	Man-sized
Cobra	2 yards/sec	0	2D (poison)	Small
Crocodile	5 yards/sec	2	5	Large
Dog (average)	10 yards/sec	0	2	Small
Dolphin	12 yards/sec	2	3	Man-sized
Elephant	8 yards/sec	6	8	Large
Falcon	20 yards/sec	0	2	Small
Hippopotamus	4 yards/sec	6	7	Huge
Horse	12 yards/sec	3	4	Large
Jaguar	10 yards/sec	2	4	Man-sized
Jellyfish	1 yard/sec	0	2D - 2 (poison)	Small
Killer Whale	13 yards/sec	4	6	Huge
Leopard	10 yards/sec	2	4	Man-sized
Lion	10 yards/sec	2	5	Large
Pig	7 yards/sec	1	2	Man-sized
Python	4 yards/sec	2	4	Small
Rhinoceros	15 yards/sec	6	8	Huge
Shark	11 yards/sec	3	6	Large
Tiger	10 yards/sec	3	5	Large
Whale	10 yards/sec	7	8	Huge
Wolf	9 yards/sec	1	3	Small

# TWO-FISTED TALES

Size	Reflexes	Damage
10 creatures or less	20	2
11 - 20	22	3
21 - 50	25	4
51 - 100	30	5
101 - 200	30	6
201 - 500	30	7
501 or more	30	8

## Giant Animals

The most famous giant animal is the big gorilla with a taste for pretty young blondes, but there is no reason why others cannot be unleashed on the streets of fine cities. To make these creatures a threat, assume they have strength proportional to their weights—if a baboon is ten times taller than normal, its weight is one-thousand times greater, and it can also lift and carry one-thousand times as much.

There are two ways to build giant animals—adjust the specifications of the base creature according to the magnitude of its change or use generic specifications for the animal based on its size. As with normal animals, assume

that it has mind and reflexes ratings of 14 unless otherwise changed. Consult the Giant Animals Table.

## Dinosaurs

Pulp games are not complete without a Tyrannosaurus lurking in the jungle. The gamemaster can decide whether these beasts are fast and reasonably intelligent, as we generally believe today, or if they are cold-blooded brutes that cannot leave the swamp without collapsing under their own weight. Assume that dinosaurs, like all animals, have mind and reflexes ratings of 14; and brains, savvy and status ratings of 0. Consult the Dinosaurs Table for a list of common creatures.

## Vampires

The classic Romanian count turns into a bat and seduces women. Like other undead, a vampire does not bleed nor can it be knocked unconscious. It must be struck with an overwhelming blow (ten or more wounds in a single attack) or hacked to death (twenty or more wounds over a span of time). Vampires do have four weaknesses, however:

- A vampire can be killed by impaling its heart with a wooden weapon. This requires a called shot to a *tiny* area, and five or more wounds inflicted by the attack.

## Giant Animals

Height or Length Change	Move	Resistance / Damage	Size
2x normal	x1.5	+5	+1 category
4x normal	x2	+9	+2 categories
10x normal	x3	+15	+3 categories
20x normal	x4.5	+20	+4 categories
50x normal	x6	+26	+5 categories
100x normal	x9	+30	+6 categories

Size	Move	Resistance	Damage
Man-sized	8 yards/sec	1	2 (herbivore); 4 (carnivore)
Large	12 yards/sec	6	7 (herbivore); 10 (carnivore)
Huge	16 yards/sec	11	12 (herbivore); 16 (carnivore)
Giant	24 yards/sec	16	17 (herbivore); 22 (carnivore)
Enormous	36 yards/sec	21	22 (herbivore); 28 (carnivore)



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Dinosaurs

Animal	Move	Resistance	Damage	Size
Ankylosaurus	6 yards/sec	9	10	Large
Brontosaurus	5 yards/sec	13	14	Huge
Deinonychus	13 yards/sec	1	3	Man-Sized
Quetzalcoatlus	12 yards/sec	1	2	Man-Sized
Stegosaurus	4 yards/sec	7	8	Large
Triceratops	10 yards/sec	10	12	Huge
Tyrannosaurus	11 yards/sec	9	13	Huge

- Direct sunlight inflicts one wound per turn (possibly more if exposed to a lot of it).
- If a vampire touches a cross, it also inflicts one wound per turn.
- Holy water is like acid to vampires when thrown at them. It inflicts an amount of damage equal to the roll of one die less two (1D - 2).

Vampires can turn into bats or summon swarms of vampire bats (use the swarm rules for these creatures since individual vampire bats are pretty harmless). Vampires can only summon bats while in human form, and it requires at least a full turn for the bats to arrive (more if they have to travel from greater distances). The use of either power requires two actions.

If a vampire drinks someone's blood on three separate occasions, his victim turns into a vampire. Drinking blood requires two actions, but must continue for six turns to be considered one of those occasions.

Vampires possess a brains rating of 17, as well as the hypnotism mastery, and hypnotic suggestion and hypnotic agent schticks.

## Zombies

Zombies are mindless, animated corpses that eat people. All of their ability ratings are low. Like all undead, however, they are difficult to kill—ten or more wounds from a single attack, or twenty or more wounds from multiple blows are required. Additionally, they are immune to being knocked unconscious and do not suffer from uncontrolled bleeding.

## Skeletons

The skeleton is another form of mindless undead creature, typically animated to protect treasures. They are commonly found armed with swords or other melee weapons. Like other undead, ten or more wounds from a single attack, or twenty or more wounds from multiple blows are required to kill one. Skeletons have an additional advantage—blows that would normally hit and do damage often pass harmlessly through gaps between the bones. The target number to hit a skeleton is two higher than normal. Skeletons are also immune to being knocked unconscious and do not suffer from uncontrolled bleeding.

## Undead Creatures

Creature	Mind	Reflexes	Move	Resistance	Damage	Size
Vampire	16	12	6 yards/sec*	2	4 (claw/bite)	Man-sized
Zombie	10	5	1 yard/sec	0	3 (claw/bite)	Man-sized
Skeleton	10	14	2 yards/sec	0	6 (sword)	Man-sized

\* Double when flying in bat form

# TWO-FISTED TALES



## PULP LOCATIONS

The fiction of the Thirties was filled with stories of adventure in exotic, far-away places. From the deserts of the Sahara and the jungles of the Congo to the ancient cities of the Andes and the steamy ports of the South Pacific, there was a wide world of excitement, danger, and mysteries just waiting to be discovered by a group of bold adventurers.

The gamemaster should make sure that the settings for his stories change from time to time, so that the characters are not always walking down the same mean streets. A number of tables are provided here for inspiration. They produce random results, so the gamemaster can ignore (or re-roll) any results that do not fit the story.

Average characters are less likely to travel greater distances than higher-powered ones. The stories involving higher-powered characters, are more likely to take place in isolated parts of the world. Roll a die and consult the appropriate column on the Setting Table to randomly determine a location.

Note that characters based on certain templates are more likely to travel than others (a gritty-level archeologist, for example, is more likely to travel abroad than an escapist G-man). For characters such as these, use a higher-level (fantastic instead of escapist) when rolling on the Setting Table.

*For example: The characters are gritty-level newspaper reporters, working at the Chicago Daily Bugle. On a roll of 0 to 5, they would be assigned a story in Chicago. A roll of 6 to 7 would send them to a nearby town, possibly a suburb of Chicago, or even a nearby city like Springfield. A roll of 8 would send them elsewhere in the United States, perhaps New England, Los Angeles, or Alaska. A roll of 9 could mean a setting anywhere in the world, from Antarctica to Timbuktu.*

If the result on Setting Table is “anywhere in the world,” make a D% roll and refer to World Table to determine the country or region for the setting.





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Setting

Gritty	Escapist	Fantastic/Amazing	Description
0 - 5	0 - 3	0 - 2	The characters' home town
6 - 7	4 - 5	3 - 4	Close to the characters' home town
8	6 - 7	5 - 6	The heroes' home country ( <i>see appropriate county table</i> )
9	8 - 9	7 - 9	Anywhere in the world ( <i>see the World Table</i> )

### USA Location

Many (if not most) stories take place in the United States, but the country is quite large. Make a D% roll and consult the USA Table for a random state.

### Specific Locations

Sometimes the exact locations do not matter, but the gamemaster still has to be specific, for the purpose of describing the scene, if not for realism. In cases like these, the gamemaster can make a D% roll and refer to the Modern City, Frontier Town, Exotic City, or Wilderness Table for a specific location.

