



# RATTLESHAKE

A 20 MINUTE DEMO FOR UNKNOWN ARMIES

UNKNOWN  
ARMIES™

## WHAT IS THIS?

This is a 20-minute demonstration of *Unknown Armies 3* featuring the core dice mechanic, how identities work, the shock gauge and notches, relationships with other characters, and the brutal nature of conflict and obsession.

This demo works best with three players. You can run it for a single player or a couple. To begin, pitch some version of the following:

*Unknown Armies* is an occult game about broken people conspiring to fix the world. It's kind of like *True Detective* and *Breaking Bad* meets Clive Barker and Guillermo del Toro. I've got some characters here if you'd like a short 20-minute demo, so you can see how the rules work and get a feeling for what the game is about. It doesn't go too far into magic or the supernatural but it should give you a glimpse into the world of *Unknown Armies*.

## SET-UP

Put the three characters out in front of the players and ask them each to pick one.

## THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

Together, this group is a cabal, but the demo doesn't take this anywhere other than to note that they're all friends, they all know each other, and each has a Relationship with the other two. If there are only two players, Maria and Marcus are good choices, but any combination is fine. If there's only one player, it won't matter which character is chosen, but Jason is the most straightforward and Marcus is the best demonstration of the game's more occult side.

None of the characters has anything on them apart from their clothes. Their belongings, including wallets, phones, and pocket knives, have been tossed into a box on the workbench.

## SCENARIO BACKGROUND

You can read or paraphrase this information once the players have chosen their characters.

You're all friends who met online six months ago through a shared interest in abandoned towns across the USA. A week ago you set out together in a campervan to drive along the back roads and highways of rural Nebraska, looking for weird and desolate places. A day ago, while exploring a ghost town called Greenwater that's been abandoned because of fracking and unstable underground mines, you ran afoul of a group of crazed survivalists convinced that the world is going to end.

Our demo begins as you wake up in a basement to the rumble of a tremor somewhere in the earth. The basement floor is packed dirt and the walls are cinder blocks with cracks running through them. There's a set of wooden stairs leading up to a door, and one wall is lined with a workbench and tool racks. You're inside one of those install-it-yourself cages large enough for at least three more people. It looks like the door to the cage is secured by a lock. It smells horrible down here, like old sweat and urine and dogs. The rumbling stops.

You think you can hear heavy boots walking above you, heading in the direction of the basement stairs. What do you do?

## RULES BRIEFING

Once the players have read over their characters, break down the rules as follows:

To do something, say what you want to do. If it's risky or there's a chance of failure, I'll make you roll the dice. Pick up two dice of different colors. One's the tens, and the other is the ones. You roll them together and read them like a percentage.

Usually you're trying to get equal to or less than the percentage number on one of your abilities (Notice, Struggle, Connect, etc) or one of your identities (I'm a XXX, of course I can XXX.) If you do that, you succeed. If you roll higher, you fail. Rolling doubles means the outcome is even better or even worse, depending.

The worst thing you can roll is 00. This is a fumble. The best you can roll is 01. This is a crit.

## ESCAPE PLANS

If the players don't immediately come up with some strategy or plan to get out of the cage, tell them something like:

"Now that that earthquake or whatever has stopped, sounds like one of the survivalists is coming down to check on you. You don't have a lot of time to try something, just enough time to try picking the lock on the cage, maybe, or seeing how strong the bars are. Maybe the tremor shook something loose."

Picking a lock is not something any of the player characters has a background in, but maybe they remember looking it up on YouTube, or they had to break into their friend's house once. Apply a -10% penalty to their Knowledge (it's under Self on the character sheets) and have them roll against that:

- A success gets the lock open.
- A failure means they don't.
- If they rolled a matched success or a crit, they have time to actually get out of the cage before the survivalist comes down the stairs.

Forcing apart the bars of the cage is hard, because these are designed to keep big animals from getting out. There's also the whole issue of doing it quickly. It's a Fitness roll (under Helplessness) with a -20% penalty:

## DEALING WITH HANK

Hank is a huge, bearded, dangerous looking guy in overalls and work boots. He has a big knife hanging from his belt and an army jacket that's probably covering up a lot of muscle. Hank is just checking on the player characters, he's not here to do anything to them yet, but we don't have time to worry about that.

If the player characters are all still in the cage, whether or not they unlocked the door or forced apart the bars, Hank grunts and walks over to the workbench to mess around with some of the tools and junk on it.

