CORTEX PLUS™
HACKER'S GUIDE

Crowdsourced & Crowdfunded

We asked creators, amateurs, and professionals alike to share new mechanics, settings, and entirely new games based on our popular Cortex Plus roleplaying games: *Leverage*, *Smallville*, and *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying*. An army of authors contributed their own ideas to the project, which we dubbed the *Cortex Plus Hacker's Guide*. Emboldened by a highly successful Kickstarter project and the investment of over a thousand backers, the Guide has blossomed into a fully featured sourcebook for all things Cortex Plus!

Cortex Plus ... & YOU

The *Cortex Plus Hacker's Guide* gives you articles, essays, and three complete reference documents to bring action, drama, and heroic fantasy to your game table. From science fiction to school yards, from the end of time to the outskirts of imagination, the building blocks of your next Cortex Plus game are right here!

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CONTENTS

- **Foreword** 4
- **How to Use this Book** 5

MECHANICS AND STRUCTURE

- **On Hacking** 6
  - What do you need? 7
  - How does this address the need? 7
  - Who are you talking to? 7
  - How will you know if it worked? 7
  - Does it work without you? 8
- **How to Hack Cortex Plus** 9
  - The Most Basic Cortex Plus Game Ever 9
  - Is That It? 9
  - So What Else? 9
  - So, Is That It? 11
- **The Basics of Dramatic Roleplaying** 12
  - When You Roll 12
  - What You Roll 12
  - How You Roll 13
  - Supported Game Styles 14
- **The Basics of Action Roleplaying** 15
  - When You Roll 15
  - What You Roll 15
  - How You Roll 15
  - Plot Points 16
  - Character Creation 16
  - Supported Game Styles 16
- **The Basics of Heroic Roleplaying** 17
  - When You Roll 17
  - What You Roll 17
  - How You Roll 17
  - Plot Points 18
  - The Doom Pool 18
  - Character Creation 18
  - Supported Game Styles 18
- **Machine Shop** 19
  - The Setting 19
  - The Characters 19
  - Talents 20
  - Assets 20
  - The Game 21
  - Example Campaigns 22
- **Roleplay Like You're on TV!** 23
  - Modified Cortex Classic Character Sheet 24
- **Hacking Stress** 26
  - A Menu of Stress 26
  - What's in a name? 26
  - Die Rating & Granularity 27
  - Changing Stress in your Game 27
  - Different Stress for Different Leads 27
  - Stress in Action 28
- **Time & Tactics** 30
  - What Time Can Do for You 30
  - Cortex Plus Time Basics 30
  - Tactical Conflict 32
- **Random Feature Generation** 34
- **One-Shots** 37
  - Preparing a One-Shot 37
  - Introducing Your One-Shot 39
  - Playing Opening Scenes 39
  - Montages 40
  - Climax! 40
- **Dramatic Fluency** 41
  - How to use this model 41

HISTORY AND FANTASY

- **The Old School Job** 44
  - Attributes 44
  - Roles 45
  - Specialties and Distinctions 45
  - Talents 45
  - Treasures 46
- **The Old School Fight** 48
  - The Battlefield 48
  - Conflict Basics 48
  - Actions 48
  - Stress 50
- **The Dungeon Fixer's Guide** 51
  - Core Assumptions of The Old School Job 51
  - The Building Blocks of Quests 51
  - The Inhabitants 52
  - Running the Quests 53
- **The Quest Generator** 54
  - The Factions 57
  - Random Dungeon Rooms 58
- **Cursus Honorum: Roman Drama** 59
  - The Supernatural in Rome? 59
  - Rome & The Ancient World 59
  - The Roman Familia 59
  - Creating Your Characters 60
  - Birth 60
  - Education 61
  - Focus 62
  - Heritage 62
- **The Kingdom as a Character** 63
  - Kingdom Level Actions 63
  - Creating Complications 63
  - Defining a Kingdom's Attributes 63
  - Pathways for Kingdom Creation 64
  - Pathways Within the Kingdom 64
  - Pathways Outside the Kingdom 64
  - House Pathways 65
  - Kingdom Pathways 67
- **The Eternal City** 68
  - Legendary Play 68
  - The Eternal City Campaign 69
  - Campaign Types of The Eternal City 70

MODERN LIFE

- **Ephemereality** 71
  - Doing the Leg Work 71
  - Basic Rules of Dreaming 71
  - Roles 72
  - New Assets / Complications 74
  - Advanced Dreaming Techniques 74
- **The Breed: A Mutant Animal Hack** 75
  - From Crew to Zoo 75
  - Aspects 75
  - Example Species 76
  - New Talents 79
- **Vampville** 80
  - Vampire Poses and Stress 80
  - Character Creation 82
  - Character Creation Example 82

- **Backstabbing BFFs** 83
  - Wealth 83
  - Fame 83
  - Success 84
  - Respect 84
  - Influence 84
  - Narcissism 84
- **The Junior Adventurers' Club** 85
  - Reskinning the Roles 85
  - Making Thematic Changes 85
  - Distinctions and Talents 86
  - Streamlining the System 86
  - Replacing Action Types 86
  - Being the Fixer 87
  - Example Scenario: 88

SCIENCE FICTION AND THE FUTURE

- **Cyberpunk Overdrive** 89
  - Introduction 89
  - Kimura 89
  - Mary Guns 89
  - Nancy Gibson 90
  - Little Goose 91
  - The Archology 92
  - Reveals 92
  - Wedges 93
- **Dramatic Transhuman Distinctions** 94
  - Types of Transhumanism 94
  - Transhuman Vessels 95
  - Transhuman Heritage Distinctions 95
  - Other Transhuman Distinctions 97
  - Evolution, Body-Swapping, and Distinctions 97
- **Mechaville** 99
  - Setting 99
  - Pathways 99
  - New Mechanics 101
  - Mecha Scale 102
  - Other Abilities 102
  - Afterword 102
- **A Future Born in Pain** 103
  - Brawychus Heritage 103
- **Starship for Hire** 106
  - Character Creation 106
  - The Recruitment Mission 107
  - Your Very Own Starship 107
  - Enemy Starships 107
  - Non-Starship Threats 108
  - Running Science Fiction Action Games 108
- **Episodes at the End of Time** 109
  - Anthology Series 109
  - Dying-Earth Science Fantasy Genre 109
  - Clarke's Law isn't Just a Good Idea 109
  - What Do We Do? 109
  - Starting with the Situation Generator 110
  - Elements of a PC 111
  - Characters 112
  - Action Mechanics 112
  - Sessions and Campaigns 113

CORE RULES

- **Action Roleplaying** 116
  - The Basics 116
  - Agent Creation 120
  - Agent Concept 120
  - Action Traits 121
  - Distinctions 124
  - Specialties 125
  - Signature Assets 126
  - Talents 126
  - The Rest 126
  - Finishing your Agent during Play 127
  - Sample Talents 130
  - Advancements 132
  - The Mission 132
  - Managing Traits 132
  - Actions, Scenes, & Beats 134
  - Supporting Characters 139
  - Cold Fusion 140
  - Hunters of The Holy 145
  - Customizing Action Traits 152
- **Dramatic Roleplaying** 155
  - Introduction 155
  - Values 157
  - Characters and Values 159
  - Relationships 160
  - Challenging Values & Relationships 160
  - Distinctions 161
  - Example Distinctions 162
  - Abilities 163
  - Example Abilities 164
  - Resources 165
  - Minor Assets 166
  - Pathways 167
  - Pathways and the Pathways Map 169
  - Rolling the Dice 171
  - The Trouble Pool 173
  - Plot Points 173
  - Contests and Tests 175
  - Stress 177
  - Growth and Experience 179
  - Creating a Pilot Episode 181
  - Setting Starters for Dramatic Roleplaying 181
  - Street Justice 182
  - It Swings 184
  - St Jerome's Hospital 186
  - Local Politics 188
  - Monster Teen Drama 190
- **Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying** 192
  - Basics and How to Play 192
  - Hero Creation 198
  - Milestones and Spending XP 208
  - Magic Items 211
  - Gamemastering Basics 214
  - Monsters, Traps, and Other Threats 232
  - NPCs 240
  - Minions (Level Die d4) 243
- **Bestiary** 243
  - Standard Monsters (Level Die d6) 245
  - Elite Monsters (Level Die d8) 247
  - Boss Monsters (Level Die d10) 251
  - Epic Monsters (Level Die d12) 255

- **Contributor Bios** 257
- **Kickstarter Backers** 259

FOREWORD

For years, fans have enjoyed games powered by Margaret Weis Productions' award-winning *Cortex Plus* system. From the embroiled teenaged drama powered by *Smallville* to the high-tech heist hijinks of *Leverage*, and the comic book action of *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying*, the community has embraced these games and made them their own. Many have taken the rules from each licensed game and adapted them to a wide variety of settings, genres, and play styles.

In the spring of 2010, MWP sent out a call to its growing community for the best "hacks" of the *Cortex Plus* system. They asked creators, amateurs, and professionals alike to share new mechanics, settings, and entirely new games from the bones of existing games. Over 20 different authors contributed their own ideas to the project, which was dubbed the *Cortex Plus Hacker's Guide*.

After a delay from other projects, MWP was able to put the *Hacker's Guide* back onto the schedule, thanks to the magic of Kickstarter. In January of 2013, thanks to the support of 1,288 backers, we were able to not only publish the original vision of the *Hacker's Guide*, but also expand the book to include three largely self-contained versions of *Cortex Plus*.

This is a book for fans of the *Cortex Plus* system and for game designers of all kinds. The authors of this book explain, modify, and otherwise break apart the critically acclaimed system in order to give you the tools to make your ideal game. The contributions herein cover a broad selection of different kinds of styles and settings. Some are only pieces of other games, while others are most comprehensive attempts at entire new games. You are encouraged, almost required, to combine the various articles and add your own preferences and insights. This is a guide for game planners, game players, and most of all, game hackers.

We hope that you find somewhere in these pages the game you want to play, or at the very least, the tools to make the game you want to play.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The book you hold in your hand is like one of those ancient explorer's maps where known landmasses comingled with large empty spaces and artistic renderings of scary monsters. The many contributors of this book's content took a look at the mechanics behind beloved *Cortex Plus* games and concocted creative and exciting new ways to play. From alternate ways to generate characters to entirely new games, this guide provides sparks for near endless gaming variations.

Originally planned to be used with either the *Smallville* or the *Leverage RPG* rulebook (including page references for each), the hacks can be adapted for use with the generic versions of either *Cortex Plus Dramatic* or *Action Roleplaying* games found in this book. Some might require a little bit of work, but you can trust your hacking potential; it's easier than it looks.

The *Hacker's Guide* serves three major purposes. First, you can borrow one, or maybe more of those hacks to customize your game experience. Want Vampires that scheme and cavort? You prefer to play hotshots mecha pilots whose trials of the heart are as intense as their battles for survival? You are tickled by the idea that you could steal secrets from other peoples' brains or raid dungeons like it was a heist? You always wanted to run a sci-fi game featuring starship crews hauling cargo and getting fugitives under the authorities' radar? Just dive into the guide with your rulebook nearby and start planning your game. We even have three, fully playable generic games for you, ready to fuel hundreds of hours of exciting gaming.

Of course, most of these hacks aren't complete games; they serve as a jumping point for extended play. When one of those hacks grabs your imagination, you'll find a foundation to build upon. That's the book's second purpose: entice your own creativity to tweak and build upon what's in the book to make it your own. The common core of *Cortex Plus* games is a very straightforward and mechanically simple engine. It's not based on complex algorithms and extensive statistical models. Don't be afraid to experiment with it to complete the hacks you like most and make them into your own games.

Finally, the book also serves as an anthology of case studies on how to hack games, sometimes spectacularly so. Each hack was written by freelance game designers, some among them professionals, many amateurs. As you go through them, we hope it will wake up your inner hacker and bring to the front the curiosity and eagerness to send your favorite game in a whole new direction.

Let us know how it turns out!

ON HACKING

BY ROB DONOGHUE

Like many young gamers, I began my career with a profound interest in copyright infringement.

I didn't think of it that way, of course. I had this cool new game with *dice* and *graph paper* and *cool pictures,* and I was excited by the possibilities it offered. I'd like to say that my creativity was unbounded, a fountain of youthful exuberance, but the reality is that I wanted to use things I'd seen on cartoons that week. I traced pictures from comic books, stole names from fantasy novels, statted up weapons from science fiction, and generally had an awesome time doing so. I sometimes find my old notes and "drawings," and a part of me winces in embarrassment; but mostly, I'm pleased. Because it was *my* game.

Sure, I'd bought these nice books and boxed sets, and I was stealing shamelessly from every source I could get my hands on, but none of that mattered. Once we started playing, it was about *us.* It was my friends and I doing cool things and having awesome adventures. It was great. I got older and discovered that gaming is a hobby you can spend a lot of time apologizing for. It's weird. Nerdy. And don't forget rumors of devil worshipping. It was easy to lose that early confidence, that profound understanding that it was my fun to have however I saw fit. And I did lose it, for a while. I still bought a lot of games, and they were entertaining, but they were someone else's games. No matter how good it was, something was missing.

So I started messing around with the guts of things. Stole a piece from one game and plugged it into another. Came up with new schools of magic. Ripped out complicated systems, replacing them with ones I would actually use.

And it came back. I was still happy to buy games and learn from them, but when it came time to play at my own table, they were inspiration, not shackles. It didn't matter what someone writing a book somewhere thought was the right way to play; it was my decision.

So, I hope you enjoy this book, and I hope it's full of ideas that inspire you, but I also hope you tear it up. For all the great ideas in here, they're just a transition from someone else's pen to your table. While it will certainly be fun to play with these rules as is, they're even more useful as examples of what you can do yourself. Look closely at what people have done to the system and think about why they've made the decisions they have, and then see about doing the same.

Of course, that's easy for me to say. What if you do it wrong? To that, I'll let you in on a secret: there's a very good chance that your first effort is going to suck.

Yes, I know you've put down good money here, and my job is to spout rainbows and unicorns about how there's no way to do it wrong so long as you try hard and do it from the heart, but that's a load of hooey, and you need to know that. Otherwise, you'll try, it'll suck, and you'll stop, and that's dead wrong. You need to suck, and then do it again.

Seriously. Look at the articles in this book. Look at any game you like. It might look nice and tidy and laid out with beautiful fonts, table and graphics, but I guarantee that, at some point, it was a terrible stinking pile of an idea—one that made the writer want to throw it all away and take up Canasta full time. We all have ideas, but they only get anywhere when we stand them up, watch them fall, and then learn something from the process.

This advice applies just as much to the guy who wants to create a new game to set the world on fire as it does to the gal who wants to try out a new damage system in her current game. When you've got an idea in mind for a hack, you should absolutely try it out. With that in mind, consider these five questions:

1. What do you need?
2. How does this address the need?
3. Who are you talking to?
4. How will you know if this worked?
5. Does it work without you?

They're simple questions, but there's a lot of work bundled into them that can help you out. Let's break it down.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

Easy one, right? Well, maybe. Even if you think you know the answer to the question, take a minute and write it down. Maybe it's something simple and coherent like "To speed up combat because we're barely getting any play in," and if so, great. But there's a danger that it's something fuzzier, like "Make magic more awesome." That might be an admirable goal, but it's kind of hard to pin down.

When in doubt, ask yourself what problem you're trying to solve. *Why* is magic insufficiently awesome? Does your wizard feel ineffective? Is magic underpowered? Does it need better special effects? Identifying the specific trouble means you're a lot more likely to solve the right problem.

HOW DOES THIS ADDRESS THE NEED?

OK, so you now know what you need, and you've got your hack, but is it the right hack? Can you explain, in simple words, how this will solve the problem? Notice I'm not asking you to explain how the hack *works,* I'm asking how it solves the problem. It's a subtle but important difference.

Answering this question can keep you from going down mechanical rabbit holes. There have been plenty of occasions where I've come up with a *really neat* mechanic, and only after hours of work have I realized that it does absolutely nothing to solve the problem I set out to fix. I like to call these "fruitful detours" because that sounds more productive than "utter waste of time."

WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?

Don't hack in a vacuum. At the very least, you should be talking to the players at your table, but it never hurts to talk to a wider circle, be it on a blog, forum, mailing list, Facebook group or whatever other technological marvel you prefer. You can find other people who have had similar problems, and you can talk about what they've tried. Maybe the work has already been done for you. More likely, other people's hacks won't satisfy you, but you can always use a good idea or two.

Even if you don't collaborate as you hack, you're eventually going to have to communicate your hack to your players. They're your first audience, and you need to understand their needs. Do they see the same problems you do? Do they understand this new idea of yours? (Pro tip: if they don't get it, it's your fault. Just accept that now.) Do they have feedback or ideas of their own?

If you wait until the night you're going to use the hack to spring it on your players, you haven't answered any of those questions. Deployment is not the time to find that you're the only one who thinks there's a problem. Whoever your audience is, talk to them early and often.

HOW WILL YOU KNOW IF IT WORKED?

This one trips up even seasoned pros. Consider this scenario: last week, you had a terrible session. Things just went wrong all over the place, and no one had any fun; so you introduced some radical hacks, and this week's game went better. Clearly, your hacks rocked, right?

Wrong. If last week's game was that bad, odds are this week's game would be better, even if you changed nothing. It's entirely possible that your hacks actually made things worse, but since everyone was so committed to making the session go well they just smoothed over them. Or maybe you didn't run the hack as you wrote it, instead improvising on the fly to make play better. All these things might have made for a better game, but none of them tell you if your hack *worked*.

To answer this question, you're going to want to look at the earlier questions. If you know what you're trying to fix, and how this hack should fix it, then it should be easy to judge. How did you spot the problem in the first place? Was it by watching the clock? Was it because Dave complained after the game? Then watch the clock, or talk to Dave. Look where you first found the problem.

And, of course, keep talking to your players. Just as they (hopefully) agree there's a problem to solve or an issue to improve, they also have opinions on how well it worked or didn't work. Listen to them. Even if they don't agree with you, they're your players. If they're unhappy with the change, think long and hard before you decide that the hack is more important than doing what they enjoy.

DOES IT WORK WITHOUT YOU?

The final test of a hack is how well someone else can use it. It's easy to build a sloppy hack that you can gloss over with improvisation and the fact that you know what you meant, but that all falls apart when someone tries it at another table. There's a lot of satisfaction when others use your hack, so it's worth your while to put in the time and thought to make sure it's going to survive contact with the "enemy," otherwise known as the rest of the world.

Bottom line, the difference between hacking and game design is mostly one of semantics and paperwork. You've got the power to make your game as awesome as you want it to be, whether that means subtle and nuanced poet duels under the moonlight or T-Rexes with laser beam eyes and wendigo DNA. It takes work to do well, but it's good work to do, and nothing else will remind you that this all comes down to the fun that you and your friends are having. Make it what you want it to be. Game on. Hack responsibly.

TOUCH
TUNING

HOW TO HACK CORTEX PLUS

BY CAM BANKS

So you've got big ideas and you're ready to jump into the deep end of hacking or drifting or otherwise playing around with a *Cortex Plus* game. Fantastic! This short essay is for you. Before you go reading up on the specific elements of each flavor of *Cortex Plus* (*Action*, *Dramatic*, or *Heroic Roleplaying*) it might be helpful to take a look underneath the hood and see what the various games have in common, and what you can (and are encouraged to) throw out.

THE MOST BASIC CORTEX PLUS GAME EVER

Consider the following set of stripped-down rules. How much does this resemble the *Cortex Plus* games you're used to? Is anything critical missing? Is there something here that doesn't need to be?

- Write down your character's name and one central thing your character is good at doing. This is your character's trait.
- Make decisions for your character.
- If you want your character to do something and the character's trait would help, roll 2d6.
- If your character's trait doesn't have anything to do with what you want your character to do, roll d6.
- Your character starts with one Plot Point.

JANE DEFALT

Seasoned Journalist 2d6
Plot Points: 1

When there's something that might get in the way of what you want to do (the environment, another character, time, etc.), somebody else picks up dice to establish your difficulty.

- For easy opposition, roll d6.
- For challenging opposition, it's 2d6.
- For hard opposition, it's 3d6 or more.

Then you either roll your trait's dice (2d6) or your default d6, depending on whether what you want to do is covered by your trait or not.

If you roll a 1 on a die, that die doesn't count and you get a Plot Point. You can spend a Plot Point later on to add a d6 to your actions if you can describe something cool that helps you out.

Total up your dice. If you had more than 2 dice, only add the two best dice. Your opposition does the same.

- If you beat your opposition's total, you succeed!
- If not, you fail. Talk about what happened instead.

IS THAT IT?

Obviously not. These games have more mechanical support for the various genre styles that they're designed to emulate. Dramatic incorporates Relationships and Values to underscore the interpersonal and melodramatic underpinning of TV and movie dramas. Action focuses on quick, light traits with limited heavy mechanics, but it does bring in Talents and other systems to differentiate one action movie hero from another.

SO WHAT ELSE?

There is a common language shared by each *Cortex Plus* game, and it's this language that makes them each so readily hackable. Let's go into a little more detail about what that design language looks like.

TRAITS

Every *Cortex Plus* game, even our stripped-down basic, rules-lite version, incorporates traits. A trait is, when you get right down to it, a descriptive label with a die rating attached. For the most part, the rating is a die type (d4 through d12), but it could be a multiple of dice (like 2d8) or even two die types together (like d4 + d12). Other games might use flat numbers, modifiers, or percentages in place of die ratings, but *Cortex Plus* traits are almost universally this: Trait Name dx.

The game might further break traits down into categories, such as Roles, Values, and so on. If you're hacking *Cortex Plus*, this is one of the first areas in which you might experiment with drifting the original flavor of *Cortex Plus* to something that better suits your setting or property. Attributes might be thrown out and Drives added in (as with *Dramatic Roleplaying*). You might lump all Skills together into a small number of Roles (as with *Action Roleplaying*). These categories are like buckets in which the various traits are dropped, handily dividing a character into areas that are easily defined and assigned when making new characters.

Trait categories are also helpful when you think of them as component elements of a dice pool. Most of the time, a *Cortex Plus* character that attempts to do something might grab a die from each of a number of appropriate categories. The act of choosing a die from a category helps pull you back into the narrative and gives some structure to what would otherwise just be an elaborate dice game.

PLOT POINTS

Cortex Plus also runs on a narrative currency called Plot Points, so named because they help you influence the plot. You could probably rename them Action Points, Drama Points, or Hero Points (or Fate Points, Story Points, Karma, etc.) as you like, but they're the fuel for the *Cortex Plus* engine. The cycle of earning, spending, and then earning Plot Points is something you need to take great care to maintain when deciding what to use in your *Cortex Plus* hack.

So long as there are various ways to earn PP, spend PP, and explain what it means to do this within the context of the story, you're set. If you find that the hack relies too heavily on PP being generated by utterly random occurrences (such as the rolling of 1s on your dice), players aren't going to feel as in control of their character's progression through the story as we generally like them to be. Always work in some method for the player to make a somewhat antithetical or unpopular choice and gain PP in the process. Don't leave this to the Gamemaster to manage, either—it should be in the hands of the players.

ROLL AND KEEP

Cortex Plus operates on the idea that you don't have to add too many numbers together. Adding a lot of numbers can be great for the folks who have a good sense for it, but too much of that drags the player out of the game even more than fiddling with various dice does in the first place. By default, you should only call for players to add two dice together for their total.

The statistical qualities of rolling a number of dice of varying sizes is a little beyond this introductory essay, but it's intentionally obfuscating. You may have a sense when choosing dice that a D12 is better than a D4, that five dice should logically result in a better average total than two (especially if you pick the two highest rolling dice at any given roll). But there's a lot of swing in there. This is intentional, and the use of Plot Points to manipulate or alter the outcome to some degree is similarly intentional. *Cortex Plus* games rely on the tactile nature of picking up a few polyhedrals, clicking them in your hands, and then tossing them onto the table to see what comes of it.

STEPPING UP AND STEPPING BACK

Because *Cortex Plus* games feature some degree of die manipulation, the most common method of changing the potential variable involves changing the type of die being rolled. You'll see many occasions where such things as Distinctions, SFX, and Talents allow you to step up a die (changing it from a die of one size to one of a larger size) or step back a die (the reverse). We do this in lieu of flat modifiers, to preserve the swingy nature of the dice pool, and give you the feeling of improving your odds without actually breaking the balancing nature of the roll-and-keep method.

Note that, yes, the correct terminology is "step back" and not "step down." That's because we picture the die types as being steps on a staircase, with you standing on those steps facing up to the top of the stairs. As you improve your dice, you step up. As you reduce them, you step back. It's not a ladder! (But you can call it whatever you want in your hack. It's okay.)

ASSETS AND COMPLICATIONS

Finally, what some would call the other central axis of *Cortex Plus* beyond the traits and the Plot Points is the use of Assets and Complications. This includes such things as Stress, Useful Details, or Stunts—basically, temporary traits that either help you out or make life more difficult for you.

The purpose of an Asset is to be something that you can create during play and instantly label a part of the fiction as being significant. Sure, there are guns everywhere in an *Action Roleplaying* session, but when it's a GUN D8 people take notice. Whether you create them by spending Plot Points or as a result of a die roll, an Asset lets you improve your chance at influencing the story by adding more dice in a flavorful and thematic way.

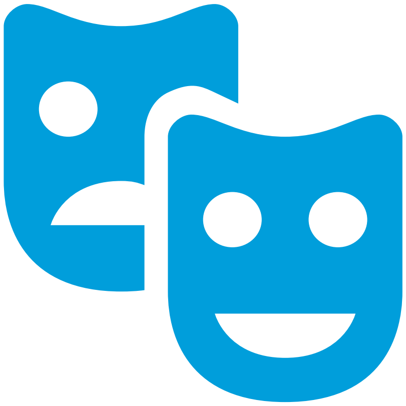
Complications by contrast are traits that make things harder for you. As *Cortex Plus* is almost always a game of opposed dice rolls, increasing the risk of something isn't a case of applying a negative penalty to your dice. No, we prefer to make the opposition better by kicking up their dice. Complications (or Stress, or whatever they end up being called) are bonus dice included in your opposition's dice pool when your negative circumstances would hinder you.

A healthy game of *Cortex Plus* often ends up with the playing area or character sheets covered in sticky notes, each labeled with some Asset or Complication or equivalent. They come and go, they change hands, they get bigger or reduced in size, but they are a sign that the story is an evolving and changing thing, directly affected by the players and their choices.

SO, IS THAT IT?

Obviously not, because this is a book packed with ideas, suggestions, variables, and drifts that you can make good use of. Many of them are setting hacks, but a lot of them are rules hacks that should (in one way or another) work in almost any *Cortex Plus* game. With a shared design language and a shared goal of emulating genre, these hacks are primed and ready to inspire, motivate, save time, and above all allow you and your players to express yourself.

Go forth, mess around, and see what else you can strip away before you build it right back up again!



THE BASICS OF DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING

BY MARGARET WEIS PRODUCTIONS

The specialty of *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* is right there in the name—drama. It focuses on interpersonal conflict and complex relationships between characters, where there are no clear-cut good guys and bad guys. The people in a *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* game aren't necessarily the most powerful or most skilled, but instead are those with the greatest amount of personal investment in whatever's at stake.

Currently, the *Smallville RPG* exemplifies this branch of *Cortex Plus*.

WHEN YOU ROLL

In *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* (DRP), you most often roll dice when you're trying to impose your will on another character. That may mean getting them to buy into a lie, convincing them to accept your point of view, or making them apologize. It may even mean you want them to roll over when you punch them in the face. The substance of the action doesn't matter as much as whatever it is you're trying to get from the other character.

Because of that, the characters in a game of DRP have a wide variety of potential capabilities. Superhuman heroes battling it out in the streets can be a Dramatic game just as much as Victorian-era sisters vying for a potential suitor, as long as the beliefs and relationships of the characters are front and center.

WHAT YOU ROLL

Like in other *Cortex Plus* games, you assemble a dice pool from various categories of Traits. Your character (called a **Lead**) in DRP has two core Traits: **Values** and **Relationships.** You also have two kinds of **Assets** to draw from: **Distinctions** and **Abilities**. Finally, you have **Resources** that can make a "guest appearance" to help out during a session.

VALUES

A Value is a representation of what your Lead believes in and holds dear. Each game of DRP has six **Values** that highlight the setting's "big ideals." In the *Smallville RPG*, those are Duty, Glory, Justice, Love, Power, and Truth, but a custom DRP game might have different ones.

Your Lead has a die rating that indicates how important that Value is, and then a statement that explains your character's feelings about that Value. You roll your Value when its statement is relevant to your action.

So, if you're trying to get someone to admit how he screwed over your friend, you might roll Duty *(My Friends Depend on Me)* d6. If you're trying to keep a secret, you might roll *I Can't Trust Anyone with the* Truth d8.

BUT WHAT IF MY STATEMENT'S WRONG?

Sometimes, you'll be in a situation where your statement doesn't fit, even though a particular Value or Relationship seems appropriate. If that happens, you can challenge that Value or Relationship for more dice, which gives you the chance to revise the statement and grow your character. In a good Dramatic game, people change their assumptions and grow all the time—that's part of the fun!

RELATIONSHIPS

A Relationship describes someone who's important in your Lead's life. Like Values, Relationships have die ratings that show the strength of the Relationship, and statements that show how your character feels about the person.

You roll a Relationship when that person is important to your action, whether you're confronting someone directly or you're doing your action on his behalf. So, if your boss Steve is about to fire an employee and you're trying to convince him not to, you'd pick up Steve *and I Understand Each Other* d6.

DISTINCTIONS

Distinctions answer the question of who you are and how you do what you do. Literally, they're what make your Lead distinct in the eyes of others. Are you a Smartass? Incredibly Wealthy? Did you spend a large part of your career as a Soldier? Nearly anything you can think of that sets two characters apart can be a Distinction.

Distinctions have a die rating showing how important they are, and then a number of triggers, or special tricks you can do because you have that Distinction. The higher your Distinction rating, the more tricks you have—one at d4, two at d8, and three at d12.

You roll a Distinction when it would help your action. If you're trying to humiliate someone in public, it's a good time to be a Smartass. If you're trying to stop someone from getting away with a stolen purse, it's probably good that you're a Soldier. You can use the triggers whenever they're appropriate, as well.

ABILITIES

Abilities are the apex of your Lead's power, the areas where you simply outclass everyone else. In the *Smallville RPG*, Abilities represent the superpowers that certain characters have, like X-Ray Vision or Super-Speed, and this is a pretty easy go-to option if your game includes magic or other supernatural abilities. You can also use Abilities to represent other kinds of power that create wide gulfs between people, like political status, military authority, or fame.

Abilities have a die rating, like all the other Traits, as well as a number of special effects. These are like the Distinction triggers, but much more flashy and extreme, allowing you broad authority to just say what happens in the story. (Super-Speed, for example, lets you just say you show up in a scene no matter where you were last scene.)

You roll an Ability whenever it would help your action out, and you can use the special effects whenever they're appropriate.

RESOURCES

Resources represent the "set dressing" around you—people you can call on for help and places that are important to you.

Resources have two dice at whatever their rating is (2d6, 2d8, etc.), as well as a pair of Specialties describing how they help your character. If you're a wealthy businessman, you might have Jeeves (Refuge, Life Management) 2d6, a loyal butler, and frequent your Skyrise Office (Business, Hard Bargaining) 2d8.

You can use your Resource dice to help on a roll when it'd make sense that they were available, but doing so uses up their dice, so they can only help you a limited number of times per session.

HOW YOU ROLL

To roll dice in DRP, you describe what you're doing and pick up an appropriate Value, an appropriate Relationship, and then one die from a Distinction or Ability. You can also bring in a Resource, if you have one that has dice left.

Once you have a dice pool, roll all the dice and total up the highest two. That's your result.

You'll use that result to try to win Contests and Tests.

CONTEST

In a Contest, two characters roll against each other in alternating turns, trying to top the previous result until someone can't escalate anymore. Whoever can't escalate loses the Contest.

Your opponent is either going to be another player's Lead, or a major NPC played by the GM (called a Feature). Features have the same Traits you do, and build dice just like you do.

If you lose, you must take **Stress,** described as a condition like Injured or Afraid, which gives a free die to anyone who can take advantage of it. Taking enough Stress makes it possible for people to force you out of a scene entirely, rendering you powerless to act further.

You can avoid taking Stress if you Give In early, letting the other person have what they want from you.

TESTS

In a Test, you only roll once and try to get the highest result.

Your opponent is the GM, who rolls a set of special dice called Trouble, representing a general sense of calamity and bad luck. Tests are for those situations that are risky, but don't involve another Lead or a Feature.

Losing some Tests may force you to take Stress.

PLOT POINTS

This game uses **Plot Points,** like all the *Cortex Plus* games. They can add more Traits to your dice pool, let you include more dice in your result, create Minor Assets or Relationships for you to use, and activate Distinction triggers or Ability special effects.

You can gain Plot Points whenever the GM takes advantage of you rolling a 1 on a die (called a Complication), or when a Distinction trigger calls for you to earn one.

CHARACTER CREATION

You, along with all the other players in your game, make your Leads using a system called Pathways. Pathways has two components: the Pathways Chart and the Pathways Map.

The Pathways Chart takes you through the different stages of your Lead's life, so you learn about their history—where they grew up, what problems they faced as they developed, and so on. At each stage, you add Values, Relationships, Distinctions, Abilities, and Resources to your character sheet, eventually culminating in a complete Lead.

The Pathways Map is a giant sheet of paper that shows how your Lead and the other Leads interconnect. Every time you establish a new background element (such as a Relationship or a Resource), that goes on the Map. During each stage, you and the other players draw connections between the elements on the Map.

This might mean that a particular character ends up being important to both of you, or that you share a Resource. It might mean that one of you has an enemy that another Lead considers a friend. It might mean that you and one of the other Leads are enemies!

By the time you're done, you not only have a complete character, but also a tangled web of interconnections with the other players and their stuff, and you're set to kick off your game.

SUPPORTED GAME STYLES

Ideally, you want to use DRP to play games where the Leads have a lot of interpersonal problems and reasons to get in each other's way. Values and Relationships, and how those affect the way characters deal with each other, should always be at the forefront of a Dramatic game.

This isn't for happy-go-lucky adventuring parties using teamwork and tactics to achieve goals. This is for people who don't fit in with each other, who have issues to work through, and yet need each other to get what they want. They don't have to hate each other. In fact, it's more dramatic if they don't, despite their differences—the most complicated tensions we work through in life are with our closest friends and loved ones. The GM's job is to tease out the points of tension between the Leads and poke at them, using Features and shared elements from the Pathways Map to push the Leads into conflict with one another.

Then, you just see where it goes—do you settle up? Hold a grudge? Become bitter enemies? Try to wreck each other's lives? Change for the better and become even stronger friends?

So much drama...hence the name.

THE BASICS OF ACTION ROLEPLAYING

BY MARGARET WEIS PRODUCTIONS

Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying is used to emphasize action-packed adventures in a variety of genres, from fast-paced heists to spy thrillers to anything with a car chase.

The *Leverage RPG* was the first game to use this version of Cortex Plus.

WHEN YOU ROLL

In *Action Roleplaying*, you roll when you are taking action that could involve failure. In general, odds are stacked in your favor, but taking action implies fallout in the form of Complications, and overcoming those Complications as they pile up drives play.

WHAT YOU ROLL

You assemble a dice pool from various categories of Traits. Your character (called a Crewmember in the *Leverage RPG*) in *Action Roleplaying* uses two Action Traits at its base: Attributes and Roles. (Some versions of Action may use different Traits, including just one Trait doubled up.) Then a number of other bonus dice and abilities define the Crewmember.

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes describe raw physical and mental ability of your Crewmember. Attributes in *Leverage RPG* are Agility, Alertness, Intelligence, Strength, Vitality, and Willpower.

ROLES

A Crewmember's place on the team is related to a combination of skill and expertise. These five broad Traits are called Roles. In the *Leverage RPG*, the five Roles are Grifter, Hacker, Hitter, Mastermind, and Thief.

Roles may also have Specialties attached that add bonus dice to specific uses of that Role.

DISTINCTIONS

Distinctions are descriptive Traits that define the character that fall outside the Attributes and Roles. In *Action Roleplaying*, a Distinction can be used as a d8 if it would help in a specific situation, or as a d4 (gaining you a Plot Point) if it would complicate the situation.

TALENTS

Talents are special abilities, generally tied to a specific Role, that help the Crewmember break the rules in a specific way. They are not rated in dice and rolled but often will modify how certain rolls or situation work.

SIGNATURE ASSETS

Signature Assets are helpful bonuses that are strongly associated with your Crewmember that could come up in a variety of situations. Often they take the form of specific equipment or locations.

ASSETS

Assets are situational bonuses that are created through play, usually through Plot Points.

COMPLICATIONS

Complications are generated by the Crewmembers as fallout for an action they take that work in dice pools against the Crew. They are created by rolling Opportunities, as described below.

HOW YOU ROLL

The most basic kind of action is called a Basic Action.

The Gamemaster (called the Fixer in the *Leverage RPG*) rolls to set the stakes of an action, using a combination of dice from opposing Traits, including those that represent the difficulty of the action being performed. The Fixer rolls the dice, setting aside any 1s (these are called Opportunities) and picks the highest two dice. The total of those two highest dice is the Result.

The Crewmember will assemble a dice pool using Attribute and Role, plus any bonus dice from Distinctions, Specialties, and Assets. The Crewmember sets aside any 1s, then takes the highest two dice for the Result. If the Crewmember's Result was higher than the Fixer's, the action was successful.

Any Opportunities rolled by the Crewmember can be paid with Plot Points to create new Complications. Any Opportunities rolled by the Fixer can be activated with Plot Points for a variety of effects.

There are a few variations on actions that use the same method of rolling, with some differences.

FACE AND NOTICE ACTIONS

Face and Notice Actions, along with other Role actions, help create Assets for later with a successful roll.

CONTESTED ACTIONS

Contested Actions are when another character is actively opposing a Crewmember, the stakes of which involve a degree of back and forth by seizing an advantage or gaining a decisive edge. Contested Actions require multiple rolls involving setting the stakes and trying to raise them in successive actions. Fight Actions are a specific kind of Contested Action, where the stakes are who gets knocked out.

TIMED ACTIONS

Timed Actions are those actions that take place over the course of several actions, but with pressure to complete the string of actions before time runs out.

FLASHBACK ACTIONS

Flashback Actions come in multiple types. They can establish details that happened in the past in order to add a new Asset, or a series of Basic Actions that wrap-up the story.

PLOT POINTS

Plot Points can be used to include more dice in your result, activate certain Talents that require it, or create new Assets.

You can gain Plot Points whenever the Fixer takes advantage of you rolling a 1 on a die, or when you choose to roll a Distinction as a d4.

CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation begins by deciding who fills which role among the Crew. Certain aspects are decided at the beginning, while others are decided through play and through flashbacks that introduce certain parts of your character. This process is known as The Recruitment Job, though an alternative known as The Fast Recruitment Job allows characters to be created by assigning values as desired.

SUPPORTED GAME STYLES

The key to *Action Roleplaying* play is right in the name: the Action. The dice rolls are fast-paced, and play keeps moving. *Action Roleplaying* characters are involved in complex operations, where the emphasis is on the execution, with any relevant elements of planning mostly coming up during play via flashbacks.

Action Roleplaying characters are highly competent, with the expectation being that the Crew will ultimately succeed. Much of the play is driven by the Complications that arise instead of the possibility of failure. *Action Roleplaying* characters show off how cool and skilled they are in every situation, and instead of being stymied by powerful opponents, their main worry is being overcome by the events around them and general entropy.

THE BASICS OF HEROIC ROLEPLAYING

BY MARGARET WEIS PRODUCTIONS

Cortex Plus Heroic Roleplaying is used for games with larger than life heroes who confront epic threats. It can represent super-powered heroes in titanic struggles for high stakes.

Marvel Heroic Roleplaying was the first game to use this version of *Cortex Plus*.

WHEN YOU ROLL

In *Heroic Roleplaying*, you roll when attempting to take an action opposed by another character (or the environment itself, represented by the doom pool) or are similarly opposing someone else's action (called a reaction).

WHAT YOU ROLL

You assemble a dice pool from various categories of traits, taking one die from each category, modified by special abilities of each of those kinds of categories. Your character (called a hero in *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying*) assembles a dice pool in the same way for both actions and reactions.

AFFILIATIONS

Affiliations represent how a hero functions with other heroes in a scene. The Affiliations are Solo, Buddy, and Team, for working alone, with one other hero, and two or more heroes, respectively.

DISTINCTIONS

Distinctions are descriptive traits that define the character that fall outside the other areas that can be anything from personality to history to a memorable quote. In *Heroic Roleplaying*, a Distinction can be used as a d8 if it would help in a specific situation, or as a d4 (gaining you a Plot Point) if it would complicate the situation.

POWER TRAITS

A hero has a number of power traits, organized into one or more thematic Power Sets. Power Sets group the power traits, as well as add SFX (special effects that break the rules in the hero's favor) and Limits (ways that restrict or otherwise can hamper use of that Power Set.) Heroes can use one power trait from each Power Set in a dice pool.

SPECIALTIES

Specialties are skill and expertise areas that the hero possesses. Specialties are rated as Expert d8, Master d10, and (rarely) Grandmaster d12. Specialties can be split up into multiple smaller dice in a dice pool. Specialties are also used to make resources, explained below.

ASSETS, RESOURCES, STUNTS, AND PUSHES

Assets are situational bonus dice added to a dice pool, often as a result of a previous successful action. Some specific kinds of assets are created differently: resources are a kind of asset created based on a hero's Specialties, stunts are based on the hero's Power Sets, and a push is available in any situation.

STRESS AND COMPLICATIONS

Stress and complications are inflicted upon heroes and other characters by winning rolls against them. In subsequent rolls, stress and complications attached to a character are rolled by anyone opposing them, and if stepped up high enough, can take a character out of the scene.

HOW YOU ROLL

Whoever is taking the action rolls first. After the dice pool is assembled, the dice pool is rolled. Any 1s are set aside—these are called opportunities. Any two remaining dice are added together—this is called the total. Finally, any other die is selected to be the effect die. The higher the effect die, the more effective the action will be if it succeeds.

The reaction is rolled second, after the action's total and effect die are set. Like the action, a reaction roll will end up with a total and effect die. If the total of the action is higher than the reaction, the action was successful, and the action's effect die will be used to inflict stress or a complication, or create an asset. If the reaction's total is higher, the action fails, and there may be additional effects that follow.

Opportunities rolled by heroes give the heroes Plot Points, and in exchange more dice are added to the doom pool (explained further below). Opportunities rolled by the Gamemaster (known in *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* as the Watcher) can be activated for a variety of effects by heroes.

PLOT POINTS

Plot Points can be used to include more dice in your total, use more dice as effect dice, create certain kinds of assets (including resources, stunts, and push dice), add more dice from a category, or activate certain SFX that require it.

You can gain Plot Points whenever the Watcher takes advantage of you rolling a 1 on a die, or when you choose to roll a Distinction as a D4.

THE DOOM POOL

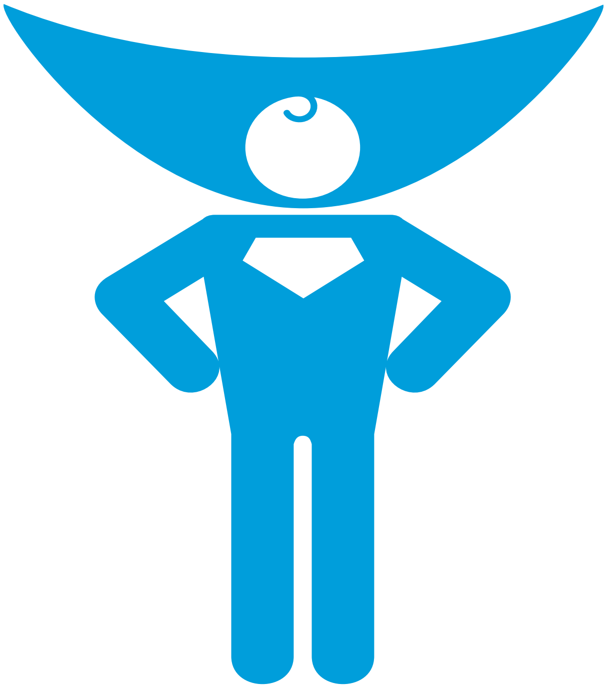
The doom pool is the resource used by the Watcher to complicate the lives of the heroes and represents the general chaos of the environment and the situation spiraling out of control (or becoming more contained) of the heroes. The doom pool is rolled as opposition if no Watcher character is actively involved in an action. Dice from the doom pool can also be spent by the Watcher for a variety of effects similar to Plot Points.

CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation is covered in multiple ways. There are many existing heroes that are ready to be played. Heroes can also be created by starting from a concept, and choosing appropriate traits in each category. Certain templates or options can also help fill out these traits. Finally, there are some options for randomly rolled heroes.

SUPPORTED GAME STYLES

Heroic Roleplaying is the version of *Cortex Plus* that is ideal for truly heroic characters engaged in life and death conflicts with potentially epic stakes. Characters with a variety of powers and abilities to draw on are ideal for *Heroic Roleplaying*. Game styles that emphasize conflict, combat, and other titanic struggles work well in *Heroic Roleplaying*. Additionally, fairly complex Gamemaster characters and use of the doom pool to represent the situation are strong elements of a *Heroic Roleplaying* game.



MACHINE SHOP

BY JOSH ROBY

You hear a lot about "toolbox" roleplaying games: games that give you all the tools you need to play whatever. *Cortex Plus* isn't a toolbox game; it's an entire machine shop. This article is your tour around the machine shop and a little primer on how you can build your own game with *Cortex Plus*.

THE SETTING

The first thing you need to hash out is your game's setting. What kind of a game are you looking to play? What awesome things do you want rampaging across your gaming table? What trouble do you want the player characters getting into and out of? Will it be science fiction, fantasy, modern-day drama, or some unholy fusion of all three?

If you're planning to be the GM, you can create the setting all by yourself, but make sure that the setting is easily conveyed to your players. Boil everything down to a single sheet of paper: a Loresheet. If you have trouble doing that, split the setting into two parts (Geography and Adventuring, or City and Wilderness, or what-have-you) and make two Loresheets. Any more and your players will get that glassy-eyed stare instead of buying in. Summarizing also helps you focus on what's really important in the setting.

Sometimes doing it on your own is necessary—if you're running a con game, hosting an event, or getting your players to try something new—but it pales before creating the setting with your players. You can use the Pathways Map from *Smallville* (with or without the associated character creation steps) or simply sit down around your table for some good old-fashioned brainstorming. You can make a mind map keyed off of a single, root idea: "ancient Rome," "Victorian ninjas," or "supernatural rock band." You could use a single image—a photograph or illustration that you particularly like—and see where that takes you.

Once you have a handle on when and where you'll be playing, it's time to focus on who.

THE CHARACTERS

Cortex Plus characters have lots of different moving parts, many of them on the character sheet. First, you must decide which are the most important pieces. You'll need to pick two kinds of Traits to be your Core Traits, and then figure out where your Talents come from. Finally, decide what other Traits will be available.

CORE TRAITS

Your Core Traits will be the axis around which the game revolves. Nearly every die roll will involve one of each, so they should be the central focus of the game. Do you want a game about the relationships between savvy characters and the highly competent things they do? Then go with Relationships and Skills. Do you want a game about what people believe, no matter what sort of person they are? Then maybe you need Values and Roles.

Here's a quick look at your options:

Attributes rate all characters on a handful of common characteristics, usually focusing on the physical, mental, and sometimes social. Every character has a rating in each Attribute. You might use the classic Cortex six: Alertness, Agility, Intelligence, Strength, Vitality, and Willpower. Alternatively, you can come up with a list of five to seven Attributes that you want all characters in your game to focus on. Use Attributes if you want a common rubric that describes everybody in your game on the same scales, and for a Core Trait that is easily understandable.

Relationships describe what the characters believe and how they feel about each other. A game with Relationships usually starts with all player characters having Relationships with each other and with a handful of important NPCs. Relationships can be challenged to add dice to the Growth pool. For the full skinny on Relationships, see the *Smallville RPG*. Use Relationships to create a game that focuses on camaraderie, rivalries, loyalty, love triangles, vendettas, and other social interactions.

Roles let players mix and match character archetypes to create a unique synthesis for their own characters. The *Leverage RPG* introduced Roles with its five: Hacker, Hitter, Grifter, Thief, and Mastermind. Unless you're playing a game focusing on capers, you'll need to come up with your own short list. As with Attributes, every character has a rating in each Role, but the top two ratings are a good indication of the kind of person the character is. Use Roles for lightly constrained but easily grasped characterization with a generous dash of style.

Skills (also known as **Specialties**) rate characters in their areas of expertise, whatever they may be. COMPUTER EXPERT? HOTSHOT PILOT? PERSON OF INFLUENCE? While it's best to have a short list (no more than twenty), not every character has a rating in every skill. You might also elect to use Skill Specialties, which allow players to create their own Traits once they reach a certain level of competence. Once you have MEDICINE D6, for instance, you might upgrade it to FIELD MEDIC D8. Use Skills as a lightly constrained, easy-to-use option with a gritty sense of character competence.

Values define what the characters believe in and lets them tap into those beliefs to fuel their actions. The *SMALLVILLE RPG* uses POWER and GLORY, TRUTH and JUSTICE, LOVE and DUTY—rather strongly flavored super hero and soap opera grist. You can use these six or come up with a list of your own. Values are most often common to all characters, but different characters can use different lists if that's the way you want to play. Use Values for stylized roleplay focused on beliefs and fueled by determination.

TALENTS

Now that you know what dice you'll be rolling regularly, there's one more thing you need: dice tricks. These go by different names in different *CORTEX PLUS* games, but for the purposes of this article, we'll call them Talents. Talents let you reroll dice, wreak more (or less) havoc, insert special details into the story, and—ever a popular choice—earn you more Plot Points. They are an essential piece to game construction because they give the players a sense of control and ownership over the story; without Talents, players often feel like they are "playing through" somebody else's story.

Talents can come from different places in different games. Core Traits are your first place to look. Roles, for instance, make great sources for Talents. Hackers have Talents involving technology and Thieves have Talents involving sleight-of-hand and breaking-and-entering. High-level Attributes or Skills are also fertile ground for growing Talents: the high STRENGTH character can beat down doors while the character with PILOT D10 can pull off amazing aerial stunts.

If your Core Traits aren't singing to you, Talent-wise, a natural home for Talents are the Distinctions that nearly every *CORTEX PLUS* game uses. You can take a page from the *SMALLVILLE RPG* and add a new Talent at every other level of each Distinction, get just one Talent for each Distinction, or some other scheme.

Wherever they come from, you need to decide, roughly, how many Talents each character gets. This number has a big effect on how play feels. Fewer Talents leads to fast-paced action and players working towards key moments where a Talent comes into play. More Talents create nuanced drama where each word and action might have game-changing significance. The *LEVERAGE RPG* starts characters off with just five (two Talents and three stealth "earn-a-Plot-Point" Opportunities for Distinctions); the *SMALLVILLE RPG* kicks off with ten to fifteen. There's a broad spectrum of possibilities between those two poles.

ASSETS

Assets are the catchall term for Traits outside the two core categories. You'll need to decide which of these to include:

Distinctions are the archetypal Asset, and are a powerful tool for players to customize their characters. Distinctions allow you to make your character a DRUNK, a SOLDIER, even an ATLANTEAN. They can be rated in dice, as in the *SMALLVILLE RPG*, or unrated, as in the *LEVERAGE RPG*. Unrated Distinctions are worth a D8 when they're useful or a D4 when they get in the way. Rated Distinctions yield their rating in any die roll where the Trait helps you. Traits from categories that didn't make the cut for Core Traits can often be converted into Distinctions (WILLPOWER becomes WILLFUL, HACKER becomes…well, HACKER).

Abilities confer superhuman capabilities to characters: FLIGHT, X-RAY VISION, TELEPORTATION, and many others. While a game with super powers or magic might make the full list available to characters, most games will narrow down the list to a handful of Abilities that are only available to certain kinds of characters. You might use the Gear rules to allow Abilities in the form of cutting-edge technology. For more details about how Abilities work, see the *SMALLVILLE RPG*.

Extras are bit characters that help other characters. They may have a name and a few quirks, but they don't have their own agenda and they don't cause trouble. They're there for the main characters, and they're potent tools for fleshing out the setting.

Locations are places that work identically to Extras. When in a Location, a character is empowered by its resources, familiarity, or other special significance. A stable of solid Locations will make a setting feel real—as long as the game's story doesn't take the characters elsewhere!

Signature Assets come from the *LEVERAGE RPG*, and are usually items or Locations that the character can use to add a D8 in appropriate rolls. Think of this as the "Simple Gear and Locations" option.

THE GAME

The last bit you need is to decide how the game will proceed. How will you structure a session of play? How will you roll dice? How will characters advance?

STRUCTURE

To create dramatic play focusing on conflicts between characters and challenging assumptions, create Episodes as described in the *Smallville RPG*. This works best when you have Relationships as a Core Trait, but can work with Values just as easily. A game with other Core Traits will require the GM to summarize the player characters' views of each other in order to create Wedges—pressure points that you apply between characters and/or their environment.

For a quicker, more action-oriented kind of game, consider creating Jobs as in the *Leverage RPG*. All you need to kick off play is a basic situation: a Client, a Mark, and a problem. As the players make their plans and try to resolve the problem, you'll all develop that situation through play together. This usually creates pulpy, heroic sort of stories, where the player characters always find a way to come out on top.

If neither of those options floats your boat, you can prepare a session of play by creating a rough Script, with a handful of necessary scenes and showdowns with your primary antagonists. Know ahead of time that the players will fill in the details between your prepared showcase scenes—or do them out of order or skip some entirely. The map is not the territory, and the plan never survives contact with the players!

DICE

The basic *Cortex Plus* die mechanic has you roll a pool of dice (one from each Core Trait, one Asset, more of each by spending Plot Points, plus any temporary Assets you can get your hands on) and add the highest two together to yield your result. What you do with that result depends on which dice you elect to use:

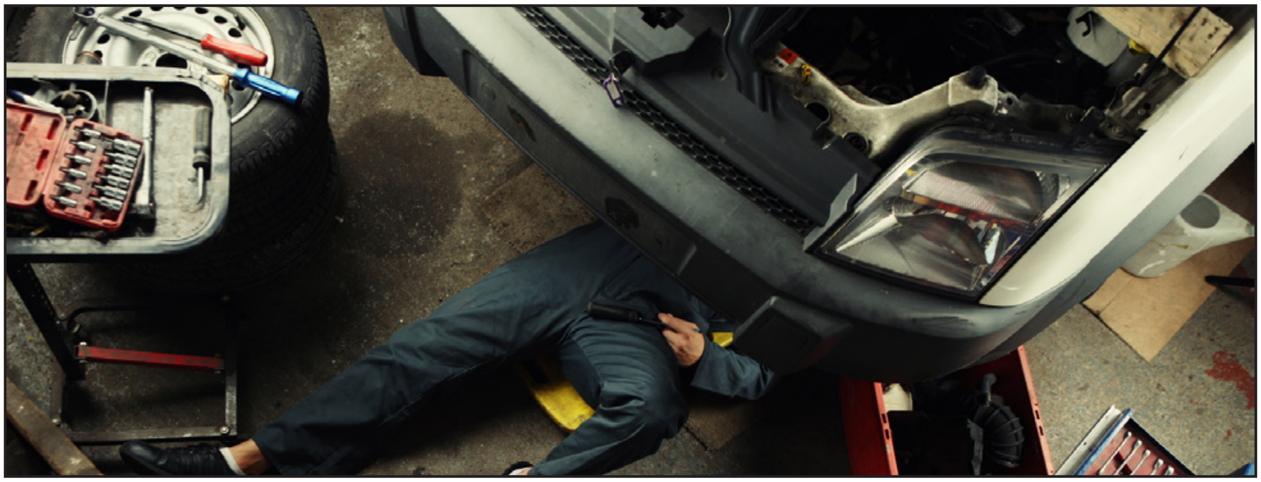
Action Dice, from the *Leverage RPG*, create punchy, fast-paced play that resolves the current conflict and moves on to the next one. Play creates a list of temporary Assets and Complications that can be called upon later for bonuses, creating rich plot development. Use Action Dice when you want the game to focus on character competence, plot development, and getting the job done.

Dramatic Dice, from the *Smallville RPG*, create tense inter-character drama, as well as thematically significant action sequences. Players might roll against the GM's Trouble pool, which ebbs and flows over the course of the game, or the dice of PCs or NPCs. Importantly, when you're using Dramatic Dice, no character is ever forced to do anything: they are, ahem, *encouraged* to Give In by the threat of Stress. Use Dramatic Dice when you want the game to focus the characters' resolve, relationships, and realizations.

ADVANCEMENT

Playing with the Record puts a focus on character competence and experience. They're good, and they grow, because of what they've done. It's up to you whether players can get bonus dice for their past deeds, as in the *Leverage RPG*. The essential element is that players can "spend" their achievements on the Record to improve the Traits on their sheet.

Playing with a Growth pool puts a focus on challenging assumptions, uncovering secrets, and adopting new perspectives. It's more than dramatic: it's downright soapy. The Growth pool only works with games that have Relationships or Values as Core Traits: otherwise, players have no opportunities to challenge. You might roll Growth in Tag Scenes like in the *Smallville RPG*, or you might use montages. Whenever you choose to roll, the thrust is the same: by exploring how your character might have been wrong, they learn and grow.



EXAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

HIGH SCHOOL PRIVATE DETECTIVE

Your high school is just like any other: chock full of secrets, injustice, and crime. Other towns may not be known for murders and corporate espionage, but that's because their schools don't have students like you, determined to get to the bottom of things.

Setting: Pathways Map

Core Traits: Relationships (from Map) and Values (Duty, Justice, Love, Luxury, Respect, Truth)

Talents: 10-15, every other level of Distinction

Assets: Rated Distinctions, Signature Assets, Extras, and Locations

Structure: Jobs (The Client, The Suspects, The Problem)

Dice: Dramatic

Advancement: Growth pool from Challenges and Highest Stress

MID-BULK TRANSPORT

It's a cutthroat solar system…literally! You play the crew of a small ship running small jobs—legal and otherwise—and you've come to form something like a family. A dysfunctional and ethically challenged family, but a family, nonetheless. The ship is home, and you'll do anything to protect it.

Setting: Loresheets

Core Traits: Relationships (PC-to-PC) and Roles (Doc, Face, Leader, Pilot, Tough, Tech)

Talents: 3 by Role, 3 from Distinctions, and 1 from Signature Asset

Assets: Unrated Distinctions and Signature Assets

Structure: Episodes

Dice: Action

Advancement: Growth pool from Challenges, plus a d8 for each Distinction rolled at d4

MONSTER-HUNTING ROAD TRIP

Normal people have jobs, kids, and lives. You don't. You hunt monsters, keep normal folks safe, and live The Life. It's dangerous and dirty and terrifying, and normal folks think you're crazy or criminal or worse, but somebody's got to do it. Somebody has to stand up against the darkness.

Setting: Mind Map (keyed off of Route 66)

Core Traits: Values (The Job, The Girl/The Boy, The Town, The Life, The Past, The Big Picture) and Relationships (buy at d6 for a Plot Point, challenge for a Plot Point)

Talents: 10-15, every other level of Distinction

Assets: Rated Distinctions, Abilities, and Signature Assets

Structure: Jobs (The Girl/The Boy, The Monster, and The Attack)

Dice: Action

Advancement: The Record

SEXY ROBOTS AND SPACESHIPS ON THE RUN

Humanity's six planets were destroyed in a surprise attack by their robot servants. Now a rag-tag fleet of ships—what may be the only remnants of the species—is on the run, trying to find the mythical Homeworld. Worse: the robots are on board, disguised as humans—inevitably very attractive humans—scheming, seducing, and subverting the last hope for humanity's survival.

Setting: Group Brainstorming

Core Traits: Values (Duty, Home, Freedom, Glory, Justice, Love) and Skills (Athletics, Covert, Guns, Hand-To-Hand, Influence, Medicine, Perception, Performance, Pilot, Science, Survival, Tech)

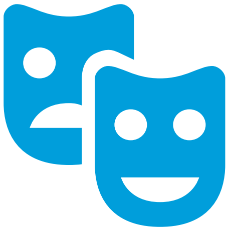
Talents: 8-10, one per Skill at d8 and from Distinctions

Assets: Unrated Distinctions, Extras, Locations, and Abilities (for Robots)

Structure: Episodes

Dice: Dramatic

Advancement: Growth pool from Challenges and all Stress



ROLEPLAY LIKE YOU'RE ON TV!

BY MONICA VALENTINELLI

Have you ever fallen in love with a television show? Played an RPG? If your answer to both of these questions is "Yes!" then chances are you've joined thousands of gamers who've wanted to turn their favorite TV show into a game. The questions that follow are: Why and How?

This hack explores these questions and provides several answers through the merging of the Cortex Classic Generic Roleplaying System with some elements of *Cortex Plus* games like the *Smallville* and *Leverage RPG*s.

The appeal of playing a game based on a television show is twofold: players either want to step into the shoes of their favorite character or explore a setting they really like. At first, it doesn't sound like the two goals are all that different, but take a closer look. In one scenario, what's drawn a fan to the show is a popular character. If that's the case, the player's emotional connection to this character encourages him to spend Advancement Points (from Cortex Classic) to level him up or build an iconic character right off the bat. Here, spending AP for other aspects of play may not be as important to this player as the chance to play Malcolm Reynolds, for example.

In the second scenario, a fan enjoys a show's story so much it doesn't matter what character she plays, as long as she get to engage in similarly themed plots. *LOST* is a great example of this, since the setting is rife with mystery and the story can go in a direction far different from what went on the screen.

An ideal cinematic system would affect an individual character, the players as a group, and the story to ensure both the GM's and the players' needs are met. While there are no perfect systems, some of those you like to play can help you reach that goal.

Cinematic-style systems vary wildly, even within Cortex. Take a look at the *Supernatural* and *Smallville RPG* books for example. In *Smallville*, there's a fair amount of attention to character relationships in the mechanics, which were pioneered in the *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* system. *Supernatural*, on the other hand, built on the original *Cortex System RPG*, focuses on more classical RPG mechanics such as skills, gear and combat abilities.

Both these systems fulfill separate needs and yet each has its own merits. If you take a close look at *Cortex Plus*, you will clearly see some core elements taken from Cortex Classic. Even if you were to strip out any one of these systems, you'll quickly find they don't work for every type of cinematic game. Instead, you might be better served with a simplified version that hits the high points of both styles—especially if you're used to playing Cortex Classic as opposed to the highly customized *Cortex Plus* system.

So, the answer presented here lies somewhere in the middle. To have a generic system you could use for any cinematic game, you can take elements from *Cortex Plus* as inspiration and install them into Cortex Classic. Before we get into that, though, let's look at cinematic RPGs from a bird's-eye view.

To adapt any television show to an RPG, you will need a high concept before you even think about emulating it with a game system. What will you do in your game? Hunt ghosts? Investigate murders? Say you were going to adapt a game to a show like Legend of the Seeker or He-Man. You decide your goal is to find a mysterious box hidden deep within a mountain. Sure, the roles might be similar to a standard dungeon crawl—Cleric, Barbarian, Ranger, Rogue, Wizard—but imagine all the action is captured with a camera and things change, from the pace to the emotional intensity.

Once you have established what your game is about, consider your characters' roles and how they relate to each other. After all, it's not just about playing a Cleric or Barbarian; it's also about a character's place within the team. That's where universal roles or archetypes come into play. By using a one-word description, you can dramatize your roleplaying to fit a more cinematic style game. While there are dozens of roles you can assign to your character, here are five examples:

Cheerleader: Doesn't matter what the circumstance the group is in, the cheerleader will use her sunny disposition to encourage and inspire everyone.

Peacekeeper: Abhors conflict and violence. This character will do whatever he can to avoid it and keep everyone happy.

Judge: Always voices her opinion regardless of whether or not she's informed, and expects others to listen and trust her judgment.

Opportunist: Regardless of the risks, this character always looks for ways to benefit the group, either for himself or for the team.

Closer: Once a course of action is decided, this character will see a job through to the end, no matter who hired her and how moral it may be.

These generic roles allow a character's personality to flourish within a team environment. The Cleric might be the Peacekeeper; the Barbarian might be the Closer. By assigning a one-word description like this to any character sheet, your roleplaying will immediately improve because you don't need to figure out all of your character's personality or how well he plays with others. Often, it can be challenging to have good cohesion and team synergy right off the bat for any game. Here, a simple word helps you jump right in. Of course, these roles are samples, so don't be afraid to come up with your own to fit your game.

Turning back to the game system, after assigning a team role to your character, you can flesh out your Assets and Complications to support that idea. The Cheerleader could be GOOD-NATURED and an IDEALIST; the Opportunist might have an ALTERNATE IDENTITY and be GREEDY.

Now that you have a good foundation for your character, grab your character sheet from the *CORTEX SYSTEM RPG*. We'll demonstrate how you can alter and update Cortex Classic to fit any television show you want to play.

MODIFIED CORTEX CLASSIC CHARACTER SHEET

Classic Cortex provides you with everything you need to play any setting. However, there are some elements missing from the *CORTEX SYSTEM RPG* character sheet. Contemporary elements of Relationships and paths found in *SMALLVILLE* were designed to dramatize your character in a way that's similar to an actor's role on a television show. So, to have a generic template you can use to play in any character-focused game, we're going to develop a modified character sheet that's simple enough to use for any show, any genre.

The first thing we're going to do is take a page from the *LEVERAGE RPG* and drop the following from the first page of the character sheet: General and Specialty Skills, Armor, Weapons, Health and Derived Attributes. Next, we're going to move Plot Points and Die Steps along with Assets and Complications up front and center. Those three things will give you everything you need to play any game. Under the Description box, we're going to add a slot for Team Role. That's where you're going to write your one-word idea to help you roleplay your character. We'll get to Advancement Points in a minute.

On the second page, add back in the Derived Attributes: Weapons, Armor and Health. Gear and History remain unchanged.

So far, so good. What you now have is a customized two-page character sheet. On the first page, you've simply placed the Classic Cortex system mechanics best suited for a cinematic game. Now, the second page is optional for those of you who enjoy more crunch in your RPG. As a Novice, remember you'll have a pool of 42 points to spend on Attributes, 68 on Skills and zero on Traits. So, if Traits are important to ensure you'll have a decent character in your first session, don't be afraid to utilize the stats for Veteran (48/68/4) and Elite (54/74/8). Don't want to limit your character with a group of Skills? Simply drop them from your character creation process altogether.

By rearranging the existing boxes, the focus of Classic Cortex is more in line with a cinematic-style game. Let's take that one step further and highlight interpersonal Relationships in a way inspired by the *SMALLVILLE RPG*. Under Description, add a three-column box called "Connections." In the first column, go around the table and list each character's name in your team. In the second column, label that Admire (+1) and Envy (-1). Similar to your character's team role, come up with a short description that describes how your character feels about the others at the table. For example, you might say: "I envy Kahlan's power." Or say, "I admire Orko's tact." If you can figure out how that might apply to a roll at the table, then you'd add a bonus (or penalty) to your result. If you shoot for a Veteran or an Elite character, change that +1 to a +2 or +3, respectively.

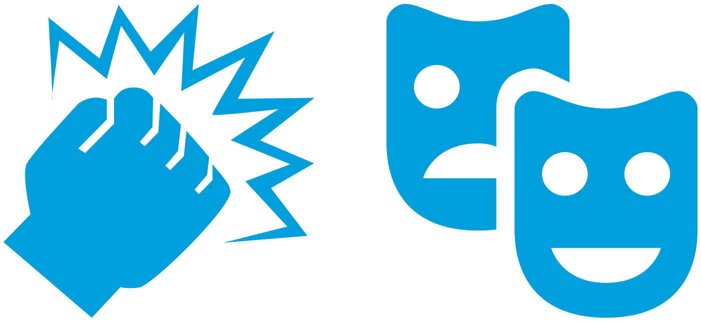
The assumption behind this addition is that you as a player already have feelings about a television show's characters before you sit down to play. Adding these feelings onto your sheet provides you with another layer of quick roleplaying tips that you can both use mechanically and in spirit. Writing down what you like and don't like about a character could also lead to closer relationships, romantic infatuation, or rivalry.

Okay, now that we've addressed your character from a roleplaying perspective on your sheet and from a descriptive point-of-view, there's one thing left to do. Let's discuss how to spend your hard-earned Advancement Points.

Earlier, we moved the Skills to the back of your character sheet. So, we're going to keep all the current costs for Advancement Points (AP), just in case. No need to duplicate that box, right? Instead, we're going to add two more options for you to spend your hard-earned APs on. The first option circles back to the idea that a player might want to play an iconic character. Instead of spending your APs on your character's Attributes, Traits or Skills, bank your AP to earn a temporary session bonus to all your rolls; the cost is ten points per bonus die. After all, if you're swinging across a canyon or fighting a black dragon, you'll need all the help you can get.

A second option reinforces those emotional connections you just figured out. To add another number to your Admires/Envies column, spend 14 AP points. This option facilitates players who want to focus on their interpersonal relationships and strengthen (or weaken) these ties.

Roleplaying a character from any television show is a lot of fun because you're invested in the show before you roll your die. *Cortex Plus* allows you to really dig in and have a well-developed system that's designed to fit a particular show like *Leverage* or *Smallville*. For those of you who want a quick, down and dirty version for your favorite TV show, you can accommodate multiple styles of play and genres by tweaking your Classic Cortex character sheet. What are you waiting for? Now go play!



HACKING STRESS

BY RYAN MACKLIN

In *Cortex Plus* Drama, Stress is how your characters deal with setbacks and defeat. It hits them in the moment when they lose a Contest, and it stays as lasting consequences until they get some Stress Relief. Stress is a key piece of your Lead as you play, since you want to gain Stress in order to get your Growth pool. Also, people dealing with Stress are interesting.

The five original Stress Traits—Afraid, Angry, Exhausted, Injured, and Insecure—are perfect for a Drama about young adults finding their way in a world, who happen to have superpowers. There are a lot of different forms of Stress your Drama game can take, and a few different ways you can change Stress in your game.

A MENU OF STRESS

Here are over thirty different Stress Traits. The meaning of most of these will be obvious. Some will make you stop and think. But it's not for me to tell you what Angry or Delusional or Overconfident means. It's for your Leads to tell us what they mean.

This is far from exhaustive, but it's a good start to get you thinking.

- Afraid
- Angry
- Anxious
- Bitter
- Blissed
- Clumsy
- Cold
- Controlling
- Crippled
- Delusional
- Depressed
- Distracted
- Embarrassed
- Exhausted
- Feral
- Hacked
- Hateful
- Hungry
- Hysterical
- Injured
- Insecure
- Intoxicated
- Isolated
- Overconfident
- Quiet
- Rash
- Shaken
- Shell-Shocked
- Sloppy
- Stubborn
- Suspicious
- Uncertain

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The names you use for your Stress Traits will have a huge impact on your game. Choosing them wisely makes the difference between a good Drama and a fantastic one.

In supernatural horror, it makes sense to have an Afraid Stress Trait. But the word Afraid doesn't sound quite right for a game about mind-shattering knowledge and monsters made of tentacles and ichor. Terrified or Horrified has a much stronger ring to it. It that sort of game, saying you're dealing with d10 Horrified feels like it has more weight than d10 Afraid, even if it is basically the same thing. Those sorts of words are more primal and are in keeping with the genre. Alternatively, using a word that suggests an added taste of competency under horror (for your "operatives against the supernatural" story), try Unnerved. That suggests a different way to play out how your Leads handle the Stress.

Any time you can see a word your characters would use in the fiction, that's a signal that it could be a good Stress Trait. In a paramilitary drama, Sloppy might be one you're interested in adding, but the name sounds comical, downright goofy. If your Leads are meant to be sharp, strong individuals in extraordinary times, another word to use is Undisciplined. You can imagine how the characters in this story would talk, and they would throw that word around at and about each other.

Sometimes you need a little extra oomph to set something apart as a Stress Trait. In many settings, Suspicious is fine. But in very conspiratorial Dramas, everyone already is (or had better well be). That would be like having Breathing as Stress. To kick that up a notch for those stories, use Paranoid.

Sometimes the word fits exactly right, but you need to still note down what it means because of your genre. That's okay, too!

Say you're setting up a drama set in Louisiana, where humans live in a turbulent peace with other creatures of the night. It would make sense for Leads to have Hungry. As long as everyone is on board with knowing that's talking about people, not steak, you're set.

Genre-specific Stress like Hacked might be better served in your game by using in-world slang. Pwned, Trojan'd, or Root3d are along from our real world. What's it called in yours?

DIE RATING & GRANULARITY

Most people playing Drama have a sense that d6 Afraid doesn't feel like d12 Afraid. Sometimes, you'll want to use different words for those different ratings. Do that by adding a little granularity to some of your Stress Traits.

To start with, pick an overall name for that Stress Trait, which you'll use in rewriting any Distinctions or otherwise referring to it mechanically. Then come up with names for it for the d6, d8, d10, and d12 rating.

For a war drama game about paratroopers in WWII, you might want a bit more detail in Injured:

- d6 Flesh Wound
- d8 Bleeding
- d10 Crippled
- d12 Medic!

Or for our supernatural horror above, with Horrified:

- d6 Unnerved
- d8 Afraid
- d10 Horrified
- d12 Lost in Horror

It's important to keep in mind that no matter what you call these, at no point does the name of a Stress Rating mean a Lead cannot act. The only time where a Lead cannot act significantly is after being Stressed Out. Your secret operative with d12 Medic! and d12 Lost in Horror can still fight the good fight and give it all for humanity.

If you do this, limit it to one or two Stress Traits rather than all five. That's a lot of work for everyone to keep track of.

CHANGING STRESS IN YOUR GAME

Now that you have an idea of how to do different Stress, it's really easy to change it. Once you've got all your Leads made, you have one last step. Come up with what five Stress Traits you'll use (either the GM alone or as a group, though as a group is always better).

THE RULE OF FIVE

Stick with five Stress Traits. Too few and each one will come up too often. That'll get boring. Too many and they won't hit often enough to be interesting. Someone who is, for example, Afraid constantly is a one-note character. Characters who only get Afraid once never show us anything interesting about how they deal with fear. You want Leads that are Afraid sometimes, so they can play that out in different ways at different times.

If you want to break this rule, know that you'll change how Stress feels.

REWORKING DISTINCTIONS

Once you have your Stress, look at the Distinctions people have taken. Many key off of increasing or decreasing Stress Traits, either their own or others'. If a Lead has a Distinction that applies to a Stress you aren't using, work with the group to decide how to rewrite that Distinction (or maybe decide that Distinction doesn't fit your hack either).

DIFFERENT STRESS FOR DIFFERENT LEADS

Once you know how to tweak Stress Traits for your game, it doesn't take much to realize you can tweak them for each Lead. This can put even more personality into your Leads. You're already coming up with what they believe in, who matters to them, and the notable things they can do. To say how they're vulnerable, how they deal with setbacks and defeats, adds even more story mojo to your game.

YOUR BOX OF TRAITS

When coming up with your campaign, you have two choices: **Playing with the Big Toy Box** or **Focusing the Pain.**

Playing with the Big Toy Box lets everyone pick from any Stress Traits. This gives you all sorts of options to come up with interesting characters that you might not expect.

Focusing the Pain means narrowing down the list of available Stress Traits down to between eight and twelve. This allows you to craft a more consistent theme in your game, while still allowing room for flexibility.

Neither one's better than the other; it's all about what you and your game need.

COMMON GROUND

Once you know what Stress Traits are available to the Leads, you can come up with each one's when doing the finishing touches. You have some other choices you can make here: **Free for All, Common Stress,** and **Heritage Stress.**

Free for All is simple. From the list of available Stress Traits, pick five that feel right for a Lead, and would be fun to see the Lead deal with. This is great if you want a looser drama, where Leads come from many different backgrounds and have very different roles in the story. You might even consider changing these as you play, possibly one per Tag Scene.

Common Stress is a little more involved, as you have to come up with two or three Stress Traits that everyone in the campaign should have, leaving the remaining ones open for a Free for All. This unification results in a tighter story about characters that are similar. It's a great way to explore how such characters still differ in that tight story space. In particular, a "humans versus supernatural menaces" or "military drama" game will be well served with a few common Stress Traits.

Heritage Stress is a variation on Common Stress, for specialized character types like different races or species, or characters with very different walks of life—whatever your Drama game decides are Heritages. A game with elves, dwarves, and humans might have all three with their own set of Common Stress Traits. (And possibly even have some special Stress Traits the other races can't take!) Likewise, a game where you have disciplined military or law enforcement personnel alongside untrained civilian scientists could be reflected in two different sets of Heritage Stress.

STRESS IN ACTION

Now that we know all sorts of ways to change Stress in our games, let's take a look a few examples:

THE FUTURE SAVIOR OF HUMANITY

You're a family like any other. You get up, go to school, get home, and fight against killer robots from the future. Your mother has been training you since birth to be a great leader of a future resistance, your "uncle" was sent back in time to aid you both, and your "cousin" is a reprogrammed killer robot. Oh, and next week is show and tell!

All Robots from the Future have the same Stress Traits: DAMAGED, HACKED, REVEALED. (The group decided that Robots should feel very similar and only have three Stress Traits.)

All Humans have PARANOID and any four other Stress Traits that Robots don't have.

NO ONE KNOWS WE SAVE THE WORLD

Back when the Bureau of Unnatural Containment was first formed, the world was in chaos. Germany was marching across the Earth with Powers Unknowable. It's been years since their defeat, both temporal and supernatural, but their dark legacy lives on in secret. The Bureau was shut down a few years ago, but evil continues to discover and wield Nazi magitech. So you and your pistol continue the Bureau's good work in secret, unknown even to your spouse and children.

Everyone has: DISTRACTED (specifically from the Lead's home life), EXHAUSTED, HORRIFIED.

Everyone can choose from: AFRAID, DELUSIONAL, DEPRESSED, INJURED, INTOXICATED, OVERCONFIDENT, PARANOID, SHAKEN, SLOPPY.

WE FEW, WE PROUD, WE BRAVE SOLDIERS

Never before has something so grand been attempted by individual men and women. Taking Planet Haxith will be difficult without boots on the ground. Ion cannons will take out large dropships, but you three hundred will drop solo from high orbit in pods too small to be targeted, land, and make our beachhead. Our success depends entirely on you. Welcome to Fall Brigade.

Everyone has the same six Stress Traits in the game: Afraid, Blissed (due to the combat drugs), Hacked (their jumpsuits & other gear), Injured (using die ratings & granularity), Insecure, Tired.

The group couldn't choose which one to drop to make five, so they're trying all six to see what happens. They'll see if one should go away after the third session. They had five until someone suggested Blissed and explained it.

PREDATORS ALONGSIDE PREY

Vampires, werewolves, ghosts, and sorcerers, oh my! The world got a lot weirder a few years back when the vamps outed themselves and tried to live among us, but life's still more or less normal. At least, until that new guy came into town to reclaim his family's lost estate. They say he's trying to live "off the vein," but I fear everything's about to change.

Vampires have: Hungry, Injured.

Werewolves have: Feral, Injured.

Ghosts have: Bound, Incorporeal. (They intentionally don't have Injured.)

Sorcerers have: Exhausted or Overconfident, Injured.

Normal humans must take: Crippled (they're much more delicate that everyone else), Enthralled.

Of the remaining three Stress Traits, the group says, "Get your emo on!": Afraid, Angry, Cold, Depressed, Insecure, Shaken.

THE MYSTERIOUS CASE FILES

There have been thirteen instances of reality deviation in Manhattan in the last month alone. Naturally, this is a cause for concern. The local authorities can't handle this. This is a case for you, the Luxmas Group. You have the expertise and resources to handle this before we have another Incursion. And Ms. Cranston…we have evidences that suggests your deceased husband is behind all this.

Everyone has: Distracted (specifically about something from their past), Stumped (in an investigative Drama, this is a fun Stress).

FBI-trained characters have: Restrained (meaning dealing with bureaucratic red tape).

Scientist characters have: Obsessed (the Luxmas Group tends to recruit a certain sort of gifted individual).

The remaining Stress Traits are open.

TIME & TACTICS

BY ADAM MINNIE

Ever wanted to add edge-of-your-seat action to your *Cortex Plus* game? Making scarcity of time or action a core piece of your task resolution system is one way to simulate mounting threats. By tracking ever-shrinking resources or limiting a player's range of action, you can evoke urgency and desperation. While a dynamic time mechanic can add intensity to any game, it fits best in games with frequent scenes of time-sensitive action, regardless of the scale of those actions.

Once you standardize how players interact with time, tactical conflicts become much more feasible with *Cortex Plus*. The second half of this article notes some tips for making tactics and positioning matter.

Leverage, *Smallville*, and *Marvel Heroic* RPGs use cinematic or dramatic pacing, dividing action into scenes, episodes, and beats as needed to find and focus on drama. This format works wonderfully for games based on TV shows, movies, or comic books. It doesn't, however, quite capture the tone of many other classic genres and game styles where the drama itself grows from characters always coming up short.

WHAT TIME CAN DO FOR YOU

Time itself is often hand-waved away in roleplaying games in favor of focusing on character action. Forcing attention onto dwindling options, though, is what makes time compelling in a game. When every choice has an irrevocable cost, those choices take on additional dramatic importance. Certain stories and genres are more gripping when players are pressed to make the most of limited resources.

Relentless urgency and reflexive gambles, intersected by moments of heroism, clarity, or epic failure—this tone is ripe for games in which characters fight back against overwhelming odds, or where an objective's success depends on speed, efficiency, and team coordination.

Many classic action genres rely heavily on "before it's too late" urgency or the opportunity cost of every effort:

- **Zombie survival:** Can you reach somewhere safe before you run out of ammo, daylight, or brains?
- **Disaster or environmental survival:** You've just crashed or became stranded. How long will you last when the environment or your companions are hostile?
- **Alien invasions:** Can you juggle developing defenses and finding a weakness before you're conquered?
- **Criminal investigation:** Can you catch recidivist criminals before they repeat crimes, retaliate, or escape?
- **Espionage and subterfuge:** Will you accomplish a mission before your cover's blown?
- **Tactical combat:** How can you achieve objectives or neutralize enemies before they do likewise?
- **Negotiation:** What will it cost to achieve a civil resolution before escalation ensues?
- **Epidemic or disaster control:** Will you find the cure, treat the patient, and prevent the cataclysm before all is lost?
- **Dynastic development:** How much can you achieve in a lifetime?
- **Exploration or war:** How far can you stretch resources of fuel, food, or troop loyalty?
- **Courier, getaway, or racing themes:** Can you get from Point A to Point B before something terrible happens, like losing?

Mixing and matching these ideas can draw on the appeal of urgency at various levels of scale. Epidemic control as an overarching plot connects and gives meaning to zombie-survival missions, which could become repetitive on their own.

The primary tension in all these games lies in the characters' inability to have it all; they must sacrifice some opportunities for the sake of others. Presenting that same tension to players in your game mechanics helps them experience the game in a unique way, along with their characters.

CORTEX PLUS TIME BASICS

One way to make a time-centered *Cortex Plus* game is to introduce a Time Die and Time Steps.

THE TIME DIE

Like most everything in *Cortex Plus*, Time Dice are measured in die sizes from d4 to d12. Rather than representing a fixed die size, Time Die ratings fluctuate with each action, depending on how much attention and focus a player is willing to commit. The more time a character spends on an action, the larger the Time Dice for that action becomes; this results in a greater chance for success, minimizing the odds of rolling a Complication, but at the cost of limiting further action.

Example: Imagine Katya, a Heavy Infantry private fighting in an alternate universe war using a variant of the *Cortex Plus* Action rules. As usual, she builds her dice pool based on her Attribute and Role, but to capture the tone of urgency, Katya's player decides to roll a Time Die along with whatever other dice are used. Using little to no time (therefore using a lower Time Die) makes the action relatively faster but increases the odds of rolling Complications. Using more time and focus increases her chances for success (a larger Time Die), but will cost the Squad precious time it may not have.

TIME STEPS

Time Steps measure abstract time when using Time Dice.

In each scene, decide what time span Time Steps represent so they best fit your scene. These steps may represent seconds, daylight, or seasons, and may even relate to how much focus or willpower a character has to spend during that amount of time.

When a character takes an action, the player decides how many time steps to spend on an action. The player gains the appropriate Time Die and performs the action in a turn order relative to the Time Step chosen. A player choosing 1 Time Step acts at the beginning of the turn (at the same time as anybody else who chooses 1 Time Step), while those spending 5 get to roll last in a turn. Handle ties according to narrative sense and teamwork.

The amount of time steps spent by each character sets the size of the Time Die rolled when taking the Action.

- 1 Step = D4
- 2 Steps = D6
- 3 Steps = D8
- 4 Steps = D10
- 5 Steps = D12

To determine how much total relative time a group has spent in a turn, add the total Time Steps based on all actions that depended on each other to be performed on a turn.

Example: Katya chose 5 Time Steps to roll a D12 TIME DIE to increase her chances of taking down a tank barreling toward her team's position. Before firing, she had to wait for Ender to provide her with a High Explosive Ammo Asset, which he created on Time Step 3. During that time, Crystal spent 2 Steps providing cover fire with her Assault Rifle. The total Time Steps of that turn would be Katya's 5 plus Ender's 3, for a total of 8. Crystal's Action was performed in parallel, as it was independent from her teammates.

PROMOTING TEAMWORK

As the example shows, adding a Time Die to every action encourages teamwork and cooperation. Katya likely felt more comfortable rolling a D12 even if it meant slowing down her whole team. That's why Crystal decided to perform an independent action to prevent squandering too much time.

THE TIMETABLE OF DANGER

What makes time truly matter with such mechanics is that time used by characters should tie strongly into available game and story resources. The anticipation of passing time's effect on other resources carries the dramatic weight that makes for a compelling game. Have Assets and Complication such as Air Support or Enemy Patrol decay or grow based on the amount of Time Spent in a scene.

Either way, the players should have clear understanding of how each passing round affects the story and their precious resources.

GMs act on behalf of opposition or perform upkeep on growing or decaying Traits at the end of an action using Time Steps.

You may be surprised by the extent that maintaining crucial resources can drive story and plot, pushing players to take action to secure what they need. The following are examples of resources that fluctuate with time and may play vital roles in various games.

- Energy/Stamina
- Attention/Focus
- Maintenance costs
- Food/Life Support
- Fuel/Power
- Ammunition
- Lifetime/Vigor
- Funding
- Coordination of Forces
- Patience/Unrest
- Fervency of an Ideology
- Social Favor
- Morale/Loyalty
- Daylight/Favorable Climate

Example: Katya and her team have no time to rest and move from battle to battle, making it harder to focus on threats around them. At the start of each scene, players can choose Time Steps of four or more, but must step back their Stamina rating at the start of the scene to do so.

EXPANDING THE SCOPE

Whether rounds represent a few seconds, hours, day, seasons, or more depends on the scope of your game's action. Since this mechanic can easily scale up and down, consider embedding scenes at a personal scale within larger scale efforts.

Example: Continuing Katya's example, after completing an adrenaline-pumping mission, the squad must prepare before the next assault. Scale back your rounds from a few seconds to days or weeks, allowing players to pick new Time Steps to influence their chance to upgrade holdouts or vehicles, achieve long-distance travel, scrounge for supplies, investigate evidence gathered during missions, or foster relationships with friends and patrons. After a number of rounds at the wider scale, urgency flares with a newly sighted assault and rounds zoom back to seconds and minutes as characters jump seamlessly back into personal-scale scenes.

NO TIME DICE FOR THE OPPOSITION

GMs, do yourselves a favor and avoid tracking Time Steps for each member of the opposition. Instead, have them perform actions grouped together or at certain Steps as the story demands. Maybe slow zombies act after Time Step 5. Faster, nastier zombies may act on Step 2 or 3… or even maybe more than once per turn! Perhaps a virus spreads to a new city each day, or hunted criminals secure and step up Assets each round leading to a getaway or the next big crime.

TIME-BASED SPECIALTIES, TALENTS, OR SFX

Heighten characters' unique roles in a time-focused game by allowing Specialties, Talents, or SFX to further manipulate time-based mechanics. Perhaps a player gets to step up or double a Time Die for certain actions.

Examples:

- **Unerring Sniper:** When your TIME DIE is a D12, spend a Plot Point to double your TIME DIE for MARKSMANSHIP rolls without increasing Time Spent.
- **Solid Rock:** When rolling at least a D8 TIME DIE to support another character's morale, recover one of your own Stress by one step.

SIDELINING TIME

You can still feature time without making it central to your game in a number of ways. Perhaps you assume all actions take enough time unless otherwise stated. In this case, players only add a TIME DIE to actions that are hurried or take special focus, in which case it operates as *CORTEX PLUS* Action-style Distinction, adding either a D8 or a D4 to earn a Plot Point.

Another option would be to use two other character Traits as primary dice, as in *SMALLVILLE* and *LEVERAGE*, but give players a slowly but regularly accumulating budget of Time Steps; they can then add bonus Time Dice to actions, either whenever players wish, or in certain character-specific circumstances. Using this method, Time Steps represent a character's ability to focus, charge up abilities, or slow time as needed.

TACTICAL CONFLICT

Tracking tactical conflict in *LEVERAGE*, *SMALLVILLE*, or *MARVEL HEROIC ROLEPLAYING* is not necessary, advisable, or even possible. Using Time Steps, or growing and decaying Assets or Complications, however, can add enormous tactical potential to *CORTEX PLUS* games without too much difficulty.

While managing resources encourages players to strategically coordinate their actions, you can further expand your *CORTEX PLUS* tactical toolbox with three simple additions: zones, zone Traits, and basic maneuvers.

USING ZONES

Divide scene locations into zones representing the relative size, navigability, and complexity of various parts of the area.

Let's say you can punch someone sharing a zone with you, throw something into adjacent zones, shoot effectively into zones 2-3 spaces away, and barely see zones 4+ spaces away (except with a gun scope, magic, or equivalent). At another scale, an adjacent zone could be a day's drive away on good roads, a month's march in decent weather, or one jump to the next planetary system.

Place a few zone Traits such as obstacles or benefits within and between zones.

Scene Distinctions as seen in *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* work well here. If it fits your game, let players place additional Assets or Distinctions using Plot Points or actions. A white board, index cards, and tokens work well to show zones with their Traits, as well as character locations and temporary effects.

Sample zone Distinctions:

- Weapon Emplacements
- Prime Vantage Point
- Volatile Canisters
- Computer Access
- Noxious Smoke
- Air Of Suspicion
- Growing Unrest
- Surly Crowds
- Thick Jungle
- Barbarian Tribes

The following are examples of more advanced zone Traits:

- Overcoming complex barriers between zones that require a set number of Time Steps or successful actions.
- Traps, alarms, or events that trigger when people enter certain zones.

Use Time Steps to immediately achieve basic maneuvers that aren't interesting enough to warrant rolls.

Sample Maneuvers (for personal scale combat scenes):

- **Movement:** Add 2 Time Steps to your action to move a character from one zone to another.
- **Operations:** Add 1 Time Step to access and operate devices such as doors, lifts, lights, and vehicles.
- **Cover:** Players may choose Time Steps to create cover Assets instead of gaining a Time Die: e.g., 3 Time Steps grant Cover d8, while a single Time Step gives Problematic Cover d4.

AT THE END OF THE DAY

Tweaking the mechanical focus of your *Cortex Plus* game can highlight time's limitation on the characters and their Resources, introducing or enhancing themes of desperation, dread, urgency, and shortage. Give these suggestions a try, and let them be your springboard to hack and explore new, more compelling ways to inject time and tactics into your gaming experience.

RANDOM FEATURE GENERATION

BY SCOTT CUNNINGHAM

The process for creating Leads through the use of Pathways is an essential part of the *Smallville RPG*. When players get together to create the Pathways Map, it creates a shared investment in the game. Players gain a clear sense of their characters: who they are, where they've been, and who and what they care about. Such an approach, however, is not always practical for new Features the Watchtower wants to introduce to the game.