- Most major cities in Western Europe and the United States can be considered *modern*. Most citizens enjoy the conveniences of twentieth-century technology in their homes (heat and running water), and automobiles and public transportation are readily available.
- *Frontier towns* are small, isolated cities or villages with few permanent residents and seedy reputations. Wild West towns fall into this category, but port cities, border towns, and other isolated places may also qualify.
- *Exotic cities* are typically ancient cities outside of the United States or Western Europe that were founded in ancient times, or during the Middle Ages, and never got the chance to fully join the twentieth-century.
- *Wilderness* locations typically depend on the country or region of the story. If the terrain in a country is very diverse (such as it is in the United States), the Wilderness Table can be used.

## World

## Part 1

Result	Americas
00 - 02	USA
03 - 04	Canada
05	Greenland
06 - 08	Mexico
09 - 11	Central America
12	Colombia or Venezuela
13	Peru or Ecuador
14	Chile or Bolivia
15 - 17	Brazil
18	Paraguay or Uruguay
19	Argentina
20 - 21	The Caribbean
	<b>Europe</b>
22	Great Britain
23	Ireland
24	Norway, Sweden, Iceland or Denmark
25	Finland or the Baltic Countries
26	The Netherlands, Belgium or Luxembourg
27 - 28	France
29	Switzerland, Austria, Hungary or Czechoslovakia
30 - 31	Germany
32 - 33	Italy
34	Spain or Andorra
35	Portugal
36	Poland
37	Rumania or Bulgaria
38	Yugoslavia or Albania
39 - 40	Soviet Union
41	Greece or Cyprus
42	Turkey

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## World

## Part 2

Result	Asia
43	Lebanon or Syria
44	Transjordan
45	Iraq
46	Saudi Arabia
47	Yemen or Aden
48	Oman or Kuwait
49 - 50	Palestine
51 - 52	Persia
53 - 55	India
56	Nepal or Tibet
57	Afghanistan or Mongolia
58	Burma
59	Siam or Malaya
60	French Indo-China
61 - 62	Dutch East Indies
63	The Philippines
64 - 66	China
67	Korea or Manchuria
68 - 69	Japan
	<b>Africa</b>
70 - 71	Egypt
72	Anglo-Egyptian Sudan
73 - 74	Ethiopia
75	Eritrea or Somaliland
76	Kenya or Uganda
77	Tanganyika, Portuguese East Africa or Madagascar
78	Algeria
79	Tunisia or Libya
80	Morocco or the Spanish Sahara
81	French Equatorial Africa or Cameroon
82	Congo Free State
83	Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, South-West Africa or Angola
84	Union of South Africa
85	French West Africa
86	Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone or Liberia

## World

## Part 3

Result	Other
87 - 89	Australia
90	New Zealand, New Guinea
91 - 92	Pacific Islands
93 - 94	Antarctica
95 - 99	Pick a location or roll again

## USA

Result	State
00 - 01	Alabama
02 - 03	Arizona
04	Arkansas
05 - 09	California
10 - 11	Colorado
12	Connecticut
13	Delaware
14	Florida
15 - 16	Georgia
17 - 18	Idaho
19 - 22	Illinois
23 - 25	Indiana
26	Iowa
27	Kansas
28	Kentucky
29	Louisiana
30	Maine
31	Maryland
32 - 34	Massachusetts
35 - 38	Michigan
39	Minnesota
40	Mississippi
41 - 43	Missouri
44 - 45	Montana
46	Nebraska
47 - 48	Nevada
49	New Hampshire
50 - 52	New Jersey
53 - 54	New Mexico
55 - 58	New York
59 - 60	North Carolina
61	North Dakota
62 - 65	Ohio
66	Oklahoma
67 - 68	Oregon
69 - 72	Pennsylvania
73	Rhode Island
74	South Carolina
75	South Dakota
76	Tennessee
77 - 81	Texas
82 - 83	Utah
84	Vermont
85	Virginia
86	Washington
87	West Virginia
88 - 89	Wisconsin
90 - 91	Wyoming
92 - 94	The Philippines
95 - 96	Alaska
97	Hawaii
98	Puerto Rico
99	Other US Territory

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## Modern City

Result	Location
00 - 01	Airport
02 - 03	Amusement Park
04 - 05	Apartment Building
06 - 07	Asylum
08 - 09	Bank
10 - 11	Bar / Speakeasy
12	Billiard Parlor
13 - 14	Bridge
15 - 16	Brothel
17 - 18	Business Office
19 - 20	Casino
21 - 22	Cemetery
23 - 24	Church / Cult Temple
25 - 26	Circus
27	Clubhouse
28	Construction Site
29 - 30	Courthouse
31 - 32	Derelict Building
33 - 34	Dock-side
35	Embassy
36 - 37	Factory
38	Garage / Service Station
39 - 40	Government Building
41	Gymnasium
42 - 43	Hospital
44 - 45	Hotel
46 - 47	Library
48 - 49	Mansion
50 - 51	Military Base
52 - 53	Museum / Art Gallery
54 - 55	Newspaper Office
56 - 57	Opium Den
58 - 59	Park
60 - 61	Police Station
62	Post Office
63 - 64	Prison
65 - 66	Racetrack
67 - 68	Radio Station
69 - 70	Research Facility
71 - 72	Restaurant
73	School
74 - 75	Sewers / Storm Drain
76 - 77	Ship / Boat
78 - 79	Stadium/Arena
80 - 81	Store
82 - 83	Street Corner
84 - 85	Tenement
86 - 87	Theatre / Nightclub
88 - 89	Train Station
90 - 91	University / College
92 - 93	Vacant Lot
94 - 95	Warehouse
96 - 97	Zoo
98 - 99	Home of a Character

## Frontier Town

Result	Location
00 - 04	Bank
05 - 06	Boarding House
07 - 10	Boat
11 - 14	Brothel
15 - 19	Cemetery
20 - 21	Church
22 - 23	Clubhouse
24 - 28	Farm
29 - 33	Jail
34 - 37	Lighthouse
38 - 40	Mansion
41 - 44	Mine
45 - 47	Newspaper Office
48 - 51	Pool Hall
52 - 55	Post Office
56 - 64	Ranch
65 - 73	Saloon
74 - 75	School
76 - 79	Small House
80 - 83	Store
84 - 86	Town Hall
87 - 91	Train
92 - 99	Wilderness

## Wilderness

Result	Location
00 - 05	Abandoned City
06 - 07	Castle
08 - 11	Cave
12 - 19	Desert
20 - 24	Forest
25 - 26	Hermit's Home
27 - 31	Island
32 - 41	Jungle
42 - 44	Mountain Valley
45 - 49	Mountaintop
50 - 53	Mysterious Ruins
54 - 59	Native Village
60 - 64	Ocean
65 - 67	Plantation
68 - 71	River
72 - 76	Shipwreck
77 - 81	Swamp
82 - 86	Temple
87 - 91	Tomb
92 - 95	Tundra
96 - 97	Tunnels
98 - 99	Volcano

## Exotic City

Result	Location
00 - 01	Barracks
02 - 08	Bazaar
09 - 11	Brothel
12 - 15	Cemetery
16 - 17	Clubhouse / Guild Hall
18 - 19	Craft Shop
20 - 23	Dock-side
24 - 27	Drug Den
28 - 30	Dungeon
31 - 34	Gambling Den
35 - 37	Gardens
38 - 39	Hospital
40 - 43	Madhouse
44 - 47	Mansion
48 - 49	Monument
50 - 53	Palace
54 - 56	Public Bath / Sauna
57 - 59	Public Square
60 - 62	Restaurant
63 - 67	Ruin
68 - 76	Street
77 - 81	Tavern / Coffee Shop
82 - 87	Temple
88 - 92	Tenements
93 - 94	Theater
95 - 97	University / School
98 - 99	Warehouse / Silo

# TWO-FISTED TALES



## MACGUFFINS

Alfred Hitchcock invented the term “MacGuffin” as something for which all of the characters want badly enough to kill; but as far as the story is concerned, it does not matter what the object is. A MacGuffin can be a ceremonial African mask, ancient book of magic, briefcase full of plutonium, truckload of stolen bank-notes, or a priceless string of emeralds. If it is valuable to a lot of people, featured prominently in the story, and characters spend a lot of time chasing after it, it is a MacGuffin.