If the player characters did get out of the cage, Hank is alarmed and yells, "Hey!" and moves in their direction, intending to grab them or knock them out or something else physical and violent.

This is where you have the players deal with shock. Hank is big and scary and they're stuck in a cage (or eyeing against violence). That means it's either a Helplessness (3) check or a Violence (3) check, depending on the situation.

Have the players look at the relevant notches on their character sheets:

- If they fail, they just sweat a lot and nothing budges.
- If they succeed, there's space to squeeze out of but they won't be able to do it just yet (and it'll require another roll on Fitness or Dodge or something).
- If they get a matched success or a crit, there's space to squeeze out and they can do it before the survivalist arrives.

They could also try other stuff: screaming for help, trying to team up to knock the cage over from the inside, pretend to be dead. They can give pretty much anything a shot but it's not likely to get them out of the cage before the survivalist arrives.

Once they've each had a chance to try something, they're either going to still be in the cage, or maybe they've managed to get out, but either way the basement door opens, heavy boots come down the creaky wooden basement stairs, and Hank has arrived.

- If it's a Helplessness check, both Marcus and Jason have to roll (they have fewer than 3 hardened notches).
- If it's a Violence check, all three of them have to roll (none of them has 3 or more hardened notches).

To resist shocks to Helplessness, the players have to roll against Status. To resist shocks to Violence, they have to roll against Fitness.

- If they fail their roll, they mark off a Failed notch on their sheet and you can ask the player if they fight, freeze, or flee.
- If they succeed, they mark off a Hardened notch on their sheet. Tell them that their Fitness and Dodge (if Helplessness) or Connect and Struggle (if Violence) scores have changed as a result.

Now ask the players what they intend to do with Hank. There are usually three possible actions in situations like this: use coercion, run away from him, or try to fight him.



## TRY TO COERCE OR PLEAD WITH HANK

A player might try to coerce Hank, pleading with him to spare them or free them, or try to threaten him somehow, or convince him to act in some way that doesn't result in violence. Anyone who wants to try this gets to go before any fighting or running out.

It's a roll using one of the player character's abilities or an identity that can substitute for it. To get Hank to spare the character's life, that requires rolling on Knowledge (which targets Self). To threaten Hank, it's a roll on Struggle (which targets Violence). To spook Hank out somehow with occult nonsense, it's Secrecy. To appeal to Hank's humanity, it's Status.

With a success, the player character forces Hank to pause a moment and not do anything immediately. Hank doesn't come to any decision, but it also keeps Hank from attacking the cabal, or doing anything else.

With a failure, Hank ignores the player character. If the character is outside of the cage, he's going to try to grab him. The other player characters can try to attack, or run out.

## TRY TO RUN AWAY FROM HANK

This is a flat-out dangerous thing to try but might be the only option apparent to the players. Each fleeing character rolls on Pursuit, and then Hank rolls as well.

- If a player character succeeds on Pursuit, they make it to the stairs.
- If a player character gets a matched success or a crit, they're up the stairs and through the door.
- If a player fails, they hesitate and don't get anywhere.
- If a player fumbles or gets a matched failure, he backs up and falls over or otherwise is compromised.

If Hank succeeds on his Pursuit roll (45%), he's on the stairs and catches anyone who's on the stairs. If he fails, he

## THE CRACK

The next thing that happens is that the entire basement shakes again, stronger than before. It feels like an earthquake or a really heavy train going overhead. A split second later, one half of the basement — from the basement stairs and halfway to the cage where the player characters were locked up — gives way and drops into the earth, much as a road disappears into a collapsing sinkhole. There's more shaking, and it appears the building above the basement is getting ready to follow suit.

Right off the bat, Jason and Maria need to withstand an Unnatural (3) stress check, because of the dramatic nature of the collapse. Marcus doesn't need to as his Unnatural is 4. Even if it was caused by fracking (it sort of was, but really it's a part of the survivalist's bruising reality), it's still "not right." Remember to have them apply a hardened or failed notch afterward.

Hank is toast — wherever he was when the crack opened up, he falls backwards and is lost into the darkness. The player characters have to get out of the basement and to the surface alive.

The shaking has broken the cage or shaken the locked door open, so anyone who was still locked up can now get out.

doesn't go anywhere but can catch somebody who hesitated. If he fumbles or gets a matched failure, he's on his ass.

Once anyone's tried to get out, it's straight to violence for those who're still in the basement.