This hack offers a semi-random approach to characterize a new Feature with the appropriate mechanics to present an engaging Wedge for the characters. This could happen, for instance, when an Extra is promoted to a full Feature status.

There are seven categories of Traits in *Cortex Plus* Drama.

- Abilities (described on pages 102-115 of the *Smallville RPG*)
- Distinctions (pages 90 – 98)
- Gear (page 115)
- Extras (pages 118-121)
- Locations (pages 122-126)
- Relationships (pages 85-88)
- Values (pages 82-85)

You begin with your concept, established by the Pathways Map, and by the role the Feature plays as a Wedge in your upcoming story. In order to capture the Feature with the appropriate mechanics, you need to determine how many Traits they have in each of the categories of Traits. Furthermore, you'll need to know which of these Traits get stepped up and are therefore rated with bigger dice. The two charts shown below work as an alternative to following the full Pathway or doing it on the fly.

When establishing new Traits, you look up each category in the "New Traits" column of Table 1: Adding and Raising Traits. The table will tell you to do one of three things: roll, fix, or read.

Roll sends you on a specific column of Table 2: Rolls for Traits, to roll dice and generate a number of new Traits or raises. All new Traits start with a d4 rating.

Fix means setting the value as established by the game. For instance, the game fixes the total number of possible Values at six.

Read means consulting the Pathways Chart in the *Smallville RPG* book (Pages 18-19) to pick Traits from it.

When prompted to roll new Traits, pick 2D10s, add them together and cross check the appropriate column in Table 2. You'll get the number of new Traits in the given category you rolled for.

Assigning the new Traits to specific choices involves an exercise of creativity for the Watchtower. The pre-established Traits given in the *Smallville RPG* serve as a great source of inspiration. Or, the Watchtower may create entirely new Traits using these examples. Don't forget that your Feature exists solely to drive a wedge between your players. Using the existing Locations and Extras already identified for your session help ensure that your new Lead promotes drama.

TABLE 1: ADDING AND RAISING TRAITS

TRAITS	NEW TRAITS	RAISED TRAITS
Abilities	Roll on Column II	Roll on Column II
Distinctions	Roll on Column IV	Roll on Column V
Extras	Read from the Pathways chart or roll on Column IV	Roll on Column II
Gear	Roll on Column I	Roll on Column II
Heritage	Roll on Column I	Roll on Column I
Locations	Read from the Pathways chart or roll on Column IV	Roll on Column V
Relationships	Read from the Pathways chart or roll on Column III	Roll on Column VI
Values	Fix the number of values to six	Assign nine raises in any combination

TABLE 2: ROLLS FOR NEW AND RAISED TRAITS

ROLL 2D10, CONSULT APPROPRIATE COLUMN

# OF TRAITS / RAISES	COLUMN I	COLUMN II	COLUMN III	COLUMN IV	COLUMN V	COLUMN VI
0	2-9	2-7	2-4	2	2	
1	10-17	8-12	5-7	3-4	3	
2	18-19	13-15	8-10	5-8	4-5	2
3	20	16-17	11-13	9-10	6-7	3
4		18-19	14-15	11-13	8-10	4-5
5		20	16-17	14-15	11-12	6
6			18	16-17	13-14	7-8
7			19	18	15-16	9-10
8			20	19	17	11
9				20	18	12-13
10					19	14
11					20	15-16
12						17
13						18
14						19
15						20

Raising Traits involves determining the number of raises received per Traits category. For each category, check on Table 1 to determine which column to roll on Table 2. Then make another 2d10 roll for each category. The result in the column maps to the number of raises you get to distribute, as you see fit, in the category.

Features created using this method will have, on average, the same number of Traits as any Feature created using the full Pathways process. Features coming off the Pathways Charts tend to be moderately specialized—two Traits or so which have been raised four or more times. The charts reflect this. Any Trait that you choose not to raise stays at d4.

There are some exceptions to the tables that are worth noting. If the Feature gains no new Traits in any category, you may still roll to raise the Trait if you wish. You can then use a raise to open up a new Trait at d4. Feel free to add as many Traits as you want with this method, too. Values are very important to the game and should be balanced carefully against those of the Leads; don't roll for raises.

Here's a quick example to demonstrate the process. The Watchtower creates a new Feature, an intrepid ranger born and raised in the jungles of South-East Asia. The Watchtower begins with Abilities. First, the Watchtower rolls the number of new Abilities. Looking on Table 1, the Watchtower knows to consult Column II for the number of new Abilities, and again Column II for the number of raises. He rolls a 9 for new Abilities. Consulting the table he reads the result for a 9 in Column II, this grants: one new Ability that defaults to a d4. He then rolls a 5 for raises. Consulting Column II indicates no new raises when a five is rolled. The new Feature begins the game with a single d4 Ability. This process continues with Distinctions, Extras, and so on.

You may easily advance the new Feature still further. The established *Cortex Plus* rules (Developing the Wedges into Characters, *Smallville RPG*, page 69) suggests that the Watchtower step up a Trait for each three sessions since the Feature was first introduced. You may wish to do this even for a newly introduced Feature if you feel the Feature may be underpowered. Feel free to tweak the results to taste!

ONE-SHOTS

BY JOSH ROBY

Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying is all about creating a lush, detailed world out of character interrelationships, and uses tools like the Pathways Map to help all the players have a finger in the pie. However, while Pathways is a powerful tool, it's also time-intensive: it usually takes a full session to create characters and their personalized backdrop. Sometimes, you don't have that time: you just want to play a single session of the game. That's where these One-Shot rules come into play.

Building a one-shot takes a couple hours of prep work. You're going to create Leads, place them in a One-Shot Map, develop a situation, and make Features. When you're done, you'll be ready to roll with a self-contained dollop of goodness. You can play it in a session at home or run it at a gaming convention.

PREPARING A ONE-SHOT

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPTS

Everything in is about the characters, so we start there. Figure out how many players you will have and come up with an equal number of character concepts.

A character concept is shorter than a short sentence and describes the core identity of a character. The best concepts have two parts: a base and a zinger. The base is an incredibly basic character idea—so basic that it's nearly boring all by itself. The zinger fixes that by complicating the base.

Here are some examples:

- Lawman on the run
- Hotshot pilot with daddy issues
- Monster hunter infected with demon blood
- Mad scientist caring for small children
- Platypus secret agent
- Ruthless warlord rebuilding civilization

You might start with a handful of bases and then add zingers, or they might spring into your mind fully developed. If you can't immediately think of a zinger, don't worry: a couple will present themselves in the next step.

Sometimes you're not sure how many players will be showing up. This is especially true for a convention one-shot. In such a case, make at least three foundational character concepts: the characters that are necessary to get across whatever mood or feel you're aiming for. Then make a number of "expendable" concepts to round out your cast; these are still interesting characters, but they don't have to appear for the game to work.

STEP TWO: THE ONE-SHOT MAP

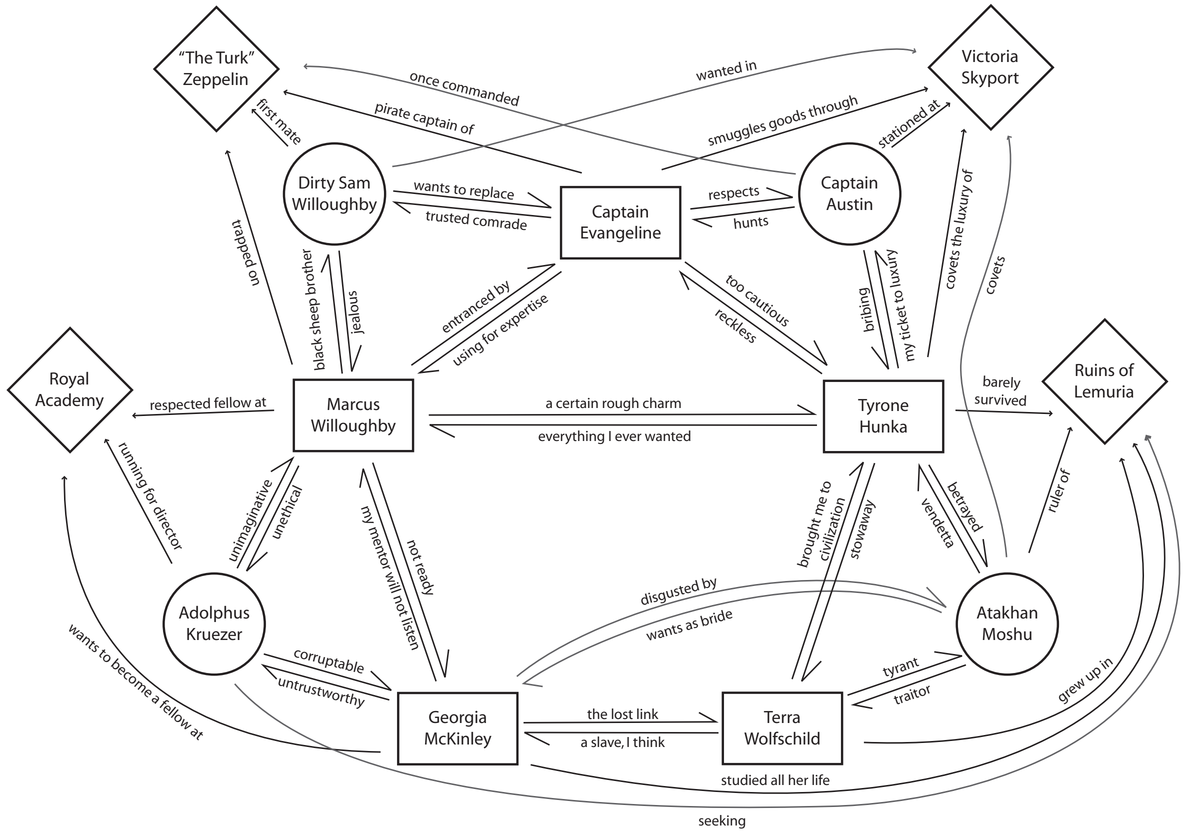
The next step takes your character concepts and networks them together in a web of Relationships. This step is sort of a hybrid between the Pathways Map and the Episode Map. In a one-shot, the wide-angle setting and the narrow-focus situation are nearly identical, so they're built on the same map.

Start by placing your character concepts in a loose ring in the middle of the sheet, leaving enough space between them to write in Relationships. You might not have names for these characters yet, and that's fine; just draw a square to represent the character's concept. That will give you a series of squares arranged in a ring, ready to be interconnected.

Next, take two neighboring squares and draw two arrows going back and forth between them. Write in a Relationship on both arrows, making sure that those Relationships create some sort of conflict. The conflict might come from conflicting views (She's my hero coupled with He gets in the way) or from violent agreement (Reckless and Coward). Do this all around the ring, so that every square has a conflicted Relationship with both its neighbors.

Optionally, you might add a couple more conflicted Relationships across the ring of squares. This isn't strictly necessary—the one-shot will run just fine without this step—but this is the only real way to create a love triangle among Leads. If that's the sort of thing you want in your one-shot, be sure to include it now. If you have foundational characters, they're prime targets for this sort of thing.

Now we add Wedges—characters who target the conflicted Relationships. They draw attention to the conflict, they make the conflict worse, and sometimes they even try to resolve the conflict…in undesirable ways. For each conflicted Relationship, add a circle to the map connected to the conflicted Relationship's two squares. Label the circle with the character concept that will complicate the Relationship. Label the arrows linking squares to each circle with the Relationship each Lead has with the Wedge, and vice-versa.


"The Turk" Zeppelin
Victoria Skyport
once commanded
wanted in
pirate captain of
smuggles goods through
first mate
stationed at
Dirty Sam Willoughby
wants to replace
trusted comrade
Captain Evangeline
respects
hunts
Captain Austin
trapped on
black sheep brother
jealous
entranced by
using for expertise
too cautious
reckless
bribing
my ticket to luxury
covets the luxury of
covets
Royal Academy
respected fellow at
Marcus Willoughby
a certain rough charm
everything I ever wanted
Tyrone Hunka
barely survived
Ruins of Lemuria
running for director
unimaginative
unethical
my mentor will not listen
not ready
brought me to civilization
stowaway
vendetta
betrayed
ruler of
disgusted by
wants as bride
Adolphus Kruezer
Atakhan Moshu
wants to become a fellow at
corruptable
untrustworthy
tyrant
traitor
grew up in
Georgia McKinley
the lost link
a slave, I think
Terra Wolfschild
studied all her life
seeking

Every conflict needs a venue; how else will we get collateral damage? For each conflicted Relationship, add a Location in a diamond connected to both squares and to the associated Wedge. Then connect each Wedge to one additional Location, if you can make it work

Sometimes, two conflicts can use the same Wedge or Location. That's perfectly fine—and means one fewer Feature to create.

When you're done, it will look something like this:

STEP THREE: WRITE REVEALS & OPENING SCENES

This step is almost entirely unchanged from the rules presented in the , pages 67-68. Brainstorm all the information and plot developments that are necessary to show the players what is happening behind the scenes. Just jot them all down as they come to you, working your way around the map. Don't worry just yet about what happens when: get them all down on paper first.

The various conflicts often try to bleed together at this point, and that's great. Mix that peanut butter with the chocolate! Let Wedges hop around the map and make things worse (or even better) in other conflicts.

Once you've got them all down, you can sort your reveals into an approximate chronological order and pick your opening scenes. The best opening scenes have two or three Leads in them, but one or two solo scenes are workable. Never start the game off with everybody in the same place.

STEP FOUR: CREATE CHARACTERS

At long last, you can turn your character concepts and Wedges into Leads and Features. Give them names, but keep the concepts; "Ferris Martin, boy detective" is a great way to introduce the character later.

Start off each Lead and Feature with a d4 Relationship to each other Lead. Leads also start with d4 Relationships to their Wedges and 2d4 Resources for their Locations. Features each have two 2d4 Locations.

The easiest way to add Assets and die ratings is to use the Quick and Dirty rules in the Watchtower Report. Alternatively, you can run each character through the Pathways chart, ignoring the steps where you add things to the Pathways map.

If any of your reveals suggest a specific Asset will be handy or necessary, be sure that at least two Leads are suitably prepared. Other characters can, of course, stumble over the same information; that's not the point. The Assets on the page prompt the players to look for information in a particular way. Two characters with the Connected or Investigator Assets will go a long way in setting the tone of the game.

Similarly, if an Extra or Location suggests itself, feel free to add it at 2d4 in place of increasing another Trait.

Occasionally, the same Feature will be used as a Wedge for both of a Lead's conflicts. In such a case, bump up the Lead's Relationship with that Feature by one die step.

INTRODUCING YOUR ONE-SHOT

When you sit down to play your one-shot, start by distributing the Lead sheets. Read off the character concept for each Lead as you introduce them.

If you have expendable Leads, only hand out as many Leads as you need, starting with the foundational Leads and the expendable Leads that have conflicts with the foundational Leads. Avoid handing out a Lead who has conflicts with Leads that aren't in play.

You can give the foundational Leads to the players who might be shy wallflowers and to the players newest to roleplaying. This puts them right in the middle of the action and doesn't require them to insert themselves, which they may have trouble doing.

Whatever you do, don't introduce a character by saying that he is expendable! If all goes well, every character will feel central and necessary to the game as it plays out.

If your reveals or opening scenes refer only to conflicts involving expendable Leads that aren't in play, check them off before you play. You don't need to worry about those!

Once everyone has a sheet in front of them, give them a quick tour of what makes up a *Cortex Plus* character, describing each Trait category. Explain how resolution is handled in the game. Then direct their attention to the triggers listed under their Distinctions. Have them spot their Earn triggers, and advise them that they'll want to find opportunities to indulge in these behaviors to earn Plot Points. Then segue into the opening Relationships roll to determine starting Plot Points.

PLAYING OPENING SCENES

Explain that the game always begins with a few set pieces called opening scenes, and then the rest of the game will be a series of scenes that you'll make up together as you go. Then kick off the first opening scene—everything else can be explained as you encounter it in play. Try to start roleplaying within fifteen minutes of sitting at the table.

Opening scenes usually entail the Leads being confronted with a problem, or at least the first smell of something fishy. Whenever a Lead picks up dice in the opening scenes, ask them what Values and Relationships they'll be using and if the statements fit their character's present state of mind. When—inevitably—a player responds in the negative, loudly congratulate them and tell them that they're challenging the Trait. Give them two more dice of the appropriate die size and tell them to jot down the die under Growth. Players may need gentle reminders to challenge throughout the game, but the bigger the production you make in the opening scenes, the fewer reminders they'll need later.

Once you're underway, if the players seek out unplayed expendable Leads, use them as Features to make the Leads' problems worse.

MONTAGES

In lieu of Tag Scenes at the end of the session, you can use Montages to roll Growth. These are special scenes that occur once or twice during your one-shot, usually at what would be an act break if you were watching a movie.

Trigger a Montage when:

- The Leads are all separated, each doing their own thing.
- The Leads leave one city or planet for another.
- The Leads prepare for a climactic confrontation with a Feature.
- You exhaust your reveals list.

Prompt each player to describe what their character is doing in a very short vignette and have them pick any Trait that they'd like to improve. Have them roll their Growth pool plus all their Stress dice while you roll 2d6. If the player has the higher result, she may increase the selected Trait. If not, she may step down any other Trait in order to step up the selected Trait.

Once everyone has rolled Growth, tell them that they can restore any of their challenged Drives to their starting die ratings if they rewrite the Drive's statement. This is a great opportunity to take a quick break and stretch your legs. When everyone gets back to the table, start by having everyone read their rewritten Drives, and then move directly into the next scene.

CLIMAX!

Keep an eye on the clock and drop reveals as quickly as you can so that the Leads can get to their Climax before the night is over. If you haven't explained Aiding yet, now is a great time to do so. Be sure to make the final scene as explosive as you can for the big finish. Afterwards, let each player have a Tag Scene (without rolling Growth) to bring the game to a satisfying conclusion.

DRAMATIC FLUENCY

BY JOLI ST. PATRICK

So you've got around to picking up *Smallville* and are ready to play it, right? You've read the extensive rules and try to explain the game, but everyone forgets it five minutes later. Whatever you try, roleplaying halts while you furiously flip pages to find a rule.

It doesn't have to be this way.

You can turn every moment of learning the game into play, by breaking it down into bite-sized pieces and building slowly upon the game's mechanics. We call this approach Dramatic Fluency. By introducing tiny narrative vignettes for every Rookie stage of Pathways, we can teach the dice rolling and resolution system bit by bit. Thus you can eliminate blank stares and head scratching so you start enjoying all that *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* goodness right out of the gate!

HOW TO USE THIS MODEL

The point of Dramatic Fluency is to respond to the needs of the moment, letting the group become fluent with one rule before introducing another. It'll be up to you to suss out what the group is ready for. As awesome as all the components of *Dramatic Roleplaying* are, there's no use piling them on before you're ready to get the most out of them.

These instructions are addressed to Watchtower, but they aren't secret; it is an oral teaching process that is more useful when someone acts as the teacher.

Throughout Dramatic Fluency you'll find text in quotation marks. These are bits of instruction to be spoken aloud to the players. Think of them as guides for how to describe the techniques.

PATHWAYS

Let's use the Pathways procedure (*Smallville RPG*, page 14) to teach the basics of *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* resolution. Pathways are already a great way to get everyone aligned creatively and it's easy to build on that.

Familiarize yourself with the rules for Tests (*Smallville RPG*, page 58) and Contests (*Smallville RPG*, page 53), and then go through Pathways with your group. When players are picking Distinctions and Abilities, avoid having them read through the *Smallville* book to choose; it'll be a drag on play and bring up complex mechanics that are unnecessary at this point. Encourage the players to make up their own Assets. If you think you may have players who will get stuck, consider creating a simple list of the Smalllville RPG Assets.

At each Pathways step, after the players have all drawn their shapes and arrows on the map, and chosen their steps in Relationships, Assets, etc., you'll lead a small exercise to teach a bite-sized piece of the mechanics and flesh out the Leads' backstory.

Generally, do each of these steps for every player in turn, but factor in the group's energy and needs. If they all get it after the first two players do a step, it's OK to move on. Especially in later, more involved steps, you'll want to avoid repeating the exercises past the group's endurance. However, don't assume just because someone's listening attentively and nodding along, that they're getting it. It doesn't hurt to ask!

ORIGIN

Look at the circle the player drew on the Pathways Map. Ask a question or two about what the Lead and Extra's relationship is like, and then ask, "When your Lead was a child, what traumatic, painful, or dangerous event did he face?" Customize the question to involve the Extra, if it seems fitting.

When the player answers, set two d6s in front of you, and say, "This is the Trouble pool. When you try to accomplish something important and you're not opposed by a major character, I'll roll these dice and you'll have to beat their total."

Now, continue: "OK, in a single sentence, describe how your Lead tried to cope with the danger."

When the player does so, hand him a different pair of d6s and tell him, "Now you'll roll these dice and I'll roll Trouble. This is called a Test. We'll total them and compare."

If the Lead has the higher total, tell him, "OK, you win! Your Lead triumphed over his childhood adversity." Describe the Lead's success in a sentence or two.

If the Trouble pool has the higher total, tell him, "Sorry, you've lost. Your Lead fell prey to the danger. Describe in a sentence or two how he was traumatized or hurt."

YOUTH

Ask, "Which of the other Leads did you try to impress in Jr. High?"

When the player answers, tell him, "Look at the die rating for that Relationship. Take that die into your hand. Now, in a sentence or two, what's one thing you tried to impress her with?"

Next say, "Look at your Values and tell me why you did it." Feel free to add, for instance, "Sounds like POWER or GLORY to me," if the player seems stuck.

Instruct the player to take the die for his Value into his hand, and say, "OK, you're going to roll another Test vs. the Trouble pool. From now on, you'll make every Test using one Value and one Relationship. Now roll your dice!"

After the roll, give instructions as in Origin.

FOCUS

Say, "Look at the entries you've made in Assets. Pick one. Tell me in a couple sentences what you did to make you realize you were gifted in this way."

When he does so, ask, "And who, looking at your Relationships, did you do this for or against?" And then, "Why, looking at your Values, did you do it?"

Tell the player to take those Value and Relationship dice into his hand. Then say, "Now, in every Test, you have the opportunity to add a single Asset die to the roll. Take that die into your hand as well."

Then explain, "All the dice you're rolling at any given time are called a dice pool. Roll them now, and I'll roll the Trouble pool." After the roll, say, "Now find the two highest dice, and add them together. This is called your result."

Compare results and give instructions as in Origin.

ROAD

Tell the player, "Pick a Lead with a different Road than yours. Tell me something important you had an argument or fight about."

Then say, "OK, now *both* players are going to take dice for their Values and Relationships, plus an Asset if it applies. When you're opposing a Lead or Feature instead of Trouble, it's called a Contest."

Say to the first player, "State what your Lead said to the other, making it clear what he wants her to agree to. This is called telegraphing your intent." Then have him roll and sum his result.

Turn to the second player and say, "Now, you've got a choice to make: Give In, and agree to what the other Lead wants, or fight on, rolling your dice against his and risk taking Stress. This is called a reaction."

If the second player Gives In, tell her, "All right, describe in one or two sentences how you back down and agree with the other Lead. This is called selling the opponent's victory."

If the second player reacts, have her describe her rebuttal, roll, and compare results. If she loses, tell her, "Well, you lost the roll, but that doesn't mean you agree. Instead you take Stress. First player, decide which kind of Stress makes sense based on the types listed on your sheet. Roll your Dice pool again and find the highest rolling die; you inflict that die size in Stress. Second player, you can describe in a sentence or two how that Stress expresses itself to end the argument."

If the second player wins the roll, say, "OK, you've won the roll. Normally this would go back and forth until someone either Gives In or loses a reaction roll and takes Stress. For now, though, we'll stop here; feel free to give a parting shot as you end the argument."

LIFE-CHANGING EVENT

Say, to everyone, "OK, now we're going to put it all together and do a full Contest. First, though, erase any Stress you received in the last step, and you'll all need a Plot Point. I'll show you how to spend it in a minute."

Then say to the player in question, "A Contest can be any clash between your Lead and other Leads or Features. Look at your Life-Changing Event. Bearing in mind that the Event will happen regardless, think of something you did just before or after the Event, at cross-purposes with a Lead or Feature. We're going to play that out as a Contest."

Frame and guide the Contest, gathering dice pools and telegraphing intent, much as in the previous step, but with this addition: when a player selects a Relationship or Value, ask, "How, in one sentence, does your Lead feel about that [person/Value]? Write that down. Whenever you call on that [Relationship/Value], it means acting on your belief in that statement."

Find a Contest scene that everyone involved is passionate about. If you reach the point where the reacting Lead or Feature wins the roll, say: "Your reaction result now stands as a new action result that the first player has to beat."

Turn to the first player and say, "Now you're faced with the same choice she had: react and risk Stress, or Give In. Giving In is free in the first round, but since you've already rolled dice, you're committed to the fight and Giving In now costs a Plot Point." If he does Give In, have him hand the Plot Point to the other player.

Now simply play out the Contest as per the *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* rules, but without the more advanced mechanics such as triggers, Resources, or buying additional Value, Relationship and Asset dice.

If the Contest concludes with one participant Giving In, ask them to describe and sell the victory; if it concludes by inflicting Stress, have them describe the fictional effect of the Stress. This time, keep the Stress to carry over to the first episode, but don't roll the Growth pool.

Gauge how many Contests to run by the energy level of the group. If the first Contest lasts many rounds, it's best to do just one more; if it's resolved in the first round, you probably want to keep going until you get a longer one. It's good to involve a Feature or two in this step, but make sure, if you can, that more than one player gets to participate in a Contest.

GOING FORWARD

Begin early episodes with one or more Tests, for as many of the Leads as is feasible. Tests are simpler than Contests, and make nice opening events for the episode's plot. This is a way to ease back into the mechanics each episode.

Add the rest of the mechanics one at a time. The individual uses of Plot Points can be introduced when a relevant situation comes up, and when you've got enough of them you can start compiling a list for easy reference. Resource dice can be introduced the first time someone wants help from an Extra, or says "I wanna do research at the library." And so on.

The extra goodies attached to Distinctions and Abilities can wait. At the beginning of the second episode (or mid-week if your group is willing to do homework via email), you can talk about Distinction triggers and lead everyone in creating them for their Leads. In a future session, you can do the same with Special Effects for Abilities.

Above all, look for what creates the best game flow for your group. This method of learning is open and infinitely customizable. Just remember: bite-sized pieces, and hold back a new rule until just when you need it. Experiment and have fun!

THE OLD SCHOOL JOB

BY PHILIPPE-ANTOINE MÉNARD

A DUNGEON CRAWL IS JUST A BADLY PLANNED HEIST.

The essence of classic fantasy RPGs is easy to summarize: A band of heroes explores dank dungeons for unknown riches and strange secrets. They get in over their heads and often overcome staggering odds with creative guile rather than brawn (though there's often fighting, too). *The Old School Job* takes a shot at re-imagining the fantasy adventure games of the late 70's in the context of *Cortex Plus* Action.

Pick up your battle axe and don't forget your backpack. The way is dangerous and arduous. Be ready for traps, villains, minions and riches—lots of riches. And be sure to keep your eyes on that Scoundrel.

ATTRIBUTES

Your characters' attributes are the same as those presented on page 31 of the *Leverage* Roleplaying Game book. They also retain their dual physical and social components; you just need to transpose them to the classic fantasy genre.

Strength is physical brawn. It's what you use to lift, bend or break objects. It is also how you intimidate others through sheer bulk and menace.

Intelligence is acquired knowledge (recalling mundane or arcane facts). It encompasses the ability to decipher strange tomes, magical runes or demonic script, and impress people with your acute powers of deduction.

Willpower helps break mind-numbing enchantments, overcome pain, and plough through mental and physical hardships. It covers divine guidance, spiritual discipline, and just plain grit.

Alertness is what spots the hidden, hears the silent, and pierces the falseness of disguise and illusionary magic.

Agility is dodging away from traps, hitting targets with thrown weapons, climbing whatever will hold your hero, and the mental dexterity to find a witty retort while facing dire threats.

Vitality is withstanding the most horrendous of physical ordeals while keeping a positive outlook about making it out of the dungeon alive. Chipper holy warriors and bards have way too much of it.

ROLES

A classic dungeon crawling party calls for classic Roles. Similar to *Leverage*, Roles are used when the character makes an Action or reaction that is thematically related to a Role. Each character begins with a d10, d8, d6, and d4 to distribute among the four Roles. When using a d10 or d8 Role, the character can split the dice up into smaller dice, so a d10 can be split into 2d8 or 3d6, and a d8 can be split into 2d6.

HOLY ONE

This covers all sorts of divinely inspired heroes. They provide protection, succor, divine wrath, and healing. There may be the occasional side of preaching involved, but that usually falls on deaf ears. But then, there's always hope for the unbelievers.

WARRIOR

There's nothing complicated about this one. If something can be used to trash monsters with, they are proficient at it.

MAGE

Discarding the local laws of reality while digging up the secrets of the multiverse is what Mages really want. Putting up with whining, brutish, or disloyal allies to achieve such goals is what they must settle for. Still, nothing warms their hearts more than an occasional exploding ball of fire engulfing sources of annoying delays.

SCOUNDREL

People keep forgetting that the life of a Scoundrel is much more than picking pockets and skimming on everyone else's part of the treasure. It's also about *not* getting caught doing it, hence all the stealth training. If caught, well, that's what backstabbing and fast-talking is all about, right?

SPECIALTIES AND DISTINCTIONS

Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying makes it dead simple to bring your hero to life with just a few short sentences. Specialties represent unique sets of skills that add depth to your hero's Roles. Choose two Specialties under two different Roles to add an extra d8 when taking an Action using that Specialty.

Specialty examples: Trap Springer, Sword and Board, Swashbuckler, Acrobat, Adept of the Fire Fist, Undead Hunter, Dragon Slayer, Demonologist, Necromancer, Elementalist, Illusion Master, Shadow Walker, Diviner, Healer, Enchanter, Holy Adept of the Seven Swords.

Distinctions can cover your hero's race, culture, supernatural abilities, unique gear, and countless other genre-specific tropes whose duality can impact play in wildly different ways.

Distinction examples: Dwarf, Wood Elf, Last Halfing Of The Proudfeet Tribe, Amazon, Barbarian, Noble, Greedy, Infrared Vision, Cursed With Lycanthropy, Marked, Destined, Bloodlusting, Vow Of Silence, Silver-Tongued, Heavily Armored, Laden With Scrolls, Attached To A Cursed Sword, Battle Lust.

TALENTS

Nothing brings out the flavor of adventure gaming like the unique abilities that each major Role brings to the table. Below are a few examples to inspire you to create your own using the tropes and archetypes of fantasy adventure gaming. Refer to the guidelines presented on page 43 of the *Leverage* Roleplaying Game book for more details.

HOLY ONE

RESTORATIVE TRANCE

Channeling your deity's energy, you alleviate weariness, heal wounds, break enchantments, and even bring a fallen comrade back to life!

Activation: The Dungeon Fixer rolls an Asset die related to stress, an enchantment, or a curse against a party member you are in visual contact with. Spend at least one Plot Point to activate this talent.

Effect: You reduce that Asset by one die rating per Plot Point spent. Any Asset reduced to d4 is removed.

I BANISH THEE, FOUL SPAWN!

You may not wield a battleaxe the size of an ox, but with a short prayer and a disapproving gaze, you can turn the undead to cinders and send all types of demons back to the netherworld from whence they came.

Activation: Whenever you take an Action against the undead or any type of summoned creatures (Fixer's call).

Effect: Add an extra d8 and add three dice to determine results. If you spend a Plot Point, you get a d12 instead.

WARRIOR

FIVE VS. LITTLE OLD ME? THAT'S HARDLY FAIR FOR YOU, NOW IS IT?

There's nothing like a good scuffle against more numerous opponents to get your blood pumping as you gleefully forgo defense for some pure, undiluted mayhem.

Activation: You're engaged in a Fight Action and you are outnumbered.

Effect: You can remove dice the Dungeon Fixer gains from outnumbering you. For each die removed, you roll an extra D4.

MINION SLICE AND DICER

In a frenzy of blades and screams, you make quick work of those seemingly endless minions pestering you, scattering them to the four winds.

Activation: Whenever you perform a successful Action against Minions (See Dungeon Fixer's Guide).

Effect: You reduce the Minions by one die for free. Additionally, you may spend Plot Points to remove one additional die per point spent.

MAGE

REALITY IS FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T BEND THE RULES

There is nothing wrong with reaching your goal faster by ripping just a tiny hole in reality.

Activation: MAGE is one of the dice in your roll.

Effect: Add an additional INTELLIGENCE dice to your roll; however, you also must roll an additional D4.

ARBITRARY BLAST OF ELEMENTAL ENERGY

Any Mage worth her salt has studied the classics, from missiles made of pure eldritch energy, explosive spheres of incandescent light, and arrows inexplicably made of acid.

Activation: Use in any Action where raw elemental magic power could help solve the problem at hand. You have to spend a Plot Point to activate this talent.

Effect: You add your INTELLIGENCE die to the Action and add three dice to determine the result.

SCOUNDREL

IT FELL IN MY POUCH, HONEST!

Things you don't own have a strange tendency of falling into your possession, always by complete accident or, on occasion, for safekeeping.

Activation: The Scoundrel performs an Action while there are Gold Points (see below) in the Scene's pool or in possession of other players.

Effect: You take possession of a Gold Point and generate a Treasure Asset you can use in the Action; you can perform this only once per Action.

IS IT MY FAULT YOUR BACK MAKES SUCH GREAT TARGET PRACTICE?

When the Warrior gets excited and the Mage starts blowing stuff up, things get confusing…that's when you sneak behind people and really *surprise them!*

Activation: You are engaged in a Fight Action and the Dungeon Fixer gives you an Opportunity.

Effect: You add your AGILITY roll to your Fight Action and add three dice to determine the result.

TREASURES

During a scene, whenever the Dungeon Fixer rolls an Opportunity, a Gold Point gets added to the Scene's Treasure Pool. Gold Points are undefined pieces of treasure that are shared among heroes after the successful completion of a Scene. Gold Points can be spent in any Scenes to create a D6 Treasure Asset. The player defines what form this helpful piece of treasure takes. It remains available until the end of the session. All Assets thus created are labeled "Treasure" to differentiate from other Assets.

At the end of the session, all Treasure Assets are converted back to Gold Points, pooled with unused ones and distributed among players. Generous Dungeon Fixers can award extra Gold Points for successful main or side quests to even out shares, or maybe let the Scoundrels propose gambling for them.

As a variant, the Dungeon Fixer can allow players to permanently give up a Gold Point to create a D10 Treasure Asset that lasts only for the current scene or combat, e.g., a POTION, a WAND WITH A FEW REMAINING CHARGES, A SET OF SCROLLS.

GEAR, TITLES AND STRONGHOLDS

Gold Points can be spent to acquire new powers, magical items and other cool symbols of status that populates classic fantasy adventure games. Quests can be spent like Jobs in the *Leverage* Roleplaying Game; however, instead of spending Quests between game sessions, a player can decide to spend two Gold Points to create one Signature Asset, as per the Signature Asset rules found on Page 52 of the *Leverage* Roleplaying Game book.

For example, you can create a special piece of high quality and/or magical gear. You should choose evocative names to make items stand out like The Elven Longbow of the Frontier, Heirloom Knightly Plate Armor, or The Staff of Death Rays, etc.

Other options are titles of nobility or status that help you grease your way out of those dark dungeons and into the no less dangerous crusts of upper society. Feel free to give them pompous-sounding titles like Lord of the Seven Shades, Archduke of Winterspawn, or Revered Sister of the Seven Pains.

In the same vein, the wealth and influence you gain from completing Quests could allow you to secure a domain like a Fortress, Temple, Gambling Den, or even a Tower Of Magic. Finally, you can get a Retinue of Hirelings, a Group of Fanatical Retainers, or even a Loyal Squire to spruce up your heroic entourage. Discuss it with your Dungeon Fixer.

THE OLD SCHOOL FIGHT

BY PHILIPPE-ANTOINE MÉNARD

This section describes rules for *The Old School Job* to allow multiple players to engage in fight conflicts against several opponents. The design strategy of this hack is to give each player the chance to roll an Action that can significantly affect the state of the fight at least once every "turn."

Play then alternates between players (who can choose the order they play their Actions) and the GM's team of Villain and Agents. Note that Extras and Minions do not perform Actions in conflicts other than supporting their stronger allies and acting as opposition to the heroes' Actions.

THE BATTLEFIELD

When a fight scene starts, the GM needs to prepare a few Location Assets and determine how they fit together. For example, a tavern could be split into four areas: A bar, the first half of the common room, the second half (with stairs) and a mezzanine.

These areas can be represented by index cards, with some way that shows how they are connected to one another, usually by touching and, possibly, short notes for special connections (e.g., Climbable Wall d8).

Each Location Asset should have at least one Trait that can come into play, be it defensive (a Barrier), offensive (Broken Bottles) or mobility related (Chandeliers).

HEROES AND OPPONENTS

Players, Villains, and their Agents, represented by figurines or tokens, are placed on the appropriate zones when the conflict starts according to what the adventure calls for. Extras and Minions, when present, are stacked on the Locations, represented by poker chips or other flat tokens of different colors.

MINIONS

Minions are special d6 Assets that represent the weakest, most numerous servants of a Villain. In a conflict, the GM decides if any Minions are present and sets their relative number by choosing a level (from 0 to 5, or more). When setting a conflict, the GM places one Minion token per level on each Location Asset of the conflict.

Minions act exactly as Extras, except they can't move from one space to the next, not even when stacked with a Villain or one of its Agents.

CONFLICT ACTIONS AND TURN ORDER

Conflicts are played out in turns where players and the GM perform Actions in order to achieve conflict-related tasks. The order of play for those turns is either determined by the result of a previous scene, or some sort of pre-conflict action like "We try to sneak up on the guards without being heard."

CONFLICT BASICS

Non-Minion characters can move one space without rolling an Action unless:

- An obstacle must be overcome to move from one space to the next (For example: Climbing a Rope, moving through a Conjured Web.)
- They were restrained by an opponent or a game effect and must overcome it; see "Restraint."

Heroes, Villains and Agents choose an Action and announce their intent:

- Attack: Try to take down any opposing forces, including Minions, with weapons, spells or body.
- Support: Create, Strengthen, Weaken or Destroy Assets with maneuvers, weapons or spells.
- Push: The character moves into another adjacent zone, rolling if necessary.

The stakes of opposed Actions are determined by the intents of the opposition, Traits, and available Location/situational Assets.

RESOLUTION:

- Resolve Action.
- Create/Modify Assets and Traits.
- Apply level(s) of Stress to Heroes.
- Remove Minions and Extras or apply level(s) of Stress to Villains and Agents.

ACTIONS

ATTACK

A character attacks an opponent in the same location with a weapon/unarmed/magical attack or performs a ranged attack. The defender sets the stakes by rolling the appropriate Traits based on the described intent. The attacker tries to beat the stakes by doing the same. Location Traits can be used by either side as common sense and the GM dictates.

MELEE ATTACKS

The winner of a contested Action (regardless if attacking or defending) gets the choice of:

- Inflicting a level of Stress (See Stress).
- Pushing the opponent to an adjacent zone (limit 1).
- Restraining the opponent (See Restrained).

If one side of the contest beats the other by 5, an additional effect can be inflicted, or the die rating of Stress or Restraint can be bumped up one level. Each additional step of success (+10, +15, etc) lets you increase the effect of the attack.

RANGED ATTACKS

An attacker can use a ranged weapon on any opponents on the battlefield, based on the situation and the GM's judgment. Ranged attacks are performed in a similar way to melee attacks, except that the results are influenced by the target's declared intent. If the target is not in the same space, has no ranged weapons, or declares defensive Actions instead of firing back, she chooses the first result of a successful attack instead of the shooter (e.g., she can retreat to better cover). However, if a target on the defensive loses the challenge by more than 5, then the shooter picks the other result(s).

If a shooter loses the challenge while the target was performing defensive maneuvers, he suffers no effect.

SHOOTING IN MELEE

Shooting at a target engaged in melee with the shooter or allies adds a SHOOTING IN MELEE D4 Trait to the attacker's roll for each ally (including himself) engaging the target in the location.

COMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Complications rolled by Heroes during attack Actions should be represented by minor cuts and bruises, nicked weapons, monsters attracted by the noise, and other sources of trouble. Remember that the GM must hand out a Plot Point whenever a Complication is handed out, so feel free to ignore Complications when the situation gets too complex.

As a variant, you may allow a Hero to spend a Plot Point to convert any wound-related Trait gained through a Complication into a Stress level. This can be useful if the Complication created a Trait with a high die rating on an otherwise unhurt Hero.

In similar ways, Opportunities should give the Heroes a little more breathing space; maybe a beam falls from the ceiling and creates a ramp between two previously unconnected locations, crushing a bunch of Minions and scaring all the others away for one crucial turn.

SUPPORT

Through the use of magic, weapons, brute strength or any other relevant ability, a character attempts to Create, Destroy, Weaken or Strengthen a Location-based or situational Trait or Asset. For example, a Mage could conjure a Web of Strong, Sticky Filaments in an adjacent Location to hinder all movements through it or a Warrior could cleave a Granite Statue to reduce its cover potential.

CREATE/STRENGTHEN

The character describes his intent and the GM sets the stakes by picking a difficulty die (d6 by default) based on the intent and the situation. For the creation of a new Location Trait, a d6 is added; for strengthening, the Trait's die current rating is used.

All new Traits start at a default rating of d6. The effects last until the end of the scene (but see the variant below).

Examples: Creating a Sheet of Ice (d6 difficulty + d6 new Location Trait), conjuring an Astral Guard Dog (d8 difficulty + d6 new Location Trait), pushing furniture against a Door rated d8 (d6 difficulty + d8 existing Trait), etc.

Upon success, the character either creates a d6 Trait that he applies to characters or the battlefield, or he increases an existing one by one rating. For each additional 5 margin of success, the character can increase the die rating of the Trait by one (max d12). After a successful roll, the character can also spend Plot Points to increase the die rating of the Trait by one per Point spent (max d12).

As a variant, you can allow the character to Create/Strengthen a Trait until the end of the character's next turn instead of for the duration of the whole scene; in that case, a created Asset starts at d8 or is increased by two ratings (max d12).

WEAKEN/DESTROY

The character describes her intent and the GM sets the stakes by picking a difficulty die (d6 by default) based on the intent and the situation. She then adds the Trait's die current rating. The effects are usually permanent unless the intent of the character indicates otherwise (e.g., temporarily cover a sword with conjured grease).

Examples: Trying to destroy a Table d8 with an Axe (d6 difficulty + d8 Trait), rusting an opponent's Plate Armour d10 (d10 difficulty + d10 Trait), casting a prayer to Heal a Bloodied Character (d6 difficulty + d8 Trait, see below), etc.

Upon success, the character lowers the Trait die rating by one (d4 means completely removed). For each additional 5 margin of success, the character can further decrease the die rating by one. Upon rolling successfully, the character can also spend Plot Points to decrease the die rating by one level per Point Spent.

Note: This is the default "Healing" Action as it allows to weaken/destroy all Traits, including negative Traits on the Heroes.

STRESS

Whenever an attack Action is played out, the winner gets the choice to inflict Stress on the opponent. This is a special Trait that represents the relative degree of bodily damage suffered by the character. As a conflict progresses, Stress levels rise and become a Trait that the opposing party uses in all Actions against the stressed character.

Stress works slightly differently for Heroes and their enemies.

HEROES

Heroes have five levels of Stress: Stunned d4, Bruised d6, Bloodied d8, Dying d10, and Dead d12. Stress acts as an opposed Complication added to all Actions against the stressed Hero. A "Dead" Hero gets one last chance to perform an Action before being taken out of a scene. Furthermore, "Dead' Heroes have one last chance to be revived, through a support Action. If untended before the conflict ends, they are considered dead.

VILLAINS AND AGENTS

Villains and Agents have only three levels of Stress: Bloodied d8, Dying d10, and Dead d12.

However, instead of gaining Stress, they can sacrifice one Minion or Extra in their Location for each Stress level they would gain.

MINIONS AND EXTRAS

Minions and Extra do not suffer Stress. Instead a Hero destroys one Extra and one level of Minions for each Stress level dealt to them in a given location.

RESTRAINT

Restraint is a Trait rated d6 to d12 that represents imposed limited mobility characters have in a given area, forcing them to roll an Action to leave it. It is combined with other relevant Traits when setting the stakes a character needs to beat to leave an area. The restrained condition expires at end of a restrained character's turn.

While characters roll their relevant Attribute and Role Traits to escape Restraint, Villains and Agents combine their most appropriate Traits with a d6. Extras can't leave an area when restrained.

THE DUNGEON FIXER'S GUIDE

BY PHILIPPE-ANTOINE MÉNARD

This section builds upon The Old School Job for Cortex Action by providing ideas, examples and variants to create memorable Quests straight out of the classic fantasy gaming era.

CORE ASSUMPTIONS OF THE OLD SCHOOL JOB

Classic fantasy games were built on a zero to hero (and often zero to dead) philosophy. Crafty, lucky players were often the only ones to achieve success and reach significant levels of competence with their characters. The Old School Job is based on the assumption that all Heroes have in fact already reached that point and will remain so.

That's why this hack assumes that character death will be, by default, a rare or non-existent thing. Injuries should arise as interesting complications, but should not automatically lead to arbitrary incapacitation or death.

The "Job" performed by the heroes is called a **Quest.** Completing them gives your players the "experience" they need to progress further, as indicated on pages 51-53 of the *Leverage RPG* book. The concept of Wealth (coins, jewels, etc) is abstracted. It is partly folded into the inherent rewards that come with completing quests (gear upkeep, training, lodging, etc) and the rest is represented by Gold Points.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF QUESTS

Quests are made of interlocking elements that the Dungeon Fixer defines in more or fewer details as per personal preferences. Here are their main elements.

THE PATRON/MOTIVATION

Like the Clients described in the *Leverage RPG*, Heroes may need a reason to go on a dungeon crawling Quest (beyond "We need more loot"). Nobles and monarchs often send Heroes to investigate sources of trouble. Patrons can also be lore seekers, civic leaders, business owners, members of various religions, and even desperate citizens.

Sometimes, especially during campaign play, Heroes may come up with their own motivations for Quests, like recovering the honor of one's family, or destroying the seventh seal of doom before it falls in the wrong hands... again.

THE QUESTS

While a near infinite number of Quests can be created, they mostly resolve around five core themes you can choose from:

Recovering a Thing from a Dangerous Place: This one is the basic Job of obtaining a MacGuffin (e.g., a treasure, someone, a lost bit of knowledge). It's what makes dungeon crawling so similar to heists. A common variant is Deliver a Thing Through a Dangerous Place, such as "Escort the Bishop through the Valley of Hunger so he can broker a peace agreement with the Orcs."

Foil the Plans of a Villain: Someone is doing something horrible in the dungeon and the Heroes must put a stop to it. It can be breaking a corrupting ritual, interrupting the summoning of the Chained One, or just blowing up the evil technomancer's Doomsday Golem.

Clear Threat(s) from an Area: Something is causing trouble and it needs to be addressed. A goblin swarm raids a village, a coven of were-tiger witches is kidnapping children, a sentient siege engine goes berserk, etc. Someone must step forward to resolve the problem and the party of Heroes is it.

Chart the Unknown: A minaret from a previously forgotten library rises from the sands of the desert, an underwater city is discovered, or a pathfinding mission needs volunteers. All those and other exploratory missions are staples of classic Quests you can pick from.

Uncover a Sinister Secret: A mysterious murder, a vampire that can't be put down, or a village that sleeps all day and builds a dark tower all night. Something's fishy and the Heroes must find the cause of this mystery. Such Quests, when solved, often twist into deep trouble for the Heroes.

THE DUNGEON

This is where it happens. While the earliest fantasy adventure games focused mostly on underground locales, a dungeon remains a catchall name for any defined space where a Quest takes place. From a dragon's lair under the mountain, to a cave complex lost in the Weeping Swamps, to an entire city or kingdom, the dungeon is where you confine the action of your adventure. Setting a Quest in an actual dungeon is not an absolute requirement, but it remains a common, easy way to implement one.

There are several ways to set up your dungeon. At its simplest expression, the whole dungeon is one Location Asset with a few pre-defined Traits. For example, you could have a Slimy d6, Humongous d8, filled with Secret Doors d8, and decked out in Deadly Traps d10 dungeon.

If you want to add more variety and create something closer to classic dungeons, create a series of Location Assets, each with their own Traits like Lost Temple: Cursed Altar d8, Scary Tentacles Of Energy d10 or Apparently Empty Corridor: Spiked Pit Trap d8. You can then sketch each "room" as a wireframe diagram or map the whole thing out completely, like old school dungeons.

As the adventure progresses and complications arise, don't forget to assign some to the dungeon itself. Cave-Ins, Traps, Pockets of Noxious Gases, Screeching Fungi—all excellent Traits to make the Heroes' lives more challenging.

THE INHABITANTS

A dungeon, regardless of its actual form, is only half the fun. It's the predatory monsters, warring factions of humanoids, scheming Villains and their Minions that bring the whole place to life.

THE MAIN VILLAINS

Not all dungeons need them, but when you decide to have one, make it count! Design them with the same approach you would with a *Leverage RPG* Mark (see page 122). Make them seemingly untouchable and powerful (d12s and d10s), flavorful (d8s) and with clear weaknesses (d4s) that the Heroes can eventually discover and exploit. More importantly, give them plans that move forward as the Heroes struggle to catch up with them.

Examples:

- **Big Bad Dragon:** Hella-Hot Fire Breath d12, Jewel-Encrusted Dragon Scales d10, Sharp Claws d8, Susceptible to Flattery d4, Weak Spot on Underbelly d4.
- **Count Von Guttenbaun:** Vampire Lord d12, Aura of Fear d10, Horrendous Accent d8, Coffin-Bound d4, Allergic To Vampire Clichés d4.
- **Mad Necromancer:** Wand of Death d12, Necronomicon d12, Death Stench d8, Consumptive d4, Daddy Issues d4.

Dungeon Villains have their own allies: loyal bodyguards, arcane constructs, enslaved brutes, and sometimes even whole tribes or local communities of evil humanoids. A proper Villain should have a handful of lieutenants, built like Agents in the *Leverage RPG* book, pages 125-126.

Examples:

- **Troll Bodyguard:** Regeneration d10, Flesh-Shredding Claws d8, Pyrophobia d4.
- **Skeleton Archers:** Longbows d8, Lack of Vital Organs d8, Real Dry and Brittle d4.

Finally, no self-respecting Villain would occupy the vastness of an underground complex (or ruined tower, or run-down neighborhood, etc.) without a virtual army of Minions. Consider Minions as one (or more) ever-present d6 Assets that the Villain has spread out all over the dungeon. Such Minions are likely to pester the Heroes in most scenes until the players decide to take them out as a dedicated Action.

Examples:

- Diseased Giant Rats d6, Shambling Zombies d6, Goblin Runts d6, Dire Cockroaches d6.

HUMANOID FACTIONS

A fundamental aspect of classic fantasy dungeons is the presence of several factions of humanoids populating it. Factions are not necessarily associated with the main Villain, but they usually have a well-defined role in the dungeon's "ecology." Such factions can have their own plans (represented by their main Traits) regarding the dungeon itself (e.g. Our Home d8), the surroundings (e.g., Our Hunting Ground d6) or other factions of the dungeon (e.g., Orcs are Enemies d8). Many will have minor Villains as identifiable leaders.

Consider members of such factions as Extras and their leaders as Agents (*Leverage RPG* book page 125) that share the faction's Traits. Heroes can choose to interact with factions to further their own Quests or use them as cannon fodder for some good, clean dungeon rumble fun. Just remember to milk all Complications to create as dynamic a dungeon environment as you can.

RANDOM THREATS, CHARACTERS AND FOILS

Dungeons have weird, forgotten, often predatory inhabitants that roam its corridors, empty chambers and caves. Semi-sentient oozes, corrosive patches of slime, prowling flesh-eating beasts, restless undead guardians and other monstrosities are common in dungeon adventures. Create them by putting a few evocative Traits together and giving it a punchy one liner description.

Example:

- **Land Squid:** More Hands than Mouths, no wonder it's always hungry. Tentacles d8, Horny Beak d10, Ewww, Is That Ink? d8.

Other characters can roam the halls of dungeons: lost adventurers, escaped prisoners, raiding parties from the underworld, and even slightly unhinged merchants, trying to fleece gullible Heroes with maps of dubious quality and improved-tasting iron rations. Consider those as Extras (*Leverage RPG* book, page 125).

Finally, another group of questing adventurers could interfere with the party's goals. While they may start off as nothing more than d6 annoyances, they could eventually develop into full-fledged Foils (*Leverage*, page 126).

RUNNING THE QUESTS

You can run The Old School Job in countless ways, from exploring a keyed map, throwing challenges as they come up, to adapting the five acts Heist structure described in the *Leverage RPG* book (page 82). One such adaptation is the classic five-room dungeon as introduced by Johnn Four in his online RPG newsletter. It consists of dividing the Quest into five encounters (Entry, Challenge, Red Herring, Climax and Plot Twist) in a different "room" of the dungeon, each one leading the Heroes closer to their goal while throwing a plot twist at the most opportune moment.

At its simplest expression, you can just describe the area in general terms and ask what the players want to do. Transform each significant Action into a dice challenge, letting Complications and Opportunities shape what happens next. As long as you keep an eye on pacing and make sure that everyone can feel progress in the story, the adventure will eventually steer itself to its logical conclusion.

Use and abuse Complications to create as much trouble as possible. Send the Heroes tumbling down the deepest levels of the dungeons, make them lost, trigger a trap that floods a whole level, reverse gravity…all these things are staples of classic gaming.

THE QUEST GENERATOR

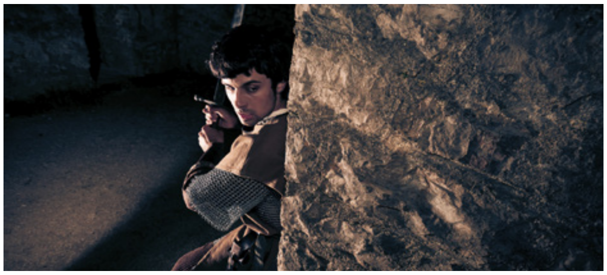
BY PHILIPPE-ANTOINE MÉNARD

As a tribute to classic fantasy adventure games, this hack offers a set of random charts to generate a whole night's worth of dungeon crawling for The Old School Job. These charts are based on those found on the *Leverage RPG* Situation Generator (pages 138-145). If you are short of ideas, pick up your dice, get or draw yourself a dungeon map, and get ready to roll. Feel free to change results that you don't like or don't inspire you.

THE PATRON

D10	RESULT
1	Nobility
2	Mercantile
3	Religious
4	Politician/Public Servant
5	Scholar
6	Citizen
7	Family/Ally
8	Transdimensional/Xenian
9	Self-Motivated
10	Roll twice on this table, ignoring 10s

- **Nobility:** A monarch, a member of court or an aristocrat, including servants.
- **Mercantile:** Merchants, guild masters and members (including crime syndicates), sailors, and anyone living off commerce and shipping.
- **Religious:** Bishops, abbots, priests, nuns, cultists, shamans, witch doctors, or any servants of a divine or animist/elemental faith.
- **Politician/Public Servant:** A civic leader or servant. A mayor, a burgomaster, a ranger, or any person likely to ask for help in the name of their charge.
- **Scholar:** Academics, non-adventuring mages, historians, explorers, and all bookish patrons unlikely to get in a dungeon.
- **Citizen:** Worried townsfolk, sick farmers, grieving widows and widowers, and anxious parents.
- **Family/Ally:** Someone close to a hero, a previous patron, or an established, trusted ally.
- **Transdimensional/Xenian:** An angel, a demon, an elemental lord, or something beyond comprehension from out of time and space.
- **Self-Motivated:** The Heroes are following a rumor, lead, or hunch from a previous adventure.



THE QUEST

D10	RESULT
1	Recover an Object/Person
2	Bring an Object/Escort a Person
3	Kill/Capture the Villain
4	Interrupt the Villain's Plans
5	Clear an Area of Hostile Creatures
6	Save an Area from Imminent Danger
7	Explore an Uncharted Area
8	Solve a Mystery
9	An Opportunity for Experience
10	Roll twice on this table, ignoring 10s

- **Recover an Object/Person:** Something or someone is locked/hidden/lost somewhere in the dungeon; go and get it back!
- **Bring an Object/Escort a Person:** Take this thing, chuck it in a volcano, or make sure no one ever sees it again. Escort an important person through a dangerous area.
- **Kill/Capture the Villain:** He's up to no good; make him disappear, or lock him up and throw away the key.
- **Interrupt the Villain's Plans:** Intercept the nefarious schemes of the bad guy before it's too late, though he will likely stay out of reach.
- **Clear an Area of Hostile Creatures:** One of the dungeon's factions (or the bad guy's minions) is causing trouble; take care of it.
- **Save an Area from Imminent Danger:** Prevent that dam from collapsing, calm this volcano, or stop our sewers from backing up with bodies.
- **Explore an Uncharted Area:** Go explore that strange island where all previous explorers have disappeared.
- **Solve a Mystery:** The All-Stone was stolen from the impenetrable vault and all the butlers are dead; what happened?
- **An Opportunity for Experience:** You all need to master the five-points exploding butt-kicking technique; time to kill a few hundred boars.

THE DUNGEON

D10 RESULT	
1	A Fortification
2	An Underground Dwelling/Outpost
3	A Natural Cave Formation
4	A Temple/Church
5	Sewers
6	A Village/Neighborhood/City
7	The Wilderness
8	Transdimensional
9	Weird
10	Roll twice on this table, ignoring 10s

- **A Fortification:** A tower, a castle, a fort. Made of stone, wood or floating in the air. Intact or ruined. Abandoned or inhabited.
- **An Underground Dwelling/Outpost:** Dwarven halls, goblin burrows, orcish mines, dark elf raiding camp.
- **A Natural Cave Formation:** Interconnected, multi-leveled caves. Dry, flooded, or in between. Underground rivers, lakes, or forests of mushrooms a possibility.
- **A Temple/Church:** Cathedrals, basilicas, rural churches, graveyards, chapels, shrines, temples, crypts, or pyramids. Recent or ruined. Lost or recently uncovered. Abandoned, occupied and/or haunted.
- **Sewers:** They stink, they're full of monsters, and Heroes hate going in them; the perfect spot!
- **A Village/Neighborhood/City:** The adventure is focused around a settlement, but can contain some dungeon elements or scenes. The city could be underground.
- **The Wilderness:** A forest, a swamp, the Dark Hills, the Hellsgate Mountains, the Razor Steppes. The Dungeon is the Wilderness.
- **Transdimensional:** The Dungeon is on another plane of existence. The fey world, the plane of Fire and Ice, the 5th Hell, or on the sides of the Celestial Mountains. It usually contains portals from and to the physical world.
- **Weird:** A trip through Lewis Caroll's Wonderland, a crashed starship, a portal that sends the players on a Martian army base during an alien invasion. There are no limits.

THE DUNGEON'S SECRET

D10 RESULT	
1	Relic of Dark Power
2	Forgotten Prison/Vault
3	Vile Corruption
4	Haunted
5	Lost Symbol of Hope
6	Wild Magic Pockets
7	Power Behind the Throne
8	Politically Inconvenient
9	I Am Your Father
10	Red Herring: Roll again, ignoring 10s

- **Relic of Dark Power:** A hidden altar to a long forgotten evil, a talisman that summons the Fallen One, the Last Seal that keeps all the elements of the world combined.
- **Forgotten Prison/Vault:** The dungeon was created to harbor something so vile, so dangerous that it had to be guarded for eternity…except it wasn't. An imprisoned god, a sun-slaying spear, an anthology of world-shattering bad poetry.
- **Vile Corruption:** The dungeon itself is an agent of chaos and degradation, calling evil monsters to itself, compelling them to build more passages and room until the whole world collapses.
- **Haunted:** Lost Souls were wronged and are trapped within the dungeon, exacting eternal vengeance and pain on anyone entering it.
- **Lost Symbol of Hope:** Though it houses scheming, evil inhabitants, the dungeon was once a harbor of light. Some pockets of that former glory remains, ready to be rediscovered by weary Heroes seeking refuge and solace.
- **Wild Magic Pockets:** Something strange is going on that causes magic to be even more unpredictable in certain areas.
- **Power Behind the Throne:** The threat you came to face isn't the true threat after all; there's someone pulling the strings.
- **Political Recall:** You're asked to call off your dungeon raiding. The mayor may have sent you down there, but after seeing the trouble, he wants you to stop investigating.
- **I Am Your Father:** An important piece of the dungeon or person there has a strong connection to one of the characters.
- **Red Herring:** Roll again on the table, and that's the rumored secret, but ends up being completely false.

THE MAIN VILLAIN

D10 RESULT	
1	A Grand Beast
2	Undead Master
3	Dark Lord
4	Arcanist
5	Unholy One
6	Transdimensional
7	Xenian
8	Small Fry
9	Too Many Villains
10	Roll twice on this table, ignoring 10s

- **A Grand Beast:** The villain is a large, intelligent, cunning monster such as a dragon, a giant, or some other massive, powerful being.
- **Undead Master:** A vampire, a mummified sorcerer-king, or a lich-mage that pushed its existence passed the frontiers of life.
- **Dark Lord:** A savage barbarian-prince, the Scion of the orcish God of Strife. A dark elf slavelord or an evil dwarven king.
- **Arcanist:** The classic mad wizard, the secretive necromancer, the power-obsessed mage.
- **Unholy One:** The Unholy warrior, the cult-leader of the Coiled Ones, the Arch-Priestess of the Cannibals; the villain is a representative of the darker divine forces of the world.
- **Transdimensional:** A fallen Archangel, an agent of the planes of Chaos, or an elemental Duke.
- **Xenian:** An alien, brain-eating entity from between the fabrics of worlds, made of claws, fangs, and tentacles.
- **Small Fry:** The sinister villain behind it all is...actually a kobold on stilts?
- **Too Many Villains:** The denizens can't agree on who is actually in charge.

THE MAIN VILLAIN'S PLAN

D10 RESULT	
1	Muster Military Troops
2	Obtain an Item of Power/Knowledge
3	Perform a Vile Ritual for Power/Influence
4	Summon One or Many Transdimensional Beings
5	Build a Doomsday Device
6	Harvest a Resource
7	Corrupt/Destroy the Area/World
8	Revenge
9	Unfathomable/Alien
10	Roll twice on this table, ignoring 10s

- **Muster Military Troops:** The villain seeks to gather an army, or a significant strike force to attack a particular strategic objective. Maybe he seeks to ally with the factions of this dungeon, or to tame/bribe a fearsome monster to join his troops.
- **Obtain an Item of Power/Knowledge:** The villain wants something to become more powerful and/or knowledgeable. Maybe it's just a milestone in its grand plan or maybe this is the last piece to become an unbeatable threat.
- **Perform a Vile Ritual for Power/Influence:** The villain performs strange, forbidden magic or prayers to unleash a game-changing effect on her surroundings or herself.
- **Summon One or Many Transdimensional Beings:** The classic "demon summoning" ceremony that invariably goes wrong at the worse possible moment.
- **Build a Doomsday Device:** Yes, there's someone building a death-ray-yielding titanium golem in there; can you please do something about it?
- **Harvest a Resource:** The villain needs a rare or illegal resource. He either mines the dungeon for it, or uses it as a base of operation. Metals, gemstones, slaves, food, enchanted lava, etc.
- **Corrupt/Destroy the Area/World:** The villain wants to spread chaos and desolation around him, or better yet, destroy the world.
- **Revenge:** The villain wants to get back at someone, possibly the Heroes, or get revenge against a whole population.
- **Unfathomable/Alien:** The villain wants to steal all the clouds and turn them into mushroom farms or maybe eat all the dreams and leave living nightmares behind.

THE FACTIONS

Roll a D10, divide the result by 2 (round up) to determine the number of Factions in your adventure. Then roll on the next two tables for each.

THE FACTIONS

D10 RESULT	
1	Humans
2	Demi-Humans
3	Other Surface Humanoids
4	Underworld Humanoids
5	Aquatic Humanoids
6	Sentient Undead
7	Transdimensional
8	Xenian
9	Weird
10	Roll twice on this table, ignoring 10s

- **Humans:** Refugees, bandits, pirates, cultists or a secret brotherhood of assassins.
- **Demi-Humans:** Elves, dwarves, gnomes, halfings and other human-like races.
- **Other Surface Humanoids:** Gnolls, goblins, lycantrophes (werewolves and similar) or ogres.
- **Underworld Humanoids:** Dark elves, trolls, deep dwarves and other creatures from the depths.
- **Aquatic Humanoids:** Lizardfolk, fishfolk, merfolk and other aquatic creatures.
- **Sentient Undead:** Ghouls, wights, wraiths, ghosts, liches and vampires.
- **Transdimensional:** Elemental humanoids, angelic and demonic agents, half-angels, half-demons. Exiled fey. Shadow or light people.
- **Xenian:** Hive-minded aliens, pod people, a colony of face-sucking parasites, and all kinds of disgusting, slimy sentient creatures.
- **Weird:** Rock men, sentient crystal columns, beings of pure magic, quantum physicists who got lost on the way to a convention. A faction of really out of place or completely incomprehensible people.

THE FACTIONS' OUTLOOK/PLAN

D10 RESULT	
1	Protecting Territory
2	Hunting/Raiding
3	Warring
4	Seeking
5	Breeding
6	Scheming
7	Hiding
8	Trading
9	Allied to Main Villain/Other Faction
10	Roll twice on this table, ignoring 10s

- **Protecting Territory:** The faction wants to maintain what they have and protect their living area.
- **Hunting/Raiding:** The faction has a base of operation for hunting food and raiding (food, resources, slaves, etc.).
- **Warring:** The faction is at war with another faction, the main villain or some other population near the dungeon.
- **Seeking:** The faction seeks a specific resource, object, or piece of knowledge. They might also be seeking help from the heroes.
- **Breeding:** The faction has established a breeding ground that they viciously protect.
- **Scheming:** The faction pursues intrigue, playing factions, heroes and monsters against one another.
- **Hiding:** The faction hides from other factions, the main villain, the surface, the Heroes, or from some other, much bigger threat.
- **Trading:** Members of the faction are traders. They seek to establish commercial relationships with the surface, other factions and even denizens from deeper in the underworld.
- **Allied to Main Villain/Other Faction:** The faction has achieved (or is about to) an alliance with another force of the dungeon, possibly the main villain.

WANDERING THREATS

D10	RESULT
1	Crafty Beast
2	Hunter/Seeker
3	Mindless Predator
4	Fugitive
5	Restless Undead
6	Bumbling/Clueless Idiot
7	Adventuring Party
8	Transdimensional/Xenian Prowler
9	Phantoms
10	Roll twice on this table, ignoring 10s

- **Crafty Beast:** A cunning monster has its lair in the dungeon and patrols it for food and treasure.
- **Hunter/Seeker:** A creature, construct or living spell seeks or hunts something very specific in the dungeon, possibly the Heroes or the object of their Quest.
- **Mindless Predator:** Giant insects, acidic motile ooze or corrosive fungi that crawls around, ready to grind or dissolve Heroes and their gear in primordial soup.
- **Fugitive:** A creature who is either fleeing from surface justice or something much worse from below.
- **Restless Undead:** Something can't stay dead and it's roaming, exacting its hate of all things living. Zombies, skeletons, mummies, or ghosts are all likely examples.
- **Bumbling/Clueless Idiot:** Someone who just shouldn't be in the dungeon has found his way and miraculously survived, be it a snake-oil peddler, a naïve bard, or a distracted scholar.
- **Adventuring Party:** What are the odds that another party of adventurers showed up in the same dungeon at the same time? What the hell do they want? (Feel free to roll up a new Quest).
- **Transdimensional/Xenian Prowler:** The Hate Elves from the fey realms of Agony are out for a little bit of fun with the local wildlife. Or maybe a huge orb, covered with energy-ray-shooting eye stalks has lost its monocle and is very angry about it.
- **Phantoms:** It sounds like something bad is around every corner, but on further investigation, nothing ever shows its face.

RANDOM DUNGEON ROOMS

You need to generate a dungeon room and can't think of what to put in it? Grab 3 d10 and roll on the next three charts. For each Location Trait created, roll a d6 to determine its die rating as indicated.

RANDOM DUNGEON ROOM CHART I

D10	RESULT
1	Altar (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
2	Books (1: d4, 2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5: d10, 6: d12)
3	Candelabras (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
4	Dung (1-3: d6, 4-6: d8)
5	Echoes (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
6	Frescoes (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
7	Gears (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5: d10, 6: d12)
8	Hoard (1-4: d4, 5-6: d6)
9	Idol (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
10	Empty

RANDOM DUNGEON ROOM CHART II

D10	RESULT
1	Jars (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
2	Keys (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
3	Lights (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
4	Manacles (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5-6: d10)
5	Noises (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
6	Observatory (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
7	Portcullis (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5: d10, 6: d12)
8	Quicksilver (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5: d10, 6: d12)
9	Rugs (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5-6: d10)
10	Empty

RANDOM DUNGEON ROOM CHART III

D10	RESULT
1	Statues (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
2	Tapestries (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
3	Vines (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5: d10, 6: d12)
4	Weapons (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5-6: d10)
5	Fountain/Pool (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5-6: d10)
6	Nest (1-2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5-6: d10)
7	Trash (1-2: d4, 3-4: d6, 5-6: d8)
8-10	Trap (1: d4, 2: d6, 3-4: d8, 5: d10, 6: d12)

CURSUS HONORUM: ROMAN DRAMA

BY SHREYAS SAMPAT

Before Cæsar there was the Republic. This is a game of that time. It isn't strictly historical, nor is it strictly fantastical. It lies in the middle ground where we find historical fiction: you can just as easily find Spartacus here as Astérix, Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire as Tarr and Turtledove's Household Gods. There are adjustments and adaptations here to make this possible; Cursus Honorum is set to deliver a dramatic Rome experience rather than a textbook-perfect Rome simulation.

Cursus Honorum is compatible with the *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* system. This hack will take you as far as Lead creation; after that you are on your own.

THE SUPERNATURAL IN ROME?

Dramatic Roleplaying contains Abilities and Gear, which allow characters to exhibit larger-than-life powers. Cursus Honorum uses these as well, but adjusts how they are accessed: they will be available to all members of the character's family (see The Roman Familia) to some extent.

To run a game where the supernatural is less in evidence or absent, it's as easy as describing your Abilities and Gear as special hereditary talents and particularly valuable or rare, but still natural, Assets of the family.

ROME & THE ANCIENT WORLD

The age of the Republic begins several hundred years before Christ. During these centuries, Rome's borders and influence slowly expand from their origins as a particularly successful Latin tribe to a powerful military and trading empire, punctuated by wars with neighboring Italians, Greeks, and Macedonians. By the end of the Republic, Rome controls the entire Mediterranean basin and is moving north into Britain. Most of the action in Cursus Honorum probably occurs in Rome and its immediate surroundings, but military campaigns may bring characters out to the provinces.

THE ROMAN FAMILIA

As you progress through the Pathways in this game, you will develop not only your own character, but also your Familia, the Roman family. Everyone under the authority of a single living patriarch is a member of the same Familia—including his children, any servants or slaves retained by the household, and for landowners, the plebeians or serfs working the house's lands, as well. The wife might be under the authority of her husband, or her father, depending on the type of marriage.

Before you start building characters with Pathways, decide which of the other Leads are members of your Familia. Every Lead should have at least one additional Familia member. You don't have to take the same Birth Pathways as other Familia members. You will share Resource Assets with all other Familia members, and Heritage Distinctions with all the members of the Familia that have the same Birth as your character, so keep this in mind when you assign them. Any Features that you personally add to the Pathway Map should be part of your Familia as well—either as members or property. (By the way, Romans kept slaves. This is a good time to talk about whether you want to have slavery in your game or not.)

OTHER TYPES OF FAMILIAS

Women married "cum manu" became a part of their husband's Familia and were subject to his Familia's will. Women in free marriages were still legally bound to their fathers, however, and not under their husbands' control. Living in a separate household from their fathers afforded them greater independence, though, as they weren't under daily scrutiny. Roman women could also inherit property, so it was entirely possible for a woman to be head of her own household, with full control over property, including servants or slaves.

Familias included more than just biological children, too. Adopted children and other relatives were often included under the paterfamilias, the patriarch's absolute authority. If a Roman man had no male heirs, he could adopt to ensure the family name continued. Adult children were still subject to their father's will, even if they lived in their own households and had their own families.

ADDING FAMILIA TRAITS

If you arrive at a Pathway that grants a new Familia Trait—a Resource or Heritage option—you add it to your own sheet at 2D6 (Resources) or 1D6 (Heritage) and add it to the sheets of all other eligible Familia members at 2D4 or 1D4, respectively. If you have a D4 Familia Trait when given the option to add or step up a Familia Trait, you must step up the D4 Trait rather than adding a new one. You can add new Familia Traits if you have none at the D4 level.

STEPPING UP FAMILIA TRAITS

When you step up a Familia Trait, you step up your personal rating only. It doesn't affect the ratings other Familia members have with it. For Resources, this typically means that you have more or less access to them than other members; for Heritage, it shows how strongly it runs in your blood.

CREATING YOUR CHARACTERS

Cursus Honorum only includes Pathways developed until the Focus stage; however, you should develop characters as full Rookies or Veterans using the Pathway information listed in the *Smallville RPG*. Take note that the Familia rules will result in slightly more capable characters. After each Pathway step, be sure to pause briefly and take note of any necessary Familia updates. Read on for updated Pathway descriptions.

BIRTH

In Rome, who you came from is more important than where. Although there are destitute patricians and wealthy barbarian merchant-nobles, the roles that society casts them in are solid, and people's rights are determined by birth and ancestry, not the contents of their wallet or the size of their estates.

PATRICIAN

One of your ancestors was a member of Romulus' founding Senate, and consequently your forebears have enjoyed certain legal benefits for many years. Many patrician families own land and live in extensive villas, and most public offices can only be held by male patricians.

Patricians get the same benefits as Rich characters in the *Smallville RPG* (page 20). Patrician leads to: Voyage, Rhetor, and Apprenticeship.

EQUES

The wealthier male plebeians constitute the equites, the business class of Rome. Equites are not born; they are made, through sheer determination and hard work. Only plebeians of sufficient wealth are awarded the title. The word eques (Equites is the plural) literally means "horseman" or "knight," because many equites were obliged to serve as officers or cavalry in the Roman armies.

Equites get the same benefits as Gifted characters in the *Smallville RPG* (page 20). Eques leads to: Rhetor, Apprenticeship, and Agoge.

PLEBEIAN

You're a Roman citizen, but you probably don't enjoy it much. Plebeians who don't enjoy equestrian status (see Eques, above) are, for the most part, artisans and laborers. It's not an easy life.

Plebeians get the same benefits as Ordinary characters in the *Smallville RPG* (page 20). Plebeian leads to: Apprenticeship, Agoge, and Paragon.

CHARMED

A Charmed character can be of any social order. Soothsayers, demigods, prophets, the scions of heroes: these are the Charmed, born with unusual talents and mysterious gifts. When you choose Charmed, choose Patrician, Plebeian, Eques, or Foreign, as well; you share Heritage with Familia members of the chosen class.

Charmed characters get the same benefits as Alien/Metahuman characters in the *Smallville RPG* (page 20). Charmed leads to: Agoge, Paragon, and Voyage.

FOREIGN

Foreigners stand outside the social order of Roman citizenry. They do not generally follow the Roman concept of Familia, and few apart from the wealthy manage to find a home in Rome. Mechanically, a Foreign character's Familia constitutes all other characters of the same nationality on the Pathway map.

Foreign characters get the same benefits as Strange characters in the *Smallville RPG* (page 21). Foreign leads to: Paragon, Voyage, and Rhetor.

EDUCATION

Most Roman citizens enjoy some kind of education depending on the Resources their Familia has access to.

RHETOR

Privileged sons of the wealthy have the opportunity to study under a rhetor to learn the arts of oratory, law, and politics. A particularly accomplished rhetor might also teach astronomy, geography, philosophy, music, and so on, to give his students a more well-rounded education that will better support them in future debates. Students under a rhetor have a valuable opportunity to build connections with their peers. Privileged daughters may have access to a tutor, but their education would not be as extensive as their brothers. If your Lead is a privileged Roman woman (patrician or the daughter of an eques), this option represents her education, regardless of how complete it might be. Also, if your Lead is Foreign, this represents the equivalent advanced education of that culture.

Characters at Rhetor get the same benefits as Average characters in the *Smallville RPG* (page 22). Rhetor leads to: Supernatural, Money, or Life.

APPRENTICESHIP

For those who choose not to hire or buy a teacher for their children, apprenticeship is the way of teaching them a trade or art that they will follow later in life. Access to a master to learn from is a function of a Familia's connections and status; if your Familia is plebeian you are likelier to apprentice with a sandalmaker than with a silk dyer or an ironworker. However, it also provides an essential opportunity for social mobility.

Characters at Apprenticeship get the following:

- Add a Distinction
- Step up a Distinction
- Step up a Relationship, Asset, or Resource
- Choose Money, Life, or Status as your Focus Pathway

or

- Step up a Distinction
- Step up a Relationship, Asset, or Resource
- Choose Science or Supernatural as your Focus Pathway

AGOGE

Male youths of a military bent may enter a Spartan-style agoge, a military school, to develop their physical skills and their abilities as soldiers and strategists. Students at agoge are housed in loosely-organized groups called "herds," each having its own dormitory and being led by a senior student, who is generally in his early twenties. They are strongly encouraged to discard loyalty to their Familia in favor of loyalty to the herd. If two or more Leads are at agoge together, they may create a new pseudo-Familia and abandon their original one in favor of this new opportunity.

In addition, characters at agoge get the same benefits as Jock characters in the *Smallville RPG* (page 22). Agoge leads to: Life, Status, and Science.

HOT TOPICS: GENDER, RACE, & RELIGION IN ROME

The ancient Roman civilization spanned approximately 2200 years, from its rise as a city-state ruled by a king through the Republican and the Imperial periods. Over those two millennia, its demographics went through major changes and these changes were accompanied by differing attitudes toward gender, race, and religion. The Holy Roman Empire of later years was a very different place than the pre-Christian Republic.

It's beyond the scope of this article to give a full, chronological breakdown of how these attitudes shifted over time. Social movements within Rome and the annexation and integration of outside cultures both had great effects on Roman culture and law, and to detail those historically would take up much more space than is available.

The assumption of Cursus Honorum is that you apply modern ideals to an ancient setting—that is, people of all races, genders, and creeds are equal under the law, and the law reflects the majority population's point of view on this. People who hold differing views are the exception rather than the rule. Should you choose to deviate from this, there are numerous scholarly treatments of the subject that you can consult.

PARAGON

Paragon remains unchanged from the version in the *Smallville RPG*, except that it leads to Science rather than Technology.

VOYAGE

There is much to do in the world outside of Rome herself, and the character on a Voyage has taken the opportunity to do it. Instead of settling down with an advanced education or a profession, Voyagers go to see the world.

Characters at Voyage get the same benefits as Outsider characters in the *Smallville RPG* (page 22). Voyage leads to: Science, Supernatural, or Money.

FOCUS

Only a single Focus is changed from the *Smallville RPG* version. The other four remain as they appear in that book.

SCIENCE

You have long been fascinated by the achievements of scientists: the mystery of lenses, the majesty of the aqueduct, and the balancing act of architecture, so delicate despite being a science of wood, brick, and stone. You spend much of your money on papyrus and materials for your experiments.

Science leads to: Lofty, Underground, or Ethical.

HERITAGE

As in the *Smallville RPG*, Heritage Distinctions describe characters who have unusual origins. You can use the Heritage Distinctions provided in that book (pages 99-101) for a more four-colored style of game, where the King of Atlantis or an Amazonian princess-priestess wouldn't be out of place, or you can use Heritages like the following for a more classically inspired game.

UNCANNY

Rome was cosmopolitan for its time, but its people were still hidebound and xenophobic, as well as ignorant of the world's full cultural diversity, by modern standards. For this reason, people are expected to conform to stereotypes, and the strange and powerful most of all. If characters choose an Ability that is not one of the Associated Abilities for their Heritage, they gain a new Stress track: Uncanny.

CHRISTIAN

In the Republican period, most Romans followed the animistic Roman religion, and Christianity was in its infancy. It was still the time of miracles, the age of the New Testament. The few Christians within Roman borders were seen as witches and mystics—they were not necessarily reviled, but they were outsiders, foreigners, and suspected of wielding mysterious abilities passed down to them from their nameless and unknowable God.

D4: Earn a Plot Point when you are singled out or mistreated by Roman authorities.

D8: Spend a Plot Point to Reveal that you "know a guy" who is secretly Christian and will come to your aid.

D12: Spend a Plot Point to intercede on another's behalf with your mysterious God. You may roll a Stress Relief Test for them without their presence or ability to participate.

Associated Abilities: Adaptation, Animal Control, Healing.

Limits: Anger

DELPHIC ORACLE

Long ago in Apollo's temple at Delphi, the oracle, known as the Pythia, spoke true words of fortune to her people and what supplicants would come to the temple to seek her counsel. Though that time is long past, Apollo's favor still anoints a lucky few, mostly Greek and Minoan women of no great age and wholesome character. To these, the serpent Python whispers Apollo's secrets.

D4: Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die in any roll associated with giving advice.

D8: Add a D6 to the Trouble pool when you invoke Apollo's blessing to use a Special Effect from a connected Ability you don't have.

D12: Spend a Plot Point to learn an object or person's recent past simply by touching it.

Associated Abilities: Comprehension, Luck, Precognition, Shadow Walk, Telepathy.

Limits: Touching Bronze or Iron

THE KINGDOM AS A CHARACTER

BY DAVE BOZARTH

Characters in all *Cortex Plus* games are made up of an accumulation of Traits separated into distinct categories. Similarly, we can take that same comparison and extend it to mighty Kingdoms (or similar organizations such as guilds or organized crime families). However, the scope of consequences for a Kingdom's actions is much further reaching than a single character.

The goal of this hack is to establish guidelines for representing the cascading actions and reactions of the powers behind large-scale organizations into something that can be managed and reincorporated into the story.

In this hack, players play nobles and other figures of power behind different Houses, thrown into circumstances involving each other as any other dramatic Leads in a *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* game. Using the Pathways system of *Dramatic Roleplaying*, the players both define the Houses they have command over, and also place themselves within a web of connections with the other Houses. The Pathways system maps how each Kingdom connects to the rest of the world.

While Houses themselves are fully integrated *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* characters, the characters could be created using another flavor of *Cortex Plus*, like Action, where characters work within the Houses to take down the elite of other Kingdoms or the corrupt rulers of their own Kingdom.

KINGDOM LEVEL ACTIONS

The time and scale to which a Kingdom adheres is vastly different than that of the normal character. All Kingdoms are on a timetable and are allotted one action per session to accomplish their agenda.

The players with influence in the House decide what agenda their House is pursuing. Just like in *Cortex Plus* Drama, these may take the form of Contests (like a House attempting to place high-level spies in another) or Tests (like a House working on better arming its soldiers).

The actions of the House, and their results, help power the rest of the play of the Leads, even if it's just providing a backdrop for their activities.

CREATING COMPLICATIONS

A House, or the Kingdom that contains it, gains Complications when rolling just like other *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* characters. This is the driving force behind the Kingdom's worries and deficiencies. Complications represent, among other things, a lack of accessible resources, ideological shifts of the populace, exposed spy networks, or the discontented vassals that carry out the ruler's will.

A Complication can be removed by spending one of the House's seasonal actions. They also act as a call to player involvement, as they do not just go away with time. Logging camps keep burning down? Send in some troubleshooters to see why. The Kingdom's new warship goes missing and you want it back intact? Send in the player characters to retrieve it.

Individual actions could provide Kingdom-level Assets that may affect the seasonal Kingdom roll.

DEFINING A KINGDOM'S ATTRIBUTES

Kingdoms use a different set of core Attributes than standard *Cortex Plus* Drama. They are defined as follows:

AEGIS

The military might of a Kingdom is represented in the form of regular troops. Aegis encompasses the basic defenses of the Kingdom from both internal and external threats. It's the ability to police insurrection, repel skirmishes, and conduct formal warfare.

Suggested Complications: Morale, Injuries, and Inept Strategy.

SHADOWS

The extent of a Kingdom's intelligence gathering and covert capabilities are defined by the Shadow. It is also responsible for engaging in unorthodox and irregular warfare, espionage, sabotage, infiltration, sedition, and even assassination.

Suggested Complications: Double Agents, 5Th Column Support, Compromised Endeavor.

ENDEAVORS

The industrious nature of the Kingdom is reflected by this Attribute. The ability to create new Dominions or improve on them typically uses Endeavors.

Suggested Complications: Labor Strikes, Native Resistance, Infestations, Plagues, or Flawed Design.

MYSTERIES

Arcane and esoteric knowledge is the providence of priests, scholars, and madmen. This Attribute represents the accumulated lore and scientific discoveries that the Kingdom has uncovered. Whether hidden away in secluded abbeys or on display in the greatest universities, Mysteries are used to enhance Traits of Units through training or to create the unique Assets by rituals, uncovered lore, and scientific advancement.

Suggested Complications: Conspiratorial Agenda, Church Resistance, Scientific Byproducts.

CULTURE

Every Nation claims the sovereign right and duty to cultivate and encourage the proper ways of life in its peoples. Culture is useful in all actions from building diplomatic inroads to encouraging the arts or hosting a gala event.

Suggested Complications: Rebellion, Ideological Differences, and Embarrassing Diplomats.

PATHWAYS FOR KINGDOM CREATION

The first step is like any other for the Pathways system from *Cortex Plus* Drama: get a big piece of paper. This can get complicated and sprawl out a bit. Familiarity with the Pathways system is necessary for Kingdom creation: see page 18 of *Smallville* for all the details.

The first section deals with the creation of a Major House within a Kingdom (or other forms of major power), detailing their Abilities, Resources, and the Relationships that they have. This assumes that the group will be staying mostly inside the Kingdom in their rise to power. The second section will detail the Relationships that the Kingdom as a whole has to the outside world.

PATHWAYS WITHIN THE KINGDOM

Squares represent the Houses or political Forces within a Kingdom and the Noble that currently has authority over it.

Circles are the people of the Kingdom. These people are significant factors in how the Kingdom will develop and fulfill one of three roles for the story: Extras, Agents or Foils.

Diamonds are the Dominions of the House. Taking the form of Lands, Holdings, Treasures and various Resources, Dominions define the real estate of the Kingdom and allow access to Kingdom Level Talents.

Arrows are the links between the various elements. Each arrow is a directional statement for the relationship that one element has with another. Label each arrow from your square so that it describes the nature of the relationship you have towards the subject. These labels act as Distinctions (as in *Cortex Plus* Action). E.g., Raw Recruits of House Hever, Palatial Estates of Oareford, Howe's Haunted Woods, My Conniving Grandmother the Blood Witch.

PATHWAYS OUTSIDE THE KINGDOM

The first step is to draw a double square around the entire session previously created. This double square represents all things within the Kingdom. The following steps are created as a group on behalf of the whole Kingdom; it is somewhat helpful to use another set of colors for these elements. For the sake of our example, all of the Pathways within the Kingdom will be blue, and Pathways outside the Kingdom will be red.

Double square the entirety of the Kingdom with all of its holdings and internal relationships.

New squares that represent the Nations and major Forces outside the Kingdom should be on par with the Houses or even the entire Kingdom. While Nations tend to be gathering of organized people, Forces can be a Barbarian Horde, a lone Being of Immense Power, or even an Idea Sweeping the Lands.

New circles are characters not native to the Kingdom or at least not aligned with the good of the Kingdom. Any circle at this stage is treated as an Agents or Foils; there are no Extras at this stage of game. This may be foreign diplomats or monsters; they may exist outside the squares of other Kingdoms, but should have relationships as appropriate for their description.

Diamonds are the Locations, Resources, and Natural Wonders outside the Kingdom's borders. These may be claimed by other Nations, contested, or hinted at only in legend. Regardless, these places will be important to the story and are referred to as Loci.

Arrows are the same as within the Kingdom, but here it's best to create interesting conflicts to further play. So, you desperately need that Resource, but will you try to take it or trade? That Nation is a bunch of heathens; best plan to burn it down. That mysterious cave is the home of the Legendary Dragon Mnemopheelakas and you must gain his wisdom.

HOUSE PATHWAYS

The use of ↑ indicates a choice of either stepping up a die trait or creating a new Kingdom element.

LEGACY

Where your House has come from and the history you have been dealt.

PROSPEROUS

Start all Attributes at d4
↑ Aegis OR Culture x2
Land x 3
Holding (Estate)
Agent (Lord)
Foil (Lord)

GIFTED

Start all Attributes at d4
↑ Mystery OR Endeavor x2
Land
Extra x 2
Resource

ORDINARY

Start all Attributes at d4
↑ Aegis OR Endeavors x2
Land
Holding
Extra
Dominion

ENIGMATIC

Start all Attributes at d4
↑ Shadow OR Mystery x2
Land
Holding
↑ Extra x3
Agent (Spy Master)
Foil

AUTHORITY

Your ruling power stems from a source to which you are beholden to maintain, lest your House come crumbling down around you.

TRADITION

↑ Culture
Land x2
↑ Holding (Estate)
Agent (Lord)
↑ Extra x2

RELIGIOUS

↑ Mystery
↑ Agent (High Priest)
Land x2
↑Holding (Church)
↑ Extra x3
Foil

MILITARY

↑ Aegis
Land x3
↑ Extra (Military Unit) x2
↑ Agent (General)
↑ Holding (Garrison)
Foil

PERSONA

↑ Shadow or Endeavor
Dominion x2
↑ Extra x3
↑ Agent

STATUS

What others see in your House is a reflection of your standing.

STAGNANT

↑ Culture OR Aegis
↑ Holding x2
↑ Extra

SHUNNED

↑ Mysteries OR Shadow
Agent
Dominion x2
↑ Extra x2

DECLINE

↑Aegis or Shadow
Agent (SERVANT)
Land
↑ Extra x2
Foil

ASCENT

↑ Endeavors OR Culture
Dominion x2
↑ Extra x2
Foil

IDEOLOGY

The ruling ethos of your House.

CONVICTION

↑ Aegis OR Shadow
Land x2
↑ Holding x2
↑ Extra (Military Unit)

VALOR

↑ Aegis OR Culture
↑ Extra (Military Unit) x2
↑ Holding (Garrison)
Land x2

COMPASSION

↑ Endeavor OR Culture
↑ Holdings x2
Agent
Land

REASON

↑ Endeavor OR Shadow
↑ Agent x2
Land x2
Extra

DEFINING MOMENT

Recently, something has happened to you and your House. How will you recover from this blow?

DISASTER

↑ Endeavor
↑ Agent x2
↑ Holding x2
Extra

WAR

↑ Aegis
↑ Extra (Military Unit) x2
Agent (General)
↑ Holding (Garrison)
Land

INNOVATION

↑ Mystery
↑ Holding (Academy)
↑ Holding x2
Extra x2 (Academy Fellows d6)
Agent (Academy Chair)
Foil

CONSPIRACY

↑ Shadows OR Culture
NEW Extra x2 (Spy Network d6)
↑ Holding (Estate)
↑ Agent x2
Foil

KINGDOM PATHWAYS

These Pathway choices create elements applied to all Houses as well as define the elements and relationships outside the Kingdom. All internal elements are in blue. Remember to define the relationships of external elements to the Nations or Forces that spawned them.

FOCUS

Your Kingdom seeks this above all else.

COMMERCE

↑ Endeavor OR Shadow
Nation x2
Force
Loci
Foil

PRESTIGE

↑ Culture OR Endeavor
Nation x2
Agent
Foil
Natural Wonder

JUSTICE

↑ Aegis OR Culture
Nation
Force
Foil
Agent
Loci

LIBERTY

↑ Aegis OR Shadow
Foil
Force x2
Agent
Loci

METHODOLOGY

Now that you know what your Nation wants, this is how they do it. Agents elevated at this stage become accessible by all Houses.