A number of later films got away without even describing their MacGuffins. This is fine for a movie, but it does really work in a roleplaying game—the players need something tangible in order to form a connection. The whole point of a MacGuffin, however, is that the details of the item do not matter. For that reason, if a gamemaster is stretched for time or at a loss, he can use the following tables to determine the specifics of the item randomly. Simply make a D% roll and consult the General MacGuffin Table, then rolling again on the table specified by the result.

Once a MacGuffin is chosen, the reason for its value must be decided. There are four possible reasons why an item might be valuable:

- The item is magical or it has rare chemical properties—a sword can kill an otherwise invulnerable monster, a helmet can control the weather, or a rare form of rock can counteract gravity.
- The MacGuffin can solve a puzzle or prove a theory—a map to priceless treasure is found inside of a suit of armor, dinosaur bones full of ancient bullet holes prove the existence of time travelers from the far future, or an old scroll includes Plato’s Lost Books of Atlantis.
- The item has historical or sentimental value—Julius Caesar’s ring appears in an auction, the bones of Charlemagne are found in an ancient dig, or the MacGuffin is an old family heirloom.
- The item is valuable because of what it is—gold, silver, rubies, pearls, old coins, rare stamps; items that are valuable



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because they are rare, look pretty, or are considered valuable by convention.

To determine why an item is valuable, roll two dice (2D) and consult the MacGuffin Value Table if applicable. Subtract one from the roll for an escapist story and two for a fantastic or amazing story.

Once the item has been valued, the rest of the details required to insert it into the story are left to the imagination.

## MacGuffin: Weapons

Result	Item
00 - 01	Arrow
02 - 07	Axe
08 - 15	Bow
16 - 17	Crossbow
18 - 33	Dagger
34 - 35	Flail
36 - 41	Javelin
42 - 47	Mace
48 - 49	Morning Star
50 - 51	Pick
52	Sling
53 - 64	Spear
65 - 84	Sword or Scimitar
85 - 86	Trident
87	Net
88	Throwing Stick
89 - 94	War Club
95 - 99	Other

## General MacGuffin

Result	Item
00 - 03	<u>Armor</u>
04 - 11	<u>Weapon</u>
12 - 19	<u>Artwork</u>
20 - 39	<u>Jewelry / Gemstone</u>
40 - 41	<u>Furnishings</u>
42 - 43	<u>Human Remains</u>
44 - 45	<u>Animal Remains</u>
46 - 47	Rare Animal
48 - 49	Rare Plants or Potions
50 - 61	<u>Manuscript</u>
62 - 73	Map
74 - 85	Coins or Other Collectibles
86 - 97	Cash
98 - 99	Other

## MacGuffin: Armor

Result	Item
00 - 09	Breastplate
10 - 19	Chain Mail
20 - 24	Gauntlet or Bracers
25 - 44	Helmet
45 - 49	Leather Armor
50 - 69	Complete Suit of Plate Armor
70 - 89	Shield
90 - 99	Other Armor

## MacGuffin: Jewelry/Gemstone

Result	Item
00 - 05	Amulet or Periapt
06 - 11	Bracelet
12 - 17	Brooch
18 - 23	Crown
24 - 29	Earrings
30 - 35	Girdle
36 - 41	Mask
42 - 47	Medallion
48 - 53	Necklace
54 - 59	Pendant
60 - 65	Ring
66 - 71	Scepter
72 - 77	Seal
78 - 83	Staff
84 - 89	Talisman
90 - 95	Tiara
96 - 99	Other

## MacGuffin: Artwork / Manuscript

Result	Item	Result	Item
00 - 09	Drawing	00 - 44	Book
10 - 34	Painting	45 - 49	Clay Tablet
15 - 44	Photograph	50 - 74	Loose Pages
45 - 54	Relief	75 - 84	Scroll
55 - 79	Statue	85 - 94	Stone Tablet
80 - 89	Tapestry	95 - 99	Other
90 - 99	Other		

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## MacGuffin: Furnishings

Result	Item
00 - 03	Bed
04 - 07	Bowl
08 - 11	Cabinet
12 - 15	Chest
16 - 23	Cup or Goblet
24 - 27	Desk
28 - 35	Mirror
36 - 43	Musical Instrument
44 - 45	Plate
46 - 53	Rug
54 - 61	Shrine or Altar
62 - 63	Silverware
64 - 65	Stool
66 - 69	Table
70 - 73	Throne or Chair
74 - 81	Vase or Jug
82 - 85	Wardrobe
86 - 99	Other

## MacGuffin: Human Remains

Result	Item
00 - 14	Ashes
15 - 19	Blood or Vital Organs
20 - 29	Clothing
30 - 34	Death Mask
35 - 44	Skull
45 - 54	Hand or Other Body Part
55 - 69	Mummified or Preserved Body
70 - 84	Skeleton or Decomposed Remains
85 - 99	Other

## MacGuffin: Animal Remains

Result	Item
00 - 29	Bones
30 - 39	Eggs
40 - 49	Footprints
50 - 59	Preserved Remains
60 - 69	Stuffed Remains
70 - 84	Skin or Hide
85 - 99	Other

## MacGuffin Value

Item	Magical/Chemical Properties	Solves a Puzzle Proves a Theory	Historical/Sentimental Value	Other
Armor	2 - 4	5	6 - 14	15 - 20
Weapon	2 - 5	6	7 - 14	15 - 20
Artwork	2	3 - 5	6 - 12	13 - 20
Jewelry / Gemstone	2 - 3	4 - 5	6 - 12	13 - 20
Furnishings	2	3 - 4	5 - 11	12 - 20
Human Remains	2	3 - 6	7 - 18	19 - 20
Animal Remains	2 - 3	3 - 9	10 - 12	13 - 20
Rare Animal	2	3 - 10	11	12 - 20
Rare Substance	2 - 6	7 - 9	10 - 11	12 - 20
Manuscript	2 - 5	6 - 8	9 - 16	17 - 20
Map	2	3 - 9	10 - 17	18 - 20
Coins / Collectibles	2	3 - 4	5 - 7	8 - 20
Cash	2	3	4	5 - 20
Other	2	3	4	5 - 20



## STORYTELLING

### Keeping Track of Time

During the game, the gamemaster may wish to track the timing of actions very carefully. There are two reasons for doing so. First, if the characters must solve a mystery, a careful record of events and timetables can help the players evaluate a suspect's alibi.

Secondly, if the characters are facing any kind of time pressure, such as when their girlfriends have been kidnapped or if a bomb is about to detonate, a careful record of the time can contribute to the suspense. This technique was commonly used in the *Gray Seal* stories and the *Spider* novels to build suspense and tension.

When characters face real danger and intense time-pressure, a kitchen timer can be used to keep track of time. For example, if a bomb is set to explode in ten minutes, the players see the time counting down from ten minute on the kitchen timer. They are acutely aware of the pressure they are facing. If the characters are in a really tight spot, game time can move

even more slowly than real time—the timer can have twice, three times, or even five times as many minutes than the actual story. Players can always stop the clock by playing any card (see pages 20 and 21).

The more dramatic an event is, or the greater the threat, the slower the pace of the story should be. Thus, when a character is fighting a powerful opponent to the death, the pacing of the story should be somewhat slowed. If a character is facing certain death, the pace should crawl—a minute in the trap may take as much as five minutes of real time. This gives players more time to think when their characters are in danger, and acts as a way to increase suspense.

### Ending the Game

The gamemaster should leave his audience hungry for more. Cliffhangers are one way of doing this—the characters are about to face certain death, be gunned down by a firing squad, drive their car over a cliff, or be

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dropped in a giant vat of acid. How do they survive? A game session can end before the players discover the outcome, leaving them waiting for next-week's episode. Not only does a cliffhanger add to the excitement, it also gives the players an entire week to think of ways to save their characters.

Not every game should end in a cliffhanger, however. Story-arcs should eventually come to a close, and the players should get a chance to relax and feel good about saving the world yet again. A good game quote ends a story arc nicely. The gamemaster can award a roleplaying bonus challenge to the player who comes up with the best quote at the end of a story arc.

## Description

Many pulp writers had a regrettable fondness for melodrama and purple prose, while others followed the example of Ernest Hemingway and Dashiell Hammett. They used spare, simple sentences, shorn of unnecessary description. It was a style that was well-suited to the pulps, in which the emphasis was on quickly paced, furious action. The gamemaster should follow this example, by describing the settings as briefly and as simply as possible.