## TRY TO ATTACK HANK

The big survivalist probably has the drop on Jason or Maria, but Marcus has a strategic mind and the Provides Initiative feature for one of his identities, so Marcus can try to attack Hank before Hank attacks him. Otherwise, Hank takes a big swing with his fists at a 60% check — on a hit, Hank does wounds equal to the two dice added together, which is unlikely to take out any of the player characters. If it's a crit, the player character just drops and is out.

- If a player wants to have their character jump on Hank, grab something heavy and swing it at him, or tackle him, it's probably Struggle (under Violence). You can let the player grab something to use against Hank, since there's a workbench nearby. Most of the tools will add +3 to the wounds, and switch the attack from fists & feet to melee weapons.
- If the attack succeeds, Hank takes wounds equal to the two dice added together. If the attack was with some improvised weapon, add +3, and if the attack was a matched success (doubles), the wounds are equal to the percentage rolled rather than adding the dice.
- Finally, if the attack was a crit (01 on the dice), Hank is flat out unconscious.

Don't worry about continuing the struggle — things are going to go haywire shortly. Move to the next section unless somebody's trying to coerce or plead with Hank, or run out of the basement.

Anyone who was in the basement but not on the stairs is safe for the moment, but looks at a gap of around eight feet between the basement floor that hasn't fallen into the sinkhole and the stairs.

Anyone who was on the stairs feels the wooden structure creaking dangerously, but they're safe.

The only way out right now appears to be up the stairs and out the door, but getting to the stairs is quite a jump. They might be able to shove the workbench along and climb over it to the stairs. Or they might stay where they are, seeking some kind of shelter (under the workbench?) and wait until the rest of the building collapses and they can climb out.

## GETTING OUT

Since this is likely near the end of the 20 minutes, it's an opportunity for the players to help each other out or else present a literal cliffhanger. Go around to each of them and ask them how they want to get out. They could be split up, or they could be all together. Have them look to their relationships. They can use their relationship percentage ratings instead of their abilities if they can justify making the roll about that relationship.

- To jump or otherwise physically try to scramble out of the basement, roll against Fitness.
- To stay and avoid being crushed or fall into the sinkhole, roll against Dodge.

If anyone fails a roll, they're holding on to dear life by their fingers at the edge of the sinkhole. Another player character can try to save them, or not. If nobody does, they have one last chance to get out with Fitness. If not, they fall out of sight.

If anyone succeeds on a roll, they either get out of the basement or find a safe place to wait it out. Those who get out can duck and dodge through what looks like a large wooden residence and to the street and bright daylight. Those who stay see the back of the house collapse into the sinkhole with a huge crash, raising clouds of dust. This provides a new opening from the basement to the surface that the remaining players can climb out.

### FREEDOM?

Those who escape the house now face getting out of Greenwater and fleeing the remaining survivalists... but that's a story for another time! To give you something to work with, assuming you want to take this scenario further, here's a shortlist of things that may happen next:

- A desperate chase through ruined, abandoned houses with the survivalists in pursuit on mountain bikes, armed with machetes and nets
- The ritual site is a playground, in the center of town, surrounded by a sinkhole crevasse while mysteriously still intact on the top of a pillar of rock
- The sheriff of the county makes an appearance and seems sympathetic but is he really one of them?
- Turning a lot of the less-devoted former residents of the town that now live in a trailer park outside of the area against the survivalists
- Natural gas company sends somebody to deal with this... a few suits, or a crack team of armoured security?
- Something under the town, buried deep, wakes up from its slumber. Garden-variety monster, or collective guilt and fear of the survivalists made flesh?

### YOU'RE DONE!

Thank the players and answer any questions they might have about the game or the rules.