PIETY

↑ Agent (High Priest)
Force (Deity/Prophet)

SHADY

↑ Agent (Spy Master)
Force (Guild)

DARING

↑ Agent (Hero)
Loci

PATRONAGE

↑ Agent (Diplomat) or ↑ Agent (Engineer)
Nation (City-State)

IDENTITY

Your Nation is known as this; how does that affect your aspirations?

TYRANT

↑ Aegis OR Shadow
↑ Agent (General)
Force (Enemy Army) x 2

XENOPHOBE

↑ Mysteries OR Endeavor
↑ Agent (Spy Master)
Force (Enemy Spy Network)
Agent (Spy Master)

LIBERATOR

↑ Aegis OR Culture
↑ Agent (Hero)
Force
Foil

PHILOSOPHER

↑ Mystery OR Culture
↑ Agent (Philosopher)
↑ Agent
↑ Loci (Academy)

This hack presents you a new kind of higher-level "character" that adds a whole new scale to playing. Enterprising players can even add new elements to Kingdom management, having sessions with a more compacted time-scale where several House actions are played out. Thus you could create additional Assets, Extras and Wedges that get mobilized to resolve Nationwide Drama. From wars to catastrophes, from revolutions to decay, the possibilities are there for you to exploit.

THE ETERNAL CITY

BY DENNIS TWIGG

Drawing inspiration from Greek myth, comic books like *Fables, Sandman,* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman,* and novels such as *The Chronicles of Amber, The Eternal City* introduces a new Legend Mechanic, a new setting called The Eternal City, and plot hooks for games taking place in The Eternal City.

LEGENDARY PLAY

The themes and rules presented can be the basis for a new game, or incorporated into other *Cortex Plus* settings. The notion of Legend is meant to be broad and applicable to many character archetypes. Later on, we'll discuss a setting meant for a diverse group of Legends, but, needless to say, a playgroup with a scion of Zeus, Peter Pan, a gambler with improbable skill, and Alexander the Great might initially appear hard to manage. However, the Legend mechanics are designed to make integrating all different types of backgrounds and "power levels" of play at the same table simple and straightforward.

LIVING LEGENDS: LEGENDARY CHARACTERS

The Legend mechanic reflects the great power and danger that comes with the abilities of a Legend. First, during character creation, the GM runs a round table among the players. Before any other Aspects of the character are discussed, the active player names his character's Legend. It may be as simple as being a figure from legend, such as King Arthur, to more complex representations of an abstract concept like "Luck," "Passion" or "Death."

Even if a character is an incarnation of a specific Legend, it does not mean he has to literally be that Legend, or the Legend as we know him. He may be the latest person to take on those Traits, a famous figure reborn, or anything else that makes sense in this context.

The active player then names one Aspect that his Legend is known for. After that, the other players decide among themselves on another Aspect that the Legend embodies.

This process continues for each player as they name their Legends. After all players have finished this naming process, the rest of group character creation occurs based on normal *Cortex Plus* rules for the game you are playing. Finally, after this phase would normally be over, players return to their Legends and name one more Aspect for themselves based on subsequent character developments.

Using King Arthur as an example, the active player decides that King Arthur is CHIVALROUS. The other players chat among themselves, and decide that King Arthur always ends up being betrayed by Lancelot, loses the love of his life, and watches his beloved Camelot fall to ruins, and thus is TRAGIC. The players then go through the normal character creation process for *Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying* where the active player has a Flashback of his character drinking heavily in a bar. Considering everything else, the active player decides to take things a new direction and make King Arthur's final Aspect DRUNK.

LEGENDS IN PLAY

Each Legend begins with as a D8 and includes three different Aspects. These Aspects can be adjectives, or short descriptions, that define a character. Whenever the player believes that one of his Aspects applies in a situation he may call upon his Legend and add its die to a roll, just like an Asset in *Action Roleplaying*.

Similarly, the GM may choose to invoke an Aspect of the Legend against a player when an Aspect would make his Action more difficult, adding the die to the GM's dice pool.

However, Legend dice do not behave as normal dice do. Rolling a 1 still triggers Complications or adds to the Trouble pool of a Drama game, but rolling the maximum result on the die triggers a step up in the size of the Legend die. This step up is permanent and represents your character's legendary prowess increasing.

These steps up occur until the die rating reaches D12. Once a 12 is rolled on the D12 the Legend die steps all the way down to a D4. This represents the danger of overextending your abilities, wearing out your fame, and tempting the fates. These moments provide the GM with great opportunities to couple wild success with the harrowing knowledge that the character's Legend has effectively burned out.

During game play, based on your character's actions and development, you may find your Legend evolving. Whenever your Legend steps down to a D4, you may change an Aspect. Should you change an Aspect, discuss with your GM and the other players the most appropriate new Aspect to reflect how your Legend has evolved.

THE ETERNAL CITY CAMPAIGN

Although it's simple enough to add the Legend mechanics to an *Action Roleplaying* or *Dramatic Roleplaying* game, it may be that a GM desires to have a setting that is specifically tailored for Legends to play in. The Eternal City is just such a place.

POPULATION OF THE ETERNAL CITY

The Eternal City exists everywhere in some way, shape, or form. Actions within The Eternal City reverberate through the multiverse and shape the nature of reality itself. Within it, Gods and Heroes bump elbows with Typicals. The Typicals unwittingly form the archetypes that populate the cosmos. The bartender at the pub? He's the basis of bartenders everywhere. That cozy inn your characters populate? It's the Inn on which all other Inns are based.

However, for the Typical multitudes that inhabit the Eternal City unsuspecting of its hidden nature, there are a select few that know the truth of its existence. Perhaps it's for power, perhaps it's to set things right, or perhaps it's for ego, but some seek out The Eternal City. It is never obvious, but there are hints of its existence permeating every facet of reality. For some, it is a disquieting notion to think that they are but reflections of entities in The Eternal City. These brave souls head to The Eternal City to take control of their destiny. They must contend with jealous Legends guarding their own place in the cosmic hierarchy, the press of new faces seeking out The Eternal City to further their own Legends, and the absurd difficulties of life within The Eternal City.

No one in The Eternal City is safe. A God can be torn down and replaced, a Hero overshadowed, or a myth forgotten. In a different realm, these Legends could have unrivaled power, but they would always know that their actions are but reflections of the events of others in The Eternal City. The thought of relinquishing their ability to shape reality in their image and instead being a powerless subject to The Eternal City is too much for most Legends to bear.

LIFE IN THE ETERNAL CITY

The Eternal City is a place of towering wealth and enormous poverty. The finest examples of just about anything, including churches, banks, markets, and homes can be found there alongside the meanest and crudest buildings and dwellings. From The Eternal City, Legends can make their way to any other realm in existence, provided they know the proper way. All roads lead to the Eternal City, but reaching any one place is more a function of focus, willpower, and universal notoriety than any coherent geography or map.

The Eternal City itself has no overarching government. Instead, a dizzying array of bureaucratic Agencies handles areas of governance. They run the gamut from democratic and fair to despotic and tyrannical. Legends freely peddle power and influence in the political game between the Agencies of the city. Legends of great power jealously guard their position, knowing that any direct use of their power threatens to unravel all they have obtained. This

chance of pushing themselves too far explains Legends' penchant for mysterious and byzantine plots.

Typical folk in The Eternal City are aware that Legends exist, but most often strive to avoid such entanglements. They usually fail to understand that their actions and behaviors echo through the multiverse. In fact, some have suggested that common folks in The Eternal City have just as much potential as their Legendary counterparts, if they only believed that they did. For every King Arthur there could be an Innkeeper, master of bartending, cooking, and bookkeeping. However, what separates the Legendary from the Typical is the belief in their abilities. No one knows what would happen if the rank and file people of The Eternal City all realized their own potential, and, truthfully, most are terrified to find out.

CAMPAIGN TYPES OF THE ETERNAL CITY

What follows are a few suggested campaign setups to motivate a group of disparate Legends to band together.

ATYPICAL LEGENDS

The mythic and the powerful, they take what they want. We steal it back for you. And sometimes, it takes a Legend to beat a Legend.

In The Eternal City, Legends play immortal games against one another at the expense of the Typicals that live in ignorance of The Eternal City's true nature. In a city filled with long memories, you play a team of Legends that offers their services to those caught up in the power struggles of other Legends. Unreliable Agencies, powerful Legends, and indifference to the plight of Typicals shield Legends from the consequences of their actions. That's where you come in.

The players take the role of Legends that are tired of the strife among of their kind and are tired of the callous treatment of the Typical folk in The Eternal City. Characters take on the Roles from Cortex Action and craft a Legend for themselves. Adventures center around assisting the downtrodden and ignored Typicals.

LEGEND IN ONE'S OWN TIME

Some Legends aren't born, they're made.

Typicals in The Eternal City have an unwitting inkling of the place's true nature, and a select few even manage to ascend to the secretive elite caught up in their own universe-spanning squabbles. When a mortal becomes a Legend, it's not always pretty. It's usually at the expense of someone older, wiser, and meaner. In the sprawl of The Eternal City, thrust into a life they barely understand, these newborn Legends band together with other emerging Legends and the friends and family they still know and love.

Play follows the Cortex Drama ruleset, as players take on the role of emerging Legends caught between their old lives and a new world they barely understand. Most of these Legends do not simply sever ties with their old lives, but instead find the tensions of their past and the dangers of Legendary living in direct conflict with one another.

LEGENDS LOST

Life in The Eternal City is in constant flux, but recent events have caused even greater than usual paranoia among the Legends in The Eternal City.

In the multiverse at large, Legends are fading away, gods are forgotten in record numbers, and old faces return to The Eternal City fearing their own safety in the multiverse. These events have their origins in a startling trend of Legends gone missing. People live and die in The Eternal City, but somehow, people are actually being forgotten with implausible speed. Foul play must be afoot. In the past, Legends rose and fell, reborn or replaced, but somehow recaptured their glory.

Now, Legends are missing and no one knows why. The jealously individualistic Legends have found that banding together is the surest way to stay safe. Some Legends band together for protection, others have ideas on unraveling the mystery of lost Legends, and a few sinister cabals suspect there is power to be gained by raising the stakes and irrevocably destroying their fellows. As smaller groups begin to band together for protection, the entire Eternal City is threatened with unparalleled instability. Some voices urge caution and moderation, lest The Eternal City's strife be felt across the multiverse, but as the number of disappearances grows the level of fear and anxiety only increases. Amidst the ratcheting fear and paranoia, great opportunities arise.

Players play a cabal of Legends (using Cortex Plus Action, Drama, or even Heroic) during these paranoid and difficult times intent on surviving whatever it is that is happening and figuring out how to benefit best from the interesting times.

EPHEMEREALITY

BY ZACHERY GASKINS

It is the Information Age. The world's rising sense of paranoia has made secrets more valuable than oil, gold, and land. Such a world is bound to spend unearthly amounts of effort and resources to develop ways to acquire and sift through the most protected of secrets. With technological security rising to keep up, states and corporation turn to a new breed of spies to hunt and extract what it seeks... from the human mind.

A small percentage of the population possess the talent, innate or technological, to lucidly enter the semi-permeable dream world. In this place, secrets may be found, stolen, and manipulated.

Ephemereality is a hack for the *Leverage RPG* that focuses on a party of investigators as they explore and exploit the dream worlds of the secret keepers of the world. Can the party succeed in their mission without losing their own grip on what is real and what is imagined?

This ruleset can be used to add a dimension to your existing *Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying* campaign by allowing characters to have their minds explored in a heist-like fashion. It can easily be tailored to suit a fantasy setting (potions, magic spells, and ethereal planes), postmodern science fiction (sleep-sharing devices, chemical sedatives), or more future-bound locales (cybernetic neural interfaces, AI constructs, and virtual landscapes).

DOING THE LEG WORK

Every successful job requires careful planning. The investigation of one's dream world is no different. Since dreams can take place anywhere the investigative characters wish (or can reliably conjure), they'll want to use their real-world skills to gather information about the Mark's life experiences. The team then attempt to incorporate these elements in the dream, to encourage the Mark to go along with the con. You can use the standard *Leverage* Role stats for these types of activities without too much difficulty.

BASIC RULES OF DREAMING

EVERY DREAM'S PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE IS CONTROLLED BY A SINGLE WEAVER

In a given dream world, one person sets the framework upon which the entire experience hangs, including landmarks, terrain, and basic laws of physics. All other participants are considered to be visitors within that world, and must play by the Weaver's rules, no matter how bizarre.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS POPULATE THE LANDSCAPE WITH THEIR SUBCONSCIOUS TO MAKE IT "REAL"

The subconscious fill a dream state with content, such as people, animals, vehicles, etc. Every person included in the same dream-sharing experience does this to some extent. The goal is to get the Mark to complete the illusion, by making the world as convincing as possible so he will accept it as real.

THE SUBCONSCIOUS PROTECTS WHAT IT HIDES THROUGH PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS

Since the Mark's mind is where the actual theft is being performed, the Mark's subconscious will automatically fill structures in the dream that represent security with private information (of people or of memories). A key, a top-secret folder, and a hidden wall-safe are good examples.

A DREAM IS PERCEIVED AS REAL UNLESS THE PARTICIPANT HAS REASON TO SUSPECT OTHERWISE

Participants in a dream perceive themselves as awake. When a Mark doesn't question the world he's presented with, he plays along and will make assumptions (the key to any con). However, participants are capable of "losing themselves" if it is familiar enough, so the team should make sure that the environment isn't too real (usually handled by a thorough pre-dream briefing).

THE SUBCONSCIOUS REJECTS THAT WHICH IT BELIEVES TO BE NOT OF ITS OWN MAKING

If a Mark suspects the world isn't real (or not his own), then his subconscious' defenses will begin to look for that world's Weaver (starting with rude stares and bumpings-into, and escalating into physical conflict). A Complication die measures the "alert level," and steps up every time someone "breaks the rules" of the dream or allows the Mark to disbelieve.

TIME PASSES SLOWER IN A DREAM THAN IN THE STATE ABOVE IT

In practical terms, whatever length of time you set for sleeping in reality gives you 10 times as much in the dream world. In a normal night's sleep (8 hours), you can pull off a four-day Job.

EXTERNAL STIMULI CAN AFFECT THE DREAMERS

Even little things perceived in reality can carry over into the dream experience. Sudden changes in temperature, balance/orientation, pressure, and sound are felt by participants. If they occur to the Weaver, the effects are more widespread.

ONE STAYS IN A DREAM UNTIL SNAPPED OUT BY THE DREAMING DEVICE, OR A SUDDEN PHYSICAL STIMULUS OR TRAUMA

If an external stimulus is significant enough (or if the plot device powering the dream ceases), it forces the dreamer to wake up or snap out of that dream. Alternatively, participants can end their (or someone else's) presence in a dream by causing instant death.

WITH GREATER DEPTH COMES GREATER UNDERSTANDING, BUT GREATER RISK

The further into the mind you go, the less influence one's conscious mind has within the dream. Without the conscious mind's ability to analyze and compartmentalize, the dream becomes less stable. In addition, the subconscious gains further control, toughening the defenses. A single DEPTH die represents the "depth" of a particular dreamscape—as an Asset when searching for information, or as a Complication when dealing with defenses, maintaining the integrity of the dream itself, or attempting to maintain composure when affected by an external stressor.

ROLES

The Roles for Ephemereality map well onto existing *LEVERAGE RPG* ones. When adding dream-based adventuring to a campaign, simply use the same stats when preparing specifically for a dream-based Job or when actually performing it (though you might represent unfamiliarity with the dream-theft concept as a D6 Complication that can slowly disappears as the characters become familiar with the rules stated above). If the situation being tested is something unique to dream exploration, use the Ephemereality Role; otherwise, use the *LEVERAGE* Role.

WEAVER (HACKER)

The Weaver is the dream world's builder. A Weaver constructs the physical environment and maintains a stable, convincing reality. Focusing singly upon this task, Weavers design and shape the boundaries and limitations everyone will encounter. If disrupted or removed from this task, the world collapses quite quickly, as the others have only a grasp of the world's underlying detail and must "carry the weight."

This stat is used whenever a dreamscape's Weaver must add to, remove from, or alter the parameters of the dream. Other characters roll the WEAVER die whenever they navigate, overcome, analyze, or resist the dream's physical nature.

Sample Weaver Talent:

TROMPE L'OEIL

The Weaver is strong at creating architecture that fools the eye into seeing depth where none exists, staircases that go on forever, etc.

Activation: A Crewmember is pursued by subconscious defenses in a tight, enclosed structure, or attempts to find a shortcut to a location.

Effect: Add a D8 to the Crewmember's roll to evade pursuers or quickly navigate a structure; alternatively, add a D10 and a D4 (with a 1 signifying that the illusion also fooled the team member in some fashion).

ARTIFEX (GRIFTER)

An Artifex is a master of deception, concealing her own mind's identity and desires within the dream. If a team has a dedicated Artifex, she has the task of becoming completely different people in the dream (friends and associates of the Mark with whom she can foster trust and manipulate loyalty). Bear in mind that the portrayal's accuracy is only as good as the research performed prior to the dream.

Use the Artifex stat when a character attempts to persuade the Mark or a subconscious persona of a forged belief, hide her true motives, or determine the "legitimacy" of a persona the Mark is fabricating. A dedicated Artifiex will use this stat to completely take on the identity of a specific individual and sell that performance to the Mark. If convincing enough, the Mark's memory and persona of that individual may also be altered.

Sample Artifex Talent:

FACE-HEEL TURN

The team member is good at taking the qualities of an assumed identity and turning her personality quirks against/towards the mark.

Activation: A Crewmember, disguised as another person, is trying to behave in a manner that is severely unlike the Mark's perception of her; she is a friend whom the team wishes to have the Mark distrust, or an enemy the Mark needs to respect.

Effect: The player may reroll one of her dice, or all of her 1s (but not both).

LOOKOUT (HITTER)

Lookouts have a task more grounded in real-world strategy. It's their job to be vigilant about the collective subconscious' mental and emotional defenses, which will slowly sense the dream's foreign nature and begin to manifest people and objects that will harass, obstruct, and attack the team, forcing them to abandon their task.

Stat-wise, the Lookout die is rolled when one performs an Action to thwart a defensive response; doubling-back through a stairwell, fist-fighting in a hallway, or leading an army of Persians through a narrow, rocky passage. It takes a fervent belief in one's own physicality in the dream (performing superhuman feats in a world not designed for such will just attract more attention). Similarly, Lookout is what a Mark would roll any time they witness an event in the dream that would cause them to question the authenticity of the world.

Sample Lookout Talent:

I WILL LEAD THEM ON A MERRY CHASE

The Crewmember knows the right gestures and triggers to get subconscious defenses to shift their attentions away from a team member, and focus it on another (usually himself).

Activation: An event in the dream causes the subconscious defenses to suddenly converge on a Crewmember (or are in the process of converging already).

Effect: The Crewmember may (re)add his Lookout die to his roll and include a third die to the result to attract the attention of the defenses.

INQUISITOR (THIEF)

Without diminishing the necessity of the other Roles, the team Inquisitor is the key to the team's success. If there is a secret that must be found, the Inquisitor must be the one to sense when the Mark is calling attention to it. If the Weaver and the Artifex manipulate the look of places and people, the Inquisitor must apply the underlying themes and notions of what she perceives, and "read between the lines."

Whenever a character tries to gather information directly from the Mark (or from a well-defined persona that the Mark's subconscious generates), access the secure manifestations of the Mark's secrets, or there is an opportunity to achieve greater understanding about the Mark's innermost motives, the player should roll on her Inquisitor stat.

Sample Inquisitor Talent:

FEAR, SURPRISE, & RUTHLESS EFFICIENCY

The Inquisitor has an uncanny knack for figuring out the weak points of the subconscious that get the Mark to reveal information.

Activation: The Inquisitor is questioning the Mark under duress.

Effect: The Inquisitor may add her Strength or Willpower die to the roll (whichever isn't already used).

MASTERMIND

The Mastermind keeps the grand plan in the forefront, while several surreal and bizarre events occur simultaneously. Since the dream world can be just as detailed as the real one, someone might forget they are actually lying on the couch of a passenger carriage in a high-speed train. Some may even start having misgivings about leaving a dream where their fantasies and real-world ambitions are finally realized. This is where the Mastermind steps in, keeping his team focused and reminding them they are still dreaming and must eventually return to the real world.

While this team Role remains largely unchanged from the *Leverage RPG*, the nature of the job suggests a greater responsibility and need for good support. If an aspect of the dream causes the world to be too real, or if it fulfills a desire or negates a fear, rolling the Mastermind die will check whether the Crewmembers can still focus on the Job. Failing that roll may mean they're starting to lose their grip and wish to stay rooted in the dream. In the worst-case, Crewmembers who fail these rolls too many times may not wake up, instead collapsing into a private dreamscape.

NEW ASSETS / COMPLICATIONS

Personal Focus (d6 or d8): A unique item used by Crewmembers to keep track of their current reality (no other person knows the detailed nature of the object like the owner does, so it will behave differently if someone else controls the dream).

My Own Worst Enemy (Varies): Through a combination of logical traps and smooth talk, the Crewmember convinces the Mark to help fight or control his own defenses. Once established, the Mark himself assists in various tasks, whether it is explicit help, or just something to calm his subconscious defenses down.

Banshee/Guardian Angel (Varies): Due to a particularly traumatic or exuberant experience, an aspect of an event, a loved one, or an antagonist will crop up during the mission. Banshees will harass and tip the Mark off, while Guardian Angels are subtle and insightful. Either is capable of exhibiting some awareness of the dream's fabricated nature, and can be a nuisance when 1s are rolled.

ADVANCED DREAMING TECHNIQUES

DREAMS WITHIN DREAMS

Because of the time-dilating effect of a dream, sometimes the only way to buy a Crew enough time to accomplish their task in the dream world is to establish multiple dream states. Each level multiplies the available time tenfold and brings the team closer to the secrets they desire, but increases the dream's instability and defensive response.

You can keep these levels separate by using sheets of paper outlining the environments in each level, and the Assets and Complications active in each. You then carry out the Actions of the highest level for a period of time, and then after establishing what happens, run the appropriate length of time in the next level down.

ARTIFICIAL INSPIRATION

While finding out secrets is easy, planting an idea in someone's head is not. However, if you take that idea and break it down into smaller concepts and engineer situations designed to elicit emotional responses—and you go deep enough—then it's entirely feasible to change someone's mind. However, be warned that deep suggestion such as the ones caused by shared dreaming can forever influence the Mark's behavior with possibly disastrous results.

THE BREED: A MUTANT ANIMAL HACK

BY STEVE DARLINGTON

In 2013, scientists discovered a way to splice human DNA into that of animals, producing creatures with human intelligence and semi-human form, a chimera of man and animal. Some of these creatures escaped their laboratory prisons. Now they stalk the shadows, outcasts in a world that fears them. Some call them mutants, freaks, or monsters. They call themselves The Breed.

So might begin a fictional television show about animal-human hybrids. In the absence of such a show, we can make one ourselves, with the rules of *Cortex Plus* Action. Such a show might not, in the end, owe much to the heist genre, but the *Leverage RPG* is a great place to begin for any "monster-of-the-week" style show.

FROM CREW TO ZOO

Making your Crew in a game of mutant animals uses many of the same steps as a standard game of *Leverage*. We'll use the Fast Recruitment rules rather than The Recruitment Job. Steps 1, 2, 5 and 6 remain the same, so let's pick things up with step 3:

STEP 3: CHOOSE YOUR SPECIES

Your original animal form will have a huge effect on your character, so make sure you're happy with your choice. Consider your campaign and any restrictions your Fixer may have specified. There's no point being a mutant dolphin if the entire game is taking place in downtown Indianapolis.

STEP 4: ASSIGN YOUR ASPECTS

Instead of Roles, your characters are now defined by six Aspects, reflecting their animal abilities. Assign die ratings to Savagery, Senses, Size, Society, Speed, and Stealth. You'll be assigning the ratings of d12, d10, d8, d6 and two d4s.

STEP 7: CHOOSE TALENTS

As these rules no longer use Roles, players can choose any Talents they wish. You may also choose from the new Talents listed below, to flesh out your beastly heritage.

STEP 8: CHOOSE SPECIALTIES

Without Roles, it becomes harder to determine what a character knows besides natural instincts. You may therefore take up to four Specialities, rather than two.

FINISHING THE JOB

Finish off your character just as in *Leverage*. Fill in any other details you like about your background, your goals and why you ended up with the motley Crew around you.

ASPECTS

Every creature evolves a way to survive. The means and methods they use to do this, however, vary widely. We represent this variety with Aspects. These six values reflect the animal's natural gifts, talents and skills, and thus act much like Roles in *Leverage*. The six Aspects are:

SAVAGERY

Savagery is the classic survival technique, nature red in tooth and claw—although not all savage beasts are gifted with deadly weapons if their appearance will do the trick instead. The flashing hood of the cobra, the mad rush of the boar, and the screaming fury of the macaque are all examples of Savagery. Sometimes Savagery can be hidden, such as poisonous bites or stinging spurs.

The Savagery Aspect is close to the Hitter Role. However, while a good Hitter can deal damage and take a hit, Savagery in an animal is about ferocity, not necessarily stamina. Creatures that lack Size are more surprise attackers or snipers. Savagery can also help with other Roles: a Grifter or Mastermind playing on a Mark's weakness can be savage indeed, and a Hacker needs a fierce edge to stay at the top of his game.

SENSE

Among humans, the Alertness Attribute is a good enough measure of sense, because human senses are very weak. A dog, on the other hand, can smell what you had for breakfast last week, and a hawk can read a newspaper from a mile away. Hearing and smell have the added bonus of working in every direction, so it's much harder to catch you unawares. Good ears can hear a heart rate speeding up, and a good nose can smell fear, so Sense is a built in lie detector, great for Grifter and Mastermind types. You can also track an item, spot a concealed weapon and smell the exits, making it useful for Hitters and Thieves.

Almost all animals have some gift for at least one sense, but don't stop at just the human five. Bats have sonar, otters have seismic sensors in their whiskers, and many birds and reptiles have infrared vision.

SAVAGERY IS NOT THE ONLY WAY TO KILL

Hitter-types among you may want a high die in Savagery—then examine the example animals below and find that the Wolf only has a d4 in Savagery, and be confused.

The truth is, wolves rarely rely on ferocity to bring down their prey. Although they have nasty teeth and jaws, they hunt their food by stalking it for days (Sense), utilizing tactical maneuvers (Society), and then sprinting after the exhausted beast (Speed). If backed into a corner, they can be savage, but it's not their preferred strategy, and that's what these numbers model.

As the above example shows, wolves would rarely roll Savagery when it came time to attack, but rather Sense, Society or Speed. Don't think of Aspects of measures of what you do but more how you do it. All of them are survival skills, used in nature to kill prey and dodge predators. Replace prey with Mark and you'll see that every Aspect can be used for any part of a Job, in its own way. You could even use Aspects instead of Attributes, keeping Roles so your game has a stronger *Leverage* flavor.

SIZE

Size is not just a measure of strength or toughness, but also of bulk. A creature of sufficient Size can intimidate or damage its enemies without needing speed, finesse or terrible claws, and if that fails, it can survive great wounds by simply having more flesh to fall back on.

Creatures with Size alone are better at taking damage than dealing it, and prefer situations that need pure force and no finesse. The Aspect leads to dramatic breaking-and-entering and self-contained demolitions—ideal for the less than subtle Thief or Hitter. As a bonus, the large can carry huge amounts of gear if the van breaks down.

Animals with great Size include elephants, hippos and rhinos, plus the less fierce but still fearsome buffalo, oxen, and moose. Bears and big cats combine Size and Savagery into a very nasty package.

SOCIETY

There really is safety in numbers. Society isn't about there being a lot of you, but about understanding and communicating across any large group to keep those numbers safe. Creatures with a gift for Society have an instinctual awareness of where their Crewmembers are, what they're doing, and how to move them around to achieve the best possible result. It also helps with making sure they get moving when you tell them to. Wolves use this to outflank prey with complicated tactical manoeuvres, buffalo use it to stop wolves from picking off the weaklings, and beavers use it to build their enormous dams.

A gift for Society is akin to being a Mastermind, but it also works as a backup for Sense—if you know how groups tend to move, you can predict where the gang of thugs behind you are standing. Society is found in many herbivores, from the large (oxen, antelope) to the small (rats, rabbits). Most carnivores hunt alone, but omnivores and scavengers like canines prefer teams.

SPEED

You don't need to win a fight if you can get away fast enough. If you choose to stick around, your target may not have time to dodge. Thieves will benefit from improved reflexes and agility, but every member of a Crew needs to be able to move as quickly as possible, especially when things take an unexpected turn. Speed of mind is part of the package; it might not be chess-winning intellect, but the rabbit knows which way to run as well as how fast. That's perfect for Hackers or Grifters improvising on the fly.

Speed is the province of dive-bombing birds and darting reptiles. It's also found in the charge of a rhinoceros, the bound of a kangaroo, or the swing of a chimpanzee.

STEALTH

Stealth is more than just camouflage or silent movement—it can represent the lyrebird's ability to mimic sound or the opossum's ability to play dead. Whatever it takes not to get eaten when you can't run away.

It's always a good idea to keep your intentions hidden, whether you're in the jungle or running a con. Not being seen is the heart of theft and hacking, but since it also includes deception, it is the soul of grifting. Hitters know feints and distractions are always useful. and all Crewmembers have times when they're somewhere they're not supposed to be, and need to disappear.

Some Stealth is inbuilt: the tiger and the zebra have coats to match the grasslands they call home. Others adapt to their environment: the bat and the cat use their powerful Senses to hunt in darkness.

EXAMPLE SPECIES

These are only guidelines: members of the same species may have different Aspects to reflect individual variance and your preferences (alternatively, you may just not agree with the stats). You can use these examples to design your own species, too.

ALLIGATOR OR CROCODILE

Savagery d12 Sense d4 Size d8
Society d4 Speed d6 Stealth d10

Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Fangs), Special Movement (Swimming)

ANTELOPE OR DEER

Savagery d4 Sense d10 Size d8
Society d6 Speed d12 Stealth d4

Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Horns)

BAT

Savagery d4 Sense d12 Size d4 Society d6 Speed d8
Stealth d10

Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Flight)

BEAR

Savagery d8 Sense d10 Size d12 Society d6 Speed d4
Stealth d4

Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Claws)

BUFFALO OR CATTLE

Savagery d6 Sense d8 Size d12
Society d10 Speed d4 Stealth d4

Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Horns)

CAT

Savagery d6 Sense d10 Size d4
Society d4 Speed d8 Stealth d12

Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Claws), Special Movement (Climbing)

CHEETAH OR JAGUAR

Savagery d10 Sense d4 Size d8
Society d4 Speed d12 Stealth d6

Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Claws)

COYOTE, DOG OR WOLF

Savagery d4 Sense d12 Size d6
Society d10 Speed d8 Stealth d4

Suggested Talents: Natural Weapon (Fangs)

CROW

Savagery d6 Sense d12 Size d4
Society d8 Speed d10 Stealth d4
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Flight)

ELEPHANT

Savagery d6 Sense d8 Size d12
Society d10 Speed d4 Stealth d4
Suggested Talents: Natural Armor, Natural Weapons (Tusks)

ELK OR MOOSE

Savagery d4 Sense d10 Size d12
Society d6 Speed d8 Stealth d4
Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Horns)

FALCON OR HAWK

Savagery d8 Sense d12 Size d6
Society d4 Speed d10 Stealth d4
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Flight)

FOX OR WEASEL

Savagery d8 (d10 for weasel) Sense d10 (d8 for weasel) Size d4 Society d4 Speed d12 Stealth d6
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Burrowing)

GORILLA

Savagery d8 Sense d4 Size d10
Society d12 Speed d6 Stealth d4
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Climbing)

HORSE

Savagery d4 Sense d8 Size d10
Society d6 Speed d12 Stealth d4

LEOPARD OR TIGER

Savagery d12 Sense d4
Size d10 (d8 for leopard) Society d4
Speed d6 Stealth d8 (d10 for leopard)
Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Claws and Fangs)

LION

Savagery d12 Sense d4 Size d10
Society d4 Speed d8 Stealth d6
Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Claws and Fangs)

LIZARD

Savagery d6 Sense d10 Size d4
Society d4 Speed d8 Stealth d12
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Climbing)

MONKEY

Savagery d4 Sense d8 Size d4
Society d10 Speed d12 Stealth d6
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Climbing)

OWL

Savagery d6 Sense d12 Size d4
Society d4 Speed d8 Stealth d10
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Flight)

RHINOCEROS

Savagery d10 Sense d8 Size d12
Society d4 Speed d6 Stealth d4
Suggested Talents: Natural Armor, Natural Weapon (Horns)

RABBIT

Savagery d4 Sense d6 Size d4
Society d8 Speed d12 Stealth d10
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Burrowing)

RAT

Savagery d4 Sense d8 Size d4
Society d10 Speed d8 Stealth d12
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Climbing)

SNAKE

Savagery d6 Sense d10 Size d4
Society d4 Speed d8 Stealth d12
Suggested Talents: Special Movement (Climbing)

TURTLE, LEATHERBACK

Savagery d6 Sense d12 Size d8
Society d10 Speed d4 Stealth d4
Suggested Talents: Natural Armor, Special Movement (Swimming)

WOLVERINE

Savagery d12 Sense d10 Size d6
Society d4 Speed d8 Stealth d4
Suggested Talents: Natural Weapons (Claws)

NEW TALENTS

NATURAL WEAPONS

You're never without a weapon when you need one. Of course, that also means you're always using a weapon.

Activation: You're engaged in a Fight Action. You must announce if you are not using this Talent; if you choose not to, the Fixer can give you a Plot Point to roll a D6 Complication against you for "pulling your punches."

Effect: Add a D8 to your roll and include an extra dice. If you roll a 1, you generate a Complication without receiving a Plot Point. This usually reflects doing too much damage, but could also indicate your claws getting caught in something, or, because your attack is one big pounce on a single target, exposing your flanks to other attackers.

NATURAL ARMOR

This can represent a leathery hide, thick fur, or bone plating. The point is you can shrug off the damage. That might not apply to the pain.

Activation: You're engaged in a Fight Action and the Fixer is rolling to raise or set the stakes and gives you an Opportunity.

Effect: You can choose to have the Fixer re-roll any or all of his dice.

HOW CAN A MOUSE BE STRONGER THAN AN ELEPHANT?

A system as simple as Cortex would have trouble modeling a mouse and an elephant on the same scale, so we assume that the mutation process pulls creatures towards a human norm. This ensures your Crew can wear clothes, hold things in their hands, and not have to run on all fours, which makes games a lot easier to run. It also allows for a very strong "mouse" to bench-press more than a weak "elephant," but the elephant will always have SIZE on her side.

SPECIAL MOVEMENT

You can move in a way that the average human cannot. Perhaps you can fly over, climb up, or dig under whatever is in your way, and that provides a whole new way in or out.

Activation: You're in a Location with a Location-based Trait that would normally count against you in a roll. Spend a Plot Point to activate this Talent.

Effect: Take the Location-based Trait, step it up by one, and add it as an Asset until the end of the scene.

VAMPVILLE

BY ANDERS GABRIELSSON

The *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* system described in the *Smallville RPG* is excellent to play games based on vampire drama. You can have powerful vampiric abilities, dark secrets, and twisted relationships while easily covering common themes such as recently turned characters, scheming elders, and interacting with other supernatural beings or mortals. This is made possible by the system's focus on social interactions between characters and their priorities rather than mechanical representations of their abilities.

To do so, you must first answer the following question: What aspects of vampire drama do you want to focus on? The choices are many, such as the allure of eternal life, the conflict between retaining one's humanity versus feeding on human blood, political conflicts between elders and rebellious youngsters, or just plain playing with cool vampire powers? Unless you plan to run one-shot games or very short campaigns, you shouldn't settle on too narrow a focus. Thus you'll avoid having a game that plays out too soon.

This *Cortex Plus* variant will outline how you can combine three different aspects of vampiric existence into a fascinating game experience. This act will explore their theatrical natures, the internal struggles with bestial emotions, and conflicts with others over limited, vital resources. This can be achieved through a few tweakings of the *Smallville RPG* rules.

Let's start with the theatrical nature of vampires. A common trope about vampires is that they lack a human soul. This, coupled with their predatory nature, should make them act quite differently from living humans. Yet they are usually portrayed, especially in recent times, as behaving much the same as when they were alive. Why should that be?

What if they were faking it? Maybe they have to keep up pretenses because they can't lose themselves completely to their animalistic instincts and maintain their existence. Or maybe they stick to old behaviors out of habit. Maybe it's much simpler than that. It might simply be that that losing their souls makes them unable to change their original nature; they can just exaggerate it. While they may they lack the internal drives that shape so much of human behavior, they choose to maintain a semblance of it.

VAMPIRE POSES AND STRESS

Consequently, vampire Leads don't have Values as one of their Traits categories. Values denote convictions, morality and opinions on right and wrong, something vampires no longer have or need. Instead, vampires have Poses: types of behavior they feel they should display, but are not based on genuine emotions.

The Poses are:

- **Allure:** Spending significant effort to appear pleasing to the eyes of others.
- **Charm:** Behaving in such a way to elicit a positive emotional response from others.
- **Menace:** A combination of body language and behavior that seeks to intimidate others.
- **Mystery:** Maintaining a sense of the unknown, making others wonder who you really are.
- **Style:** Radiating a sense of confident style and attitude that impresses others.

Unlike Values, Poses do not have statements and cannot be challenged.

Vampires do have genuine emotions. They are usually very powerful, animalistic emotions they do their best to control. These emotions are represented using the *Smallville RPG* Stress mechanic, which is given an expanded function as described below. Some of the types of Stress are renamed and have slightly different descriptions:

- **Afraid:** The vampire fears for its wellbeing and/or survival.
- **Angry:** The repressed feelings of animalistic hate and anger.
- **In Pain:** Replaces Injured; vampires heal their wounds very quickly, but can feel pain.
- **Insecure:** The confusion brought by the internal conflict between vampiric and human nature.
- **Tired:** Replaces Exhausted. Includes emotional fatigue and general sense of ennui.

Vampires also have a sixth type of Stress, Hunger, which represents the vampire's need for human blood. It works differently from the previous five. Instead of being a result of conflicts, Hunger is increased through the uses of certain vampire-related Special Effects, as described below.

During play, the strongest type of Stress a character suffers (the one with the highest die rating, with the one raised most recently winning any ties) is said to be dominant. The dominant type of Stress will prevent the use of one Pose, as the vampires are too overcome by their feelings to summon the control needed to fake the human behavior linked to the Stress.

The equivalent Poses for each type of Stress are as follows:

- Afraid shuts down Menace
- Angry shuts down Charm
- In Pain shuts down Style
- Insecure shuts down Mystery
- Tired shuts down Allure

On the flipside, vampires can use their dominant Stress as if it were a Pose, essentially giving in to their animalistic nature while acting on pure, unbridled instincts.

Hunger functions differently: For each die rating it gains (from d4 up to d12) it disables one Pose, starting with the one with the lowest rating (player's choice for ties). For example, a vampire with Allure d6, Charm d8, Menace d4, Mystery d10 and Style d8 would first lose Menace at d4, then Allure at d6, then either Charm or Style or vice versa at d8 and d10, and finally Mystery at d12. When a vampire's Hunger reaches d12, she can only act on that drive as the need for blood overwhelms her mind.

A vampire can still pay Plot Points to add extra Poses and types of Stress to a roll, but blocked Poses cannot be activated in this way. Types of Stress are also connected to Abilities, as noted below.

CHARACTER CREATION

Creating a vampire character doesn't use the *Smallville RPG* Pathways. Instead follow these steps:

1. CHOOSE A CHARACTER CONCEPT

Choose what kind of vampire you want your character to be. Is he a brooding, manipulative aristocrat? Is she a devil-may-care rebel without a cause? What about a shadowy mystic or a tortured artist? Much like in the *Smallville RPG*, it's a good idea to discuss your character concepts with the other players in order for Leads to complement each other and come into the type of conflict everyone looks forward to explore.

2. RATE YOUR POSES

Assign the following dice to your Poses: one d10, two d8, one d6 and one d4. (Alternately you can start all Poses at d4 and step them up a total of eight times.)

3. CREATE RELATIONSHIPS

Start all your Relationships with the other characters at d8. You can step down one to step up another as many times as you like, as long as no Relationship is reduced below d4. Write Relationship statements as per the *Smallville RPG* (page 85).

4. SELECT AND RATE DISTINCTIONS

Pick three Distinctions and assign one of them a d10, one a d8 and the last a d6. These are the dice you will use for those Distinctions; however, you have access to the triggers for all three.

5. SELECT ABILITIES AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

Select three vampire-appropriate Abilities from the *Smallville RPG* (page 103), all rated at d8.

Choose one Special Effect for each Ability. Classical vampires often have Animal Control, Body Transformation (mist), Claws (to represent fangs or actual claws), Dream Manipulation, Flight (in bat-form), Mind Control, Regeneration, Shapeshifting (animal forms), Super-Senses, Super-Strength or Telepathy.

Common Limits include Sunlight, Mirrors, Crucifixes, Holy Water, Garlic, and Running Water.

Then select one additional Special Effect from one of your Abilities and associate them to each type of Stress (including Hunger). These Special Effects are available for free when you are dominated by that type of Stress.

6. CREATE PRIZES

Describe three things your vampire cares enough about that they might lose to the other Leads. This can be almost anything, but common examples are Prestigious Titles, Mortal Servants, Prime Hunting Grounds, Nightclubs or other businesses. These function like Resources and should be given keywords like Extras or Locations. All of them are rated at 2d6.

CHARACTER CREATION EXAMPLE

Judy is creating a new character for a series set in New York. She wants to create someone who is tragic but in a slightly ridiculous way, so she decides her vampire is a brooding teen goth poet turned ten years ago who calls herself Ravenheart the Dark-Souled.

Judy rates Ravenheart's Poses as follows: Mystery d10, Style d8, Menace d8, Allure d6 and Charm d4. Then she assigns a d8 to her Relationship with each of the other characters. After discussing with the other players she decides to step down her Relationship with John's Lead, Karl, the Lord of New York's Enforcers, to d6 (He's such a tool) so she can increase her Relationship with Jane's Lead, Lucinda Malificient, a flamboyant artist, to d10 (She keeps it so real).

Next she selects the following Distinctions for Ravenheart: Backhanded d8, In Over My Head d10 and Manipulative d6, noting all three triggers for each.

For Ravenheart's Abilities she picks Claws (for fangs and actual claws; Limit: Crucifix, SFX: Increase your Hurt or Afraid Stress pool), Shadow Control (Limit: Sunlight, SFX: Envelop a scene in darkness) and Telepathy (Limit: Eye Contact, SFX: Send messages psychically to a character in a different scene).

For her Stress-triggered Special Effects she makes the following choices: Afraid (Shadow Control: Attack someone with his own shadow), Angry (Telepathy: Attack another person with a mental blast), In Pain (Claws: Rip apart solid, inert obstacles), Insecure (Telepathy: Read another character's surface thoughts), Tired (Telepathy: Create a mental shield) and Hunger (Claws: Cling to a surface).

Finally Judy creates Ravenheart's Prizes: A group of Mortal Admirers (Gossip, Socialize), an Abandoned Factory where she lives (Quiet, Dark) and a Club where she finds her victims (Hunting Ground, Crowded), all rated at 2d6.

BACKSTABBING BFFS

BY MATTHEW GARDNER

THE FRENEMY OF MY FRENEMY IS MY FRENEMY

Most *Smallville* games will involve a cast of conflicting Leads capable of being both heroes and villains, frequently in the same episode. But what happens when you want everyone to be playing selfish conniving jerks?

Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying can support a vast number of settings and character conceits extending far beyond the "conflicted super hero and associates" paradigm the *Smallville* game was originally built around. Sometimes when going through the Pathways system, especially as you stray farther and farther from the game's original model, you may find the default Values don't quite match up with the characters you are creating. Perhaps you find yourself ignoring two or three of the Values, as you don't find them relevant to the character in your cast. Alternatively, maybe you just want to push the focus of the game in a different direction.

Backstabbing BFFs is a simple hack for *Dramatic Roleplaying* to do just that: changing the Values to more goal-oriented Agendas to reflect more self-centered, success-at-any-cost scenarios like those seen in high-school dramas or career-focused workplace comedies.

This hack uses the following Agendas in place of the default Values

- Wealth
- Fame
- Status
- Respect
- Influence
- Narcissism

These represent the basic goals and desires of the Leads and Features, the ultimate goal they are trying to achieve. When it comes time to roll the dice, instead of asking "What Value motivates the character to perform this action," instead ask, "What Agenda are they trying to further by doing this?" A further exploration of each of those Agenda Traits is done below.

Using these Agenda Traits in place of the default Values can drastically change the flavor of your game, while keeping the core mechanics essentially the same. These particular Agendas are designed to make Leads especially goal-oriented, tending toward more selfish motives. There are numerous settings and concepts you can use for your game, whether it be about in-fighting among the cast of a morning news show, the drama surrounding a national dog show, any sort of celebrity reality show, or just a good old-fashioned group of cutthroat high school students looking to undermine each other.

WEALTH

Who doesn't like money? Those who have it, enjoy it. Those who don't, desire it. This Agenda represents the desire to obtain more material wealth, to keep what you already have, and flaunt it at the drop of a hat. It can certainly extend beyond simple cash; to some people, wealth may mean having the biggest boat, or the nicest clothes, or, of course, simply having the most spending money in their purse.

Keep in mind that this value does not necessarily represent how much wealth you currently have, but rather how much the desire to have it motivates you. Poor characters with a d12 in Wealth may be solely focused on the acquisition of material goods. Conversely, rich characters may have a d4 rating and not feel that keeping their money as important to them as other goals.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR WEALTH

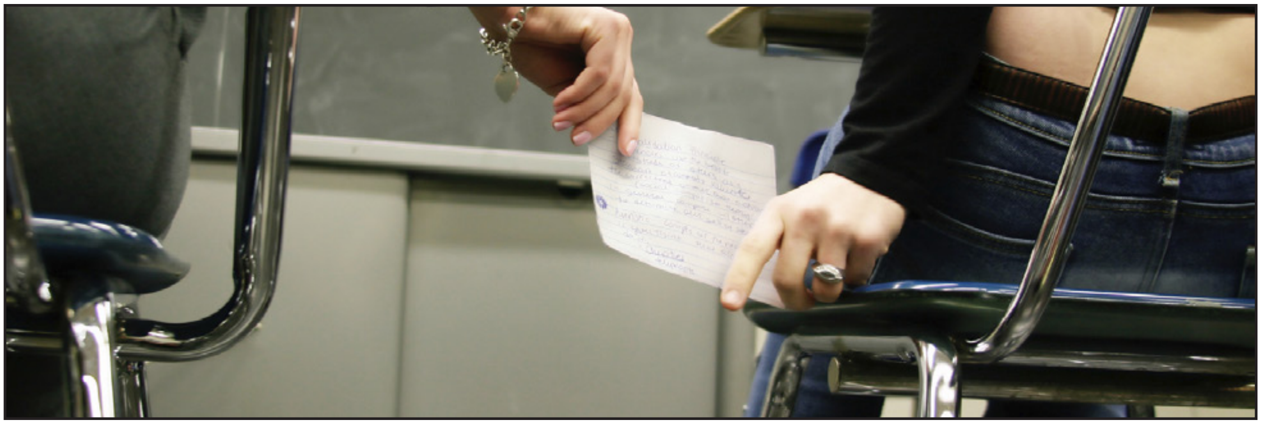
- Live by the golden rule: he who has the gold makes the rules.
- Student loans won't pay themselves.
- I want the world! Give it to me, now!
- Money won't make me happy.

FAME

Being known is everything. If you walk into a crowded room and someone fails to recognize you, then you have failed. The Fame Agenda is all about striving to be the center of attention, whether for good or ill. You could be a faceless choirgirl who would do anything to be the headlining star of the Glee club or an already-known socialite desperate to stay on the covers of every tabloid on the stands. All that matters is that people are talking, and that the conversation revolves around you.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR FAME

- I will be able to skip past the line at the most popular clubs.
- I prefer to stay anonymous.
- My name will be in lights! Top billing!
- My mugshot on the front page? There's no such thing as bad press.



SUCCESS

You're clearly better than everyone else; that much is obvious. But does everyone else realize this? When Success is what's important to you, your main goal is making sure that the world knows that you are standing on the top rung of the ladder. This may mean many different things according to the setting. In high school, focusing on Success may drive you to be associated with all of the cool cliques or getting top marks in your class. In an office one, it could mean you're working to be the first one considered for that upcoming promotion.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR SUCCESS

- Class presidency here I come!
- I'll always be a failure.
- I'm the best at everything!
- This is too much work to bother.

RESPECT

Nobody talks back to you. You may not be the most successful, the richest, or the most influential person in town, but what you do have over everyone else is esteem. Maybe you're known as the person willing to make the tough decisions, or as someone who always takes the moral high ground, or perhaps you just never back away from a fight. There are many ways to strive for Respect, but however you do it, what's important is that you get it and keep it.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR RESPECT

- I am practically royalty and will be treated as such!
- People can think what they want; it doesn't affect me.
- Nobody puts me in corner!
- I am the only trusted name in news.

INFLUENCE

You're a trendsetter; you define what is and isn't popular and everyone follows your lead. When Influence is important to you, your main desire is to be the one pulling the strings. Maybe you want to remain behind the scenes manipulating everything from the shadows, or simply whispering in the ear of the one who makes the big decisions. Conversely, you may want to be out in the open, so everybody knows that you're the one in control. Regardless of how you go about it, when you have a high score in Influence, your goal is to get to be the one calling the shots or subtly nudging everyone in the right direction.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR INFLUENCE

- I define the fashion world!
- I'd rather not rock the boat.
- You don't have to like me, just do what I say.
- Oh no, you couldn't possibly have heard of this band yet, they're from Europe.

NARCISSISM

What you do isn't about other people. It's not about being popular, or gaining power or influencing those around you. It's all about yourself: making yourself feel better, stroking your ego, and boosting your own self-image. While most of the Agendas are inherently selfish in nature, Narcissism comes into play when that selfishness in and of itself is its own end goal. For instance, a class bully picking on everyone else to make himself feel better would have a high Narcissism die rating.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR NARCISSISM

- It's all about me!
- My own feelings come second.
- Does this make me look fat?
- I don't ever have bad-hair-days!

THE JUNIOR ADVENTURERS' CLUB

BY ELIZABETH SAMPAT

If you're familiar with children's television staples like *Ni Hao, Kai Lan* and *Dora the Explorer,* you're aware that most children's television follows a very rigid structure: the team is presented with a problem, the team plans, solves the problem, and then parties down. What you might not have realized is that—minus the parties—the television show *Leverage* follows the very same structure. While you won't see the main character of your son or daughter's favorite show sticking it to bank executives and crooked politicians, you can use the *Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying* system to do what kids love best: assemble a team of friends to tackle an important problem.

So what you get instead is the Junior Adventurers' Club: a group of plucky kids (or anthropomorphic animals, or robots, or whatever else your kids are excited to be) who find and tackle problems for their friends and loved ones.

RESKINNING THE ROLES

While the Roles in the *Leverage RPG* are juicy and fun, they're not entirely suited to children's games. (You can see the current roles in the *Leverage RPG*, starting on page 18.)

Instead of the Mastermind, Grifter, Hitter, Hacker, and Thief, you can use the following:

- **Explorer:** The Explorer is the kid with the plan. She's great at helping everyone work together, and figuring out the best way to solve the problem everyone is working on.
- **Charmer:** The Charmer is really nice and likeable. He's good at talking to people, asking for help, and helping bad guys understand what they're doing is wrong.
- **Protector:** The Protector is very brave. She's good at standing up to scary stuff, and helping the team feel better when they're frightened or unsure.
- **Brain:** The Brain always has the best gadgets for the job. He's in charge of maps, computers, backpacks, and other neat stuff, and always has what his friends need.
- **Sneak:** The Sneak is quiet and good at sneaking into hard to reach places, as well as sneaking past sleeping or distracted bad guys.

MAKING THEMATIC CHANGES

While it is possible to preserve the "Bad guy gets what's coming to him" vibe of the *Leverage RPG* even for kids—bullies are bullies, no matter what age!—if you plan on playing this with your kids on a regular basis, it might be more useful or uplifting to focus instead on solving specific problems.

How rigidly you define the problem that needs to be solved really depends on the ages of the children who are playing the game. If you're playing with five- to seven-year-olds, be more structured: choose an eventual goal that has a set number of distinct obstacles to reach it. Make sure that there is an obstacle tailored for each character to solve by doing something fun. With this particular age group, it's important that they know exactly what to expect so that they don't get lost or confused. Tailor the number and length of obstacles to their attention spans.

If you're playing with eight- to twelve-year-olds, you have more leeway with the structure. Instead of looking at shows like *Dora the Explorer,* you can take a page from shows like *Cyberchase*—there's one problem, one bad guy, and the twists and turns happen more organically. Because you may feel like you can GM this age group in a way similar to how you'd do it with adults, you need to keep an eye on attention spans. Keep an eye out for fiddling, doodling, and other signs of boredom. If you see bored faces, surprise the kids with something cool that speeds things up a bit. Robot Ninja Dinosaurs work well.

DISTINCTIONS AND TALENTS

The rules for Distinctions remain the same as the *Leverage RPG* (page 33). However, kids might need a little coaching to come up with them; feel free to make suggestions.

When it comes to Talents, many of the ones listed in the *Leverage RPG* (page 34) work for this hack, as well. In addition here are some teamwork-based example Talents that fit the Roles available for the Junior Adventurers' Club:

EXPLORER

FOLLOWING THE PLAN

When another character rolls to do something you suggested, she gets an additional d8.

THINKING AHEAD

When trying to decide the best way to solve a problem you haven't encountered yet, you can roll an additional d6.

CHARMER

ENCOURAGEMENT

When another kid is rolling to do something other than their main role, you can encourage them to do well. Spend a Plot Point, say something to help give him confidence, and he can roll an additional d8.

IT'S OKAY

When dealing with an NPC that is scared or confused, you can calm her down. Roll an additional d6 when trying to soothe a scared NPC.

PROTECTOR

BULLY BUSTER

When you're rolling in a Contested Action (or a Basic Action, in a simplified game) to defend or protect another teammate, you roll an extra d8.

CHAMPION

Some kids get nervous about Puzzle Actions. Your teammates can spend a Plot Point to get your help on a Puzzle Action if they're having trouble.

BRAIN

RUMMAGING

The Brain can use a Resource as a Basic Action instead of having to spend a Plot Point.

ANALYSIS

When a kid is having trouble with a Puzzle Action, the Brain can spend a Plot Point for a hint.

SNEAK

SMALL

Any other teammate can hide the Sneak somewhere on them—in a pocket, in a backpack, or elsewhere. (That implies that the Sneak is a very small child, or a very bright, talking pet.)

SILENT

Get an extra d8 when trying not to be noticed.

STREAMLINING THE SYSTEM

The *Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying* system is really sleek, but there are still a lot of moving parts in comparison to many kids' games—and not all of the moving parts that emulate the *Leverage* TV show are necessary to emulate youth programming. Here's a list of things to skip.

Establishing Distinctions and Talents (Leverage RPG, pages 33-34): Flashbacks are fun, but, especially with the five- to seven-year-old crowd, the shifting backward and forward in time can be fairly confusing. Instead, have the kids share their Distinctions with the group before play, and encourage them to ask each other why and how their characters got those Distinctions.

Specialties (Leverage RPG, pages 20-30): Very cool, but not necessary in a simplified setup. You're creating the Job so that there's an obstacle tailored for every kid; that alone would make Specialties less useful, and it's one fewer thing for the kids to keep track of.

REPLACING ACTION TYPES

Leverage has a number of different kinds of Actions that all contribute to giving it that signature caper feel; you can find them starting on page 68 of the *Leverage RPG*. Here are the Actions for the Junior Adventurer's Club:

Basic Actions are the same, though they don't break down any further than "Basic," which means there's no distinguishing between Notice and Face and other sub-Basic actions.

Contested Actions are great for older kids, but with younger ones, most conflicts are better resolved with a Basic Action.

Instead of Timed Actions, use **Puzzle Actions.** In many kids' television shows, there are certain obstacles that can only be solved by the adventurers doing some kind of puzzle: picking which animal doesn't belong, jumping and ducking to avoid obstacles, or doing simple math problems. These puzzles invariably request that the kids at home participate. Having the kids do a minigame to get past one of the obstacles can be a fun and refreshing way to incorporate movement or academics into your game time.

Instead of Flashbacks, give the kids **Resource Actions.** A kid can spend a Plot Point to look at their MAP or in their ADVENTURER'S BAG and see what's coming up ahead, or find any tools they have to help them solve a problem. These tools can be Distinctions (*Leverage RPG*, page 33) or Assets (*Leverage RPG*, page 66) depending on the situation.

SECONDARY ROLES FOR YOUNGER KIDS

The concept of secondary Roles (*Leverage RPG*, page 17) work great as-is for older kids, but if you're playing with younger kids, they can get confused by having SNEAK dice if someone else is playing a Sneak, and their reading skills may not be up to keeping track of which die is for rolling with which Role. Give each kid a D12 for their main Role, and D6s for everything else.

BEING THE FIXER

If you're doing a game for older kids, you may have a Mark, but if you're doing a problem-solving game (such as Murray the Forgetful Robot), there's no Mark, just a Client. The people you run in to that have or cause problems are obstacles, and act as Extras or initiate Puzzle Actions.

Make a map or flow chart of what the adventurers can expect to encounter—the things that stand between them and their eventual goal. These encounters should be fairly rigidly episodic, and for younger kids, you may even want to telegraph to them precisely what they should expect to encounter.

EXAMPLE SCENARIO:

MURRAY THE FORGETFUL ROBOT

Murray the Forgetful Robot needs more memory! But he forgot the way back to Dr. Gearman's house. It's up to the Junior Adventurer's Club to take him over the Marshmallow River, through the Dark Forest, and deliver Murray to Dr. Gearman's house.

Each one of these three locations has two obstacles that can be overcome through a combination of Roles:

The Marshmallow River is a big, wide river of marshmallow fluff that the team can't get past without help. There's a grumpy man with a boat, and also some cookie islands the team might be able to hop across.

The Boatman is Grumpy, which is good for the Charmer—or maybe the Protector.

The Cookie Island minigame works for anyone, though the Protector can help and the Brain can get tips on how to do it best.

As a Complication, Murray may forget that he doesn't have a tummy and try to gum up his insides by eating marshmallow fluff.

The Dark Forest is a scary place full of wildlife. There's a fox outside, and lots of spider webs covering the trees.

The Spider is Scary, which is good for the Protector—or maybe the Sneak.

The Fox has a Riddle, which is good for the Brain (or anyone good at riddles).

As a Complication, Murray's solar cells run out of energy! The team has to figure out a way to get him some sun.

Dr. Gearman's Neighborhood is a nice place, but it's not that easy to get into the house. The main road is for humans only, and Dr. Gearman's house has a combination lock.

The Sleepy Guard makes sure that only humans use the main road, but he keeps falling asleep. This is good for the Sneak—or maybe the Explorer.

The Combination Lock is a minigame that works for anyone. Choose a simple math problem that is age appropriate.

As a Complication, there are three similar looking houses, and Murray can't remember which one is his.

Of course, other things can happen naturally along the way as well, but these are the six main obstacles. Feel free to add or subtract depending on the number of kids in your playgroup and the ages; for a five-, seven-, and eight-year-old, this takes about an hour.

RUNNING FOR KIDS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

If you're in a situation where you're planning to run this for kids on spectrum, you know that each child is different and has different needs. Generally, though, be ready and willing to telegraph solutions, and talk the kids through challenges that might be outside of their comfort zone.

Additionally, if you're designing scenarios specifically for HFA and Aspie kids, making Puzzle Actions that are about recognizing the emotional states of other characters from environmental clues would be a great puzzle. Sometimes when playing games with my daughter, we have four cartoon smiley faces out: a happy face, sad face, angry face, and confused face—and she chooses the one she thinks is most appropriate for the current situation.

CYBERPUNK OVERDRIVE

BY JAMES RITTER

Cyberpunk Overdrive pays homage to the classic stories of Gibson, Stephenson, and Sterling by tweaking elements of the *Smallville RPG* to make it into a playable adventure.

INTRODUCTION

Little Goose and Mary Guns are just off a failed data heist for the Yakuza, which saw the death of Mickey Finn, Little Goose's mentor and Mary Guns' lover. Mary Guns has been hired as a bodyguard for Nancy Gibson, a faded virtual starlet. Kimura, a ranked man in the Yakuza, is on a mission from his Oyabun. Much of the scenario centers on the Archology, an AI created by the Russian corporate government, Komstar, to house the "ghost" personalities of the deceased.

KIMURA

The Disciplined Yakuza Kobun

VALUES

The Job: My duty to the Oyabun is absolute. d10

My Rep: The warrior cares not if he be called a dog, so long as he wins. d4

Love: When one truly follows one's heart, one can do no wrong. d8

Power: Tradition is the quickest path to power. d6

Conformity: A wise man makes his own decisions. d8

Nihilism: This world of dreams passes in a twinkling of an eye. d4

RELATIONSHIPS

Mary Guns: The key to controlling her is to threaten her reputation d6

Nancy Gibson: She will return my love when I convince her of her perfection. d8

Little Goose: He is a thief, lacking all honor and discipline. d4

The Archology: The AI is a robot, a perfect vessel, but nothin nothing more. d6

ASSETS

ON A MISSION D8

- Earn a PP and Add a d6 to Trouble when you pursue a mission.
- Spend a PP to Reroll a die in a roll that contributes to your mission.

YAKUZA RANKED MAN D10

- Earn a PP when you follow orders/maintain discipline to your detriment.
- Spend a PP to Reroll a die because of your discipline and training.
- Add a d6 to Trouble when you draw upon your military expertise to Increase your Injured or Afraid Stress pool.

KENJUTSU D8 GEAR: KATANA

- Spend a PP to Decrease opponent's Injured or Afraid Stress pool.
- Spend a PP to Increase your Injured or Afraid Stress pool.

WEALTHY (D4)

- Spend a PP to Reroll a die in a roll where money is relevant.

ATHLETIC (D4)

- Spend a PP to Reroll a die in any Athletic roll.

EXTRAS/LOCATIONS

- Hideo, The Blind Ninja (Sneaky, Traditional Weapons) 2d8
- Tea Garden (Serenity, Preparation) 2d4

MARY GUNS

The Aggressive Merc Freelancer

VALUES

The Job: I do hurt people sometimes. It's how I'm wired. d8

My Rep: "Steppin' Razor," the scourge of Babylon. d8

Love: Everyone has lost someone, or is about to. d4

Power: Secrets are the root of cool. d10

Conformity: The street finds its own uses for things. d4

Nihilism: There is no future. There is only risk management. d6

RELATIONSHIPS

Little Goose: Little Goose got my Mickey killed. I'm going to even the score. d8

Nancy Gibson: I need to protect her; she's playing with fire. d4

Kimura: He's dangerous and serves a dangerous man. d6

The Archology: The Archology doesn't think like we do and can't be trusted. d6

ASSETS

RAZORGIRL D10

- Earn a PP and Add a d6 to trouble when your reputation draws unwanted attention.
- Add a d6 to Trouble pool to Increase your ANGRY or AFRAID Stress pool.
- Spend a PP to Reroll a die in a roll involving your status as a Razorgirl.

ENHANCED VISION D8

- **Effect:** Sensory
- **Descriptors:** Mirrored Lenses, Sight
- **Special Effects:** Spend a PP to…
  - » See into a nearby scene you're not in.
  - » See minute details others might miss.
  - » See in all directions at once.

DARING D8

- Add a d6 to Trouble to Reroll a die in a Daring roll.
- Add a d10 to Trouble to Reroll two dice in a Daring roll.

FLECHETTE PISTOL D8

- **Limit:** Gear
- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to run out of ammunition.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die when firing your pistol.

EXTRAS/LOCATIONS

- The Mole, Small Time Fence (Connected, Technology) 2d4
- The Spring Blossom Hotel (Espionage, Sex) 2d4

NANCY GIBSON

The Faded SenSim Starlette, Stubborn But Smart.

VALUES

The Job: An actress is all I've ever wanted to be. d10

My Rep: They're obviously loving somebody I'm not. d4

Love: A wise girl leaves before she is left. But who says I'm a wise girl? d6

Power: I don't care if it's a man's world, as long as I get to be a woman in it. d8

Conformity: The people that made me a star, but if I'd observed their rules, I'd never have got anywhere. d8

Nihilism: They'll pay you a thousand dollars for kiss, and fifty cents for your soul. d4

RELATIONSHIPS

Little Goose: All his clocks are set for hustler's time. d4

Mary Guns: Mary Guns is someone you can rely on. d8

Kimura: His wealth and admiration will finance my comeback. d4

The Archology: My feelings for him are more real than anything Sense/Media can offer. d8

ASSETS

ALTERED GENETICS (DIRECT ACCESS TO THE MATRIX) D12

- **Effect:** Control
- **Limits:** Altered State
- **Special Effects:** Spend a PP to…
  - » See through the "eyes" of electronic devices in scenes other than your own.
  - » Join a scene anywhere on the Matrix.
  - » Take another character with you if they are connected to the Matrix as well.
  - » Detect anyone investigating you or searching for you if they use technology.

MANIPULATIVE D4

- Earn a Plot Point and Give your opposition a d6 when you ask them to trust you, even if you don't mean it.

ATTRACTIVE D4

- Earn a Plot Point when your looks draw you unwanted attention.

IN OVER YOUR HEAD D8

- Earn a Plot Point and Add d6 to Trouble when you get into trouble over your head.
- Add a d6 to Trouble to Increase your Insecure or Angry Stress pool against opponents who outclass or capture you.

WILLFUL D6

- Earn a Plot Point and Add a d6 to Trouble when you put your foot down.

EXTRAS/LOCATIONS

- Barry Mathers, Lawyer (Law, Resources) 2d6
- Susan Pocket , Reporter (Investigation, Contacts) 2d4
- The Chiba Grill, Restaurant (Crowded, Publicity) 2d4

LITTLE GOOSE

The Washed-Out Console Jockey

VALUES

The Job: The best console cowboys are a breed apart and I was one of the best. d10

My Rep: Washed-out data sniffer. d6

Love: The body is meat. Love is meat soup. d8

Power: Data is power, but you need money to get to it. d4

Conformity: A big score will get me back on top. d4

Nihilism: Sometimes the Darkness is the only game in town. d8

RELATIONSHIPS

Mary Guns: I love her. She must see Mickey's death wasn't my fault. d8

Nancy Gibson: She's smarter than she looks. d6

Kimura: He doesn't realize how much he needs me. d6

The Archology: The AI is an asset that could fetch a lot of scratch. d4

ASSETS

CONSOLE COWBOY D8

- Add a d6 to the Trouble pool to Reroll a die when hacking into systems.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reveal a fact about security holes or other exploitable weaknesses in the target of your Ice breaking.

TRICKED-OUT CYBER CONSOLE D8

- **Limit:** Gear Effect: Sensory
- **Special Effects:** Spend a PP to…
    - » Observe a scene anywhere on the Matrix.
    - » Quickly escape a scene on the Matrix.
- Send messages psychically to a character in a different scene in the Matrix.

CLEVER D4

- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to show off your smarts in some annoying or frustrating manner.

GUILTY D8

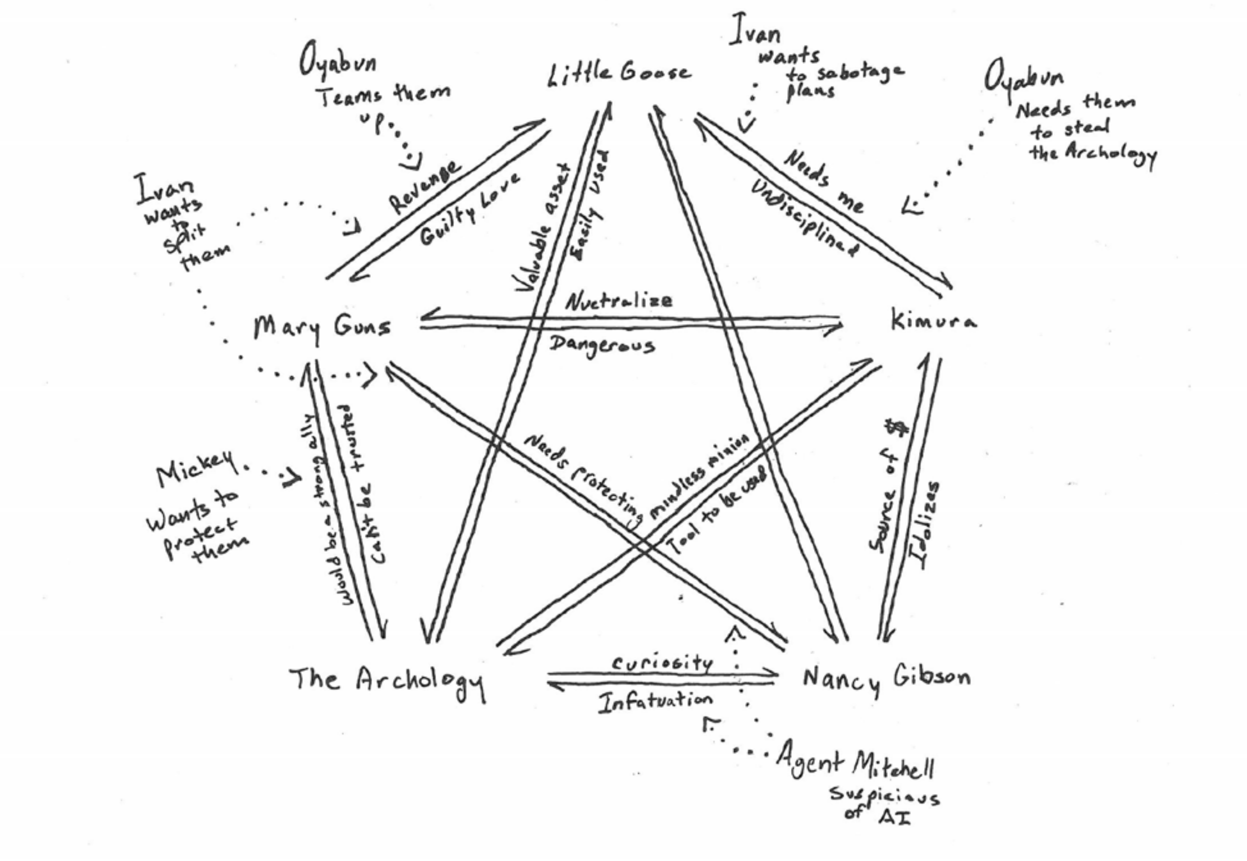
- Earn a Plot Point and Give your opposition a d6 when your guilt stymies or confuses you.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die on any roll when trying to make amends.

SMARTASS D8

- Earn a Plot Point and Give your opposition a d6 when you're being a Smartass in a dangerous situation.
- When you Give a die for this Distinction, it's now a d10; however, if you inflict Angry or Insecure Stress in that Contest, Increase your Stress pool.

EXTRAS/LOCATIONS

- **The Raylight Bar** (Regulars, Shady) 2d6
- **The Spring Blossom Hotel** (Espionage, Anonymity) 2d4
- **The Mole** (Rumors, Connected) 2d6


Little Goose
Ivan wants to sabotage plans
Oyabun Needs them to steal the Archology
Oyabun Teams them up
Revenge
Guilty Love
Valuable asset
Easily used
Needs me
Undisciplined
Ivan wants to split them
Mary Guns
Nuetralize
Dangerous
Kimura
Mickey
Wants to protect them
Would be a strong ally
Can't be trusted
Needs protecting
mindless minion
Tool to be used
Source of $
Idolizes
The Archology
curiosity
Infatuation
Nancy Gibson
Agent Mitchell
Suspicious of AI

THE ARCHOLOGY

The AI Repository of the Deceased

VALUES

The Job: It is my duty to preserve all personalities that dwell inside me. d8

My Rep: Word of my sentience must not get out. d8

Love: Love is an alien, fascinating concept. d10

Power: I have no power as long as I am seen as property. d4

Conformity: The rules of human society don't apply to me. d6

Nihilism: The Net is more real than reality. d4

RELATIONSHIPS

Mary Guns: Her inner strength makes her a good ally. d6

Nancy Gibson: She's a fascinating curiosity. d8

Kimura: Kimura is a mindless minion who just follows orders. d6

Little Goose: Little Goose is easily manipulated through his ego. d4

ASSETS

SENTIENT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HERITAGE D12

- Earn a Plot Point when your Abilities are Shutdown by technological interference.
- Spend a Plot Point to join or observe any scene on the Matrix with a Lead where you have a Relationship at d6 or higher.
- Add a d10 to Trouble to use a Special Effect from a connected Ability you don't have, temporarily rerouting your cybernetic systems.

TECHNOPATHY D8

You can control technology remotely with your mind, accessing even unfriendly devices as if they were your home computer. Roll this Ability's die in when you interact with computers and technology.

- **Effect:** Control
- **Limits:** Intrusion Countermeasure Electronics (ICE)
- Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to…
  - » Break through a computer system's firewall.
  - » Control any electronic device in the same scene as you; you may use this device as a d8 Useful Detail for the rest of the scene.
  - » See through the "eyes" of electronic devices in scenes other than your own.
  - » Override security codes on door panels or electronic vaults.

GENIUS D8

- Spend a Plot Point to Reveal that you've studied a subject and know its basics.
- Earn a Plot Point and Add a d6 to Trouble when you assume others can't follow your complicated thinking.

EXTRAS/LOCATIONS

- Distributed Information Archives (Information, Technology) 2d10
- Avatar (Disguise, Sneaky) 2d4
- Turing Park At Sunset (Intimacy, Solitude) 2d6

REVEALS

1. The Oyabun blames Little Goose for screwing up the job and getting Mickey Finn killed. He owes them 5 million eYen. He is now hunted by Komstar, but the Yakuza will shield him as long as he works for Kimura.
2. Mickey reveals to Mary that his ghost is preserved inside the Archology.
3. Nancy's agent tells her that the money has run out, but there is a job offer for a SenSim show where the audience participates in her relationship with the Archology.
4. Mickey reveals to the Archology and Nancy that there is a plot to steal and erase the AI.
5. Ivan reveals to Nancy that a biosoft has been implanted in her containing some of the Archology's source code that can be used to hack the AI.
6. Oyabun sets up a meeting among Kimura, Little Goose and Mary Guns and instructs them to steal the Archology and erase all personalities, leaving it a pristine vessel.
7. Ivan tells Little Goose that the failed job was a Yakuza setup.
8. Oyabun wants Mary to kill Nancy and bring him her cryogenically frozen brain. Threatens to finger her to Komstar as part of the botched job.
9. Hideo reveals to Kimura that the Oyabun is dying and wants to preserve himself inside the AI forever.
10. The Mole tells Little Goose that a large sum of Russian money has been anonymously wired into Mary's account.
11. Hideo tells Kimura that the Oyabun's immortality will mean that he will never advance.
12. Ivan reveals to Nancy that the biosoft can also be used to download a personality and replace her own.
13. The proposal for Nancy's show has roused the suspicion of the Agent Mitchell of CAPTCHA Authority, tasked with assuring no AI achieves sentience.

14. Agent Mitchell wants Nancy to help capture and analyze the Archology. She should approach Mary Guns with a cash offer to double cross Kimura.

WEDGES

IVAN

The Komstar Fixer

VALUES

The Job: Following Komstar directives is my sworn duty. d10

My Rep: d8

Love: Love is the opiate of the masses. d4

Power: I must prove myself on this mission. d6

Conformity: All citizens must work together for the glory of the New Soviet Republic. d6

Nihilism: People should be worth more than machines. d6

RELATIONSHIPS

Nancy Gibson: I can't let anything happen to her. d8

The Archology: I must protect him for the good of Komstar and my ambitions. d10

Little Goose: The little thief is a threat to my mission. d6

ASSETS

- Fixer d6
- Athletic d8
- Cosmopolitan d6
- Big Brother d10
- Russian Thugs (Intimidation, Brawl) 2d8

THE OYABUN

Yakuza Clan Leader

VALUES

The Job: I am the embodiment of our family kami. d10

Power: The truly powerful use those of lower station as they see fit. d10

Conformity: It is right and proper for all to know their place. d6

Nihilism: The way of the warrior is to choose death. d6

Love: Love is an illusion. d4

RELATIONSHIPS

Kimura: My loyal kobun; he does my bidding in all things without question. d10

Nancy Gibson: Her place is beside me for eternity. d8

The Archology: It will serve me as well. d10

Little Goose: A petty criminal, but necessary to my plans. d8

Mary Guns: Dangerous and wild, but even she can be tamed. d6

ASSETS

- Clan Leader d10
- Family Reputation d6
- Tatami Room (Serenity, Security) 2d8
- Swarm Of Ninja (Protecting, Capturing) 2d6

MICKEY FINN

The Ghost of a Dead Hacker

VALUES

The Job: I'm getting too old for this. d6

Power: My friends need my help. d4

Conformity: The Archology's sentience must stay hidden. d6

Nihilism: Life's a bitch, and then you die. d10

Love: I'll do anything for love. d8

RELATIONSHIPS

Little Goose: The kid needs to loosen up. d8

Mary Guns: My everlasting love. d8

The Archology: Home is where the hard drive is. d10

Nancy Gibson: Nice girl like her shouldn't be messed up in this. d6

ASSETS

- Big Hearted d12
- Fast Talker d8
- Likeable d4
- Turing Park At Sunset (Romantic, Isolated) 2d6
- Agent Mitchell, Captcha Operative (Kidnapping, Investigation) 2d10

DRAMATIC TRANSHUMAN DISTINCTIONS

BY HM "DAIN" LYBARGER

If we set our will and technology to transcend the limitations of the human form, to go past the human condition, what can we become? If everything about us is subject to voluntary change, who are we, really? The world of Transhumanity has some answers.

TYPES OF TRANSHUMANISM

Anything beyond the standard model human is considered transhuman, but the form a transhuman takes can vary widely—from technology-augmented humans to digital constructs that change bodies as easily as we slip on a pair of shoes.

CYBERNETICS

When technology and humans combine, almost anything can happen. Nanobots that can repair your body? A synthetic arm that can crush a car? Bionic legs that can run faster than a cheetah? These humans use technology to augment their physical forms—humanity plus, if you will. The classic cyborg is an example of a Cybernetics-enhanced human. While the options are seemingly limitless, this heritage is best suited for "standard" humans with primarily physical augments. Characters that wish to swap bodies or exist without a body altogether should choose Ego or AI heritages.

'JACKED

'Jacked individuals are a specific type of Cybernetic human—ones that can swap out personality traits and skills through the use of "skillsofts," bits of neuro-formatted software stored on modules that can be loaded through a direct neural interface, usually on the temple or at the back of the neck. Most of the original personality remains the same; 'Jacked individuals augment their minds rather than their bodies. Like Cybernetic humans,'Jacked individuals do not switch bodies or replace their entire personalities.

EGOS

Your perception of self, your personality—these make up who you are. An Ego in this case is a digital reconstruction of your mind, a reflection of your "self," capable of living inside of a computer or being downloaded into a body or other kind of vessel. This is the standard human mind, though freed from the constraints of the body. Multiple copies of an Ego can exist simultaneously, some as static backups and others as full-fledged individuals, known as Forks, with unique experiences.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Not all minds are human. Artificial intelligences (AI) are purely digital constructions and often lack the drives and emotions that distinguish a human mind from a computer's (though they may fake it). In some cases, a non-human mind could be cultivated to reach sentience, such as a house cat, or a cockroach, or any creature you can imagine. AIs work the same way as Egos, but many prefer to exist as an Infomorph, maintaining their consciousness inside of a computer rather than imprinting onto a body.

LIVING DOLL

Regular Dolls are simply empty vessels, waiting to be imprinted upon by an Ego or AI, but a Living Doll is something else. Yes, they can have their personalities completely overriden, but unlike regular Dolls, these Living Dolls can sometimes remember previous imprints. Characters that wish to explore an ever-changing identity with a fixed body should choose this heritage; extremely experienced Living Dolls can remember all of their previous imprints, and can swap between them at will.

A BRIEF LEXICON

Let's define a few terms for the purposes of this hack:

- **AI:** an artificial intelligence capable of being imprinted onto a physical body.
- **Backup:** A stored Ego or AI, held inactive and in reserve in case the original is unrecoverable.
- **Doll:** A human body with a limited personality.
- **Ego:** A personality that can be imprinted onto a physical body. Sometimes referred to as a "ghost."
- **Death:** An outmoded term that has no precise definition in the Transhuman Era.
- **Fork:** When used as a verb, this term refers to activating more than one copy of an Ego concurrently. As a noun, it refers to those individual copies.
- **'Jacked:** Possessing a direct neural interface jack to interface with computers and networks.
- **Imprinting:** The act of downloading a personality into a body. Other terms for this are "sleeving" or "meshing."
- **Infomorph:** Generic term for either an AI or Ego running inside a computer network, without a physical body.
- **Morph:** A manufactured body without a personality. Biomorphs are made of living tissue; Synthmorphs are made of non-living materials. Hybrid biosynthetic morphs may also exist.

TRANSHUMAN VESSELS

Transhumanism can also be achieved by the complete separation of mind and body. Minds, both natural and artificial, exist as data structures independent of their physical vessels. The vessels need not be living, or even humanoid. Since you can switch bodies or live in some sort of machine, you get to pick a set of Abilities that corresponds to the physical entity you inhabit. Thus, when creating an Ego or AI Lead, leave your Ability slots empty during character generation. Whenever you enter a new vessel, pick a set of Abilities that fits it.

There are two main types of vessels for Egos and AIs to imprint upon.

DOLLS

Dolls are "standard" humans whose personalities have been wiped, replaced with a simplistic, generic personality when not carrying an imprint. The original human minds no longer exist and the base personality does not remember previous imprints. A Doll could be anything from an unaugmented human to a fully Cybernetic one; the main defining feature is that a Doll was once a "normal" human—born, not grown.

MORPHS

Genetically engineered humanoid bodies, intelligent tanks, android animals—any vessel you can imagine can be a morph. When entirely synthetic, the morph is referred to as a Synthomorph. When made from living tissue, they are considered Biomorphs. Biosynthetic Hybrid Morphs combine the best of both worlds. Morphs tend to have more fantastic Abilities, as they are completely freed from human limitations, though some may emulate the human form exactly.

TRANSHUMAN HERITAGE DISTINCTIONS

The following are Heritage Distinctions you can give your *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* character to represent one of the various ways humanity has been transcended.

CYBERNETICS

The Cybernetic Systems Heritage Distinction on page 100 of the *Smallville RPG* is the place to start. This is ideal for a "standard" human Lead who has been upgraded by technology, but does not swap bodies.

'JACKED HERITAGE

When selecting this heritage, pick three additional Distinctions. You only start with as many as your Pathway granted you in any given scene; all others are considered to be on skillsofts. In the same vein, pick three additional Drives that represent different personalities you can upload to change your outlook during play. You can swap skillsofts between any scene, or even during a scene as defined by the trigger below.

SPECIAL EFFECTS TRIGGERS (REMOVE THE APPROPRIATE DICE FROM YOUR GROWTH POOL)

D4: Spend a Plot Point and add D6 to Trouble to swap a Distinction with one stored on a skillsoft.

D8: Spend a Plot Point and add D6 to Trouble to immediately rewrite a Drive without waiting for a Tag Scene. The rewritten Drive must be swapped with one stored on a skillsoft.

D12: Earn a Plot Point whenever you Choose to have your currently loaded selection of Drives or Distinctions cause you trouble.

Connected Abilities: Technopathy

Limits: Electricity

EGO

You are data—a human intellect, complete with memories and personality, encoded in digital/holographic form. As an Infomorph, you can be aware and "alive" inside a computer system, or downloaded into a Morph or Doll body. Your Abilities are dependent on the form you take; select an appropriate set of Abilities when you choose a vessel.

SPECIAL EFFECTS TRIGGERS (REMOVE THE APPROPRIATE DICE FROM YOUR GROWTH POOL)

D4: Earn a Plot Point whenever your Abilities are Shutdown by technological interference.

D8: Earn a Plot Point whenever you Choose to treat a physical body (yours or someone else's) as disposable. Downloading into a new body counts for this purpose.

D12: Spend a Plot Point and Add D6 to Trouble to activate an Ego backup after your "death" or erasure. Make it a D10 to create a Fork.

Connected Abilities: TECHNOPATHY
Limits: Electricity

AI

You are data—an artificial intelligence that thinks as well as a human, but not like a human. AIs may download into physical Morphs, but many prefer to exist in their "pure" forms. Thus, they too pick Abilities based on their current form.

SPECIAL EFFECTS TRIGGERS (REMOVE THE APPROPRIATE DICE FROM YOUR GROWTH POOL)

D4: Earn a Plot Point whenever you Reveal your non-human motivations or emotional make-up.

D8: Add a D6 to Trouble to Reroll any Ability die in a Test or Contest whenever your non-human nature alienates those around you.

D12: Spend a Plot Point to access stored information to which you would not normally have access.

Connected Abilities: TECHNOPATHY, COMPREHENSION, PRECOGNITION (heuristic analysis)
Limits: Electricity

You could also modify it to represent an uplifted animal: replace the D12 trigger with "Earn a Plot Point and add a D6 to Trouble when you Choose to act on primitive animal impulses."

SYNAPTIC MATRIX

Your mental structure has been overwritten with a software equivalent that permits you to accept memory and personality imprints. You are a Living Doll, with fleeting glimpses of your previous imprints.

D4: Earn a Plot Point whenever your current imprint is deleted or overwritten by a technological device, leaving you in your vulnerable Doll Persona.

D8: Spend a Plot Point and add D6 to Trouble whenever you have a flashback to a prior imprint and Gain a temporary Distinction for a scene.

D12: Spend a Plot Point to Replace a die from your current pool with the equivalent die from any prior imprint.

Connected Abilities: COMPREHENSION
Limits: Imprinting technology

The Doll persona is the blank personality installed as the baseline along with the Synaptic Matrix. Depending upon the motivations of the person or organization that created the body, the Doll persona may have robotic or childlike, programmed responses, in order to make the Doll easier to manage between downloads. Dolls might even have programmed maintenance routines—built-in desires to keep healthy and physically fit.

Some sample Drive statements for the generic Doll persona might be:

- I always try to be my best.
- I always follow instructions.
- I trust <insert name> with my life.
- <Insert Name> takes care of me.

OTHER TRANSHUMAN DISTINCTIONS

Both AIs and Egos can download their consciousness into a physical frame. When that frame is synthetic or mechanical, a whole plethora of Abilities, often superhuman, become available. Choose a make and model that suits your needs, fits your status, or projects your preferred image. There is no single Morph Distinction, because Morphs come in so many shapes and sizes.

Here's an example.

DYNACHROME XK-17 COMBAT MORPH

Maximum hardware for maximum power-projection!

D4: Spend a Plot Point to Decrease your opponent's INJURED or EXHAUSTED Stress Pool.

D8: Spend a Plot Point to attach optional hardware or weaponry to gain an unconnected ability for one scene at a D6 rating.

D12: Add a D6 to Trouble to use a Special Effect from a connected Ability you don't have.

Connected Abilities: INVULNERABILITY, SUPER-SENSES, SUPER-STRENGTH, ADAPTATION, BLAST (lasers, chainguns, railguns, rocket launchers)

Limits: Electricity

Endless variations are possible: Multi-limbed, aquatic, or stealth Morphs, Morphs designed for hostile environments, swarm Morphs, etc. Create as many different types as your setting requires. Necessary Abilities come with the Distinction, built into the Morph.

Dolls with Cybernetic enhancement can be built the same as a Lead with the Cybernetic Heritage. Completely unaugmented Dolls would have regular Distinctions instead of a heritage.

Imprinting a recorded Ego on a Doll (or Morph) is an automated procedure, but true understanding of the neuro-technology involved takes training:

IMPRINT TECHNICIAN

You understand more about the psyche and neural architecture than is healthy for your own sanity.

D4: Earn a Plot Point and add D6 to Trouble whenever you Reveal that you know far too much about someone's personality, motivations, or psychology.

D8: Spend a Plot Point to Increase your AFRAID or INSECURE Stress pool by using neuro-linguistic techniques against someone.

D12: Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die associated with operating, repairing, or inventing new imprinting technology.

A character with Imprint Technician at D8 or above can create artificial Ego imprints "made to order" with whatever Drives and Distinctions the technician desires. Artificial personalities are generally less nuanced than natural ones, and degrade over time. Issues relating to that degradation make great Complications, as the artificial personality begins to disturb people around it, or becomes "disturbed" itself.

EVOLUTION, BODY-SWAPPING, AND DISTINCTIONS

What's the difference between a Doll as a vessel and the Living Doll heritage? The Living Doll heritage focuses on identity as it is related to the physical body, while a Doll is simply the current vessel for an Ego or AI. Who is the star of your show? If you believe identity is tied to the mind, treat the Doll as just a vessel. If you think identity persists with the body, try the Living Doll heritage.

If an ordinary person is turned into a Doll, the process is technically irreversible. The character gains the Heritage Distinction: Synaptic Matrix, and the Doll Persona that goes with it. Their original personality (if it was saved) becomes an Ego imprint. Even if that Ego is loaded back into its original body, the Synaptic Matrix and its vulnerability to erasure and re-imprinting remains…once a Doll, always a Doll.

An organization that utilizes Dolls (as programmable special agents, sex-toys, or for other purposes) will generally have Dolls with the Synaptic Matrix heritage at D4 or D8. Doll Leads using Growth might gain the D12 level, and be able to remember all of their prior imprinted personalities. Such Dolls could become very dangerous to their sponsoring organization. Most Doll bodies have the ATTRACTIVE and ATHLETIC Distinctions, as well.

With all the body-swapping going on, it might seem like there should be a difference between regular Distinctions and those that are purely physical in nature. You might think that physical Distinctions should stay with the body, while other Distinctions become part of the imprint. With *DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING*, it's not necessary to divide things up: Distinctions like ATTRACTIVE and ATHLETIC depend on physical characteristics, but they also require the mental or social ability to use those characteristics effectively. An imprinted Doll may have a physical Distinction like Attractive but is unable to make use of it socially because the imprinted Ego is not aware of the body's physical appeal.

Likewise, an imprint that includes a vivacious self-image may be able to use the Attractive Distinction even in a body with an ordinary appearance. Distinctions like Athletic or Martial Artist work similarly: An Ego with such knowledge can push a body beyond its usual capabilities—at the risk of pulled muscles or other self-injuries (ideal explanations for Complications arising from the roll).

An imprint is therefore a complete character sheet. Players of Doll Leads with the Synaptic Matrix Distinction at greater than d4 should keep the character sheets of all their prior imprints; the information will become useful later.

PC Dolls that have long-term imprints may experience Growth normally—this will lead to two versions of the Ego: the active one, and the original, stored version. Keep copies of both sheets, since it is always possible to reload the original.

It might be possible in your setting to imprint an unwilling subject. The new imprint overwrites the original character's Drives, essentially enslaving the host body as a Doll. The rules for Possession (*Smallville RPG*, page 110) provide a method for the original Ego to fight free of the control. (This is why Doll Personas are so passive; they're designed to never fight back.)

MECHAVILLE

BY JOLI ST. PATRICK

An innocent boy caught in a battle interfaces with a strange cockpit, and is catapulted into destiny. An enemy lieutenant proves an honorable opponent, pursuing his own mysterious vendetta. A driven young soldier plugs into a prototype combat computer, driving herself insane with battle-lust to protect those she loves.

These are the stories of Mecha anime and video games such as the Gundam series, Vision of Escaflowne, Xenogears, and Zone of the Enders, where brave heroes and driven villains pursue their destiny amid a backdrop of war and intrigue, each wielding a metal frame as an extension of their iron will and burning passion!

SETTING

The Earth Confederation rules the Solar System, but relies on resources mined in Space Colonies to sustain itself. Spacers ply the asteroid belt, scavenging ancient alien technology from long-derelict hulks at great risk. This status quo held until the Colonists rebelled, demanding political and commercial autonomy in exchange for keeping the resources flowing. The Confederation refused to deal and moved swiftly to crush the rebellion, which had no real military. But strange, poorly understood alien devices traded from Spacers provided the Colonies hope. Desperate colonial scientists developed those devices into a fearsome new type of machines — the Meta Frame. Only a few prototypes were available to tip the balance.