For example, the characters are walking to the South Pole to investigate rumors of an alien base. The gamemaster wants to emphasize how deadly cold it is. One method is to just tell them the temperature every morning: "Your thermometer says it is -50°F this morning. That's a little warmer than yesterday, but the wind is a lot more fierce." Players should know that -50° F is bone chilling, and the strong wind makes it even worse.

The cold can also seem more real by describing how it affects their characters. Their toes and fingers go numb, a sign of encroaching frostbite; bare skin sticks to metal surfaces; on a sunny day, they must worry about snow-blindness; or their teeth may crack if they drink something hot. Fatigue from the cold should be tracked (see page 125); as the characters take fatigue, their players can appreciate how deadly the environment is.

## Sound Effects and Music

Another way to add atmosphere is to use sound effects during a game. Compact discs (or MP3/WAV files) containing background noises

work well when played during a gaming session. It is not hard for players to imagine a cold wind if the stereo is howling and whooshing in the background. The volume should be kept relatively low and subtle for background sounds, however. Playing these sounds in the background is one thing, but attempting to simulate every sound in the game is probably more trouble than it is worth.

While sound effects have their place in a game, background music is not recommended, except at the beginning and end of the game. This technique was actually practiced in old-time radio shows. Playing music during the session is also helpful when it can be heard as part of the story. Avoid "mood" music since the mood can change frequently during play.

Part of the job as the gamemaster is to gauge the mood of the players. If they are bored, it is time to increase the action. If they are frustrated, give them some incentive. Music can sometimes distort a gamemaster's judgement in this respect—the pacing of the music can suggest more excitement in the game than is actually present. In the end, the gamemaster should trust his personal judgement and experience when describing events and telling the story.

## MYSTERIES AND DANGERS

Mystery and danger are the two magic ingredients for keeping a player's interest. The character should be pitted against strange occurrences, and threats to his mind, body, or spirit. This chapter discusses a few sources for both of these ingredients.

### The Simple Art of Murder

The Twenties and Thirties are regarded today as "the golden age of mysteries," and the pulps played an important part. Not only were the detective pulps a genre unto themselves, but strange and bizarre murders popped up in just about every kind of pulp story, from westerns to science-fiction. Murder mysteries can be a great addition to any game.

*Classic Golden Age* mysteries followed fairly rigid conventions, and these stories tended to unfold in similar ways. The stereotypical Golden Age plot is as follows:





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- A dead body is found, preferably in an isolated place, such as a country manor or train car.
- There are several suspects, but the police conduct a lousy investigation and find no important clues.
- The master detective conducts his own investigation. After countless interviews and searches for evidence, the detective figures out who did it, but keeps the identity of the perpetrator to himself.
- All of the suspects are gathered, and the detective explains why each suspect could not or did not commit the crime in turn.
- The great detective finally points out the killer, explaining how and why he committed the crime. The police arrest the suspect and everyone goes home.

Few mysteries follow this blueprint to the letter, and by the mid-Thirties, stories like these were becoming old-fashioned. By then, the “hard-boiled school” had begun to break all of these conventions in a number of key ways:

- Bodies could be found anywhere, from the bottom of a lake to the middle of an alleyway.
- There was no clear list of suspects. In fact, at first, there may not be any suspects to be found. The detective must work very hard to find people with a reason to kill the victim, or to find those who knew what the victim was doing.
- The police were not incompetent, but other reasons kept them from solving the mysteries. In vigilante stories, red tape and legal loopholes hampered the police (an outsider, not bound by such rules and regulations, had a better chance of delivering justice). In other stories, the police were brutal and corrupt—they could solve a mystery, but they did not care enough to do so.
- The detective does more than just collect clues—he stirs the pot, confronting each suspect, demanding to know their angle, and threatening to get straight answers. Sometimes he comes across as a friend or an ally, but other times as an enemy, to the point that no one knows where his true loyalties lie.

- The detective does not gather all of his suspects together. He confronts the killer himself, tells the police what he knows, or informs his client of the truth, and walks away from the case.

While the hard-boiled stories broke a number of Golden Age conventions, they also introduced plenty of clichés of their own—the curvy secretary, run-down office, mysterious blonde clients, confrontations with the police, and the bottle of hooch in the detective’s desk drawer.

Rather than substitute one set of clichés for another, the gamemaster should borrow whichever conventions he likes from either type of story, and develop a synthesis of his own. In the end, that is the only way to keep the players from feeling that they have seen all this before.

## Method, Opportunity, and Motive

Three questions have to be answered before the killer can be identified:

- How was the victim killed?
- When did the killer have the opportunity to kill the victim?
- What was the motive for killing the victim?

Methods of killing are the easiest to identify. Victims can be killed with guns, knives, or simply bare hands; they can be poisoned, strangled, drowned, or asphyxiated; or they can be burned alive, buried alive, or devoured by wild animals. While the possibilities are endless, it is usually pretty obvious how a victim was killed. If not, an autopsy can usually tell the characters everything they need to know. It is only in really fiendish and bizarre murders that the method can be hard to decipher.

Anyone who is capable of committing the murder must have had the opportunity to do so. This means that the killer had to be close enough to the victim at the time of the murder to kill him. Anyone without an ironclad alibi might have had the opportunity to commit the crime.

Motive can be a lot harder to establish. Greed is probably the most common motive in fiction, and also in real-life. The victim can be killed for the money in his wallet, although that is a bit too dull and mundane

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for a pulp mystery. Instead he can be killed for the insurance money, stolen bank loot, priceless Aztec artifact or a map to buried treasure. Other forms of gain are also possible motives—a politician may have his rival killed to ensure his own re-election or a nurse could kill her employer's wife to marry him and inherit his millions.

Revenge makes another possible motive, one with which the characters might sympathize—a woman may kill the man who murdered her father or a thief kills the guy who ran off with the loot from a bank heist.

Conviction is yet another possibility, slightly more sinister in motive, but common in political assassinations—the killer may feel that the victim is such a despicable or dangerous person that he needs to be eliminated. Terrorists and madmen typically kill for notoriety—by killing a famous figure they can draw attention to their cause, or just get their names in the paper.

Sometimes, people are killed out of a sense of self-preservation. Killing to protect someone else from imminent, mortal danger is justifiable homicide. It does not necessarily have to be justified, however, for the killer to act in this way. For example, a wealthy woman could kill a blackmailer who was about to expose her shady past; a businessman may kill his lover after she threatened to tell his wife about their affair; a kidnapper can eliminate the only witness to his crime; or a group of thieves may turn on each other out of fear of being betrayed.

Other possible motives exist, such as jealousy (a down-on-his-luck musician murders a popular band-leader) and lust (a man kills his wife to marry his mistress). Some particularly fiendish criminals might use suspicious deaths to distract the investigators from their true crimes. Finally, madmen often kill for the love of it. In any case, the motive probably is not known until the crime is already solved.

## Hiding Clues in Plain Sight

If the players are going to have any chance at solving a mystery, they should be given all the necessary clues. The mystery should be designed so that if all the clues are presented to a player, he should be able to identify the killer. The clues should be such that a player does not have to a genius, so obscure knowledge

of esoteric subjects should be omitted, unless provided with knowledge that his character might know. An attentive player with a fairly sharp mind and high-school education should be given a reasonable chance to solve the mystery.

While most good mysteries follow this concept, many are very hard to solve. Authors use a number of tools to hide clues from the reader:

- Clues can be hidden among a lot of insignificant details. For example, describing the contents of a professor's desk drawer—among the papers, pencils, slide-rules, inkwells, and spare change is a single significant clue, which the players are apt to miss.
- A writer can distract his reader's attention from the clue. In a gaming context, the characters may be attacked by a group of gangsters right after the clue is discovered (or one of them is kidnapped, dragged off to jail by the police, or poisoned by cobra venom). Anything exciting or dangerous can distract the players, so they forget about a clue.
- The author may present his readers with a clue that only has its significance disclosed long after being forgotten. Cigarettes are found at a crime scene, for example, but it takes several hours for the characters to discover that the victim never smoked.

While these techniques are popular staples in mystery stories, the gamemaster may not wish to hide clues from his players. The master detective eventually solves the mystery, and even if the reader is stumped, he is eventually told who the killer is. In a game, however, the players, by way of their characters, are the master detectives. If they cannot finger the killer, nobody will, and the game ends in frustration.

The gamemaster may therefore decide to present clues straightforwardly, without obfuscation. Players can follow each clue until the identity of the killer becomes obvious. This takes some of the intellectual challenge out of the mystery, so the gamemaster should provide other challenges (such as combat) to keep the players entertained.