*Unknown Armies* created by **Greg Stolze and John Tynes**  
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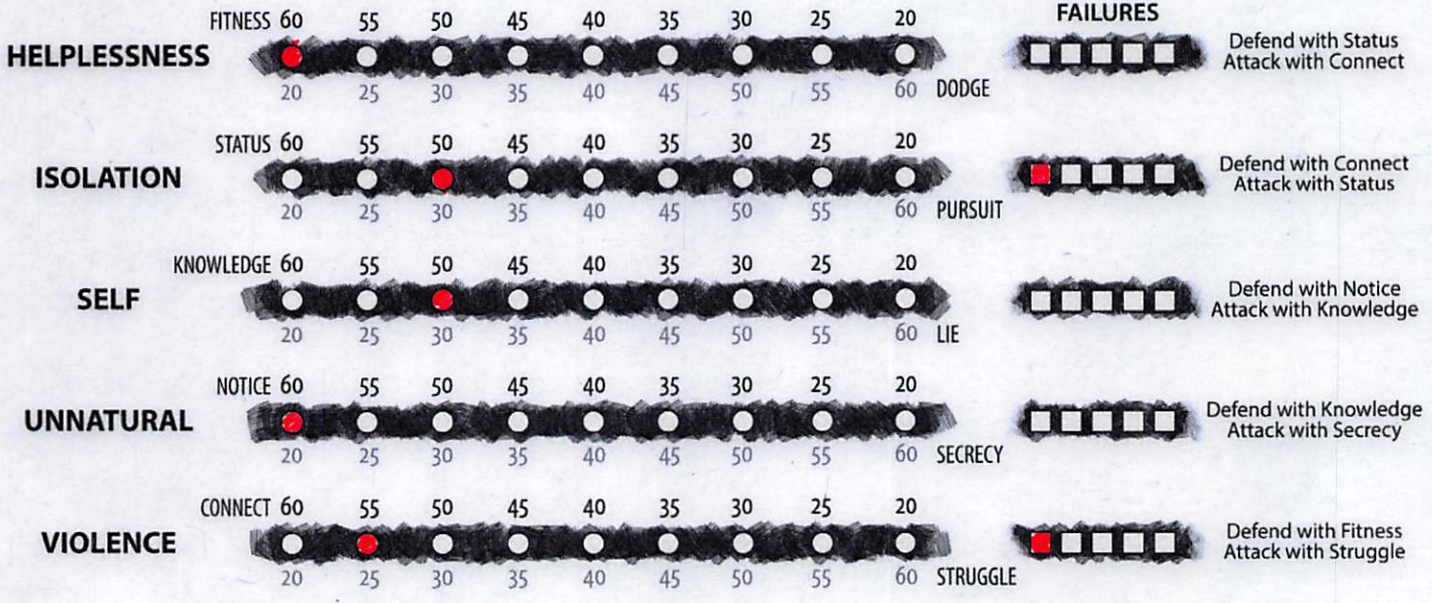
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Name: JASON HOLLANDER  
 Cabal: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

**RAGE** Harm to animals  
**NOBLE** Helping others while hurt  
**FEAR** Cannibalism

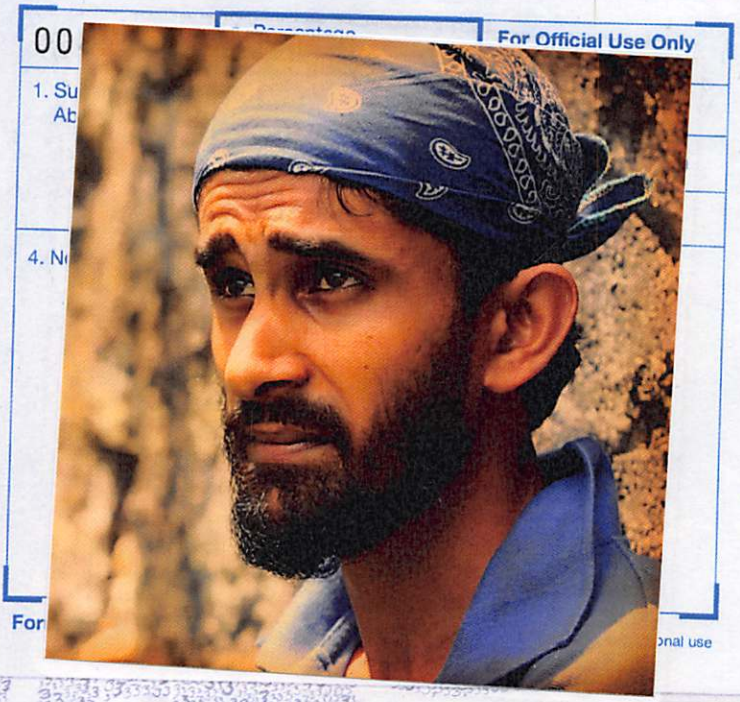
Distinguishing Characteristics:

_____ % Favorite (Status)	_____ % Guru (Notice)	_____ % Mentor (Connect)	<b>MARIA</b> 50% Responsibility (Knowledge)	<b>MARCUS</b> 55% Protégé (Fitness)
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**WOUND THRESHOLD** / 55