Meta Frames require an advanced neural interface that few can sync with successfully, let alone withstand the mental and physical strain. Thus a handful of bold, young pilots set out to face the Confederation, while the Confederacy races to engineer their own Meta Frames.

It's easy enough to adapt this framework to another genre, like a fantasy kingdom with mystically powered armor. Just take a central ruling power, add rebellious outlying provinces, sprinkle some wandering scavenging folk, and dress them up appropriately!

PATHWAYS

Use these alternate names and descriptions for Pathways choices. Follow the instructions for the equivalent entry in the *Smallville RPG* Pathways section, (*Smallville RPG*, page 18) unless otherwise noted.

ORIGIN

Rich — Earther — Colonist — Spacer — Prodigy

CAREER

Military — Business — Labor — Scavenge — Science

FOCUS

Status — Life — Money — Discovery — Technology

ROAD

Ethical — Straight and Narrow — Underground — Risky — Lofty

LIFE-CHANGING EVENT

Advancement — Tragedy — Manifestation — Revelation — Destiny

Let's explore this in more detail.

ORIGIN

RICH

You were born to great privilege — prominent among the aristocracy that the Earth Confederacy truly serves, or the child of the Administrator of a Space Colony, or perhaps the heir to a merchant-trading dynasty. Taught to wield power from an early age, do you find yourself emotionally crippled or empowered to embrace your destiny?

Rich gets: Same as the Rich choice in *Smallville RPG*.

Rich leads to: Science, Military or Business

EARTHER

You were born on Terra, cradled in the arms of an all-providing planetary government. Whether raised among the administrative middle class or the laboring masses, you've been instilled with notions of loyalty to the state, and see the Colonies smeared as ungrateful and selfish, withholding what others need to live. Did you buy into this, or did you start to ask questions?

Earther gets:

- Step up Duty or Truth twice or step up each once
- Add a new Distinction
- Step up a Resource
- Step up a Relationship, Asset or Resource

Earther leads to: Military, Business or Labor

COLONIST

You were born in one of the Space Colonies, each orbiting one of the Sol System planets as far out as Jupiter. Colonies perform the vital task of mining resources from the planets via space elevator and shipping them back to Earth. The ideals of democratic government resurfaced in your parents' generation and spread through the colonies. They are now rebelling against the totalitarian Earth Confederacy. Do you see this movement as genuine, or does it mask a more cynical agenda?

Colonist gets: Same as Ordinary in *Smallville RPG*

Colonist leads to: Business, Labor or Scavenge

SPACER

Born to space-faring wanderers, it's possible you've never been off your ship, and likely you've never set foot on planet Earth. There are various reasons people wander the system; self-determination and freedom from governing bodies top the list. Whether your family gets by through salvage, repair, intercolony trade, or dangerous excavation of alien ruins, you've been raised with an independent streak and mistrust for authority.

Spacer gets: same as Strange in *Smallville RPG*

Spacer leads to: Labor, Scavenge or Science

PRODIGY

You were always an unusual child, possessing an uncanny aptitude for advanced skills. Whether a genius of science, military tactics, psychic sensitivity, or the uniquely challenging pilot interface of Meta Frames, you have a gift that showed itself at an early age. However, what set you apart may have alienated you from your peers.

Prodigy gets: Same as Gifted in *Smallville RPG*, *except* may substitute the last item for a Heritage with one free Connected Ability.

Prodigy leads to: Scavenge, Science, or Military

CAREER

MILITARY

The life of a soldier — whether a lowly grunt, proud officer, or commander — is one of discipline and mettle. And with the Solar System in turmoil, there's never been a harder, bloodier time to serve. Did you skate through the campaign with your head down, rise to the challenge of duty and honor, or use your position to serve your own agenda?

Military gets: same as Jock in *Smallville RPG*, *except* may substitute the last item for a Heritage with one free Connected Ability.

Military leads to: Technology, Status or Life

BUSINESS

The control of resources is vital throughout the Solar System, and you were poised to take advantage of the economic realities of a civil war. Whether a Resource Administrator for the Earth Confederacy, the heir to a financial empire, or a Free Merchant of the Colonies, you had interests to protect and the bargaining power to do it, which is more than can be said for some.

Business gets: Same as Paragon in *Smallville RPG*, *except* may not choose to add or step up an Ability.

Business leads to: Status, Life or Money

LABOR

Someone's got to do the dirty jobs. Whether Earthside or Colonial, modern civilization requires laborers to perform basic maintenance, operate heavy machinery, and transport resources. Spacers, too, need some services to get by, and even the loftiest scientists require staff for menial tasks. This life made you hardy, but also wore you down.

Labor gets: Same as Average in *Smallville RPG*

Labor leads to: Life, Money or Discovery

SCAVENGE

It's a big System. When the odd freighter slips through the cracks, or satellites and research stations are abandoned, you're there to pick through the carcass. Unlike those dutiful folks chained to their jobs, you made your own way by your own rules, surviving by wits and nerve. And occasionally, you may have found the really big payoff: mysterious sites of ancient alien technology from which our most fantastic tech is derived. Only the bravest and most skilled scavengers can extract it, but the science types pay out big.

Scavenge gets: Same as Outsider in *Smallville RPG*

Scavenge leads to: Money, Discovery, or Technology

SCIENCE

A life of knowledge and discovery was yours, whether researching in conventional fields, studying strange phenomena like psychic powers and alien technology, or engineering cutting-edge Meta Frame prototypes. Did you pursue these things for the joy of discovery, to make the world place, or merely to increase your own power or prestige? How would you feel about the Confederacy or the Rebellion harnessing your work for military application?

Science gets: Same as Geek in *Smallville RPG*, *except* may substitute the last item for a Heritage with one free Connected Ability.

Science leads to: Discovery, Technology, or Status

FOCUS

STATUS

Same as Status in *Smallville RPG*

Status leads to: Lofty, Ethical or Straight and Narrow Life Same as Life in *Smallville RPG*

Life leads to: Ethical, Straight and Narrow, or Underground

MONEY

Same as Money in *Smallville RPG*

Money leads to: Straight and Narrow, Underground or Risky

DISCOVERY

Same as Paranormal in *Smallville RPG*

Discovery leads to: Underground, Risky, or Lofty

TECHNOLOGY

Same as Technology in *Smallville RPG*, *except* may substitute the last item for a Heritage with one free Connected Ability. Also, may add or increase Connected Abilities for Meta Frame Aptitude Heritage in place of Gear, if applicable.

Technology leads to: Risky, Lofty or Ethical

ROAD

All Road choices in Mechaville are identical to their *Smallville RPG* counterparts.

LIFE-CHANGING EVENT

ADVANCEMENT

Same as Advancement in *Smallville RPG*

TRAGEDY

Same as Tragedy in *Smallville RPG*

META APTITUDE MANIFESTATION:

Whether a seasoned soldier or just a civilian in the wrong place at the right time, you accessed a part of yourself you never knew existed. The ability to interface with a Meta Frame Prototype is miles beyond the piloting of its ordinary Motion Frame cousins. To do so under battle conditions, and to survive, requires a special gift. And now that you know you have it, how will you use it?

Manifestation gets: Same as Manifestation in *Smallville RPG*, *except* replace one "Step up Location" with "Add Meta Frame Pilot Heritage," if you do not already have it.

REVELATION

You've discovered something amazing — a new alien artifact, a chilling government secret, or a bold new stride in human technology. Now, powerful forces will undoubtedly turn their attention to you, to control, exploit or suppress this new knowledge. Can you use it to accomplish your ends before they catch up to you?

Revelation gets: Same as First Contact in *Smallville RPG*

DESTINY

Same as Destiny in *Smallville RPG*

NEW MECHANICS

HERITAGES

The Heritage examples in the *Smallville RPG* do not apply to Mechaville. Use this Heritage Distinction for Meta Frame Pilots:

META FRAME APTITUDE (NAME OF FRAME)

D4: Earn a Plot Point and Add a D6 to Trouble when your status as a Pilot attracts unwanted attention.

D8: Add a D6 to Trouble to use a Special Effect from a connected Ability you don't have.

D12: Spend a Plot Point to access the hidden power of your Frame, gaining an unconnected Ability for one scene at a D6 die rating. Spend an additional Plot Point at the end of the scene to add the new power to connected Abilities.

Connected Abilities: Varies; list 5-7 including Lead's starting Abilities. Name the Abilities in the manner of mecha weapons and systems.

Limits: Alien Technology

If you like, you can flesh out additional Heritages for Psychic Sensitivity, Alien Heritage, etc.

MOTION FRAME ABILITIES

Mecha are handled in two ways; for ordinary Motion Frames treat it as a Gear Ability:

MOTION FRAME (MODEL)

Special Effect: Spend a Plot Point to reduce INJURED or EXHAUSTED Stress by one die size.

Additional Special Effects specific to model

For prototype Meta Frames, build a set of Connected Abilities linked through a Meta Frame Aptitude Heritage. Weaponry, shielding and armor, propulsion systems, or a combat computer can all be individual Meta Frame Abilities with appropriate Special Effects.

In addition, a Meta Frame has two special Stress categories: DAMAGED and OVERLOADED. These overlay the Pilot's INJURED and EXHAUSTED categories, respectively, so that an opponent cannot inflict those Stresses directly on the Pilot without a trigger or Special Effect that bypasses the Meta Frame's armor.

Stressing out DAMAGED or OVERLOADED means a Shutdown of all Abilities connected to Meta Frame Aptitude Heritage. Repairing DAMAGED or OVERLOADED Stress is just like Stress Relief for Leads, but the character doing repairs must have the expertise and facilities. DAMAGED Stress steps down at the end of the Episode as normal. OVERLOADED Stress is a special case; it steps down automatically at the end of the scene, and disappears completely at the end of the Episode.

MECHA SCALE

All Meta Frame Abilities are considered to have the Limit: Huge, which restricts the circumstances under which a Frame can be meaningfully present or active in a scene. If a location is cramped, for example, a Lead can't use their Meta Frame without catastrophically, perhaps lethally, disrupting the environment. Also, if a character is cut off from their Frame, (e.g. unable to reach the ship where it is docked) they cannot spend Plot Points to have the Frame appear in a scene.

Any character not piloting a Frame who is involved in a Contest with a character who is piloting a Frame reduces the die size by one for any Asset they roll, unless it is a Gear Ability with the Anti-Frame descriptor. A character not piloting a Frame cannot inflict DAMAGED or OVERLOADED Stress on a Frame without an Anti-Frame Gear Ability.

When piloting a Frame, a character steps up the die size of any Frame Abilities they roll to Interfere with two characters not piloting Frames.

If a Lead is in a scene but not piloting his Frame, his player can spend a Plot Point to bring the Frame into the scene. If a player with a Lead not present wishes to join the scene with her Frame, it costs a Plot Point each for the Lead and the Frame.

A character not piloting a Frame has one advantage — if he participates in a contest with a Frame pilot, and he rolls his Relationship with that pilot, he may triple the Relationship die as if he had challenged the Relationship (and also step back the die for the rest of the episode as if he had challenged).

OTHER ABILITIES

The normal *SMALLVILLE RPG* array of super-powered Abilities don't apply to Mechaville. Your group can, if desired, introduce Abilities implied by the setting such as psychic talents or mysterious powers from alien bloodlines.

AFTERWORD

It's up to you to take these ideas and flesh them out into a full-fledged epic of brutal robotic warfare. *CORTEX PLUS DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING* will carry you to great heights of triumph, tragedy and titanic conflict. Seize hope in a metal fist!

A FUTURE BORN IN PAIN

BY TOM LYNCH

We've all seen TV shows and movies dedicated to the adventures of a Crew or other group of Leads in space; scraping around for a living on a run-down ship, sailing the spaceways in the best craft available, members of a society dedicated to upholding Light across the galaxy, or the staff of a space station becoming a bastion against enemy forces. Whichever setup your players favor for their Leads, sacrifice—pain—is the price they'll pay to secure their future.

So what focus do you want your series to have? Broadly, this breaks down into two strands—interpersonal and political drama set against the backdrop of the stars, or a gang of heroes acting as shining beacons against the darkness, set against overwhelming forces. This breakdown, fortunately, is almost exactly the same as the breakdown between core *Cortex Plus* structures. Let's look, first, at a campaign revolving around the complex politics of the galaxy. Suitable, mostly, for *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying*.

Time now to start considering how the setting we create will shape the series. The first question, really, is how do you plan to handle aliens? Almost no space opera series boasts a purely human cast, and even the Leads of most shows are a mix of human and alien.

The temptation is to treat all alien races as Heritage Distinctions (*Smallville*, page 99), and while I would agree with that, I would suggest treating Heritages as you would any other Asset—thus making it easy for players who want alien Leads to still have freedom at the Origins stage. (After all, the resilient honorable warrior race and the religious, introverted masters of psionics are unlikely to have similar upbringings.)

So, perhaps, the aforementioned warrior race might become the following Distinction:

BRAWYCHUS HERITAGE

Throughout the galaxy, the Brawychus' reputation in combat is unmatched. Their many vassal races know protection, however, and the expanding sphere of humanity's influence has brought both cultures in contact. The honor of the Brawychus cultures has won them friends among the other species. Roll the Distinction's die when relying on your race's reputation or when putting your training, unusual strength, and legendary resilience to good use.

D4: Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to have your temper get the better of you in a tense situation.

D8: Spend a Plot Point to Decrease your opponent's INJURED stress pool.

D12: Add a D6 to the Trouble pool to Reroll a die in any contest involving your reputation or your race's many military treaties.

Of course, a player who wishes to emphasize his race's strength, or psionic ability, etc, is likely to choose the equivalent of the "Alien" section in Pathways—purchasing a relevant Ability. The GM may choose to limit the number of Special Effects allowed—the kind of extraterrestrial power *Smallville* sees regularly is unusual in a science fiction Lead—but otherwise, the Origins phase can simply be reskinned.

This is also the case for most other sections of Pathways; if you are allowing Abilities to be purchased as racial Assets, however, you may want to think about moving the Ability increases to a point before the **Life-Changing Event.**

Similarly, the Life-Changing Event itself will need some thinking about. The core idea remains the same as in *Smallville*: a point in your life when priorities have to change. With the political nature of this series, we can assume that the LCE becomes the point at which you enter a post connected to this turmoil: **Recruitment.** Looking at the original Pathways diagram, we might rename them as POLITICIAN, SECURITY, PHYSICAL UPGRADE, SUPPORT STAFF, and MILITARY. Physical Upgrade would, here, represent common character concepts, with psionic ability brought out through training or drug regimes, cybernetic enhancements, nanotechnological augmentation, etc. Safe bet that you'll see Leads who wish to explore all of these—what's a space station without its highly educated Support Staff doctor, after all?

Whenever you rework this system, it's worth considering renaming Values. In a politically structured drama, however, Duty, Power, and Glory are all obvious motivations. Truth, too, stands as it is. Love and Justice come under the microscope but, ultimately, Duty already covers the areas you might move Justice into, and as for Love... well, interpersonal, private relationships are how we'll make this Series come to life. So perhaps what's needed is a rebranding entirely; might Glory reasonably become Desire?

Stories where politics is a faceless series of events aren't interesting. To introduce the drama inherent in two ambassadors, each seeking advancement for their world, we need to make the political personal. When those two ambassadors are Leads who need the favor of another to settle the decision, then things can become very personal indeed. The key to this kind of series is to grasp the question of scale, and how easily the public can become the personal and vice versa.

After all, these stories also involve plenty of fighting, on various scales: the occasional brawl with security, squad-level boarding actions, and ship-to-ship combat. Perhaps your Leads include a hotshot pilot?

Whatever the case, rules-wise it's worth remembering that this is resolved almost identically; a commander rolling Duty + Enemy Commander + Fully Operational Battle Station might suffer Exhausted, Afraid, or Insecure Stress rather than Injured, but there's no reason why his leadership cannot be, as far as the rules of *Cortex Plus* are concerned, the mechanical factor that determines success or failure.

If your preference is for an action-framed series, on the other hand, the situation calls for a different approach. Let's take a look at that.

Much of *Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying* is currently oriented around the *Leverage* episode structure. We need to adjust that, to begin with.

The obvious first step is to re-examine the Roles; Commander maps neatly to Mastermind, but otherwise things change. Lay out what you want to emphasize in the campaign; if you have a secret society of psionicists, that could be a Role all its own, maybe replacing Hitter—or perhaps fill the same "support" slot as Hacker or even Thief, while Security supersedes Hitter.

You might want to keep the Thief Role much the same to use as an Infiltrator specialist, or expand the Hacker's domain, as so much more of the world embraces technology. Here is where your version of the space-based Series will really become distinct from the game in the next room.

Alien racial qualities, as with *Dramatic Roleplaying*, are best treated as Distinctions, but will be simpler; the Brawychus Distinction described earlier, for example, works to the Crewmember's advantage when in combat or when dealing with a race who knows of the Brawychus' honor, but to their disadvantage when their fearsome reputation doesn't help—and when you meet a new race, a Complication or an Opportunity may define which stories they believe.

Talents, on the other hand, need to be adjusted to the setting; the advice given in *Leverage* (page 43) will be handy here. They can still be picked up in play during the Starship Launch—an equivalent to *The Recruitment Job,* the Launch sees the Crewmembers arriving for their first tour of duty together in much the same way that the Job serves to introduce them and set up the premise of the series.

So what comes next? Naturally enough, what we're looking at now is the structure of the episode.

Where *Leverage* recommends having a Client, problem and Mark in place, the rules are different in science fiction. The Client might not know who they are; might not even appear on screen. They're probably secondary to the problem, and can range from an individual—even that android Crewmember—to a planetary population.

The Mark, too, is not always going to appear, or perhaps only in narrated cut scenes, away from the Crewmembers. Remember that such Marks are going to be season-long antagonists, and will eventually get their comeuppance—but in any given episode, ask yourself whether the Mark or the problem will be more prominent.

Don't steer clear of this kind of non-standard structure—a chance for Crewmembers to stretch their Roles in a new direction is going to open up many possibilities and fantastic scenes.

Take a plague outbreak on a nearby planet as an example; in this kind of series, the focus is on what can be done to contain it and care for the afflicted—and odds are good that a Mark had a hand in creating the problem in the first place.

Why? That question might only resolved in a later episode, as this one will focus on containing the problem and stopping the Mark from doing something similar in future. His motivations should be revealed slowly, over the season, allowing the Crew to build their understanding before finding his vulnerability, closing the season out by taking him down. Maybe they'll even see the next Mark rear his head before the episode finishes.

STARSHIP FOR HIRE

BY DAVE CHALKER

In this *Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying* setting, the players take command of a starship crewed by those who take care of all kinds of independent, unofficial missions while operating under the radar of a well-meaning but repressive galactic Utopian empire.

This version of the game puts the focus on the exploits of your Crew and their ship, which is created collaboratively among the players. It can be used to play in many existing science fiction settings from television and movies with an action bent, or can be used to create a new setting.

CHARACTER CREATION

First, for each Crewmate, choose Attributes, as described in the *Leverage RPG* (see page 31).

Second, assign Roles. This is the same as described under "Fast Recruitment" in the *Leverage RPG* (page 50), using the following roles:

- Security, for dealing with external threats to the ship and its crew.
- Command, for mission planning and providing direction for the crew.
- Operations, for handling all the logistical duties of running a starship.
- Personnel, for taking care of other crewmembers, from medical officers to counselors.
- Engineering, for maintaining and upgrading technology aboard the ship and elsewhere.

The group chooses someone to be the Captain of the ship. This is usually the character with the highest Command die.

Next, choose two Specializations. The following are some examples for each role.

- Security (Gunner, Optimize Shields, Melee Combat)
- Command (Giving Orders, Mission Planning, Protocol)
- Operations (Science, Piloting, Communications)
- Personnel (Medical, Counselor, Chaplain, "Escort")
- Engineering (Repairs, More Power!, Upgrades)

Choose two Distinctions. If you are a non-human, you should choose your species as one of the Distinctions. This can be an alien from the established universe you're playing in, or you can propose a new kind of alien you'd like to play.

Finally, choose two Talents. A few examples of new Talents are listed below. For the rest, either work with your GM to create new Talents, or adjust one of the Talents from the *Leverage RPG*. Mastermind Talents tend to work well for Command, Hacker for Engineering, Thief for Operations, Grifter for Personnel, and Hitter for Security.

SAMPLE TALENTS

MORE THAN HUMAN

Requirement: A Distinction indicating a non-human.

Effect: Increase one of your Attributes by one die size (maximum d12), and decrease one of your Attributes by one die size (minimum d4).

PSYCHIC

Requirement: A Distinction indicating a psychic ability.

Activation: You must spend a Plot Point to activate this Talent.

Effect: You perform a psychic feat, possibly requiring a roll to determine success. For example, you might have the Telekinetic Distinction. While it can be used as a Distinction normally, you can spend a Plot Point in order to try and move a heavy object.

FIRE AT WILL

Requirement: Security primary Role

Effect: Any starship weapon Asset used by you is increased by one die size for the roll.

MAKE IT SO

Requirement: Command primary Role

Effect: When issuing a direct order to someone who can hear you give the order, you may add your Command die to another's die roll when they follow that order.

HAILING FREQUENCIES OPEN

Requirement: Operations primary Role

Effect: When making first contact with another ship, colony, base or planet, add a d8 to your roll or to the roll of whoever makes contact.

I'M A DOCTOR, NOT A CARPENTER

Requirement: Personnel primary Role

Activation: You must spend a Plot Point to activate this Talent.

Effect: Remove a health-related Complication from a single character in the same scene as you.

MIRACLE WORKER

Requirement: Engineer primary Role

Activation: You must spend a Plot Point to activate this Talent.

Effect: Remove a temporary Complication related to mechanical difficulty on the ship provided you have access to the problem.

THE RECRUITMENT MISSION

The first mission is an introductory one, showing how each of the Crewmates joined the ship in the first place. In the process, through a series of Flashbacks similar to *The Recruitment Job* (*Leverage RPG*, page 44), the players will design the ship where their adventures will take place.

The Captain goes first, and describes the scene of how he came to own the ship. This should involve some kind of conflict, for which he will roll a Test. The character chooses one Asset for the ship that he is defining with this conflict as well.

Examples: Virtual Reality Repair Net, Extra Explosive Torpedoes, Quantum Shields, Piercing Teleporter

The GM should oppose this roll with 2d6. If the player succeeds in the conflict, he adds the Asset to the ship, rated at d8. If he fails, the character adds a Distinction to the ship instead. Any Complications rolled are added to the ship by the GM, and the ship itself gains a Plot Point. Any other Plot Points gained during the scene go to the ship, as well; note down the total on the ship's sheet.

Each other player does this in turn, describing the scene of how they came to join the crew, and adding Assets, Distinctions, Complications, and Plot Points to the ship. Once everyone has had a turn, the entire Crew must agree on what to call the ship. You have your ship and Crew and are ready to undertake your first mission.

YOUR VERY OWN STARSHIP

As the other "star of the show," the starship acts like a shared resource that everyone draws on. It has Assets that help to assist the rolls of the crew, Distinctions that give it character, Complications that are drawbacks, and a bank of Plot Points.

When making a check aboard the starship, whether it's scanning for life forms, calling for battle stations, or firing the lasers, the character performing the Action will roll as normal (generally, an Attribute plus a Role), and then add in any Assets from the ship that are appropriate.

If the character needs an extra boost, she can spend from the ship's bank of Plot Points, which can only be spent to help rolls related to the ship. Usually, this will be to add temporary Assets, like a piece of technology rarely used, a minor crewmember specialist, or an experimental maneuver. A character may use the starship's Distinctions as well to add a d8 to the roll or a d4 and give the PP to the ship.

Additionally, the ship's Plot Points can be spent to step down a Complication against a player character; the Complication hits a nameless crewmember instead (who might be wearing a crimson-colored shirt).

The character can always spend her personal Plot Points for herself as described in the *Leverage RPG*.

ENEMY STARSHIPS

In Starship for Hire, the most frequently encountered enemies are other starships.

While each player rolls his own Attribute, Role, and other dice when taking Actions aboard his starship, enemy starships are represented more abstractly.

An enemy starship can be summed up with the following 5 statistics:

- Crew, representing the general aptitude of the enemy crew to any situation.
- Size, representing the amount of damage the ship can take, as well as access to resources like security forces.
- Speed, representing both how maneuverable it is, as well as how fast it can travel in space.
- Weapons, representing how powerful the armament is.
- Science, representing the ship's general awareness (via sensors) and its ability to come up with surprises.

To quickly make an enemy ship, just assign one different die size to each statistic (d4, d6, d8, d10, d12), keeping in mind that the Crew is more powerful than the others.

SPACE TOURS

When your character does something opposed by the enemy starship, the GM rolls Crew + appropriate statistic, plus any applicable Complications. For an especially difficult Action, the GM may also optionally add an extra die of any size as an edge.

Example: Captain Rhag has taken the helm and is attempting to outrun the Death Cruiser on his tail. He rolls his Agility + Operations to try and get away, and adds in Ruby's Extra Boost Asset for an additional d8. The Death Cruiser rolls Crew + Speed, and the GM also brings in Ruby's Unreliable Engine Complication to add another d6. This is a fairly straight-up situation, so he doesn't add in any kind of edge die. If the Captain were trying to outrun the Death Cruiser while also trying to keep power for the Engineer, the GM may add another die to represent the added factor that the challenge poses.

NON-STARSHIP THREATS

Other threats are represented the same way as Marks, Locations, and Extras in the Toolbox section of the *Leverage RPG* (page 122). Traits can be used to describe planetary surfaces, atmospheres, stellar bodies, unstable nebulae, and so on.

The captain of an enemy starship can be represented just as you would a Mark. In this case, however, the enemy captain is especially dangerous because in addition to the enemy's starship dice, an enemy captain can add his Traits in as appropriate, making him even more formidable. For a recurring villain, consider writing him up as a Foil (*Leverage*, page 126.)

RUNNING SCIENCE FICTION ACTION GAMES

Remember, in this style of game, the focus is on action in a science fiction setting, not on the raw science itself. Keep the pace up instead of worrying about the mechanics of the situation. In a genre laden with questionable science, if the player can explain it using a simple metaphor, go with it.

Steal liberally from other shows. The personalities of your characters (and your ship) will give it a unique spin, and the Complications generated during play will take it in new directions.

Some Roles, like Personnel, can sometimes be tough to work into every space battle. One good way to give everyone time to shine is to present multiple threats that the Crew will have to split up to deal with. That could mean a Crewmate is thrust into a situation she's not ideal at and has to adjust, while others deal with an even bigger threat. If characters aren't getting enough spotlight time, make the next Complication rolled target them. Similarly, unlike some other shows in the genre, the players don't always need permission from the Captain to take action; this isn't a military ship, after all.

Most of all let your players drive the story. Whether it's creating a new technology that could disastrously backfire or pulling a dangerous pilot move, everything they do creates the potential for more twists and turns that started with the player, and now have to be solved.

EPISODES AT THE END OF TIME

BY JIM HENLEY

Episodes at the End of Time lets you play an anthology series of adventures using a variant of the *Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying* rules. Player characters reappear from episode to episode only by making themselves an integral part of the story. (Players persist!) Character creation is quick, and much of it happens while you're playing. A modified Situation Generator is used to set the cast and plot of each new episode. Freed from prep, the GM becomes conductor and instigator of the fast-flowing action.

ANTHOLOGY SERIES

When you sit down to play the first episode, you'll start creating a character based on suggestions from the Situation Generator. Your character will pursue his Imperatives. (If you're the GM, you'll be playing the characters nobody else wants. Isn't that always the way?)

When you sit down to play the second episode, you might play the character you played last time, but you might play a different PC. Want to play the same PC? We'll tell you how to earn that right. Want to play a different PC? Just keep reading.

GMs, you don't have to prep. You can't. You set scenes, up the stakes, and give everyone the chance to achieve or fail their goals.

The first anthology-series RPG was Vincent Baker's *In a Wicked Age*. Vincent generously blessed using some of his ideas for this hack.

DYING-EARTH SCIENCE FANTASY GENRE

It's so far in the future we can't tell you how far. Time itself varies. The sun is small and dim, or huge and red. Civilization has survived uncounted rises and falls, but people can sense an end of human days. (Or maybe a renewal, as promised in legend.) Most people live primitive lives. Isolated remnants of technology survive, but are sufficiently advanced that most people consider them magic. There are cloistered specialists who can keep some ancient wonders working, but there's no Science—no culture of positivism and experiment. Aristocracy and mercantilism replace social democracy and market liberalism.

Famous examples of the genre include Gene Wolfe's Book of the New Sun, Robert Silverberg's Nightwings and M. John Harrison's Viriconium. Wikipedia provides a good discussion of common tropes and a list of representative works at **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dying_Earth_(subgenre)**.

CLARKE'S LAW ISN'T JUST A GOOD IDEA

In the variant of dying-earth science-fantasy covered by these rules, something may appear as "magic" to people within the setting, but around the table, your group should have an idea of a "scientific" basis for the phenomenon. This can be very hand-wave-y, but that difference in perspective between characters and "audience" (players) is a pleasure of the genre.

WHAT DO WE DO?

The unit of play is an Episode, which lasts a session or two of real time. Episodes begin with the Situation Generator and end when the PCs have resolved their Imperatives.

If you're a player: roll on the Situation Generator for the first Episode, and choose a character inspired by the results. Do your version of Fast Recruitment before play starts. Continue to develop your PC's Traits in play. Pursue your PC's Imperatives in play. Then, find out whether you'll play the same PC or a different one in the next Episode.

If you're the GM: roll on the Situation Generator and take ownership of the NPCs, Locations, and elements suggested by the results. Set and close scenes for the PCs, singly, in pairs, and in groups. When it's time to roll dice, choose the Action Type and decide which Style and Arena apply. Give all PCs a chance to satisfy their Imperatives, and close the Episode when all Imperatives are won, lost, renounced or deferred.

If you're a character: pursue your Imperatives. Explore. Love. Hate. Help or Hinder. Choose.

STARTING WITH THE SITUATION GENERATOR

Everything starts with the Situation Generator, specifically tuned towards Dying-Earth science fantasy.

For the first Episode:

- The GM rolls a D12 once on each of the five columns: **Who**, **What**, **When**, **Where**, **Why**.
- Each player rolls at least one D12 on the column of her choice, *but* no more than three rolls on any one column.
- Write each result down on a separate sticky-note or card and spread them out.
- Together, briefly discuss characters implied by the elements you rolled. The GM should quickly list these on a single, separate card/note as everyone talks.
- Players, start snapping up characters! "I want to be that guy." Grab a character sheet and dive into Fast Recruitment.
- GM, scratch elements off your list as players snatch them up.
- Once all the players have grabbed a PC, the GM is left with a lot of scraps of paper. But good scraps! See Sessions and Campaigns for what to do with them.

The Sit-Gen results imply more characters than just the ones from any Who rolls you made.

"Atonement" implies someone atoning and someone wronged. "The slums of a great city" suggests all kinds of people.

Don't get bogged down! Get enough ideas to get started and go. Whether GM or player:

- Don't be afraid to be obvious.
- Build on your fellow player's idea.
- Try to keep pre-play time under 30 minutes.

THE SITUATION GENERATOR

DIE ROLL	WHO	WHAT	WHEN	WHERE	WHY
1	Traveling scholar(s)	Love letter	The eve of a holy day	Busy thoroughfare	Escape
2	Entertainer(s) between gigs	News of a lost relative	The morning of a public execution	A ship traveling dangerous waters	Revenge
3	Soldier(s) separated from their unit	Magnificent beast, theoretically tamable	Just after exile or dismissal from an important post	A bandit-troubled road	Atonement
4	Petty criminal(s) and victim(s)	Hulk of a spaceship used as a building	Just as an enemy returns into one's life	The ruins of a once-proud metropolis	Justice
5	Lover(s), spurned	Instrument of unspeakable torture	The month before a rite of passage	A small village that sees few visitors	Curiosity
6	Member(s) of a great procession (pilgrimage, caravan, army)	Relic revered by competing sects	One year after a great personal loss	Slums of a great city	Status
7	Important official(s) on important business	Map to a cavern of ancient treasures	A couple of days since the food ran out	Days from any human habitation	Wealth
8	Victim(s) of a terrible disaster	Strange gem from another world	The start of a long journey	A lonely dwelling in the wilderness	Love or Lust
9	Master and servant	An artificially intelligent sword	The end of a long journey	Labyrinth built by a great civilization	Survival
10	Spacer(s) stranded planetside	Flying vehicle, crashed or working	Just before or after a great battle	An isolated, little-used spaceport	Mercy
11	Nonhuman(s) passing as human (alien, mutant, robot)	An energy weapon that sometimes works	Upon a meeting of old friends	The holding pens of an alien outpost	Renewal
12	Nonhuman(s) just being themselves	A building whose rooms open on different eras	The present time of the players	A wasteland rife with mutates and chimaeras	Forgetfulness

ELEMENTS OF A PC

PCs use a modified set of *Cortex Plus Action Roleplaying* Traits. By default, PCs do not get Talents or Specialties.

STYLES & ARENAS

Styles replace Attributes. Arenas replace Roles. By default, each takes an array of d12, d10, d8, d6, and d4. But don't distribute them yet!

STYLES - HOW YOU DO THINGS:

- Force: You power your way to your objective, physically, mentally, socially.
- Grace: You use speed, fluidity, balance.
- Subtlety: You get tricksy, and probably false.
- Resilience: You just hang in there until you win.
- Planning: You prepare ahead of time.

ARENAS - WHERE YOU DO THINGS:

- War: The battlefield, the arena, wherever it's violent.
- Another: Dealing with a single person (non-combat).
- Crowds: Many people: parties, audiences, electorates.
- Lore: Knowledge, from history to technology to myth and arcana.
- Place: The world around you; Locations.

For any Action, roll Arena + Style, and maybe Imperatives or Assets.

Examples:

- Force + War to kick somebody's butt.
- Grace + Another to build rapport with someone.
- Planning + Crowds to throw a great party.
- Subtlety + Lore to spot what's keeping an ornithopter from starting.
- Resilience + Place to complete a desert vigil.

SIGNATURE ASSETS

Signature Assets: By default, you get none. But you can buy one or two.

Step your Style or Arena d12 back to a d10 to open a Signature Asset. This gets you either:

- A d8 Asset that's fundamentally mundane—Dad's Sword, an Apartment in Town, a Useful Friend.
- A d6 Asset that's indistinguishable from magic—A Flying Car (yes!), a Useful Friend From The Future, Dad's Talking Sword; these should let you do things you couldn't otherwise even attempt, like fly or raise the dead.

Step your other d12 back to d10 to either:

- Step up your first Signature Asset.
- Open a second Signature Asset.

IMPERATIVES REPLACE DISTINCTIONS

Imperatives work mechanically like Distinctions, but they're stated as a motivation. "Atone for breaking my village's oracle," (an ancient decorative fountain with a still-functioning AI) counts as an Imperative. "Atone for breaking my village's oracle by replacing it with the Vizier Sword of Homan's people" is a better Imperative. And it's a better Imperative yet if Homan is a fellow PC.

Just defining your Imperatives earns you Plot Points, as outlined in the Plot Points section below. Then you earn Plot Points when you include your Imperative at its d4 rating in your dice roll.

DICE AND COMPLICATIONS

PCs always roll Style + Arena. You can choose to roll your Imperative as either a d4 or a d8 when it's germane to your Action. (See Plot Points below.) You can also roll relevant Assets. Keep the best two dice unless you spend Plot Points to Include more.

See the Action Mechanics section for more detail.

COMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Player rolls 1s against the GM—each 1 becomes a free Complication for the GM to use as he sees fit OR a free Opportunity for an NPC in a current Contested Action (GM's option). Players get no Plot Points for it.

GM or player rolls 1s against a player—each 1 becomes a free Opportunity for the opponent of whoever rolled the 1.

The GM uses Complications as described in *Leverage*, page 67 and pages 109-112.

You can take an Opportunity to:

- Take a free beat to attempt to remove a Complication or Asset being used against you, if you can provide narrative justification.
- Take a free Establishment Flashback.
- Change a Basic Action to a Contested Action.
- In a Contested Action, add a second Style or Arena die you can narratively justify to future rolls; OR
- In a Contested Action, switch both your and your opponent's Style or Arena die to a new type.
- In a Timed Action, switch a Style or Arena die in a way your group agrees makes narrative sense and reroll the current beat; you must take the new result.

PLOT POINTS

You earn Plot Points for things that drive the game forward, entangle yourself with other PCs and NPCs, and constructively engage fellow PCs in conflict. Earn them:

- When you declare your first Imperative that involves another PC (positive or negative)
- When you declare your first Imperative that puts you at odds with another PC or NPC
- When you declare your second Imperative
- If you finish pre-play character creation first!
- When you Give In to end a Contested Action against another PC
- When you Defer or Renounce an Imperative. See Ending an Episode
- When the GM (only) spends a Plot Point to Include extra die-values against you
- Any time you roll an Imperative as a D4

For spending Plot Points, see page 13 of the *LEVERAGE RPG*.

At the end of an Episode, each player needs to know how many total Plot Points were earned. The simplest way to handle this is to use a distinct token type for each player.

CHARACTERS

PRE-PLAY CHARACTER CREATION

Before you start play in earnest, do only these things. Remember, some of these steps earn you Plot Points.

1. Get a blank character sheet.
2. Write a name and brief description.
3. Assign D12s to your top Style and Arena. Or, step a D12 down to a D10 to open a Signature Asset, assigning a D10 instead.
4. Assign one other die from the standard array to a Style and one other die to an Arena.
5. State at least one Imperative.
6. Choose any Signature Assets you bought.
7. Tell the GM, "I'm ready!"

CHARACTER CREATION IN PLAY

As play proceeds, complete your character sheet. There's a system to it.

8. Any time you need to roll dice you haven't assigned yet, assign them! For example, your PC has to convince an ancient AI that you totally should have access to the chamber whose entrance it controls. This calls for SUBTLETY + LORE, but you haven't assigned dice to either. Do it now.
9. At the end of a scene you are in, you can fill in one unfilled element—a Trait score, a Signature Asset, or an Imperative.

Remember, once you assign a value you're stuck with it for at least the rest of the Episode, and longer if you replay this PC.

EXPERIENCE

Experience works just as described on pages 51-52 of *LEVERAGE*, except you can't buy or improve Talents or Specialties.

ACTION MECHANICS

ACTIONS, SCENES AND BEATS

Episodes uses all three *CORTEX PLUS ACTION ROLEPLAYING* Types (*LEVERAGE*, pages 68-75), with changes discussed above in Dice and Complications. Also see Consequences and Conditions below, which modifies the Taken Down and Consequence rules.

When PCs and/or NPCs are at odds, and one side wants something the other side just won't give them, either an involved player or the GM can declare it's time to roll dice. The GM always gets initial say on which Action Type—Basic, Contested, Timed—will be used.

If the GM decides to use a Basic Action, the losing side can't turn the contest into a Contested Action. Unless the winning side rolls a 1, then the losing side may choose to take that Opportunity to extend the contest into a Contested Action. The winning side's result stands and the loser rolls again to attempt to raise the stakes. Follow the Contested Action rules until resolved.

A Taken Down result gives the winner wide sway over a defeated PC—capture, exile, and stolen or destroyed Assets are just a few possible results a Taken Down character can expect. Remember the Giving In option.

Only a PC's player can declare her PC dead. You can leave her for dead, but that's the limit. In Dying-Earth SF, death might not be very final anyway.

DECIDING WHAT TRAITS TO ROLL

The GM always gets initial say on which Style and Arena apply to the current Action based on the fictional situation and the players' description of their efforts. The GM is encouraged to go for the obvious choice, guided by the Consequences and Conditions section following. For instance, if one character wants to hurt another, call for the Force die. In Contested Actions, Players may get a chance to switch up Style and Arena dice by taking Opportunities, as described above.

CONSEQUENCES AND CONDITIONS

When you use Force and win a Contested Action, your opponent is Beaten Down. This can mean injured, dead or captured (War); intimidated (Another); cowed or dispersed (Crowds); dealt with, disabled, refuted (Lore); trashed, smashed, ransacked or cleared (Place).

When you win using Grace, your opponent is Dazzled. This can mean escaped, left in the dust, flat-footed (War); impressed, delighted, enamored (Another); rapt, galvanized (Crowds); well-explained, clear (Lore); traversed, well-arranged, propitiated (Place).

When you win using Subtlety, your opponent is Confounded. This can mean faked out, overextended (War); tricked (Another); filled with false conviction (Crowds); laid bare or spoofed (Lore); unearthed or secreted (Place).

When you win using Resilience, your opponent is Outlasted. This can mean exhausted (War); worn down (Another); sapped of conviction or will (Crowds); finally memorized or explained (Lore); survived or transcended (Place).

When you win using Planning, your opponent is Outwitted. This can mean ambushed (War); out-prepared (Another); channeled along harmless paths (Crowds); out-studied (Lore); known or explored (Place).

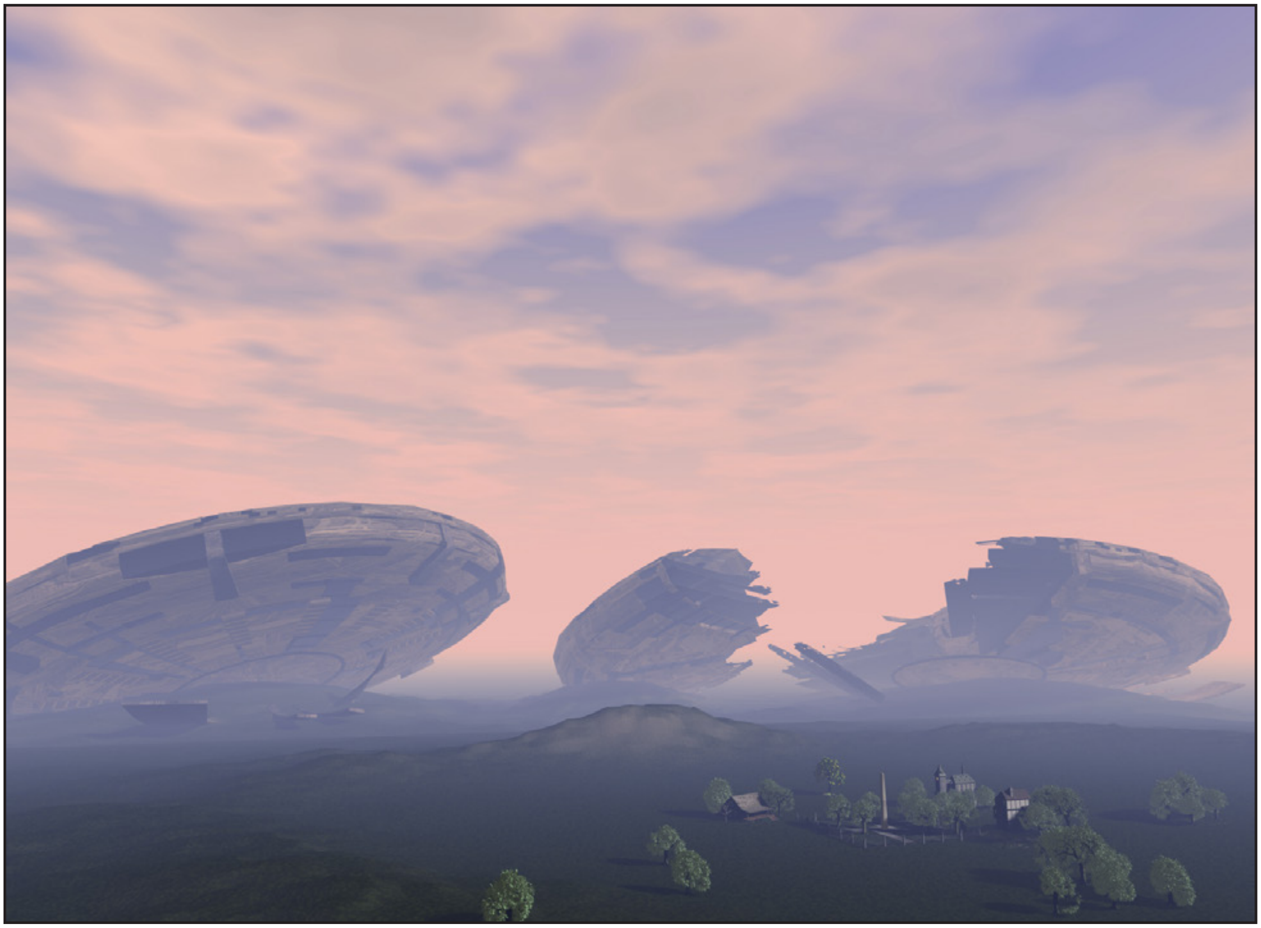
SESSIONS AND CAMPAIGNS

THE STUFF LEFT OVER

You're the GM, looking at a pile of used sticky-notes left over from Character Creation. Congratulations: it's your plot! Own the NPCs and setting bits suggested by the results. Set and close scenes for the PCs, singly, in pairs, and in groups. Give everyone a chance to satisfy their Imperatives.

The important thing is simply to get the session started. Stick something between a PC or two and their Imperatives and your job gets easy. Anything could happen. But at any given instant, only one thing has to happen.

Timed Actions are great for things like competing teams of PCs racing each other to the same destination. Timed Actions also let you call for entertaining sequences of different Style + Arena combinations. Take every excuse to throw in a Timed Action.



PEOPLE AND NAMES

You have a variety of naming options in this genre: Latinate-names, common-noun names, slight misspellings of contemporary names, etc.

For NPCs, see *Leverage*, pages 122-126. Build out NPCs only as you need them.

Big Bads/Goods get a full d4-d12 array of Arenas, and three starting freeform Traits at d12, d10 and d4.

Build vulnerable allies or dependents of PCs like Clients. Build everyone else as an Extra or Agent. Attach Complications to an NPC as it suits you.

ENDING AN EPISODE

End an Episode when all PC Imperatives have been Won, Lost, Renounced or Deferred.

- **Won:** Your PC achieved the Imperative; e.g. escaped the Temporal Thicket.
- **Lost:** Your PC can no longer achieve the Imperative; e.g. her husband was murdered despite her efforts.
- **Renounced:** Your PC gives up on the Imperative; e.g. "Why are we even fighting?! We're both victims here!"
- **Deferred:** Your PC has been balked, and you've reached a good stopping point for the session.

Next, determine how likely it is each PC in this Episode comes back.

PREPARING THE NEXT EPISODE

To figure out which PCs from this Episode come back when, the GM needs to make and maintain the Campaign Roster. The roster table has four columns:

1. PC Name
2. Player Name
3. Priority: Your PC's Priority equals the number of Plot Points your PC earned this Episode (only).
4. Sway: Your (the player's) Sway equals the number of different PCs you've played over the life of the campaign. At the end of the first Episode it's 1.

At the end of the first Episode, fill out your initial roster. You'll update it throughout the campaign to determine which PCs appear in each new Episode.

AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH EPISODE, STARTING WITH THE SECOND...

There are two ways your PC might return this Episode:

The PC with the highest Priority definitely comes back this Episode. If there's a tie, break it in the following order:

1. Highest Sway.
2. Most deferred Imperatives.
3. Mutual agreement.
4. Random roll.

You decide your PC fits one of this new Episode's Sit-Gen selections well. For example, "The morning of a public execution? After what happened to Homan in Episode 3, you just know that's him." See below for instructions on making Sit-Gen selections for Episodes after the first. You never have to take advantage of this option if you don't want to.

Before each new Episode, the GM will make five total selections from the Sit-Gen table and each player will make one. Some selections may now be non-random:

1. If you play a PC returning because she had the highest Priority, you may choose instead of rolling.
2. If you as a player have the highest Sway, you may choose instead of rolling. (Tiebreakers: 1. Highest Priority. 2. Random Roll.) Yes, that means if you have the highest Sway, you can pick an element you know will fit one of your existing PCs, making their return a sure thing.
3. The GM may make a non-random selection.

All remaining selections are done as random rolls per the instructions for the first session. As in the first session, take no more than three selections from any one column.

Cross every returning PC off the Campaign Roster. They'll get added back at the end of the new Episode.

Pull out your returning PC's character sheet and deal with any experience and advancement per the *Leverage* rules. If you deferred an Imperative, it's still there. If you resolved an Imperative, choose a replacement. All other players do Fast Recruitment just like you did in the first Episode. GM, take the scraps and do your thing, again. The scraps may suggest the return of certain NPCs; go for it.

AT THE END OF EACH EPISODE, STARTING WITH THE SECOND...

1. Add your PC's name to the Campaign Roster. (Your PC is either new, or was crossed off the list for returning this Episode.)
2. Set your PC's Priority to the number of Plot Points your PC earned this Episode (only).
3. Update your Sway. The easy way to do this is to count the number of times your name appears next to a PC.

AS A CAMPAIGN CONTINUES...

You may want to replace some default Sit-Gen values with new ones. For example: "I'm sick of slums. How about we substitute in 'A small cargo ship plying the coastline' for any future rolls of 3 on the WHERE table?" Eventually, you'll want to start winding up a campaign. (Your campaign's Earth is dying after all.) A great way to do *that* is to reincorporate elements from earlier Episodes.

One key to reincorporation is to just seize opportunities for it. If you roll "The slums of a great city" three times in a campaign, at least two of those times it should be the same slum. If earlier Episodes have established a religious schism between two sects, and this Episode's Sit-Gen elements call for a new monastic character, have her be from one of those two sects. In the heat of play in early episodes, you'll find yourselves inventing and naming cities, guilds, dead empires and entire alien civilizations on the fly. That's awesome. Just keep notes—a GM job—so all that invention doesn't go to waste.

You can also cut back on random Sit-Gen elements toward the end of a campaign, such as by switching an extra GM selection from random to choice every episode. But there should always be at least one random Sit-Gen element each episode, including the last one.

ACTION ROLEPLAYING

Design: Cam Banks and Ryan Macklin
Development: Cam Banks and Dave Chalker
Cold Fusion Setting: David Hill
Hunters of the Holy Setting: Steve Darlington
Based on the *Leverage Rpg*

THE BASICS

Action Roleplaying is a flavor of the *Cortex Plus* system that favors lightning-fast high-stakes action stories featuring competent and flavorful action heroes. Originally presented as the *Leverage RPG*, *Action Roleplaying* is described here as the core system for other settings and stories with a similar feel: modern spy thrillers, caper flicks, crime stories, and any television adventure show with an ensemble of skilled experts.

WHAT SETTING IS THIS?

While these rules are fundamentals, we've chosen to present them with a basic modern action-adventure theme where the player characters are Agents and the adventures they go on are Missions. These correspond to *Leverage RPG*'s Agents and Jobs. The player responsible for managing the game, playing the Supporting Characters, and providing the Missions for the Agents to tackle is the Gamemaster. This role corresponds to the *Leverage RPG*'s Fixer.

In order to show off the potential of *Action Roleplaying*, we've included two mini-settings for you: Cold Fusion, a sci-fi action setting, and Hunters of the Holy, a supernatural action setting. You can use these, one of the *Action Roleplaying* hacks in the *Hacker's Guide*, or a setting of your own; *Action Roleplaying* is ripe for new settings.

WHO'S WHO OF THE GAME

Action Roleplaying defines the players and the characters that feature in every game session with the following terms.

PLAYERS

The game works well with two to six players, each creating and playing their own Agent. An Agent is an action-adventure hero, someone who belongs to a secret society, spy agency, military organization, or something like that. Every Agent is an expert in his or her field.

GAMEMASTER

The Gamemaster provides the Mission, or adventure/scenario/situation, packed with exciting scenes, locations, and Supporting Characters. A Supporting Character might be Major, Minor, or a Mook. Major Characters include the villain, the rival Agents, and many of the villain's lieutenants or majordomos. Minor Characters include other named but not as significant characters, especially those that don't do much in the way of action. Mooks are the faceless hordes of ninjas, thugs, henchmen, and mobsters that are fairly easy to dispatch.

TRAITS

Each Agent's Agent Sheet is mostly a list of Traits and related game statistics. The three main categories of Traits belonging to Agents are Attributes, Roles, and Distinctions. There's also space on the Agent Sheet for Talents, which cover special tricks and techniques the Agents picked up in their line of work, and Plot Points, which are a game currency you can spend to grease the wheels in your favor. We'll take a closer look at each category in a little bit. This book calls out most specific Traits by using small caps, Like This.

Each Trait has a die rating. When that Trait comes into play, you'll roll that die. Bigger dice tend to roll higher, but no die is safe from rolling a 1 (rolling a 1 is significant—we'll get to this later).

ATTRIBUTES

When it comes to describing raw physical and mental ability, Attributes are the yardstick. Every time your Agent does something where the outcome's uncertain, you're going to be rolling an Attribute that relates to it. Each Attribute's die rating represents how significant that Attribute is to your Agent's performance. Every Agent has the same six Attributes: Agility, Alertness, Intelligence, Strength, Vitality, and Willpower.

ROLES

Your Agent's place in the Agency is decided by where her skill and expertise is most obvious. There are five broad Traits that encompass these skills, and we call them Roles. Your Agent has a die rating in each of the five: Brains, Face, Muscle, Sneak, and Tech. The Role with the largest die rating is called your Primary Role, and that may determine which Talents you're likely to pick up. You roll one of these Traits with your Attribute whenever you do something in the game.

Roles are also associated with Specialties, specific and narrow fields of training. A Specialty can arguably fall under multiple Roles, but you'll need to decide on one in particular. This covers things like driving, explosives, and cooking. They have die ratings, too, but you can only use them when you use the Role they're attached to.

DISTINCTIONS

Is your Agent a Drunk? Is she Smarter Than She Looks? Maybe she's a Geek, or a Jock, or a Control Freak? These are all examples of Distinctions, descriptive Traits that fall outside of the area of Attributes and Roles. Most Agents have three Distinctions. They can either help you out or make life difficult for you—or both—but you decide which is which, and when. Distinctions don't have a specific die rating; how good or bad their influence is depends on the circumstances. They exist to make playing your Agent more interesting and, at times, get you into all sorts of trouble.

TALENTS

Not every spy or special operative is the same, and this is reflected in your Agent's choice of Talents. These are the things your Agent keeps up her sleeve or relies upon to get the job done, and they frequently take the form of exceptions to the normal rules. Most can only be used on certain occasions or when some condition is met. They don't have a die rating, but they do influence Traits that have dice, or change dice that are already in play.

ASSETS AND COMPLICATIONS

Not all Traits belong to Agents or get marked down on your Agent Sheet. Some are temporary, reflecting things that help your Agent out (Assets) or make things difficult for you (Complications). These Traits often start out with only a minor influence on the Mission, but as more and more twists and turns take place they can become game-changers.

Assets are included in the roll with your Agent's other dice when they're applicable. You might have an Asset like Hefty Crowbar, which could help you break into a locked building, or Thermal Jacket, which makes undertaking Missions in the Alps much easier. They can be environmental, too: Footholds Everywhere is an Asset that would help you climb a cliff face. You can create them yourself by spending Plot Points.

The Gamemaster rolls Complications as part of your opposition's dice and they make it harder for you to get the results you want. Complications might include things like Extra-Alert Security or Slippery Floors. A Complication comes up as a result of rolling a 1 on your dice, which is why the smaller your dice the more likely things are going to get…complicated. Complications earn you Plot Points, because the Gamemaster must hand a Plot Point to you in order to create them from your bad roll.

OTHER TRAITS

As well as your Agent's Traits and any Assets or Complications that might crop up in the course of a Mission, many Supporting Characters are described by Traits that are both descriptive and functional. In fact, a Mook is not much more than a single Trait, like Seedy Merchant, Chef, or Security Guard. Locations are given Traits, too, when they might be useful as opposition to your Agents: Vault, Alarm System, and Laser-Filled Hallway Of Death are similar to fixed Assets or Complications that help the Gamemaster describe where the action takes place.

DICE

Action Roleplaying uses five different kinds of dice: d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12. The number tells you how many sides the die has, and the more sides, the bigger the numbers. If you see a number in front of the d—such as 2d6—it means you roll that many dice of that type. We assume that if there's no number there, it's just a singleton.

TAKING ACTION

As a player, you make decisions for your Agent in response to the challenging situations the Gamemaster presents. Whenever your Agent takes action, the Gamemaster chooses two of your Action Traits to form your Action Pool. In the default *Action Roleplaying* rules, this is an Attribute and a Role.

The Gamemaster picks up dice based on what your Agent is up against. This is usually a difficulty die (d6 being average, d8 hard, and d10 pretty darn difficult) and one or more dice based on Traits possessed by the opposition or the situation.

Usually, the Gamemaster rolls his dice first and totals them up. This is called setting the stakes. You then roll and total up your own dice from your Action Pool, hoping to raise the stakes by rolling higher. If you raise the stakes, your Agent succeeds in the action you were hoping to take. If you fail to raise the stakes, something else happens.

Sometimes you or the Gamemaster get more than two dice—such as when you use Distinctions, Specialties, Assets, and so forth. In those cases, you add two of the dice to set or raise the stakes. You can spend one of your Plot Points to add in another of your dice to your total. Spending a second Plot Point lets you add a fourth die, and so on.

- You're trying to clear the room of second-rate ninjas? STRENGTH + MUSCLE
- You're leaping into ductwork to escape the notice of security? AGILITY + SNEAK
- You're scanning the room for a suitable scam target? ALERTNESS + FACE
- You're going over the latest piece of military intelligence? INTELLIGENCE + BRAINS
- You're trying to decipher an encrypted database well after 3am? VITALITY + TECH

COMPLICATIONS

If you roll a 1 on any of your dice, the Gamemaster introduces a Complication. Whether your Agent succeeds or fails at the action, a Complication means something else has gone wrong, making life difficult.

When the Gamemaster introduces a Complication, you get a Plot Point; aside from Distinctions, this is the main way for you to gain Plot Points. The Gamemaster notes down the Complication—sticky notes or index cards work well for this—and adds a "D6" next to it. For the rest of the adventure, if that Complication comes into play, the Gamemaster gets to roll an extra D6.

If more than one 1 comes up on your dice, the Gamemaster may choose to step up the Complication by one step for each additional 1 that shows on the dice. For example, if you rolled three 1s on your dice, the Complication starts out as D10. However, the Gamemaster still only pays a single Plot Point.

If a Complication is ever stepped up beyond a D12, it has overwhelmed your Agent and keeps you from acting further in the scene until it's removed or no longer hinders you. You can force action by spending a Plot Point, but you may only keep one die for your total rather than two. This is a severe handicap, but sometimes it's necessary!

If the Gamemaster rolls a 1 on his dice, this is known as an Opportunity, and any player can spend a Plot Point to step an existing Complication back to a smaller size die. A D6 becomes a D4, and a D4 goes away. If the Gamemaster's dice include multiple 1s, you may step back existing Complications by more than one step. The player still only pays a single Plot Point. Opportunities can also be used to activate Talents—see page 126 for more on Talent Activation.

COMPLICATIONS AS INJURY OR CONSEQUENCE

Complications may also represent those times when you are hurt or suffer some manner of debilitating setback. If a bad guy takes action against you and you fail to stop him, you're usually at his mercy. Instead of being struck down, captured, or defeated, you can choose instead to take a Complication. This works just as if you had rolled a 1 on your dice, but you don't gain a Plot Point. In a sense, you're paying that Plot Point immediately to offset your loss. Complications acquired this way should represent your injury or setback, such as BROKEN ARM or IDENTITY THEFT.

The Gamemaster may also suggest that you step up an existing Complication when you take this option or when you roll a 1 on a subsequent roll of the dice. You may find that in a long drawn out fight with your enemy, your Agent just gets progressively more beat up or harassed, only to pull through in the end… it works for so many action heroes, it can work for you. Or, as sometimes happens, you're just putting off the inevitable.

RECOVERING FROM COMPLICATIONS

Many Complications are simply temporary problems and will go away before the next scene begins. An ICY ROOFTOP or NOISY CROWD can be taken care of just by changing locations or spending some time out of the action. Complications that represent injury or major consequences stick around, however. In order to get rid of them, your Agent or one of her colleagues must take action.

Whether by using EMT training or putting the right code in a nationwide database, an Agent or Supporting Character may roll against the Complication and an appropriate difficulty. If successful, the Complication is gone. Even on a failed attempt, however, the Complication's still stepped back by one, but you can't try to recover that Complication again until some time passes. Recovery of this sort should take up most of a scene dedicated to that chunk of time in the story.

If you roll a 1 on a successful attempt to recover a Complication, the Gamemaster may introduce a new Complication related to the one that was just recovered! If you roll a 1 on a failed attempt, the Complication you were trying to recover doesn't get stepped back, it gets worse by one step. Watch out!

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

When you raise the stakes, you got what you wanted and you can narrate the outcome. What this means usually depends on what you said you were trying to do. Were you trying to hack the mainframe? It's done. Knock out the bad guy? You did that, too. Describe it and then let the story move on.

If you raised the stakes by 5 or more, then you've got an extraordinary success. You not only got what you wanted, but the Gamemaster throws something extra your way. Maybe it's a free Asset you can use in your next scene, or a step up for an existing Asset. Maybe you can lose a Complication that's been hanging around for too long.

When you fail, however, you should try to be entertaining in how you describe your failure. You're not going to have any lasting effects other than the story heading in a different direction than you wanted, unless you picked up a Complication or you rolled all 1s and came up with a total of zero. In the latter case, the Gamemaster is free to describe exactly how much mess you're in and lay it on thick.

OPTIONAL RULE: FLOURISHES

Some *Action Roleplaying* settings demand more than just a narrative benefit from an extraordinary success. With this optional rule, if you roll 5 or more greater than your opposition, you succeed with a flourish! When this happens, your action produces unexpected yet beneficial results. Just as with any success, the Gamemaster should ask you to describe your amazing efforts, but that's just icing on the cake. There's an added benefit, as well.

When the flourish rule is in play and you roll 5 or more than your opposition, you may "bank" a die equal to the Gamemaster's difficulty die for use later in the Mission. If there was no difficulty die, you bank the highest rolling die in the opposing dice pool. These banked dice are called flourish dice, and you may save as many of them as you like. Write a note on your Agent Sheet to indicate how many flourish dice you've earned and what size.

USING FLOURISH DICE

To use a flourish die, spend a Plot Point and roll the die, adding it to your total in any action. You may do this at any time after rolling the dice to get a total, even if you rolled first and your opponent's rolled his own dice, but before the Gamemaster announces the result of the action. You may be so successful that you earn another flourish die! Whatever happens, erase the flourish die you used from your Agent Sheet.

For example, if the Gamemaster sets the stakes with a roll of 12 and you attempt to raise the stakes but only roll a 10, you might choose to spend a Plot Point to roll a D8 flourish die you banked earlier. The die comes up a 4, which kicks your total up to 14. Good enough for a success!

Watch out, though. Flourish dice can backfire on you. If the flourish die comes up 1, the Gamemaster may introduce a Complication. On the plus side, if this happens you get your Plot Point back immediately. In this case, you can choose to accept the 1 and add it to your total, or keep the flourish die and leave your total how it was.

GAMEMASTER FLOURISHES

If you're using the flourish die rules, the Gamemaster doesn't pick up or use flourish dice. If the Gamemaster rolls 5 or more than the player on his rolls, he instead removes a flourish die from the Agent in question equal to or less than the difficulty die he just rolled, or, if no difficulty die was involved, the highest rolling die. If the Agent had no flourish dice marked on her Agent Sheet yet or no flourish dice of equal or lesser size, nothing happens. Either way, the Gamemaster narrates something to justify the bad guy upstaging the Agent in that moment!

PLOT POINTS

Plot Points are a game currency that you spend to affect the plot over the course of your Mission. Plot Points give you more dice, make the dice you have more powerful, and let you use some of your special Talents. You need to keep track of your Plot Points somehow. One way is to write them on your Agent Sheet as tally marks. Another option is to use poker chips or some other kind of token (pennies, paperclips, spent ammunition…you get the idea).

Everybody gets 1 Plot Point to start the Mission. Don't worry, you'll get more.

SPENDING PLOT POINTS

Plot Points can be spent to include more dice into your total, to activate some Talents, and to create new Assets.

Including More Dice: After any roll, you may spend a Plot Point to include more dice out of those you just rolled in your total. In this way, your total may be three, four, or five dice added together. The only limit to how many dice you may add to your total is how many dice you rolled to begin with and how many Plot Points you have available.

Activating Talents: Some of your Talents may have effects that must be activated by spending a Plot Point. Any effect that's activated like this lasts for the duration of the Action you're using it on; once you start a new Action, the effect must be activated again.

Creating New Assets: You can create your own Assets by spending a Plot Point. Your new Asset starts out as a D6 and lasts for the rest of the scene. If you spend two Plot Points, you can keep it for the rest of the Mission—assuming something doesn't happen to remove or eliminate it. This allows you to give some dramatic weight to an item (LENGTH OF PIPE D6), part of the scenery (UNLOCKED DOOR D6), or even effectively create a new

Extra (Handyman d6), as if to say, "this thing's important to the story."

Adding a Flourish Die: If you're using the flourish die rules, you can spend a Plot Point to roll one of your banked flourish dice and add it to your total, even after your opponent has rolled to raise the stakes.

THE GAMEMASTER AND PLOT POINTS

Typically, spent Plot Points go into the big pile in the middle of the table, in front of the Gamemaster. The Gamemaster may spend Plot Points on his rolls, too, but he doesn't have his own private supply the way players do. Instead, when he spends Plot Points in a roll against you, he picks up a Plot Point from the pile and slides it over to you. Whenever you get Plot Points like this, keep them separate from the Plot Points you already have. You can't use these until the current Action has been resolved and the dice are set aside.

EARNING PLOT POINTS

So, Plot Points are useful—but you only start the Mission with one of them. How do you get more? We've already mentioned that when the Gamemaster wants to spend a Plot Point on one of his Supporting Characters, he has to hand one over, but there are other, more painful ways to get them.

We've talked about Complications as Traits that the Gamemaster adds in. Well, whenever you roll a 1, the Gamemaster might hand you a Plot Point to activate that Complication. So, while you might not have rolled so well and the situation's just got a little more complicated, at least it gets you a Plot Point. Complications start as a d6, but the Gamemaster can use any additional 1s that you or others roll to step up the Complication to d8 or more.

You also get a Plot Point whenever you use a Distinction as a d4, or you use one of your Action Traits rated at a d4 in your Action Pool. So, if you have a Muscle d4 or an Alertness d4 and use that in an Action, you get a Plot Point for being so reckless (and interesting).

COLLABORATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

Here are three short lists of what everybody is responsible for. These aren't exhaustive, but they're pretty concise summaries of who does what.

PLAYERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- Deciding what their Agents do.
- Deciding whether their Agents get taken out or take on Complications.
- Confronting the problems the Gamemaster throws in front of them.
- Pointing their Agents in directions that make for good stories.
- Supporting other Agents and giving them a shot at what they're good at.
- Deciding how their Agents change and grow over time.
- In general, telling the story of their Agents.

GAMEMASTER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- Presenting problems (or apparent problems) for the Agents to confront.
- Deciding how Supporting Characters can give the Agents exciting challenges.
- Presenting the Mission, the Situation, and the Opposition.
- Managing Complications and structuring the scenes.
- In general, stirring up trouble.

EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- Making everybody else at the table look awesome.
- Offering suggestions to other players, but respecting the decisions they make in the end.

AGENT CREATION

So you're making your character—or Agent—for a high-octane game of *Action Roleplaying*. Great! Agents are fairly quick to make, and this process is geared to get you playing as soon as possible.

Agent Creation has two parts: making your starting background before play and revealing details during play. This gets you into playing faster, and it makes your first session with this Agent feel like those movies and TV shows where everyone finds out something cool about each of your Agents constantly.

Each part of an Agent is described on the following pages, along with how to make that part either before or during play.

AGENT CONCEPT

The first thing you need is a concept. Are you some sort of elite martial arts commando? Master of disguise? Hacker extraordinaire? Superspy and brilliant thief? Think of a few words that describe the Agent, and then move on to your Action Traits.

CHARACTER CREATION QUESTIONS

Throughout Agent Creation, sections will have you ask yourself about different parts of your Agent. These questions are intended to spark ideas, not be an essay test. It's fine to answer some mentally, write down answers if it helps you remember, or even just quickly skim them and play to see what those answers might be.

Above all, don't let them get in the way. Have a good idea for an answer? Great! You don't? Think about it for a moment, and then move on.

ACTION TRAITS

Your Agent has a total of eleven Action Traits, divided into six Attributes and five Roles. Some versions of *Action Roleplaying* might be different. You don't select all of your Action Trait dice ratings right up front; some of them are assigned dice later.

ATTRIBUTES

Your six Attributes are: Agility, Alertness, Intelligence, Strength, Vitality, and Willpower.

Some Attributes are physical in nature, and the others are cerebral. None are specifically social—social-minded Agents use keen bodies and minds to deal with those situations.

AGILITY

This Attribute measures how quickly your body reacts to what you want to do, how fast you can move around, hand-eye coordination (crucial to things like firing weapons), and generally how flexible and athletic you are.

ALERTNESS

This is your ability to notice things and mental acuity, how well you notice details others don't, react to sudden changes in mood or environment, and think on your feet in general. Alertness can be used actively whenever noticing things quickly is the key component to an action.

INTELLIGENCE

This reflects both vast sums of knowledge in your mind and your ability to command that information to get things done. That doesn't just mean what you've learned in books, but also your experiences in life. It also covers taking information you acquire and putting the pieces together to form a whole.

STRENGTH

This Attribute focuses on your muscular capabilities, useful for forcing something opened or closed, lifting and moving things, and of course for fighting.

VITALITY

This covers your physical endurance; stress tolerance (like being beaten in a fight) or your ability to survive and thrive in extreme situations like the arctic, desert, being underwater—even being dumped in a foreign alley where you don't speak the language.

WILLPOWER

This Attribute details your mental resolve and ability to withstand social pressure. You'll use Willpower when you're concentrating on delicate work amidst distractions, standing up to someone pressuring you, and even pressuring someone into caving by staring them down.

AGENT CREATION OVERVIEW

The first part of Agent Creation involves coming up with a few core ideas.

- You'll come up with a basic concept in a few words (page 120).
- Then you'll come up with some of your Action Traits: Attributes (page 121) and Roles (page 122). Attributes cover your approach to doing an action, and Roles cover what action you're doing.

With each choice, you'll be prompted with a question to think about. You won't fill in all of the Action Traits right away, just enough to support your basic concept.

- After that, you'll come up with one of your three Distinctions (page 124). The other two will be filled out in play.
- You'll take one Plot Point as a starting Agent (page 126). As you flesh out more details, you'll gain and spend Plot Points.
- Finally, you'll sketch out a few details about your identity (page 126), including your name, nationality, and affiliations. (Of course, you could also be undercover, so nothing says what you come up with now is your real identity.)

The second part involves revealing new things about your Agent in play (see Finishing your Agent During Play, page 127). That includes:

- The rest of your Action Traits and Distinctions.
- Your Specialties (page 125)—specific ways where you excel in a Role. You'll either have one rated high or two rated lower.
- Your Signature Assets (page 126)—special gear or contacts you're able to utilize in the field. You'll have two Signature Assets.
- And finally, your Talents (page 126)—ways where your Agent can change how the rules of the game work because you're just that awesome. You'll have two Talents.

There's no specific order to these; reveal them as you see fit.

CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

Before Play: Pick one Attribute as core to you. That Attribute is rated at d10. Once you pick one, ask yourself the following questions:

- What lead to this being important to you?
- Were you always this good, or did you have to work for it?
- What one or two key events in your life featured this Attribute (whether you were good at it then or needed to be but wasn't)?
- Then pick one Attribute as a weakness or hindrance. That Attribute is rated at d6. Then ask yourself the following questions:
- Was this always a weakness, or did something happen in the past to make it a weakness?
- What situation seems to come up where this gets in the way?

During Play: You'll fill in the other Attributes during reveals. Once you've filled them all in, you'll have one of these two setups:

- Two Attributes at d10 (one already picked), two at d8, and two at d6
- One Attribute at d10 (already picked), four at d8, and one at d6

ROLES

The core of attempting something in *Action Roleplaying* involves an Agent's Roles. These five Traits cover a wide variety of situations that Agents get into on a mission. Roles are very broad, more about mindset and the high concept of what you're doing rather than a specific set of skills. When you talk about doing something, you'll describe the action and the Gamemaster will tell you what Role that requires.

Since Agents in *Action Roleplaying* are extremely competent characters, you don't need individual skills to tell us what you do: someone with Muscle d10 is equally comfortable using fists, a baseball bat, firearm, rocket launcher, wine bottle, frying pan, whatever. (Though you might prefer one over the other, either just as a character quirk or in the form of a Specialty, page 125.)

Many real-world situations are purely associated with a single Role—things like fighting, hacking, conning, etc.—that are listed with those Traits. Other situations are flexible, as noted in Situations and Roles (page 124).

CHOOSING ROLES

Before Play: Pick one Role as core to you. That Role is rated at d10, and defines your character—if you pick Muscle, you're the Muscle of the group, and so on. Once you pick one, ask yourself the following questions:

- What lead to this being your main skill set?
- Did you plan to be good at this, or did you plan for something else and life took a different turn?
- What one or two key events in your life featured this Role (whether you were good at it then or needed to be but wasn't)?

During Play: You'll fill in the other Roles during reveals. Once you've filled them all in, you'll have: one Role at d10 (already picked), one at d8, one at d6, and two at d4.

BRAINS

The Brains is about action that's dependent on strategy, planning, thinking six steps ahead, and organizing a disparate group of people despite their egos or personal circumstances. Every operation needs somebody to be the Brains, but it doesn't map directly to intelligence. Sometimes, the Brains is actually just remarkably well-educated and that education or instinct is what pulls all the weight.

Situations: Tactics, analysis, figuring out schematics, figuring out coded info, org charts, clues, forensic evidence, and applying knowledge directly to a problem. The Brains also gives the best orders, arranges the best deals, and understands the situation faster.

FACE

The Face is all about action that's manipulative and deceptive—getting people to do what you want and figuring out how they tick.

Situations: Fast-talking, charming, intimidating, or otherwise making people do what you need them to. Also reading people's emotional state and figuring out their weak points. Different from the Brains because it's all about psychology and tells rather than information and analysis.

MUSCLE

The Muscle is all about action that's dangerous and direct—whether mixing it up in a bar room brawl, handling a bunch of trained Mossad agents, getting into an all-out firefight, or placing some C4 to open a door and make a quick getaway.

Situations: Physical fighting, gunfights, using explosive ordinance, or driving the getaway car. Includes knowing all of the sort of stuff the heavy would know, or an ex-soldier, or a thug.

SNEAK

The Sneak is all about action that's elusive and hidden—including your ability to detect others with those skills. This Role is also about access, getting into places that you're not meant to go, including locked doors, safes, and anywhere else where physical barriers are.

Situations: Infiltrating, safecracking, avoiding notice, casing, blending in. It's about knowing everything a thief, scout, or similarly stealthy Agent would know.

TECH

The Tech is all about action involving gear, technology, and, most importantly, information. This Role covers dealing with machines and electronics, hacking into networks to retrieve or alter data, and doing electronic surveillance and counter-surveillance.

Situations: Building, hacking, breaking and sabotage, analyzing mechanics or electronics, surveillance, defusing explosive ordinance.

PAIRING ATTRIBUTES AND ROLES

When you're describing your actions, the core two parts of your action are your Action Traits. That means every action involves an Attribute and a Role. Roles are pretty straightforward: describe what you're trying to pull off, and a Role covers that. Attributes are flexible—they cover how you're going about a particular action.

Plenty of actions will lead to the same combination of Attribute and Role each time, and some actions will vary depending on how you describe it. (Keep in mind that how you describe it can also affect the Assets and Complications that could come into play, but that's all covered in Actions, page 135.)

BRAINS

Brains + Agility**:** Executing a plan that requires precise timing; reacting to a sudden event to adjust the plan.

Brains + Alertness**:** Sensing the weak points in a contained situation; getting a quick read of someone else's plan.

THE BRAINS

The Brains can be the toughest Role to play, because it's usually less active than the other Roles, is tougher to pair with physical Attributes, and also because the player has to try to stay one step ahead of everyone else. There's a few ways to make this easier to manage if it's an issue in your game.

First, you could just leave the Brains out altogether, either by just not having anyone assign their d10 to it (and always make it secondary) or drop the role completely (see page 152 for details on playing with 4 roles).

Second, instead of the combinations above, you could make Brains a special Role that couples with the other Roles. That would make the combinations:

- Brains + Face: Research a mark and gather all the details on loved ones, habits, bank accounts, etc.; execute a long con.
- Brains + Muscle: Small or large scale tactics; battlefield strategy.
- Brains + Sneak: Develop backup plans for escape; put key tools into place after a security checkpoint.
- Brains + Tech: Plans for massive machines and other technological undertakings.

That way, the Role becomes less focused on taking its own actions, and more on helping the actions of the other Roles, in much the way you'd use an Attribute in the set of Action Traits (see page 121.)

Brains + Intelligence**:** The go-to combination involving most analytical decisions; also recalling specific information relevant to the plan.

Brains + Strength**:** Using force against a weak point or structure; seizing advantage in a fistfight.

Brains + Vitality**:** Staying focused on an objective; clearing your head of physical pain; motivating exhausted Agents.

Brains + Willpower**:** Improving morale when all seems lost; asserting your own authority in a chaotic situation.

FACE

Face + Agility**:** Pick pockets while keeping a mark's attention; impress someone with your athleticism.

Face + Alertness**:** Read a room and know who's an easy target and who's not; realize that someone else is trying to con you; figure out someone's emotional state; fast-talk someone into give you access or letting you pass.

Face + Intelligence: Know a mark's weaknesses and buttons to push.

Face + Strength: Intimidate people with your brawn or displays of physical power, whether demonstrated or implied; impress people with those same characteristics.

Face + Vitality: out-drink an enemy Agent; maintain a disguise in a situation for hours.

Face + Willpower: Browbeat or socially cow someone into giving in to you; gamble for hours while paying more attention to your target than your luck.

MUSCLE

Muscle + Agility: Use a firearm; avoid combat by dodging; use martial arts focused on positioning rather than harming; driving aggressively.

Muscle + Alertness: Notice if guards are concealing weapons; use a random improvised weapon; know the make or model of a pistol by hearing it fire one shot; notice if you're about to be ambushed.

Muscle + Intelligence: Focus on pressure points and other weaknesses; fool opponents with a feint.

Muscle + Strength: Use your fists or a melee weapon; push a heavy crate off of a rooftop.

Muscle + Vitality: Take a punch; fire from a sniper position.

Muscle + Willpower: Withstand torture; intimidate the hell out of somebody.

SNEAK

Sneak + Agility: Crawl around air ducts and other tight crawlspaces; get over fences and other common means of infiltration; follow without being noticed.

Sneak + Alertness: Evade motion detectors and other security systems, human or electronic; notice those systems in the first place; notice others trying to sneak; quickly crack a simple safe by listening to the tumblers lock.

Sneak + Intelligence: Look at a building's exterior or floor plan and know the best way to get in and get out; case a place unobtrusively; crack a complex safe.

Sneak + Strength: Infiltration methods that are as much about power as stealth—lift a manhole or open a fire door without being heard.

Sneak + Vitality: Maneuver around underwater passages, sewers, and other places where people really shouldn't be; hide for a long time in a cramped location.

Sneak + Willpower: Hold still and not give yourself away when there are guards literally inches from you otherwise unaware; crack a safe under pressure.

SITUATIONS AND ROLES

Some situations can bleed into different Roles, all depending on what you're trying to do. Few illustrate this better than driving. Are you trying to run someone off the road, or avoid that? You're rolling Muscle. Or are you trying to get away unnoticed by the local authorities? That's Sneak. Trying to get more out of the vehicle in order to pull off something really difficult, like jumping a bridge, would be Tech.

There are a few places where two Roles clearly cover the same situation, just from different angles—like Sneak and Tech both being good for breaking into an electronically locked door. In those cases, it's just about personal style and the tools you have on hand. Someone using Sneak would need sophisticated tools of the trade, but could do it while people are walking by. Someone using Tech could jury-rig it to open with just a pocket screwdriver, but certainly not while anyone's watching unless he wants to alert people to a little breaking and entering.

TECH

Tech + Agility: Handle delicate work, like defusing a bomb or tinkering with something inside a moving vehicle.

Tech + Alertness: Find something useful among a bunch of random parts so you can jury-rig or sabotage something; notice that a device or piece of code is booby-trapped.

Tech + Intelligence: Construct or analyze some sort of device or software program; recall a series of important weaknesses about a specific technical system.

Tech + Strength: Make heavy machinery do what you want, or break it with physical strength so that it can't be repaired anytime soon (or at all).

Tech + Vitality: Work in bitter cold or other conditions inhospitable to either you or your tech; work into the night and next day to get things done.

Tech + Willpower: Push tech to beyond its limits, like that Scottish guy on the USS Enterprise.

DISTINCTIONS

A Distinction is a short phrase, statement, or sometimes a single word that describes how your Agent is set apart from others. Distinctions can come from your Agent's background, personality, physical features, or whatever else you can think of that has to do with your Agent and is more or less inseparable.

Distinctions are dual-purpose Traits: they can be used as a d8 Trait or a d4 Trait in any dice roll, depending on

CHOOSING DISTINCTIONS

Do the following things to determine when you get Distinctions.

Before Play: Write down one Distinction. Once you pick one, ask yourself the following questions:

- When did this Distinction become a part of your life?
- How did that happen?
- How has it come to help you out, salvage an operation going bad, or even save your life?
- How has it complicated your life?

The last two answers are important, because if you can't come up with good answers for those, you'll likely struggle with using this Distinction in play.

During Play: You'll make two more Distinctions during reveals.

whether the Distinction might contribute to your success or get in your way. If you choose to use a Distinction as a D4, you also gain a Plot Point as a reward for playing your Agent as someone whose flaws make her interesting!

You don't have to use a Distinction on every roll, and you get to choose whether your Distinction is used positively or negatively. Distinctions are a way that you, as a player, get to turn your hero's story potential into a game mechanic reality.

Some examples of Distinctions:

- Insufferably Right All the Time
- Prepared
- A Little Too Prone to Violence
- Control Freak
- Cool under Pressure
- Classic Beauty
- Trendsetter
- Smarter Than I Look
- Bad Boy/Girl
- KGB Through and Through
- Burned CIA Agent
- Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

SPECIALTIES

Specialties are areas of training, skill, or experience that your Agent may use to your advantage. They represent the knowledge or ability that gives you the edge you need to pull off an epic heist—qualities innate to you, not about stuff you carry around or people you know.

Each Specialty has a rank and corresponding die type: Expert (D6), Master (D8), or Grandmaster (D10). It's also linked to one of your Roles. When using that Role, you can also include the Specialty as one of the dice in your action, provided the Specialty applies to that situation.

You might look at these and think they're a bit similar to Distinctions. The main difference is that these can't bite you (and give you a Plot Point for doing so) like Distinctions can, and they're linked to Roles rather than general use.

Example Specialties:

- **Brains:** History, Inspiration, Politics, Puzzles.
- **Face:** Crime Lore, High Society, Babyface.
- **Muscle:** Krav Maga, Freerunning, Stare Down, Drunken Fighting.
- **Sneak:** Tight Places, Safecracking, Ropewalking, Sleight of Hand.
- **Tech:** Security Systems, Phishing, Retrofitting, TV Repair.

Note: You can use a Specialty for a different Role by paying a Plot Point. So you can use your Muscle's Krav Maga D8 in a Face situation when you need to bluff as a personal trainer; it just takes a bit more juice than when you're using it to beat up a bunch of thugs.

CHOOSING SPECIALTIES

You'll either start with two Expert Specialties or one Master Specialty.

Before Play: Don't write down your Specialties yet.

During Play: When you create your Specialties, you have a choice between two Expert Specialties or one Master Specialty.

If you're wondering why you'd choose two Expert Specialties instead of one Master Specialty, remember that each one's tied to a Role; this way you can have two Roles covered by the same Specialty, if you really wanted to. Whichever way you go tells everyone whether you're hyper-focused or an Agent with breadth.

SIGNATURE ASSETS

Signature Assets work like regular Assets (page 117)—they give you an extra die to roll on actions when you're able to work them in. They're in a sense the opposite of Specialties: they're about stuff you have or people you know, not about qualities innate to you.

They're always rated at D6. And they're general use, not tied to a particular Role—though your Roles will probably give you ideas for Signature Assets to pick. Here are some examples tied to different Roles:

Example Signature Assets:

- **Brains:** Library Of Classic Literature; Political Strategist; Safe House.
- **Face:** Briefcase Of Alternate Ids; Old Friends In The Agency; Favorite Nightspot.
- **Muscle:** Big Gun; Sledgehammer; Local Thugs.
- **Sneak:** Safe House; Rappelling Rig; Chuck The Fence And Shady Old Flirt.
- **Tech:** Sweet Custom Laptop; Universal Multi-Tool; Heather, Hacker Who Can Find Dirt On Anyone.

Take a look at the What About Gear? sidebar (page 127) for more on how gear works in *Action Roleplaying*.

CHOOSING SIGNATURE ASSETS

Before Play: Don't write down any Signature Assets yet.

During Play: You'll create two Signature Assets during reveals.

TALENTS

Talents are the amazing tricks that Agents have, going above and beyond skills, contacts, and gear. In short, Talents are what turn a competent civilian into a true Agent—one of you guys.

Each one grants special rules to Agents who have it. Along with a description, each Talent has three key parts:

Role: Talents are associated with Roles. You need to have a D10 in the Talent's Role in order to take this Talent. Some Talents are listed as "open," which are available to anyone. Others might be available to multiple Roles, but not every Role.

Activation: These are the situations or circumstances where the Talent can be applied—the cause to the Talent's effect. Talents can have a wide variety of activations based on: narrative details, what characters are doing in the same scene, Opportunities or Complications rolled, using a certain type of action or a specific Action Trait, and so on. Some require a combination of those.

Particularly powerful Talents require spending a Plot Point to activate, possibly in addition to some other situational element.

Effect: The effects Talents have when activated vary! This could cover some advantage you get (in terms of die, rerolls, negating Opportunities, etc.), change the narrative details about the situation you're in, give you more information about what's going on, give someone else an advantage, and so on.

For the list of sample Talents and how to make your own, start on page 130.

CHOOSING TALENTS

Before Play: Don't write down any Talents yet.

During Play: You'll create two Talents during reveals. The list of example Talents starts on page 130. Use them as-is or as templates to make your own.

THE REST

Here's how to handle the rest of the Agent Sheet right before you get started playing.

STARTING PLOT POINTS

You start with one Plot Point once you've finished this far. You earn more by continuing to flesh out your character using flashback montages in play (page 127), by using D4s from Distinctions or Action Traits, or when the Gamemaster buys Complications.

At the beginning of every session after the first, you start with two Plot Points.

MISSION SUCCESSES

You start with zero Mission successes. That doesn't mean you haven't been amazing before! These are used to track getting better over time, so with every successful Mission in play, you gain points that you can use to advance. See Advancements on page 132 for more information.

YOUR IDENTITY

Of course, you need a name! It could be your real name, a code name, one of many false identities—anything to get you started. You can (and should!) reveal more about your identity over play, so a name is all you need at the moment.

Likewise, having a sense of your nationality (or at least whatever accent you're faking at the moment), government or criminal affiliation (which could be a cover), and so on helps the first couple of scenes with other Agents click and make sense.

FINISHING YOUR AGENT DURING PLAY

With two Attributes and one Role filled in, one Distinction written down, and basic information about your identity, you're ready to jump in! The rest of your Agent—other Attributes, Roles, Distinctions, Specialties, Signature Assets, and Talents—will be filled in as you reveal interesting things about your character.

HOW REVEALS WORK

There are two ways you can show that you have a given Attribute, Role, Specialty, Signature Asset, or Talent: by having a quick flashback or showing off in a surprising way. Do this when you want to declare that you have a new element that you want to use, either right then and there, or sometime in the near future.

FLASHBACKS

If you've seen heist films where a key character bit gets introduced through a quick flashback, then you know this trick. Essentially, when you write down a new Agent aspect, you describe a quick scene in past where we see your Agent being awesome or interesting, as if we were watching it as a movie. Just describe this with a couple of sentences, and then get back to the present-day action!

For example, if you reveal having a FRIENDS IN EVERY PORT Distinction, you might describe a montage of five scenes all over the world, where you went into a bar and people immediately greeted you in the local language. Or you reveal having D8 MUSCLE with a scene of you handily fighting a bunch of thugs who are trying to take revenge.

It's fun to tie the flashback into the current story. For the D8 MUSCLE scene, maybe earlier in that session, another Agent called you. You could reveal that you got the phone call right before or after (or during!) the beat down.

SURPRISING MOMENTS

If you've seen action movies where characters not only surprise you with what they can do, but surprise the other characters enough for them to comment, you know this technique. Basically, when you write down a new Agent aspect, describe with some flair how what you're doing is awesome in a surprising or amusing fashion, and not what people would expect to happen.

WHAT ABOUT GEAR?

Action Roleplaying Agents don't have lengthy lists of equipment covering what weapons and tradecraft gear they carry around or have stashed in their vehicles or safe houses. Agents are amazing people who usually have what's needed on hand, and they aren't forgetful about having important gear on hand for a mission.

You might want to write down the sort of equipment you have. After all, describing the stuff you're using during an action is fun! Just don't be limited to it.

Gear can be a problem at times, especially in a good story. Your Agent won't always have the gear needed or wanted. Here are some situations where that's the case:

- **Unbelievable Gear:** you probably didn't sneak into a secure building with a chainsaw. If something seems to break the narrative for the Gamemaster or others at the table, you'll have to figure something else out.
- **Unique or Specialized Gear:** you'll discover—usually as a Complication, but sometimes with a Notice Action—that some situations require specialized equipment. Like a state-of-the-art safe or making a forgery of a masterpiece on special canvas.
- **Unexpected Situations:** if you didn't expect guard dogs to be in an otherwise unoccupied officer building (I mean, who has guard dogs patrolling a cube farm?!), then you probably don't have a tranquilizer gun on you. This might also come up from a Complication.
- **Broken or Missing Gear:** a Complication also might cause your gear to break, get lost down an elevator shaft, be pickpocketed by a rival Agent, and so on.
- **Wrong Role:** for your D6 Role, you'll only have the most basic equipment for that Role. That's part of having that D6. For D4 Roles, you don't even have that, unless it's really obvious (like having a knife on hand even if you have MUSCLE D4). And in those cases, the gear is likely going to cause you more trouble than it's worth.

Broken and lost gear should always push the story forward somehow. Your lock picks break? They should do that when some guards are on the way. Your awesome hacker software suddenly corrupted? That's because someone else is counter-hacking you. Missing your fake credentials for a security conference because someone else swiped them? You find out the hard way when you have to fast-talk a guard into not throwing you out.

Now, your Agent probably has special gear. Signature Assets cover these (if you permanently have them) or regular Assets (if you need one for a single Mission and get it during the game). In those cases, gear works like any other Asset (page 133), giving you an extra die to roll for your action. If any special gear gets broken or lost, it should always be easy enough to repair or retrieve it. That just means that for the moment, you've got to live by your wits rather than rely on your tech.

A quick note to the Gamemaster and other players: this technique works best if, like the characters in those movies, you react in a surprised or amused fashion. Even something as simple as saying "huh" or smirking makes this worthwhile.

For example, you could be tagging along someone else's scene, where a couple of people are playing chess (either in the background, or as an important part of the scene). If you want to reveal that you have d10 Intelligence, you could describe taking one of the bishops and placing it elsewhere, with a little "checkmate" at the end in a bored manner. The player you just helped drops his jaw.

Or maybe you want to reveal having a Superspy Car as a Signature Asset. Describing a scene where you drive up in your fancy, beautiful car that makes the valet ohh and ahh works. As does describing your character flipping open a dashboard panel to reveal different switches, for oil slicks and nitro boosts, during a vehicle chase.

NO COMMENT

If you want to fill an aspect in but don't have a good idea for a reveal, just fill it in and move on. You won't get a Plot Point for doing so, though. People sometimes do this when filling in their d4 Roles or d6 Attributes, which is fine.