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One final option is for the gamemaster to keep certain clues in reserve. These clues are not necessary to solve the crime, but if the players knew about them, the mystery could be easily solved. If the players get stumped, the gamemaster can always present this clue to his players.

## The Locked-Room Mystery

Locked-rooms are very popular gimmicks in mystery stories. In fact, the very first detective story, *Poe's Murders in the Rue Morgue*, was of this sort. In this kind of story, a body is found in a room that is locked from the inside, with no apparent way for a killer to have entered or exited the room. So how was the murder committed?

All sorts of variations on this theme are possible—a body can be found in a snow-bank without any footsteps leading to or from the corpse; a man could be killed while flying an autogyro; or a magician locks himself in a cage that is buried underground, and he is found dead with a dagger in his back when excavated. As long as there is no clear way for the killer to get near or flee the victim, the mystery is considered a variant of the locked-room.

So how does a villain kill a man in a locked room? John Dickson Carr, a master of the field, explained how to solve these crimes in *The Hollow Man*. If a person has been murdered in a locked room, there are a number of possible explanations:

- The victim committed suicide, or was killed in an accident, only appearing as a murder. For example, the victim stabbed himself with an icicle, which then melted in the well-heated room. A suicide requires the gamemaster to explain why the victim tried to make it look like a murder.
- The fatal blow was inflicted before the victim entered and locked himself inside the chamber. The easiest way to do this is by poisoning the victim, although this makes it easy to solve the crime with an autopsy. Fatal wounds that cause hemorrhaging or similar symptoms can result delayed results, thereby killing the victim well-past any sort of conflict.
- The victim was alive when the room was opened, yet pronounced dead, and killed

afterwards. Drugs might have placed the victim in suspended animation, and after the room was opened, the killer used conventional means to finish the job.

- A mechanical device, placed in the room beforehand, killed the victim.
- While no human could have entered the room, it would have been possible for an animal to do so.
- The killer entered the room, killed the victim and left, making it appear as if the room was securely locked from the inside. One obvious way to do this is to enter from a secret passageway, although mystery fans consider this to be cheating, unless there is a good reason for the building to have secret passageways.
- A villain used magic or weird science to get in the room and kill the victim. Most mystery fans probably consider this to be an unfair solution, but players might not mind, especially if they know which villains have these powers.

As the gamemaster, it is likely to be more difficult to rationalize why a killer went through all the trouble to murder rather than how. In a classic murder story, the answer is simple—the killer wanted to commit the *perfect crime*, and murdering a man in a locked room was a good exhibition of his skill or increasing his chances of getting away with it. In a more gritty, *hard-boiled* setting, a better answer is required—as Raymond Chandler put it, “murder is committed for reasons, not just to supply a corpse.”

## Missing Person or Murder?

While most mysteries start with a corpse, it is not a necessary beginning. The characters may be asked to find a missing person, whether that is someone's wife, daughter, or business partner. They eventually find a corpse in their investigation; it can be the missing person or someone allegedly murdered by the missing person. The case can quickly turn into a murder investigation.

If a missing person was murdered, the gamemaster must explain why the body has not been found. A few grisly possibilities are:

- The body was left in the wilderness.
- The body was dumped in a river, lake, or ocean.

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- The body was buried.
- The body was tossed in with other corpses, like at the morgue or in a battlefield, where a dead body does not attract much attention.
- The body was completely destroyed—it was incinerated, burned with acid, or placed in a wood-chipper.
- The body was hidden in a construction site, dumped into concrete.
- The victim was locked in a sealed chamber, such as a tomb, and left to die.

These are just a few possibilities. The gamemaster is free to use his imagination to invent other options.

One interesting possibility is that the missing person can be murdered and the body hidden, while the killer disguises himself as his victim. The disguised killer can make brief appearances here and there, so that few people suspect any foul-play. If other dead bodies are discovered, the missing person is the first suspect, rather than the real killer. The killer can also say that he saw the victim briefly, to make people believe that the missing person is still alive.

On the other hand, the missing person may be alive, disguise, or in hiding. When people start dying, it is usually to keep the missing person from being found.

## The Character as Suspect

One easy way to introduce mystery and danger into an story is to turn one of the player characters into a murder suspect. This situation was a staple of the pulps, as the hero would be knocked unconscious and awaken next to a dead body with blood on his shirt and a gun in his hand. The hero is forced to solve the murder to prove his innocence, and keep himself out of the gas chamber. There is no reason why the gamemaster cannot subject players to the same deadly experience.

There are a few ways to frame a character for a murder—he can be drugged or knocked out, and left next to the dead body; incriminating evidence can be planted on him; and the character can even be suspected of killing someone who threatened or attacked his family.

One interesting twist is if the other players are not quite sure about their comrade's

innocence. He may have been drugged or hypnotized, and have no recollection of the incident. Even worse is if the suspect fought with the victim earlier, and left him with a mortal wound (or that is what everyone believes). Any of these options offer great opportunities for roleplaying, as the character's sense of guilt or helplessness weighs heavily upon him.

## Why are the Characters Involved?

Getting the characters involved in a story is always a challenge; it can be even more of a challenge in a murder mystery. After all, in the real world, when someone is murdered, people do not call the local private-eye or a reporter from the city paper. It is even more unlikely to call an archeologist, daredevil pilot, or little old lady who likes to solve crimes. People call the cops—the only ones trained and qualified to investigate a murder. This was just as true in the Thirties as it is today.

Assuming that the characters are not federal agents who are supposed to be looking in to such things, why would a group of people investigate a killing? Some suggestions have already been offered—they may wish to clear the good name of a friend (or themselves), be asked to investigate other matters and get caught up in the murder case, or get involved as a personal favor to the suspect's family. If the characters are a group of "super-sleuths" that enjoy a good working relationship with the police, they may even be asked to join the investigation. Even more unusual is if a "Master Criminals" sends clues to the characters, pulling them directly into the investigation.

## CIPHERS AND CODES

Pulp villains loved to send messages to their underlings (and heroes) disguised with all manner of ciphers and codes. The gamemaster can provide a lot of challenging fun for his players with a villain's secret code, and ask them to decipher it.

Ciphers tend to be easier to break. There are two kinds of ciphers—substitution ciphers and transposition ciphers. Simple substitution ciphers are probably the easiest of all, as each letter is replaced with another letter, numeral, symbol, or even a picture. For example:



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DQMBWMBWTWKMGQRO

...or...

ГЦ/Х /Х И З/ВУОК

When translated, both of these messages are the same—THIS IS A CIPHER. In the first example, every T has been replaced with a D, every H with a Q, every I with an M, every S with a B, every space with a W and so on. The second cipher works in a similar fashion, although symbols replace the letters (and the spaces have been retained).

Long substitution ciphers can be easily analyzed through the use of a frequency table. The code-breaker counts the number of times each digit appears in a message. Digits that appear most often are likely to replace for the most commonly used letters in the English language—E, followed by A, R, T and S.

In a transposition cipher, letters are jumbled in a systematic fashion. Skytales are one form of transposition cipher. At first glance, a skytale is a long, horizontal string of gibberish letters, like this:

MRIKUUFIVGDLSELNRONSHGVEHFGTJKJHHGVJYTDQFMLNILUEGKUSGC

This message can be read if all but every-fourth letter is skipped—KILL SETH JONES. Traditionally, skytales were deciphered by wrapping the message around a stick of a specified width.

Another type of transposition cipher is the grille. The recipient is given a block of letters, like this:

GHGOFRTKOJWRTHFEKFDAAADRTNK  
TADFKETKESDFGCDGOTDFUFTRAA  
DHATHSFOSUSDANSXDQCLLAASRSS

The recipient can decipher the message by covering it with a piece of metal or cardboard, punctured at irregular intervals so that the proper letters are seen, as in this example:

G■O■T■O■■■TH■E■■■B■A■■■NK  
T■K■■■E■■■■■■■■O■■■UT■■■A  
■■■TH■■O■US■AN■D■DO■LL■■■RS

In another form of cipher, the recipient is supposed to pick out certain letters from ordinary words, and string them together to read the message. For example, the recipient could receive a message that reads:

TO HELP INDIGENTS, SERVE IN SALVATION ARMY CENTERS. IF POSSIBLE, HELP EACH RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD ACHIEVE SALVATION ARMY FUND-RAISING TARGETS.