IDENTITIES	
I'm a <b>VETERINARIAN</b>	of course I can
diagnose & treat sick animals, rattle off drug names, deal with pet owners	65%
Substitutes for Ability:	Knowledge
Feature:	Resists challenges to Helplessness
Feature:	Medical (-10% on humans)
I'm a <b>HEALTH FOOD NUT</b>	of course I can
prepare healthy meals, forage in the wild, survive on limited intake	55%
Substitutes for Ability:	Lie
Feature:	Provides Wound Threshold
Feature:	Evaluates Helplessness
I'm a _____	, of course I can _____%
Substitutes for Ability:	
Feature:	
Feature:	
I'm a _____	, of course I can _____%
Substitutes for Ability:	
Feature:	
Feature:	



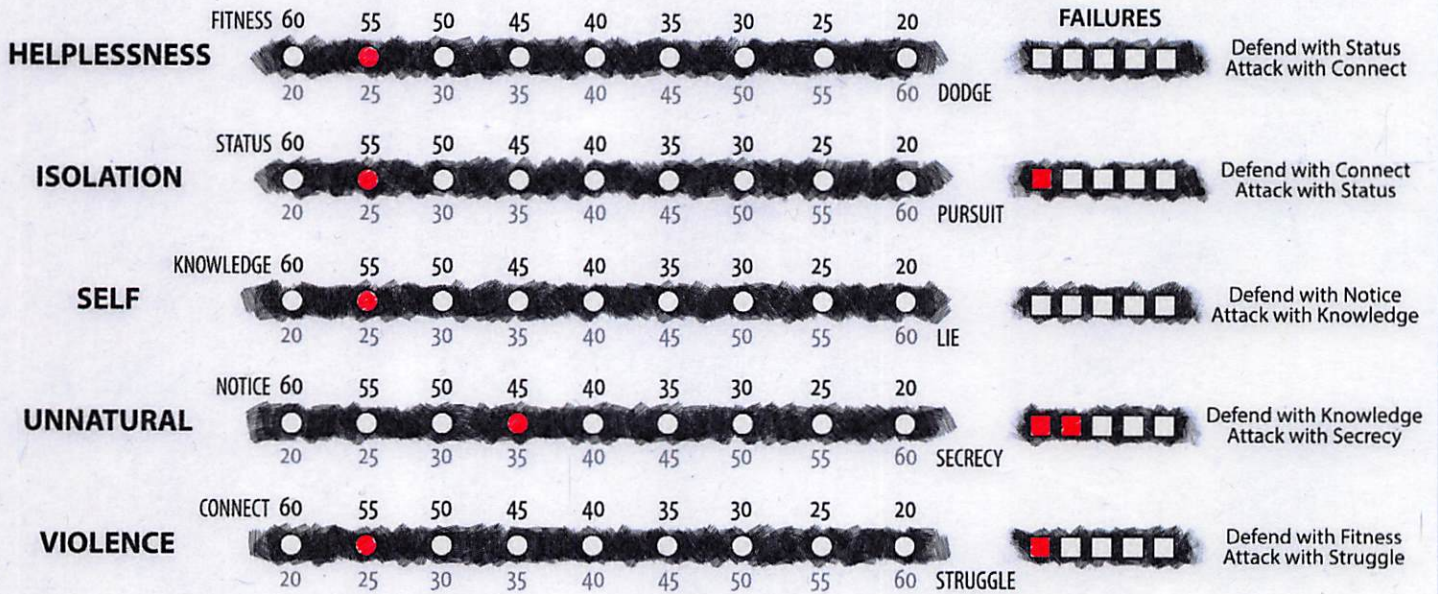
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Name: MARCUS WASHINGTON  
 Cabal: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

**RAGE** Irrational behavior  
**NOBLE** Mathematical challenges  
**FEAR** Losing his intellect


Distinguishing Characteristics:

<b>MARIA</b> 55% Favorite (Status)	—% Guru (Notice)	<b>JASON</b> 55% Mentor (Connect)	—% Responsibility (Knowledge)	—% Protégé (Fitness)
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**IDENTITIES**

I'm a **PRO CHESS GRANDMASTER**, of course I can think steps ahead, fake out opponents, compose myself under stress. 70%  
 Substitutes for Ability: Notice  
 Feature: PROVIDES INITIATE  
 Feature: RESISTS SHOCKS TO HELPLESSNESS

I'm a **CASUAL NUMEROLOGIST**, of course I can draw up birth charts, see mystic patterns in numbers, do math in my head. 50%  
 Substitutes for Ability: Secrets  
 Feature: 