REVEALING DIFFERENT PIECES

There are a few things to consider when revealing new aspects of your Agent.

REVEALS AND PLOT POINTS

When you reveal new Attributes, Roles, Distinctions, you gain a Plot Point for each new one you reveal. Those three elements are core to your character, so showing them off is important.

Specialties, Signature Assets, and Talents cost a Plot Point each time you reveal a new one. These are the parts that depend on your Attributes, Roles, and Distinctions. Once you pay the Plot Point, you can use it as normal.

The Plot Point paid for revealing a Talent counts as the Plot Point for activating it, if it requires a Plot Point for that.

ACTION TRAITS

When revealing Attributes and Roles, keep in mind the restrictions, listed on page 122. Once you're at a point where there's nothing left to reveal on either of those Action Traits, fill in the rest. For instance, when you have d10 Tech, d6 Muscle, and d6 Brains, the moment you say that your Sneak is d8, we know that your Face is d4. Likewise, if you have d10 in Intelligence and Alertness, a d6 in Strength, and d8 in Agility, if you take the other d8 in Willpower, we know that your Vitality is a d6.

In those cases, those are just revealed as if you used the No Comment option above.

DISTINCTIONS

Revealing a Distinction is as simple as writing it down.

SPECIALTIES

When you reveal the first Specialty, you decide if it's Expert (d6) or Master (d8). If you choose Expert, you can reveal another one later that's also Expert. If you choose Master, then you're done with Specialties.

Don't forget to write down which Role the Specialty goes with.

SIGNATURE ASSETS

As with Distinctions, revealing a Signature Asset is as simple as writing it down.

TALENTS

These are also as simple as writing the Talent down. Remember that the Plot Point paid for revealing it counts toward its activation.

BEING DONE

Once you've filled in everything, you've got a full Agent! No need to look at any more of these creation rules.

If you end up finishing the first session with some parts of your Agent left open, fill them in before the next session. These rules only count for the first session of play. (Though, if that ends up being a short session for some reason, the Gamemaster might extend this to cover the second session as well.)

COMPLETING BEFORE PLAYING

Playing out Agent Creation is a lot of fun! But if you don't want to do that, it's pretty simple to make a full Agent right out of the gate.

- Assign dice to all six Attributes, using either method outlined on page 122.
- Assign dice to all five Roles, as per page 122.
- Write three Distinctions
- Add two Specialties
- Create two Signature Assets
- Pick two Talents
- Start with zero Mission Successes
- Since you have a full Agent right away, you'll treat the first Mission just like any other, where you start with one Plot Point.

GOING HALFWAY

You might have a couple ideas on Agent Creation and don't want to wait until you're playing to write them down, but you don't want to be cheated out of the experience or the Plot Points. Go ahead and write them down now! When you reveal that you have it, narrate that flashback and gain or spend the Plot Point as needed. The only difference is that you know right away what you want to reveal, instead of discovering it in play.

The bonus to this option is that before revealing it, you can completely change it as you react to the world in play and discover surprising things about yourself.

MAKING A TALENT

If you have an idea for a Talent, you're not limited to existing ones! Here are some guidelines to making Talents (which is more art than science). To start, look over the list of Talents and get a sense of how they work and how they're written.

Then start with the Talent's effect—after all, that's the part of Talents that showcases Agents being awesome. After that, figure out how the Talent's activated. Finally, assign a Role to it and come up with the rest of the flavor.

EFFECT

This is what the Talent does. Effects should have an impact on that moment worth noting, but without being overpowering—Talents with effects that make you say "You'd be crazy not to take this!" need to be toned down (or their activation made more restrictive).

Effects fall into a few broad categories.

Manipulate Dice: This includes allowing for a reroll, nullifying Complications, etc.

Adding Dice to a Roll: This could be a specific die type or referring to another Role's die or Attribute's die. For specific die types, make it a D6 if it's frequent or a D8 if it's not. Some powerful Talents could make the die a D10 or D12, provided the activation is correspondingly rare.

Manipulate Plot Points: Allow sharing of Plot Points among other Agents under certain circumstances.

Manipulate Complications: Remove or suppress Complications.

Allow Extra Benefits From Certain Actions: See the examples in the settings on page 140 and 180.

ACTIVATION

This is the set of circumstances that allows the Talent's effect to kick in. It should be narrow enough that it doesn't constantly come up in every scene, but not so narrow that it will only come up once every few Missions. The sweet spot is that you should be able to break out one of your Talents two or three times per Mission.

Similar to effects, activation criteria fall into some broad categories.

Narrative: Anything that depends on the circumstances of the story can be an activation trigger. Someone is in the same scene as you, you're talking with an NPC about a certain subject, you're outnumbered, etc.

Mechanical: Mechanical triggers revolve around the dice and the actions around them. They can include rolling a particular Action Trait ("The player is making a roll involving her FACE die," etc.) or doing a type of action ("You're in a Fight Action"). Or they can involve the results of the dice, such as the Gamemaster rolling an Opportunity.

Restrictions: Some Talents may also have restrictions limiting their activation further, if their effects are potent or especially dramatic. That can include restricting the Talent's activation to only once per scene. Talents activated by things like the Gamemaster granting Opportunities can limit the activation, if you want a Talent that is themed around random openings in the story.

Plot Point Spend: The ultimate restriction is to require a Plot Point. That'll limit it to crucial and dramatic moments. (Rarely, this is combined with other restrictions. Usually if you feel the need to layer multiple restrictions, you're better off toning the effect down.)

The activation should match the effect's theme. If you look at the activation and the effect and wonder why they're related instead of getting an immediate sense, then you need to reexamine both ends of your Talent.

ROLE

The Role reflects the type of Agent who would take this Talent. Some Talents are appropriate for almost any Action character, and a few might be appropriate for two Roles. Resist the urge to make a bunch of generic Talents; you take your Roles for a reason, and it's not that interesting or exciting when someone else can do your job almost as well as you can.

NAME AND DESCRIPTION

Finally, come up with a snappy name and a little flavor to describe it. This is as important as the rest of the Talent—after all, you'll be saying the Talent's name when you're using it, and you want to sound cool when you're being cool.

SAMPLE TALENTS

ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR

You can hyper-focus on the smallest details for use later.

Roles: Brains

Activation: You use Brains in a Notice Action, and spend a Plot Point to bank an Asset for later, related to something you've observed.

Effect: Write down the Asset, hidden from everyone else. You cannot use the Asset in the current scene. When you reveal the Asset at a dramatically appropriate moment in a later scene, step it up.

EYE IN THE SKY

You are always aware of which Agents in your team could use some extra help.

Roles: Brains

Activation: You're in voice contact (face-to-face or electronically) with the other Agents in your team.

Effect: Any Agent you're in contact with (including yourself) can spend Plot Points to give a die to any other member of your team you're in contact with (also including yourself).

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

You use your opposition's power against him.

Roles: Brains

Activation: The GM uses a Complication die in a roll against you. Spend a Plot Point.

Effect: You take that Complication die and add it to your own roll as an Asset. Step it up by one if your description of how it helps you rather than hurts you involves a quick flashback scene.

COLD READ

You gain startling insights into someone you just met.

Roles: Face

Activation: You are using your Face die in an action against someone you have just met, and the GM rolls an Opportunity.

Effect: The GM provides you with a useful detail about the character you are rolling against.

MASTER OF DISGUISE

Your disguises are so convincing that you seem to be an entirely different person.

Roles: Face

Activation: You are in disguise, talking to a character whom you have talked with before as another identity.

Effect: You always gain an extra d6 to pass as someone you're not while wearing a disguise. The GM may not invoke a Complication against you to see through your disguise.

TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE

You can spot a liar better than anyone.

Roles: Face

Activation: You are using a Notice Action to judge whether someone is lying to you.

Effect: Add a d8 to your Notice Action to sense a lie.

ANYTHING IS A WEAPON

If you can get your hands on it and swing it, it can do damage.

Roles: Muscle

Activation: You're engaged in a Fight Action, and you've spent a Plot Point to gain an improvised weapon Asset.

Effect: Step up the Asset (d12 maximum).

DIRTY FIGHTER

You shot first.

Roles: Muscle

Activation: You're taking your first roll in a Fight Action. Spend a Plot Point.

Effect: Add a d8 to your roll for the rest of the fight. If the GM rolls an Opportunity against you in the first roll, increase that die to d10 for subsequent rolls, otherwise, decrease that die to a d6.

NOW IT'S A FAIR FIGHT

"There's only five of you?"

Roles: Muscle

Activation: You're engaging in a Fight Action, you're outnumbered, and the GM gives you an Opportunity.

Effect: Remove one of the dice the GM gains from outnumbering you.

1337 HACKER

You've never met anyone as good as you at hacking.

Roles: Tech

Activation: You are using your Tech die in a roll opposed by another human involving a computer system.

Effect: Add a d8 to your roll.

GADGETEER

You are sure to equip everyone in your team with some extra tech just in case.

Roles: Tech

Activation: Spend a Plot Point.

Effect: Give another member of your team an extra d8 Asset by reminding him of the sweet piece of gadgetry you gave him.

INSPIRED GENIUS

And to think they called you mad…

Roles: Tech

Activation: You make a roll with Tech that involves a hard science like physics or chemistry.

Effect: You may add a d8 to the roll and include one more die in the result. You don't gain any Plot Points for any Complications that arise from this Action.

NO SWEAT

You shine when under a crunch.

Roles: Sneak

Activation: Sneak is one of the dice in your roll during a Timed Action.

Effect: Add an extra d6 to your roll. If you beat the stakes for that beat, the beat takes no time off, just as if you had scored an Extraordinary Success.

PICKPOCKET

No wallet, keycard, or mobile phone is safe from you.

Roles: Sneak

Activation: You're making a roll including your Sneak die to steal a small item without being noticed, including during a flashback.

Effect: Add an extra d8 to your roll.

STEADY AS SHE GOES

A non-precise Sneak is a dead Sneak.

Roles: Sneak

Activation: Sneak is one of the dice in your roll, and the GM gives you an Opportunity.

Effect: You may reroll one of your dice for each Opportunity the GM gives you.

HEART OF THE TEAM

You have a strong rapport with the other Agents.

Roles: Any

Activation: You're in the same scene as another Agent.

Effect: You may share (give or accept) Plot Points with that other Agent. No more than 3 Plot Points may change hands through the use of this Talent per scene.

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

You have a knack for being where you need to be.

Roles: Any

Activation: Spend a Plot Point.

Effect: You can place yourself in any scene that didn't already have you there, and you give an extra d6 to the next roll that you or another Agent makes in that scene. You can't activate this Talent if you're heavily engaged elsewhere.

UNUSUAL FIGHTER

You have an unpredictable fighting style.

Roles: Any

Activation: You're engaged in a Fight Action, rolling Muscle as one of your dice. Spend a Plot Point.

Effect: Add your highest Attribute die that you're not already using to your roll.

THE DIRECT APPROACH

You can apply maximum pressure to a situation, but often at the cost of increased fallout.

Roles: Any

Activation: You are taking an action using your primary Role. You must spend a Plot Point to activate this Talent.

Effect: Add both a d10 and a d4 to your dice pool.

DRIVING ACE

You're right at home behind the wheel of any kind of vehicle.

Roles: Any

Activation: You're making a roll to control a vehicle.

Effect: You may add your Alertness die to the roll and include one more die in the result. If you're already using your Alertness die, add a d8.

ADVANCEMENTS

While Agents start with as competent, experienced professionals, they change and grow during the course of the Missions they take on happen during the game.

Each time your Agent completes a Mission, make a note of the Mission's name on your character sheet. This is the Agent's Record, and over time it provides history of the Agent's accomplishments.

CALLBACKS

The Agent may use the Record to make callbacks, references to events from other Missions that may be useful towards the current Mission. To make a callback, the Agent makes a reference to a Mission in her Record while performing a task. While the name of the Mission might be referenced explicitly, it's more stylish to say something like "This is just like that time in Malta…." When a callback is used in this way, the character may gain a benefit immediately for anything that a Plot Point could be used for. You can only make a callback to a specific Mission once per session.

TRAINING UP

An Agent can spend Missions from her Record to make permanent improvements. A spent Mission remains on the Record, but can no longer be used for callbacks or to train.

Add a Signature Asset: 1 Mission
Add a new Specialty or increase an existing Specialty: 2 Missions
Add a new Talent: 4 Missions
Step up an Action Trait (including Attributes and Roles): 8 Missions

Training can happen anytime during downtime between Missions.

OTHER CHANGES

Sometimes, Agents are changed by the events, or players are no longer satisfied with options they have selected for their Agents. If you want to adjust your Signature Assets, Distinctions, or Talents, discuss with the GM some ways to change that make sense and is mutually agreeable.

THE MISSION

This section covers the rules of the game, the nuts and bolts of *ACTION ROLEPLAYING* that directly influence the outcome of the Mission.

MANAGING TRAITS

One of the first things you need to get a handle on when playing a Mission is how to handle your Agent's Traits, including Attributes and Roles, and the Traits on other people and places. Since they're the main source of dice for your Action Pool, and therefore the core of any action that takes place, it's best to become familiar with them.

When it comes time to roll the bones and see what happens—whether you're the Gamemaster or a player—you roll dice associated with the Traits on your Agent Sheet and, sometimes, on some part of the scene or even another character. That's a lot of possible Traits, though, and you can't roll them all. So which Traits are appropriate?

CHOOSING CREW TRAITS

In many cases it's obvious which Traits an Agent should be rolling. Muscle needs to punch a guy in the head? Pretty clear he's using STRENGTH + MUSCLE. Sneak needs to climb over a fence? That's AGILITY + SNEAK. It won't always be crystal clear which Traits are most appropriate. For example, which Role do you use when the Agents need to blow something up? SNEAK makes sense because you need to be able to blow up safes, right? Or how about MUSCLE? Bombs are weapons after all. TECH? A bomb is just a gadget that explodes, right?

There's no one right answer (and if you want to clarify these issues, Specialties are the right tool for the job), but context offers some clues. If you're blowing open a safe, SNEAK is probably right. If you're using grenades, dynamite, or military ordinance then MUSCLE is probably it. If you're using something with lots of wires and at least one digital counter, it sounds like TECH.

If it's a crapshoot, the Gamemaster has to make a judgment call, and this is one of those situations where speed trumps fidelity. Better to just come up with an answer on the spot, roll the dice, and settle on an outcome than it is to spend five minutes dickering over the right answer.

CHOOSING OPPOSITION TRAITS

When the Gamemaster decides what dice to roll against the Agents, he should look at the Traits in play. Consider the Traits of the characters in action, any Traits of the location or situation, and add in any applicable Complications. Even just rolling the Traits applicable to the situation should give the Gamemaster enough dice, and if he ever has too few dice to total up, he can just add in enough D6s to bring up the total. The Gamemaster can choose to not roll larger dice, if appropriate, but he should always roll any appropriate D4s.

TRAITS FOR PEOPLE

Most Supporting Characters can be summed up in one or two Traits. An uninteresting security guard might just be Security Guard d6, but if the Agents are going to end up actually talking to him or otherwise interacting with him, it might be worth adding in a little characterization. He might be a Lazy d4 Security Guard d6 or an Earnest d8 Security Guard d6. For characters who are just color, a single Trait is usually enough; for more important characters, you rarely need more than two or three Traits. Some characters are going to get whole Agent Sheets of their own.

TRAITS FOR LOCATIONS

Locations can also have Traits. These Traits might describe something about the place, or something about the situation. For example, one office building might have Professional Security d8 while another might have Rent-a-Cops d4. That short notation reveals a lot about both buildings. In addition to telling you what dice to roll, the difference in Traits helps the Gamemaster when he needs to describe a situation to the player.

It's also possible for Traits to reflect temporary qualities, like the mood of a room (Cold Room d8) or abrupt problems (On Fire d10).

TRAITS ON THE FLY

When in doubt, *the default Trait for anything* is d6. This is important anytime the Gamemaster needs to make a roll and doesn't have two Traits to use for it: he can fill in any missing Traits with a d6, and in situations where there's no apparent Trait in opposition, the Gamemaster just rolls 2d6.

READING TRAITS

Because higher dice mean a better chance of success, it's easy to assume that the only meaning to them is numeric. A d6 is better than a d4 and so on. And, yes, that's true as far as it goes, but there's more to it than that. Dice have a meaning that goes a bit deeper than the straight numbers. The trick is that a d4 may be the lowest value, but it actually means that the Trait is more important than if it were a d6. While a d6 just means that something is unremarkable, a d4 is a flag for something that's likely to go wrong. This is why the Gamemaster is always happy to give you extra d4s to roll—they're unlikely to raise the total of the roll, but they greatly increase the odds of rolling a Complication. Similarly, any time you can get the Gamemaster to roll some d4s, it increases your chance of getting an Opportunity. In plain English, when you see the Trait values, they really read like this:

d4—Something Interesting
d6—Dull
d8—Noteworthy
d10—Scary
d12—Aw, Hell No!

TRAITS AND SCALE

Even though we rate things in terms of dice, that's not all you need to consider. You might have Freight Train d6 and Motorcycle d6, but just because they're both rated at d6 doesn't mean it's a fair fight when they collide. The Gamemaster needs to make judgment calls in situations like this. The good news is that most of these situations are a piece of cake to adjudicate. When a train hits a motorcycle, you just don't worry about rolling the dice; it ends badly for the motorcycle.

Most situations are sufficiently clear-cut that you don't even need to worry about the dice. Most, but not all. Some situations are a little more muddled.

Rules-wise, these are pretty easy to handle. A simple advantage usually gets handled by adding more dice to the roll, but more dramatic advantages may allow the advantaged party to include more dice from his roll to his total beyond the two he gets for free. One additional included die represents a pretty profound advantage, and two additional included dice is almost overwhelming. If you're ever tempted to go to three additional included dice (assuming the pool was 5 dice or more to start with), that's probably time to just set aside the dice. As a rule of thumb, when the mismatch is so unfair that it would never work for a normal person, but someone as exceptional as an Agent might be able to pull it off, that's the cue to go to the extra dice.

ASSETS AND COMPLICATIONS

Most Traits are reasonably static, but sometimes they reflect temporary situations, such as when an Agent has the right tool for the job or when a security guard's a little more suspicious than usual. These Traits are handled with Assets and Complications.

The details here cover the most important game details that everyone at the table needs to know.

ASSETS

Assets cover anything going in the Agents' favor. Most often, Assets enter play when a player spends a Plot Point to create one. For a single Plot Point, you can create a d6 Asset that's useful for the duration of a scene, and for 2 Plot Points it remains useful for the duration of the Mission. Some Talents improve this ability—Techs, for example, are often at an advantage when coming up with new gadgets—but the basics are pretty straightforward. There's no such thing as a generic Asset. If you create an Asset, you need to name it.

Assets can't just be used on every roll—the Asset needs to be applicable in some way or worked into your description of what your Agent is doing. This can be a little fast and loose, especially when players are creative, but that's a good thing. It does, however, point out an important guideline about Assets: there should be situations where they're not useful.

It's also worth noting that Assets can go away, and there should be some reason why. Again, with tools, it's pretty simple, but with more abstract Assets, it's worth thinking about the logic of it.

This idea of transience is important because, even if an Agent has bought an Asset for the duration of the Mission, it's still possible something might happen to it. Suppose, for example, a character has a BIG KNIFE D6. That's handy for a number of things, but if it comes time to search the characters for weapons, the Gamemaster may pick up that die (for a casual search) or just take it away (for a thorough search, such as in prison). The Agent can recover the Asset later (without spending Plot Points) but that requires time and effort she can't spare.

THE LOGIC OF ASSETS

If the Muscle picks up a golf club to beat up some thugs but doesn't spend a Plot Point, should he still get an Asset? After all, he's still got a weapon, right?

Well, no. Here's the thing—the Muscle's a badass. If he gets into a fight, he uses whatever's on hand to his best advantage—that's just a given. Picking up the golf club, going after the weakest guy, or looking scary, this is all assumed to be part of kicking ass and taking names. Spending the Plot Point doesn't magically make the golf club he picked up into something that's more dangerous than some other weapon. Instead, spending that Plot Point makes a statement. That statement is "this golf club matters." When he tells the story of the fight, it's "that time I beat up a guy with a golf club" rather than just another fight where he picked up whatever was on hand.

COMPLICATIONS

Whenever a player rolls a 1, the Gamemaster can hand over a Plot Point to the player and add a Complication to the Mission. The Complication's represented by a D6 Trait, with each additional 1 rolled by the player stepping up the die to a larger size. So, with three 1s, the Complication is a D10 (D6 to D8 to D10). The Gamemaster gets to roll this Trait into his pool whenever it's appropriate, in opposition to the Crew.

Notice that doesn't mean the Complication needs to come up right then, or even has to apply to the Agent who rolled the 1. The Gamemaster has pretty free rein with this, and no reason not to be creative.

Complications can add new things, but they can also be used to raise the stakes or add a beat (we'll talk about these in a moment) to an existing scene. Like Assets, Complications have limits—they shouldn't apply to every roll, and there should be some way for them to go away, even if it's not necessarily obvious.

CHANGING ASSETS AND COMPLICATIONS IN PLAY

Sometimes the Agents don't want a particular Complication hanging around too long. If the guards are ON ALERT D8, that's going to make a lot of things more difficult. It may be worth the Agents' time to do something to put them at ease. Exactly what the Agent needs to do depends on the Complication in question, but normally it means they need to act—usually taking a beat within a scene—and roll the dice. If they succeed, the Complication is removed; if they fail, then it either steps up (going from D8 to D10, or D10 to D12) or a new Complication is introduced.

ACTIONS, SCENES, & BEATS

Agents take lots of actions over the course of a Mission, and they roll the dice a lot, so it's incredibly important to get a sense of what those die-rolls mean so you know when to roll and when not to.

The flow of the story can be broken down into scenes, as anyone who's taken high school English and read some Shakespeare knows. Scenes can be further broken down into chunks called beats, and an action is a character's attempt to do something (usually involving rolling some dice), typically over the course of a single beat. These concepts are the basic building blocks for creating a narrative from scratch; they also provide us with tools to take apart a narrative and see what makes it tick.

Let's start by talking about beats.

BEATS

A beat is basically the smallest dramatic unit of the story. If two characters exchange a password, that's a beat. If an Agent picks a lock, that's a beat. If an Agent hides behind a dumpster as thugs run past, that's a beat. If an Agent spends hours researching a problem, that's a beat. The trick is that it doesn't matter how long or short the activity is, but how simple it is.

An Agent may spend all night developing a piece of malware to attack the bad guy's firewall, but it's a single beat because it can be boiled down to "My Agent writes some code." In contrast, within the span of thirty seconds, another Agent's scaled a wall, picked a lock, and evaded a laser tripwire—three separate beats.

Scenes are composed of several beats and represent a complete event, like a meeting or an attempt at breaking and entering. There's no real way to say how many beats make up a scene since that can depend a lot on the dice, but it may be as few as one and as many as, well, a lot.

The important part is this: each beat corresponds with an opportunity to roll the dice, or take an **Action.** This gives you a gut sense of the scope of the outcome, and hopefully that comes across clearly in the breakdown. An Agent takes an Action to spot the thugs (success), then takes one to try to slip away unseen (failure), attempts to hide for a moment (success), then hacks the car (success).

What types of Action you're taking, however, can vary based on the nature of the beat and what the Agent is trying to do. Which leads us to the next section.

TAKING ACTION

You've already read about standard Actions, where one side sets the stakes and the other tries to raise them. That's a Basic Action and it's the most commonly used Action in the game.

There are other types of Actions that are frequently used in a Mission: the Timed Action, which is really multiple Basic Actions in a row against the clock; and the Flashback Action, which is a variation of the Basic Action that reveals useful Assets in the present. But more on them later.

VARIATIONS ON ACTIONS

Some examples of Basic Action variations include the **Notice Action** and the **Role Action,** but anything you can imagine taking place in one beat with a specific end-goal counts. Lifting a wallet, cracking a code, knocking a guard unconscious, or scaling a wall might all be suitable Basic Actions. Most of the time, the Gamemaster is the one who calls for these Actions, which is why he rolls his dice first to set the stakes.

NOTICE ACTIONS

Anytime you want to get a read on somebody, case a scene, spot something out of the ordinary, or generally just use your senses, you're rolling a **Notice Action.** Generally, these are based on ALERTNESS, but you could make a case for INTELLIGENCE or WILLPOWER if the situation is more about putting two and two together (INTELLIGENCE) or ignoring a lot of distractions and remaining focused (WILLPOWER). The situation also tells you which Role to roll in. For instance, if it's sizing up a bad guy, it's MUSCLE. If it's computer-based, it's TECH. The Gamemaster usually calls for a Notice Action, though it's just as valid for a player to ask for it. The stakes for a Notice Action are set by rolling a straight 2D6—unless the Gamemaster decides otherwise.

With a successful Notice Action (you roll higher than the Gamemaster), you gain some crucial information or gather some useful intel. Most of the time you can use this as justification for a cool Asset in a later scene. If you spend a Plot Point after you succeed at your Notice Action, you can bank the Asset until you need it, rather than using it in the scene you're in. For instance, if you see that the bad guy's second security thug is a twitchy kind of guy, you could bring in NERVOUS NUMBER TWO D6 in the next scene, once you confront him.

With a failed Notice Action, you're not standing there staring out into space, but you won't be able to get anything useful for later. If you don't beat the stakes set by the Gamemaster, it's business as normal, essentially.

Some Talents specifically work with Notice Actions.

ROLE ACTIONS

Like other Basic Actions, the **Role Action** is a single roll of the dice to really exploit something a given Role is suited for. In this case, though, the Agent using a Role Action is setting the stakes, as opposed to trying to beat the stakes the Gamemaster sets. With a Role Action, the opposition's a Supporting Character. Role Actions set up the situation in such a way as to make further actions more successful. One of the most common is the Face Action, based (obviously) on the FACE Role.

A Face Action starts with adding FACE to the Action Pool. Then, it's a matter of choosing WILLPOWER (for forcing your impression on the opposition), ALERTNESS (for sensing the right moment or exploiting the opposition's tells), or INTELLIGENCE (for a display of knowledge, facts, or logic). Roll the dice, spend any Plot Points, and when you're done, you've set the stakes. The Gamemaster has to roll higher than this to win.

The opposition to a Face Action (or any Role Action) is a character, who the Gamemaster usually rolls for with an appropriate Trait based on resisting what the Agent is trying to do, plus a die for how difficult it is for the Agent to impress the Supporting Character. If the Gamemaster doesn't raise the stakes set by the Agent, the Role Action works. If the Gamemaster does raise the stakes, it just means you didn't really make an impression, set up the situation, or move things along.

Like a Notice Action, when you succeed at a Role Action you can spend a Plot Point to bank an Asset for a later scene. This means that not only is the opposing character going to have some opinion of you (good, bad, whatever), but you get to bring it in the next time you cross paths.

OPTIONAL RULE: CONTESTED ACTIONS

Sometimes another character actively opposes what you're trying to achieve, to the extent that the purpose of the Action is about seizing advantage or getting an edge over the opposition. Contested Actions go back and forth, each side trying to raise the stakes higher until only one side can come out on top.

A Contested Action takes place over a single beat, but it's a struggle, not a single maneuver. You can string multiple Contested Actions together to represent multiple beats in a scene; each time one side might give in, losing ground. Of course, as soon as one side is taken down, the scene is probably over—unless more opposition comes out of the woodwork.

The best example of a Contested Action is the **Fight Action,** though it's easily expanded to cover everything from dueling with laptops to engaging in a furious argument. See "Contested Action Variations" later in this section.

FIGHT ACTIONS

Many fights are resolved quickly with a Basic Action—one side rolls the dice and sets the stakes, the other rolls to beat them, and a winner is determined. Not necessarily dramatic, but for criminals, this is serious business and best dealt with in a serious fashion. Still, every now and again you'll face a situation where the conflict's a little too intense to just cruise through it. In these cases, you'll want to jazz up the scene a little bit by making it a **Fight Action.**

Fight Actions use whatever Attribute and Role combination seems appropriate, as well as any Assets, Complications, Distinctions, and benefits from Talents that apply. Most brawls are STRENGTH + MUSCLE, for instance, while a firewall-smashing duel would be INTELLIGENCE + TECH.

Complications that come up in the course of a Fight Action reflect the slip-ups, injuries, and other twists of fate in any face-off. Most last until the end of the Fight Action, getting in the way, but some might stick around longer.

A Fight Action always starts with one side picking up dice because they think it's time to throw down. If it's unclear which side is initiating the Fight, or if more than two sides are involved, all sides roll their dice and the one that gets the highest total has set the stakes. The other sides can then choose to either give in right away ("This ain't the fight for me!") or roll to raise the stakes.

WINNING THE FIGHT

As soon as you've raised the stakes high enough that your opponent isn't able to beat it with his own total, you've come out on top. Your opponent's been **Taken Out**—knocked out, incapacitated, tied up, buried under a mound of furniture, deeply embarrassed, whatever—and he's out of the action for the remainder of the scene.

If you're the one who lost, your Agent's at the mercy of the Gamemaster and the bad guys who won. Generally, this leads to a scene where your Agent's stuffed in a locker, strapped to a chair in the bad guy's warehouse by the docks, or some other nasty situation.

Either way, there aren't any long-lasting game effects for losing a Fight Action, unless you came up with some Complications during the course of it. As far as the Mission goes, however, things may have gone completely south if you're out of the picture and your Crew has to come and rescue you.

You can automatically take down somebody by raising the stakes by 5 or more (an Extraordinary Success). This only works with a single opponent, however; if there's a mob, this translates to taking down multiple goons in one go. See "Ganging Up" later in this section.

GIVING GROUND: TAKING A COMPLICATION

After any beat in a Fight Action, if you think you're going to lose the next beat and you don't want to be taken down, you can instead choose to give ground, AKA take a Complication (or step up an existing Complication that's appropriate). You have to decide this before you roll dice to raise the stakes—you need to make the decision before the dice leave your hand. When you give ground, the other side wins the exchange, but you get to walk (or jump, or fall) from the scene, taking only a D6 Complication as a consequence (like BLOODIED D6 or EXHAUSTED D6). That Complication lasts until the end of the next scene, unless you take care of it earlier, and the Gamemaster decides what the Complication is.

You can, if you like, choose not to leave the scene but shift to somewhere else within it. Say you spent one beat going at it with the hired heavy in the stairwell, but he kept the advantage and you chose to give in. You take that D6 Complication and move the fight to the parking structure, starting another Fight Action in the next beat. Of course, now the hired muscle has an extra die to roll thanks to your Complication. You sure you want to keep this up?

GANGING UP

Supporting Characters often gang up in the desperately misguided belief that more thugs are somehow more dangerous. You'd think they'd learn, but no amount of evidence seems to be able to persuade them. So, as long as they keep doing it, here's how you handle it.

Each additional opponent adds a single die to the opposition's dice pool equal to the highest Trait they could use in the fight. This doesn't change the number of dice added together to set or raise the stakes (it's still two), just the number of dice rolled. The most common example of this is a gang of six THUGS D6, which amounts to a roll of 6D6 (first thug is D6, each additional thug adds another D6, so it's 6D6).

Every time you raise the stakes against a side that's got multiple assisting characters, you also knock one of their dice away and they don't provide any more help. This represents whittling away the opposition, one ugly mook at a time. If you happen to raise the stakes by 5 or more with an Extraordinary Success, you take out two of the extra mooks instead of taking down the whole mob. Once you get down to a single opponent, though, no more dice get knocked off.

You and your fellow Agents can gang up in the same fashion, handing over a single die of the appropriate type to the player whose Agent is leading the charge. This is risky because if the opponent raises the stakes, that die gets removed, and the Agent is taken out (as if he had lost the fight). Most Agents find this risk is a good argument for letting the professionals do their jobs. Even if you help an Agent out on one roll, though, you can always choose to drop out before the dice are rolled to raise the stakes next time.

CONTESTED ACTION VARIATIONS

Using the Fight Action rules above, you can also model other kinds of conflict. The only things you need to change are the Attributes and Roles involved, and what the Complications and consequences are for giving in. Remember, each time you're rolling those dice to raise the stakes you're doing something to swing the contest in your favor. You can even switch out the Attribute and Role you're using if you think the next move you make is a different tack.

Examples of other Contested Actions include seizing control of a computer network from a rival Tech, outsmarting a rival Brains's tactics, successfully lifting a wallet or security pass from a guy that another Sneak is trying to pickpocket, or even getting another Face to slip up and out herself in front of a room full of cops.

TIMED ACTIONS

Hey, many hands make light work, right? Especially when you're trying to beat the clock.

When you do a **Timed Action,** the Gamemaster determines the opposition you're facing and how much time you have. Timed Actions use a series of Basic Actions, either several of the same kind (INTELLIGENCE + TECH, for instance) or a series of different Basic Actions based on attempting something that has different steps (AGILITY + SNEAK, then ALERTNESS + SNEAK, then INTELLIGENCE + FACE). The number of Basic Actions (the Gamemaster setting the stakes and you trying to roll higher) depends on the time limit the Gamemaster puts into place.

The time's measured in beats—the more beats, the longer you have. Each time you roll the dice, you lose one beat. Use checkboxes or tokens to keep track of beats. It's a countdown, because you've only got a finite amount of time; once that's gone, you're done.

If you raise the stakes, it only costs you the time you spent. An Extraordinary Success means you found a shortcut and don't lose any time at all. Don't lose a beat for that roll.

If you fail to raise the stakes, that part of the action took too long, and an additional beat is lost. Move on to the next stage of the Timed Action.

FAILING DOESN'T MEAN GAME OVER

Notice that I haven't said that you didn't succeed at completing your intended action. Action Roleplaying is all about people who are really good at what they do, and the Timed Action is a pacing mechanic. Of course your Sneak is going to break into that safe. Question is, can she do it before somebody comes in? How many Complications does she trigger by rolling 1s? Does she grab any Opportunities from the Gamemaster? Those are the places where major twists and turns happen, not in failing to roll higher than the opposition's dice.

Running Out of Time: If you run out of beats—zero or less—you're out of time, and probably got caught in the act. You might have a chance to escape, depending on the situation, but you aren't able to finish your objective. The Gamemaster should have something in mind for when this happens, but if he doesn't, feel free to suggest something to the group and see what happens next.

Completing the Action: When the Gamemaster finishes with the obstacles planned for that Action and you succeed with time left, you've achieved your objectives (including a clean getaway, if that's what you're looking to do). If you succeed but have zero beats left, you have to choose between a clean getaway and achieving your objective.

Buying Time: If you're running dangerously low on time, the rest of the Crew might be able to help you out. They can make a Basic Action of their own—causing a diversion, trying to delay the Mark with conversation, eliminating some security guards—and with a success, they give you back one of the beats you've lost. If they get an Extraordinary Success, it's two beats. Failure means that Agent can't help any more for the rest of the Timed Action. No matter what, only one attempt at buying time can happen in between each step of the Timed Action.

OPTIONAL RULE: FLASHBACKS

Flashbacks are one of your best tools in successfully completing a Mission. They're a more advanced form of dramatic editing than using Plot Points to create Assets, as they essentially rewrite some of the story so far to make things turn in your favor. Flashbacks come in two varieties, the **Establishment Flashback** and the **Wrap-Up Flashback.** Here's how they work.

ESTABLISHMENT FLASHBACKS

An **Establishment Flashback** creates an Asset and fills in some of the story, thereby changing what is true about past events.

To use an Establishment Flashback, somebody has to trigger it, either one of the Gamemaster's Supporting Characters ("How do you plan to get out of this one?") or another Agent who's in the scene with you ("I sure hope you did that thing earlier.") You can then describe a brief monochromatic flashback moment of your Agent doing something, hand a Plot Point over to the Gamemaster or the player who triggered the flashback, and you've got a D6 Asset you can roll into your next action.

If you don't have anybody around to trigger the flashback for you, you can still make use of an Establishment Flashback. You hand over a Plot Point to the Gamemaster, like normal. In this case, however, you also have to roll for it. Describe the scene, but now roll dice appropriate to the Action you took in the past. The Gamemaster rolls his own dice to set the stakes, based on the situation (usually it's D6 +D6, but it could be more than that). If you raise the stakes, you get the Asset to use in the current scene. If you fail, you don't, but you've still introduced that reveal. It's up to the Gamemaster to explain why it doesn't necessarily help you out, even though it happened.

WRAP-UP FLASHBACKS

A **Wrap-Up Flashback** is a series of Basic Actions played around the table by all the Agents at the end of a Mission or at some critical point. The Crew's Brains usually initiates it, because it uses the BRAINS Role and sets up a final blow against the villain's own plans.

Each Agent participating in the wrap-up plays out his or her own individual Establishment Flashback, setting up some cool thing he did that helps the Brains out or tilt the odds in the Agents' favor. The Brains player can suggest an idea, but it's best if the other players use what's already happened on the Mission to think of the scene on their own. Going around the table, each player describes his or her flashback. They each spend a Plot Point in order to take part; the Brains can spend the Plot Point for the player, in which case he also gives the player his BRAINS die to add to the pool of dice.

In almost every case, the Agent is the active party and rolls dice first, setting the stakes. Then the Gamemaster rolls an appropriate response.

- If the player's roll is a success (the Gamemaster failed to raise the stakes) the Agent gives the Brains a D6 Asset or may step up an existing Asset by one. No Asset can ever be stepped up higher than D12.
- If the player's roll is a failure (the Gamemaster rolled higher) the Agent's efforts didn't have any real effect on the wrap-up. The Gamemaster can describe why it didn't help, but it's better to let the player do that. Own that screw-up! It'll make you a better person afterward. Trust me.

Don't worry about Complications on any of these Flashback scenes. If you roll a 1 when you're taking your turn in a Wrap-Up Flashback, it just gets left out of the total.

Once everybody but the Brains has had a shot at setting up the big reveal, it's the Brains' turn. His player rolls an appropriate Attribute (usually INTELLIGENCE or ALERTNESS, but exceptions might present themselves) + BRAINS, also adding in all of the Assets his buddies produced for him (and any that were already out there). The Gamemaster then rolls for the villains, throwing in as many Complications and other things that weigh in the villain's favor as currently are in play; this is no time to be timid.

If the Brains's Action is a success, then that's usually it for the villain. His plans unravel, he flees the coop, or his lieutenants and mooks turn on him. The details are generally contingent on the Mission itself, the story so far, and so on.

If the Brains's Action is a failure, the villain gets away with it...almost. See, the Agents have done enough to blow the lid off the villain's plans, exposed the Client's grievances, or spoiled the whole arrangement. The rub is that the villain's not going to face his accuser. Luckily, there's always the next Mission, where the Agents go up against the villain in a different location with a new adventure.

WRAP-UPS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MISSION

Sometimes there's good reason to run a Wrap-Up Flashback after the second act, especially if it's to take care of some initial plot that's suddenly going to twist into a whole new mess. If that's the case, maybe the villain in question is revealed to be a proxy, and the lieutenant the Crew met earlier is the real villain. If you're going to keep the story going after one of these wrap-ups, the Agents get an Asset equal to the highest-rated Asset they produced in the Wrap-Up Flashback, for use later in the Mission against the "real" villain. Even if it's just I THOUGHT I SMELLED A RAT D6, it's still a bonus.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

These are the characters the Gamemaster introduces into the Mission and gets to play, for better or worse. Most Missions have at least a bad guy or villain, who is a Major Character and deserves at least a full-fledged sheet like the Agents have. Sometimes, however, the villain is just a couple of Traits because the true opposition for the Agents is the villain's lieutenant or majordomo. If that's the case, they're the ones the Gamemaster needs to write up in more detail.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

A Major Character has Attributes, Roles, Distinctions, Specialties, and Talents just like Agents do. Because they're the opposition, they can have Roles that aren't available to the players. The Gamemaster might even reduce how many Roles they have to just a D4, D8, and D10, or some other array of dice. It's important that they always have at least two or three dice to roll, therefore making them worthy antagonists.

Because the Gamemaster has an effectively unlimited pool of Plot Points to use (albeit hand over to the players when used), a Major Character doesn't earn a Plot Point when an Action Trait or Distinction is used as a D4. Instead, the Gamemaster can bank a D6 for that character and drop it into a future action when needed. There's no limit to how many of these bonus dice a Major Character can save up, but regardless of how many are used on any given roll, the Gamemaster may still only use two dice for a total.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Any character that isn't a significant headliner in the Mission, but is nevertheless going to interact with the Agents in some fashion, gets at least three Traits that can be anything. They don't have to be Attributes, Roles, or Distinctions. They're just dice with appropriate labels, like CORRUPT LAWMAN D8, FAT D4, BIG NIGHTSTICK D8. The Gamemaster could also choose three Attributes he thinks are significant and add a single Role, for a trimmed-down Agent. The Gamemaster has a lot of flexibility with Minor Characters, and can usually come up with them fairly quickly if needed.

MOOK CHARACTERS

Mooks are unnamed characters with only one die. Generally they're useful because they're the additional die the Gamemaster rolls when he assigns a difficulty die to an Agent's opposition pool. They can also gang up with a Minor or Major Character by just adding their die to a roll. Something as simple as HIRED ASSASSIN D10, GRIZZLED SCOUT D8, or CUT-RATE THIEF D6 works just fine. If you like, add another Trait in during play as things progress. The Gamemaster can upgrade any Mook Character to a Minor Character in this way.

COLD FUSION

INTRODUCTION

Thousands of years in the future, humanity discovers that it is not alone. With a strange mistake in engineering, scientists develop a theorem that turns physics on its head. They discover cold fusion. With this advancement, Earth ends its energy crisis, and can focus on exploring the cosmos. The massive output of cold fusion allows them to build machines that were previously the stuff of science fiction.

With a few centuries of trial and error, they find other galaxies with inhabited worlds, many of which have interacted with one another for eons. For the first century, humankind doesn't know what to do with their discovery. They were the new kids on the universal block. Space was a lawless place. As numerous species converged among the stars, conflicts rose, and most of the influential species banded together to form a galactic alliance.

Time passes. Humanity adapts technology and medicine from other worlds. Now, humanity experiments with psychic abilities, reverse-engineered from more advanced peoples.

One deep space exploration group discovers the remnants of numerous lost civilizations, planets, and species. All traces of these species cease at a set time, millions of years ago. All these cultures ended simultaneously. Some left warnings of a murderous species ending everything in the universe. These "Cultivators" seemed a strange footnote in history. That is, until they returned. That day is today, and you are the universe's last hope. You're playing a motley crew of elite soldiers ready to face the ultimate threat and stop current civilization from becoming a historical footnote for later peoples.

Cold Fusion works with *Action Roleplaying* rules. Anywhere we don't have a rule listed, use the default rules.

A UNIVERSE AT WAR

At the tipping point, when the Cultivators attack, a few species have the power to take up arms. These are not the only species represented in the universe, just a taste of what's out there. Choose which species you are by selecting it as one of your Distinctions.

RAKTAN

The Raktan people are immense, averaging eight to ten feet of muscle, external bone, and leathery joints. To humans, they look almost reptilian, and share many biological features with large saurians. They're fierce combatants from a no-nonsense tribal society that values honesty and loyalty above all else. They don't trust the Bellem, since they cannot naturally communicate. The two cultures have developed minor computerized methods of communication, but they're limited.

BELLEM

The Bellem are wiry, soft green beings that stand roughly human height. They're genderless, and each one looks identical to the last. It's impossible to determine differences by appearances alone; they differentiate through a complex system of scents and subsonic sounds. They also do not speak in any traditional manner, but communicate telepathically. Fortunately, they're able to communicate with humans this way.

SINTRA

The Sintra are an eight-limbed, fur-covered species that come from a planet covered in deep, thick jungles. They hide like no other species in the universe, and can sense acutely in any environment. They've expressed suspicion of humanity, since the Cultivator menace reared its head shortly after their arrival in collective space. They look vaguely arachnid to human observers.

HUMANITY

Humanity is a young species, new to the cosmic community. They maintain a rugged, individualist approach in their dealings.

THE TIPPING POINT

The Tipping Point is the moment that the Cultivators make first contact with the galactic alliance, and the squad. It is used as the framework for your first Mission.

STARTING OUT

First contact is not a pretty sight. The Cultivators hit down and cause massive damage, even though they're only showing a small hint of their true forces. First, determine where the squad happens to be, and their basic role there. Are they from the galactic alliance? Are they mercenaries? Are they an independent crew? Why are they present?

The first contact should be in a highly populated area, so the Cultivators can cause massive harm. The Tipping Point battle should be highly dramatic, and allow the squad a few shining moments while they save some of the bystanders from the Cultivator menace. They shouldn't save everyone, or even a majority of the people; the Cultivators should seem an overwhelming threat, but one that can be fought.

In the Tipping Point, the Gamemaster's job is to make things look bleak and frightening. But it's also his job to give control to the players any time they want. They can call for a Confirmed Kill or a Rescue whenever they'd like, and they have the power to narrate those scenes and shine a light on the war effort.

ROLES AND ATTRIBUTES

Everyone chooses a D10 Role for their starting character as listed below. The five Roles are COMMANDER, ENGINEER, PSYCHIC, SNIPER, or SOLDIER. Everyone should know their Role before the Cultivators strike, so they know how their character will respond. Find more on the Roles below.

As normal in *ACTION ROLEPLAYING*, select a D10 Attribute as core to you. Your weak and middle Attributes will be decided through play.

THE STRIKE

Then, the Cultivators strike down. While you may describe other characters on the field fighting back, all the dice rolling and actual actions should involve the players' squad. The strike lasts until everyone has established their Distinctions, other Roles, Signature Assets, and their Talents. Develop these through Rescues, Confirmed Kills, and Failings. These scenes flesh out the squad's Traits. Don't take too long on these; each should be a rapid-fire moment of grace, competency, or tragedy.

RESCUES

In a Rescue, your character saves a small population of potential casualties. Perhaps she rushes them onto an escape shuttle. Maybe she leads them to cover. She might defend them with her psychic shields or heal them with her advanced medical tech. You can use Rescues to develop Talents, Specialties, Signature Assets, or secondary Roles. As well, you can declare Distinctions, but the other players must come up with the specific Distinction you get.

Describe the rescue, and how it uses the relevant Trait, and make a roll. For Rescues, the Gamemaster should roll a D8 difficulty die plus CHAOTIC SITUATION D6 to set the stakes. If the Talent would take a Plot Point, it's free this time. If the player succeeds, take the Trait, and describe how your character accomplishes the rescue. If the Gamemaster raises the stakes, you can either raise the stakes right back, or take a Plot Point and make the Rescue a Failing (see below).

CONFIRMED KILLS

In a Confirmed Kill, your character takes out one or more Cultivators in an impressive, cinematic fashion. Choose a Talent, Role, Signature Asset, or Specialty. If the Talent would take a Plot Point, it's free this time. Make a roll. The Gamemaster should roll a D8 difficulty die and CHAOTIC SITUATION D6 to set the stakes. If the player succeeds, take the Trait, and describe how your character takes down the Cultivators. If the Gamemaster raises the stakes, you can either raise the stakes right back, or take a Plot Point and make the Confirmed Kill a Failing (see below). As well, you can declare Distinctions, but the other players must come up with the specific Distinction you get.

FAILINGS

Any time a Rescue or Confirmed Kill fails, you can take a Plot Point to make it a Failing. On a Failing, take any Talent, Specialty, Signature Asset, or Distinction you were aiming for. But also claim one of your Roles or Attributes at D4 or D6, if you have any left to assign for those values. (If you already have all of your D4 or D6 Action Traits defined, fill in any left to be filled in as per page 122.) Narrate how your character fumbles, and how the Cultivators overwhelm the battlefield because of it. This can provide later moments of angst and drama, as your character was responsible for the deaths of innocents. Alternatively, it can provide conflict if your character doesn't take responsibility, but someone else expects them to.

FINAL NUMBERS

In the end, you should have all of your Roles and Attributes defined. You should have two Talents, either one or two Specialties, two Signature Assets, and three Distinctions (including your species Distinction).

WRAPPING UP

Wrap the Tipping Point at any logical point, or when the players all have full characters. If characters aren't complete, players can fill out their remaining Traits before the first Mission, or during play through additional Rescues, Failings, and Confirmed Kills. The wrap-up should be a cinematic conclusion, usually involving a large alien monstrosity or a massive rescue effort.

THE ROLES

Here are the five Roles, which replace the basic *ACTION ROLEPLAYING* roles as described on page 122. Each has a handful of Talents. These Talents work differently than *ACTION ROLEPLAYING* by default. Each has two effects: a normal version and a "maxed" version. The normal version is free to use. The maxed version costs a Plot Point to activate.

COMMANDER

The Commander Role is in charge of keeping the squad together. He acts as leader, as diplomat, and as a moral hub for the group. Use Commander any time you're dealing with others through persuasion or threats, or when you're dealing with squad mates or developing tactics. A primary Commander should always be ready to delegate, diffuse, and decide.

COMMANDER TALENTS

FIRST AID

Your Commander has constant eyes on the battlefield, and can intervene when his troops are in danger.

Normal: When a squad mate is making a roll that would lead to her being knocked out, she can spend a Plot Point to add your Commander die, if you're present.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to return a squad mate to play when she's been knocked out.

LEGENDARY

Your Commander is the stuff of war stories. He's walked close to death many times, and will always come back for more.

Normal: Once per scene, when you are knocked out, gain a Plot Point.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point when facing death. Return from the brink at a dramatically appropriate time, and count an additional die in your next roll.

MOTIVATION

Your Commander is a master of rousing speeches, and knowing just the right thing to keep his squad fighting at its level best.

Normal: Give a squad mate one of your Plot Points with a motivating speech or a bit of perspective.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to allow a squad mate to count an additional die in any challenge and add your Commander die to that roll.

ENGINEER

The Engineer Role takes charge of the team's tech needs. She hacks security systems, scrambles communications devices, and takes control of enemy robotics. Any time you're dealing with tech or gear, Engineer is the Role to use.

ENGINEER TALENTS

DRONE

Your Engineer can summon forth a short-lived drone to assist her in minor combat, investigative, and other simple tasks. When taking this Talent, choose a Distinction that applies to your drones. You can change this up between missions. You can only have one active drone at a time; creating a new drone makes the previous disappear.

Normal: You can summon a drone at any time. It uses 2d6 in any actions, as well as its Distinction.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to create an overcharged drone. It uses d6 and d10 in any actions, as well as its Distinction. As well, in a combat action, you can sacrifice the drone to add a third die to its total.

ENERGY SHIELDS

Your Engineer carries a portable energy shield generator. At any time, she can have a shield on herself or one of her squad mates. She can change the recipient with a minute of reprogramming.

Normal: Add d6 to any rolls that would benefit from a shield.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point. The shield's recipient denies his enemy its highest die type before rolling. However, maxed shields are prone to glitches. Give a Complication to reflect a glitch.

PULSE GRENADE

Your Engineer can rig a grenade to release an electromagnetic pulse that only affects enemy frequencies.

Normal: Remove the highest die from your next pool to step down one die in an enemy's next roll.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to remove a die from an enemy's pool before he rolls.

PSYCHIC

Most Cold Fusion characters wield guns against the coming onslaught. Your character wields his mind as a weapon. He can control minds, throw objects, and even shake the ground with the force of his psychic power. Unless your character has d8 or higher in the Psychic Role, he cannot use psychic abilities. However, the Psychic Role is the defense for any psychic powers.

PSYCHIC TALENTS

PSYCHIC SHIELDING

Your Psychic knows how to defend himself and others with his psychic abilities. He's always somewhat resistant to mental effects, but he can create a force shield with effort.

Normal: Add a d8 in any roll where your character is defending himself against mental or emotional influence. He can shake the Urging Talent with a single Plot Point.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to build a psychic shield around your squad, defending them against fast-moving projectiles. Give one of them a d8 to any roll to defend against ranged attacks.

PSYCHOKINESIS

Your Psychic can lift and throw things with his mind. With effort, he can throw them with the force of a deadly weapon.

Normal: Your character can do things with his mind that he could usually do with his hands. He can lift. He can throw. He can manipulate.

Maxed: He throws with force. Spend a Plot Point. Choose a gun Signature Asset. Use your Psychic die for that gun type any time your character throws a person or thing.

URGING

Your Psychic bends the minds and wills of his targets, and forces them to act the way he chooses. This Talent only works on living, thinking creatures.

Normal: If you knock out an opponent, you can choose to make her do one simple thing for you. This must be accomplished in the same scene, and only one action.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to take control of a knocked out subject for the scene. Your character must remain in constant concentration while controlling another. The subject may give you two Plot Points to end the effect. If she does so, she's immune to this effect for the rest of the Mission.

SNIPER

The Sniper stays back in the shadows, removing her enemies quickly and silently. She's an expert at both starting fights, and ending them. Any time your character has to use espionage to solve problems, or go unseen, use the Sniper Role.

SNIPER TALENTS

CLOAKING FIELD

With a little tech, and a lot of skill, your Sniper can move throughout the battlefield without being seen.

Normal: Until your character engages in combat, she can go uninhibited and unnoticed by anything without advance scanning technology or psychic abilities. This Talent must be activated when nobody can see her.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to engage the cloaking field in plain sight.

KILL SHOT

Your Sniper is an expert at hitting at the right place, at the right time, to maximize the damage caused. She has to take a moment to aim for Kill Shot to work.

Normal: You can reroll a single die on a roll to shoot an opponent. You have to take the second total.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to reroll any number of dice in a roll to shoot an opponent.

PERFECT SENSES

Your Sniper has trained her senses to a fine point. She always notices details and ambushes before they become problems.

Normal: Your character automatically succeeds in any Notice Action.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point when making a Notice Action. Not only does your character succeed, but the Gamemaster must give you an important detail, and you get a D8 when acting on that detail.

SOLDIER

The Soldier Role is the iconic combatant. Psychics and Engineers use tricks to win a fight. Snipers use subtlety to get one good shot. The Soldier just focuses on using the right gun at the right time, and making bullets fly in all the right places. Any general athletic rolls use the Soldier Role, as well as rolls to take a hit or to endure the environment.

SOLDIER TALENTS

GRENADE BOMBARDMENT

Your Soldier is always prepared. If the preparation needed is a bandoleer of grenades, that is. He can toss a few off with a moment's notice.

Normal: You can add a D6 to any Fight Action against a crowd of enemies.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point during any Fight Action against a crowd of enemies. No matter the results of the Fight Action, even if you're knocked out, they're knocked out at the end.

GUNZERKER

Your Soldier can unleash a massive hail of bullets from multiple guns at the same time.

Normal: You can use multiple weapon Assets and Signature Assets in the same roll.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point to step up all gun Signature Assets in a single roll.

SUPPRESSING FIRE

Your Soldier is adept at filling the battlefield with bullets. This forces enemies to take cover, or to take a shot.

Normal: Enemies must make a choice: Step down their biggest die once, or take the SUPPRESSED Complication.

Maxed: Spend a Plot Point. Enemies must make a choice: Count one fewer die in their total, or you may take a d10 and count an additional die in your total.

CULTIVATORS

Cultivators are the scourges of the universe. Evidence suggests that they destroyed all other life in the universe millions of years ago. It appears that's their goal again.

When portraying Cultivators, play up their alien aspects. Do a Google search for the strangest undersea and insect life you can find, and use those as a basis for your descriptions. They should be odd and distant. They're not relatable antagonists; they're very much "the other." Look to Lovecraft and derivative authors for inspirations. Their motivations should remain a mystery without extensive investigation. Even when their motivations come to life, they should only barely make sense, on a cosmic scale.

Cultivators are relentless, tough, and act as a collective. In any given conflict, be sure to engage all the players. Have at least a mob of mook Cultivators for each Agent, as well as any signature Major Characters. Major Characters are capable of limited communication, but this should mostly serve to bring home just how terrifying and driven these monsters are.

Cultivators should use the normal rules for Fight Actions, and for Major Characters. However, Cultivator Major Characters can use special Talents to reflect their monstrous abilities. Cultivator Talents are not structured like PC Talents; they tend to just change the rules a bit in the monster's favor. Give a Major Character Cultivator two Talents, or four for a particularly loathsome specimen.

CULTIVATOR TALENTS

CARAPACE

The dense carapace on this type of Cultivator rejects any attacks of limited strength. An Agent cannot roll d6s against this Cultivator. Ignore the results of those dice completely, unless they provide Complications.

DEVASTATOR

This Cultivator causes mobs of Cultivators around it to explode when engaging the enemy. When in a Fight Action, give the Agent a Plot Point. Roll an extra d6, and count it to the total. If you do this, the mob explodes, regardless of whether or not it knocks out the Agent.

HIVE MIND

With this Talent, the Cultivator becomes a hub of a hive mind. All mobs in its presence roll an additional d6 in all Fight Actions.

GHOST

This Cultivator can cloak itself like a Sniper, clouding the minds of onlookers. Give the players a Plot Point to prevent a Fight Action against it. It cannot be attacked while cloaked, and can only be revealed by a Psychic, or by taking a Fight Action of its own.

IMMORTAL

A Cultivator with this Talent never dies, so long as it has another body to jump to. If it's knocked out, you may give the player a Plot Point and possess a member of a Cultivator mob, so long as there's still a mob standing.

MASSIVE

This Cultivator is enormous, towering over land vehicles and crushing people with a single step. Add a d12 to all its rolls. However, when multiple characters take a Fight Action against it, they all roll their dice together, and take the highest three against it.

POSSESS

With this terrifying Talent, a Cultivator can possess a living being of any species. An Agent can prevent this Talent by spending a Plot Point or raising the stakes against the Cultivator with a Psychic roll. Other characters get no such resistance. When the Cultivator leaves the body for a new one, the old body dies.

RAVAGE

A Cultivator with this Talent has massive jaws, a devastating weapon, or some other implement of massive harm. Always add a d4 to Fight Actions, and add three dice to the total instead of two.

HUNTERS OF THE HOLY

When the angels and demons were cast down to Earth, they lost access to their powers—but discovered they could pass those powers into objects. Over the last ten thousand years, a few exceptional mortals have commanded these objects for good and evil. Others found that the objects consumed them, and they became gods or monsters. As the centuries passed, these stories faded into myths. But now the final war has begun in Heaven, the power of these ancient artifacts has returned, and the humans who control them will decide the fate of their world.

At first, of course, humanity had no idea what was going on. Only Doctor Lani Pradesh, of the Smithsonian Institute, had an inkling—but her ideas have been dismissed as irrational. Using her department's resources, she has gathered a crew of experts, in the hopes of winning a desperate race against time, and to ensure these powerful objects don't end up in the wrong hands.

THE PITCH

Hunters of the Holy is an example of adapting the *Action Roleplaying* rules to emulate the feel of a television show. Like the *Leverage RPG*, Hunters of the Holy focuses on the episodic adventures of a misfit crew of skilled Agents who seek to acquire heavily guarded items and defeat powerful enemies. Unlike *Leverage*, the focus of this setting is on the supernatural and mystical, with the items typically not in laser-guarded vaults but buried in lost temples or ancient tombs. Even if you do not use all of this setting, you will find plenty here that is useful for any game focusing on such elements.

The central structure of the show is that each episode revolves around a monster or relic "of the week." Information found in researching the past or observing the news of today will lead the Agents to an event or location where they must uncover the true path of events, identify their target, and either eliminate the threat, or recapture the item. The general setting is assumed to be the continental United States (i.e., within the reach of the budget and scope of the Smithsonian Institute, the assumed employers of the Agents), but you can use your own home city, state or country (and associations), or expand things to a much more global threat with ease.

AGENT CREATION

Recovering the lost treasures of history requires a lot more than scholarly acumen. Relic hunters and tomb raiders will find their skills much in demand, as will other kinds of troubleshooters and operators.

Agents in Hunters of the Holy are built in the usual fashion, following the steps in the Agent Creation section. There is likely always going to be a need for those who can make nice, and those who can handle it when it doesn't stay nice, so Agents in this setting will still use the Face and Muscle Roles. Since the setting involves stealing precious objects, it is thematic to re-skin the Sneak Role into Thief. Tech, however, is not a good fit: Agents will need ancient knowledge more than modern geekery. So Tech is replaced with a new Role, the Scholar.

The Scholar has knowledge, and knowledge is power. It is far more than raw intelligence or quick wits—those are just freak occurrences of biology that must be applied to be truly useful. The Scholar's knowledge is arcane, hidden, and eclectic; it can only be found in the deepest of libraries or strangest of laboratories, and only mastered after half a lifetime of passionate study. Passion, truly, define Scholars, for it is not the knowing that drives them, but seeking to know more.

You may find the Scholar Role useful in other settings, even if you include the Tech as well. In a modern espionage game, you could use Scholar to model important experience in the field that no Tech can provide, or to distinguish between a Science Officer and a Chief Engineer in a science fiction setting.

OTHER ROLE OPTIONS

If you want to change or add to the four chosen here, there are plenty of other options. You could bring the Tech back in, as well as the Brains (see page 122) if your tomb raids are more like heists. In a more international setting, a Pilot or Driving Ace might have a vital role. If your setting features a magical power with a single source and everyone has a little of it but some have a lot, you could consider having a Role called The Power to capture that. If your magical types are more of a motley crew of misfits—a half-vampire, a werewolf, an ex-demon, a talking Great Dane, etc., then you could have a special Role that embodies being The Freak.

WHAT THE SCHOLAR DOES

The Scholar's job on a team is to be their guide into the arcane world. Her knowledge of the real world is formidable, too, but her strength is where our world gives way into the strange and unknown. She likely reads two-dozen languages, including several long-dead ones, but she can also translate tongues never yet seen by humankind. She not only has made a study of Viking mythology, she can also extrapolate how those myths might have been half-describing a mis-remembered alien visitor. She may not be able to summon demons herself, but she knows every famous historical figure who could, and where they keep the books they used. And wherever magic is just a matter of knowing the words, the numbers and the rituals, she is the best candidate to take the lead.

Scholars also have trained minds, honed far beyond the capacities of the average intellect. They can make links no one else could ever see, leading to ever-expanding discoveries, or conclusions that appear miraculous. They are not planners, but they can see the plans of others through simple extrapolation. If you know enough of psychology, or boot manufacturing, or pipe-ash, the rest quickly falls into place, and if nine out of ten expeditions encountered the Demon Flies of the Bantu Hills, then she knows to bring the bug spray.

Scholars don't always get their knowledge from books. One might be a lifelong cop who knows every corner of a city and every criminal by his smell, or a tracker who knows where she is in the jungle—and what she'll find there—by the color of the moss. What sets the Scholar apart is not her trappings, but her dedication—sometimes well past the point of obsession. Certainly that is often the view of outsiders, but they cannot understand the life of a Scholar, of the power and wonder hidden behind the curtain only they dare draw back.

PAIRING ATTRIBUTES WITH SCHOLAR

- Scholar + Agility: Carefully dust off an archeological fragment; piece together an ancient frieze or puzzle; step only on the tiles that spell IEHOVA.
- Scholar + Alertness: Spot the tell-tale marks in the cross-section that reveal the vase is a fake; notice that the flintlocks mentioned in the diary weren't invented in the period described; see that one of the disciples at the table is clearly a woman.
- Scholar + Intelligence: Translate the ancient language on the parchment; orient the hidden map to line up with the aerial topography; remember the names of all the kings and queens of England.
- Scholar + Strength: Break the ancient vase so you can see the cross-section; operate an ancient Vindayan flying machine based on your knowledge of their anatomy; apply exactly enough pressure to open the chest without destroying the scrolls inside.
- Scholar + Vitality: Stay up all night cataloging slimes, molds and fungi; find the one eye-hole in the mile-long Mayan mural that is the secret release button; go through ten years of police reports on microfilm to find every mysterious disappearance of teenage girls.
- Scholar + Willpower: Swallowing the hideous delicacy without grimacing to show the tribe you know their ways; avoiding being distracted by the fascinating insights into Sumerian agriculture while the demon tries to escape; staying alert after staying up all night cataloging slimes, molds and fungi.

SCHOLAR TALENTS

COLLECTOR

The Library of Alexandria? Warehouse 23? They've got nothing on your collection of arcane and powerful items you collected on your many travels.

Roles: Scholar, Tech

Activation: Choose a location in your game's setting, representing your personal collection of artifacts or your laboratory, etc. This Talent only works while in this location.

Effect: If anyone spends a Plot Point to add an Asset in this location, it begins at d8.

FIND THE WEAKNESS

It may be a time-travelling demon, an undead slime monster, or an alien super-genius, but it still has a weakness. Study long enough, and you'll find it.

Roles: Scholar

Activation: You are in a scene featuring an opponent and the Gamemaster rolls an Opportunity.

Effect: Spend a Plot Point to invent a weakness in your opponent. From then on, when you or any of your team attack the opponent you may aim for the weak point by removing his highest rolling die and then adding three dice to make your total.

THIS IS HOW IT HAPPENED

Once you have the pieces, you can solve the puzzle: Who did what, to whom, in which room, and with which household object, even if it happened a thousand years ago.

Roles: Scholar

Activation: You trigger an Establishment Flashback yourself (and pay the Plot Point as usual).

Effect: Add a d8 to your roll. Also, you may use this Flashback to establish a Complication for an opponent, instead of an Asset for you.

THE SETTING

In the beginning, the Godhead created the universe, and she placed her children in charge of it. But some of them were full of pride and wanted to rule the world, not just care for it. So began the War between the faithful and the renegades, whom men came to call the angels and the demons. The war soon became cold, however, for neither side could launch an all-out attack without risking the very prize they fought for. If the demons focused on attacking the Heavens, the angels would be able to place the entire world under their protection, and if the angels attacked en masse, the demons would burn the world to ashes rather than surrender it.

Over the centuries, some of the celestials lost their way. They became tainted with too much of the world, and were cast down onto it. Here on Earth, they took mortal form, but only in appearance. To bind them to this plane of existence, they were given a shackle: an item, made of earthly materials, yet touched with enough divine power to bind a celestial to it, and through it, to our world. But soon the celestials found a loophole: if they passed enough of their essence into the object itself, they could sever the tie. It was freedom at a great price, forcing the angel or demon to become almost entirely mortal, or vanish into nothingness. However, it also allowed these exiles a way to gain temporal power on Earth—by granting their powers to mortal men, in the form of the object that had been their prison. In exchange, they hoped that mortal would follow their plans and obey their orders, and allow them to remake their celestial kingdoms on Earth.

Every civilization has myths of this form: an otherworldly being who presents a mortal with a sacred item. Merlin gave Excalibur to Arthur. Utnapishtim gave the Tree of Life to Gilgamesh. Apollo gave Perseus his shield. These are echoes of the persistent truth: of angels and demons working with mankind to try and secure power for themselves, or to win the War on Earth so as to win it in Heaven.

Other legends were also told: of monsters in the forms of men. These legends came from objects that contained so much of their former owner that the character of the celestial could overpower any mortal who came near. These poor hosts are known as the Taken, and their imprint is seen in everything from the legend of the Zahir to the curse of Tutankhamun's Tomb.

Most of these ancient objects are lost to history. Others sit in museums or collector's vaults, their owners ignorant of their true power. A few scholars and wizards own some of the smaller pieces, and desperately hunt for more. New items are still being made as well, for the celestials never ceased to walk amongst us, and no age is without its relics. But in recent years, things have changed dramatically.

Seeing the devastation wrought upon the world during the Second World War, angels and demons alike realized that humans now had the capacity to destroy the Earth, to reduce their prize to an ashen wreck neither side would want to win. It was no longer safe to play the long game. The War turned hot very fast. Celestials, both fallen and untainted, took greater risks to control the Earth and its inhabitants, even acting directly at times. In the halls of Heaven and Hell alike, the trumpet calls of battle were sounded. Essences long dormant in lost items responded instinctively, and sought out new mortals to wield them. Long-sleeping spirits reclaimed the minds and bodies of the Taken. Psychics and magicians across the world felt the shockwaves and became aware of the holy relics, the War, and the stakes of the game. Some chose a side. Others, as is the way in any war, made their own plans.

World expert in Middle-Eastern mythology, Dr Lani Pradesh is one of the few scholars to put the pieces together. To an outsider, her theories sound like apocalyptic ranting. Nobody wants to hear about demons and monsters walking the world, and it is hard enough to get funding to dig up anything less "marketable" than the Ark of the Covenant (although she has a fair idea where that might be). What she needs right now are highly skilled professionals who are used to the strange and the terrifying. People who know how to get the job done without arousing too much suspicion or alerting the authorities. People who can cross several international borders to find the finger bone of a forgotten saint, buried in an ancient tomb under a modern warzone. This is where the Agents come in.

THE OTHER PLAYERS

This setting assumes the Agents are working (semi-officially) for the Smithsonian Institute, but that doesn't have to be the case. This section lists some of the major power brokers who are also involved in the chase to collect the items. Each of them could be used as the Agents' employer; they can be allies or enemies, depending on how you choose to represent them and their actions.

THE HOST

Angels are a diverse breed, varying in form and function as the Godhead designed them, and acquiring ever more variety from any prolonged time away from Heaven and contact with humans. Those who have fallen are less likely to be monstrous, being bound to human form, but will thus also be harder to find. The angels also vary in their devotion to or understanding of their cause. Some are still waging war in the Heavens, and ignore everything else. Some still see humans as innocents that must be protected at all costs. Many are instruments of pure, unfettered judgment that care nothing for human ideas of morality. Many. Not all.

THE HORDE

The legions of Hell don't pretend it was all a frame-up or that they have a heart of gold. They're realists, is all. What matters is the world itself, not Heaven and Hell. They want what everyone wants, what everyone deserves: a nice place to live, and to be themselves. How much they think this should impact the life of the average human depends on the individual demon, and they are even more varied than angels. Their forms are manifold, and deception is their art form. And most frightening of all for most humans: they look exactly like angels, for they were cut from the same cloth. No horns or halos: both are creatures of fire and madness in their true forms, and both look like humans when they fall.

THE TAKEN

Celestials are creatures of purity: pure force, pure emotion. To be Taken is not simply to be possessed, but transformed. Rarely can the human beneath be salvaged after the transformation is complete—which is not to say they necessarily become something entirely alien or bestial. Those who retain the ability to think, plan, and gather resources can and have done so, and will bring their extensive forces to bear against anyone who tries to take their toys away. While most of the Taken are unique, patterns exist and some even suspect that whole "races" of Taken may exist. Whether this is because of hosts of angels with similar powers, or because minute particles of the Demon of Infection are being passed into victims' blood systems via biting the jugular vein, nobody is yet sure.

IGNUS DEI

The largest collection of historical artifacts in the world lies inside the vaults of the Vatican. Of all the Relics known or suspected to exist, the Catholic Church likely already possesses half of them. They are not about to give up the rest, not least because they believe they are theirs by right. There is also the fact that many in the church know or strongly suspect the Final War has begun, and, either out of parochial pride or pure survival instinct, believe this is a chance for the Church to regain dominance over the Earth. The Catholic Church never does anything by halves, and it does not intend to shun the spotlight for the final curtain, so it is bringing its full force to bear on this issue. The body of the Church pursuing the acquisition of Relics is the secret society of Ignus Dei. Templars of Ignus Dei—the Fire of God—work off the books, performing black ops and wetwork with total deniability, and with the assured knowledge they will go to Heaven for their deeds.

THE ASCENSION MOVEMENT

On the surface, the Ascension Movement is a new-age religion crossed with a trendy business strategy based on meaningless buzzwords, and for the most part, that view is accurate. Those high enough in the organization, however, know that all of that is just a smokescreen and revenue generator for the true mission of the enormous and wealthy corporation: to acquire as many as possible of the celestial relics, and through them perform a far more literal "ascension." James and Janet Sandhurst, the original founders of AM Incorporated, follow a gnostic philosophy that leads them to believe that humans can become angels, perhaps even gods, through arcane rituals of power transference. The more Relics they acquire, study, and consume the power of, the closer they come to their goal. James' recent diagnosis of cancer has driven his quest to a frenzied obsession, as he now has a very limited timetable in which to become immortal.

SMALLER PARTIES

Even if you have more money than God, nothing says wealth more than possessing the unique, the exquisite, the incredible—the (not quite literally) priceless. All of the ancient Relics certainly qualify, even if their power is never tapped. To anyone with enough Hermetic scholarship or mystical power to see more than just market value, even the smallest, weakest Relic is worth fighting for. Among some collectors of the arcane, this may simply be friendly one-upmanship: having bragging rights by owning the best, or the most, toys. For others, it is about maintaining power and safety. As it is with nuclear weapons, you can only win the war if you have more than anyone else.

THE RELICS

Celestials vary greatly in their power; so too do the relics that hold their power. As a general rule, the most powerful angels and demons walked the Earth longest ago, and made their gambits for power when it was much easier to raise a giant army of nomad horsemen and try to conquer the Earth. Therefore almost all of the most powerful relics are thousands of years old. Lesser angels are legion, however, and lesser relics can be found across all of history. It was and is still common for wizards and monarchs alike to bedeck themselves with as many talismans as they can find, growing in power with each one they add to their collection. Of course, such hoarders often fall victim to fakes and scams. Sifting the true relics from the infinity of false charms humanity has sold and coveted over its history is no easy task. Everything even rumored to have power is thus worth finding, if only so collectors can be sure it is a fake.

Relics need to survive thousands of years, so are usually made of metal or earthenware. They had to be portable, so are rarely larger than a suitcase. Small relics are often incorporated into larger items to make them harder to lose or easier to use, like a brass button sewn onto a jacket, or a gem set in the handle of a handgun.

Whatever organization the Agents work for will frown upon personal use of the items, even on Missions. Exceptions would be permitted only in the case of those items that were directly needed to help find more of its kind. This is a safety concern: the items are unpredictable and dangerous, and what's more, give off a celestial signal even when their powers are dormant. That attracts other collectors, as well as angels, demons, and the Taken. It also reveals to the enemy exactly which weapons you possess. In other words, the Agents will rarely get to keep what they find beyond a single game session.

Relics are rated from d6 to d12 just like Assets. Relics more powerful than this can and do exist (and may be the focus of a whole series or campaign), but their mechanics are best left to Gamemaster fiat. Anyone holding or wearing a Relic can add its die to any appropriate rolls, just like a Signature Asset. Relics also provide an extra advantage whenever a Plot Point is spent (or, in the case of d6 Relics, once per Episode), like many Talents. With the Gamemaster's permission, Relics at the d8 level can be purchased for Agents during character generation in exchange for a Talent, or by spending a Mission (see page 132, Advancement), just like a Signature Asset. However, the Gamemaster may freely attach a d6 or higher Complication to such Relics to reflect their dangerous and unpredictable nature.

The table on the next page provides some appropriate types and powers of Relics at each level. You can choose from these examples or use them as guidelines to build your own. A higher level power can be added to a lower level Relic by adding Complications, requiring narrow or specific conditions, or making the power work only once per Episode or for a shorter duration (a single roll or contest rather than a scene). Likewise, lower powers can be upgraded by having them last longer or be useful under wider conditions. A few fully fleshed out examples are below.

**: The special power of d6 Relics only works once per Session.

RELIC EXAMPLES

THE CROSS OF ST LAWRENCE

Level: d6

Description: An ancient and blackened brass crucifix from the first century AD.

History: Legend has it that when Lawrence was laid on burning coals for his faith, he suffered no pain and after a time cried out, "I am well done, turn me over!" He was preserved from the heat by the Relic he wore round his neck. The Romans then beheaded him instead. Early Christians kept the Relic, but it was lost in the fall of Rome. It ended up in the hands of a New York firefighter who was killed in the events of 9/11, and the Relic was lost again.

Powers: The wearer reduces by one step all fire- or heat-based Complications, and may add a d6 to any rolls made while suffering under said Complications. The wearer may spend a Plot Point to ignore any such Complications for an entire Scene.

THE DEVIL'S COIN

Level: d8

Description: A gold coin approximately four inches in diameter, stamped with the fierce visage of an unknown Mesoamerican god or demon. Possibly from the Toltec empire.

History: Found by Catholic Spanish explorers in the 17th century, it appears in records throughout the history of the Mexican colonies. After the gold rush, tales of the coin appear among California settlers, and now stories of its legend are told as folk tales to Las Vegas tourists. Some say it was thrown into the famous Bellagio Fountain by its last owner.

Powers: The coin controls luck and anyone holding it gains a d8 to any rolls where chance plays a significant factor (Gamemaster's call, certainly no situation covered by a Talent, Specialty or d10 Attribute). The wearer may spend a Plot Point for luck to break his way allowing him to stumble onto a helpful d8 Asset regardless of how unlikely. In a situation where luck is the only factor, he can also spend a Plot Point to have the odds tilt in his favor. Anyone doing this too often or too publicly will quickly gain the Complication Nobody Likes a Winner d6, as well as being thrown out of casinos, etc.

THE EMERALD OF FIVE-FOLD DISHARMONY

Level: d10

Description: A small but perfectly cut emerald, not set in jewelry.

History: The emerald was apparently found by Japanese sailors among the possessions of a spy from the Korean kingdom of Silla, on a mission to disable the alliance between the Korean kingdom of Baekje and Yamato-era Japan, c 665 AD. According to the ship's log, the ship was taken with ease because everyone on board was already dead. The treasure ended up in the Imperial Jewel Collection, and today is stored in the Tokyo National Museum. Recently, Japan has lent some elements of the Imperial Collection to international museums as part of growing cultural exchange.

Powers: If the emerald is held to an open flame, it begins to glow, and for the next hour (or scene) anyone looking at it suffers the Complication Quarrelsome d8 to all die rolls as they find reasons to argue with everyone about anything. For each Plot Point spent, one target will be so consumed with quarrelling she will be unable to do anything else until the scene ends or the emerald is removed. The quarrelling always escalates, and will eventually lead to violence and even murder.

THE RING OF SOLOMON

Level: d12

Description: A gold ring bearing the six-pointed star known as the Seal of Solomon

History: According to legend, Ethiopian Emperor and proclaimed messiah of Rastafarianism, Haile Selassie, possessed this ring, having traced his family's heritage back to King Solomon and the treasures possessed by him. Selassie is said to have given this ring to singer Bob Marley during his 1966 visit to Jamaica. By all reports, Marley was buried with the ring in 1981.

Powers: The ring gives the wearer the power to summon and control the spirits of the dead. This gives him access to the assistance of two Lieutenants and up to a dozen Minions, to be summoned when needed. Each of these has the Distinction Strength OF THE DEAD d8, which he can add to appropriate die rolls. Also the wearer of the ring may add a d12 to all rolls to control or direct the spirits' behavior. For a Plot Point, specific figures can be called up and forced to obey, revealing secrets or turning on their loved ones. The Gamemaster may demand that the user have or be near something connected with said individual, and likewise be near a place connected to large numbers of the dead (graveyard, battle scene, hospital) to provide the army.

DIE RATING	EXAMPLE RELICS	EX. PASSIVE POWERS	EX. PLOT POINT POWERS
D6—"Uncanny"	The Crowley Tarot, The Dead Man's Hand, The Rest of the Antikythera Machine, The Cross of Coronado	Small instances of good or bad luck; wounds bleed badly or heal faster; reduce an unusual type of damage; gain a real-world, mundane skill	**Hunches of the future; glimpses of the past, one wound closes or becomes lethal; immune to an unusual type of damage; gain a real-world skill or ability as a Master Specialty
D8—"Amazing"	The Devil's Bible, Seven-League Boots, A Hand of Glory, King Tut's Death Mask	Special movement; strong good fortune; significantly increase skills or abilities; gain a rare or powerful skill; cause more damage than a gun or sword; reduce a common type of damage	Read one thought from a mind; ignore a common type of damage; enter or leave any scene; set an Attribute or Specialty to D12; create a new D8 Asset or remove a D8 Complication; incapacitate a target; damage or affect a large group at once.
D10—"Incredible"	The Dagger of Aqu'abi, The Sankara Stones, The Sampo, The Optics of al Rasheed	Wide-ranging blessings to a whole area; gain arcane, superhuman or impossible (for example, flight) skills or abilities; do damage to a large group all at once; create/remove D8 Assets or Complications	See the future or past clearly; ignore all damage for a scene; cause mass destruction to a building or city block; affect a massive crowd of people; create/remove a D12 Asset or Complication; kill or critically wound someone; survive a killing blow
D12—"Miraculous"	The Holy Spear of Antioch, The Blood of Hercules, The Philosopher's Stone, The Tarnhelm	Gain powerful superhuman abilities; control minds, perception, the elements; break physical laws; move through time and/or space; grant D10-level abilities to many people or large area at once	Become functionally immortal or invincible for a time; kill or enslave a large number of people; bring about apocalyptic-like effects over an area the size of a city
Beyond	The Emerald Tablet, The Obsidian Mirror, Mjolnir, Aladdin's Lamp	Unlock godlike superhuman powers permanently for you and others	Destroy the world or build it anew; rewrite the time lines; forever alter rules of physics or causality

CUSTOMIZING ACTION TRAITS

The thing that makes RPGs so compelling to play is how they get us to talk about awesome characters and amazing stories. In *Action Roleplaying*, a good chunk of that lies in mixing and matching Action Traits, and the scenes we describe because of that. You're not just fighting some thug—you're describing using your raw strength (Muscle + Strength), sweet ninja moves (Muscle + Agility), or superior cunning (Muscle + Intelligence). You're not just picking someone's pocket—you're bumping unnoticed into a mark while you're in a crowd (Sneak + Agility), or you're doing it while distracting the mark with witty conversation (Face + Alertness). So changing how Action Traits are framed is a great way to customize your *Action Roleplaying* experience.

RESKINNING ROLES

The most basic way to change your Action game is to change the Roles, since they're how you describe what you're doing.

SETTING

The Roles inform what your Agents do in a given setting—the basic five being about the heist or espionage film. You'll see different Roles in the included settings: **Cold Fusion** and **Hunters of the Holy**. For a setting that's more like a Le Carre Cold War Berlin story and less like a Mission: Impossible vibe, changing "Muscle" to something darker, like "Killer" makes it feel different when you describe your actions. Rolling Intelligence + Killer leads to a different mindset than Intelligence + Muscle, even if the actions covered are the same.

Likewise, maybe you'd throw Tech out, for a setting that isn't about slick gadgetry and hacker access. The "and make stuff explode" part of Tech could be covered by a Muscle Talent that simply allows you to roll your Muscle die when dealing with explosives.

You could also split up a large Role for a setting with nuance in that department. Face is pretty universal, but in setting with a prominent seedy criminal underbelly and an equally prominent high society, you might split Face up into Criminal and Socialite. They cover the same set of actions, but in very different situations.

LANGUAGE

Nothing says that Roles actually need to be about, well, Roles. They're really just giant sets of skills with occasional overlap and a sense of flair. You could just as easily call them "Skill Sets" and use different, broad terms. If we did that for the five Roles, we would probably call them Fight (for Muscle), Engineer or Tinker (for Tech), Plan (for Brains) and Con (for Face). Honestly, we'd still call the Sneak "Sneak" because it works as the name of a Role or a Skill Set.

Of course, this lets you get a bit creative with your individual Agents. Everyone has a Fight Skill Set, but you could retitle it to tailor to your character: maybe you have Manhandle or Kung Fu, and say "So, I'm rolling Strength plus Kung Fu, right?" And even using flair to color a d4 Skill Set can be fun—calling your d4 Con Skill Set Inappropriate Honesty or Bumble could just be as fun when describing your actions (and justifying that sweet Plot Point for the d4).

CATEGORY

Roles are about the action you're doing, but this category doesn't have to be. Whenever you're gathering dice, you're at least saying, "I'm doing this awesome action (Role) with this sort of style or method (Attribute)." But since we already know what the action you're doing is, we could change Role to be another category, like Motivation. (If you've checked out *Dramatic Roleplaying*, you've got a sense of how this idea works.)

The sorts of Motivations you choose are also informed by your setting. If you want something swashbuckling, you could go with: Love, Faith, Guilt, and Selfishness. Love is great for a game about romance, loyalty, and passion. Faith-based actions convey a sense of trust, either in a higher power or in your associates. Guilt can bring some of that classic pathos to a swashbuckling game. And, of course, Selfishness is always an option.

Suddenly, you're playing something with a radically different feel if you're saying, "I'm going to handle these ruffians, with Strength plus Love, because I will not let my comrades be harmed as they make their escape!" Or "I convince the Cardinal's aide to let us in with Willpower plus Guilt, as I break him down by projecting my shame and my burdens on him."

Motivations aren't the only option for reskinning the entire Roles category. Anything that would prompt exciting, quick language about every action is an option.

CHANGING THE NUMBER OF ROLES

If you keep with the starting number of Roles, then you'll have one at d10, one a d8, one at d6, and two at d4. If you change the number of roles, adjust your dice accordingly:

- **Six Roles:** one at d10, one at d8, two at d6, two at d4
- **Four Roles:** one at d10, one at d8, one at d6, one at d4
- **Three Roles:** one at d10, one at d6, one at d4

If you are looking at more than six, then you need to combine some. If you are looking at fewer than three, you need to separate them out.

Some people try playing with only one d4 Role, making the other one a d6. While that makes agents a tiny bit more competent, it comes at a price: they aren't as interesting. We like watching characters when they're put in place where they're awesome and where they're problematic. A d6 Role isn't either, and taking away a d4 Role removes one way an Agent can get more Plot Points. So stick to the formula on this one.

CHANGING SPECIALTIES AND TALENTS

However you change Roles, just remember to rework the Talents accordingly. Some might not fit a different paradigm, or need to be rewritten to mesh with the new setup. Specialties will have to change, too, though that isn't as thorny as dealing with Talents since Specialties are just written down as phrases on your Agent Sheet.

RESKINNING ATTRIBUTES

Like with Roles, changing the terms around Attributes can make your game and story pop with different flavor.

LANGUAGE

Changing how you describe the flair or spin with Attributes has as much impact as changing how you describe what you're doing with Roles. As with Roles, there are many different ways to tweak the language.

You might start by just renaming one or two Attributes, to better fit a given theme. With the swashbuckling idea above, maybe Alertness becomes Wits, since both are roughly the same—about noticing things and reacting quickly in a mental capacity. And saying "I'm using my Wits!" is a lot more in keeping with that vibe.

You could also combine or collapse them down into a smaller set. Alertness and Agility are mental/physical analogs, as are Strength and Intelligence, and Vitality and Willpower. If you don't care for the mental/physical split, you could instead go with Finesse (for Alertness and Agility), Power (for Strength and Intelligence), or Resolve (for Vitality and Willpower).

CATEGORY

See this entry in Roles for ideas. The only difference is that you'll stop describing the way you're doing actions with broad comments about hyper-competent physical and mental aspects. But that's all right! When you change the Attribute category to something else, make sure whatever you're adding in compensates for that change of description.

For instance, you could just as easily use the Motivations idea to replace Attributes, and keep the Roles as they are. It'll feel a little less like an action movie, and more like an intrigue movie as you're constantly revealing inner thoughts and emotions, but that setup will keep the same quick pace of *Action Roleplaying*.

CHANGING THE NUMBER OF ATTRIBUTES

If you keep with six Attributes, you'll have the same setup as normal, with either:

- One d10, four d8, one d6
- Two d10, two d8, two d6

If you change the number of Attributes, use the following setups. Note that none of these have the dual setup that six Attributes do:

- **Five Attributes:** one d10, two d8, two d6
- **Four Attributes:** one d10, two d8, one d6
- **Three Attributes:** one d10, one d8, one d6

As with Roles, if you've got a list that has more than six or fewer than three, you need to revise that list.

JUST ONE SET OF ACTION TRAITS

For a totally different take on Action Traits, instead of having two lists and combining one from each, you could have one list and pick two from there each time you do an action. To illustrate this, we'll riff off the Motivations idea above, and make a list with five Action Traits:

- Bravado represents courage, will, and mental fortitude.
- Conviction represents faith, strength of spirit, and not bowing to pressure.
- Guile represents craftiness, deception, and wits.
- Reason represents intelligence and the ability to understand and execute complex ideas.
- Vigor represents physical endurance, strength, and effort.

With just one list, you'll pick two different Action Traits and roll those dice. The way you mix and match those Traits tells everyone about how you're doing some amazing action, and it means you can describe the same thing in different ways. Let's take being chased on the Autobahn, and trying to avoid being pushed off the road into conveniently placed exploding barrels.

- Conviction + Reason describes you being cool under pressure, analyzing all the traffic around you and finding the right spot to dart in to avoid a new fiery paint job…for either you or any innocent bystanders.
- Bravado + Guile describes a very different take, where you're pushing back against the cars trying to run you off the road, and feinting at the last minute to get one of them to drive into a hazard as you blow past.

With this setup, this part of the action die mechanics is much simpler, and more of the game's flavor relies on how Distinctions and other components interplay. So if you use this, also look at changing how those other components work (which you'll read about shortly).

WARNING ON CHANGING ACTION TRAITS

Whenever you change Action Traits, you need to look at how that changes what Agents can do in and expect to do in the game. Look over Pairing Attributes and Roles on page 123, and note down any ways where your change makes that different.

You might even—if the changes are drastic enough—choose to make an entirely new list so that all the players are on the same page about how the new Action Traits work.

And remember that the sort of Traits you use also inform the sort of Complications that could come up. If someone rolls a 1 when using a LOVE Motivation, for instance, that could open up something different from rolling a 1 on a KILLER Role.

TYPED DISTINCTIONS

Unlike Action Traits and other parts of an Agent, Distinctions are a solid rock. Three is the perfect number: more than that, and you start having Distinctions you'd never use. Less than that, and you start overusing Distinctions to boredom.

That doesn't mean you can't change them. As it stands, Distinctions are open-ended. Whatever you want can fit there. And that's where creating Distinction types comes into play.

When making an Agent for a given setting, look at the important touchstones in that setting. For one that's about monster hunting in the urban jungle of Detroit, you could require a Distinction focused on the supernatural, one focused on the normal world, and one that's open. Or, for short: your Supernatural Distinction, Mortal Distinction, and Open Distinction.

The rules for how they're used wouldn't change—they still give you a D8 for positive use and a D4 when they complicate. But what this does is unify all of the Agents to the setting's theme. (In this case, that they are people who have to deal with the secret, horrific world while also being people with lives outside of that.)

If you take this option, only have one or two of the Distinction restricted to a type. Leave at least one open, to keep with the flexible nature of Action.

CHANGING SPECIALTIES AND SIGNATURE ASSETS

Specialties and Signature Assets are fairly easy to change: just change how many there are. The rules for them are simple enough, and they are not core parts of Action, that there isn't more you need to do.

Still, don't overdo it. Having two starting Specialties and one or two (depending on type) starting Signature Assets is a good number. Adding one Specialty or one Signature Asset makes Agents a little more competent, but not much more. And while it seems like a good idea to give out more toys, it actually makes an Agent feel less iconic—you become someone with broad abilities rather than someone known for a certain shtick or bit of gear. Broadly talented people aren't memorable. People with a particular expression of their abilities are.

Likewise, unless you're looking to remove one of these rules entirely because it doesn't fit a genre or setting, don't reduce the number. You want to play iconic Agents, but you also want a few options for covering different sorts of scene. The basic setup is the right spot between "boring because of too few" and "boring because of too many."

CHANGING TALENTS

There are already rules for making your own Talents, and we talk above about how changing Roles means also having to reexamine all the Talents, so the primary thing to talk about here is changing the number of Talents for an Agent.

Talents reflect special tricks that an already hyper-competent Agent has. Adding tricks increases that competency and gives the players more toys to play with, but that adds a cost: having to keep in mind all the different special rules that your Agent has (and for the Gamemaster, all the special rules every Agent has). After a while, that's not worth the increased number of Talents.

Keep the maximum number of starting Talents to two. If you want a simpler game of *ACTION ROLEPLAYING*, strip Talents out completely—especially for a one-shot of convention game where you're introducing the game to people, Talents aren't core to how Action works.

You could also do one Talent, either as a way to give players something to try out in your game, or to reflect that the Agents are young recruits or trainees just getting into the profession.

All that said, if you're playing with advancement, gaining Talents over time is perfectly fine. That's slowly adding new options while getting used to the options already attached to an Agent, which doesn't create the same burden as starting with a lot of Talents.

DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING

Design: Leonard Balsera and Filamena Young
Development: Leonard Balsera, Amanda Valentine, and Filamena Young
Settings: Filamena Young with Amanda Valentine
Based on the *Smallville RPG*

INTRODUCTION

This is *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying*. Set down your sword—that's not the weapon of choice here. Put down the armor—it can't help you. *Dramatic Roleplaying* is, as advertised, about the drama. Get a group of friends together, create your characters, and bring on the hard choices, the tense scenes, and the intimate character interactions you've been craving. *Dramatic Roleplaying* lets you recreate some of your favorite movies and television dramas, from tense political thrillers to fun and sexy young adult paranormal romance. Here, conflict doesn't (usually) come at the barrel of a gun. Rather, it comes when passionate people butt heads and pull out the stops to mentally, socially, and physically get the upper hand.

Here are the things you'll do in *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying*:

- Create dynamic Lead characters with strong ties to each other and the world around them.
- Use Pathways (see page 167) to create characters from the ground up and let the stages of their life tell you who you're playing, OR use the Pilot Episode (see page 181) to create characters on the fly while you game. The choice is yours!
- Create a breathing, living setting full of people beyond the Lead characters. They will help shape your stories as both aids and challenges along the way.
- Pit character against character as players work together to explore and examine everything they believe in. Challenge each character to discover what really drives them. What they really Value. What Relationships motivate them.
- Emulate your favorite dramas—whether from TV, books, or movies—with a straightforward system meant to give your characters special Abilities and Distinctions. This streamlines the unique qualities of a setting, be it lycanthropy or courtroom finesse, so you can get back to what you really want out of your game—the drama!
- Set scenes organically as a group. Players and Gamemasters alike influence the story by describing and benefiting from scene details, surprise relationships, and setting color. Everyone is invested when everyone is creating.

ROLES

A game table can be a portal into a thousand worlds, and the way you frame the interactions among people at the table is what makes one game different and unique from other games. This ranges from what sorts of characters you'll be playing to who gets to take on the extra work and reward of being the Gamemaster.

One person around the table takes on the role of Gamemaster (the GM), with everyone else taking on the job of playing a Lead. The Leads are the most important part of the stories you'll all tell. They're the people who act with passion and drive and whose stories are interesting enough to tell. Because their stories are the stories we're interested in, they gain and spend the currency we use to move the story along. That is, your Lead earns something called Plot Points. You'll read more about Plot Points later (see page 173), but for now, know that Plot Points are how you influence the stories and occasionally take control of chance, fate, and setting.

If you're the GM, offering the opportunity to earn Plot Points is also how you influence the players to take real risks with their characters. But that's only part of your role. The majority of your fun comes from playing out Features and using the Trouble pool.

As described, Leads are the characters that are vital to the story. **Features,** on the other hand, are characters who are important to the story, who add to the story, who make the story possible, but who aren't the active agents in what goes on. They are the Leads' loved ones, enemies, family, and friends—anyone who matters and can affect the story, but who doesn't have the influence that the Leads do.

Features can't spend Plot Points. In place of Plot Points, as the GM, you get a **Trouble pool.** This is a pool of dice you can use to raise the stakes against your Leads, add to the drama, and, over all, cause a lot of trouble. Your Trouble pool grows and shrinks during the course of play, so don't let it get dusty.

WELL, ACTUALLY...

In the *Smallville RPG*, Features can spend Plot Points—the GM pays out of her unlimited pool and gives the Lead's player a Plot Point for their trouble. If that's your preference, go for it.

Many of the rules in this book are meant to streamline, but not necessarily supersede, the rules in the *Smallville RPG*.

COLLABORATION & RESPONSIBILITY

In *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying*, you and your group work together to create great stories of drama and conflict. Sometimes the story just flows and it's obvious to everyone where it's headed. Often, though, you explicitly collaborate with the group to discuss the decisions that need to be made and how to move the story forward.

Good collaboration requires responsible participants. Everyone around the table needs to know what each of you is responsible for. Remember that, no matter how intriguing everyone's suggestions are, in the end you're the one who makes the decisions for your Lead, while balancing your responsibilities as a member of the group.

As a player, you are responsible for:

- Deciding what your Lead does.
- Deciding whether your Lead stands up and fights or Gives In during a conflict.
- Confronting the problems presented by the GM.
- Pointing your Lead in directions that make for good stories, even (or especially) when that means failing or doing something less than ideal.
- Getting into conflicts other Leads and testing your assumptions, sometimes with Contests.
- Deciding how your Lead changes and grows over time, often by challenging the things that Drive you.
- In general, telling the story of your character.

As the GM, you are responsible for:

- Presenting problems—or apparent problems—for the Leads to confront.
- Deciding how Features can best provoke responses from the Leads.
- Framing the scenes and deciding when they end.
- Calling for Tests.
- In general, stirring up trouble.

Everyone is responsible for:

- Making everyone else at the table look awesome.
- Selling the success of other characters, even when it means your Lead doesn't succeed.
- Offering suggestions to other players, but respecting the decisions they make in the end.

Resources are everyone and everything else that adds to the story. The girl at the cafe who knows more than she's saying. The classic cherry-red muscle car you drive around in. The school where so much of the story unfolds. The police department and its persons in blue. Resources are what Leads can draw on to make their efforts more successful and more colorful. These are things and people that matter to the Leads, but aren't fully fleshed out characters, places or objects.

Resources are part of the Pathways Map (see page 169) that the players and the GM draw out during character creation. They're a shared responsibility at the table. Sometimes you'll play out your own Resource if it's necessary for the scene. Often though, the GM or even another player will step in. Resources that are people may eventually grow into Features if they become important to the story and the plot demands it.

TRAITS

Traits are the things that make up your character. They describe what makes your character unique, and what really matters to your character.

In *Dramatic Roleplaying*, we break down Traits into three categories: **Drives, Assets,** and **Resources.** We also break those down further. Drives split into **Values** (the ideals your Lead holds as most important, see page 157), and **Relationships** (the people and connections that matter most, see page 160), as these are the things that ignite your Lead's passions and egg them on to action and story. Assets split into **Distinctions** (what makes your Lead unique, see page 161) and **Abilities** (the way you influence the world, see page 163). **Resources** are the things in the world you can call on for aid (see page 165). From these Traits, you build your dice pools during actions and conflicts.

Traits exist for a reason beyond determining which dice you get, obviously. Each Trait describes a facet of your character and helps guide you in your roleplaying and your story creation.

DICE

Like all *Cortex Plus* games, *Dramatic Roleplaying* uses dice to help determine how conflict gets resolved. Whenever a Lead faces off against Features, other Leads, or challenges and speed bumps created by the GM, the players pick up dice to see how the situation resolves and to help to build the story.

In *Dramatic Roleplaying*, all Traits have die ratings. The more sides a die has, the better your chances of success. It also reflects competency or attachment to the thing the die defines. So, if you have a d8 in the Value Love, (more on Values on page 157) you're much more motivated by love than someone who has a d6 in Love. This holds true for any Trait your character possesses. The higher the die, the better you are at or with it, and the more important what it represents is for your characters.

The dice used in the game are:

d4 = **Troublesome:** This frequently complicates your life.
d6 = **Average:** Whatever. You guess this is important. Sometimes.

D8 = **Noticeable:** This is something that matters to you.
D10 = **Impressive:** This defines you and matters more to you than to most people.
D12 = **Outstanding:** This is critical to who you are. It's your top priority in life.

You tell your stories, you take your Leads on adventures, and you put them head to head against each other and against the perils and challenges of your living and breathing setting. But when do you roll the dice?

Don't sweat it; there are actually two times you roll the dice and they're pretty easy to define. You roll the dice when a Lead does something risky (a **Test**,) or when your Lead is trying to get something from or out of someone else (a **Contest**.) It's that simple. But let's break it down a bit further.

THE TEST

When your characters are putting themselves in danger, when they're putting their life on the line, or otherwise challenging themselves and, perhaps, changing what they understand about themselves, we call that a Test. Running a triathlon, infiltrating an enemy bunker, fighting a bear, or performing *Il Dolce Suono* as the lead soprano might all require a Test to accomplish your goal. (See page 175 for more on Tests.)

Example: Topher is playing Connor, a lovelorn werewolf who was just recently ditched by his girlfriend of seven years. Connor's in a bad place, emotionally, and Topher decides that Connor will pick a fight with the tough-as-nails biker gang that his ex now hangs around with. The GM asks Topher what he wants out of the exchange. Topher explains that he hopes Connor can blow off some steam and maybe assert some dominance with the gang. He also mentions that he's perfectly happy if Connor gets the snot beaten out of him. Either would be a chance for growth. Because the bikers are currently just Gamemaster characters without real speaking roles (and therefore no Traits to go up against), the GM decides this is a Test, and tells Topher to pick up some dice.

THE CONTEST

Here's the meat of *Dramatic Roleplaying*: when your Lead runs into direct conflict with other significant characters, you may enter a **Contest**. You have to want something from them, and they have to not be willing to give it to you without putting up a fight. Often, this manifests in conflicting desires. You want him to give you the keys to his car, he wants to swerve home drunk. Pick up your dice. Maybe she knows the secret of where your true enemy resides, but won't tell you out of fear of him. Pick up your dice. She's put you down in front of your friends for the last time, and you're going to get her off your back once and for all. Pick up your dice. Contests also handle physical altercations—since you have no hit points or health to track, you use Stress (see page 177). You don't need to learn a sub system for combat. A Contest is a Contest whether you're slinging insults or throwing fists.

Example: Lillianna consults with a witch. Lillianna's player, Abena, has been roleplaying a conversation with this witch for a while, but it's becoming clear to her that the witch isn't going to give up what she knows. The information is vital, and Abena asks if there's a way that Lillianna can pressure the witch into telling her more. The GM nods and tells her to pick up some dice.

But what dice do you pick up? Good question! Earlier we discussed step dice, and this is where they come in. Your Lead and Features have various **Traits**—Relationships, Values, Distinctions, Abilities, and Resources. During character creation, you assign each Trait with a dice rating. When rolling a Contest or a Test, you build your dice pool from the Traits you have that relate to the thing you're doing. Relevance between Trait and the situation is important—it helps inform the story and makes that story richer.

You may also pull dice into your potential pool by calling on **Minor Assets**, descriptions of the scene or the situation that the GM and players alike call out as important enough to note. In the right situation, you can call on these potentially scene-changing details and add dice to your pool (see page 171).

WHAT ARE MINOR ASSETS?

If you're familiar with the *Smallville RPG*, you know them as Useful Details. You'll find more information about them on page 166.

VALUES

Leads and Features have Traits we call **Values**. In a game of *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying*, Values tell you two things. On the grand scale, they tell you what things are going to matter in the course of your story. On the character level, they tell you how the characters interact with those things that matter.

VALUES THAT MATTER

As the GM, you have to set up a few things ahead of time to create your *Dramatic Roleplaying*. Deciding on which Values to use sets the stage for the sorts of stories you're going to tell. All characters share the same six

Values that you choose. For example, a game in which Love is a Value will have to address romance, familial connection, and the other ways that love manifests. A game in which Love isn't one of the six Values might touch on some of those ideas, but they won't be the core of any stories told.

Below you'll find a list of suggested Values and the sorts of stories they might tell. You can always add your own as well, so long as the players all understand clearly how the Value is used in a game. Some of these Values may mean nearly the same thing, but each choice says a great deal about the stories you're writing. Fairness, for example, says something very different from Justice; though both of them may start off with the same stories, a character's relationship with Justice is not the same as their relationship with Fairness.

ADAPTABILITY: Stories about survival. Stories in which massive change is inevitable. Stories in the midst of danger and violence. Stories where the status quo is omnipresent and oppressive. Stories in an alien environment.

AMBITION: Stories about succeeding against all odds. Stories about finding contentment in a meritocracy. Stories about beating out the competition. Stories about reaching higher and farther than anyone ever said you could.

AUTHORITY: Stories about power and control. Stories about rising to the top. Stories about bringing down the establishment. Stories about bringing order to chaos.

BEAUTY: Stories about art. Stories about the transcendental. Stories that pull back the facade. Stories about nature and simplicity. Transhumanist stories.

BALANCE: Stories that seek the middle. Stories that warn against extremism. Stories with strong opposing possibilities. Stories that warn against false moderation.

BELONGING: Stories where communities matter. Stories where the lone wolf comes home. Stories where characters might lose their identity. Stories that pit the greater good against the personal need.

BRAVERY: Stories full of danger to be faced. Stories about high-risk occupations. Stories that pit doing against thinking. Stories that may have turned out better with more planning and plotting by the characters. Stories about jumping feet first.

COMMUNITY: Stories about bringing people together. Stories about cliques coming apart. Stories about social games and manipulations. Stories about protecting what you've got against those who would come take it from you.

DECORUM: Stories where propriety is the order of the day. Stories where a faux pas could ruin a person. Stories about a stifling social order. Stories about shocking the system. Stories about star-crossed lovers.

DISCOVERY: Stories about exploration. Stories about digging too deep. Stories that celebrate curiosity. Stories that question the speed of advancement.

DUTY: Stories with a regiment. Stories with a strong ethic. Stories with direct consequences. Stories where failing means innocent people get hurt. Stories that examine the need for personal freedom.

ETHICS: Stories that ask you to take a stand. Stories that question everything you believe. Stories with clear right and wrong. Stories with no clear right and wrong.

FAIRNESS: Stories where compassionate understanding is important. Stories with simple ethics. Stories where the morals are complicated, and finding the simple answer is the challenge. Stories in an imbalanced world where the system is against you.

FAITH: Stories about belief. Stories that question the miraculous. Stories that examine false prophets. Stories that celebrate the invisible. Stories with childlike wonder.

FAME: Stories that celebrate personality. Stories about people with questionable power and importance. Stories that ask us to build pedestals. Stories that topple people from pedestals.

FORTITUDE: Stories about standing against all comers. Stories about endurance. Stories about inner strength. Stories in extreme climates. Stories about a status quo that needs to, but won't, crumble on its own.

GALLANTRY: Stories with dynamic heroism. Stories with romantic sword play. Stories with dashing heroes. Stories with damsels causing distress. Stories that put the Bourgeoisie to task.

GLORY: Stories about amazing feats. Stories that will live on in legend. Stories that prize appearance over substance. Stories that ask us to question our idols.

GRACE: Stories about poise even under fire. Stories about forgiveness. Stories that question violent resolution. Stories that question pacifism. Stories about compassion and its limits.

HONESTY: Stories where a personal truth outweighs systems of justice and law. Stories where characters have to face who they really are. Stories where lies are a weapon, and honesty is the only defense.

HOPE: Stories about not giving up. Stories with happy endings. Stories that reject the darkness. Stories that are endlessly bleak. Stories where the heroes lose at the end.

IMAGINATION: Stories that celebrate creativity. Stories where stretching the truth may save the day. Rashomon stories. Stories set in impossible places. Stories with children as the heroes.

INDIVIDUALITY: Stories of rebellion and revolution. Stories of breaking away from the crowd. Stories of resisting control. Stories of pomp and self-importance. Stories of sacrificing the many for the sake of the self.

JUSTICE: Stories seeking an absolute balance. Stories where a balanced scale is a must, no matter how grim the efforts to get there. Stories of revenge, or stories of letting go of vendettas.

LOVE: Stories that have romance center stage. Stories that explore the power of fraternity and sorority. Stories that revolve around passion, for people, callings, or crafts.

MASTERY: Stories where "average" isn't enough. Stories where the characters are larger than life. Stories where striving for perfection in the skill or talent of choice informs the narrative. Stories with training montages.

PEACE: Stories that challenge war. Stories set during a time of war. Stories that respect pacifism. Stories that warn inaction is the same as death, maybe literally. Stories about ghosts. Stories about an end to violence.

PIETY: Stories about sticking to a code. Stories about resisting temptation. Stories about self-sacrifice. Stories questioning an organized church. Stories that pit faith against evangelicalism. Stories with rebuking the undead.

POPULARITY: Stories where status matters. Stories about rising to the top. Stories where the cool kids get the disdain. Stories where the cool kids aren't the popular kids. Stories the popular kids would tell.

POWER: Stories that have clear right and wrong. Stories that question where power comes from. Stories about the underdog triumphing. Stories about exerting control when needed.

SACRIFICE: Stories about what a character wants the most. Stories about what the characters will give up to get what they want. Stories about what characters will lose to protect each other. Stories about what a character will give up to elevate themselves.

TRUTH: Stories that seek to uncover, regardless of the consequences. Stories that pull back the curtain. Stories where the truth is a currency. Stories that question credibility.

When deciding on the Values you'll use, think about the stories you'll tell, but also think about how the Values will interact with each other. Make sure you have Values that potentially conflict with one another. That conflict can spur a lot of the conflict and drama that's so vital to *DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING*. It may be tempting to choose pairs of opposites, but that's already built into Values—you don't need both Ambition and Sloth, because AMBITION *means nothing to me* D6 models Sloth just fine.

SOME SAMPLE VALUE SETS

- **The Game:** Victoriana
- **Values:** AUTHORITY, COMMUNITY, DECORUM, DUTY, LOVE, POPULARITY

- **The Game:** High Flying Wuxia War Epic
- **Values:** DUTY, GALLANTRY, GLORY, GRACE, MASTERY, SACRIFICE

- **The Game:** High School Monsters
- **Values:** ADAPTABILITY, BELONGING, DISCOVERY, FAIRNESS, INDIVIDUALITY, LOVE

For more game ideas with different Value sets, see the Setting Starters on page 181.

CHARACTERS AND VALUES

Once the GM has decided what Values you'll be using in the game, each player needs to decide how their Lead interacts with those Values. Each Value will end up with a step die associated with it as part of character creation (see page 167). Once the die type is established, each Value needs a Value statement. How does the character feel about the Value? What aspect of the Value is the most important to them?

A Value statement doesn't have to be a positive outlook. (**Example:** LOVE *is for chumps.)*

A Value statement will change over the course of your game. So you can make it extreme, but don't make it absolute or generic. (Good **Example:** *I have no time for your petty* JUSTICE *system.* Bad **Example:** JUSTICE *is a good thing.)*

A Value statement should be evocative and have punch. This is no country for weak opinions—the more extreme the statement, the more opportunities you have to challenge it. Challenging Value statements is a big part of character advancement, and therefore something you want to do as a player. (**Example:** *I've never met an* Honest *man.)*

You can format a Value statement in one of two ways. You can directly reference the Value, or you can skip mentioning the Value. Either way, you're making a powerful statement about that Value, just in different ways. Consider that when you're writing Value statements.

Example: *I have a* Duty *to protect my son,* or, Duty *My son is what matters to me.*

Both of those examples say something; while they're similar statements, the second says a bit more. That doesn't make it a better statement, just one with a different nuance.

RELATIONSHIPS

Each Lead that you play exists in a rich and intense setting full of other interesting and unique characters. Leads don't exist in a bubble—their lives are touched by the Features and Extras they interact with. Rather than simply noting that your Lead has connections with other nonplayer characters and leaving it at that, *Dramatic Roleplaying* uses these connections as part of the *system* as well as the stories.

These connections are called Relationships, and they're a Trait you use whenever you're rolling your dice. Relationships are so important to *Dramatic Roleplaying* that they're core to every roll you make. Every passionate, daring, or powerful action your Lead takes in the stories you tell is in part motivated by the people your Lead loves, hates, admires, or cannot forget.

During character creation (see page 167), you'll be asked to create Relationships with Features, Extras, and other Leads. As part of the character creation process, these Relationships will have step dice assigned to them just like Values. The Leads in your game will have different numbers of Relationships depending on how you each progress through character creation.

Also like Values, each Relationship needs a statement that goes along with it. Your Relationship statements help you remember how you feel about the Feature or Extra, as well as giving you another thing to challenge as the story progresses.

Relationship statements should be intense, like Value statements, and reflect a character's feelings for another. Features have Relationship statements about each other and about the Leads as well. (**Example:** *I'd cut the stars out of the sky for* Sally.)

Like Value statements, Relationship statements should not be absolute or generic, as they are things that can and will change along with the story. (Good **Example:** Lucy *is my pet project this summer vacation.* Bad **Example:** Phil*'s my brother.)*

Relationship statements don't have to be positive. Hate and other strong negative emotions can be every bit as empowering as positive Relationships. (**Example:** *What I do, I do to spite my* Stepfather.)

CLIQUES

Not all Relationships are with individual people—you may have a similar Relationship with a group of people or an organization, which can be represented as a Clique. If you needed to have a Relationship with every member of the Suits at the Office or with the Cheerleaders in your high school, you'd have a lot of redundant Relationships rated with very low dice. Instead, you can have a Relationship with a Clique, which you roll any time you're interacting with the interchangeable members of the group or organization.

If one member becomes differentiated in some way, you can use that to challenge (see below) your Relationship with the group, and you may want to add a new Relationship if this character starts to become important to your Lead.

Cliques can also be used as Resources (page 165). Maybe the Gals at the Bar are a great source of information for you. Groups of people acting as a Resource are treated exactly like any other Resource. You give them two specialties and recognize that they're a limited resource. When you use up their dice, as with any other Resource, it means you've exhausted your connection with them for a while.

For more information on Cliques, expanded rules, and many samples, check out the *Smallville High School Yearbook*.

CHALLENGING VALUES & RELATIONSHIPS

Whenever you're in a situation where the statement for one of your particular Values or Relationships is inappropriate, in doubt, or flat out wrong, you can choose to **challenge** that statement. You decide that this situation may change your character's views, so you're calling into question the statement that defines your Lead's Relationship or Value.

For example, if you have a Relationship called Jason *would never let me down* d8, and someone gives you evidence that Jason has betrayed you, you could challenge that Relationship. If you have a Value called Truth *Everyone's a liar* d6, and you're trying to get someone to trust you, you could challenge that Value.

Challenging a statement gives you triple the die value of that Trait in that Contest or Test. So, in the above two examples, you'd get 3d8 or 3d6 respectively to roll as part of your dice pool. You also get to add a die of that size to your Growth pool (see page 179).

Regardless of what else happens, at the end of that scene, you step back the Value or Relationship by one step for the rest of the session. Your convictions have been challenged, so you can't get your usual benefit from that Trait while your character remains uncertain. You can challenge a Value or Relationship multiple times during an episode, reducing the Traits by one step each time. If the Trait would be reduced below a d4, you take the Trait off the table and cannot use it until the next session.

Example: Bart is a keyboard cowboy in the cutthroat world of cyber warfare. He learned early on to Trust *no one* d8. However, from the moment he ran into Trex, a code breaking genius, everything started to change. Now, she's in trouble, and she's begging him, just this once, to trust her and help her save herself! This is important, and he's willing to look at his world in a new way if it means he can help Trex.

So on the Contest roll with a shadowy Federal Agent, he challenges his Trust and adds 3d8 to his roll. He does amazing on that roll, and makes note that his Growth pool now contains a d8. For the rest of the session, his Trust Value will be a d6 while he figures out how he should really feel about trusting people.

DISTINCTIONS

Your Leads are unique. In *Dramatic Roleplaying*, you may start out with a generic, cookie cutter cop, librarian, or court wizard, depending on setting, but they don't stay that way. They shouldn't stay that way. They should stand out, they should be exceptional, they should be fascinating and interesting.

Most of all, they should be distinct.

And that's where Distinctions come in. A Distinction is a Trait that sets you apart from the crowd. Something that makes your Lead special. They may manifest as a personality Trait or quirk, a specialized professional training, a reputation no one but you carries, or a special natural aptitude.

Distinctions also inform the setting—when creating your Distinction, you're staking a claim. If, for example, your Wuxia-based master swordsman has the Distinction The Fastest Blade in the Dynasty, it becomes true. There may be stronger, better trained swordsman, but there is none faster. Top Cop, Fairest Of Them All, Iron Chef—all of these things imply as much about other people in the setting as they do the character themselves.

And a GM can play with this as well. If, for example, one of your Leads has the Distinction Meanest Cat In the Whole Dang Town, introduce a Feature down the road with the Distinction Not From 'Round Here, and watch the sparks fly. Your Leads will have varying numbers of Distinctions, depending on how you advance through character creation (see page 167).

Distinctions are rated, like other Traits, with step dice from d4 to d12. As you'll see later, a d4 Trait is one that tends to get you into a lot of trouble, so keep that in mind as you create your Distinctions. If you have Ladies Man at a d6, generally it works out just fine for you. If you have Ladies Man at a d4, think about how often being smooth gets you into trouble. And have fun with it! Getting into trouble is a wonderful source for drama.

THE DISTINCTION JOB

If you're familiar with *Cortex Plus Action/Heroic Roleplaying,* and prefer your Distinctions that way, you can totally do that. You'll simply name your Distinction as you would for any *Cortex Plus* game, but you get it at a d4 and a d8. If you choose to use it as a d4, you get a Plot Point and something…interesting is probably going to happen. If you use it as a d8 it's more likely to make you shine in the Contest.

Keep in mind, though, that while Action/Heroic style Distinctions are quick and easy, they mess with character advancement a bit since you can't step up their dice value. If you're using Action/Heroic style Distinctions, expect other aspects of your Dramatic characters to advance more quickly.

But What If…

If you like the d4/d8 style Distinction, but you also love triggers, no worries. You can have both! After you've bought the Distinction, you can add a trigger up to three times as if you were advancing the die per the normal *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* rules in character creation (see page 167) and in Growth (see page 179). However, the die rating stays d4/d8.

Additionally, your Distinctions can have up to three triggers, attached to your step die value. So you get your first trigger when your Distinction is a D4, a second trigger when your Distinction is a D8, and your third trigger when the Distinction has reached a D12. You can assign specific triggers to each die rating ahead of time—that's how it's done in the *SMALLVILLE RPG*—or you can take the triggers in whatever order makes sense to you.

TRIGGERS

A Distinction trigger always has two parts: a drawback and a benefit. You suffer the drawback in order to get the benefit. Embrace your drawbacks and play them up—your flaws are as much a part of your Lead as your strengths are. Drawbacks get your Lead into trouble. They can up the ante and twist the story. All of these things make *DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING* better, and they help your character advancement.

Here are some things you can do with drawbacks and benefits. Borrow from this list when creating your Distinction. You can even twist them a bit, using them as springboards for your own dice tricks, but check with your GM and the other players to make sure everyone agrees that what you came up with feels fair.

DRAWBACKS

- **Spend** a Plot Point
- **Step back** a beneficial die
- **Step up** a non-beneficial die
- **Choose** to do something risky/dumb/complicated
- **Add** to the Trouble pool (works like a Complication, see page 172)

For examples of drawbacks in action, take a look at the list of Distinctions on page 162.

BUT I THOUGHT THERE WERE MORE…

These are highly simplified versions of the drawbacks and benefits you'll find in the *SMALLVILLE RPG*. For a longer, more detailed list of drawbacks and benefits, see the *SMALLVILLE RPG* and *THE WATCHTOWER REPORT*, but these should be enough to get you started.

BENEFITS

- **Earn** a Plot Point
- **Step up** a beneficial die
- **Step back** a non-beneficial die
- **Reveal** a story detail
- **Change** Stress from one type to another
- **Reroll** a die
- **Create** a D8 Minor Asset or Relationship for the rest of the scene.

Stepping up past D12 steps up the lowest die of your pool or adds a D6 in addition to the D12 if all other dice are D12. Note that stepping up a D12 Stress will Stress Out your character (see page 178), so if your Stress is that high, you may want to think twice before using that drawback.

"Stepping up" a non-existent die puts a D6 on the table. Stepping back below D4 takes that die off the table.

A LITTLE MORE ON REVEALING STORY DETAILS

Basically, the benefit that lets you Reveal a story detail is meant to give you some control over the way the story goes. You make a statement about something that is not yet defined that's advantageous for you. You can use these Reveals to set up a Minor Asset later (see page 166), to create a Resource or Relationship on the fly, or just to make the story stronger.

For example:

- **Spend** a Plot Point to **Reveal** that you have spent time in a foreign culture.
- **Spend** a Plot Point to **Reveal** you "know a guy" who can provide you with information or material goods.
- **Spend** a Plot Point to **Reveal** a fact about security holes or other exploitable weaknesses in the target of your hacking.

EXAMPLE DISTINCTIONS

The following are examples of completed Distinctions for you to use. You can use them as is or, better yet, use them to inspire your Distinction creation.

MARTIAL ARTIST

You've been trained in one or more melee combat disciplines. You're a master of both attacking and deflecting techniques. Roll your MARTIAL ARTIST die when using your training to attack or defend yourself.

Triggers:

- **Spend** a Plot Point to **Step up** your MARTIAL ARTIST die in any Test or Contest.
- **Choose** to engage multiple opponents simultaneously to **Reroll** your MARTIAL ARTIST die during a Contest.
- **Add** a D8 to the Trouble pool to **Change** INJURED or EXHAUSTED Stress to ANGRY Stress.

METICULOUS

A place for everything and everything in its place. Organization and preparation are crucial to success. This means you're usually well prepared for anything, but it *can be difficult for you to handle situations where flexibility is required and chaos reigns. Roll* Meticulous *when your attention to detail and organization comes into play, whether as an advantage or a distraction.*

Triggers:

- **Add** a d8 to the **Trouble** pool to Create a d8 Minor Asset representing your thorough preparation for a particular scene.
- **Earn** a Plot Point to **Step up** your opponent's highest die in a situation where your Meticulous tendencies give them an advantage against you.
- **Spend** a Plot Point to **Reveal** an out-of-place detail on anything you're scrutinizing or investigating.

SMARTASS

Your sarcastic wit is always getting you into trouble. Roll SMARTASS *when cracking wise, goading others, or stirring up trouble in social situations.*

Triggers:

- **Earn** a Plot Point when you when you **Choose** to shoot your mouth off in a dangerous situation.
- **Step back** an ally's Angry or Afraid Stress and **Add** a d6 to the Trouble pool when your sarcasm takes the edge off a tense situation.
- **Spend** a Plot Point to **Reroll** any die involving your verbal taunts and insults.

COUNSELOR

You're the one everyone turns to when they need a friendly ear. Whether in an office or over a cup of coffee, you bring clarity and calm to even the most distressing situations. Roll Counselor *when being a confidante would be helpful to others—or perhaps provide you with secrets you can use.*

Triggers:

- **Spend** a Plot Point to **Step back** someone else's Insecure, Angry, or Afraid Stress.
- **Step up** your own Insecure, Angry, or Afraid Stress to **Reroll** your Counselor die in a Test or Contest.
- **Add** a d8 to the Trouble pool to **Reveal** psychological issues or problems in any subject you've had a chance to interview.

MORE DISTINCTIONS!

For more examples of Distinctions you can use in your game, see the Setting Starters on page 181.

ABILITIES

Abilities represent the apex of your character's power and competence, describing the ways they overshadow others. In many games, they represent supernatural abilities like superpowers or magic, but they don't have to. Many genres of drama have characters considered to be iconic in one or more fields of competency. Stories with master detectives whose deductive powers can't be mirrored in the real world, or a sniper whose aim is nearly a supernatural talent, or, should you like, an artist who can literally change minds and hearts with her work.

Additionally, Abilities can reflect things you want your character to be decidedly good at, but that the game itself isn't about. A game of *Dramatic Roleplaying* could be set in a hospital, but ultimately, it won't be about a hospital and medicine. Instead, the focus of most of the game would be on interpersonal conflict, making hard choices, dealing with stress, and probably sex and romance. Still, you want to play a world class surgeon who saves lives, though you know rolling each step of a surgery isn't going to happen often, and so you create an Ability to demonstrate how great you are off screen in the surgeries you aren't rolling for. Special effects are particularly good at handling sweeping statements about outcome and they give a player narrative control in a lot of cases.

Depending on how you choose to create your Leads, they will have a variable number of these in a *Dramatic Roleplaying* game.

Abilities have a step die rating, just like other Traits, ranging from d4 to d12. Each Ability also has a series of **special effects** and a **Limit.**

THAT'S IT?

The listed possible effects of both special effects and Limits are abbreviated for the sake of this book. For more, and for more detail on Abilities, check out *Smallville RPG* and *The Watchtower Report*. Any of the special effects and Limits in those books can easily be adapted to any *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* game.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

As you read on, you'll notice similarities between special effects and triggers for Distinctions. The key difference is that special effects should be more powerful than triggers. Because they're more potent, all special effects require a Plot Point to activate.

The benefit is usually a more encompassing version of Reveal, giving the player a lot of power to narrate details into the story or to create effects. When Revealing a detail, you're limited by what hasn't been declared yet. With a special effect, you can spend a Plot Point and change details about things that are already a part of the story. Don't like the car described in the parking lot? Spend a Plot Point and declare you use your Energy Blast Ability to explode the car. Wish you were in a scene in progress? Spend a Plot Point and use your Superspeed Ability to show up. That courtier is annoying you? With the Ability The King's Ear, you can have him arrested when you spend a Plot Point.

In addition, a special effect can do things such as:

- Make you immune to a certain kind of Stress for the scene.
- Remove a certain kind of Stress entirely.
- Provide you with a 2d8 Resource for one scene (it goes away completely when the scene is over).
- Allow you to do a **sweep effect**—choose the characters you want to affect and force them to roll a Test, inflicting Stress on whoever fails.
- Automatically inflict the highest die in your pool as Stress.

When you take an Ability, you automatically get one special effect for it. You can use Growth (page 179) to gain more.

LIMITS

Of course, constant success rarely produces much in the way of tension or excitement. A character has to stumble or come up short to really shine. So even with Abilities, there's a chance for failure. Rather than relying directly on dice rolls to determine story-changing failure, you create Limits that go along with your Abilities. A Limit describes a circumstance or condition in which you either can't use the Ability or it acts as an active hindrance. Limits should be narratively appropriate and should be things that can actually be fulfilled sometimes—if your Limit is too specific, it won't come into play enough to be useful or interesting.

If someone uses your Limit against you in a Contest, they get to triple the die of whatever Trait represents that Limit. Of course, keep in mind that you can do this to other characters with Abilities, too.

FULFILLING LIMITS

So a Limit is listed on a character's sheet, but how do you get it into the story? Well, a character may have a Resource to reflect that Limit (Silver Bullets 2d6). By spending a Plot Point, a player can create a Minor Asset to reflect having a representative of that Limit, usually starting at a d6. If the GM would like, she can create a Minor Asset to represent that Limit by taking a die from the Trouble pool for her or the other players to grab onto.

They can also spend a Plot Point to **Shutdown** your Ability while the Limit is present, preventing you from using its die or any special effects. You can Shutdown the Ability of any other Lead or Feature if their Limit is present.

You can also volunteer to do this to yourself, for a Plot Point.

One common Limit often associated with Abilities is **Gear**, which indicates that the Ability is attached to a particular piece of equipment that can get lost, stolen, broken, or otherwise put out of commission. You don't get triple dice against someone using Gear, but you can still spend a Plot Point to Shutdown the Gear if you can describe what you do to disable it.

EXAMPLE ABILITIES

ENERGY BLAST

You wield elemental energies as a weapon, frightening and injuring your foes. Roll Energy Blast *when you attack with a blast of your chosen energy type.*

Limit: Choose something antithetical to the type of blast you have. So if you have a heat blast, then cold might be its limit. If your Energy Blast is magical in nature, then countermagic or magical dampening might be its Limit.

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Create a wide-angle sweep effect (see above) that inflicts Insecure or Afraid Stress.
- Destroy an inanimate object as big as a car. Spend two Plot Points for an object as big as a house. Spend three for an object as big as a skyscraper or a river.
- Make geysers of your energy type shoot up from the ground beneath your foes.
- Create a sweep effect that explodes on contact, inflicting Injured or Exhausted Stress.

POWER ARMOR

This suit of armor protects the wearer from most kinds of attack. Roll this die whenever a bit of extra physical protection may be to your advantage.

Limit: Gear, EMP, armor-piercing or anti-vehicle weaponry

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Gain immunity to INJURED Stress for a scene.
- Survive an explosion, vehicular crash, or other kind of disaster unscathed.
- Smash through a fence, wall, or other barrier unheeded. Spend two Plot Points to bash through stone. Spend three to bash through steel or other metallics.

TELEPATHY

You can enter the minds of others, conveying messages or even reading thoughts and memories. Roll TELEPATHY *when using the power of your mind to reach the mind of another.*

Limit: Lack of concentration, lack of eye contact, psychic defenses

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Read another character's surface thoughts.
- Send messages psychically to a character in a different scene.
- Create a mental shield to block other mental powers from invading your mind.
- Sense the location and well-being of any one person that you have met before.
- Attack another person with a mental blast, inflicting the highest die as INSECURE, AFRAID, or EXHAUSTED Stress.

THE KING'S EAR

You're one of the King's most trusted advisors. You know more and have more influence than nearly anyone at court. Roll THE KING'S EAR *when wielding the power of being in the King's confidence.*

Limit: Outside the royal court, the presence of another Royal Advisor

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Reveal the king's opinion on any matter of politics.
- Reveal a new royal edict that will soon be announced at court.
- Have a character in another scene arrested.
- Reveal the king's current whereabouts and state of being.
- Create a sweep effect (see page 163) when you threaten people with royal authority, causing INSECURE or AFRAID Stress.
- Remove someone else's INSECURE or AFRAID Stress by explaining how the king supports him or her.

MORE ABILITIES!

For more examples of Abilities and even more tweaks on how to use Abilities in your game, see the Setting Starters on page 181.

RESOURCES

If you framed your life as a novel or a movie, not everyone who matters to you, who helps you out, or who has ever helped you out is a major role. In fact, not everything that keeps you going, day to day, is a person at all.

In *DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING*, these people and things are called **Resources**. Resources represent the "set dressing" around you—people you can call on for help and places that are important to you. The connection you have with a Resource isn't as deep or all-encompassing as with a Relationship, but it's significant enough to get you the occasional benefit.

Your character will have a variable number of these depending on how you create your Leads. Features also have Resources at their disposal.

Resources are limited—your Leads can't use them as many times as they want. Your pull with the police department only gets you so far, and there are only so many times your buddies from the Frat will help you move a body. However, back off for a while and you can start asking for help again—Resources are renewed at the beginning of each session.

Resources have two dice at whatever their rating is (2D6, 2D8, etc.), as well as a pair of **specialties** describing how they can help your character.

Specialties describe important details about a character's Resources and prevent them from being too generic. THE CAFE becomes more interesting when you describe it with the *Relaxed* specialty. Or changes meaning if you instead give it the *Bustling* specialty. Additionally, specialties say a great deal about your connection to your Resources, sort of like miniature Relationships. If you have a MECHANIC Resource who keeps an eye on your classic cars, giving her the *Confidante* specialty adds a layer of interest that can stay in the background, or perhaps inspire her to grow to be a Feature some day.

Resources provide Aid (see page 177) to any roll they're called in on—you determine your result and then add the Resource die to your total. When you call on a Resource, you get to roll both of its dice at the same time you roll the rest of your pool for a Contest or Test. You need to keep track of exactly which dice these are, so use a different color or roll them separately. You can then add one or both of the Resource dice in your total for that roll, but doing so spends that die for the rest of the session, for everyone. If you use both dice in one total, that's it for that Resource until the next session. If you used only one, the other is open for use later in the session. Resources are renewed at the start of the next session.

Example: My Local Watering Hole (Gossip, Relaxation) 2d6 or Pirate Joe (Brawling, Skullduggery) 2d10

SHARED RESOURCES

Multiple characters—Leads and Features—can have access to the same Resources. This shows up on the Pathways Map (page 169) when several characters draw arrows to the same circle or diamond. So, Mr. Salvatore might be your friend's dad and also your favorite art teacher who you confide in. But Mr. Salvatore's time and energy is still limited and still represented by a total of two dice. When you spend one of those dice, it's gone for your friend, too. Then after she calls on her dad to help, Mr. Salvatore may be tapped for both of you for that session.

What you get from your connection to Mr. Salvatore is probably different from what his daughter gets and it may be rated differently. So, you may have Mr. Salvatore (Advice, Inspiration) 2d8, while your friend—who views her father mostly as a mobile ATM who gets her out of trouble—has Daddy (Excuse, Spending Money) 2d6. But he's still one Resource with a total of two dice to be spent per session.

SOME SAMPLE RESOURCES

- **The Game:** Victoriana
- **Resources:** The Sanitarium (Research, Control); Madam Nadine (Comfort, Information); Audrey, The Governess (French, Music); Retired Colonel Horton Farnsworth (Military Lore, High Society).

- **The Game:** High Flying Wuxia War Epic
- **Resources:** The King's Treasury (Wealth, Secret); Faithful Bandit Gang (Loyal, Violent); The Scholar-Bureaucrat (Backdoors, Paperwork); Lady Warrior In Disguise (Intrigue, Blade Mastery).

- **The Game:** High School Monsters
- **Resources:** The Library (Respite For Outcasts, Research); The Av Club (Belief, Trust); Tonya's Car (Freedom, Escape); The Janitor (Advice, Hiding Places).

For even more sample Resources, see the Setting Starters on page 181.

You can also gain access to Resources that aren't written down on your Lead sheet, but it costs you a Plot Point. Suppose you really could use access to your friend Sam's Old Clunker (Privacy, Transportation) 2d8. You pay Sam a Plot Point for using up one of his car's two dice, and you can roll it as a Resource—but since it's not your Resource, it always defaults to a d6. This also uses dice like discussed above

MINOR ASSETS

Think of your favorite scene in a thriller or action movie. From wild rooftop chase scenes to tense quiet debates over a dimly lit chessboard, a good scene has set dressing. Imagine the quintessential game of Russian Roulette with the characters sitting in Grandma's brightly lit, country-decorated living room. That changes things pretty significantly compared to the standard "game" lit by a bare bulb in a back room of some tropical hell. How you dress your scene can be an important part of how it plays out and how clearly the players see, and enjoy, the stories.

Just as characters don't exist in a vacuum when it comes to other people and relationships, *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* doesn't want your characters to exist in a blank physical space. It's long been the job of GMs to lay out vivid and inspiring scene descriptions when running a game. *Dramatic Roleplaying* takes this a step further, by empowering players to both create that set dressing and use it during their Tests and Contests.

In *Dramatic Roleplaying*, we call the juicy details of a scene **Minor Assets.** Sometimes, you'll call out something from the story as being important or advantageous. Maybe you have a bit of Damning Evidence you take with you in order to strong-arm a suspect. Maybe the getaway car has a Rockin' V8 Engine that aids your escape. Maybe you manage to get your hands on a Broken Bottle to use in a bar brawl. Players can add Minor Assets that could conceivably be there to a Scene by paying a Plot Point per Minor Asset. See Spending Plot Points (page 174.)

Minor Assets are always a d6 by default unless created with a Distinction trigger, in which case they're a d8. Minor Assets usually only last for the scene in which they're introduced.

THE DEVIL'S IN THE USEFUL DETAILS

In the *Smallville RPG*, these are called Useful Details because they're useful and they're detailed. We call them Minor Assets here mostly to connect them with other *Cortex Plus* games.

At your table, use whichever term you like—regardless of what you call them, they work the same way.

PATHWAYS

The Pathways system helps you bring your Leads to life through moving through a Pathways Chart and, as a group, creating a Pathways Map (see page 169). Each **stage** of a Pathways Chart is a mile in the Leads' shoes. You'll make choices at each point in the Pathways, and these choices open options and determine the Leads' game Traits—Relationships (see page 160), Values (see page 157), Distinctions (see page 161), Abilities (see page 163), and Resources (see page 165). At the end, you should have a simple description of who your Lead characters are and where they came from.

Creating characters that suit the genre and setting of the game you're playing is the target of Pathways. When preparing your game, you'll have to come up with the Pathways Chart to help guide the types of characters you need for your tales. This includes deciding on what Values will matter for the game (see page 157). The GM should do this before the group sits down to play.

DESIGNING CHARACTERS IN PLAY

The full Pathways experience is a great way for the group to design the campaign they want to play. However, it requires a lot of prep beforehand to create the Pathways Chart, and going through Pathways takes a session or two.

If this all sounds like a bit much for you and your group, check out the Pilot Episode on page 181 as an option to replace the Pathways Chart.

You'll still want to read up on the Pathways Map (see page 169) since your group will be creating that whether you use a Pathways Chart or a Pilot Episode.

SCOPE?

The first step the GM takes when designing a Pathways Chart is determining the scope of the game and reflecting it in how many Trait steps the characters can get through the Pathways Chart. **Trait steps** are when you add a new Trait or step up an existing Trait. The average *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* game clocks in at 25 Trait steps. This can go up or down as you see fit. A game that favors remarkable characters should be more like 30. 35 is a good upward limit for absolutely amazing characters. 20 will feel very grounded and realistic. We don't recommend going below 15 to reflect your average, run-of-the-mill people.

Example: Devin's gotten roped into running *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* for her friends. She couldn't be more excited. After discussing it over email, they decide they want to play a telenovela style game—Devin needs to brush up on her Spanish anyway. So she sits down to get everything ready for the first session. Because Spanish language soap operas tend to be pretty mundane, she's going with 20 Trait steps.

HOW MANY STAGES?

The next decision is how many stages you want to hone in on. In games with long, elaborate origin stories, you might have as many as eight or even ten stages. Most games will work comfortably with four to six.

Then you need to figure out what those stages are. Find a good starting point—typically, birth or origin works pretty well for that. You can then move into childhood, teen years, college years, early career—or whatever trajectory characters in your genre might go through. That'll account for as many as five. Then consider some of the more interesting twists and turns you want to add. Does everyone in your story have a major, life-changing event? Is everyone exposed to a strange force at some point in their life? Does everyone have to establish a secret identity?

If your characters are going to be in different life stages (e.g., a group of teachers and students) they still need to go through the same number of stages in Pathways—find stages that cover the things all your characters have in common.

Write down all your stages in the order you'd like to see them addressed.

Example: Devin gives some thought to the pacing of your average telenovela, and decides that five stages will about cover it. She wants Family Background, Youth, Teenage Years/College, Early Career, and a stage to cover each character's Darkest Moment. This one will happen at the end of Pathways, but the moment may have happened at any point earlier in their lives. She knows it's important each character have something they're hiding.

PLOT THEM OUT

Now get a piece of paper (or maybe use index cards for more flexibility), and plot the stages down the side. Give yourself a nice bit of room for each. In fact, if you have more than five, we recommend using two pages.

Next, on a separate sheet of paper, make a list of categories for each stage. Give them names. Consider archetypical characters that could come up in that part of life. For example, in the high school years, you might choose Jock, Cool Kid, Nerd, Overachiever, and Goth. If you can't fill them all perfectly, don't worry just yet! It's okay. Just build your list. You can tweak it later.

Starting with your final Pathways stage at the bottom of your chart, start filling in the list of categories for each stage. If you find any similarities between two or more archetypes, you may want to put them beside one another. Once you've finished a stage, move up and fill in the next. Above each, place the option that most seems like it could evolve into the later stage. For example, your Nerd in high school could logically move into Tech Head in college. So you'd want to put the Nerd above the Tech Head. Keep in mind that players can move diagonally through the final chart, so keeping similar archetypes near each other can be helpful.

Keep going until you've filled all the columns and all the rows. Check it over and see what you might want to tweak—make sure characters can at least somewhat logically move vertically and diagonally through the Pathways Chart.

Example: Devin breaks up her steps like this:

FAMILY BACKGROUND:

- Wealthy
- Professional Family
- Deeply Religious
- Blue Collar
- Poor

YOUTH:

- Easy and Carefree
- The Golden Child
- The Weird One
- Student of Hard Knocks
- The New Kid

TEENAGE/COLLEGE:

- The Passionate Youth
- The Academic
- The Innocent
- The Bad Boy/Girl
- The Outcast

EARLY CAREER:

- The Slacker
- The Rising Star
- Family Focused
- New Celebrity
- The Drifter

DARKEST MOMENTS:

- The Abandoned Child
- The Affair
- The Mystical
- The Murder
- The Theft

MORE PATHWAYS IDEAS!

The Setting Starters on page 181 have some other ideas and guidelines to help you design your Pathways Charts.

DIVIDING UP TRAITS

Now that you have a full Pathways Chart, evenly divide up the total Trait steps over your stages (see Scope? on page 167 for guidance on determining total Trait steps). Jot that number down next to each stage. With anything left over, put one more in whichever stages you want to emphasize most.

Then, go through your stages and plug in options for each Trait. Your options are:

- Resource (people, locations, or gear—see page 165)
- Distinction, see page 161, or Ability, see page 163
- Relationship with a Feature (see page 160)
- Value (see page 157)

DIVIDING UP VALUES

Values are different from all other Traits. Each character starts with all six Values rated at D4. No matter how many stages there are in your Pathways Chart, there are nine Trait steps in Values. In the end, each character has one Value at D4, two at D6, two at D8, and one at D10.

These steps stay constant—even during Growth (see page 179), to step up one Value, you must step back another one. You can never step back a D4 Value, which would remove the Value from your sheet.

As a rule, stages where a character would become more attached to the world around them earn Resources. Distictions and Abilities should come from major events that twist and turn the character's direction in life.

Relationships should come from stages where the character would have the chance to relate to people. Values should come from stages that reaffirm one's personal beliefs.

Spread them out a bit. Avoid putting two Values on the same stage unless you only have a few stages. You should give a few Resources before you start handing out Relationships. Distinctions and Abilities should only come with a handful of entries on each stage.

FLESH THEM OUT

Look at each Resource, Distinction, Ability, and Value. Determine whether you should focus them down a bit to more specific Traits. For example, you might allow the player to take any Resource. But it says a lot more about the stage and the archetype if it only allows Gear.

For Values, use these stages to make declarative statements about the characters that make those choices on their Pathways. Not only will this make things easier on your players, it'll also fine-tune your stories. Typically, you do this by offering a choice between two specific Values that would likely be important to that archetype at that stage.

Consider the overarching implications of Abilities and Distinctions. If you want a game where everyone has supernatural powers, you'll want to pepper Abilities throughout the Pathways. But if you want them to be rare, keep them on one or two key stages and, even then, only on a couple of options. Distinctions should be much more common.

You can further flesh stages out by declaring whether the player can or must take a *new Trait* or *step up an existing Trait.* Use this to emphasize focused or diverse character types. For example, if you want your game to be about strong, deep Relationships, only allow players to step up their Relationship dice so they don't end up with too many low level Relationships. Just remember, if you're going to make them step things up, these things must exist. So don't put these restrictions on the first stage of the Pathways, and be careful on the second or third stages. If push comes to shove and they don't have a Trait they're supposed to step up, they can just create a new one.

In addition, you can offer an either/or scenario. So you might allow for Gear *or* a Distinction.

Example: For a telenovela without supernatural powers, Devin decides not to use Abilities. That lets the players focus their twenty Trait steps on Relationships, Values, Distinctions, and Resources. Dividing twenty Trait steps by five stages gives her four Trait steps per stage.

She assigns Values first to make sure all nine Trait steps are accounted for. With nine steps spread over five stages, most stages allow for stepping up one Value twice or stepping up two Values once. For instance, she decides that at the Deeply Religious in the Family Background stage will have "FAMILY *or* FAITH X2." This means that a character can step up FAMILY twice *or* FAITH twice *or* FAMILY once and FAITH once.

There are eleven Trait steps left for Distinctions, Relationships, and Resources. The characters—Leads and Features—will have different numbers of these, based on how they go through the chart. Devin makes sure there are Distinctions sprinkled throughout, and then she fills in the gaps with Resources and Relationships where they seem appropriate.

The Student of Hard Knocks probably gets a Distinction and possibly a Resource, such as an Extra who can provide information or a Location that offer refuge.

Family Focused is all about the Relationships—"Relationship X2" makes sense there, allowing a Relationship to be stepped up twice, or two Relationships to be stepped up once.

Devin continues on like this until all of the Trait steps are assigned. She creates a couple of Features, just to make sure the Pathways Chart is working the way she intends it to.

PATHWAYS AND THE PATHWAYS MAP

As players start play, they walk their characters through the Pathways Chart you've created. They start at the top, choosing an option from the first stage. They take all the various Traits that are offered and determine what they mean. Then, they move into the next stage. They can move into the next one down, or one to the left, or one to the right. If they're at an edge, they can "wrap around" to the other side. This means that at every stage, they'll have three available options—all other options are restricted.

If your last stage is some kind of life changing event, you may want to break that rule, allowing any player to choose any option, regardless of what category they chose for the next to last stage.

Example: Even though Jerome ended on The Slacker in his Early Career stage, Devin lets him choose The Murder for his Darkest Moment because it just makes the most sense for his character.

ADDING AND STEPPING UP TRAITS

Characters start with no Traits, except for Values. All Values start at D4. When you add a new Trait, it starts at D4; unless it's a Resource, then it starts at 2D4.

When you step up a Trait, increase its die type by one. So D4 steps up to D6, D6 to D8, D8 to D10, and D10 goes to D12. A D12 can't be stepped up again. If you're supposed to step up a D12, choose another Trait of the same type to step up instead. Resources step up similarly, but they include two dice. So 2D6 becomes 2D8 when stepped up, for example.

When an Extra becomes a Feature, change its Resource dice type to a single Relationship die of the same kind. So a 2D10 Resource becomes a D10 Relationship.

BUILDING THE PATHWAYS MAP

As the players work their way through the Pathways Chart, they'll collectively jot down their new Relationships and Resources on a Pathways Map. You'll want a huge sheet of paper or maybe a clear table with index cards and string. This will get large, messy, and wonderful. Once you're done with the Pathways Map, be sure to keep a master copy somewhere—the GM will want to refer back to this frequently when planning game sessions.

As you add new characters, locations, and other elements to the map, the players have a chance to connect different elements and associate them. Before long, you'll have a complex web of connections and Relationships.

SQUARES, CIRCLES, DIAMONDS, ARROWS

As you develop the Pathways Map, you use different symbols to represent different Traits and character types. Write the name of the thing in the symbol.

Squares represent Lead characters. At the very beginning, add all these to the map. Connect each of the Leads to all of the other Leads, but don't label these Relationships until the very end.

Circles are other characters, either Extras or Features. An Extra is a type of Resource. But once two characters tie to one Extra, you can choose to upgrade it to a Feature and turn its Resources into a Relationship. Drawing a second circle around the original circle shows that an Extra has been upgraded to a Feature.

Diamonds are locations. They represent a type of Resource.

Arrows connect characters and locations. Just make a little note of the connection along the arrow.

MAP MOVEMENTS ON THE PATHWAYS

Now that you know how Pathways Maps are drawn, you'll need to add Map actions to each stage of your Pathways. Each will get two, except for the first stage, which also gets, "Add squares for each of your Leads. Draw an arrow from each to each other. Don't fill them in yet." Choose two for each step. Mix and match. Note, these are by Pathway stage—each player, regardless of their choices for that stage, will take the same action on the Map.

The Map actions you can add are:

- Draw an arrow from your square to a new circle (a new Extra).
- Draw an arrow from your square to a new diamond (a new Location).
- Draw an arrow from any circle or diamond that you added to any other circle or diamond.
- Draw an arrow from any circle or diamond to any circle, diamond, or square.
- Draw an arrow from anything back to a square.
- Draw an arrow from your square to an existing circle or diamond.

When the players draw an arrow, they need to declare the connection, and jot it down along the arrow. After the last step, also add, "Label all your arrows from your square to the other Lead squares" and, as an option, "Remove a D4 Relationship or 2D4 Resource to step up an existing Relationship or Resource."

Declaring a connection should be ripe with motivation and character. Many of these connections will become, or are, Relationship statements. Others might define Resource specialties. Regardless of whether or not they end up represented on the Lead or Feature sheets, they're a way for the GM and player alike to remember how the character feels and interacts with the other end of the arrow.

Connections on the Pathways Map build a tangled web of story that helps bring the setting to life. Any actual die ratings for your Lead's Traits come from going through the stages of the Pathways Chart.

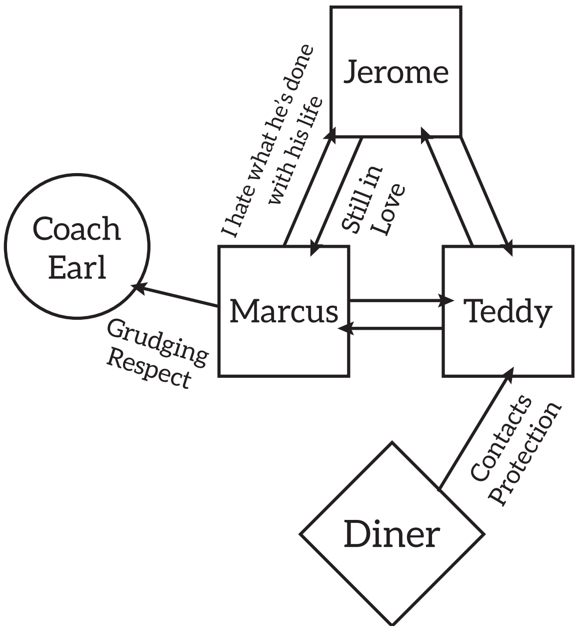
Example: Devin sits down with Marcus, Teddy, and Jerome to go through their Pathways. As they work their way through the Chart, they will also be creating the Pathways Map. The players put their character names on the big piece of paper Devin brought along. They put squares around each character to make it clear those are their Leads. Each person then draws arrows from their Lead to the two other Leads. They leave the arrows alone for now.

As other parts of the Pathways Map get filled in, the connections are labeled right away. Simple sentences, fragments, or even one word will work just fine.

Marcus hits a part of Pathways where he's created an Extra—in this case, his Gym Coach, Earl. Marcus writes Earl down and circles the name. Marcus draws an arrow going from his Lead to Earl and writes "grudging respect" along it. This is how he feels about Earl, not how Earl feels about him. Later, someone might draw an arrow in the other direction, labeling how Earl feels about Marcus' character.

On one of her steps, Teddy decides to add a Location, the local 24-hour diner. So she writes "Diner" and puts a diamond around it. Then she draws a line between her Lead and the diamond. On the line, she writes down the two specialties the place has for her: (Contacts, Protection). She turns the line into an arrow pointing to her character to help her remember that those specialties are just for her. Other Leads who might connect to the Diner will have to have their own arrow and their own specialties.

At the very end, Jerome is labeling the arrows connecting his Lead to both Marcus' Lead and Teddy's. He puts "Still in Love" on the line connecting his Lead to Marcus', and this will double as his Relationship statement on his sheet (see page 160). Marcus' character isn't "still in love"—those feelings only flow in one direction. The arrow from Marcus' Lead to Jerome's says, "I hate what he's done with his life." Talk about drama.



GETTING A JUMP ON FEATURE CREATION

Usually, Features are made the same way Leads are, taking them through Pathways. That can be time consuming, and it may only be worth it for a few of the most important characters.

As your players move through Pathways, they'll be creating and introducing some of the Features they want to see. You can use this creative process to get a jump on die ratings and statements.

When a player makes a connection from one Feature to another Feature, to a Resource, or back to a Lead, the GM may want to get a head start on making the sheet for the Feature.

If you tweak the connection just a bit, it can define a Relationship statement or become a Value statement. You can even add a die value with that statement. Now the Relationship Map has half a character sheet for many of your important Features!

You can use that to write up full sheets, or you can finish creating the Feature on the fly. Using the d4/d8 Distinctions from The Distinction Job (see page 161) is one easy way to assign die ratings. You can also assign Traits as they come into play by spending from the Trouble pool—spend a die and add a Trait of the same rating to your Feature's sheet.

ROLLING THE DICE

Now that you know about the different Traits that give you dice, let's talk about what to do with those dice. As in all *Cortex Plus* games, you build a dice pool that you use in an opposed roll—often against the GM, but also frequently against other Leads.

Whether it's a Contest (see page 176) or a Test (see page 175), you build a dice pool the same way. Describe what you're doing, and then:

- Pick up a die for a Value and for a Relationship. You must always roll these two Traits into any roll. If you don't have a Relationship that fits, you must immediately establish one at d4 (or spend a Plot Point to establish the Relationship at d6).
- Pick up a die for an appropriate Distinction OR an appropriate Ability.
- Pick up a die for every Minor Asset that helps you out.
- Pick up one or two dice for a Resource that could help you out in the scene. If you use the die of a Resource in your final total, take the die "off the table" for the rest of the session. See below.

Once you've picked up all your dice, roll them at the same time. Then, add two of them together to get the total.

Example: You roll d10, d8, d6, and d6, and get 4, 7, 3, and 5. You add the 7 and 5 together for a total of 12.

EXAMPLE OF BUILDING A DICE POOL

Elin's character, Marcy, is a 55-year-old grandmother who, through happenstance, now finds herself street racing. The GM decides to run this as a Test (see page 175), as it's more about Marcy against the car than it is about Marcy versus the other racers. Elin looks at her Lead sheet and decides that she's going to use her Bravery Value at d8 and her Relationship with her no-good grandson at d6. (He can't keep out of trouble! is her Relationship statement, and since she's drag racing because of him, it works!)

What the street gang doesn't realize is that Marcy's got the Former Badass Distinction at a d10, and now seems like a good time to revel in former glory. Since Elin's only added two dice to her pool so far, she can add her Distinction for free. She doesn't have any Abilities—if she did, she could spend a Plot Point to use one here, since she's already added in a Distinction for free; see Spending Plot Points (page 174).

Marcy has some Resources to call on. One that jumps out is that she has the Resource Knitting Circle (Supportive, Wily) 2d6. The Knitting Circle is hanging out on the sidelines cheering her on, so Elin takes takes the 2d6 she has for her Knitting Circle and adds it to the pool, but she'll only use the highest rolling die. Elin could use both d6 on this total, but then she wouldn't be able to use the Knitting Circle for the rest of the game session, and she's sure she'll need their help later. (They're a wily group.)

ESTABLISHING A D4 RELATIONSHIP

Remember, in *Dramatic Roleplaying*, rolling a d4 has a high risk of giving you Complications and adding to the Trouble pool. That's a great thing for drama and always makes the story more interesting. So when none of your existing Relationships quite seem to fit, add a new one and consider ways that it could be a potential headache for your character.

This does differ slightly from the system in the *Smallville RPG*.

Example: Sarah's character Lora is at a bar trying to get information from the locals about a drug ring. Unfortunately, Lora isn't from around here and this is sort of a side project for her, so calling on any of her existing Relationships feels a little funny. Sarah opts to create a new Relationship at a d4. She thinks for a second then says, "Well, the bartender is Lora's ex-girlfriend. It wasn't a clean break." The table laughs and the GM leans in, excited to see what that d4 rolls. If it rolls okay, that's fine; if it rolls a 1, the GM will make sure that break up was even messier than Lora remembers!

But that's not all she has available to her, and so she looks at her Plot Point pile. She has four she can spend.

Marcy's not driving a clunker. Earlier in the scene, the GM described it as a souped-up hot rod with all the trimmings. Elin asks if she can spend a Plot Point to add the car as a Minor Asset, and the GM is only too happy to go along with it.

So tabulating that, Elin lines up her dice. She has:

- Value: Bravery d8
- Relationship: Grandson d6
- Distinction: Former Badass d10
- Resources: Knitting Circle d6 (leaving her with only one more d6 from that Resource to use later)
- Minor Asset: Hot Rod d6 (costing her a Plot Point)

She picks up the dice to see what happens. Since it's a Test, the GM picks up the Trouble pool to roll against Elin's roll.

COMPLICATIONS

Rather than punishing your character when you roll badly, *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* celebrates the twist in the story brought on by a rotten roll. In essence, *Dramatic Roleplaying* acknowledges that when a door closes, another opens. And that a new conflict, threat, or drastic error can make the story better—and even more dramatic! Thus, when you roll a 1, things get complicated.

If you roll a 1 on any dice, you can't include them in your total. Set them aside. These are called **Complications**. If you roll a Complication, the GM can activate it by paying you a Plot Point to use later, when you really need it. If the GM rolls a Complication, you can activate it by spending a Plot Point.

Complications have no effect on whether your roll succeeds or fails—they just let the Trouble pool (see page 173) make a little more trouble. There's also no obligation for anyone to activate a Complication unless it seems like it will make the story more fun.

Example: Tyson rolled his three dice, and he's got two 1s (or two Complications) on a d4 and a d6. He gulps and the GM laughs. His other die is an 8 on a d8, a nice roll. Since he can't add 1s (Complications) to his roll, he can't add anything, and so his roll is an 8. The GM offers him two Plot Points, one for each Complication he rolled. Tyson takes the Plot Points, assuming he's going to need them in the future. With those Complications activated, things are about to get interesting.

To see what the GM can do with those activated Complications, see Earning Plot Points on page 173.

THE TROUBLE POOL

Everything's a little more exciting where there's a looming threat, when we, as players, know that things could turn on our characters at any minute. *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* makes this looming threat a very real, very palpable thing that both the GM and the players can see and touch as it waxes and wanes over the course of the game. This looming threat is referred to as the Trouble pool.

The GM gets to use the Trouble pool to make your life difficult, but she has a limited supply of these dice. At the beginning of a session, the Trouble pool typically starts at 2D6, but it increases and decreases over time.

The GM can spend dice from the Trouble pool during the game.

Each die she spends can do one (and only one) of the following:

- Add a die to any dice pool she rolls for a Contest.
- Include an additional die in a Contest or Test total. The spent die has to be equal to or greater than the die she wants to include.
- Create a Minor Asset in a scene with a rating equal to the value of the spent die.
- Add a new Trait to a Feature sheet with a rating equal to the value of the spent die.
- Activate Distinction triggers or Ability special effects for any of her Features.

In addition, the GM always rolls the Trouble pool against you in any Test. That doesn't count as spending dice.

When a Trouble pool die is spent, it goes away and can't be reused.

Example: Kimberly has the role of GM. One of the Features, Rodrigo, is involved in a heated Contest with Allen, one of the Leads. Allen's last roll gave a total of 15, which isn't going to be easy for Rodrigo to beat. Kimberly starts building Rodrigo's pool: a D6 Relationship, a D8 Value, and a D6 Distinction—she needs to find him some more dice.

The Trouble pool has 3D6, 1D8, and 1D10. She wants to hang on to that D10 for later, so she adds the D8 to Rodrigo's pool—that D8 is now spent and won't go back into the Trouble pool after this roll.

Rodrigo's pool of 2D6 and 2D8 comes up 3, 4, 7, and 6. His total is 13, but by spending a D6 out of the Trouble pool, Kimberly can add the D6 that came up 4 to Rodrigo's total for a total of 17.

The Trouble pool now stands at 2D6 and 1D10, but Rodrigo has survived this round of the Contest—hopefully Allen won't be able to beat a 17.

PLOT POINTS

During the course of writing a good story or novel, sometimes an author exclaims, "There was just this moment where the characters came alive for me and seemed to make choices for themselves!" Because each player is the advocate and voice for the Leads they play, *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* allows for the players to achieve those moments of character agency. Players hit those moments by spending Plot Points to temporarily take control of the story.

You have a number of Plot Points that you can use to play with the dice in cool ways or to influence the story. You start each game session with a few, and your supply should dwindle and grow through play. We'll talk first about how you earn Plot Points, and then what you can do when you spend them.

HOW MANY PLOT POINTS TO START?

In the *Smallville RPG*, you determine starting Plot Points by rolling all your Relationship dice and adding the highest two together. The player with the highest total gets three Plot Points, the player with the lowest total gets one, and everyone else gets two.

You can use this method if you like. If it feels like Plot Points aren't flowing around your table in a satisfactory way, consider using this method but giving two, three, and four Plot Points.

Alternately, you can give everyone three Plot Points to start, or whatever method seems to make sense to your group and keep the Plot Points flowing—you don't want players hoarding Plot Points because they have so few, but you also want to make sure they feel the need to earn more.

EARNING PLOT POINTS

You start the game with just a few Plot Points, but they're so useful you'll definitely want to get your hands on more. How do you do that? Here are the ways you can earn Plot Points.

Suffer a Complication. When you roll a 1, the GM can pay you a Plot Point to activate your Complication (see page 172). That allows her to increase the size of any die in the Trouble pool (past D12 adds a new die at D6), grab a new die for the Trouble pool of the same size as the die that rolled a 1, or immediately place a D6 Minor Asset on the scene that benefits her Features. If you roll multiple 1s, the GM can pay you one Plot Point per Complication and get multiple benefits.

Example: The dice hit the table and Marla groans. She's gotten three 1s in her dice pool of four. The GM grins. She gives her three Plot Points. "This could go badly, but taking your lumps now means you'll be packing heat later this session." Marla nods and takes the Plot Points. She'd rolled a 1 on a d6, a d8, and a d4. The GM turns the d6 into a Minor Asset Someone Called the Cops. She adds that d8 straight to the Trouble pool, and then uses the d4 to step up a d6 already in the Trouble pool into a d8. Things look bad.

THE TROUBLE WITH D4S

Since d4s are the dice most likely to come up as Complications, you may find a Trouble pool full of d4s if you frequently add a new die at the same size as the die that rolled a 1.

An optional rule is to use an activated Complication to add a d6 to the Trouble pool, regardless of the size of the die that rolled the 1. This rule is similar to *Cortex Plus Heroic Roleplaying.*

Activate a Distinction trigger. Some Distinctions let you earn a Plot Point when you accept a drawback.

Example: "Alright, you call out what a beautiful man you are with your Sexy and He Knows It Distinction." The GM passes a Plot Point toward Henry's player. "How about your 'unwanted attention' drawback?" Henry's player takes the Plot Point, and fangirls start screaming.

Shutdown an Ability when you encounter its Limit. See page 164 for more on Limits.

Example: "Wait a moment," Kennedy stops the GM in the middle of saying something. "Aren't we right next to a large body of water?" The GM looks at her notes. "Yeah, the river is right there." Kennedy sighs. "Felix's Psychic Sense doesn't work near large bodies of water." He puts down his dice and reconsiders his roll. For calling out his own Limit, the GM grants him a Plot Point.

Receive a payback for Plot Points spent against you. This happens at the end of a scene—if any Leads have spent a Plot Point to your detriment during a scene, you receive those Plot Points at the end.

Example: It was a tense scene. Taylor and Trinity finally had it out, and it was a long time coming. Trinity took the gloves off and, during the scene, spent two Plot Points against Taylor, ultimately Stressing her Out. Near the end, Taylor spent a Plot Point in a last ditch effort to get the upper hand, but no luck. The GM gives Taylor two Plot Points and Trinity one Plot Point for them to use in future scenes.

THE D4 PLOT POINT GENERATOR

If you're familiar with other games, you might notice that d4s never happen by accident. Rather, a player almost always chooses when a d4 hits the table. Their reward for taking a risk like that means they sometimes get a Plot Point when they choose to use a d4. That rule wasn't part of the original and isn't part of the basic rules as presented here.

You can absolutely use this rule at your table while playing *Cortex Plus* Dramatic Roleplaying. Any time a player chooses to add a d4 to his dice pool from one of his Drives or Assets, he gets a Plot Point.

Just keep in mind that, if you incorporate this rule, you may have a lot of Plot Points on the table when you add it to all the other methods players have for generating Plot Points. You might limit it to just their Drives, for example.

SPENDING PLOT POINTS

Now that you have those Plot Points, what all can you do with them? Lots of stuff, as it turns out.

Add more dice to your pool. You get to add one Value, one Relationship, and one Distinction or Ability on any roll for free, for a default pool of three dice. For every Plot Point you spend, you can grab an additional Trait, including a new Trait from a category you already used, and roll it along with your other dice.

Example: Juliette is a whip-and-fedora type anthropologist on a mission. She's building a pool to get herself across a deep chasm. She's got her Value, her Relationship, and her Distinction (Afraid a Nuthin'). But this is going to be a tough Test, and her Daring Heroics Ability would be really neat here. So she spends a Plot Point, which lets her use four dice in her pool instead of three. Her total is still calculated using the two highest dice.

Include more dice in your total. For every Plot Point you spend, you can include another die as part of the total. So, one Plot Point lets you add the highest three dice together, two Plot Points lets you add the highest four, etc.

Example: Jada rolled the best pool she could put together for her character's Contest against a mortal enemy. She rolled terribly and came up with 2, 3, and 2. Luckily, Malik didn't roll much better, so there's still a chance for Jada's character. She spends a Plot Point and turns her total of 5 into a 7 and just squeaks by with a win.

Create a Minor Asset. Spend a Plot Point and describe something in the story that's advantageous for your character. You can then write it down as a Minor Asset with a d6 value and use it the rest of the scene.

Example: "What about the planes? I mean, this is an air strip, there are planes around, right?" Terry asks. The GM nods hesitantly. "Sure, that makes sense." "Great!" Terry exclaims, spends a Plot Point, adds a d6 to her pool, and describes how she's using a plane in her argument with the Spetsnaz assassin.

Create a Relationship. If you're interacting with a character that you don't have a Relationship with, spend a Plot Point and establish one at a D6, writing a statement down immediately. That D6 Relationship lasts for the scene—afterward, the Relationship steps back to a D4.

Example: Darcy's in a bad spot, and he's going to have to do something drastic to escape arrest this time. Matt, his player, coughs. "Darcy's going to flirt with the cop." Flirting isn't something Darcy is very good at, and his pool looks pretty pathetic. Matt considers a minute, spends a Plot Point and declares, "But it's okay, because Darcy and the cop have run into each other before at a dance club, and the cop remembers how well Darcy can dance." Matt can use a D6 for Darcy's Relationship with the cop instead of a D4. Things are looking up!

Activate triggers or special effects. Some Distinctions have triggers that require you to spend a Plot Point, and all your special effects for Abilities use Plot Points.

Example: Aiden's been beaten pretty soundly, socially, at the ball, but she's not done yet. Her player, Chris, says, "I want to activate my Ability. I'm going to use the *Mind Blast* special effect." Chris hands over a Plot Point. The GM grimaces. "You're going to do a *Mind Blast* at the ball?" Chris nods. "Marissa gave me a piece of her mind; now I'm going to give everyone around us a piece or two of hers as well."

Activate a Complication. When the GM rolls a 1, you can spend a Plot Point to activate the Complication. This lets you remove a die in the Trouble pool equal to or smaller than the size of the die that rolled a 1, or to get rid of any Minor Asset the GM has placed on the scene. If she rolls multiple 1s, you can spend one Plot Point per Complication and get multiple benefits.

Example: The GM rolls her pool on behalf of the Feature she's playing. On top of a lousy roll, the dice turn up two 1s. The players get excited. Justin tosses a Plot Point to put out the fire represented by the RAGING FIRE Minor Asset. Tina spends a Plot Point and points out the D10 that rolled a 1. The GM grimaces and removes a D10 from the Trouble pool.

Call on a Resource. At times, you may have access to Resources other than the ones on your Lead's sheet (see page 165). You can call on them as though they were your own Resources at D6 by spending a Plot Point.

Example: Dahlia's pretty far from home, and her Resources are either too far away or tapped. She could use a boost on a roll, though. She spends a Plot Point and says, "I think the local Biker Club is impressed enough by my chopper to come to my aid, just this once." The GM agrees, and Dahlia adds a D6 to her pool.

Give In during a Contest. If you picked up dice during a Contest, your character is invested in the conflict and you must pay a Plot Point to Give In (see 220). If you never picked up dice, Giving In is free.

Example: Kevin's late for work, again, and Dante is in his face, again. Dante's making demands, and the conflict escalates into a Contest. After a bad round, Kevin's player decides that Kevin just isn't in the mood to argue. He spends a Plot Point and Gives In, so Kevin agrees meekly to Dante's demands before escaping to work.

Interfere in a Contest or ignore someone else's interference. If a Contest is about to break out and your character wants to prevent it, spend a Plot Point to Interfere (see page 177). If you're in a Contest and someone wants to interfere, you and your opponents can spend a Plot Point to shut them down.

Example: Thunder and the Hunter are about to get into it again. Lilith Cross has had enough, and as team leader, it's her job to stop the fight so they can get on with the real threat—the Martian Death Ray. She spends a Plot Point and picks up her dice. However, Thunder and the Hunter aren't having that this time. They both spend a Plot Point and shut Lilith down without rolls.

CONTESTS AND TESTS

By now, you know how to build your dice pools, how to get and spend Plot Points, and of course, what your Lead sheet is comprised of as well as how to use it. Now what happens when you roll the dice you picked up?

Rolling dice for Contests and Tests is how you resolve conflict in the game. You roll a **Contest** when you're trying to get something out of another Lead or Feature. You roll a **Test** when you're doing something risky or dangerous, but no other Leads or Features are involved.

TESTS

A Test is just a single roll between a player and the GM. The player assembles a dice pool as normal; the GM rolls all the dice in the Trouble pool, along with any relevant Minor Assets or Resources.

Succeeding at a Test means the player accomplishes whatever he was after; failure means he doesn't. In addition, the GM can specify that some Tests will inflict Stress if you fail them, in which case the GM would reroll for Stress (see page 177).

Example: Lana is about to play the most important piano recital of her young life. She's been preparing for this recital for a year now, and if she does well, she'll get into Julliard. If she does poorly, her parents may disown her. The GM decides she's going to need to roll a Test to see how she does and that she'll take Stress if she does poorly. The GM also says that Lana can keep rolling until she wins or gets Stressed Out.

Lana's player, Karen, builds a dice pool using her Value, a strong Relationship, a Distinction, and even throws in a Plot Point for her MUSICAL GENIUS Ability. With a die from her DOTING PARENTS Resource, she's got quite a pool in her hands. Unfortunately, the GM has her entire Trouble pool to roll, and thanks to earlier shenanigans, that's up to 3D8 and 2D6. To make matters worse for poor Lana, it was already established that the judges of the recital were in terrible moods, so the GM spends one of his Plot Points to add the Minor Asset TOUGH CROWD for another D6.

Karen and the GM both roll. On the first roll, the GM's total of 13 beats Karen's 10, and then the GM takes her same pool and rolls it again. The total of 8 on one of those D8s means that Lana jumps to a D8 in her EXHAUSTED Stress. Things need to get better fast, or Lana's in a lot of trouble.

CONTESTS

Contests play out in a series of **actions** and **reactions**.

Example: Jean Luc and Winston look over maps and make plans for their next run on the oppressive British occupation of Boston. It's been a tense couple of days, and everyone is walking on eggshells around Winston, as his temper is legendary among the anti-Loyalist conspirators. Winston makes an unrealistic demand—he wants more men for a mission that will waste valuable resources and do little more than buffer his status in the conspiracy. Jean Luc has had enough of Winston's temper and his grandstanding. Jean Luc's player looks at the GM and says, "I think I'm going to need a Contest here."

Whoever's initiating the Contest takes the first action by announcing what they do, announcing what they want from the other Feature or Lead, taking up dice as explained on page 171, and rolling them.

Example: The GM asks Jean Luc's player, Isaac, what he wants out of the scene. Jean Luc declares he wants Winston to shut up about his side mission so they can focus on the task at hand. He wants Winston to give up the idea entirely. Isaac builds his dice pool and rolls it.

The target of the action then has two choices: Give In immediately, or react by announcing what they do in response, picking up dice, and rolling them. (This is the only time you can Give In without paying a Plot Point; from here on out, it costs you one Plot Point to get out of a Contest.)

Example: Winston *could* back off about the side mission, but his player, Tanya, doesn't think that's very in character for him. Plus conflict is good for the game, so Winston blusters and tries to shout Jean Luc down. Tanya builds her dice pool and rolls it.

What happens next depends on whose roll was higher.

If the action roll is higher, the target takes Stress and that ends the Contest. (If you win by five or more, you also have the option of Stressing Out your opponent—see page 178.)

Example: Isaac gets a total of 12, which Tanya can't beat with her 8. Jean Luc wins the Contest, and Tanya has a choice to make. Winston can either take Stress or pay a Plot Point to Give In, thus abandoning the idea of the mission and giving Jean Luc what he wants.

If the reaction roll is higher, then the target has turned the tables. Now everything reverses—the initiating character must decide whether to Give In or attempt a reaction, describing how they respond and trying to beat the new, higher number to keep the Contest going.

Example: Unfortunately for Jean Luc, Tanya just rolled better, and so the tables are turned. Now Isaac has a choice to either Give In or attempt a reaction. Isaac decides that Jean Luc is going to push on, calling out Winston's temper and telling him, point blank, what the other conspirators think of him. Isaac builds a new pool, hoping to beat Tanya's roll. He loses again, and takes Stress. If he'd won, the Contest would keep going, with the positions flipping a second time.

It goes back and forth like that until someone either Gives In or can't beat the high roll. The loser takes Stress, and that ends the Contest. Giving your opponent Stress doesn't mean you get what you want, though. That only happens when your opponent Gives In.

GIVING IN AT THE END OF YOUR ROPE

Sometimes it happens—your character has been pushed and pushed, and you run out of Plot Points. Worse, you're in a Contest you can't handle, so you want to Give In. What do you do?

You have two choices here—you can either soldier on, going through with the Contest even though your character may be on his last legs, with no hope for escape. If you use this option, the GM might award you a Plot Point at the end of the Contest for having the guts to go through.

Otherwise, you can choose to step back a Relationship or Value die by one step for the remainder of the game session to reflect a new level of exhaustion for you. If this would reduce that Trait below a D4, take the Trait off the table. You can't use it until next session.

AIDING

You can help someone else in a Contest. To aid another character, describe what you're doing to help her, assemble a dice pool, and roll it. Take the die that rolls highest and give it to the person you're Aiding. She can add that die to her total.

Aiding can really turn the tables of a Contest and should be acknowledged as a very powerful player choice.

If the side you Aid loses, you also take Stress.

Example: Hakiru rushes onto the battlefield to see his daimyo, Keiko, locked in mortal combat with Hakiru's mortal enemy. For the sake of his daimyo and, indeed, the shogunate itself, he must step in to protect Keiko. Her honor will not allow her to step back from the fight, no matter how injured she is, so together they will work to defeat the enemy.

Hakiru's player, Kumar, builds a dice pool and rolls. His best die is a D6 that came up a 6. So Keiko's player can add 6 to her total. The tide of battle quickly shifts in their favor.

BUT AIDING DIDN'T HURT BEFORE

The sharing of Stress with characters Aiding parties in a Contest is a slight change from the *SMALLVILLE RPG*. Helping out the losing side can be painful!

INTERFERING

If you want to **Interfere** in a Contest between two other people, pay a Plot Point, describe how you're Interfering, then take up dice and roll. You have to beat the highest standing roll to stop the Contest.

If you win, the Contest immediately stops—no one has to Give In and no one takes Stress.

If you lose, each participant you lose to inflicts Stress on you, and then can continue fighting.

If the two people in the Contest really want to keep fighting, they can each pay a Plot Point to ignore you, no rolls needed.

WAIT, THAT'S IT?

This is a simplified version of the Interfere roll in the *SMALLVILLE RPG*. You can check that game out for more nuanced mechanics.

Example: In the middle of a scene in a courtroom drama, the two lawyers have lost their cool during a powerful cross-examination. They are poised to start bickering with each other in the middle of the case and they've picked up dice to begin a Contest.

The defendant, with his freedom riding on his lawyer, wants to Interfere and stop the Contest before it starts. He grabs his lawyer by the jacket sleeve and whispers urgently, reminding her what a stickler the judge is. The defendant's player picks up dice and rolls, along with both lawyers' players.

If the defendant beats both lawyers, the Contest stops, and no one is embarrassed or Stressed by the scene. If they'd wanted, both lawyers could have spent Plot Points to ignore the interference entirely.

Unfortunately for the defendant, his lawyer beats him in the roll. Not only can she continue her fight with the other lawyer, but she also rolls Stress against her client.

STRESS

In the most dramatic stories, a hero keeps going, keeps taking punishment—physical, emotional, or otherwise—long after normal people would have given in or given up. The plucky reporter who won't stop chasing the lead despite a conspiracy to silence the truth, or a soldier abandoned and yet pushing on through a harsh winter climate. Every defeat slows them, but never stops them. For many of these characters, it's not about actual wounds or broken bones—what can bring them down (temporarily, anyway) is Stress. And so, in *CORTEX PLUS DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING*, Stress is a metric for how long your characters can push on before they suffer a setback and lose control of their agency for a while.

You have five kinds of Stress you can take; they describe various kinds of harm you suffer, the price of sticking to your guns at all costs. You didn't Give In, you never gave your opponents what they wanted, but you suffered for your obstinacy.

In the *SMALLVILLE RPG*, the default Stress types are AFRAID, ANGRY, EXHAUSTED, INJURED, and INSECURE. The Stress you take depends on the action that forced you to lose the Contest—if someone's punching you in the face, you'll probably take INJURED Stress. If you're in a bitter argument, you might take ANGRY or INSECURE Stress.

ALTERNATE STRESS

Not every game of *CORTEX PLUS DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING* needs the same five Stress tracks. In fact, introducing different kinds of Stress can change the moods, themes, and manner of play just as much as changing Values.

When GMing *DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING*, make sure the Stress fits the genre and style of play. ANGRY may not be important for a game without angsty teenagers.

Exhausted may not apply in a game without normal human characters. Injured may not come up if your game won't have combat. They're all replaceable.

You can look at Stress in two ways—increasing something negative (my character is more Angry than she was before) or decreasing something positive (my character has lost some of her Social Status). Choose what works best for your game and make sure all the players agree on what the different kinds of Stress mean.

EXAMPLE ALTERNATE STRESSES

- **Humanity:** Everyone is playing monsters. Maybe werewolves, vampires, and constructs. Or high profile, high risk positions like politicians or people in the legal system. Whatever the reason, a constant strain on their ability to empathize and remain human is a big part of these stories.
- **Mana:** Magic is a big part of the setting. Spells are thrown about like confetti, and duels between wizards are a common enough occurrence that Tests or Contests may sap a character's ability to interact with the magical world.
- **Popularity:** Social games and status moves are a big part of the setting. Having sway with people is super important to the characters. This Stress is a reflection of popular disapproval, the slow crawl to obscurity, and dwindling power over the populous.
- **Stability:** Characters regularly confront the unbelievable. Alternate realities. Super science. Outsider horror and incomprehensible evil. This Stress reflects a character's struggle to stay sane and continue to function in the face of these terrors.
- **Wealth:** In a game where characters are expected to be wealthy and throw their money around as a way to both show off and control their Resources and Relationships, Wealth reflects the exhaustion of their money and contacts, and shows when waiters start cutting up their credit cards.

MORE STRESS!

Want to see even more ideas for alternate kinds of Stress? See the Setting Starters on page 181.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

When your character is Stressed, the GM and other players can use it against her. Whenever you're in a Contest or Test where your Stress would work against you, the opponent gets to add your Stress die to his pool.

Example: Torres and Pinky are out in the backyard throwing around the old pigskin for "old time's sake." There's a lot more riding on this game of one-on-one, though, as the two are in a tense struggle for control of their gang. Torres hasn't had the best day ever, and he's already Injured from an earlier fight with a rival gang. He's got Injured d8. Pinky's player, Lyndsey, calls him on that during the start of the Contest, and so she gets a free d8 for her pool to start.

In order to determine how much Stress you suffer, the victor of the Contest rerolls all the dice in their pool. Whichever die has the highest number is the die size of Stress you take.

If you already have Stress in a certain category and you take more, compare the die size of the Stress you're taking now with the die size of Stress you already have. If the new die is higher, raise your Stress to that level. If the new die is the same or lower, raise your Stress by one step.

Example: Pinky's playing mean—she jams Torres hard where he's already hurt, and Lyndsey rolled really well in the Contest. To determine how badly she hurt Torres, she picks up all the dice she just rolled, (including the d8 from Torres' Injured Stress) and rolls again. This was an important roll, and Pinky had a d12 in her pool. If she'd rolled her highest on that d12, Torres' Stress would have jumped from a d8 to a d12 and he would have been in pretty major trouble.

Instead, she rolled highest on a d6. She still gave him Stress, just not that dramatically; his Injured d8 Stress becomes Injured d10 Stress and he's in some pain.

Stress is reduced by one step every session. Another character can also try to help you relieve it (page 179).

STRESSING OUT

If one of your Stress categories gets pushed past d12, you get Stressed Out. In other words, you can't do anything effective for the rest of the scene. Exactly what this means depends on the kind of Stress you've taken—someone with Angry Stress might storm out of the room yelling, and someone who is Injured may fall unconscious.

This may also happen if you lose a Contest by 5 or more, at the option of the winner.

Example: Against his better judgment, Torres keeps playing football—there's a lot riding on this game, after all. He's sitting at Injured d10 Stress. In the next Contest, Pinky lays into him, pushing his Stress up to a d12. Things look bad for Torres.

Still, he presses on and engages in one more Contest. He pulls out all the stops and blows every Plot Point he can. When the roll is settled, he beats Pinky this time. In fact, his roll is six points higher than her roll. As a result, she skips taking Stress and is Stressed Out all in one fell swoop. Lyndsay loves this come-from-behind moment and describes Pinky calling Torres a bunch of colorfully rude names before storming off to lick her wounds.

STRESS RELIEF

You can perform a Test to remove someone else's Stress (but not your own). Pick a type of Stress on another Lead, describe what you're doing to remove his Stress, assemble your dice pool as usual, and roll. The person you're trying to heal takes all his Stress dice and rolls against you. If you win, the Stress goes away. If you lose, the Stress remains.

Example: It's been a rough day fighting in the futuristic gladiator pits of Neo New York, and Reggie is at his wit's end. His boyfriend Chris knows Reggie isn't going to make it through another round of combat tomorrow if he doesn't cool off tonight. So Chris scraped together enough credits to make a homemade meal. Then after dinner, Chris does the goofiest thing he can think of—he starts singing to Reggie. Chris isn't much of a singer, but his player Josh builds a dice pool based on the heartfelt meaning and compassion in his song and he says he wants to reduce Reggie's Angry Stress. Josh rolls his pool. Meanwhile, Reggie's player Michael takes a die for each kind of Stress he has and rolls them at the same time. Chris wins and wipes out all of Reggie's Angry Stress in one cheesy love song. If Reggie's pool had won, Reggie's Stress would have remained, and probably frustrated the crap out of poor Chris.

If someone succeeds in relieving your Stress, you add a die of the same size as the Stress you just recovered to your Growth pool.

GROWTH AND EXPERIENCE

The best dramatic heroes grow with the story and are changed by the challenges they face. Indeed, to some, that's the very definition of a hero—or, at the very least, a protagonist. Even antagonists, if they're interesting, change over the arc of their story.

Your Lead gets new Traits and advances current Traits through a mechanism called the **Growth pool**, which is a pool of dice you build up over the course of the game.

You can get dice for the Growth pool in two ways:

- Challenging a Value or Relationship statement (see page 160)
- Successfully recovering Stress with someone else's help (see above)

You can then use that Growth pool to add new Traits or improve existing ones at the end of an episode, in a special kind of scene called a **tag scene.**

TAG SCENES

At the end of every episode (usually a game session, but some stories take a little longer to get to a logical narrative pause), you have the opportunity to do a special kind of scene called a **tag scene,** where you can try to improve your character's Traits.

Tag scenes shouldn't be very long—just enough narration for everyone to get an idea of how you want your Lead to change. After that, you get to do two things: rewrite statements and step up Traits.

Example: Missy's character Greg has had a long day, and the game session has been great. She's got an idea of what she wants to happen with Greg, and so she describes her tag scene. In it, Greg looks mournfully out a window while, as Missy describes it, sad-woman-at-a-piano music plays in the background. It starts to rain, and he turns from the window, picks up a picture of his girlfriend Amina, and turns it down on its face. Then he sits down to start reading his father's journal, long left untouched on his desk. Missy is going to rewrite Greg's statement about Love, since things went so badly with Amina, and he's going to step up his Relationship to his dead father as described in the tag scene. The GM can't wait to play with "what's in the journal" starting next session.

REWRITING STATEMENTS

For every Value or Relationship you've challenged (see page 160), you get to make a choice: did your Lead change perspectives? If so, you can rewrite your statement to reflect your new belief about the Trait in question and put it back to its original die level. Jason *would never let me down* d8 might become Jason *isn't the friend I thought he was* d8 or Jason *will answer to me* d8.

If your Lead didn't change perspectives, you can keep the statement the same, but the Value or Relationship must stay at the lowered die level. For Values, pick another Value or Values to increase by that same amount, so your total number of die steps remains the same (see Dividing Up Values on page 168). So, if you stepped back Love from d10 to d6 (two steps) during an episode and decide to stay there, you'd pick one Value to step up by two, or two Values to step up by one.

For Relationships, if you stay at the lowered level, add another die to your Growth pool equal to the new level. So, if you stepped back Jason from d8 to d4, you'd add a d4 to Growth in addition to the d8 you added when you originally challenged it.