By taking the first letter in each word, one can decipher the meaning—THIS IS A CIPHER. If the original message makes sense, interlopers might not suspect that it is really a cipher.

Some villains may decide to use codes instead of ciphers. Codes replace words in a message with something else, usually numbers or other words. For example:

USE GREENHORN IN YOUR MEETING WITH GHOSTMAN.

The recipient would have to be told what words GREENHORN and GHOSTMAN replaced (perhaps CYANIDE and PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT), or the recipient would need a code-book to translate each word. Codes are very hard to break unless one understands the context of each message—if the intercepting party knew that the agent was going to meet Roosevelt, they could guess that GHOSTMAN referred to the President; once the President was poisoned, they could probably guess that GREENHORN means POISON or CYANIDE. Unfortunately, this could not possibly be known until after the fact—something that would not do the President much good. If they intercepted a number of messages, however, they might be able to figure this out much earlier.

One small disadvantage to codes is that they require a code-book to decipher, and this code-book can easily fall into enemy hands. One variant that avoids this problem, while introducing others, is the book-code. Book-codes replace individual words with page AND word numbers, as in this example:

GO TO 96-2-1 AND 727-1-27 THE 611-1-8.

The recipient knows that the numbers refer to page, column, and word numbers in a dictionary (in this case, Webster's New World Dictionary, Second Edition). Because of this, it is not too hard for him to decode the message:

GO TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE AND STAB THE QUEEN.

The advantage of this system is that the code-book, a dictionary in this case, can escape notice if the agent is captured. The same combination of letters always translate to the same words, so their meaning can eventually be deciphered based on their context.

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Villains may decide to mix these methods, perhaps combining ciphers and codes to make messages especially difficult to crack. For example:

CGDGDG KGUDHR MPQXWRWDG RZQKHA

Once deciphered, the message says:

BANANA MAGNET CHRISTIAN TURKEY

This is now a code that requires more work to translate. Such complicated coding and ciphering schemes may be realistic, but they may not be appropriate for a game. After all, a code that would take State Department experts months to crack is not going to be broken by the players in the course of an afternoon. The gamemaster needs to decide how to design ciphers and codes that can challenge his players, without being so difficult that they never get a chance to break them.

## DEATHTRAPS

Our heroes are dropped into a sealed metal chamber. The room fills with gas and the walls start closing in on them. Can our heroes survive this deadly trap? Stay tuned for the next thrilling episode...

Deathtraps like these were common in the pulps, and even more common in the *cliffhanger* movie serials of the era. The gamemaster should feel free to use them in stories whenever a bit of danger or excitement is needed. Before rushing to fill tombs and mad-scientist lairs with all sorts of fiendish and deadly traps, however, a basic understanding is required of the differences between traps found in fantasy roleplaying games and those used in cliffhanger and pulp stories.

There are two kinds of deathtraps—quick and slow. The former type of deathtrap, common in the *dungeon* adventures of fantasy roleplaying, should be familiar to most readers. These tend to be fairly simple, meant to kill or injure an intruder as quickly as possible.

Quick traps are typically the easiest to survive. In most cases, it should be obvious how to survive one—the character has to leap out of the way of the falling rocks, dodge the arrows, jump over the pit, or hold his breath as long as possible. The character can survive these hazards if a successful reflexes roll is made with a target number of about 10. A few examples are presented below:

- An arrow is fired at the victim, inflicting 4 points of damage.
- A blast of fire is projected at a character, inflicting 4 points of damage every second until the fire is extinguished.
- A sharp pendulum slides out from the wall, slashing at a character, doing 8 points of damage.
- A huge rock drops from the ceiling, crushing the victim for an amount of damage equal to the roll of two dice (2D).
- Two walls slam together, flattening the victim, and inflicting an amount of damage equal to the roll of three dice (3D).
- A trap door opens below a victim's feet, dropping him twenty feet onto spikes on the floor, and inflicting 5 points of damage.
- A trap door opens below the victim's feet, dropping him into a vat of acid, which inflicts 3 points of damage per second.
- A room is filled with cyanide gas, instantly poisoning the victim, and inflicting an amount of damage equal to the roll of two dice (2D) over a five-second period.
- The victim is thrown into something unpleasant—the vacuum of space, a wall covered with spikes, etc.

Slow deathtraps were far more common in the pulps and the movie serials, and in many ways, they are much more fun for the players. In a slow deathtrap, the victim is stuck in a deadly situation that eventually kills him, but does so slowly and painfully. Here are some examples:

- The victim is tied to a laboratory table, while a death-ray blast slowly inches towards him. The death ray inflicts 12 points of damage if it ever hits the character.
- A character is trapped in a corner, while a giant pendulum swings around in an arc, getting closer and closer to the character with every revolution. The pendulum inflicts 8 points of damage if it hits the character.
- The ceiling, covered with spikes, is slowly dropping towards the victim, and eventually it stabs and crushes him, doing 8 points of damage.



# TWO-FISTED TALES

- The characters are trapped in a room and the walls are slowly moving together. They eventually crush the victims, inflicting an amount of damage equal to the roll of three dice (3D).
- The characters are locked in a room and the floor is gradually retracting, eventually leaving them with nothing on which to stand, causing them to fall into the alligator-filled pool below.
- The victim is trapped in a cage that is being lowered into a river of lava. The victim suffers 8 points of damage every second while submerged in the lava.
- A locked room is filling with water that eventually drowns the characters inside (use the drowning rules on page 122).
- Air is slowly being sucked out of a locked room, suffocating the victims inside. Characters receive 1 point of damage every five minutes.
- A “monster” is released into the locked room, and the victim has to fight the monster to survive.
- The characters are trapped in an environment of extreme cold, and without food or water. They slowly die of exposure, receiving 1 point of damage every twenty minutes.

As evident of these examples, slow traps are similar to quick traps in many ways; the quick trap just kills the victim faster. The most important difference is that characters need different abilities to survive slow traps than they do to survive quick traps. A slow trap requires more than a single reflexes roll to survive—it takes a fair amount of ingenuity and quick thinking.

The simplest and most obvious solution should almost never work in a slow death trap. For example, characters should not be able to prevent the walls from caving in simply by putting a metal pole between them. The pole should break, and the characters would need to look for another solution. At the same time, and in almost all cases, characters should be able to find a way out of the trap. There are a number of approaches a gamemaster can take to ensure the survival of the characters, without making things too easy for them:

- Players can devise several ways out of the deathtrap, but the first two never work.

It is the third idea that does the trick. If this technique is used too often, however, the players can catch on to it. To counter this, mix it up, by allowing them to escape on the first or second attempt if they find a really clever solution. The story may even call for more than three attempts if none of their efforts seem too convincing.

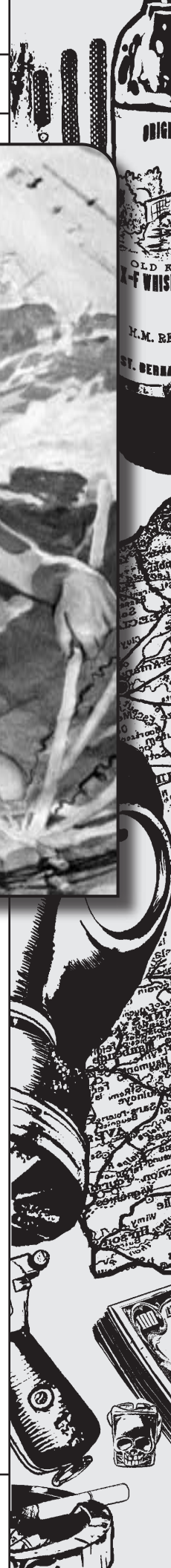
- The characters can face two dangers at once—the room fills up with water while the walls are collapsing. It may be possible that if the characters keep their cool and find a way to survive just a little longer than expected, the two dangers somehow negate each other. For example, the water-pressure becomes so great in the rapidly-shrinking room that if the characters hold their breath for a long enough time, the water-pressure forces the walls open.
- The session can end on a cliffhanger, before the characters are killed by the deathtrap. This gives the players more time to devise a way out of the trap.
- If the players are really stumped, they can be told how to escape in exchange for expending cards or even hero points.
- The last resort should be to have an ally come to their rescue in the nick of time. This is an easy out for the characters, so it should not be employed too often.

In any case, the gamemaster should always be able to think of a way out of his own deathtraps. If it does not seem possible for the characters to survive, it is not likely for the players to find a solution.