I'm a \_\_\_\_\_, of course I can \_\_\_\_\_ %  
 Substitutes for Ability: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Feature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Feature: \_\_\_\_\_

I'm a \_\_\_\_\_, of course I can \_\_\_\_\_ %  
 Substitutes for Ability: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Feature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Feature: \_\_\_\_\_

WOUND THRESHOLD



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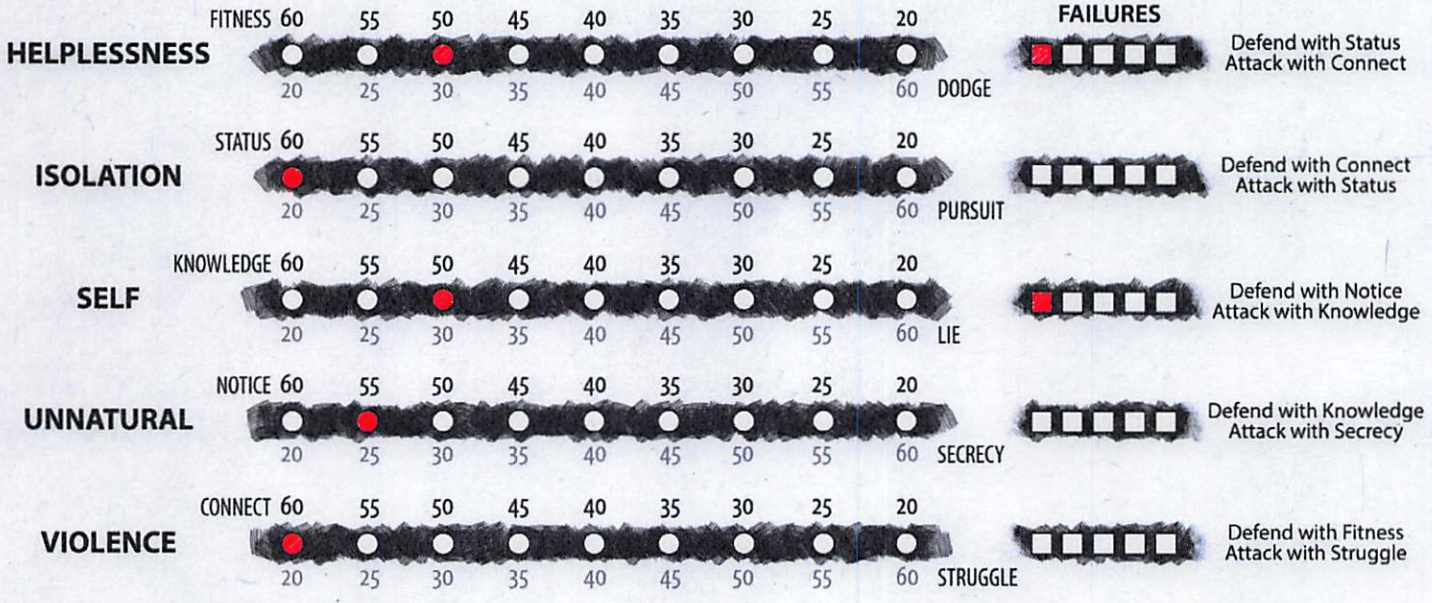


Name: MARIA ESPINOZA  
 Cabal: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

RAGE ABUSE OF POWER DYNAMICS  
 NOBLE LIBERATING THE IMPRISONED  
 FEAR FALLING

Distinguishing Characteristics:

JASON	MARCUS			
60% Favorite (Status)	55% Guru (Notice)	—% Mentor (Connect)	—% Responsibility (Knowledge)	—% Protégé (Fitness)



WOUND THRESHOLD / 50

IDENTITIES	
I'm a <b>MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER</b> , of course I can speak confidently, encourage others, believe my own hype	75%
Substitutes for Ability: <b>Connect</b>	
Feature: <b>Coerces Self</b>	
Feature: <b>Therapeutic</b>	
I'm a <b>CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS</b> , of course I can negotiate immigration system, travel w/o attention, speak Spanish	45%
Substitutes for Ability: <b>Pursuit</b>	
Feature: <b>Evaluates Isolation</b>	★
Feature: <b>Coerces Isolation</b>	
I'm a _____, of course I can _____	%
Substitutes for Ability: _____	
Feature: _____	
Feature: _____	
I'm a _____, of course I can _____	%
Substitutes for Ability: _____	
Feature: _____	
Feature: _____	



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