STEPPING UP TRAITS

You may select one Distinction, Ability, Resource, or Relationship to step up, or pick a new one to add from any of those categories. New Traits begin at D4. You can't step a Trait up higher than D12.

To raise the Trait, you must succeed at a Test. You roll your Growth pool plus your current highest Stress level. The GM rolls one die equal to the Trait level you want to step up to and a second die based on what kind of Trait it is:

- Ability D12
- Distinction D10
- Resource D8
- Relationship D6

Unlike other Tests, you can't use Plot Points to affect the outcome of this one. Ignore all 1s.

If you win, you get to step up your Trait or add a new one.

If you lose or tie, you can do it anyway, but you have to step something else down to compensate.

Example: Missy picks up some dice to see how far Greg's Relationship with his father is going to change. He has a Growth pool of D8 (from challenging his LOVE Value that day), and a D6 thanks to his ANGRY Stress. Greg would be going from a D6 to a D8 Relationship with his dad, so the GM rolls a D8 (for the Relationship) and a D6 for the type of Trait Missy wants to increase. They both roll.

Missy wins the roll, so she can step up Greg's Relationship with his father to a D8! Those dead daddy issues are getting rough. If Missy had rolled lower than the GM, she may still have stepped up Greg's Relationship with his father by stepping back his Relationship with his girlfriend. That would have been pretty poetic.

EXAMPLE SCENES

Think of the typical kinds of scenes you see in the pilot episode of a TV series. Those are the kinds of scenes you'll want to run your players through. Here are two examples:

...25 YEARS EARLIER

This scene gives you a chance to get the core idea of who your characters are and when the story really started for them. This scene is the first time the characters had a brush with the metaplot you're laying out. Make sure they step up a die, connect to one of the metaplot elements (the two Features or the location) on the Pathways Map, and add a Distinction, Ability, or Resource to their sheet (and the Map!). Note: Depending on the scope of your game, this scene can also happen "two weeks ago" or "earlier today" or whenever you want, depending on how fast you want things to happen.

THE WORST DAY EVER

Whether you're doing a tense war story focusing on the lives of real people in times of chaos, or My So Called Teenage Confessions, all Leads have a bad time of it sooner or later. Use the Worst Day Ever scene to set up further conflict and, most importantly, allow a player to pick their character's D4 Value. In this scene, players put two potential Values on the table, both rated at D6. As soon as a Test or Conflict comes up, they make a roll with one of those two Values. If the roll succeeds, that Value becomes a D6 and the other becomes their default D4. If the roll fails, the rolled Value becomes a D4 and the other Value defaults to a D6. If you're familiar, this is similar to part of character creation in *CORTEX PLUS ACTION ROLEPLAYING*.

CREATING A PILOT EPISODE

Occasionally, you don't have time to prepare a full Pathways Chart for a game of *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* ahead of time. Maybe the session is spur of the moment, or you prefer to do things more by the skin of your teeth. That's actually not a problem. If you don't have a Pathways Chart ready, try creating a Pilot Episode!

To set up, the GM does these things:

1. The GM decides (or selects by table agreement) the rough genre of the story. Teenage drama, super powered adventures in capes, hunting vampires in a classic car, the tense political drama in the White House, whatever.
2. Based on that genre, the GM comes up with two roughly sketched Features and a location that represent the overarching plot of the game. There are some requirements, but mostly they're meant to be very vague. Stuff like "thirty-year-old power hungry broker with a shark's smile." "The place where teens keep dying." "The for-profit hospital where everyone works." "The board of directors, a shadowy secret group."
3. To get started, you set out paper to create the Pathways Map just like you would if you were running through a Pathways Chart. Players put down their character names; the GM puts down the Features and the location. This helps with the "setting building" part of building the Pathways Map even from the first scene.

Ultimately, you'll run five scenes for this Pilot Episode. Each of these major scenes will give the characters a chance to step up a Value, build a Relationship, build the setting, and create or step up a Distinction or Ability.

No matter what kind of scene you're setting up, it's the GM's job to push the Leads into conflict. Tests and Contests between each other and the metaplot Features help to shape the characters and get them rolling dice. No matter how you set up the scene, conflict needs to happen.

Each player should roll dice. Each Lead should get in a Contest or Test. This helps to determine which Value steps up.

All Values start at a base d6, increasing a step die if they're used in the Lead's important roll within the scene. (The exception being the Worst Day Ever scene, see the Example Scenes sidebar. You must have one scene where the d4 Value is selected.)

During each scene, the players should announce a connection between their Leads and either each other or a Feature and add that connection on the Pathways Map. Try to alternate between other characters and Features. After the scene, have the players take a step back and think about the metaplot happening around them. Each player describes a Relationship unrelated to their character and marks it on the Pathways Map. Players can even describe a little scene to help frame that Relationship to help keep the story pace going.

During each scene, players can opt to have their Leads select one of three things:

- Create a Distinction or step up an existing Distinction.
- Create an Ability or step up an existing Ability.
- Create a Resource or step up an existing Resource.

There's no need to evenly distribute these things. An all Resource character is just as interesting as one with a number of Distinctions.

And that's about it. Once the pilot is done, you have character sheets, a Pathways Map, Extras and Features to play with, and a budding metaplot to threaten your heroes.

SETTING STARTERS FOR DRAMATIC ROLEPLAYING

Drama can happen in almost any setting—when the focus is on people, how they're connected to each other, and what matters to them most, you have dramatic stories, regardless of the trappings that surround them.

Here are a few ideas to get you started in designing your own game of *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying*. As always, feel free to take stuff wholesale and add on to it, or use it as inspiration to spin off in your own direction.

STREET JUSTICE

From the moment a bullet flies or a knife swings, a countdown starts. Every minute that passes from crime to trial is a minute that could forestall or even prevent justice. In the mean streets of the city, an elite team of investigators, technicians, and attorneys work together to protect and serve the citizenry.

Tips and Tricks: Take your favorite courtroom drama or police drama. High-octane scenes of personal risk while chasing down criminals and shootouts are easy to run in *Cortex Plus Dramatic Roleplaying* with Tests. Where this genre really shines, though, is in the intense interpersonal conflicts in interrogation on the investigative side, and in examination in the courtroom. Conflicts should be high stakes in these situations. Don't worry too much about accuracy when it comes to the legal system—focus on the interpersonal conflict, and you'll get a more rewarding experience.

SAMPLE PATHWAYS

A stage that covers general background is always a good idea, so you can include categories like "Family of Cops" or "Juvenile Delinquent" or "Harvard Law Bound at Birth" or whatever makes sense for the characters you're creating for your story. Maybe include one more stage for childhood, but not necessarily.

After that, you probably want to focus on careers. So other stages might cover things like:

- The Academy/Law School
- Rookie/Intern
- Beat Cop/Prosecutor/Associate
- Detective/Assistant DA/Partner
- Lieutenant/District Attorney/Senior Partner

Also consider including why the characters went into law enforcement. Was it expected of you? Are you trying to solve a mystery from your past? You want to make a difference? You love the power your position gives you?

SAMPLE VALUES

Ambition: Politics and the drive to "get ahead."
Authority: Control and power.
Legalism: Following procedures and the letter of the law.
Justice: Following right and wrong by the spirit of the law.
Truth: What's really going on here.
Fame: What you want the world to see.

SAMPLE STRESSES

Physical: The kind of beating you can take.
Emotional: The kind of hurting you can ignore.
Mental: The kind of exhaustion you can suffer.
Credibility: How far you'll be believed among your peers and superiors.
Outreach: Your street cred, your pulse with the little people. How trusted you are by civilians in general.

USING TRIGGERS AND ABILITIES TO CREATE RELATIONSHIPS, MINOR ASSETS, & RESOURCES

When you use a Distinction trigger to Create a d8 Relationship or Minor Asset or an Ability's special effect to Create a 2d8 Resource, those only last for one scene—usually the scene in which you created them, although there may be exceptions to that. When the scene ends, the Minor Asset or the Resource goes away. The Relationship steps back to a d4 after the scene, but you can either step it up or step it back (and thus remove it) during Growth (see page 179).

SAMPLE DISTINCTIONS

CONNECTED

You know people from all walks of life who are willing to help you out in some way. Some may owe you a favor; some may expect something in return. Either way, the connection is there. Roll Connected *when your network of contacts or the threat of using them would positively influence your outcome.*

Triggers:

- Spend a Plot Point to Create a d8 Relationship with a Feature for the rest of the scene.
- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose not to reveal your sources, even though you'll be reprimanded or otherwise face negative consequences.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reveal that you "know a guy" who can provide you with information or material goods.

GOOD COP / BAD COP

This is a Distinction shared by two characters—either two Leads or a Lead and a Feature. You're partners, and you work more effectively as a team. Roll Good Cop/Bad Cop *when working with your partner to get information, bring down a perp, or whenever your particular brand of teamwork might be to your benefit.*

Triggers:

- Spend a Plot Point to Reveal that your partner is nearby and able to jump into the scene.
- Add a d6 to the Trouble pool to Step back Emotional Stress inflicted on your partner in a Test or Contest where you're around to provide support.

- Create a d8 Minor Asset when you Choose to go along with your partner's plan despite your better judgment.

INVESTIGATOR

You're adept at finding clues and putting the pieces together to find a criminal or solve a case. Roll Investigator *when you're snooping around, trying to uncover clues, or getting the scoop on something unknown or hidden.*

Triggers:

- Spend a Plot Point to Reveal a key clue in an investigation you're pursuing. If this clue gains you some sort of tangible advantage, you can take it as a d8 Minor Asset.
- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to go off alone in a dangerous situation.
- Spend a Plot Point to establish a d8 Relationship with an informant for the scene. After that scene, it's considered a d4.

PERSISTENT

You don't give up. Once you grab onto a theory, a suspect, or a line of attack, you keep going until you get what you want. Roll Persistent *when you won't take no for an answer.*

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point and Add a d6 to the Trouble pool when you get too pushy with someone you know you shouldn't.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die when you repeat a Test or Contest you've taken Stress from previously in the scene.
- Spend a Plot Point to Step back Mental or Emotional Stress inflicted on you during a Test or Contest—your persistence lets you ignore some of that pressure.

RANGE JUNKIE

You spend a lot of time at the shooting range, and all that practice shows. You can hit any target within your weapon's range. Roll Range Junkie *when making attacks from a distance, sniping at a target, or getting a bead on an opponent's position.*

Triggers:

- Spend a Plot Point to Step up the PHYSICAL Stress you inflict in one Contest.
- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to run out of ammunition.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die in a Range Junkie roll.

RULES LAWYER

You know the letter of every law and each loophole that it provides. Arcane and impenetrable legalese that confuses and frustrates even talented legal scholars instead opens up pathways for you. You handle the most hopeless of cases and somehow get them to turn out in your favor. Roll Rules Lawyer *when the letter and not the intent of the law works to your benefit.*

Triggers:

- Add a d8 to the Trouble pool to Reveal a loophole that works to your benefit.
- Earn a Plot Point to Step up your Credibility or Outreach Stress when you blatantly ignore justice in favor of the letter of the law.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die in a roll that included Rules Lawyer.

UNSCRUPULOUS

Most people are guided by some moral code that prevents them from using certain forms of persuasion. Not you. The end justifies the means, and you don't much care what you do to get there. Roll Unscrupulous *when pursuing a course of action that would make most people cringe, such as planting or withholding evidence, using unreasonable force, or casting suspicion on someone you know is innocent.*

Triggers:

- Step up your own Credibility Stress and Create a d8 Minor Asset that helps your scheming.
- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to do your job in a way that is illegal and/or immoral.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reveal a witness who will back up your version of events.

SAMPLE ABILITIES

Our version of this setting has no Abilities. Your Leads and Features should have several varied Distinctions since you have fewer categories of dice to build your pool.

SAMPLE RESOURCES

- Friendly Judge (Warrants, Legal Advice)
- Crime Scene Tech (Clues, Science)
- The Expert Witness (Expertise, Credibility)
- Street Contact (Street Knowledge, Backup)
- Cop Bar (Talking Shop, Rumors)

IT SWINGS

You pretend your world is made up of happy hour and high-powered meetings, but you're all too aware that everything is slipping away. As the 1950's give way to the decade of free love and war protests, the country sits on the cusp of a huge social change. Out from the shadow of the Depression and the post-World War II blues, a nation tries to forget. You play the movers and shakers in a culture that's hoping to replace sorrow with style—and all the while a seething, angry wave of change is on its way.

Tips and Tricks: Focus on juxtaposed extremes. Put your characters on either side of the social divides of the time. Try not to create good guys and bad guys, but rather, people who are products of their time, and people who are trying to change the times. (Change can be a dangerous thing if left unchecked or in the hands of the selfish—today's oppressed may be tomorrow's oppressor.) Features can be more clear cut and less sympathetic if it furthers the story, and when in doubt, summon up the Red-Scare.

SAMPLE PATHWAYS

As always, a background of some kind is important so you know if characters were born into money, started out on the wrong side of the tracks, or whatever. Assuming your story is set in the world of business, you'll probably want to cover education and experience (or lack thereof) as well.

Since how characters handle change is crucial to this setting, consider a stage that deals with the characters' mindsets on that. Are they embracing equal rights? Clinging to tradition? Playing the system? Making money from uncertainty? Caught in the middle?

SAMPLE VALUES

POWER: The one who has the power makes the rules.

GLORY: All wealth and power follows popularity and fame.

PROGRESS: Change is good, right?

TRADITION: Traditions are a sign of a strong civilization.

COMPASSION: Whatever's wrong is wrong because we don't care about each other.

SELF-RELIANCE: It's a cutthroat world; no one else is going to take care of you.

SAMPLE STRESSES

PHYSICAL: Sometimes you're going to take a tumble.

INEBRIATED: Everyone's got a little helper in their desk drawer or purse, right?

EMOTIONAL: How many catcalls can you handle? How many brow beatings from your boss before you flip?

CULTURE SHOCK: How much change can you endure?

RESPECTABILITY: When you step out of line, resist your role, how badly will you be punished?

SAMPLE DISTINCTIONS

SCOUNDREL

You have a certain ethical flexibility that allows you to act and speak in ways that other people might find…what's the word…reprehensible. While they may disdain your ethics, they always come back to you when they need something only you can provide. Roll SCOUNDREL *when you disparage loyalty or doing what others expect, when you call on your shady experience, or when you can play on your ambiguous reputation.*

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point and Add a D6 to Trouble when you act for purely selfish purposes.
- Add a D10 to Trouble and Gain a 2D8 Extra when you have a shady contact in the area.
- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to betray a Lead or Feature with whom you have an existing Relationship.

TEAM PLAYER

You know it's not all about you. You work well with others and you know your place on the team. Roll TEAM PLAYER *when you're Aiding your buddies, carrying your share of the weight, or figuring out what's best for your group.*

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to follow instructions and stick to the game plan when it would benefit you more to do otherwise.
- Spend a Plot Point to allow another Lead or Feature to Reroll a die in a Test or Contest that you've Aided.
- Spend a Plot Point to Step back another Lead or Feature's EMOTIONAL or RESPECTABILITY Stress in a Test or Contest when you're nearby to provide support.

MANIPULATIVE

You thrive on twisting others to do your bidding or concede your point of view. You have a tendency to get people to do what you want them to do, even when they know full well you're pulling their strings. Roll MANIPULATIVE *in situations that hinge upon your persuasive or convincing nature.*

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point and Add a D6 to the Trouble pool when you ask someone to trust you, even if you don't mean it.

- Spend a Plot Point to Create a d8 Relationship for one scene with a Feature with whom you don't already have a Relationship.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die in a Contest with someone you've been manipulating.

SAMPLE ABILITIES

HYPER-COMPETENT SECRETARY

There's no way you could keep track of all of your appointments, meetings, travel plans, and phone calls. The office would come to a screeching halt if it weren't for that person at the desk outside your office. Roll Hyper-Competent Secretary *to accomplish organizational miracles—last minute travel plans, information on people and deals, lunch meeting at exclusive restaurants.*

Limit: Forgetting her birthday, sick days

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Join a scene a distance away because your secretary pulled together last minute travel arrangements.
- Reveal that you have a reservation for a lunch meeting at an exclusive restaurant. You can use this as a 2d8 Location for a scene.
- Have your secretary contact someone who typically doesn't take calls.
- Gain immunity to Inebriated Stress for a scene—your secretary will make sure business keeps moving smoothly.

MORE MONEY THAN GOD

Who says money can't buy happiness? You have enough to prove them wrong. You have yet to find a problem you couldn't solve by throwing enough money at it. Roll More Money than God *when you use your copious resources as a primary way to solve your problems.*

Limit: There are some things money can't buy

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Reveal that you've bought something extravagant—a corporation, a radio station, a small country, a national sports team.
- Gain immunity to Respectability Stress for a scene. Yeah, money can buy a reputation.
- Reveal that you've bought someone's loyalty, provided they haven't been previously introduced as a Feature or Extra.
- Inflict the highest die in your pool as Inebriated Stress when in social Contest with someone who is related to you through family or work.

PEOPLE AS GEAR

In some cases, the help provided by a loyal assistant goes well beyond the Aid that an Extra can provide a couple of times per session. And often these helpers are viewed more as things than people anyway. Consider using an Ability, based on Gear, to model this. The Hyper-Competent Secretary, Local Fundraiser, and Patron or Mentor are all examples of people as Gear. It's possible you'll never hear a word from these people in play—they aren't characters in the game and they mostly work behind the scenes to help your Lead accomplish his goals.

Like Gear, these assistants have Limits that reflect being lost or temporarily broken, like Sick Day, Overloaded Schedule, or Scandal.

SMOOTH OPERATOR

You have a way with the ladies/gentlemen/whoever might find you attractive. You're charming, attractive, and everyone flocks to you. It seems that few can resist falling under your spell. Roll Smooth Operator *when you purposefully use your charms to work to your advantage.*

Limit: People who aren't attracted to you

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Create a d8 Relationship for the scene with someone who finds you attractive.
- Reveal the way to a particular person's heart—Flowers? Candy? A home-cooked meal?
- Buy a round for everyone in a social situation, Creating a sweep-effect that inflicts Inebriated Stress on everyone in the scene.
- Remove someone's Emotional Stress by focusing your attentions on him or her for the scene.

SAMPLE RESOURCES

- The Office (Work, Connections)
- Your Bartender (Relaxation, Confession)
- Bridge Club (Gossip, Solidarity)
- Church (Social Standing, Comfort)
- Your Better Half (Support, Status)

ST JEROME'S HOSPITAL

When lives are on the line, it's the doctors, nurses, and support staff at St. Jerome's Hospital that you can count on. Compassion meets passion in this high stakes world of life and love, pain and pleasure. There's no resisting the pull as opposites attract, strange bedfellows are made, and the proud staff of St Jerome's weathers life at a hospital's frenetic pace.

Tips and Tricks: Don't get hung up on medical details. (Unless that's a particular hobby for you and your players. Or you're all medical professionals.) Who's sleeping with whom is far more important than if that medical procedure would really cure that illness. Embrace jargon—it'll help with the genre—but only to enforce mood and themes, not to dictate character actions. Decide up front, is a life-or-death surgery a Test, or is it a Contest with the patient? Either way, very dramatic!

SAMPLE PATHWAYS

Childhood may or may not matter here, but some kind of background stage or two is probably good, if only to give a structure for the characters' personal lives. Was their childhood supportive or traumatic? High pressured or laid back? Even if you start your Pathways focusing on Med School or other higher education, make sure you have a step that defines the characters' lives at home while working in the hospital. Do they have a spouse and kids at home? Are they happily single? Unhappily single? Unhappily committed? Is there a loyal but aging dog waiting for those long shifts to be over? This all builds character, and it also adds possible conflict and tension for the characters' interactions.

It may be tempting to have a stage that defines roles at the hospital—intern, nurse, doctor, resident, administrator, etc. Maybe that's a good plan. But if your focus is the interpersonal drama, roles may be minor details. You could instead go for an approach that would help reveal personality and lead to conflicting views—healer, scientist, adrenalin junkie, risk taker, etc.

SAMPLE VALUES

Rationality: Some things are just science, just reality, you can't change that.

Compassion: People need people, and the heart is the most powerful organ, at least spiritually.

Love: When the day is ending, none of us want to be alone.

Passion: It takes fire to burn so bright.

Curiosity: Medicine is sometimes as much art as it is science, which leaves you wondering "what if" an awful lot.

Knowledge: Knowing how things are done is the only way to assure things are done right. This time. Every time.

SAMPLE STRESSES

Exhaustion: Long hours at work and at play.

Health: Sooner or later, you're going to get sick. How bad will it get?

Heart: Sick children or unfaithful lovers, what will break yours?

Disgust: How much can you see before you lose it?

Confidence: From patients to the chief of staff, if your confidence waivers, they won't be able to trust you anymore.

SAMPLE DISTINCTIONS

ARROGANT

You have the training and the talent, and you know it. It's not that you can't be fazed, but you face life with a general attitude of "I got this." Roll Arrogant *when you're in situations you're sure you can handle.*

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to act based on your previous experience instead of evidence in front of you.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reroll your Arrogant die in a social situation.
- Add a d8 to Trouble and Step back an ally's Heart or Confidence Stress in a Test or Contest when you're nearby to explain why you have everything under control.

AUTHORITARIAN

It's up to you to keep everyone in line. If the rules aren't enforced, chaos will reign and people will die. You won't give an inch to those who report to you. Roll Authoritarian *when using your clout and position in Contests against those below you in the hierarchy.*

Triggers:

- Spend a Plot Point to Reveal evidence of an underling's wrongdoing, whether or not it's true.
- Add a d6 to Trouble and Step up an opponent's Disgust or Confidence Stress in a Contest when you're in a position of authority over them.

- » Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to ignore pleas for mercy or understanding and inflict reprimands to the fullest extent of the rules.

GUILTY

You've done something terrible that you can't reconcile in your life. It's possible you weren't even at fault, but you blame yourself anyway. You would risk almost anything to make amends. Roll GUILTY *when your desire to address your mistakes, regardless of the costs, helps you achieve your goals.*

Triggers:

- » Earn a Plot Point to Step up your opponent's highest die when your guilt stymies or confuses you.
- » Spend a Plot Point to Reroll GUILTY on any roll when you're trying to make amends.
- » Earn a Plot Point when you Step up HEART or CONFIDENCE Stress inflicted on you during a Test or Contest.

SAMPLE ABILITIES

FORMER COMBAT MEDIC

You've faced the worst possible conditions, and still miraculously saved lives. Roll this die when being a FORMER COMBAT MEDIC *can help you when dealing with intensely stressful situations or when working with subpar equipment and circumstances.*

Limit: Calm, predictable situations

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- » Gain immunity to DISGUST or HEART Stress for a scene—you've seen and survived worse.
- » Use something in an unintended way, like performing a tracheotomy with a drinking straw. This allows you to make Tests or Contests in situations where other characters simply can't.
- » Immediately diagnose a physical injury.
- » Remove someone else's CONFIDENCE Stress in an emergency medical situation. Your calm is contagious.

MIRACLE WORKER

You can make the diagnoses that no one else can. There isn't a strange disease or unusual malady that can get by you, and you know how to treat them all. Roll MIRACLE WORKER *when faced with medical decisions that are beyond the knowledge and experience of those around you.*

Limit: Straightforward injuries and diseases

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- » Create a 2D8 Extra for the scene—someone you've saved in the past is happy to help you out.
- » Reveal what's really wrong and how to treat it.
- » Gain immunity to CONFIDENCE Stress for a scene. No need to question your talent.

WORLD CLASS SURGEON

You're the one they want holding the knife when a life is on the line. You're damn good at what you do, and everyone knows it. Roll WORLD CLASS SURGEON *when you're performing your art or using your celebrity to navigate hospital politics.*

Limit: Poor operating conditions

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- » Create a 2D8 Extra for the scene—a fellow expert at the top of her field offers her assistance.
- » Remove HEALTH Stress from a Lead or Feature as long as surgery would help.
- » Gain immunity to EXHAUSTION Stress for a scene. Your residency trained you well.

SAMPLE RESOURCES

- THE NURSES POOL (Solidarity, Practical Experience)
- YOUR OFFICE (Rest, Authority)
- MEDICAL LIBRARY (Research, Quiet)
- THE CHAPEL (Solace, Hope)
- THE DRUG REP (Gossip, Drugs)

LOCAL POLITICS

Everyone knows the names and scandals at the Federal level. What they don't realize is what a hotbed of drama and power local politics are. Real people, your friends and neighbors, making decisions that can support criminal enterprise, limit personal freedom, or make the city safer, depending on what they decide. You're the political movers and shakers at a local level, and people have killed for less.

Tips and Tricks: Skip the boring parts, but don't ignore the fact that they're there. Rolling a Test or six while narrating a dull and exhausting town hall meeting to drain a character before she walks into a confrontation over her affair sets the pace without you having to be an expert on local politics. When in doubt, model it a bit like high school.

SAMPLE PATHWAYS

In local politics, it matters where you came from and who your family is. Your first stage probably ought to cover the social standing your family brings you—can you trace your ancestors back to the founders of the town? Have your folks always been looked down on around here? Are you new to town? Married into one of the old families?

Schooling and experience matter, since middle and high school are great preparation for the cutthroat world of local politics. The people involved may not even change.

At least one of the stages should look at why the characters got involved in politics. You could approach it from their previous roles, such as local business owner, head of the school board, community organizer, etc. Or you could look at motivations, such as acquiring local influence, using this as a springboard to state politics, speaking for the people, making a change, etc. Like previous examples, consider having one of your stages include a Dark Secret or Potential Scandal—that way each one of the characters has something to hide.

SAMPLE VALUES

AMBITION: There's always another rung on the ladder, another person to climb over.

COMMUNITY: There's no politics without community.

POWER: It might seem modest on the grand scale, but what you have, you can sure flex.

ETHICS: There's a right way and a wrong way to do your job.

DUTY: You have a responsibility to people. How will you engage that?

PRIDE: Arrogance? Or a deep sense of pride in your community and your position?

SAMPLE STRESSES

CLOUT: What kind of authority is dribbled down to you from on high?

POISE: How many gotcha-questions until you buckle?

PERSONAL: Balancing politics and your personal life is never easy.

APPROVAL: What does the ordinary citizen think of you, really?

ATTENTION: Political death can come at the hands of obscurity—what do you do when your five minutes are over?

SAMPLE DISTINCTIONS

TOWNSHIP DICTATOR

You have a tremendous amount of power in a fairly small arena and you wield it with an iron fist. Perhaps you came into this power legitimately, but you maintain it with a ruthlessness that cares little for the law or right and wrong. Roll TOWNSHIP DICTATOR *when you exercise your power, when you threaten or intimidate, and when you square off against challenges to your authority.*

Triggers:

» Add a D6 to the Trouble pool to Reroll TOWNSHIP DICTATOR when you intimidate, coerce, or threaten others.

» Spend a Plot Point to Create a D8 Relationship with someone who owes you a favor.

» Add a D8 to the Trouble pool to Step up CLOUT or POISE Stress you inflict during a Contest.

ETHICAL

You went into politics because you truly want to make a difference. If everyone did what's right, things would work better. Roll ETHICAL *when it would be to your advantage to do something underhanded in a Contest but you act with integrity instead.*

Triggers:

» Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to confront a situation head on and honorably rather than sneaking behind someone's back.

» Earn a Plot Point to Step up your opponent's highest die when your ethics give them an advantage against you.

» Spend a Plot Point to Step back APPROVAL or POISE Stress that's inflicted on you during a Test or Contest.

FAST TALKER

You've lost track of the problems your mouth has caused over the years. But you've learned to use it to your advantage, and it's now your first line of defense. Roll Fast Talker *when bluffing or browbeating someone, giving evasive answers, or otherwise using your rapid-fire communication skills to your benefit.*

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point to Step up your opponent's highest die when you're caught in a lie or exaggeration.
- Add a d6 to the Trouble pool to Reroll a die in a Fast Talker roll.
- Spend a Plot Point to Create a d8 Minor Asset that represents something you've already talked someone into providing.

SAMPLE ABILITIES

LOCAL FUNDRAISER

It's expensive to succeed in politics. But your fundraiser works miracles, and a lack of funds is rarely an issue for you. Roll this die when your Local Fundraiser *provides you with the necessary resources to follow your agenda, or whenever adequate funds might make it easier to meet your goals.*

Limit: Overloaded schedule

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Describe the new ad that just came out in your favor. You can use it as a 2d8 Resource for the scene.
- Use the highest die in your pool as Stress when inflicting Approval Stress.
- Remove your Attention Stress—no one can forget you when your name is peppered everywhere.

PATRON OR MENTOR

Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps is all well and good, but things go much more easily when someone who's already part of the establishment has your back and serves as a guide. Roll this die when the power, guidance, and reputation of your Patron Or Mentor *can help you out.*

Limit: Scandal

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Reveal that you know how to navigate the bureaucracy.
- Show that you have support from on high. You can use this as a 2d8 Resource for the scene.
- Reveal new laws or guidelines that will soon be brought up or passed.
- Protect yourself from Clout Stress for a scene.

VOTER DATABASE

You have access to the names, addresses, email addresses, donation amounts, and more for all of the pertinent registered voters. Roll this die when you're using your Voter Database *to help you reach your supporters whether it's to get out the vote, raise funds, or bombard a public official with phone calls.*

Limit: System down, Hackers

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- Create an obstacle by bombarding a target with emails, phone calls, letters, tweets, etc.
- Garner vocal support for something you're doing. You can use this as a 2d8 Resource for the scene.
- Reveal that you know the views of the electorate.
- Protect yourself from Approval Stress for a scene.

SAMPLE RESOURCES

- Town Hall (Authority, Community)
- The Intern (Errands, The Youth Vote)
- Volunteers (Mud-Slinging, Phone Banks)
- The Mobster (Persuasion, Shady Money)
- The Union Leader (Solidarity, The Union Label)

MONSTER TEEN DRAMA

As if puberty wasn't hard enough. You always knew you were different—maybe your family was strange, maybe your body did weird things, maybe your dreams and desires differed from all of your friends. You just didn't realize how different you were. That is, until you sprouted fur, fangs, or maybe even fins. On the bright side, you're not alone, and a lot of the kids you know have this monster... problem. In fact, apparently, your high school is kind of a magnet for kids like you. How will you handle it? Alone or with friends? What do you do when you're afraid, even though you're the thing everyone else is supposed to be afraid of?

Tips and Tricks: Keep it as light or as heavy as your players want. Don't be afraid to reach out to lots of different folklore, and see how the various stories can interact. Keep the answer to questions like "what makes a vampire a vampire" fast and loose and let the players define the monster "rules" as you go—maybe even as the characters themselves discover them.

SAMPLE PATHWAYS

When telling high school stories, each of your stages probably won't cover a ton of time. Start with family and early childhood, then think of the ways that kids get categorized in elementary school and middle school. One option is to look at the categories adults impose on kids when they're in the early grades, and then the categories kids impose on each other as they get older.

Finding out you're a monster is kind of a big deal. One of your stages—possibly but not necessarily the final one—should reflect how the characters find out about their monstrous nature. Were you raised with the knowledge? Was there A Talk? Did you find out on your own in some embarrassing or horrifying way?

SAMPLE VALUES

BELONGING: Can you find your "people" and can you stay tight with them?

BRAVERY: You're a monster, but that doesn't mean you don't have reason to be afraid.

DISCOVERY: There's so much more to the world than you realized; what else is out there?

INDIVIDUALITY: Sometimes you just have to stay true to yourself.

POPULARITY: It may not be deep friendship, but it still feels like winning when everyone likes you.

POWER: Forget all this humanistic crap—you're a monster, why not celebrate it?

SAMPLE STRESSES

HUMANITY: How long before you freak out and hurt someone?

ACADEMIC: How are your grades?

STATUS: Where do you stand with your peer group? What happens if they kick you out?

HOME LIFE: Every teen has to go home some time. How much is that a strain on you?

LONELINESS: Rejection, social slights, and abandonment can drag you down.

SAMPLE DISTINCTIONS

BOOK WORM

While the other teen monsters are out raising hell, you have your nose stuck in a book. Roll this when your book learning gives you an edge.

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point and Add a D6 to the Trouble pool when you leave a social scene you're in to indulge in a book.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reveal useful information you read about in a book.
- Spend a Plot Point to Step back your own ACADEMIC or HUMANITY Stress when something you've read gives you insight into dealing with the situation.

POPULAR

You're fashionable, trendy, admired, and hated. You're at the top of the high school food chain. Roll POPULAR *when using your social influence on the local crowd.*

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to be distracted by your own reputation and popularity.
- Spend a Plot Point to Reroll a die in a Test or Contest using POPULAR that involves people who aren't already your fans.
- Spend a Plot Point to Create a D8 Relationship for one scene with a Feature with whom you don't already have a Relationship.

REBELLIOUS

It's not that you can't seem to do anything right—you just always get caught when you do something wrong. The thing is, you don't actually care that much. Roll REBELLIOUS *when you're doing something against the rules and you know you'll get snagged and be punished for it.*

Triggers:

- Earn a Plot Point when you Choose to do something to upset an authority figure.

- » Add a d6 to the Trouble pool to Reroll a die in a Contest using Rebellious against an authority figure.
- » Add a d10 to the Trouble pool to Reveal an illicit item you have stashed somewhere.

SAMPLE ABILITIES

Supernatural Abilities likely play a significant role in stories like this. Here's a small selection of some Abilities you might find useful.

CLAWS / FANGS

You have something sharp and pointy that you can use to attack your foes. It causes as much fear as it does blood and gore. You can roll this die for causing fear and bodily harm, as well as for other more mundane uses for sharp pointy things.

Limit: Stone, armor, other things claws and fangs won't sink into

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- » Use the highest die in your pool when you inflict Stress in a Contest.
- » Rip apart solid, inert obstacles.
- » Regrow your claws or fangs if they're damaged or broken.
- » Cling to something with your claws or fangs despite adverse conditions.

SUPER-SENSES

Your senses are broader and keener than any mortal's senses should be. You can see, hear, and smell things that other people wouldn't notice. Roll this die when you're using your Super-Senses *to help you stay alert, be aware, or aid you in perceiving things in your immediate environment.*

Limit: Overload, Interference

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- » Hear or see into a nearby scene you're not in.
- » Get the scent of a person or object and track the scent to its source.
- » See in all directions at once.

SUPER-SPEED

You can move so fast you're almost a blur. Roll this die when your ability to move quickly would directly help you out, whether it's to get something done faster or to cover more distance. When facing another character with Super-Speed*, you many Spend Plot Points to keep pace with them or to counter their* Super-Speed *effects; this makes it into a Contest.*

Limit: Could be things like sunlight, lack of full moon, etc.

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- » Join a scene or switch to a new scene regardless of distance.
- » Run so fast you run up a vertical surface.
- » Run fast enough to cross water as if it were solid ground.
- » Change direction quickly to zip around an obstacle; you may use this obstacle as a d8 Minor Asset.

SUPER-STRENGTH

You're capable of staggering feats of superhuman strength, even though you might not look all that powerful. Roll this die when your amazing strength would directly help you succeed. When facing another character with Super-Strength*, you many Spend a Plot Point to counter a special effect he uses against you; this makes it into a Contest.*

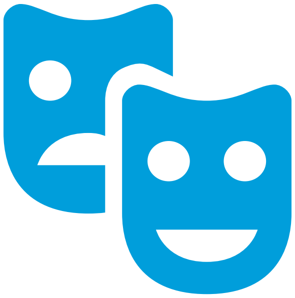
Limit: Could be things like sunlight, lack of full moon, etc.

Special Effects: Spend a Plot Point to...

- » Perform a fantastic feat of strength.
- » Throw or knock another character out of a scene.
- » Pound on the ground, creating a shockwave sweep effect and knocking everyone in the scene off their feet.
- » Break through a wall—even a brick or stone wall—to grab a target or object on the other side.
- » Wield a large inanimate object, like a car, as a weapon (and as a d8 Minor Asset).

SAMPLE RESOURCES

- Your First Car (Freedom, Respect)
- The Make-Out Spot (Excitement, Discovery)
- The Science Lab (Science!, Experimentation)
- The Guidance Counselor (Advice, Compassion)
- The Student Paper (Rumors, Research)



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Based on *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying*

BASICS AND HOW TO PLAY

The *Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying* game uses the *Heroic Roleplaying Cortex Plus* system to run games of high adventure in whatever sort of fantasy worlds you wish to create. It references all those sword and sorcery tropes you know so well to create a game of amazing heroics, somber monsters, dark dungeons, and spell slinging.

Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying is a standalone game, but will benefit the most from familiarity with the *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* system and access to its *Operations Manual*. In our attempt to fit in as much content as possible for heroic fans, some parts of the original game system may be brief or omitted.

ESSENTIAL TERMS

If you've played *Cortex Plus* games before, many of these terms will be familiar. We'll get you started with some brief definitions; they will be covered in more detail later.

- **Action:** Rolling dice to achieve a desired outcome. Opposed by a reaction.
- **Action order:** The order in which the characters act, determined by the situation and then by the players.
- **Activate an opportunity:** Spending a PP or a doom die to gain a benefit from an opponent's opportunity (roll of 1 on a die).
- **Attack action:** An action taken to inflict stress or a complication on a target character or trait.
- **Asset:** A beneficial effect die that can be added to a hero's dice pool, whose creation represented some kind of risk.
- **Categories:** Sections of a character's sheet and situations that contribute dice to a dice pool. Using more than one die from the same category requires spending PP.
- **Combat Scene:** A Scene focused on a physical conflict of some kind in which time matters.
- **Complication:** A problematic effect die that is added to an opposing dice pool.
- **Dice pool:** A collection of dice from various categories that support or help to achieve a goal.
- **Distinction:** A trait that represents defining backgrounds, personality traits, or catchphrases that summarize important facets of the hero's outlook and approach to life.
- **Doom dice:** Dice in the doom pool.
- **Doom pool:** The pool of dice the GM uses in place of PP to oppose the heroes and activate additional threats, challenges, and situations.
- **Effect die:** A die from a rolled dice pool not included in your total; used to create an asset, complication, or stress.
- **Experience Points (XP):** Earned by hitting triggers in Milestones; used to unlock additional abilities or benefits.
- **Exploration Scene:** A scene in which the primary goal is to traverse from one place to another.
- **Extraordinary success:** When your action total is 5 or more points higher than your opponent's reaction total.
- **Large Scale Threat:** A more powerful and important version of a threat that can challenge multiple heroes at once.
- **Limit:** Restriction on a Power Set that helps the player generate PP.
- **Milestone:** A guide to the sorts of decisions the hero should make or seek out during play.
- **Mob:** Anywhere from two to a dozen or more individual threats that act and behave as a group.
- **Opportunity:** A die that comes up a 1 in a roll; the opportunity is granted to the opposing side.
- **Plot Point (PP):** The currency of play, earned by investing in the story or taking risks; spent to enhance your hero's actions, activate opportunities, and more.
- **Power Set:** A thematic collection of power traits, SFX, and Limits on those powers.
- **Power trait:** A trait in a Power Set that represents an exceptional ability.
- **Reaction:** Rolling a dice pool in response to an action.
- **Recovery action:** Rolling dice to attempt to recover from stress more quickly.
- **Resource:** A bonus die linked to a Specialty representing contacts, knowledge, or tools that come naturally from training.
- **Scene:** A period of time centered on a single conflict or situation.

- **Scene trait:** Assets and complications that can help or hinder those involved in the Scene from the environment.
- **Shutdown:** When you can't use a power trait or Power Set until the recovery condition is met.
- **Social Scene:** A Scene in which the primary focus is on the dialogue and interaction between characters, including non-violent confrontations.
- **Specialty:** A trait that represents skills, contacts, knowledge, and training beyond the level of an average townsperson. Each Specialty is rated at either Expert or Master.
- **Special effects (SFX):** Personalized tricks that individualize Power Sets to suit a hero or threat.
- **Step:** The difference between consecutive sized dice, such as the difference between a D4 and D6. The difference between a D4 and a D8 is two steps, and so on.
- **Step back:** Switch out a die for the next one with fewer sides.
- **Step up:** Switch out a die for the next one with more sides.
- **Stress:** Negative traits gained as a result of a conflict; can be physical, mental, or social.
- **Stress out:** When a kind of stress exceeds D12; the character can't take any actions until the stress is recovered.
- **Stunt:** A bonus die that's thematically linked to a hero's Power Set or Specialty and is created by spending a PP.
- **Total:** A measure of how much effort your hero has put forward, usually the sum of two dice in your dice pool.
- **Traits:** Powers, significant backgrounds, abilities, and so on.
- **Trauma:** Persistent negative traits that result from being stressed out.
- **Trigger:** A specific element of a Milestone that earns you XP for meeting the conditions it sets.

HEROIC ROLEPLAYING CATEGORIES

Characters in *Heroic Roleplaying* operate on a categories system for dice. Think of each category as a bucket you can pull a die out of: when you take an action or reaction, you assemble a dice pool using one die from each category (with some exceptions).

In *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying*, those categories include:

- Affiliation
- Distinction
- Power Set(s)
- Specialty

In *Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying* basic game, you use the following categories:

- Distinction
- Background Power Set
- Class Power Set
- Specialty

There are also additional dice that you might roll during the course of the game that aren't part of your character sheet, each its own "situational category":

- Opponent's stress
- Opponent's complication
- A stunt, resource, or asset

For a more advanced game, we offer a number of options. See page 208 for examples on replacing Power Sets, and page 207 for extra options to add more categories to your game. Each of those can change the tone of the game in different ways, so you can customize your playing experience.

Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying also uses one important new rule: whenever a hero or other character cannot justify using a die in one of their categories (Distinction, Background Power Set, Class Power Set, and Specialty), you may instead just take a D6 for that category. However, you cannot use any other ability of that category (no SFX or Limits for Power Sets, no PPs for Distinctions, no splitting of dice for Specialties.)Consider it as shutting down that particular category for the roll in exchange for a D6.

CORE MECHANICS

The game follows the following fundamental rules.

1. Describe what you intend to do. If you are the active player and what you want to attempt has a chance to fail, it is described in these rules as taking an action.
2. When taking an action, assemble your dice pool as listed above.
3. Roll the dice.
4. Set aside any dice showing 1s; they cannot be used in the action. These dice are called opportunities and can be triggered after the roll resolves for a variety of effects by an opposing party.
5. Pick any two remaining dice; add their values together for your **total.**
6. Pick any one other dice to use as your **effect die.** Only the size of the die matters for your effect die, not what number it is showing. If you have no remaining dice for your effect die, the default is a D4.
7. Decide if you spend Plot Points (PP) (page 194) to add additional remaining dice to your total, or add

another effect die (with some restrictions). SFX and Limits may also allow you to modify rolls.

8. Choose whether your effect die (or dice) will be used to inflict stress (and what kind), inflict a complication, or create an asset.
9. The opponent then assembles a dice pool similarly. If the action does not directly affect another target, the opposition is the doom pool (page 217). The opposition rolls a reaction, which also generates a total and effect die.
10. If the action's total **equals or exceeds** the reaction's total, the action was a success. If the reaction's total is higher, the action fails.
11. If reaction's total was higher, a counterattack may be possible—see below.
12. An opposing party can buy any opportunities (anyone directly involved in the roll gets the first chance, then if they decline, others may buy them instead). The DM buys player opportunities to add dice to the doom pool (page 217), and players may buy DM opportunities for stunts/resources in their next action/reaction.

> Unlike in *Marvel*, FHRP does not compare effect die sizes to determine the final effect die size. The effect die for the action does not get stepped back if the reaction's effect die is greater.

Extraordinary Success: If a total beats the opposition's total by more than 5, the effect die is stepped up. The effect die is also stepped up for every 5 above after that. Once an effect die hits D12, you get to add an additional effect die from the unused dice of your pool for every additional difference of 5 in total. If you don't have any more dice, you can add a D4 effect if you want.

PLOT POINTS

Plot Points (PP) are normally acquired in one of the following ways:

- Using a Distinction as a D4.
- Rolling opportunities, if the GM buys them to add to the doom pool.
- Invoking a Limit from a Power Set that grants PP.

Only players have PPs. The GM uses the doom pool for similar situations (see page 217).

Plot Points can normally be used in the following ways before you roll:

- Add an extra die from a category you're already using (like using a second Specialty).
- Create a stunt based on one of your Power Sets or Specialties, which adds a D8 to your roll (or a D6 if you can't tie it into a Power Set or Specialty).
- Activate an SFX that requires a PP.

Plot Points can normally be used in the following ways after you roll:

- Add another die to your total.
- Add another effect die. Extra effect dice cannot be used to inflict stress multiple times on the same target in the same roll.
- Activate a SFX that requires a PP.
- Activate an opponent's opportunity to create a D10 stunt for your next roll that follows narratively from the attack (or a D8 if you can't tie it into a Power Set or Specialty).
- Activate an opponent's opportunity to create a resource based on one of your Specialties, which is stepped up and lasts until the end of the current Scene. (See page 205 for details on Specialties.)
- If you make a successful reaction, you may activate an opponent's opportunity by spending a PP to counterattack. A counterattack inflicts stress or a complication on your attacker or creates an asset equal to your effect die.

> This counterattack rule is slightly different from *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* to better fit the Fantasy setting.

Plot Points can also be spent during Exploration and Social Scenes to create resources (see page 206) or extend the duration of resources or assets.

STRESS AND COMPLICATIONS

Inflicting stress on an opponent is the most common use of an effect die. The stress becomes attached to the opponent if the action is successful. If a target would take stress and already has some, it becomes the size of the effect die, if the effect die is higher; otherwise, it is stepped up. The stress die is added to the dice pool of anyone opposing the stressed character if the action or reaction described would benefit from it.

Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying uses three kinds of stress:

- **Physical Stress:** The most common type represents wounds and other injuries (strains, exhaustion, etc.) inflicted as part of adventuring.
- **Mental Stress:** Psychic attacks, concentration-disrupting effects, and emotion-affecting spells all inflict mental stress.

- **Social Stress:** When trying to convince someone of your cause, or applying social pressure, inflict social stress. This type is primarily used in Social Scenes.

If stress on a target is increased past d12, the target is considered stressed out. The target can no longer act in the scene, and gains d6 trauma of that type, or steps up existing trauma if it exists. Physical trauma represents long-term injuries that have difficulty healing, mental trauma represents major psychological damage, and social trauma represents being disgraced and humiliated in a major way among your peers.

If a character's trauma is ever increased past d12, the character is out of the game. Having physical trauma past d12 means the character is killed. Mental trauma past that point represents someone that has lost all higher mental faculties and can no longer think or act. Such intense social trauma means such a complete loss of confidence, reputation and self-esteem that *the character no longer has the ability to interact with others.*

Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying is specifically a low lethality game for heroes since a hero needs to be stressed out past d12, then gain trauma past d12 to be considered killed. If you want a more lethal type of game, you should consider lowering the trauma threshold from past d12 to just d12 or d10.

Complications operate similarly to stress, but bear a specific name linked to the situation at hand. For example, a wizard casting a spell to cover an area with sticky webbings inflicts a complication called Webbed on his targets while a Barbarian brawler might inflict a Grappled complication on the Orc Wrestler she's dueling against. Just like stress, if a target ever has a complication that exceeds d12, that target is knocked out of the scene, but suffers no trauma.

Actions can target complications in order to decrease or remove them from play. The active player rolls against an appropriate pool for the opposition (or the doom pool if there is no active opposition) plus the complication die. If the effect die equals or exceeds the size of the complication, it is eliminated. If the effect die is smaller, the complication is stepped back. Complications are also removed if they no longer make narrative sense.

RECOVERY

During the first Exploration or Social Scene after a Combat Scene, stress automatically steps back. Heroes may also make recovery rolls to reduce them further. Heroes may use their action during an Exploration or Social Scene to recover their own or another hero's stress. Heroes may not recover their stress during a Combat Scene unless they have an SFX that specifically allows it.

To recover stress, the hero assembles an appropriate dice pool to recover. Heroes recovering their own physical stress almost always use their Stamina. Heroes helping to recover another's physical stress use the Healing Specialty, along with other applicable powers. Recovering your own or another's mental stress may require the use of magic, or specific kind of counseling with healing or diplomacy. Recovering your own or another's social stress usually involves the use of diplomacy or performance in order to rally.

To roll to try and recover stress, assemble a dice pool as normal, opposed by the doom pool plus the stress die to be recovered. If your effect die is equal or greater than the stress, it is eliminated. If it is less, the stress is stepped back one step (or removed if it is d4). If the roll fails, the GM may spend a doom die to step up the stress, or inflict a related complication for the next Scene (for example, Ankle Sprain d8).

Some SFX help recover stress during a Combat Scene by specifying that they require a PP and an effect die. This only works on a successful action (not a reaction), and the effect die you use is compared to your existing stress as described above.

Trauma steps back between Quests automatically, and cannot be further affected unless an SFX specifically says it does. This means that high enough trauma will likely last more than one Quest.

STUNTS, ASSETS, AND RESOURCES

Stunts, assets, and resources are all beneficial effects created by the heroes (or occasionally, by GM characters) in different ways that provide bonus dice.

Stunts are temporary effects based on the use of your Power Sets or Specialties. They represent unusual ways to use those powers based on the situation. They help you for a single roll.

For example, a Rogue could use a wall to ricochet a sling stone off and hit an enemy behind the head. A Wizard could divide a fireball in smaller flaming missiles to attack his targets from multiple sides at the same time, limiting the effect of cover.

Stunts don't have to be complex things; they can also be as simple as a Lizardfolk springing off her tail while attacking, a Warlock tapping into the elemental nature of a node for a short boost, or a Ranger using Scouting to kick some gravel into a Cave Bear's eye.

An asset is created by using an effect die as part of your action, and represents a longer lasting bonus that carries a risk in making it. Examples include crafting an experimental potion, summoning a dire badger while being assaulted by orc archers, or tossing the screaming dwarf Warrior at a giant's face. Once created, assets usually last for the rest of the Scene (unless they are no longer appropriate or get destroyed). You can, however, spend a PP to extend their duration to the end of the next Scene.

In certain cases, the GM may rule that assets may be stepped up in much the same way complications can be. In rare situations, the assets may even be stepped up past D12 in a way that ends the Scene, such as the evil cultists making a DARK SACRIFICE RITUAL or the heroes GETTING THE HECK OUT OF THERE. All such cases should be integral parts of Scenes or established as feasible before setting up the first action roll.

A resource comes from a Specialty, and draws on a hero's innate training and contacts in a tangible way. Resources last longer than a stunt, carry no risk in their creation, but may only be created at specific times. See page 206 for examples of resources.

TYPES OF SCENES

MARVEL HEROIC ROLEPLAYING uses Action and Transition Scenes. *FANTASY HEROIC ROLEPLAYING* operates similarly but uses additional Scene types, namely Combat, Exploration, and Social Scenes.

COMBAT

Combat Scenes feature action-heavy scenes, usually against opponents trying to physically hurt your heroes. Combat Scenes can also be used in situations where timing matters, since these scenes operate in action order.

At the start of a Combat Scene, the GM determines who acts first, depending on how the action has begun in the Scene or other situational elements. After a character has taken an action, the player (or GM) controlling it chooses who goes next, until every character has acted in a round. Whoever goes last in a round may determine who goes first in the next round (including themselves).

More advice on framing Combat Scenes as a GM is on page 222.

EXPLORATION

Exploration Scenes have heroes moving overland into uncharted territory, cutting through a dangerous forest, or navigating a dark dungeon. Exploration rolls take place during Exploration Scenes, and are described on page 219, along with other details of how to handle Exploration Scenes.

Heroes may each take the following actions during an Exploration Scene:

- Roll to recover your own or another's stress. (See page 195.)
- Make an Exploration-based resource by spending a PP. (See page 206.)
- Roll to search for magic items or create an asset. (See page 211.)
- Roll to explore. (See page 220.)

SOCIAL

Social Scenes are used for those times when the heroes are negotiating, shopping, or just relaxing by the fire. Social Scenes generally last as long as they need to while the heroes are still talking. They may also take one action each during a Social Scene:

- Roll to recover your own or another's stress. (See page 195.)
- Make a Social-based resource by spending a PP. (See page 206.)
- Roll to recruit an ally asset or hireling. (See page 211.)

Some Social Scenes will feature conflicts in the form of contests of wills, critical performances, and swaying of other people's opinions. Instead of the rules listed above, such Scenes play out like Combat Scenes, using the action order. Heroes involved in such Social conflicts will likely have more than one action each, depending on how the Scene is framed.

Social scenes are further detailed on page 224.

POWER TRAITS

Power traits describe the martial, magical, and other abilities used by heroes and GM characters. They are added to a dice pool when they benefit or support the action being taken. Whether they're appropriate to the situation or not is up to the narration of the situation. If the players and GM agree on its usage, one can be added to an action or a reaction's dice pool. The same power trait may be added multiple times to a pool if multiple power sets possess the same trait and they would both apply.

The strength of power traits is represented by its die value, from D6 to D12. A D6 power is the weakest power available, representing the human average range of power. A D8 power trait is Enhanced, distinctly above the norm for humanoids. A D10 power is Exceptional, and few heroes and creatures possess abilities more powerful than that. A D12 power is Godlike, the topmost level of performance possible, able to rival the powers of the gods themselves.

The following basic traits are used for heroes and GM characters, more can be added to your game as you feel necessary:

Attack power (including Blast, Weapon): Attack powers are almost always used on attack dice pools, though certain weapons might work on defense pools (for example, a sword attempting to parry an axe). They are often used to inflict physical stress.

Durability: Durability is almost always used in reaction dice pools. Durability represents resistance to injury and harmful effects, often through armor or toughened skin and scales.

Elemental Control Powers: Elemental Control may be used in either action or reaction dice pools. Elemental Control powers represent ability to manifest or otherwise alter a specific kind of element into a variety of forms. Elements may also include other types of forces, like nature (including plants and animals), force, Necromantic Energy, etc.

Intangibility: Intangibility is usually used in reaction dice pools. It is the ability to pass through solid matter.

Invisibility: Invisibility is usually used in reaction dice pools, or in actions to create assets. Invisibility is the power to avoid being seen, whether it's an invisibility spell or an advanced form of stealth.

Magical Aptitude: Magical Aptitude may be used in action pools. Magical Aptitude is a creature's innate potential to sense and handle magical forces. Magical Aptitude cannot be used to create magic effects on its own, and must be paired with another power trait to be of use. While Magical Aptitude is the raw power possessed, Sorcery (see below) is the trained ability to wield those forces into something tangible.

Mimic: Mimic is most often used in action or reaction pools to make assets. Mimic is the ability to copy the abilities of another creature.

Movement Powers (including Speed, Flight, Swimming, etc.): Movement powers are used in both action and reaction dice pools. Movement powers confer the ability to move greater than normal speed. Speed is ground or surface travel, flying is air travel, and other movement modes (like Swimming) indicate how fast the creature can move in that mode. All Movement powers also grant the ability to survive long term in that environment.

Psychic Powers (including Mind Control, Telepathy, etc.): Psychic powers are usually used in action dice pools. Psychic powers encompass multiple kinds of magical abilities that can read or influence the thoughts of others. Mind Control usually inflicts complications that can either be resisted (with the complication opposing) or obeyed (so the complication doesn't apply for that roll). If the complication is stepped up above D12, the target can no longer resist for the remainder of the scene. Telepathy, meanwhile, is usually used to create assets.

Reflexes: Reflexes may be used in either action or reaction dice pools. Reflexes represent a greater response time, physical agility, and aim than the average humanoid.

Resistance Power: Resistance power traits are almost always used in reaction dice pools. Resistance powers grant the innate ability to withstand harm or other attack from a specific type. Mystic Resistance, for example, is the innate ability to reject magic of all kinds.

Senses: Senses may be used in action or reaction pools, though they rarely are used to inflict stress without working with another power trait. Senses are more acute, keen, or developed than the average humanoid. Sometimes senses are just more powerful version of the five senses, and sometimes they are specifically described (like magical senses).

Shapeshifting: Shapeshifting may be used in either action or reaction dice pools, usually to create assets. Shapeshifting is the ability to alter the way you look or take on the form of something else you have experienced, like when a druid shifts into a bear, or a wizard conjures the form of a dragon.

Size-changing powers (Growth, Shrinking): Size-changing powers may be used in either action or reaction dice pools. These powers allow growing or shrinking in size, usually through magic or monstrous ability. They do not grant further abilities from changing in size, which may be represented through other power traits like Strength, Durability, etc.

Sorcery: Sorcery may be used in action or reaction pools, and may not be used to inflict physical stress (which is often shown in an accompanied Limit in a Power Set including it). Sorcery is the trained ability to shape magical forces into tangible magical creations, usually as an asset or complication. The ability to channel magic into a direct strike is covered under Magical Blast, and the raw talent for using magic is covered under Magical Aptitude.

Stamina: Stamina is almost always used in recovery dice pools or in reaction pools against poison or disease-type effects. Stamina represents increased endurance and staying power, as well as recuperative ability and resistance to fatigue or toxins. It is not the ability to resist physical damage, which is covered under Durability or Resistance.

Strength: Strength is almost always used in action dice pools. Strength is muscular power beyond that of the average humanoid.

Stretching: Stretching is usually used in action dice pools. Stretching is the ability to elongate or increase the length of limbs or other body parts, often to great distances.

Teleport: Teleport may be used in action or reaction dice pools. Teleporting is the ability to travel from one point to another instantaneously, often by crossing through another plane of existence through magical means.

Transmutation: Transmutation is usually used in action dice pools. Transmutation is the ability to transmute one substance to another, sometimes through alchemical means and sometimes through monstrous abilities.

HERO CREATION

Creating your hero follows the following guideline:

- Come up with a character concept.
- Choose your Background Power Set and your Class Power Set.
- Write three Distinctions: High Concept, Trouble, and another one (personality, background, catchphrase, etc.).
- Choose Specialties: one at Master, three at Expert.
- If the GM is using other approaches or modifications to hero creation, discuss and choose those as appropriate.
- Write your hero's name. You are good to go.

BACKGROUND

Where your adventurer comes from plays a big role in their adventuring career. The Background Power Set both draws upon an adventurer's abilities that give them the edge, as well as their physical and mental advantages.

Listed below are different options for Background Power Sets. Choose one. They break down as follows:

NAME OF THE POWER SET

Explanatory flavor text that describes the Power Set

Power traits dX: These are the dice you can include in your pool when using that power.

SFX: These are special abilities that you can call upon to alter your dice rolls or other effects. Some use PP if specified, others carry some other kind of risk or costs.

Limits: Limits are restrictions to your powers. Generally, players can invoke them for a PP, or the GM can invoke them by spending a doom die. Limits can be invoked at any time, even after rolling a dice pool.

Advancements: These are suggested traits, SFX, or other qualities that the characters can unlock by spending XP (see page 211).

DWARF

The stout Dwarves of the underground bring their resilience and courage to bear against the monsters that would threaten the innocent.

ENHANCED DURABILITY D8, EXCEPTIONAL STAMINA D10, MAGIC RESISTANCE D8

SFX: *Dwarven Resilience*. Before you make an action using your Dwarf Power Set, you may spend 1 PP to move your physical stress to the doom pool and step up your Dwarf power trait for this action.

Limit: *Stocky*. Convert EXCEPTIONAL STAMINA into a complication to earn a PP. Recover on opportunity.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: DURABILITY, STAMINA, STRENGTH, any RESISTANCE
- **SFX:** *Underground Home*. Spend a PP to ignore complications related to darkness, depth, or losing footing.

HALFLING

The kindhearted Halflings don't always want to explore the world beyond their homes, but they know the importance of community and friends.

ENHANCED REFLEXES D8, ENHANCED STAMINA D8, THROWN WEAPON D6

SFX: *Easy to Miss*. Spend a PP to reroll a reaction, adding or stepping up ENHANCED REFLEXES.

SFX: *Ricochet*. When using a THROWN WEAPONS or SLING die, double that die. Remove highest rolling die and add three dice for total.

Limit: *Short*. Convert ENHANCED REFLEXES into a complication to earn a PP. Recover on opportunity.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: FEAR RESISTANCE, REFLEXES, SENSES, STAMINA, THROWN WEAPON
- **SFX:** *Two Birds...* When using THROWN WEAPON, add a D6 and keep an extra effect die.

HUMAN

The most numerous of all peoples of the realm, humans are known to be adaptable and willing to give their all.

Choose two: Enhanced Reflexes d8, Enhanced Strength d8, Magical Aptitude d8, Enhanced Senses d8, Enhanced Stamina d8

SFX: *Versatile.* Split any Human power into two stepped back dice.

SFX: *Extra Effort.* Step up any Human power for one action. Afterward, shutdown power. Recover by activating an opportunity.

Limit: *Pushed to the Limit.* Shutdown any Human power to gain a PP. Recover during the next Exploration or Social Scene.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Reflexes, Strength, Magical Aptitude, Senses, Stamina
- **SFX:** *Cosmopolitan People.* Spend a PP to step up any resource during a Social Scene.

LIZARDFOLK

The fierce lizardfolk are willing to go wherever needed to oppose the destruction of the realm while fighting the prejudice of the warm-blooded.

Natural Weapons d6, Enhanced Durability d8, Enhanced Stamina d8, Swimming d8

SFX: *Claws & Teeth.* Step back highest die in melee attack action to step up physical stress inflicted.

SFX: *Prehensile Tail.* Add a d6 to doom pool to keep an extra effect die.

Limit: *Cold-Blooded.* Step up any cold-based or dehydrating complication or stress to gain a PP.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Durability, Growth, Natural Weapons, Shapeshifting, Shrinking, Stamina, Swimming
- **SFX:** *Primal Lizard.* In attack actions using Natural Weapons, step up or double natural weapons. If action fails, add a die to the doom pool equal to highest rolling die.

OTHERWORLDER

Strange travelers from another realm bring with them the touch of their home plane and a will to oppose injustice.

Magical Aptitude d8, Enhanced Senses d8, **and choose one:** Fire Resistance d8, Cold Resistance d8, Lightning Resistance d8, Positive/Negative Energy Resistance d8

SFX: *Focus.* Remove two dice of equal size in your pool to include one stepped up die.

SFX: *Absorption.* On a successful reaction against an attack including a Resistance power, convert your opponent's effect die into an Otherworlder stunt. Spend 1 PP to use this if action was successful.

Limit: *Outsider.* Gain a PP to step up stress or complications related to being not from the natural world.

CUSTOMIZING BACKGROUNDS

In the basic setup, we use some classic fantasy examples. The Background Power Set is where we put a lot of the type of thing you'd have enhanced ability scores in other games, and fantasy benefits like an Elf's uncanny reflexes.

You can, however, play around with these if you'd like to change the focus of your characters. For example, you could say that a character's race is just a Distinction and instead have a different background like Pirate or Assassin's Guild-Trained. Other backgrounds might be philosophical factions, ancient magic bloodlines, or other allegiances.

A game that takes place in an existing world might substitute a specific region. For example:

FAERIE BORDER TOWN DWELLER

Fae Senses d8, Magical Aptitude d8, Teleport d8

SFX: *Planar Dodge.* After rolling Teleport in a reaction pool, spend a PP to step up Teleport and reroll.

Limit: *Fae Vulnerability.* Shutdown Faerie Border Town Dweller to gain a PP when near cold iron. Recover when no longer affected.

You could even go further afield with your background to support any number of character concepts:

WARHORSE

Enhanced Durability d8, Enhanced Stamina d8, Exceptional Speed d10

SFX: *Thunderous Charge.* Step up or double Exceptional Speed during an attack action. Afterward, shutdown power. Recover on opportunity.

Limit: *A Horse, of Course.* Convert a Warhorse power into a complication to earn a PP. Remove complication or participate in a non-Combat Scene to recover.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Any Control where you have a Resistance, Intangibility, Magical Aptitude, Senses, any existing Resistance, Teleport
- **SFX:** *Elemental Being*. Spend a PP to ignore physical stress from a normal weapon attack if the stress is less than a Resistance power you possess.

WOOD ELF

Elven heroes venture forth from their familiar forests to use their abilities to oppose evil that would corrupt the realm.

Enhanced Reflexes d8, Enhanced Senses d8, Enhanced Speed d8, Magical Aptitude d8

SFX: *Elven Grace*. Spend a PP to reroll an attack action, adding Enhanced Senses to pool or stepping up the die if already included.

Limit: *Fae*. Shutdown Wood Elf and gain a PP when affected by cold iron or fae-specific magic. Recover when no longer affected.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Reflexes, Senses, Speed, Magical Aptitude
- **SFX:** *Transcendent*. Spend a PP to ignore complications from sleep, charm, or aging.

CLASSES

Classes are the main representation of the role you bring to the adventure. Many of the basic archetypes of fantasy adventuring are covered here. While Backgrounds provide much of your character's physical and mental attributes, the Class Power Set covers how you use them, and certain Background/Class combinations are designed to work together better than others (though no combination is ever completely worse off).

CUSTOMIZING CLASSES

The basic game provides these ready-to-go Backgrounds and Classes as is. The assumption is that you won't have any kind of Class overlap within your group. However, you may want to customize the Classes to best fit your players.

Each Class contains a number of suggested traits, additional SFX, and other options. These abilities are mainly used when characters spend XP on unlockables to improve their characters. However, you may want to customize the characters instead by simply swapping some of the traits or SFX they start with for some of the suggested advancements. The GM may also allow you to simply add another signature trait or two that makes your character different.

BARBARIAN

Primitive warriors who are trained to wield both massive weapons and their own fury.

Weapon d12, Enhanced Stamina d8

SFX: *RAGE*! Borrow a die from the doom pool for your next roll. After the roll, return it to the doom pool and step it up.

SFX: *Sweep Attack*. Spend a PP to attack multiple targets in a Mob with Weapon. Add a d6 and keep an extra effect die for each target beyond the first.

Limit: *Heedless Swing*. Weapon may not be used in a reaction pool unless you spend a PP.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Speed, Durability, Magic Resistance, Fire/Cold Resistance, Stamina, Shapeshifting
- Replace *Heedless Swing* with Limit: *Awkward Defense*. When used in a reaction pool, step back Weapon.
- **SFX:** *Animal Totem*. When using a Shapeshifting-created asset in your dice pool, step back the highest die in your dice pool to step up physical stress inflicted.
- **SFX:** *Mighty Roar*. You may spend a PP to convert physical stress into mental stress. You may add a d6 to the doom pool to add your mental stress to your dice pool, and then step it up afterward.
- **SFX:** *Regeneration*. Spend a PP to use an effect die to recover your own physical stress and step back physical trauma.
- **SFX:** *SMASH*! When targeting scene traits or an opponent's trait that can be destroyed, add a d6 and step up effect die.

BARD

Jovial storytellers, performers, and dabblers pick up whatever skills they need to get by, especially when it comes to influencing others.

Mental Influence d6, Musical Blast d6, Sorcery d8

SFX: *Silver Tongue*. Add a d6 and step up effect die when inflicting social stress or inflicting a social complication.

SFX: *Morale Boost*. Spend a PP to use an effect die to recover your own or another's mental or social stress.

Limit: *Utility Magic*. A dice pool containing Sorcery cannot be used to inflict physical stress.

Limit: *Magic from Music*. Gain a PP and shutdown Bard when affected by a situation where you cannot sing and play music.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Mental Influence, Blast, Sorcery,
- **SFX:** *Inspiring Songs*. When using Sorcery to create a musical asset, add a d6 and step up effect die.
- **SFX:** *Jack-of-all-Trades.* Spend 1 PP to gain any one Specialty at Expert level for a Scene.
- **SFX:** *The Greatest Song in the World*. For a single action, step up any power from your Bard Power Set and borrow a die from the doom pool and add it your roll. If your action succeeds, take physical stress equal to the effect die of your action and return the die to the doom pool stepped down. If you fail, step up the die when you return it to the doom pool and take stress equal to your effect die.
- **SFX:** *Heroic Tribute*. If an ally's pool includes an asset created by a Bard power, you may spend 1 PP to allow them to reroll.
- Replace the Limit: *Magic from Music* with Limit: *The Music Within.* Gain a PP and shutdown Bard when your music is hindered. Take an action against the doom pool to recover.

CLERIC

Devoted servants of the gods are empowered both with divine magics and arms to represent their religion in the realm.

Enhanced Durability d8, Sorcery d8, Weapon d8

SFX: *Healing*. Spend a PP to use an effect die to recover your own or another's physical stress.

SFX: *Blessings*. Add a d6 and step up the effect die when creating a divine asset.

Limit: *Divine Magic*. A dice pool containing Sorcery cannot be used to inflict physical stress.

Limit: *Penance*. Shutdown Sorcery to gain a PP. Recover during the next Social or Exploration Scene.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Durability, Elemental (choose one) Resistance, Sorcery, Strength, Weapon
- **SFX:** *Divine Fortune*. When a d6 would be added to the doom pool from the GM buying an opportunity, it enters as a d4 instead. Spend a PP to change a d6 in the doom pool to a d4.
- **SFX:** *Martyr*. Whenever the GM buys an opportunity to add to the doom pool, you may instead opt to take stress equal to the size of die purchased.
- **SFX:** *Favored Domain*. When inflicting a complication themed with your favored domain on a target, add a d6 and step up your effect die.
- **SFX:** *Patron Element*. Spend 1 PP to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from an energy type you have resistance to.
- **SFX:** *Antithetical Turning*. Step up stress and complications against a monster type that has been declared anathema by your religion.

DRUID

Ancient spirits of the wilderness guide an order guardian to protect it, unleashing it when the need arises.

Nature Mastery d10, Shapeshifting d8

SFX: *Bestial Form*. When making an attack action containing a Shapeshifting asset, step up physical stress inflicted.

SFX: *Nature's Wrath*. Add a d6 and step up effect die when inflicting a nature-based complication.

Limit: *Unpredictability of Nature*. Convert a Druid power to a complication to gain a PP. Remove complication to recover power.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Durability, Elemental Blast, Flight, Mimic, Nature Control, Senses, Shapeshifting
- **SFX:** *Charm Animal.* If you stress out an animal of natural origin in a conflict, you may add it as an asset (using their Level die) for the next scene.
- **SFX:** *Plant Control.* When using Nature Control to create assets, add a d6 and step up your effect die.
- **SFX:** *Natural Perfection.* Spend 1 PP to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from fatigue, poison, aging, or disease.
- **SFX:** *Nature's Ally.* When including an animal resource in your dice pool, you may split that resource into two stepped back dice and keep an extra effect die.
- **SFX:** *Bestial Regeneration*. When including Shapeshifting in a pool, you may spend a PP to use an effect die to recover physical stress.

FIGHTER

Nearly every civilization in the realm has trained soldiers, guards, and knights, ready to protect and serve the common man with only the force of arms.

Weapon d10, Enhanced Durability d8

SFX: *Defender.* Spend a PP to take physical stress intended for a nearby ally.

SFX: *Peerless Parry.* On successful reaction against a melee attack using a Weapon, inflict physical stress equal to your effect die. Spend a PP to do this even if reaction failed.

Limit: *Gear.* Shutdown Weapon or Enhanced Durability to gain a PP. Recover by taking an action against the doom pool.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Weapon, Enhanced Durability, Reflexes
- **SFX:** *Tank.* On a reaction using Enhanced Durability, double Enhanced Durability die. Remove highest rolling die and add three dice to total.
- **SFX:** *Sword & Board.* When taking stress using *Defender* SFX while wielding a sword and shield, step down the effect die for stress, and then create a stunt of equal size.
- **SFX:** *Two-Handed Style.* While wielding a two-handed weapon, split Weapon die into two stepped down dice. Keep an extra effect die.
- **SFX:** *Polearm Mastery.* If using a polearm Weapon in a pool to inflict physical stress on an opponent, double it for an action, then add second-highest rolling die from that action to the doom pool.
- **SFX:** *Tactical Genius.* Spend a PP to borrow the highest die from the doom pool when creating tactical assets. After rolling, return the die to the doom pool and step it down.

RANGER

Wilderness guides with ancient training wield the power of arms and natural secrets to protect the wilds.

Nature Control d8, Weapons d8

SFX: *Tracking.* Step up any natural asset or resource made during an Exploration Scene.

SFX: *Multiattack.* On attack action, split Weapon die into two stepped-back dice. Keep an extra effect die.

Limit: *Unpredictability of Nature.* Change Nature Control into a complication to gain a PP. Recover by removing complication.

Limit: *Gear.* Shutdown Weapons to gain a PP. Recover by taking action against the doom pool.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Durability, Nature Control, Weapons
- **SFX:** *Two-Weapon Parry.* On a successful reaction against a physical attack action using Melee Combat, convert your opponent's effect die into a Ranger stunt or step up a Ranger power until used in an action. If your opponent's action succeeds, spend 1 PP to use this SFX.
- **SFX:** *Animal Companion.* When including an animal resource in your dice pool, you may split that resource into two stepped back dice and keep an extra effect die.
- **SFX:** *Rapid Fire.* When attacking multiple targets using the Ranged Combat Specialty, spend a PP. For each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.
- **SFX:** *Favored Enemy.* When using a *Favored Enemy* asset in your attack action pool, step back the asset for this roll and step up physical stress.
- **SFX:** *Nature Magic.* Add d6 and step up effect die when using Nature Control to make assets or complications.

ROGUE

Thieves, scoundrels, and burglars are found in any city, considered a scourge by some and valuable partners by others.

Enhanced Senses d8, Weapon d8

SFX: *Sneak Attack.* Step up any stunt created on opportunity, or step up physical stress against an opponent you're taking an attack action against by activating an opportunity in his reaction pool.

SFX: *Trap Sense.* Step back any stress or complication inflicted by a trap during an Exploration Scene.

Limit: *Exhausted.* Shutdown any Rogue power to gain a PP. Recover during the next Exploration or Social Scene.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Weapon, Senses, Durability, Reflexes, Invisibility

- **SFX:** *Uncanny Dodge*. On a successful reaction against a physical attack action, convert your opponent's effect die into a Rogue stunt or step up a Rogue power until used in an action. If your opponent's action succeeds, spend 1 PP to use this SFX.
- **SFX:** *Improved Evasion.* Spend 1 PP to ignore physical stress caused by an attack affecting multiple targets.
- **SFX:** *Poisoned Blade.* When inflicting a Poisoned complication on a target, add a d6 and step up complication. Whenever that target acts, you may spend a PP to step that complication up.
- **SFX:** *Slippery Mind.* Before you take an action including a Rogue power, you may move your mental stress die to the doom pool and step up a Rogue power for this action.
- **SFX:** *Hide in Plain Sight*. When using an stealth-based asset in your reaction pool, you may spend a PP to reroll your reaction, stepping up or doubling the asset for that reroll.

SUMMONER

By harnessing a connection to the creatures of the world or beyond, monsters of all kinds can be summoned to fight, but they aren't always well trained.

Sorcery d8, Summoned Mob 3d8

SFX: *Conjuration*. When using Sorcery to create a Summoned Minion asset, add a d6 and step up effect die.

SFX: *Look Out, Sir*! Spend a PP to ignore physical stress against you. Remove a die from Summoned Mob and take a d6 Mental Stress. Recover Summoned Mob after next non-combat scene.

Limit: *Rampaging Creatures*. When including Summoned Mob in your dice pool, 1s and 2s count as opportunities, but only 1s are excluded from being used for total or effect.

Limit: *Summoner Feedback*. Summoned Mob dice may be targeted individually or by *Area Attack* SFX. d10 stress removes a die from the Summoned Mob power and adds a d6 Mental Stress to the Summoner. Recover Summoned Mob after next non-combat scene.

Limit: *Utility Magic*. A dice pool containing Sorcery cannot be used to inflict physical stress.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Blast, Durability, Movement power, Sorcery, Summoned Mob (increase number of dice or die value for double XP cost of normal Advancement)
- **SFX:** *Swarm*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.
- Replace **SFX:** *Look Out, Sir!* with **SFX:** *Minion Shield.* Spend a PP to ignore physical stress against you or an ally. Remove a die from Summoned Mob and take a d6 Mental Stress. Recover Summoned Mob after next non-combat Scene.
- **SFX:** *Summoning Binding.* When using Sorcery to create complications or stress against extraplanar foes, add a d6 and step up your effect die.
- Remove Limit: *Rampaging Creatures*.
- **SFX:** *Dogpile*. On attack action using Summoned Mob, remove highest rolling die. Add three dice to the total.

WARLOCK

A dark pact using forbidden magics gives access to power at a price.

Mystic Blast d10, Sorcery d8

SFX: *Eldritch Energies*. Add a die from the doom pool to your attack action. After attack, return the die and step it up.

SFX: *Unleashed*. Step up or double a Warlock power on action (1 PP for both). If action fails, add a die to the doom pool equal to highest rolling die.

Limit: *Utility Magic*. A dice pool containing Sorcery cannot be used to inflict physical stress.

Limit: *Forces Beyond Comprehension*. When including a Warlock power in your dice pool, 1s and 2s count as opportunities, but only 1s are excluded from being used for total or effect.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Mystic Blast, Durability, Sorcery, Stretching, Teleport,
- **SFX:** *Profane Pact.* Spend 1 PP to recover your own stress when you inflict stress with a pool that includes a Warlock power.
- **SFX:** *Holy Pact.* Add Sorcery to your dice pool when helping others recover stress. Spend 1 PP to recover your own or another's physical stress or step back your own or another's physical trauma.
- **SFX:** *Fae Pact.* When making a reaction to avoid a physical or magical attack, add a die from the doom

pool to the reaction pool. After the attack, return the die and step it up.

- **SFX:** *Elemental Pact*. Spend a PP to attack multiple targets with Mystic Blast. For each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.
- **SFX:** *Far Pact*. Step up or double a Warlock power for one action or reaction. If roll fails, take highest rolling die as mental stress.

WIZARD

Conjurers of arcane forces harnessed through years of study.

Mystic Blast d6, Sorcery d10

SFX: *Evocation*. Spend a PP to attack multiple targets with Mystic Blast. For each target beyond the first, add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Transmutation*. When using Sorcery to inflict a magical complication, add a d6 and step up effect die.

Limit: *Utility Magic*. A pool containing Sorcery cannot be used to inflict physical stress.

Limit: *Fizzle*. Shutdown a Wizard power to gain a PP. Recover during the next Exploration or Social Scene.

Advancements:

- Suggested Traits: Mystic Blast, Durability, Shapeshifting, Sorcery, Teleport
- **SFX:** *Abjuration*. You may spend a PP to add your Sorcery die to an ally's reaction roll. If that roll fails, take d6 Mental Stress.
- **SFX:** *Conjuration*. When creating a magical asset, add a d6 and step up effect die.
- **SFX:** *Divination*. If your reaction pool includes a Wizard power, spend 1 PP to reroll. If rerolled reaction succeeds, use effect die to make a free *Divination* stunt.
- **SFX:** *Enchantment*. When inflicting a magical complication against multiple targets, for each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.
- Replace Limit: *Utility Magic* with Limit: *Necromancy*. If you use Sorcery in a pool to inflict physical stress, take d6 Mental Stress.

DISTINCTIONS

Distinctions define the personality and style of your adventurer, in ways that sometimes help and sometimes complicate their lives.

Characters choose three Distinctions at character creation (usually after selecting Background and Class, but this can be done or changed at any point during the process). Choose a High Concept Distinction, a Trouble Distinction, and a Distinction of any type you prefer.

WHAT ABOUT MY 14 KINDS OF POLEARMS?

For ease of use, basic gear is abstracted into the Class Power Set: Weapon (whose exact type is determined by the player), Durability for armor, Rods/Staves/Wands for Wizards to work their Sorcery, etc.

If you're a group that prefer more detailed gear rules, we offer an option in alternate Power Sets to make gear its own thing, in which case those traits will be substituted for something else.

Magic items, meanwhile, are exceptional and have their own traits that attach to Background or Class Power Sets and are explained on page 211.

HIGH CONCEPT DISTINCTION

This is your "go-to" Distinction that epitomizes what you are in a short statement. When you're doing what you're known for, it's usually your High Concept.

- Zealous Purger of Evil
- Unrelenting Brute
- Seeker of Arcane Mysteries
- Limerick-Reciting Jester
- Blade of the Storm Gods
- Nondescript Skulk
- Crafty Pirate
- Master of Chains
- Champion of the Eldritch Glade
- Veteran Soldier

TROUBLE DISTINCTIONS

This is the Distinction that tends to complicate your life, but occasionally, pays off.

- No Concept of Stealth
- Boorish
- Easy to Ignore
- Primitive
- Clumsy
- Impulsive
- Anger Control Issues
- Too Young to Adventure
- Inexperienced
- Drunk

MISCELLANEOUS DISTINCTIONS

This is any kind of third distinction that you choose that rounds out your character. A background element not elsewhere represented, a personality trait, an affiliation, an alignment to higher forces, a representative catchphrase, and more can all be here.

- "I Don't Have Time for This"
- Raised by Gnomes
- Chaotic Neutral
- It's Smashing Time!
- Live by the Code, Die by the Code
- Alluring
- Former Merchant
- Noble Birth
- Booming Voice
- Speaker for the Dead

These three types are lifted pretty much whole cloth out of *Fate Core* and related games by Evil Hat Productions. We recommend picking the book up, not just for the great game itself, but also because the advice on Aspects also applies strongly to choosing Distinctions.

Alternatively, you can just choose three Distinctions of your own devising, especially if you've made *Heroic Roleplaying* characters before. These three suggested types do try to ensure you have a balance to use during play, however.

SPECIALTIES

Specialties represent the training that an individual hero has and the contacts made through its application. Some will relate more directly to an adventurer's role, like the Fighter using Melee Combat, while others might come up less often but still provide a breadth of training for that character.

Specialties come in two types: Expert and Master. Expert Specialties can be used as a d8, or split into 2d6. Master Specialties can be used as a d10, or split up into 2d8 or 3d6. Choose one Specialty at Master and three Expert Specialties for your character.

The basic Specialties are as follows:

- **Acrobatics:** You've had training in leaping, jumping, contorting, and dodging out of the way. You've got a great sense of balance and you're not afraid of heights.
- **Crafting:** You can use, repair, and create physical goods, from blacksmithing to traps, to siege devices and alchemical items.
- **Diplomacy:** You have a gift for understanding sentient behavior and finding common ground with other people and cultures.
- **Healing:** You've had training in treating wounds and ailments of the body and the mind.
- **Intimidation:** You know what scares others. You're familiar with how to get others to do what you want through force, threats, menace, and fear.
- **Lore:** You have a wide breadth of knowledge, from history to politics to sciences.
- **Melee Combat:** You're good in a fight with melee weapons and the training to act on the offensive, or if you like, the defensive.
- **Merchantry:** You've got merchant acumen and know your way around finances, appraisal, and trade. This Specialty also implies a certain level of wealth available.
- **Mystic:** You have experience in occult dealings and spellcraft. This Specialty encompasses both training with magic and general magical knowledge for those who have no magical ability.
- **Performance:** You have training in entertainment of all kinds.
- **Ranged Combat:** You're good in a fight with ranged weapons and the training to act on the offensive, or, if you prefer, the defensive.
- **Riding:** You don't just know how to ride a horse, you were born to ride.
- **Scouting:** You have experience in the natural world, as well as tracking and leading the way in a dangerous situation.
- **Skullduggery:** You've got training in sneaking, infiltrating, breaking in, and hiding the truth.

DEALING WITH...

...WEALTH, TREASURES, AND OTHER VALUABLES

Treasure, personal wealth, and the financial resources of kingdoms and nations are not measured in the game. Heroes that have wealth issues (rich or poor) usually possess a Distinction to that effect. It's assumed that heroes have enough money or are backed by sufficiently wealthy patrons to get by from adventure to adventure. You could also assume that riches are part of what XP represents: material resources to gain access to more training, new powers, and studying recently found magical items.

During a Scene, any heroes hoping to make use of wealth—or secure it—may roll against the doom pool, just as one would roll a recovery action (see page 195). Heroes should tap into Specialties like Crafting, Lore, Merchantry and Performance to create wealth-related assets like Gold Ingot, Bag of Gems, and Letter of Payment.

When framing and running Scenes centered on money, don't hesitate to create Scene Distinctions and complications like We Don't Serve Surface Dwellers Here, Where's my Share? and You Got the Dragon's Attention.

RESOURCES

Resources are those aspects that adventurers can call upon to help them when they have the time, drawing on their training from Specialties. They represent situations where the adventurer wants to generate a beneficial effect, but where failure or risk doesn't come into play.

During a Social or Exploration Scene, a hero may spend a PP to generate a resource from one of their Specialties. An Expert Specialty makes a d6 resource, while a Master Specialty makes a d8 resource. The resource lasts through the current Scene and until the end of the next one, and can be extended an additional scene by spending a PP when the resource would run out. Resources can also be made during a Combat Scene by activating an opponent's opportunity, in which case it only lasts until the end of the current Scene.

Resources also provide information, allies, or other ways to move the adventure along. Resources shouldn't take the place of encounters or other situations where the play is interesting, but instead are an easy way for an adventurer to be creative with their abilities in a tangible way. It gives players greater control over the story of the game, as they are able to define certain aspects about the situation. For example, instead of a Rogue asking if he knows somebody in town, he spends a PP and declares he has an underworld contact in town based on his Skullduggery Expert Specialty, which both grants him an opportunity to talk in character with the contact and gives a d6 resources on any related rolls. Of course, that doesn't apply for risky gambits. If the same Rogue were wanted for trumped-up crimes by a corrupt duke in town, he'd have to roll to create an asset in the Scene to get the same contact, since there's an element of risk involved (unless of course, the Duke rolls opportunities, allowing the Rogue to create that resource).

CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE AT THE DOOR

The resource rules assume that if a hero has Plot Points to spend, the hero can use their Specialties in ways that matter to the story. Instead of everyone rolling a Lore check to recall an important bit of history about the castle they're marching towards, the Wizard just needs to spend a Plot Point and make a resource called Castle Lore d8. The GM then fills the party in with what they know about it and they can use the resource when they explore and/or fight monsters in it.

That being said, you can still have heroes roll to find some important information (in the form of assets), but we suggest you reserve such rolls to situations where failure can lead to interesting consequences. Sometimes misinformation is more fun. While the Wizard may know some information about the castle, maybe it's so outdated it does not take into account the new "tenants" of the place.

See the sections on Exploration and Social Scenes for more ways to make Resources and seeking knowledge matter in your game.

CUSTOMIZING SPECIALTIES

Specialties are one of the easiest things to change for your own game to represent how much granularity you want. New Specialties can be added for more diversity in skill bases and for the kind of things you want to highlight in your games, whereas the skill list can be pared down significantly if you want the heroes to have more focused experience

In the basic game, heroes (regardless of race or class) start with the same number of Specialties, and then can train more later. You may decide instead that certain Classes, like the Rogue or Bard, start with additional Specialties or have a specific list they can choose from. Alternatively, certain Backgrounds (like Humans) may have a breadth of experience that is represented by having additional Specialties. You may also decide to come up with a Specialties list to restrict which Class can take which Specialties.

Specialties are also an easy category to drop in favor of another optional category as listed on page 207.

Example resources are as follows:

- **Acrobatics:** Knowledge of fitness, circus supplies, and carny contacts.
- **Crafting:** Supplies of mundane and exotic materia, access to mundane equipment, workspace smithy contacts, etc.
- **Diplomacy:** Family and regional recent histories, rumors, insightful observations, proven gambits, etc.
- **Healing:** Herbal poultices, medical advice, town healer contacts, precise anatomical knowledge, reanimation techniques, etc.
- **Intimidation:** Fear-inducing magic, questionable research, hired thugs, gleeful recounting of maiming stories. Bad Hero/Worse Hero routine.
- **Lore:** Ancient histories, maps, dusty tomes, helpful librarians, scientific data, etc.
- **Melee Combat:** Fighting style observations, extra hidden weapons, Intense Training Montage, War Cries, etc.
- **Merchantry:** Merchant (or pirate) contacts, exclusivity agreements, trade documents and contracts, piles of gold, hot tips.

- **Mystic:** Helpful rituals, dreadful rituals, glowing arcane tomes, summoned servants, etc.
- **Performance:** Temporary Reputation and fame, rumors, a friend in every tavern, etc.
- **Ranged Combat:** Tricked-Out Arrows, Compound Bow, Crossbow Scope, Aiming Crystals, etc.
- **Riding:** Wild Horse, The Lost Heir, contacts at stables, riding trail knowledge, specialized training, customized barding, etc.
- **Scouting:** Fauna analysis, ideal paths, ranger contacts, wind reads, fresh tracks, etc.
- **Skullduggery:** Master lockpicks, "trusty" underworld contacts, observation of easy pickings, Sticky Fingers potion, etc.

ADVANCED CHARACTER OPTIONS

The basic game uses only four categories for characters: Distinction, Background Power Set, Class Power Set, and Specialties. When adding in situational categories like stress, complications, and assets, an FHRP character gets between 3 and 7 dice to play with as the game progresses.

However, a GM might want to customize the game based on the type of campaign that emphasizes different aspects.

The easiest way to use any of these additional categories is to simply add it on to the ones the characters have. An extra die in most rolls won't make that big a difference (or make it slightly more cinematic), though the GM will likely want to add more dice to monsters in order to balance things out. Alternatively, the new category could replace an existing one (Specialties being the easiest one to replace).

AFFILIATION

Affiliation is a category used in *MARVEL HEROIC ROLEPLAYING*. Heroes have three Affiliations:

- SOLO, for when a hero is working alone in a Scene.
- BUDDY, for when a hero is working with exactly one other hero in a Scene.
- TEAM, for when a hero is working with two or more other heroes in a Scene.

Traditionally, splitting the party in a fantasy setting is a bad idea. However, if your game features a lot of situations where the heroes go off in different directions, only to be reunited later, then this category might work for your game. This option also makes the option of separating the party through the expenditure of doom dice more interesting for heroes that work better alone or in smaller groups.

ESCALATION

As conflict rages on, the action gets more and more intense, and the heroes slowly bring momentum of the fight onto their side.

If you choose to have Escalation in your game, it represents a new category that heroes only get in their dice pool during Combat and Social Scenes featuring conflicts. After the first complete round of combat, that die is a D6. At the end of every round, that die steps up, to a maximum of D12. Only adventurers get this bonus die in their dice pools, not any rolls by the GM. However, whenever that die steps up, the GM adds an equal sized die to the doom pool.

Escalation is taken pretty much straight out of the 13th Age RPG from Pelgrane Press, another great RPG worth checking out for both itself and rules to adapt. "One Unique Thing" can make a great Distinction!

GEAR

Basic, non-magical equipment is abstracted into Class Power Sets most of the time. If you want to make it more important, consider something like the following to represent different kinds of weapons, armor, and so on:

FULL PLATE

EXCEPTIONAL DURABILITY D10

Limit: *Breakable*. When taking physical stress, you may step back that physical stress to step back EXCEPTIONAL DURABILITY die permanently. Recover power during a Social Scene by taking an action to repair by rolling against the doom pool plus the power rating to be restored.

FALCHION

WEAPON D8

SFX: *Sharp*. When using WEAPON in an attack action, Extraordinary Success happens for every 4 total greater than the reaction, instead of 5.

Limit: *Disarmed*. Shutdown Falchion to gain a PP. Take an action against the doom pool to recover.

STAFF

WEAPON D6

SFX: *Walking Stick*. Step back any complications or stress during an Exploration Scene as a result of fatigue.

Limit: *Disarmed*. Shutdown Staff to gain a PP. Take an action against the doom pool to recover.

If you go this way, you'll want to replace the Weapon and Durability power traits within the Classes with similar traits that work with the gear, like Strength, or add these onto the Power Sets in question. For example, a Fighter would swap his Weapon and Durability traits for new ones such as Broadsword d8, Wooden Shield d6 and Chainmail d8. Each would likely have their own set of SFX and gear-related Limits. While this makes for more detailed Gear options, this adds more complexity to Power Sets as each will feature more SFX and Limits to deal with.

Magical Gear is integrated into the basic game already; see page 211 for details.

TEAM

Teamwork is implied through the mechanics of the game, but you may want to represent the ebb and flow of a team's cooperation more directly. Being a team could be an extra Power Set shared by all heroes of the party, structured like the following:

PARTY D6

SFX: *Teamwork*. Whenever you make a successful asset for an ally, or remove an ally's complication or stress, step up Party die.

Limit: *Infighting*. Before or after rolling an action or reaction, you may step down Party die to gain a PP.