This points to the most important difference between deathtraps in *Two-Fisted Tales* and those in most fantasy roleplaying games. Many fantasy traps are designed to quickly kill or maim characters who behave in completely understandable ways—a trap stabs a character in the eye if he looks through a peephole, for example. These traps kill unimaginative characters who respond reflexively, and they demonstrate the fiendish cleverness of the gamemaster. They do not simulate deathtraps in the pulps very well, though. Heroes, after all, are supposed to survive these things. If they are to be punished for a lack of imagination, they can fall into a deathtrap, from which they must use their imaginations to escape.



# Appendix





# TWO-FISTED TALES

## WEAPONS & ARMOR REFERENCE

### Weapons

*B = bruising, H = hand(s), T = tripod, \* = restricted*

Type	Damage	Muscle	Range	Shots	Size	Cost
Brass Knuckles	Base+2 (B)	—	—	—	Tiny-	6
Black Jack	Base+3 (B)	4 (1H)	—	—	Tiny+	6
Billy Club	Base+4 (B)	6 (1H)	—	—	Small	6
Switchblade	Base+2	—	—	—	Tiny-	6
Fencing Foil	Base+3	4 (1H)	—	—	Small	8
Sword Cane	Base+5	8 (1H)	—	—	Small	9
Machete	Base+5	10 (1H)	—	—	Small	8
Saber	Base+5	12 (1H), 6 (2H)	—	—	Small	8
Bull Whip	Base+2	—	—	—	Small	7
Lasso	Base+2	—	—	—	Small	5
Garrote	Base+2	—	—	—	Tiny-	7
Spear	Base+6	12 (1H), 6 (2H)	—	—	Small	6
Nunchuks	Base+4	6 (1H)	—	—	Small	7
Hand Axe	Base+5	8 (1H)	—	—	Small	7
Boomerang	Base+2	7 (1H)	Short	—	Small	6
Throwing Star	Base+2	—	Short	—	Tiny-	7
Hand Grenade	9	—	Short	—	Tiny	8*
Stick of Dynamite	11	—	Short	—	Tiny+	6
Blowgun	3	—	Short	1	Small	7
Bow	6	6 (2H)	Medium	1	Small	7
Crossbow	6	6 (2H)	Medium	1	Small	8
Puny Pistol	6	8 (1H), 2 (2H)	Medium	7	Tiny-	8
Typical Pistol	7	10 (1H), 4 (2H)	Medium	7	Tiny	8
Big Pistol	8	12 (1H), 6 (2H)	Medium	6	Tiny+	8
Monster Pistol	9	14 (1H), 8 (2H)	Medium	6	Tiny+	8
Bolt-Action Rifle	11	12 (2H)	Long	5	Small	9*
Shotgun, 20-Gauge	7	10 (1H), 4 (2H)	Medium	2	Small	8
Shotgun, 12-Gauge	9	14 (1H), 8 (2H)	Medium	6	Small	8
Tommygun	10	15 (1H), 9 (2H)	Medium	30	Small	9*
Elephant Gun	12	12 (2H)	Medium	2	Small	9
Machine Gun	12	13 (2H), 7 (T)	Long	50	Man-Sized	10*
Artillery	15	—	Long	1	Large	15*

### Armor

*\* = restricted*

Type	Resistance	Muscle	Size	Cost
Leather Jacket	+1 (Slashing)	—	Small	8
Bullet-Proof Vest	Torso: +3 (Gunshots) Other: +1 (Gunshots)	—	Small	9
Flak Jacket	+3 (Ballistics)	—	Small	10*

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## ROLLS & BASIC FIGHTING REFERENCE

### Target Numbers

Rating	Description
5	Very Easy
10	Easy
15	Tricky
20	Very Tricky
25	Difficult
30	Very Difficult
40+	Almost Impossible

### Outcome

Result	Target - Roll
Fumble	0 or less
Failure	less than target
Close Call	equal to target or <i>doubles</i>
Success	greater than target
Great Success	more than target by 10

### Automatic Fumble

Luck Rating	Roll is...
1	9 or less
2	8 or less
3	7 or less
4	6 or less
5	5 or less
6	4 or less
7	3 or less
8	2 or less
9	1 or less
10+	0 or less

### Basic Fighting Overview

1. Declare actions.
2. Make attacks using *reflex* rolls.  
+1 penalty die if wounds is greater than half *mind* rating
3. Highest roll hits.
4. Determine damage based on attacker's *muscle* rating and relevant weapon.
5. Determine number of wounds inflicted by subtracting defender's *resistance* rating from total damage.

### The Effect of Outcome on Damage

Result	Amount
Close Call	Half damage
Success	Base damage
Great Success	Base damage +2 (or +4)

### Damage and Resistance Values

Muscle Rating	Damage	Resistance
1 - 4	0	0
5 - 8	1	0
9 - 10	2	0
11 - 12	2	1
13 - 14	3	1
15 - 16	3	2
17 - 18	4	2
19 - 20	4	3
21 - 22	5	3
23 - 24	5	4
25 - 26	6	4
27 - 28	6	5
29 - 30	7	5

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## ADVANCED FIGHTING & CARD REFERENCE

### Modifying Rolls with Cards

<b>Number</b>	+ value
<b>Jack</b>	+10 or number card x 2
<b>Queen</b>	+10 or number card x 3
<b>King</b>	+10 or number card x 4
<b>Ace</b>	+10 and combine with other cards
♦	increases another player character's roll
♠	decreases a non-player character's roll

### Targeting Size

Location	Effective Size
Face	Small (or one size less)
Skull/Brain	Small (or one size less)
Eyes	Tiny (or two sizes less)
Arms/Hands/Feet	Small (or one size less)
Legs	Man-Sized (or no change)
Major Veins/Arteries	Tiny (or two sizes less)
Vital Organs	Tiny (or two sizes less)

### Modifying Damage with Cards

<b>Number</b>	decrease damage by value
<b>Jack, Queen, King, or Ace</b>	ignore all damage
♥	decreases damage against another player character
♣	increases damage against a non-player character (use with successful attacks only) J, Q, K, A: maximum weapon damage

### Wound Effects

Single Attack Wounds	Effect
More than Five	unconscious or uncontrolled bleeding
More than Ten	instant death
Accumulated Wounds	Effect
More than Half of Mind	extra penalty die on all combat rolls
More than Mind	incapacitated
20 or more	death

### Size and Range Modifiers

Target Size	Point Blank <i>less than 1yd</i>	Short .5 - 5yds	Medium 6 - 50yds	Long 51 - 500yds	Extreme 501yds+
Tiny	0	+10	+20	+30	+40
Small	0	+5	+15	+25	+35
Man-sized	0	0	+10	+20	+30
Large	-5	0	+5	+15	+25
Huge	-10	0	0	+10	+20
Giant	-15	-5	0	+5	+15

# TWO-FISTED TALES

## SPECIALTIES & MASTERIES

### Brains

Business  
Accounting  
Forensics  
Ballistics  
Counterfeiting  
Criminology  
Fingerprinting  
Forgery  
Graphology  
Jeweler  
Wiretapping  
Linguistics  
Ancient Languages  
Modern Languages  
Mechanics  
Aircraft Mechanics  
Auto Mechanics  
Explosives  
Medicine  
First Aid  
Hypnotism  
Pathology  
Pharmacology  
Psychoanalysis  
Surgery  
Toxicology  
Occult  
Alchemy  
Astrology  
Hypnotism  
Ritual Magic  
Parapsychology  
Scholarship  
Anthropology  
Appraise Antiquities  
Archeology  
Cryptography  
History  
Law  
Library Research  
Site Preservation  
Science  
Astronomy  
Botany  
Biology  
Chemistry

Electronics  
Engineering  
Geology  
Physics  
Zoology

### Mind

Alertness  
Guard Duty  
Listening  
Shadowing  
Sixth-Sense  
Spot Hidden  
Burglary  
Alarm Systems  
Escape  
Lockpicking  
Pickpocketing  
Fear Resistance  
Husbandry  
Mental Defense  
Pain Resistance  
Stealth  
Camouflage  
Hiding  
Move Quietly  
Survival  
Arctic Survival  
Desert Survival  
Diving  
Fire Building  
Navigation  
Parachuting  
Tracking

### Muscle

Carousing  
Climbing  
Jumping  
Resist Cold  
Resist Heat  
Running  
Swimming

### Reflexes

Acrobatics  
Aircraft  
Autogyro  
Bomber

Fighter  
Seaplane  
Transport  
Zeppelin  
Archery  
Bow  
Crossbow  
Artillery  
Cannon  
Mortar  
Boxing  
Unarmed Combat  
Brawling  
Billy Club  
Black Jack  
Brass Knuckles  
Garrote  
Unarmed Combat  
Driving  
Coupe  
Limousine  
Model-T  
Motorcycle  
Roadster  
Sedan  
Truck  
Tank  
Knife-Fighting  
Machete  
Switchblade  
Fencing  
Cane  
Foil  
Saber  
Sword  
Gun-Fighting  
Bolt-Action Rifle  
Elephant Gun  
Pistol  
Shotgun  
Tommy Gun  
Martial Arts  
Nunchuku  
Throwing Stars  
Unarmed Combat  
Primitive Weapons  
Boomerang

Hand Axe  
Spear  
Riding  
Roping  
Bull Whip  
Lasso  
Sports  
Thrown Weapons  
Watercraft  
Canoe  
Luxury Liner  
Speedboat  
Submarine  
Wrestling  
Unarmed Combat

### Savvy

Art  
Photography  
Deception  
Fast Talk  
Disguise  
Impersonation  
Mimicry  
Etiquette  
Connoisseur  
Empathy  
Detect Lies  
Gambling  
Read Emotions  
Woman's Intuition  
Intimidation  
Journalism  
Photography  
Magic  
Sleight of Hand  
Ventriloquism  
Music  
Singing  
Performance  
Acting  
Dancing  
Juggling  
Storytelling  
Seduction  
Well-Connected  
High-Society  
Streetwise



# TWO-FISTED TALES

## SCHTICKS

Gadgets	cost				
Aircar	2	Blinding Strike	4	Bind Minor Supernatural Being	3
Ansible	1	Body Equilibrium	4	Contact Power	2
Anti-Electric Ray	2	Cat Fall	3	Create Protective Charm	2
Anti-Gravity Harness	3	Danger Sense	5	Curse	3
Brain Case	1	Death Strike	5	Dowsing	2
Broadcast Power Station	2	Environmental Adaptation	3	Exorcism	2
Bullet-Proof Underwear	3	Immobile Stance	1	Invisibility Dust	6
De-Evolution Machine	4	Immortality	1	Love Potion	3
Disintegrator	3	Judo Throw	2	Open Gate	3
Earthquake Machine	2	Knockout Strike	3	Possession	4
Electric Rifle	3	Light-Sleeper	1	Prophecy	5
Electro-Mace	3	Mind Over Body	2	Psychometry	4
Electronic Brain	2	Missile Deflection	1	Re-Animate Dead	5
Gas Gun	3	Paralytic Strike	4	Retrocognition	5
Glass-Steel	2	Power Attack	1	Retrogression	2
Hypnotic Radio Transmitter	4	Roundhouse Attack	1	Reveal Invisible	1
Inertialess Drive	3	Standing Jump	1	Scrying	3
Infra-Red Tracer	1	Super Jumping	2	See Into Spirit World	2
Invisibility Potion	6	Suspended Animation	2	Summon Demon Sword	2
Machine Pistol	2	Water Breathing	2	Travel Into Spirit World	5
Magneto-Ray	3	<b>Hypnosis</b>	<b>cost</b>	Ward Against...	1
Mercy Bullets	2	Control Bleeding	1	<b>Animals</b>	<b>cost</b>
Mind Transfer Machine	5	Death-Like State	2	Animal Speech	2/3/4
Mole Drill	2	Emotional Trigger	4	Animal Companion	0/1/2/3
Night-Vision Goggles	2	Hypnotic Agent	5	<b>Other Schticks</b>	<b>cost</b>
Organic Acid	1	Hypnotic Suggestion	5	Appearance Change	4
Personal Rocket-Pack	2	Invisibility	7	Clinging	4
Pocket RADAR	1	Mental Illusions	4	Clone	8
Portable Canoe	1	Mind Link	5	Darkvision	1
Ray Derringer	5	Mind Reading	5	Double Jointed	2
Robot	5	Mindwipe	4	Eidetic Memory	1
Rocket Ship	5	Muscular Control	4	Enhanced Directional Hearing	1
Space Helmet	1	Recover Memories	1	Giant Fists	1
Synthetic Insect Pheromone	5	Sight Link	3	Immunity	1
Synthetic Man/Woman	3	Sleep	2	Plant	1
Water-Breathing Pill	2	<b>Magic Spells</b>	<b>cost</b>	Plastic Face	1
Weather Control Ray	3	Animal Form	4	Periodic Invisibility	3
Wrist-Radio	1	Animate Golem	2	Permanent Invisibility	4
<b>Martial Arts</b>	<b>cost</b>	Animate Undead	3	Poison Gas	2
Adrenaline Control	2	Animate Tattoo	2	Prodigy	1
All-Around Sight	3	Astral Travel	3	Screech	1
Attack at a Distance	1	Atavism	4	Skeletal	3
Biofeedback	3	Augury	2	Thick Skin	2+
		Bind Major Supernatural Being	5	X-Ray Vision	2

# ***TWO-FISTED TALES***

***NAME, TITLE, AND ALTERNATE IDENTITY OF HERO***

***PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION***

***PICTURE OF HERO***

***HABITS***

***STYLES***

***CODE***

***MOTIVATIONS OR GOALS***

***BACKGROUND, HISTORY, AND LANGUAGES SPOKEN***

***AQUAINTANCES, CONTACTS, FRIENDS, & FAMILY OF NOTE***



# TWO-FISTED TALES

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- 65 or 67lb cover stock is typically the best choice, but 90lb is even more durable if your printer can manage it—most inkjets can, but only high-end laser printers can support such heavy paper.
- *Glossy photo paper* produces the best color on inkjet printers and is typically pretty durable.
- 20 to 24lb paper will also suffice in a pinch, but is not as rugged.
- The printer's *manual feed* may be required for heavier paper weights.

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## STAND-UP FIGURE ASSEMBLY

- Print the desired pages. Color mode works best on color printers, or B&W printers capable of 600dpi minimum (1200dpi recommended). B&W mode is recommended for B&W inkjets and all laser printers.

It may be necessary to adjust the page orientation in your print setup—the default download is formatted for *portrait* mode, while custom downloads are formatted for *landscape* mode.

When printing in color on an inkjet printer, *best quality* is recommended. Color settings can also affect the quality of the printing—*application-managed* colors often better preserve colors, if your print settings offer that feature.

- Cut out the desired miniatures along the outer lines (see *Sample A*).
- If you intend to slide the miniature into a plastic base, make one fold along its center horizontal line. Then just slide its bottom edge into the base (see *Sample B*).
- If you intend to use glue or tape to assemble the miniature, fold along its three horizontal lines. Then glue or tape the miniature's small, bottom tabs together, or you can even use a paper clip to secure them (see *Sample C*). If using glue, be sure not to use too much, as this may warp the paper.

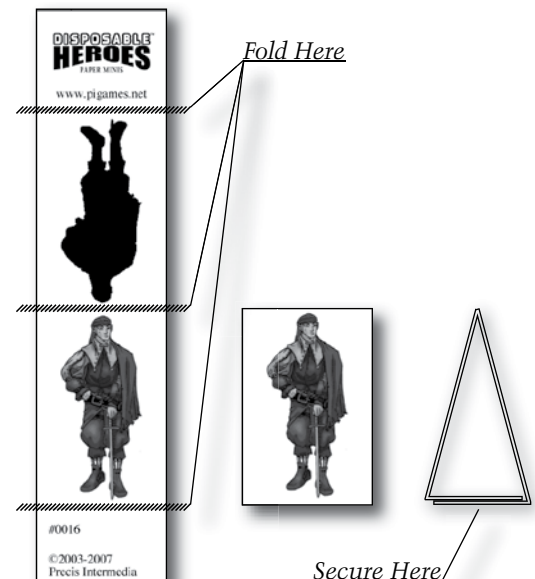
### SAMPLE A

















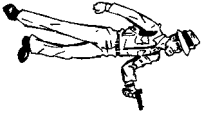



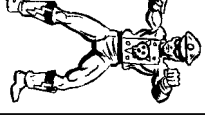





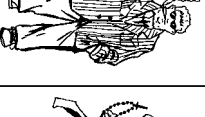



### SAMPLE B (USED WITH BASES)



### SAMPLE C (TAPED OR GLUED)



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