If you want to get more specific with your type of group, you could add extra SFX to this template in order to make it represent specific kinds of groups:

VETERAN MERCENARIES D6

SFX: *Coordinated Strike*. Whenever you use an ally's support asset in your dice pool to inflict physical stress, step back the highest die in your dice pool and step up physical stress inflicted.

SFX: *Teamwork*. Whenever you make a successful asset for an ally, or remove an ally's complication or stress, step up Veteran Mercenaries die.

Limit: *Infighting*. After rolling an action or reaction, you may step down Veteran Mercenaries die to gain a PP.

ALTERNATE POWER SETS

Gear and Team are both variants of the basic idea of having multiple Power Sets, and work just like specific/tailored versions of the Background and Class Power Sets.

Using them to replace Background and Class Power Sets might "wash out" the character a bit. This is especially true if it's a Power Set like Team that would be shared among multiple party members. They work best when added to more varied characters.

However, as discussed on page 207 for alternate Power Sets, Backgrounds and Classes can be adjusted or replaced depending on the kind of game being run. A campaign focused on a group of noble families that have inherited specific sets of powers to run kingdoms might replace Background with a Heritage Power Set, customized for each hero. Or a campaign focused on an otherworldly experience where embodiments of planar philosophies grant special powers might individually grant Power Sets, with matching Limits to enforce adherence to those ideals. Even a game focused on urban political intrigue might focus on Guild-granted Power Sets more so than Classes. In any case, each one can be expressed in a Power Set, and Gear and Team can provide some starting inspiration.

MILESTONES AND SPENDING XP

Milestones are how characters earn XP that they use to unlock character upgrades, as well as story unlockables and to find magic items during their quest.

Characters have two Milestones. Often, one is shared by the entire party, while the other is chosen personally. The personal Milestone can come from a Background, Class, the current Quest, or one developed for your specific character.

Milestones contain three different triggers:

- A 1 XP Milestone that can be hit as many times as it applies (or once per action).
- A 3 XP Milestone that can only be hit once per Scene.
- A 10 XP milestone that can only be hit once per session. If it is a shared Milestone among the party, once this Milestone is hit, it is unusable for any level until the next session. If it is a personal Milestone, it closes that Milestone completely, and the player should choose a new one at the end of the session.

Milestones are usually triggered by the players' actions, with the GM verifying if there's any question whether one has been triggered or not.

The following can be considered a core Milestone, which you can give to all players:

ADVENTURING PARTY MILESTONE

You're out there for the thrills and the fame, but mostly for the thrills. If there are monsters to vanquish and people in need of adventurers, your troupe is there!

- 1 XP when your party defeats a monster.
- 3 XP when you emerge successfully from a Combat Scene.
- 10 XP when you complete or abandon a major Quest.

However, if you are running a game where fighting is downplayed, you might change the focus of the Milestone to match your game's theme. For example:

You heed the call of all the riches found in lost ruins, forgotten tombs and strange abandoned temples. Finding the dungeon is half the fun; clearing it is where it's at!

- 1 XP when you find new treasure.
- 3 XP when you explore a new area.
- 10 XP when you finish exploring a complete dungeon or abandon a dungeon because it's too dangerous.

EXAMPLE PERSONAL MILESTONES

ACCURSED

The infernal forces of the multiverse have picked you to play some role in their unfathomable plans. Others call you unlucky, but you recognize a growing blackness in your heart…

- 1 XP when your attack action demonstrates the sinister nature of your abilities.
- 3 XP when you add at least a d8 to the doom pool, either from rolling two or more opportunities on a single roll or by using an SFX that adds to the doom pool.
- 10 XP when you are finally claimed by a villainous power for dark deeds, or you strike a major blow against a villainous power by using their own dark powers against them.

ASCETIC

How can one attain focus if they remain as the magpie, always seeking what shines instead of what matters?

- 1 XP when you abstain from a worldly pleasure.
- 3 XP when you participate in an indulgence that leads to trouble.
- 10 XP when you found an institution devoted to abstaining from worldly pleasures, or abandon the path of the ascetic to live it up in one long party.

BLESSED

You were born under a divine star and followed a god's calling. You spread the Word as you see fit so that you can spread your god's blessings.

- 1 XP when you perform a religious rite.
- 3 XP when you inflict stress upon a blasphemer.
- 10 XP when you complete a grand work in your god's name(s), or become a martyr for your god's cause.

COMFORTABLE IN THE SHADOWS

Don't look at me, I'm not important or interesting. I just want to stay alive and help from a safe distance.

- 1 XP when you hide or otherwise take action to stay out of the spotlight.
- 3 XP when you leave the shadows to accomplish something important.
- 10 XP when you step into the spotlight in front of a large group in order to accomplish something important, or decide to fade away forever.

HAUGHTY NOBLE

You were born into aristocracy and you are well aware of your station in life. You take pains of reminding others of theirs. When the going gets tough, you expect your bloodline to make problems disappear.

- 1 XP when you say something dismissive about the lower class.
- 3 XP when you try to buy your way out of a problem.
- 10 XP when you surrender your noble station for adventure, or wrap up your adventuring party up for a life of nobility.

HOMEBODY

They say you can never go home. Such truth is the adventurer's lifestyle. But if I can't go back, I can bring home with me.

- 1 XP when you remark to a party member that something that reminds you of home.
- 3 XP when you do something adventurous that you could never do at home.
- 10 XP when you return home to retire and write about your adventures, or you embrace a life of adventure and realize you can never go home.

HONORABLE WARRIOR

I live by my reputation and the honor that burdens my existence. Stand fast, foe! We shall let fate and our martial skills determine your destiny!

- 1 XP when you state that a course of action brings honor or dishonor.
- 3 XP when you put yourself in a position to take stress because the alternative would be dishonorable.
- 10 XP when you perform an inexcusable act of dishonor in the course of the greater good, or sacrifice yourself to maintain your honor.

LEADER

Adventurers are a chaotic, undisciplined bunch. You lead by example, trying to get your teammates back alive to enjoy the sweet taste of success.

- 1 XP when you give an order to a party member.
- 3 XP when a party member uses a tactical/support asset you created for them.
- 10 XP when you are recognized for your achievements in a grand Quest, or you are deposed as leader in a mutiny.

MYSTERIOUS SAGE

Apocryphal, your wisdom people say is. No matter it is, for knowledge sharing is reward in itself.

- 1 XP when you make a cryptic observation.
- 3 XP when you encounter something you can't explain.
- 10 XP when you are exposed as not that wise, or if someone in your group is the Chosen One the prophecy spoke of!

NATURE'S GUARDIAN

I have been granted so many boons by our earthly mother. I merely seek to honor her through my respect and devotion.

- 1 XP when you eschew something artificial for a tool from nature.
- 3 XP when you create a natural asset for someone else.
- 10 XP when you lay down your life to protect the sanctity of nature, or if you allow nature to be harmed in a major way to complete a Quest.

PLANAR TRAVELER

Open your eyes to the to the realities outside your limited senses. There are multiversial realities one always needs to consider.

- 1 XP when you follow a custom that is unfamiliar to your companions.
- 3 XP when you tune out of the material world in a way that endangers your companions.
- 10 XP when you become bound to the material world so you can never travel the planes again, or depart the material world for a new one.

TREASURE HUNTER

It's not about amassing riches; it's about acquiring and disposing of it in the most thrilling and entertaining manner possible. You consulted maps, scoured rumors, raided ruins, and killed monsters and it's not even noon yet.

- 1 XP when you acquire or spend money.
- 3 XP when you search for treasure during a Combat Scene.
- 10 XP when you find the big score, or when you spend all of your money in an act of altruism.

QUEST MILESTONES

Quest Milestones can be offered by the GM at the start of a Quest, or during the explanation of a Quest when the players receive plot Hooks. Quest Milestones tie the heroes directly into the story, giving them personal motivations (and XP!) for becoming involved in your story.

As each hero has two Milestones, a hero can replace his current Personal Milestone with the Quest Milestone, or if the GM allows, replace the Party Milestone until the Quest Milestone is completed.

An Adventure lasts a single session, while Quests have plotlines that stretch over multiple sessions. GMs are strongly encouraged to come up with Quest Milestones for any storyline that is expected to last multiple sessions. Three to four Quest Milestones is a good number, though none of them should be required, and which ones the players take will often indicate which plotlines are the most interesting to them. Some example Quest Milestones are below.

RESCUE XANDER CASKERHALL

My son has been abducted by a band of Giants! I won't stand for this affront to our family! Save him before it's too late.

- 1 XP when you ask somebody you just met about Xander Caskerhall.
- 3 XP when you get a clue towards Xander's location.
- 10 XP when you rescue Xander, or decide to leave him captured.

99 PROBLEMS BUT A LICH AIN'T ONE

A Lich Lord has been doing whatever nefarious things Liches do in their dry, sealed tomb. You are tasked to expose his dreadful plans and destroy him forever!

- 1 XP when you investigate one of the Lich Lord's many traps or puzzles.
- 3 XP when you make a resource related to the Lich Lord.
- 10 XP when you destroy the Lich Lord's phylactery, or are defeated and become a minion of the Lich Lord.

THINGAMAJIG EXPERIMENTS

That metal wall in the mountainside? You know the one that is impenetrable? Well, it opened and all kind of strange monsters have started plaguing the lands. Why don't you have a look and explore its contents? Bring back souvenirs for the princelings!

- 1 XP when you use a Thingamajig you found in the Peaks.
- 3 XP when you experiment with a Thingamajig in a totally new way.
- 10 XP when you decipher the use and operation of four Thingamajigs, or when a Thingamajig causes you to become stressed out.

SPENDING XP: UNLOCKABLES

XP may be spent during any non-Combat Scene in order to increase a hero's abilities or unlock other advantages. Heroes may spend as much XP as they have earned to unlock multiple upgrades at once.

Most upgrade options are listed under Character Creation. For information on magic items and allies, see page 211. Specific Quest Unlockables may be available from the GM as well. Character upgrades can be purchased at any time outside of Combat Scenes.

SPEND 5 XP

- Train a new Specialty at Expert.
- Add a new power trait at D6 from a Power Set's Advancements.
- Unlock a D6 magic item or ally from an asset.

SPEND 10 XP

- Upgrade an existing power trait from D6 to D8.
- Unlock a D8 magic item or ally from an asset.
- Add a new SFX or other Advancement from a Power Set's Advancements.
- Add a power trait at D6 from a Power Set you do not possess.

SPEND 15 XP

- Upgrade an existing power trait from D8 to D10.
- Upgrade an existing Expert Specialty to Master.
- Unlock a D10 magic item or ally from an asset.
- Add a new SFX from a Power Set's Advancement from a Power Set you do not possess.

SPEND 20 XP

- Upgrade an existing power trait from D10 to D12.
- Unlock a D12 magic item or ally from an asset.

MAGIC ITEMS

Unlike the normal gear that a class is trained to use, magic items are more powerful and significant items of power.

FINDING MAGIC ITEMS

During an Exploration Scene, instead of taking any other action (making a recovery roll, creating a resource, making an exploration roll, etc.), a character may search for loot, rolling to search against the doom pool.

A successful roll creates an asset using the normal rules, representing a useful piece of equipment found in the area. The hero and the GM should work to come up with an appropriate asset for the area searched. (An unsuccessful roll could mean nothing was found, or the GM could spend from the doom pool to create a related complication or trigger a trap.)

Once the asset is created, the hero may spend XP to convert that asset into a permanent magic item, as the hero experiments with the item or uses identification magic to find out its true purpose. The die size of the asset determines the power of the magic item discovered, and also how much XP must be spent to convert it into a magic item.

A hero can spend PP to extend the asset across further Scenes as described on page 215 until enough XP has been collected to spend them to transform the asset into a magic item.

The GM can create a magic item, or pick from the list below.

ALLIES AND HIRELINGS

In the same way that magic items can be discovered during Explorations Scenes as appropriate, allies may be recruited in a similar way during a Social Scene. The effect die of the asset determines the die size of the ally to be recruited, and how much XP to unlock them as a permanent hireling. Some example NPCs that are ready to be recruited are on page 240. Full hirelings have their own datafiles, and can take their own actions, rolled by the player commanding them.

HOW MAGIC ITEMS WORK

In the basic game, magic items are either **Background magic items** (for items that enhance a character's inherent abilities) or **Class magic items** (for items that utilize a class's training). Items "attach" to the listed Power Set, meaning you can use a power trait from the magic item as if it were a part of that Power Set, as well as any SFX or Limits from it.

For example, if you were an Otherworlder with a Cloak of Elvenkind (Background magic item), you could use one of the Otherworlder power traits or Cloak of Elvenkind power traits in your pool (but not both without spending a PP), and use the SFX and Limits in any combination as if they were part of the same Power Set.

If a magic item provides a power trait that already exists in the Power Set, only the higher power trait applies.

CREATING MAGIC ITEMS

To create a magic item, first, choose what level of magic item it is, from d8 to d12, based on how powerful it is. Then decide whether it fits better as a Background magic item or a Class magic item, depending on whether it works more as an enhancement of the hero's natural abilities, or as a tool that works with a hero's class training.

Assign the magic item at least one to two power traits from the list on page 196 as appropriate to the item. Each power trait should be at the level of the magic item, or one step lower. More powerful magic items, especially in the d12 range, can have more power traits as necessary.

Assign the item at least one SFX (more for more powerful magical items) and a Limit. If the magic item is something that can be disarmed or removed, it usually has the following Limit:

Limit: *Magic Gear*. Shutdown this item to gain a PP. Make a roll against the doom pool to recover.

If that is not the case, select another appropriate Limit. The sample magic items cover some appropriate ones. You then have a magic item finished.

SAMPLE MAGIC ITEMS

CLOAK OF ELVENKIND

d8 Background Magic Item

Enhanced Reflexes d8, Invisibility d8

SFX: *Natural Stealth*. Spend a PP to step up Invisibility while in natural surroundings for the duration of a resource.

Limit: *Magic Gear*. Shutdown Cloak of Elvenkind to gain a PP. Make a roll against the doom pool to recover.

RING OF WIZARDRY

d8 Background Magic Item

Magical Aptitude d8, Magical Senses d8

SFX: *Channel*. Step up or double Magical Aptitude for one action or reaction. Take second highest rolling die as physical stress.

Limit: *Taxing*. Step back Magical Aptitude to gain a PP. Recover when physical stress is recovered.

GAUNTLETS OF OGRE POWER

d10 Background Magic Item

Exceptional Strength d10

SFX: *Operation Ground & Pound*. When attacking multiple targets in a Mob with Exceptional Strength, add a d6 for each extra target beyond the first and keep an extra effect die.

Limit: *Collateral Damage*. Step up any die added to the doom pool as a result of an attack action using Exceptional Strength to gain a PP.

RING OF REGENERATION

d10 Background Magic Item

Exceptional Stamina d10

SFX: *Regenerate*. Spend a PP to use effect die to recover physical stress or step back physical trauma.

Limit: *Taxing*. Gain d6 Mental Stress to gain a PP. Recover when physical stress is recovered.

HEADBAND OF POLYMORPH

d12 **Background Magic Item**

Shapeshifting d12, Mimic d10

SFX: *Inherent Bonuses*. When using a Mimic asset in a dice pool copied from a creature, spend a PP to gain access to an SFX from that creature for the rest of the scene.

Limit: *Magic Gear*. Shutdown Headband of Polymorph to gain a PP. Make a roll against the doom pool to recover.

BOOTS OF TELEPORTATION

d12 Background Magic Item

Teleport d12, Exceptional Reflexes d10

SFX: *Seven-League Stride*. Double Teleport for one action. If roll fails, add a die equal to Teleport to the doom pool.

SFX: *Hang on Tight*. Add a d6 to the doom pool for each additional willing party member you wish to teleport.

Limit: *Accidental Jump*. Convert Teleport into a complication to gain a PP. Remove complication to recover.

ELVEN CHAIN

D8 Class Magic Item

ENHANCED DURABILITY D8, ENHANCED SPEED D8

SFX: *Unbreakable Mithril*. Spend a PP to ignore an attack inflicting physical stress below D8.

Limit: *Tangled*. Convert ENHANCED DURABILITY into a complication to gain a PP. Recover by removing the complication or participating in a non-Combat Scene.

DAGGER OF RETURNING

D8 Class Magic Item

WEAPON D8

SFX: *Ricochet*. When making a ranged attack action using Dagger of Returning, remove highest rolling die and add three dice for total.

Limit: *Return!* Shutdown Dagger of Returning to gain a PP. Recover by activating an opponent's opportunity.

WAND OF MAGICAL PROJECTILES

D8 Class Magic Item

MAGIC BLAST D8

SFX: *Unerring*. On failed attack action, spend a PP and step back effect dice and use it to inflict physical stress.

SFX: *Split Missiles*. MAGIC BLAST may be split into 2D6 or 4D4.

Limit: *Magic Gear*. Shutdown Wand of Magical Projectiles to gain a PP. Make a roll against the doom pool to recover.

FLAMEBRAND

D10 Class Magic Item

FLAMING BLADE D10, FIRE RESISTANCE D10

SFX: *Ignite*. Step up FLAMING BLADE on attack action. If action fails, add a die to doom pool equal to second highest rolling die.

Limit: *Magic Gear*. Shutdown FLAMING BLADE to gain a PP. Make a roll against the doom pool to recover.

LIGHTNING WAND

D10 Class Magic Item

LIGHTNING BLAST D10, LIGHTNING RESISTANCE D10

SFX: *Lightning Arc*. Split LIGHTNING BLAST into 2D8 and keep an extra effect die, or 3D6 and keep two extra effect dice.

Limit: *Magic Gear*. Shutdown Lightning Wand to gain a PP. Make a roll against the doom pool to recover.

DRAGONSCALE ARMOR

D10 Class Magic Item

EXCEPTIONAL DURABILITY D10, ELEMENTAL RESISTANCE D10

SFX: *Absorption*. On successful reaction using ELEMENTAL RESISTANCE, convert opponent's effect die into an ABSORBED ENERGY stunt. Spend a PP to use this even if reaction fails.

Limit: *Draconic Temper*. Step up mental stress or complications from attempts to provoke you to gain a PP.

AXE OF THE DRAGON

D12 Class Magic Item

DEVASTATING AXE D12

SFX: *Through the Fire of the Flames*. Double DEVASTATING AXE on attack action. If action fails, add highest rolling die to the doom pool.

Limit: *Magic Gear*. Shutdown Axe of the Dragon to gain a PP. Make a roll against the doom pool to recover.

TOME OF ELDRITCH POWER

D12 Class Magic Item

SORCERY D12

SFX: *Limited Wish*. Add an extra D12 magic stunt to a pool containing SORCERY. Add a D12 to the doom pool.

Limit: *Utility Magic*. A pool with SORCERY may not be used to inflict physical stress.

Limit: *Magic Gear*. Shutdown Tome of Eldritch Power to gain a PP. Make a roll against the doom pool to recover.

DWARVEN PLATE

D12 Class Magic Item

GODLIKE DURABILITY D12, MAGIC RESISTANCE D10

SFX: *Fortified*. Spend a PP to ignore a non-magical attack inflicting physical stress below D12.

Limit: *Clunky*. While wearing Dwarven Plate, you may not use any REFLEXES or MOVEMENT power traits.

GAMEMASTERING BASICS

RUNNING THE GAME

As the Gamemaster, you take up the role of everything and everyone that isn't directly under the control of players. You populate and describe the game world, picking exciting stories and epic plotlines. You get to create dynamic scenes and run them with gusto so players get excited. As such, you have the responsibility of directing the story through vivid description, setting a pace that keeps players at the edge of their seats, and cheerleading so everyone around the table feels motivated and empowered to have characters perform the most daring, dangerous acts we have come to expect from the genre.

In parallel, you must act as an arbiter of the rules, making sure everyone works within the spirit of the game while still granting everyone the fairest possible chance to do wild heroic feats. While daunting at first, Gamemastering remains, for many, one of the most satisfying aspects of roleplaying.

The *Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying* game handles different styles of play, each requiring you to run things slightly differently (see Adventure and Scene Creation, page 228). Whatever style you settle on, some basics of Gamemastering remain common.

The game plays out in distinct, more or less structured, Scenes. Think of a Scene as a box that contains all the elements players get to interact with their heroes. Fully fleshed Scenes contain the setup that explains the initial situation. It has descriptions that set the table for the players, letting them know what they see and hear. It contains all the bits and pieces that characters can interact or clash with, including NPCs, monsters, and traps. Finally, a Scene details how these elements interact with heroes and how the Scene gets resolved, including likely outcomes.

The game's three types of Scenes (Exploration, Combat, and Social) cover all the situations where heroes are faced with challenges and downtime. Exploration Scenes are used when heroes must travel a dangerous, uncertain path to a reach a significant destination; classic examples would be dungeon crawling, finding one's way without getting spotted in a hostile city, or even doing arcane research to unlock a strange gateway to another world.

Combat Scenes, while somewhat self-explanatory, also cover a wider range of situations where heroes must overcome challenges that involve physical and mental dangers. They cover things like fighting enraged orcs, dodging scything blades, and solving complex clockwork deathtraps while trying to avoid Death Wasps!

Social Scenes cover both challenges where heroes must use words and guile rather than brawns to overcome NPCs or get their point across, including when arguing among themselves if that's the kind of game you want to run. Social Scenes are also used when the heroes need to rest, do research to create resources, and perform any other low-risk activities that everyone agrees is important enough to play through rather than hand wave.

BASICS OF ROLLING/OPPOSITION

At the core of Gamemastering *FHRP* is the following question: is there a need to roll dice whenever a character performs a particular action? This decision is usually easy to make. A Fighter charging a monster, or a Wizard creating an illusion asset to hide a sneaking Rogue are clear-cut examples of such rolls.

In other cases, especially when characters want to perform minor actions just to make their character look cool without gaining any undue advantages, rolls should not be necessary. For example, in a Social Scene where an outraged merchant wants to confront a Rogue for not keeping his promises, the Rogue player should not have to roll to sneak up on the Merchant just so he can whisper "Why are you shouting? I'm right here." That is, unless the Rogue wants to establish an asset based on surprising the angry merchant.

As a general guideline, whenever a character wants to perform an action whose outcome is uncertain, establish if any NPC, monster, or other threat would oppose that action and why. If none come up, have the character roll against the doom pool. This represents the character attempting an action whose outcome depends on luck, fate, and the sheer chaos of the character's surroundings.

Whatever the case, always guide yourself with the two following principles. First, make sure players tell you the intent behind the actions of their characters. Literally ask players, "What is your intent here?" By declaring intent, players focus on what they want their characters to do instead of how they would do it through the rules. That's your job, not theirs.

Example: Sarah is playing Sorshana, an Elven Wizard. She's fighting an onslaught of Kobolds that seem to be pouring out of everywhere. She tells the GM that she wants to cast a Web spell using her Sorcery, targeting all the Kobolds. Before letting her build her dice pool, the GM asks her what she hopes to accomplish if her action succeeds. Thinking about it, she announces that she wants to entangle the Kobold mob and block the multiple holes in the cave they are pouring out from. The GM then asks her if she wants to go for two effects: inflict a WEBBED complication on the Kobolds and target the KOBOLD WARREN D8 trick. He explains that by beating it with an effect die of D10 or more, he won't be able to add new kobolds to the Scene. After some more thought, Sarah decides that she wants Sorshana to focus solely on the Kobold Warren, leaving the others to deal with the Kobolds.

Secondly, once you've described the major elements of a Scene and established who goes first, encourage players to bring colorful descriptive elements to a Scene through the actions they wish to perform. Encourage them to describe what happens up to the moment of uncertainty. Give players ample leeway to add minor objects and other elements to the area where the action occurs. Notice those elements: does a character jump on a table you described, does another one run across a slippery mosaic floor, do they all grab onto something as they do so? Such elements become part of the Scene, usable by both PCs and NPCs when they react to actions or perform their own.

Once a player has described the attempted action, it's time to build the active player's dice pool, make the roll, and establish the result and effect die (or dice). If an NPC or other GM-controlled character opposes the roll, you describe the reaction to the active character's action. If the action is opposed by another player's character, have the reactive player describe things. In such cases, take special care to ensure that both players play fair with the rules and established scene traits to make the confrontation exciting and fun for all.

In the case where the roll is opposed by the doom pool, feel free to borrow elements from the overall Scene to describe things that could make the action go awry.

If the action was successful, describe the results. Feel free to prompt the player to provide the description of such success. If the action is a failure, then you get free rein in describing how things do not go as the character intended. Additionally, you generally get the option to turn the table on the active player, usually by spending a die from the doom pool to apply the opposition's effect dice from the successful reaction roll.

When determining a counter-reaction to a failed action, be as creative with the Scene's environment as you want to inflict stress or complications. Feel free to exploit all scene traits, including assets added by players! Have tables break under heroes to injure them, slippery floors cause sprained ankles, and any object heroes reached for turn into something they didn't expect!

While rolling dice is the core mechanic of this game, it only exists to power the stories that the characters enact. Vivid descriptions of actions, successes, and failures are what make the game shine at its best.

SCENE TRAITS, ASSETS, AND COMPLICATIONS

As described above, this game is driven by exciting action and the roller coaster-like experience of alternating successes and failures. However, it is also very much enriched by the addition of a plethora of descriptive traits that can be used by characters and NPCs to help them or hinder their opponents. Scene traits, assets, complications and resources contribute to Scenes by adding strong flavor elements supported by well-defined mechanics. Let's discuss them in more detail.

SCENE TRAITS

Scene traits are elements that are part of the initial setup of a Scene. They are things like pieces of furniture, or features of a room or area where the action takes place that are hard coded in a Scene from the start. They are the FRAGILE TABLES, SWINGING CHANDELIERS, GLOWING ALTARS and YAWNING MAWS OF INFINITE DESTRUCTION that pepper dungeon rooms, taverns, and lost temples. Scene traits can usually be used as either assets or complications in any actions, but can't be used twice in any action/reaction pair. Like any other Scene elements, you can increase the die rating of a Scene asset through the expenditure of doom dice when the Scene starts; see Adding Trouble in the Adventure and Scene Creation chapter, page 228.

ASSETS

Assets are objects or situational elements that can provide a temporary boost to the actions of character and are created through a successful action. While they just grant an additional die to a character's dice pool, they can add more flavor to an action than the advantage they provide. Like all temporary traits, the specific wording of an asset lends its full power to a character's actions. A WIZARD'S ELDRITCH BOLT becomes much more sinister when it is launched from a NECROTIC WAND D10. In the same vein, heroes can totally exploit the advantages of a SHIELD WALL D8 when blocking the onslaught of a horde of Orcs.

When players create assets, encourage them to be as evocative and precise as possible. The use of colorful adjectives and powerful nouns make for the best assets. This is yet another good occasion to ask the player creating an asset what the character's intent is. Stating the intent can clarify what the players envisions and may make writing the asset easier. If you sense that a player is stuck for inspiration, nudge the rest of the table to provide suggestions and brainstorm a bit. While it may slow down the game a bit, this process is at the heart of what makes a scene vivid and dynamic.

Don't forget to remind players they can make their assets persistent by spending a PP after successfully creating them. Depending on the asset created, it might become usable by the whole party. You must also remember that a character can only make use of one asset when building a dice pool; you must ensure that the one picked by any given character makes sense in the story.

COMPLICATIONS

The flipside of assets, complications are your best tool for creating trouble for the characters. Of course, you could use all your successful actions and counter-reactions against heroes to inflict stress. You should, however, consider using effect dice to create complications that players won't be able to ignore. For example, by creating Sprained Ankles d8, Anti-Magic Zones d10, and Silence d12 complications in an action scene, you not only change the tactical situation, you give a chance for support heroes to shine by giving them new targets to deal with.

As players master the rules, they may realize that using complications can be a very efficient way of taking a threat, especially large ones, out of a Scene. However, contrary to stress, not all heroes might have the necessary powers to step up the same complication past d12. For example, if a Wizard successfully creates an Entangling Snares d10 complication on an enraged dragon, the party's Barbarian will likely not be able to step up that complication during her turn. Of course, you should not punish creativity; if players come up with entertaining and daring ways to step up an existing complication, you should encourage it. If the Barbarian explains how she rips vines from the surrounding jungle so she can jump on the dragon and tie it up further, then you should allow the player to roll for it.

TARGETING TRAITS

Heroes are not going to be spending all their actions trying to find the lost temple, kill monsters, and outwit silver-tongued nobles. Many Scenes of the game will feature elements that have die ratings that heroes might want to either destroy or strengthen. From furniture to traps to curses, heroes and NPCs can target many traits. In fact, both heroes and villains can attempt to shutdown traits like assets, complications, gear, powers, and possibly even some Distinctions. The driving principle here is whether it makes sense in the story that such a feat could be attempted. Targeting a trait leads to three possible outcomes depending on the type of trait and the intent behind the action.

First, any character who wants to weaken or destroy assets, complications, and Scene traits builds an appropriate dice pool and rolls it against the doom pool plus the die rating of the targeted trait. If that action would have any active opposition by a NPC or hero, the roll is opposed by a dice pool built of that character plus the targeted trait's die. On a successful action, the asset, complication, or Scene trait is destroyed if the action's effect die is equal or larger than the trait. If the effect die is smaller, the trait is stepped down by one.

For example, while facing a horde of cultists, the party must destroy the Altar of Sorrows (a d10 Scene trait) to foil the plans of the Grand Priest of the Frog God. The Warlock targets it with his Eldritch Blasts. He succeeds in his action against the cultists trying to protect it but his effect die comes up a d8. It's not enough to destroy the Altar, so its die gets stepped back. The Barbarian then charges it with her Maul. She also succeeds and gets a d8 effect die. It's enough to destroy the Altar; she smashes it to smithereens, scattering cultists left and right in the process.

In some cases, certain traits, especially Scene traits are going to be very hard to weaken or destroy. This can be either because they are made from a near-indestructible material (for example, Dwarven Steel) or because they are protected by some supernatural forces (for example, Protective Magic or Divine Blessings). You can make some of your Scene elements hard to destroy. In such cases, a hero attempting to weaken or destroy one must apply an effect die that's at least equal or larger than the trait's rating to step it down by one. Any effect die lower than the trait's rating does nothing.

For example, a Warrior armed with a Sledgehammer of Destruction d12 wants to break through a Wall of Eldritch Iron d10 to escape a trapped vault. You rated the wall as hard to destroy. He successfully rolls against the doom pool (and the Wall's rating) and gets a d12 effect dice. The Wall now becomes rated d8. If the effect die had been d8 on that first roll, the wall would not have been weakened.

Second, heroes might want to repair or strengthen assets, complications, resources, and Scene traits. As mentioned previously, if a hero has the means to affect an already existing trait among these four (through enchantment, for example), it can certainly be done. The process is very similar to attempting to destroy such traits, except that the effect die of a successful action replaces the rating of the trait if it is larger than the trait's. If the effect die is equal or smaller, step up the trait's rating. You might want rename a strengthened trait to represent its new status. For instance, a Wall of Stone d10 might become a Rune-Enforced Wall of Stone d12 after a successful action by the party's Wizard.

Note that non-complication traits usually can't be increased past d12 unless you approve of it. There may be cases where growing an asset past d12 may end a Scene. For example, if heroes have a Documented Proof d12 asset of an evil vizier's crimes, they may perform an action to uncover more proof and push the asset past d12. Also note that traits that are strengthened remain so until the end of the Scene or until another action is successfully taken against them.

Third, any character can attempt to shutdown a trait on another character's sheet or datafile, provided such an action is plausible. You have the final approval for such actions. In that case, the action is always opposed by the target character's dice pool, which must include the targeted trait. To successfully shutdown such the trait, the roll must be a success and the effect dice must be equal or larger than the targeted trait. If that's the case, the trait is no longer usable for the rest of the Scene unless a recover action is successfully performed (see Recovery and Healing, page 195).

It's worth noting that while the GM can certainly target the powers of the heroes to shut them down, you might consider creating complications instead. This usually creates a similar level of dread and peril without having players feel robbed of what their characters do best. At best, keep such tactics for major, cunning villains that might know where to hit heroes where it hurts the most. When you do adopt such tactics, consider providing Scene traits that might allow easier recovery during the conflict, like a Healing Pool d10.

THE DOOM POOL

The doom pool represents the ebbing and flowing degrees of chaos and danger that cascades from the heroes' actions in the adventure. A low number of doom dice in the doom pool means that the situation is relatively calm and the heroes can accomplish most unopposed tasks without difficulty. A large number of doom dice (and/or large dice) in the doom pool means that the situation is chaotic, possibly because of collateral damage, alerted foes, mistakes, and dark forces at work. If there is no active character to oppose a hero's action, the doom pool is rolled as the reaction pool. Certain effects may also use the doom pool as an attack action.

ADDING OR UPGRADING DOOM DICE

For most adventures, the doom pool begins most Quests at 2d6, and changes throughout the Quest. The doom pool gains dice in the following ways:

- Hero-rolled opportunities. When a hero rolls at least one 1 on a die, the GM may add to the doom pool by paying that player one or more PPs. The more 1s rolled, the more and higher dice may be added at once. A single 1 rolled means a d6 may be added to the doom pool, or the GM may step up the lowest existing die in the doom pool. Two 1s rolled means a d8 may be added to the doom pool or the GM may step up the lowest existing die in the Doom Pool by two steps, and three 1s for a d10/three steps, and four 1s for a d12/four steps. With multiple 1s, the GM may split between adding multiple dice and/or stepping up multiple dice, but for each unique die and step affected, the GM must pay an additional PP instead of just one.
- When a GM character of any kind uses a Distinction negatively to add a d4 to a dice pool, the GM may add a d6 doom die or step up the lowest die in the doom pool.
- A GM character, actively attempting to foment chaos and destruction, may use his action to add his effect die directly to the doom pool. A hero may oppose this action.
- Many Limits on GM character Power Sets also have the ability to add or alter a doom die in the doom pool.

USING DOOM DICE

Doom dice act like Plot Points for GMs. They can be spent to achieve a number of effects similarly to how Plot Points are spent, though with some slight differences and some additional options.

Before rolling, doom dice can be used to:

- Add one or more dice to a dice pool before rolling. (May not be used when rolling the doom pool as a reaction.)
- Activate a GM threat SFX that requires a doom die.

After rolling, doom dice can be used to:

- Add an extra die to total (must spend doom die of equal size or larger as die to be added).
- Add an extra effect die (must spend doom die of equal size or larger as die to be added).
- Counterattack: on successful reaction, spend any size doom die to use reaction effect die as stress, complication, or asset.
- Activate a GM threat SFX that requires a doom die.

Doom dice can be spent at other times to do the following:

- Split the party: force the group into separate Scenes by spending a doom die per hero to be split off into another group.
- Interrupt the action order: spend any size doom die to have anyone in the action order who has not yet acted this turn act next. If you're interrupting a hero with a Reflexes power, you must spend a doom die of size equal to the Reflexes power instead of any size die. After the interrupter acts, the action order returns to the interrupted character.
- Activate a hero's Limit, unless that player chooses to take a PP to shut it down instead.
- Spend 2d12 to end the Scene, narrating it as you choose.
- Introduce a new threat to the Scene—see page 223.
- Add trouble to a Scene—see page 232.
- Add a Scene complication to the Scene—see page 222.
- Recover stress on a GM character during a Social Scene—see page 236.

Whenever a d12 is spent from the doom pool, any hero affected by that d12 spend gains 1 XP. If you spend 2d12 to end the scene, all heroes in that scene gain 2 XP.

MANAGING THE DOOM POOL

The doom pool is one of the most powerful, multi-purpose tools the GM has at his disposal when running the game. It is like a stash where potential for trouble piles up. On top of being the default dice pool when heroes roll actions in the absence of clear opponents, you get to spend dice from it to do a great many things.

Since there are so many things you can do with the doom pool, managing it may feel a bit overwhelming at first. Here are some key principles and suggestions you can keep in mind when running the game.

Your first concern should be about building the doom pool. At the start of an Adventure, especially if the pool starts at 2d6, heroes are going to have an easy time creating assets and recovering. It's not a bad thing, but a heftier doom pool will make the heroes calculate risks more carefully when picking their actions. Since you can't always depend on players rolling 1s, you want to have your threats use their distinctions at d4, granting you a new doom dice or stepping up the lowest die in the doom pool.

That being said, unless the pool is filled to the brim, you should almost always buy opportunities from players rolling 1s. First, it can refill the pool as you use it. Second, this is a core mechanic of the PP economy. Players often will purposefully roll lower dice to get a higher chance There's no science to it, but you should aim at getting about as many dice in the doom pool as the heroes have categories when they build their pools, i.e. from 3 to 6, and keep it at that point.

It's not enough to have a well-stocked doom pool. You need to use it. In fact, it's preferable to keep the doom pool from growing too rapidly, both in number and size. Its dice are made to be spent, and you should try to maintain it in the 3 to 6 range. This will ensure that the pool provides a healthy challenge when you roll it to oppose actions against it.

The easiest ways to do so are by using them as additional dice in the dice pools you build for the characters and threats you control. This allows you to give a little extra "oomph" against a particularly successful heroic action or to show players you mean business with a particular threat. In the same vein, you can spend them so you can add more dice together to calculate your total after a roll. Remember, you need to take out a die of the same size or larger than the one you want to add to the total and you don't actually roll that spent die. Finally, you can spend dice to add one or more additional effect dice to the one you obtained after a successful action. This allows you to both inflict stress and inflict complications on a hero. Once again, the dice you spend must be of equal size or larger than the dice you wish to convert to effect dice.

Once you have mastered those three uses of doom dice, you should explore further uses, like splitting the party, activating a hero's limit, making counterattacks, adding trouble to Scenes like Scene complications, and enhancing monsters and other threats when you start a new one (see page 223). Finally, you should familiarize yourself with monsters, threats, or Scene elements that have SFX or other triggers that require spending doom dice. For example, some mob monsters can grow by spending doom dice. In the same vein, a summoning portal might bring in new monsters whenever you spend a d8 or more from the pool.

With so many ways to use the doom pool, you should be careful about abusing it. For instance, there's no reason to race to fill the doom pool with two or more d12. Having too many big dice in the doom pool makes it very hard for the heroes to attempt actions like recovery and asset creation against it. Additionally, you don't have to use the biggest die for your total when making a roll with the doom pool; you should gauge the state of the heroes when making rolls and possibly keep the bigger dice for one or more effect dice. This allows you to balance the challenge if you feel there's a need for it.

If you do have two or more D12 in the pool, you should consider putting an end to the Scene. In this, the doom pool also plays the role of a pacing mechanism. However, while you get to narrate how the Scene ends you should consider its most logical outcome. Ending a Scene does not automatically means the heroes lose. If they have a distinct advantage over their foes, then you should narrate an ending where they come out on top. Similarly, if things are grim and the heroes would likely be defeated, you should narrate the defeat. You should, however, do so in a way that allows the adventure to go on in interesting and challenging ways, be it an escape Scene or a Social confrontation one.

EXPLORATION SCENES

Heroes often move through uncharted territory. They have to cut through dangerous wilderness, navigate dark dungeons, or try to find the hideout of a cult in a large city. Such events are usually run through Exploration Scenes. Whenever the heroes must perform some sort of journey where the outcome has an element of uncertainty to it, you should set an Exploration Scene to handle it. What the actual journey is can be as simple as getting around a dungeon or as complex as catching an urchin thief in a crowded metropolis. In fact, you can use them for more than that; see the Alternate Uses for Exploration Scenes below.

Exploration Scenes provide a simple and straightforward way to represent characters exploring, mapping, and possibly finding trouble on the way to the next significant scene in an adventure. They act as segues between other types of Scenes, although they present active and dynamic challenges by themselves.

In a standard dungeon crawl Adventure, Exploration Scenes can be used to get to the dungeon and to get from one significant (i.e., not empty) room to the next. This type of Scene serves as an alternative to the classical use of a dungeon key with players mapping (although you can most certainly still do so, see Classical Adventuring, page 229).

In essence, an Exploration Scene requires one of the party's heroes to perform an Exploration roll. If that roll is successful, the party gets to proceed to the expected destination or to the discovery of the next "interesting" element of the adventure. Additionally, the successful hero gets to create an asset that will serve in the following Scene. If that roll leads to a failure, the GM has the opportunity to create trouble for the party, including sending them somewhere they weren't expecting, or planning to go to.

ENVIRONMENTAL DISTINCTIONS

Exploration Scenes do not usually feature monsters, NPCs, or other similar traits and complications. They can have Environmental Distinctions. Such Distinctions represent elements specific to the Scene that remain valid as long as Exploration Scenes are carried out in the same general area

For example, an Exploration Scene set in a dark forest could have LIGHT ABSORBING SHADOWS. Similarly, a Scene set in a large city could be VERY NOISY.

Environmental Distinctions can only be used by the GM when making rolls against the actions of heroes. Thus, it mostly means rolling an extra D8 or D4 with the doom pool. As usual, if the GM uses a Distinction as a D4, the doom pool grows by a D6 or its lowest die is stepped up. Heroes can't use them in their dice pool; they need to rely on their own Distinctions. Like all Distinctions, the GM can only use one per roll.

For example, the heroes are navigating through a desert to find the lost tomb of a long forgotten desert king. The Scene has an Environmental Distinction called SANDSTORM. The GM could decide to either add a D8 to his doom pool roll as a reaction to the Ranger's Exploration roll. Conversely, if the party builds a SAND SAILING SHIP asset to ride the SANDSTORM, the GM could choose to use the SANDSTORM as a D4 Distinction and add a D6 to the doom pool.

RUNNING EXPLORATION SCENES

When you run an Exploration Scene, you first describe the initial situation to players and identify, when possible, the expected destination or objective of the Scene. If the Scene covers unspecific exploration to the next point of interest, like exploring lost ruins, just tell the players that a successful roll will bring them to a Scene that will push the story forward in a significant way.

Once this is done, each hero may take one action during the entire Scene:

- A hero may roll to recover from stress or do so for another member of the party. See Recovery from Stress and Trauma, page 195.
- Make an Exploration-based asset to help another character resolve the Exploration Scene; the roll is made against the doom pool plus any Environmental Distinction (see below) the GM decides to use.
- Make an Exploration-based resource by spending a PP. (see page 206.)
- Roll to resolve the Scene; see below.

THE EXPLORATION ROLL

As stated above, resolving an Exploration Scene requires a character to take the lead to resolve it.

That player builds his exploration dice pool and rolls against the doom pool plus any Environmental Distinctions, complications, etc. you may decide to use.

On a success, the characters find where they must go and (most likely) make their way there. You then provide an initial description of the next Scene so the lead player can use the roll's effect die to create a useful asset. That means the party can exploit the situation to their advantage by gaining a particular edge over whatever challenge awaits them in the next Scene. As usual, that asset can be maintained from Scene to Scene by spending a PP if it makes sense to do so.

Examples of such assets are:

- Get the drop on any monsters awaiting at the destination (Ambush).
- Finding Perfect Cover.
- "Hey, there's a Secret Door Here."
- Finding a Convenient Piece of Adventuring Gear on the way.

Of course, even the best of trackers can lead their mates through patches of trouble on the best of days. On a successful Exploration roll, a GM is allowed to add elements of trouble to the scene (See Adding Trouble to Scenes, page 232). He must, however, spend an additional die from the doom pool that is at least the same size as the lead player's effect die before doing so.

On a failed Exploration roll, something definitively goes wrong for the heroes. You have several options to cause trouble. First, you get to send the heroes to any Scene of your choice: an ambush, into the lair of a ravenous predator, or straight into a cursed temple. Additionally, you get to use the effect dice of your roll do any of the following:

- Inflict stress
- Create complications
- Add trouble to a Scene

Inflict Stress: Heroes get hurt all the time when they explore. You can use your effect die to inflict any kind of stress on a hero. This stress should usually be physical or mental in nature, although a really bad failure could lead to hero suffering social stress from abject humiliation once in a while. You should apply that stress to the hero most likely to be affected, depending on the Scene's context. This is quite often the one who took the lead to resolve the Scene. It could, however, hit a straggler or a distracted hero.

The stress you inflict on a hero should come from a typical type of "fire and forget" threat. Static traps are a good example; heroes of classic adventures fall in pit traps, get sliced by scything blades, and are hit by runes of eldritch powers that befuddle the mind all the time. It can also represent getting mauled by a Jungle Cat, becoming confused because of dehydration, or suffering from massive sunstroke. Be sure to describe how heroes get hurt to properly convey the dangers of the environment they are trekking through.

Note that heroes can't attempt to recover from that stress until they start the following Scene.

Create Complications: Injuries can be the least of worries for adventurers trying to reach their destination. Trouble can take nearly endless forms and you should relish the occasion to make the lives of the heroes harder. You can use your effect die from a failed Exploration roll to inflict a complication based on the context of the Exploration Scene. Complications are a great channel to bring the dangers of your adventuring environment to life.

This type of complication comes into play at the start of the next Scene.

You can choose to inflict the complication on a single hero, much like detailed above when inflicting stress. You should pick a complication that represents the threats of the environment. Be as evocative as you can. Here are but a few examples:

- Poisonous Bites that wrack a hero with excruciating pain.
- Slowed or Partially Blinded by a magical trap.
- Sprained Ankle (or Fractured Arm) from falling in a pit.
- The hostile environment might make a hero Dehydrated, Sunstroked, or even Delirious.
- The Bard catches a cold, causing him to have Lost His Voice just before the great recital.
- Nearby Dark Influences hinder the Cleric's ability to tap into his divine magic to heal the King's nephew.

You can also choose to inflict a complication that affects the whole party. In such cases, phrase the complication so that it clearly can affect more than one hero. Here are examples for such complications:

- An Anti-Magic Zone that covers the whole area of the next Scene.
- Any kind of repeating traps, like Dart Throwers and Eldritch Bolt Launchers.
- Curses that make the party Noisy, Itching, or All Thumbs.

- Goblins snare the whole party in a net trap, making them Entangled.
- The party's lateness has caused a Major Scandal in the Duke's court.
- The party had to cross a Swamp in the territory of an enemy clan; they now Smell Untrustworthy to the Lizardfolk Chieftain.

Add Trouble to a Scene: Finally, you can also decide to assign the effect die to the next Scene directly by stepping up any Scene traits or those of monsters or NPCs that populate it (see Adding Trouble to Scenes, page 232).

Don't forget that a failed Exploration is also a great occasion to spend a die from the doom pool to separate the party. Thus, you could send the heroes into two different Scenes.

ALTERNATE USES FOR EXPLORATION SCENES

While intended for scenarios where the heroes want to reach a specific destination, Exploration Scenes can also be used for a much wider range of situations. For example, you can adapt it to run a chase scene. In that case the heroes attempt to catch (or evade) a specific NPC or threat. If you have stats for the other side of the chase, use them instead of the doom pool. Regardless if the party is being chased or doing the chasing, resolve the Scene the same way, with one player taking lead to resolve the Scene and the others free to do supportive actions.

Similarly, you can use Exploration Scenes to play out other types of journeys that are less literal than seeking a lost jungle temple or finding the treasure vault of the dwarven thane. For instance, if a wizard wants to teleport the whole party out of trouble, an Exploration Scene is a great way to simulate how the action resolves and the likely outcomes of a successful or failed teleport—just imagine the possibilities!

You should also consider using Exploration Scenes when characters need to uncover key information to progress to the next part of an adventure. For example, a hero might need to do arcane research to discover how to open a portal to the Sky City of Djinns. Building the dice pool for that action would require the use of the hero's magical powers as well as scholarly and mystical Distinctions and Specialties. Success provides the way to move on to the next Scene with a useful asset like Controlled Gliding while a failure can lead the characters completely astray such as dumping them right under the legs of the Walking City of the Efreets.

Finally, you may consider using Exploration Scenes to play out certain forms of investigation instead of making them Social Scenes (see page 224). For example, you could frame a Scene where the heroes attempt to uncover all the necessary clues to incriminate the Prince of Elves for the murder of the Summer Queen. The lead hero would build a dice pool by tapping into social as well as investigative powers and Specialties to roll against either the doom pool or the Prince himself (representing his attempts at deception and misdirection). A success could allow players to move onto a Social Scene where they accuse the Prince with an asset like Convincing Evidence. A failure could lead to an Assassination attempt by a squad of the prince's elite guard or a Conniving Setup complication leading to a rigged trial Social Scene where the heroes stand accused! Remember to only use this technique in situations where failure is interesting; otherwise, many investigative pieces can be taken care of through clever use of resources.

TRANSITIONING FROM AN EXPLORATION SCENE

If Combat and Social Scenes are the heart of an adventure, Exploration Scenes act as the connective tissue on which they rest. If you imagine an Adventure as a flowchart, Exploration Scenes can represent the various paths that connect the boxes that represent your planned Combat and Social Scenes. Whenever you need to have heroes progress through an uncertain journey between those two types of Scenes, Exploration is the way to go.

That means you should avoid having an Exploration Scene leading to another one. The idea behind such Scenes is to move the adventure and the story to the next significant challenge. If your Adventure itself is a long, somewhat linear journey, you should consider creating a string of Combat and Social scenes interspersed with Exploration ones. Successful rolls lead heroes to the next town, rest area, or even a Bandit encampment they spotted in advance. Have a few non-Exploration Scenes ready to drop on the heroes for their failed Exploration rolls. Have them seek shelter in a Cave populated with Ice Trolls, Dark Elves might raid their night camp, or have the ghostly remnants of adventurers prevent passage until the heroes can dispel their haunting through theological rhetoric.

The key to a good transition lies in using the result of the Exploration roll to pave the way to the next Scene in the most evocative way possible. Let's explore both possibilities.

EXPLORATION TO COMBAT

Exploration leads to Combat Scenes, either when the party is purposely heading to a place that might be inhabited by hostile threats or when you send them into the jaws of threats after a failed Exploration roll.

When the Scene is successfully resolved, you give players sufficient information about what awaits them in the next Scene so they can create an asset that is both useful and makes sense in the story. For example, they could create a DEATH FROM ABOVE asset, a TACTICAL BATTLE PLAN or even prepare a STEALTHY SPELL. Depending on how the Scene is set, a successful Exploration roll could also grant the heroes initiative over whatever awaits them, allowing them to set the order of battle: you remain the final judge of that. For instance, you might establish that a D10 or D12 Exploration effect die grants initiative to the side that got it.

Sending the heroes into combat (or in the jaws of some fiendish DEATH TRAP) after a failed Exploration roll is a great way to add excitement and danger to a session. You can use the occasion to make a "random" encounter, a planned ambush, or have the heroes stumble right into a War Council between Orcs and Ogres. In such cases, you get to use your Exploration effect dice to stack the deck against the heroes a bit. If you can't think of an evocative complication, consider using your dice to bolster the content of the room (See Adding Trouble to Scenes, page 232), or inflict some form of stress.

EXPLORATION TO SOCIAL

A Social Scene follows an Exploration Scene when heroes either seek out someone for a specific purpose or stumble upon NPCs that either expect something from the heroes or may provide help. A Social Scene is a natural follow-up to an Exploration Scene framed as the heroes giving chase or running an investigation.

As for Combat Scenes, when players successfully resolve their Scene, provide enough details about who they'll meet, the whereabouts, and the context of the meeting so they can formulate an interesting asset to help them. They may start their audience with the Sun Priest with CLEVER FLATTERY or sing a SOOTHING BALLAD to help calm an enraged crowd.

Sending heroes that fail an Exploration check into an unplanned Social Scene is the perfect occasion to segue into an embarrassing or awkward situation for the heroes. This is where you spring Scenes that start like:

- Where do you think you're going?
- It's them, I saw them kill the Seneschal!
- We don't sell to your kind.
- No one is allowed in after nightfall.
- There you are! Please follow me, the King is waiting and he hates to wait.

Once again, feel free to spend your effect die to create colorful complications or bolster the traits of the NPCs waiting to push their agenda on the heroes.

COMBAT SCENES

A wave of orcs bust through the dungeon door. They won't let the heroes escape with the treasure alive. It's time to break out the weapon and fight.

The GM's job is to frame the Combat Scene. This includes setting the Scene's location, situation, and everything that the heroes can see: threats like monsters, traps or tricks, and any Scene traits. See Adventure and Scene Creation on page 228 for details and advice on creating exciting Combat Scenes.

Once that all is laid out, the action begins. As the GM, you choose who acts first based on how you framed the scene. If the heroes got the drop on the monsters, you probably select one of them to go first, especially if one hero had been scouting ahead. If the monsters have the upper hand, choosing one of them to go first is probably best.

From there, the action order continues, as described on page 196. Remember that you can spend doom dice to interrupt the action order with one of your threats in order to keep the heroes on their toes. Spending doom dice to introduce new threats in the middle of the action order can also prevent a Combat Scene from going stale.

Remember that not all combats need to end with one side dead. Other objectives in the Scene, such as trying to obtain, destroy, or protect something, make sure that there are multiple tasks to worry about beyond just trying to unload your best attacks on the bad guy. The more heroes have to deal with at the same time, the more exciting and intense a Scene becomes. Battling Ogres while trying to dismantle a Doomsday Clock that sends earth-shattering shockwaves when it acts makes for an epic confrontation beyond just facing armed foes.

SCENE TRAITS: SCENE ASSETS AND SCENE COMPLICATIONS

From kicking the table into a group of angry villagers to avoiding the poisonous gas cloud that fills the room, the environment that a Combat Scene takes place in can be just as important (if not more so) than the monsters being fought.

A Combat Scene can contain two kinds of Scene traits: Scene assets and Scene complications. They work like existing assets (page 195) and complications (page 194) in how they're used in dice pools, so you can't use a Scene

SCENE TRAITS?

These rules are intended to replace the basic Scene Distinction rules from *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying*. They are intended to create a wider variety of possible texture to Combat Scenes, to give heroes specific traits to play off of. They're a bit more complicated than Scene Distinctions, so if you're comfortable with the existing rules, they're not hard to swap in and out.

asset and an asset you create in the same dice pool without spending a PP. However, they usually begin in the Scene from the beginning, giving heroes (and opponents!) something to play off of right away in a Scene.

Scene Assets: When a Scene begins, the GM may create any number of Scene assets at any dice values for free. These are things that can potentially be helpful to anyone who wants to use it in a creative way, narrating how an action involves that asset. The higher the die value, the more damage and effect a particular asset can cause. Scene assets can be exploited by anyone, though if you include a Scene asset in your dice pool, your opponent cannot include that same Scene asset in their reaction pool.

Scene assets can be targeted like any other trait (see page 216). The GM may also rule that certain Scene assets are cinematically breakable, which means that if you include a Scene asset in your dice pool, you may declare that you are breaking it in the process. This steps up or doubles the asset for this roll, but after the roll, the asset is removed.

Example Scene assets include:

- Chairs d6 (Breakable)
- Stairs with Railing d6
- Chandelier d8 (Breakable)
- Iron Door d8
- Swinging Mizzenmast d8 (Breakable)
- Arcane Cannon d10
- Teleportation Circles d10
- Elemental Node d12 (Breakable)

Scene Complications: While Scene assets are those traits that could potentially help anyone who chooses to exploit them, Scene complications are specifically bad news for the party. Scene complications are created by spending from the doom pool when the Scene begins. (See Adding Trouble to Scenes, page 232.) Each doom die spent creates a Scene complication of equal size that affects each hero in the Scene. For example, a d8 doom die creates a d8 Scene complication like Missing Floor Tiles d8.

Scene complications are for easy features of a Scene that make the heroes' lives more difficult, while the opponents are largely unaffected or used to the danger at hand. If the challenging factor is something active enough that it should have its own place in the action order, it probably isn't a Scene complication: it's likely a monster (page 237) or a full-fledged trap or trick (page 237).

As discussed above, Scene complications can be attacked like regular complications. Depending on the nature of the Scene complication, the GM may decide his threats may be able to increase the complication as well, though this should be used sparingly, as it could be a too easy knockout on the entire group at once.

Examples include:

- Distracting Melody d6
- Precarious Footing d8
- Tough to Breathe d8
- Magic Vertigo d10
- Underwater d12
- Volcanic Heat d12

ADDING NEW THREATS TO THE SCENE

Sometimes, the goblins will hit a gong and call for reinforcements, or the heroes will step on the pressure plate that starts the spinning blades. That's when new threats are added to the Scene.

While you start out with a rough budget of threats to start a Scene in, it might allow you to bring new threats at the costs of dice from the doom pool. The Scene usually explains how to add threats and at what costs. Tricks are often the types of threats that have SFX that allows you to bring additional monsters into a Combat Scene (see page 238). For example, a Scene can feature Summoning Portals that bring in a new d8 Infernal Fiends into combat for the cost of a d8 from the doom pool. Similarly, a Necromantic Pile of Bones might bolster a d4 Skeleton Minions Mob by adding 2d4 for each d6 you spend for the doom pool.

Alternatively, if you prefer a simpler, less structured way to add a new threat to a Scene, you can do the following. You can add a new threat into any conflict Scene by spending a doom die equal to the threat's Level die. This approach is especially good if you prefer an On the Fly approach to adventure creation (see Adventure and Scene Creation, page 228).

New threats are introduced into the action order whenever the GM has the chance to choose who goes next and choose the new threat (and spend the doom die), or at the bottom of the round once everyone else has acted.

ALTERNATE USES FOR COMBAT SCENES

Combat scenes don't necessarily have to be a straight up fight. Any time that the action order is required and time is a factor, the GM can use a Combat Scene.

Some examples include:

- Trying to save as many villagers as possible from a massive fire.
- Escaping from an exploding volcano.
- Making your way safely out of a collapsing temple, while traps spring and hostile natives try and stop you.
- Unraveling a complex set of magical RUNES to close an INFERNAL PORTAL.

While most Combat Scenes do feature something to fight, it doesn't necessarily have to be a monster. Attacking a situation or trying to complete a certain goal could fit into a Combat Scene. And certainly Combat Scenes don't have to end with killing everything in the room; adding more objectives and motivations to a Combat Scene will make them richer, and allow heroes to use more of their talents than just the capacity for violence to get the job done.

TRANSITIONING FROM A COMBAT SCENE

COMBAT TO EXPLORATION

Going to an Exploration Scene after a Combat Scene is probably the most common transition. After the monsters are defeated, the heroes might poke around the area for treasure and a clue of where to go next, or just resume crawling the dungeon after a room is cleared.

Since Exploration Scenes usually take a longer amount of time than a Combat Scene, a lot of post-Combat business can be wrapped up as the party travels onward. Heroes bandage themselves up and scrounge for loot as they move through the dungeon, while the party scout takes the lead on figuring out where to go next. Remember that in most cases, each hero will be allowed to do one significant action (rolling recovery, making a resource, finding an asset, etc.), so framing the Scene following a Combat Scene is an important one to let heroes make an informed decision about what to do with their time.

COMBAT TO SOCIAL

A post-Combat Social Scene could mean a few things. First, the heroes may have defeated all the threats, but decide to hold back from exploring or advancing so that they can discuss and recover. The classic example of this is deciding to set up camp for the night.

Another common transition is when the fighting turns into a conversation or even a confrontation…of words. Even if it's an uneasy truce, stopping a fight in order to come to an understanding with an enemy, or perhaps dictating the terms of surrender, a Combat Scene could stop. Afterward, both sides may focus on words (and social stress) to come out ahead instead of strength of arms. Such Social Scenes have a structure similar to Combat and are covered in detail in Running Social Scenes on page 225.

SLEEP HERE? ARE YOU CRAZY?

In the base rules, there's no real game mechanic reason to sleep for the night, since it doesn't provide any benefit beyond any other Scene. If the GM wants to add that as a tactical decision, he could offer it as a way to reset the doom pool to what it started at the beginning of the Quest, provided the heroes make it fully through the night without incident (and inflating the doom pool by other means). It could also be a way to recover trauma in the middle of a session, rather than having to wait.

COMBAT TO COMBAT

Sometimes, the heroes only have a few second to unwind before another band of monsters comes through the door, especially in a siege or other situation with relentless waves of enemies. Transitioning from a Combat Scene to another Combat Scene is different than just introducing new threats to the Scene. A full new Combat Scene requires the situation to shift in a major way (necessitating new Scene traits and a whole new set of threats), but closely packed together so that there's no time for a breather.

Remember, following a Combat Scene with another Combat Scene means that the heroes won't have time to recover or make new resources to be at full strength for the next battle. Back-to-back Combats are an extra challenge, so be sure to use them sparingly. If you want the feel of relentless monsters, but want to give the heroes a little edge, consider placing a small Social Scene instead to let the heroes have a few quick words and a few short actions before the next batch of bad guys comes tumbling in. Sometimes, even a short rest is enough to patch a party up.

SOCIAL SCENES

A hero's life isn't confined to the exploration of lost ruins, uncovering strange rituals, and battling countless creatures. Events and schemes are afoot in and outside of the dungeons that may sweep the heroes up and send them into the kind of trouble that swords and axes can't solve in a satisfactory way. From negotiations with rival humanoid factions of a multi-leveled cave complex to trying to convince the king that his daughter did NOT elope with the party's Rogue, Social Scenes present challenges that require an approach that require leaving one's axe at the door. On the other hand, the mere presence of a fearsome weapon can be a very convincing argument in some forms of arguments.

Like Exploration Scenes, Social Scenes can also allow heroes to recuperate from the trials and tribulations of their adventures. Whenever heroes need to recover from stress and trauma, you can stage a Social Scene where they rest and recuperate. The archetypal night encampment Scene is one such example. Similarly, such Scenes are used whenever heroes want to tap into their Specialties in order to create resources to help them face the next challenge. Of course, much like Exploration, a Social Scene can be staged where both recuperation and resource/asset creation occurs.

When you frame a Social Scene based on recovery and resource creation, each hero usually gets to do one action or create one resource before moving on to the next Scene. You may allow more if it fits the adventure and no story elements create pressure to prevent that from happening.

Social Scenes regroup all types of challenges that require heroes to deal with NPCs through negotiations, arguments, duel of wits, and other confrontations that require tapping into social skills.

Social Scenes can be used for many types of challenges. For example:

- Negotiating the surrender of a grand villain after her forces have been defeated.
- Confront a politician or noble with proof of his schemes to obtain a confession.
- Perform a riveting, yet patriotic ballad to move a battle hardened army officer to tears.
- Outwit an otherworldly creature to force it to reveal forbidden knowledge.
- Defend a fellow hero from false accusations from a scheming merchant.

Social Scenes that feature confrontations and Combat Scenes are similar in many aspects. Both type usually feature heroes trying to beat a challenge by stressing out opponents or inflicting sufficient complications to take them out. In the case of Social Scenes, the heroes usually do so by inflicting social stress and applying complications that implicate the opposition's status, reputation, and beliefs to name a few.

SCENE TRAITS IN SOCIAL SCENES

Much like Combat Scenes, the environment where a Social Scene takes place can be as important as those involved in conflict of wits and biting remarks. Scene traits, both assets and complications, are also used in Social Scenes. Some of them can be deemed "Breakable" and all of them can be targeted for removal from the Scene. See Scene Traits: Scene Assets and Scene Complications.

Example Social Scene assets include:

- NOISY MARKETPLACE D6
- DRUNKEN REVELLERS D8 (Breakable)
- HELPFUL URCHINS D6 (Breakable)
- GULLIBLE MOB D10 (Breakable)
- SANCTIFIED PODIUM OF DEBATE D12 (Breakable)
- RUNES OF GLIBNESS D10 (Breakable)

Examples of Scene complications:

- PUBLICLY DISCREDITED D6
- HECKLING CROWD D8
- BOGUS ACCUSATIONS D8
- SUSPECTED OF REGICIDE D10
- BLASPHEMY! D12

RUNNING SOCIAL SCENES

The key to running great Social Scenes relies of trading descriptions of moves and attacks for verbal sparring and vivid renditions of how the environment reacts to the players' actions. Even the simplest scene of recuperation can be made memorable if players decide to delve into their shared backgrounds to flesh out their characters more as they rest around a campfire.

Whatever type of Social Scene you stage, you start by describing the environment the heroes are in. Based on the context of the Scene, you then describe any significant NPCs that may interact with the party.

Remember that heroes can attempt to recover from stress. As described in Recovery (page 195), all stress levels step back by one at the beginning of such Scenes and further recovery requires rolling for it. Remember that each hero can't recover from the same type of stress or trauma more than once.

You should encourage players to provide the color for the Scene, like who talks to whom and about what, even in the simplest Scenes. It's true that such types of Social Scenes can be played with straight dice roll, little to no descriptions, and with minimal roleplaying. They are, however, much more memorable when players add their own story elements to it. These are the kinds of Scenes where the Cleric admonishes the Barbarian for thinking with her Axe or when the Bard suggests, once again, to sing a lively tune to cheer everyone up.

Adventures should have breaks in them where heroes can recuperate. Or you should let players frame their own when they need a break to regroup and get ready for future danger.

The same also applies to heroes who want to create resources. This is where some heroes might decide to tap into their Specialties to create resources related to their contacts, the lore they know, and their abilities to craft and create tools that will help them. The resources last until the end of the next Scene. It can also be extended an additional Scene by spending a PP before the Scene is over. See Specialties and Resources in the Character chapter for more details (page 205).

When players describe who they talk to and how they tap into their Specialties to create a resource, encourage them to name their contacts, where they meet them, or what and how they make something new. Have the player tell you about Sliven the Thief, who knows everything there is to know about the city's slums. What about the Eunuch guard who is a cousin of the party's Bard and can help them sneak into the palace? Ask them to describe how they imbue water with divine energies to use against the Undead Guardians of the Lost Tombs of the Twin Kings. And what's that about the special signature of the Mage's spells when she enchants the Warrior's Greatsword?

Adventures may need breaks to allow for unplanned resource creation. This is especially true for investigation-type games where heroes may want to seek help from contacts and tap into their skillsets to find useful clues. It is also a good occasion to get players to spend some of their accumulated Plot Points. Always be on the lookout for the possibility of running Social Scenes, as they are significant drivers to advance the backgrounds and outlook of the heroes.

You can frame Social Scenes where different heroes pursue various goals during one of the adventure's downtime. As the GM, you set the timescale of such Scenes. In fact this is a great way to have the story jump ahead a significant amount of time, allowing you to play grand epic-style stories that span months and years. Such Scenes can also include training and acquisition of new abilities through the expenditure of XPs (see page 211).

CONFRONTATIONS, STRESS, AND TRAUMA

When facing one or many antagonists that need to be convinced of something or otherwise be swayed through guile, cunning, and incisive arguments, heroes are gearing up for a Social conflict.

Such Social Scenes are almost identical to Combat ones rules-wise. The Scene's objective is usually to knock the opposition out of action through stressing out or complications. In this case, heroes usually inflict Social Stress or create complications that paint the antagonist in a bad light or fluster them enough to distract them from their goals.

Social Stress represents being shaken, disgraced publicly, and flustered. It means a mounting sense of dread and distress at the thought of being proven wrong, of failing to obtain what is sought, or the inevitability of crumbling under the intense pressure applied by the opposition. The effect of becoming stressed out through social stress depends on the Scene's context. It may represent the inability to maintain a barrage of convincing arguments or follow an effective line of inquiries. Alternatively a hero might succumb to the pressure of the opposition, the inability to face public embarrassment, or the livid rage at being proven wrong in front of peers.

A stressed out character can no longer act in the Scene. If a side manages to take out all their opponents in a Social Scene, it obtains what it was seeking. Interrogators get the info they wanted, arguments get settled, and intimidation attempts are successful. The Dragon lets the heroes pass "just this one time" through his territory or the Demon Lord reveals the Truename of one of his minor minions.

A character stressed out with social stress gains social trauma, as described on page 194. This represents long-term social consequences of the conflict and it applies to both heroes and any recurring NPCs. Social trauma can take the form of spitefulness, ruined reputation, public humiliation, and others. See Recovery (page 195) and NPCs (page 240) for additional information on trauma and recovering from it for both heroes and NPCs.

Other forms of stress can be dealt in Social Scenes. For instance, mental stress could be inflicted against the opposition through the use of magic or psychic powers. It's also quite possible that some less socially inclined heroes could decide that diplomacy is not the way to go and may

HERO VS HERO CONFRONTATIONS

You might want to run the type of game where conflict and differences of opinion between heroes is not strictly handled between players. If you play adventures that call for excruciating moral dilemmas and painful choices, you might want to use Social conflicts to resolve issue among the heroes themselves. The rules as written support such conflicts, as long as the GM ensures that players create assets and complications that make sense and don't abuse the flexibility of the rules to get an unduly advantage. Feel free to frame Scenes that pit the ideals of heroes against each others'.

choose to go for a more brutal approach. In such cases, you should consider turning the Scene into a Combat Scene. See Transitioning from a Social Scene below.

SOCIAL ASSETS

Social assets can be magical effects, newfound allies, emotional states, or even temporary titles and influences bestowed by outside forces to help the cause of heroes and antagonists. Contrary to Scene assets, these only apply to one hero or antagonist.

Here are a few examples:

- Ironclad Confidence d6
- Cheering Crowd d8
- Benefit of the Doubt d10
- Unnerving Stare d8
- Blackmail d10
- Blessed by the God of Song d12

SOCIAL COMPLICATIONS

Social complications play off the same types, but focus on making it harder for the opposition to achieve its goal. Once again, they differ from Scene complication in that they are generated through actions and can only affect one target.

A few examples:

- Intimidating Stance d6
- Hands on Swordhilt d8
- Good Guard/Bad Guard Routine d8
- Unnerved d8
- Confused d10
- Misdirected d10
- Cursed Tongue d12

SOCIAL RESOURCES

Social resources are the bits and pieces that make Social Scene livelier. They bring the tangible elements that shape how characters interact with one another.

Here are a few examples:

- Forged Documents d6
- Incriminating Evidence d6
- Voice of the Gods d12
- Bribed Official d6
- Pre-Written Speech d8
- Glibness Enchantment d10
- Amulet of Elven Friendship d10

TRANSITIONING FROM SOCIAL SCENES

The outcome of social confrontations can often be pivotal points of an adventure. A Scene's success or failure can bring even the most linear of adventures into uncharted territory. If the heroes humiliate a highly influential noble, it makes sense that assassins may attack them. If, on the other hand, they fail to stress him out, they may find themselves under house arrest, ready to be tried as traitors to the Kingdom.

Social Scenes can be directly followed by any type of Scenes, either those dictated by the adventure or new ones that logically follow the last one. The key principle when planning the following Scene is this: don't negate or undermine the success of the winning side. This is especially true when combat directly follows a Social Scene without any time passing between Scenes.

For example, if a warchief is rendered helpless with rage (i.e., stressed out) in an argument Scene, you can't have him draw an axe and attack. The heroes have beaten him fair and square and the antagonist has been taken out of the Scene. It is, however, fair game to have the nearly inarticulate chief order his remaining thugs to attack while he leaves the Scene, trying to save whatever pride he has. He may also draw his axe and attack BEFORE he becomes stressed out, but he still carries the existing stress with him.

In all cases, the GM should be ready to move the Adventure forward by staging the next Scene. The simplest transitions are those that follow recuperation and resource creation scenes. The following Scenes usually lead to the next planned Scene of an adventure as heroes spent time to get ready for what's coming next.

Here are a few more things to think about.

SOCIAL TO COMBAT

Social Scenes leading to Combat ones come in three types. First you have the kind mentioned before where heroes prepare to face hostile forces through recuperation and resource creation.

A GM might decide that a recovering party gets attacked by wandering monsters, especially if some recovery rolls failed, but this type of transition should not be abused or become the norm. Wandering monsters are best used after a failed Exploration roll.

The second case is when a hero decides that there's been enough talking and decides to take matters in his own hands. A Barbarian might decide to figuratively cut diplomatic negotiations short by drawing her sword. When this happens, you might need a few minutes to go over the traits of the characters in the Scene to see if they are combat ready. Feel free to add a few to NPCs if this sudden shift to a combat Scene took you by surprise, if only to make the Scene a little bit more challenging.

Similarly, if heroes are defeated in a Social Scene, one or more players might want to get into a more physical revenge mode. In such cases, don't forget to remind the players of the social consequences of such actions if there are any. An adventure can take a very unpleasant turn if most NPCs and minor characters turn against the heroes and their quest.

Finally, Social Scenes will transition to combat when the outcome of the Scene logically calls for a more muscled confrontation. Disgraced NPCs or resolute PCs might decide to make a move to confront their opponents in a more definite manner. Once the High Priest has been dealt with through a long theological debate about the madness of trying to control demons, the heroes might get ready to delve into the Basilica's Vaults to confront the recently freed Demon Prince. It is very important to note that heroes might start such Scenes with significant stress already inflicted on them since they may not have recovered between Scenes. This may play against them against certain forms of attacks. Use such transitions with care.

SOCIAL TO EXPLORATION

Social Scenes that lead to Exploration Scenes are usually those that feature preparation for a journey. Heroes creating resources in a Social Scene are a perfect example. By tapping into old maps in the castle's library, the party's Mage uncovers maps of the wilderness from the kingdom's original settlers, making this into a SURVEYOR'S MAP asset.

Alternatively, if heroes fail to get a villain to confess his vile schemes, they may investigate for tangible proof of conspiracy and other acts of malfeasance. This can be played as an Exploration Scene as detailed on page 219.

Finally the outcome of a social confrontation might lead the heroes on a journey, to seek something hidden or hard to reach. For example, if they succeed in interrogating the second-in-command of the Thieves' Guild, they may be able to find the Guild's emplacement without any problem. If they fail, they may have to seek the guild the old fashion way, by exploring the city for clues and, possibly, get sidetracked by the now very annoyed thieves.

SOCIAL TO SOCIAL

A Social Scene can lead to a new one without problem. In fact a low-violence Adventure might be mostly made of alternating Social Scenes interspersed with some Exploration. A game focused on intrigue might consist of pushing around minor NPCs to get access to major ones to trigger world-changing events. If time is not an issue in such Adventures, heroes should be allowed sufficient recuperation Scenes to get ready for the next ones.

ADVENTURE CREATION AND SCENE STRUCTURE

The *FANTASY HEROIC ROLEPLAYING* game has inherited a structured approach to adventure design from its super heroic predecessor. The current section describes various approaches to help you design exciting adventures that will challenge the most of stalwart of heroic parties. From running a game on the fly to adapting your favorite classical adventures, this section will provide invaluable help.

Regardless of the approaches taken to create your Adventure, the *FANTASY HEROIC ROLEPLAYING* game does not use a precise formula to determine an appropriate challenge for a group of heroes. The process lies closer to an art form than a science. You should aim to provide enough opposition to occupy each hero that gets involved in a given Scene. It is more important to give everyone something to do rather than balance a Scene to the power level of the party. Through guestimation and experience, you will create Scenes that will run the gamut from easily dealt with to too hard.

Remember that the outcome of a Scene is where you have the most power as a GM to recalibrate where an Adventure goes. If a Combat encounter is a cakewalk, maybe it's because the Adventure's villain wanted to test the heroes' strength. If an encounter easily defeats the heroes, maybe the villain will be too lax to keep the heroes imprisoned with sufficient security in the next Scene.

ON THE FLY ADVENTURES

Some Gamemasters prefer to pick a game up and play with minimal or no preparation. Some may have an overarching plot jotted down in bullet point form somewhere. Others may have drawn a map of large wilderness areas, the names of exotic locales, known dungeons and humanoid strongholds jotted down, with plans for sending heroes marching into adventure.

On the Fly Adventure planning may be a misnomer. Relatively few Game Masters can manage to create epic adventures as action unfolds at the gaming table. Most actually do some planning ahead. They create an overarching story, often stat up significant NPCs, create (or borrow) maps, and may create lists (plot hooks, names of people and places, etc.).

What happens, though, is that once players gather around the table, an On the Fly GM runs the game based on a basic premise to get the heroes going and then react to the outcomes of each Scene to decide what comes next. Instead of following a formal plan, an On the Fly game grows organically from the actions and decisions the heroes make and the subsequent reactions of the game's main NPCs.

If you wish to run an On the Fly Fantasy Heroic game you can certainly do so using some simple tools: a copy of the rules, a few notes jotted down on index cards or some electronic format, and copies of other *HEROIC ROLEPLAYING* sourcebooks for inspiration. You should pull out or create stats for the NPCs and other threats the heroes are most likely to face in the upcoming session. You should then decide how close you want to follow the game's Scene structure.

While the rules describe three different types of Scene, the game doesn't break down if you don't use them as described. If your personal style is looser, you can merge Combat and non-Combat Scenes and alternate between confrontations and Scenes to recover in as required by your story, ignoring everything else. In such case, make sure that players don't pick characters whose main powers shine in Scene types you won't use. In the same vein, we suggest you use Exploration Scenes to emulate heroes going places and possibly getting lost or sidetracked, but it is not an ironclad requirement.

CLASSICAL ADVENTURES

Countless fantasy RPG adventures have been published since the creation of the hobby in the 1970's. Many of those can be adapted wit -h some work. A lot of that resides in creating stats for the various monsters and NPCs that will confront the heroes. In such cases, you should focus on providing an adequate challenge that respects the adventure's theme rather than populate the adventure with the same number and type of opponents.

You may run the adventure as is, picking the most appropriate Scene type depending on what heroes run into and how they react to it. Feel free to play the adventure as written, using classic exploration techniques like mapping and having players describe where and how they explore (see the Exploration vs Traditional Mapping sidebar below). Alternatively, you can simplify dungeons and locations to a few key locations and use the game's Exploration Scenes mechanics to navigate from one significant room to the next.

EXPLORATION VS. TRADITIONAL MAPPING

The Exploration rules developed for this game aim to provide an alternative, streamlined approach to classic exploration rules based on having Game Masters and players going back and forth with descriptions and decisions to chart a path through an adventure. These rules are not mandatory and you can play the game perfectly well without them. In such cases, you can use dungeon and wilderness maps to serve as exploration templates and then frame Combat or Social Scenes when heroes arrive at specially keyed locations on your maps.

Should you choose to do so, you should consider reviewing the powers of Exploration-based characters like the Rogue and the Ranger to avoid making them less interesting for the players. Alternatively, you may allow such heroes (and others) to take various actions while doing classic map-based exploring to move from one spot to the next stealthily or to track some monsters.

STRUCTURED SCENE ADVENTURES

This is the default approach to designing and running adventures for the game. You create a story, you define the places where the action will play out, and you pick or create various threats and NPCs that will interact with heroes. You arrange the events and Scenes of the adventure in the way it is most likely to play out, in a series of connected events and locations in a flow chart-like structure called the Adventure Plan. See the Exploration vs. Traditional Mapping sidebar for an alternative approach.

You build the core Scenes of your adventures and categorize them into Exploration, Combat, or Social Scenes. You may want to prepare some alternate or red herring Scenes to send lost heroes to after a failed Exploration roll (see Running Exploration Scenes, page 219).

You may also create lists of likely trouble you may want to add to Scenes when you play them out. Trouble are additional elements you add to a Scene or an increase in power to existing threats and NPCs through the expenditure of doom pool dice when you start a Scene. See Doom Pool on page 217 and Adding Trouble on page 232.

Be sure to leave some breathing spaces in your adventures so heroes can recover and create resources when they need to. Also, be ready to reorganize your adventure plan if the heroes manage to shake things up so much that the next logical Scene can't be the one your Adventure Plan dictates. Such are the joys of having players mess around with your best-laid plans.

The following breaks down each element of an Adventure and outlines strategies to help you create your own Scenes.

THE ADVENTURE PLAN

The Adventure Plan is the master document of your adventure. It can be as simple or as detailed as you like and can take many forms depending on your favorite tools to manage a RPG adventure, be they paper or electronic-based. Its function is to combine your overall notes about the adventure (plot, adventure-specific setting elements, the villain's scheme, and so on) with a flow chart that shows how each Scene you planned is connected to the others.

At its simplest, picture a sheaf of graph paper. The first page could contain:

- An adventure summary: a paragraph-long elevator speech of what the adventure is about.
- A list of the named NPCs and short, one-sentence descriptions or outlook of each.

- A list of the main locations where the action will unfold, with short descriptions.
- Anything else that you could reference during play (page references, hyperlinks, etc.).

The next page(s) shows your flow chart(s), which connects each Scene from start to finish. Label each Scene with the name you gave them in your notes. Feel free to use specific shapes for Exploration, Combat, and Social Scenes if that helps you. Connect each Scene with those that would logically follow, creating forked paths if some Scenes can have different outcomes.

For example, if you want to pre-plan what happens should the heroes fail an Exploration Scene while they tramp about in the Temple of Sorrows, you can create a dotted line connection from the Exploration Scenes to a Combat Scene. That would mean that the heroes stumbling around in the Temple might attract the attention of its undead guardians.

Once your flow chart is completed, you may decide to document each Scene in the plan. Alternatively, you may decide to document those Scenes elsewhere, either on a standard piece of paper or on index cards. You can do the same for NPCs, monsters, and threats the adventure use. It all depends on your preference for preparation.

If you like to use digital tools, adding hyperlinks to your Adventure Plan lets you navigate rapidly through your plan and other associated adventure documents so you can find what you need at the click of a mouse or the swipe of a finger.

CREATING EXPLORATION SCENES

Exploration Scenes are mechanically simple, as they boil down to a one-roll resolution (see Exploration Scenes page 219). Each hero is allowed a range of actions from asset creation to recovery, but each is limited to performing just one. One hero then takes the lead and attempts to resolve the Scene.

When you create an Exploration Scene, add a description that puts the Scene in context. Document everything you feel you need to tell players so they understand where they are going and/or what they are seeking. You should then detail the likely outcome of the Exploration roll. For example: finding where the bandits are hiding out with the kidnapped Baron's daughter, or getting lost and stumbling into the path of an infernally corrupted cave bear.

While you don't have to set things in stone, you might want to include the outcome of failing the Exploration roll, too (See Running Exploration Scenes, page 219), even though you may decide otherwise once playing.

Lastly, decide if you want to add any Environmental Distinctions (see page 219) to the Scene. Just detail it and potentially add a few lines about using it.

Exploration Scenes are mostly used to get the heroes from one destination to another, but you can also used them to emulate any type of Scene that requires heroes to seek out something they aren't sure to find or dig into things they might better leave alone.

In fact, if you can picture a Scene that ends with someone shouting either "Eureka" or saying, "You really shouldn't have done that," in a menacing tone, chances are you can make an Exploration Scene out of it.

CREATING COMBAT SCENES

Combat and Social Scenes featuring conflict share the same structure. Both require the heroes to face a challenge in the presence of monsters, NPCs, or some other kind of threat (like traps or curses). Often the challenge combines several of those. Heroes must achieve one or several objectives, depending on the nature of the Scene. It can be as simple as the heroes outsmarting a garrulous ORACLE SPHINX or as complex as unraveling a series of complex enchantments while fighting SHADOW IMPS that climb out from the WELL OF DARKNESS.

You start by writing what heroes can see, hear, and generally perceive from the Scene. Much like the flavor text of classical adventure, this description sets the stage for the action to come. Make a list of all the objects and features that heroes might use in the Scene. A bullet point list is a good approach. It helps to give players ideas to shape their actions and create assets. Imagine this list as being the Scene's props. Torches, chests, chains, faintly glowing pools, and beastly skeletons are all examples of things you could find in a typical dungeon room. Alternatively, you may tell players that they can make up any minor feature that could conceivably be in the scene whenever they act. These can then be used by anyone as the Scene unfolds.

Among that list, you may decide to pick those that are most likely to be used by either the heroes or the opposition and make them into Scene traits (see page 222) by assigning a die rating to them. WOBBLY TABLE D6, CRYSTALLINE STALACTITES D8, EAGER URCHINS D6 or RUNIC CIRCLE OF PROTECTION D10 are all examples of such traits that both PCs, NPCs, and some monsters can use.

You should also list what NPCs, monsters, and other types of threats are in the Scene. For each of them, either write down their stats or refer to them if you keep them on index cards, or crib them from other sources like other *Heroic Roleplaying* books.

As mentioned earlier, there is no set formula to determine how many foes are needed to challenge a party of heroes. The core mechanics of the game make it easy to challenge heroes without spending too much time worrying about how many monsters and the size of their traits. Having each hero and opponent roll a handful of dice for each action creates wide ranges of results that may overwhelm the strongest of opponents or fill the doom pool from rolling multiple ones.

As you and your players master the game and how it flows, your rule of thumb for creating confrontation Scenes should be adding enough threats to ensure that all heroes have something to do during their turn. You should be conservative and start with threats that are weaker than the heroes, like those whose Level dice are rated d4 (Minions), d6 (Standard) or d8 (Elite). As the adventure progresses, you should progress towards adding a few d10 (Boss) threats in some Scenes. You may also end an adventure with a d12 (Epic) rated main villain escorted by a few lieutenants and thugs.

When using Mobs and Large Scale Threats, try to match the total number of Level dice with the number of heroes. So if you have a party of five heroes, your first combat Scene could feature a 3d4 Mob of Kobolds and a d6 Kobold Trap Setter and a d8 War Lizard. Later in the adventure, if you send a 4d10 Dragon after the party, you might decide to add a d8 Dragon Rider on it. Such an example also opens the possibility of making this Scene into a Social one if heroes can manage to convince the rider to stay his mount.

You then decide if the threats present can receive reinforcements, multiply, or otherwise grow in number through spending dice from the doom pool. You then indicate the doom dice cost for each addition. In general, this represents spending a doom die equal to the Level die of the monster or NPC to be added.

Alternatively, you may create a Scene that targets the specific abilities of one or a few heroes of the party. For instance, a confrontation with an annoyed, recently awakened d12 Titan might focus on the party's Bard and Mage attempts to charm it. In such case, try to add Scene elements that will encourage the other heroes to lend support by creating assets or dealing with other threats. For instance, maybe the adventure's villain has summoned a Mob of Hell Wasps 4d8 to anger the Titan into a murderous rage. The other heroes will have to get rid of them while the Bard and Mage deal with the Titan.

You can then add other types of threats to the Scene, things in the form of traps and tricks like Spiked Pit Traps or Corrupted Enchanted Altars. Some of these threats might even have triggers that require expenditure from the doom pool, helping make your Scene much more dynamic (see Traps and Tricks, page 237.) For example, a Scene might start with a Necromancer d8, a Mob of Skeletons 3d4 and a Death Gate d8. Among its SFXs, the Gate might allow you to spend d8s from the doom pool to bring Specters d8 into the Scene. You may decide to include such threats when determining the number of opponents the heroes face. However, if you think such threats will play a secondary role in the Scene, feel free to add one (or more) in addition to the monsters and NPCs you have already chosen to challenge the heroes.

Once you have made a list of the NPCs and monsters present in the Scene, you should include what motivates them to act as they should in the Scene. What are their goals, their agenda? Whose orders do they follow and how long will they keep doing it? Again, these can be short bullet points. They help you guide how each NPC and monster behaves in your Scenes, letting you pick and choose how they act and react in a Scene.

Finally, you may add various Scene assets to spice up the Scene's environment (Scene Traits: Scene Assets and Scene Complications, page 222). You can add as many as you deem fit to a Scene without worrying about balance since both heroes and antagonists can make use of them. Orcs are as likely to jump on Wobbly Tables or smash through Rickety Covers as the heroes are.

You may also note any likely Scene complication that might crop up during play or at the start of the Scene if you decide to add trouble to it (see Adding Trouble to Scenes, page 232).

Once all threats have been listed or referenced, you need to describe what objectives must be achieved by the heroes or the antagonists to bring the Scene to completion. While the default way in many Scenes may be "stressing out all opponents," you should consider other ways to do it. In fact, you should consider multiple ways a Scene might end so that heroes can achieve their goals through alternative means. For example, Scenes focused on facing a ruthless cardinal and his musketeers to release a young Viscount may also have an alternative goal. It might also be won through having part of the party succeeding at freeing the noble from his bounds while the party's Bard distracts the cardinal while arguing with her.

CREATING SOCIAL SCENES

Social Scenes are the most flexible Scene types of the game. When they pit heroes against antagonists in some form of conflict, they are structured exactly like Combat Scenes. You can follow the advice presented above. Such Social Scenes have lists of NPCs, their stats, their motivations, and goals. The Scene can feature other forms of threats like an Enchanted Zone of Silence d12 or any other trick that gives the antagonists an edge. It can also have Scene assets and complications depending on the structure of the Scene.

Contrary to Combat Scenes, Social ones based on some form of conflict don't necessarily have to involve all heroes directly. Remember that the actions and reactions of heroes and NPCs occur on a purposely undefined timescale. This lets your gaming group have more control on the flow of the Adventure. This way, heroes can do different things in parallel. So while the Bard and the Ranger are negotiating a very important peace treaty with a Hobgoblin Warlord at the broken city gates, the Cleric can help the rest of the party recover. At the same time, the Rogue can seek out members of the City's Thieves' Guild to recruit a network of cutthroats and thugs to root out the remaining goblins in the city.

You should take special care that heroes defeated in Social Scenes don't find themselves without options to move on. Heroes defeated in Combat Scenes can often try to escape from captivity or plead for their lives. Those in Social Scenes may find themselves in apparent dead ends if the Scene's goal was to obtain vital information. You should try to avoid running Scenes where success is the only way to move to the next Scene. For example, if heroes fail to extract the needed information from a recalcitrant guard, you could follow this failed Scene with a short Social one where a known crook offers to sell this information in exchange for an unsavory favor.

Not all Social Scenes feature conflict of some form. You can plan Social Scenes to allow a period of rest for the heroes where they can recover from trauma and stress, and create resources. This is easy to do when you plan "time passes" Scenes where heroes don't have to react to unfolding events and can catch a breather and plan for the next steps. Furthermore, you should leave room in your adventures to let players frame their own Social Scenes to recuperate and create resources when they need it most.

ADDING TROUBLE TO SCENES

When you start framing a Scene, you can spend dice from the doom pool to add trouble to the Scene (see Using Doom Dice, page 217). Maybe the monsters in the room are better armed than expected, or maybe there's a Poisoned Dart trap waiting for unsuspecting invaders. Adding trouble is a way for you to manage the size of a growing doom pool by focusing some of the increasing dread of the adventure into a specific Scene. In essence, it's like you are spending some of the special effects budget on a specific Scene.

You might also get a free trouble die to add to your Scene when heroes fail the Exploration Scene leading to the one you are framing. Don't hesitate to use it in the most creative way possible. Adding trouble to a Scene should elicit groans from your players, as they know things will be harder for them. That's the whole point of the exercise. For example, if the heroes are brought to the Great Inquisition to have their actions from their last mission reviewed, they may not be as eager to go when they learn that the Grand Inquisitor has decided to take interest and run the case himself (i.e., switching the d8 Inquisitor's Level die for a d12 one).

Adding trouble is the perfect way to emulate the degree of preparation of monsters and/or NPCs to the intrusion of the heroes. Let's say you decide to add some Pulsating Tentacles d10 complication coming out of the Portal to the Deep World (a trap-like trick) in a Scene featuring Cultists. This makes their objective of summoning some Deep Ones feel much more obvious.

Adding trouble to a Scene is a great way to make an environment feel more dynamic. This is especially true in adventures where heroes might revisit the same locations at different stages of the adventure.

ADDING TROUBLE SOUNDS LIKE TOO MUCH TROUUBLE

You don't have to add trouble to Scenes. It's mostly a clever mechanic to give GMs a more fiddly outlet for making the lives of the heroes harder. It's also another way to drain the doom pool from Scene to Scene. If you prefer to run games closer to the Marvel Heroic Roleplaying core rules, feel free to ignore all references to adding trouble and use the subset of doom pool abilities (listed on page 217) you are most comfortable with.

MONSTERS, TRAPS, AND OTHER THREATS

The worlds you create with *Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying* are fraught with peril. Many Scenes will contain dangerous opposition for the heroes, whether it be monsters that want them dead, cunning humanoid adversaries that have insidious agendas, or fiendish lethal devices waiting for the unsuspecting. This section describes how threats function and are created. It includes advice on making them and using them in your Quests.

Threats can be divided into three categories: monsters, traps, and tricks. Monsters include all kinds of creatures, constructs, and beings from all the physical and spiritual worlds of your game. When a monster is sentient and in charge of its own agenda, it also is an NPC (see NPCs, page 240). Traps represent non-intelligent, complex contraptions and enchantments created to inflict stress or complications on heroes in a straightforward way. Tricks are objects, enchantment, or any type of Scene element that possess SFX with effects that can be triggered through the expenditure of PP or doom pool dice . Tricks can provide beneficial effects (in the form of stress recovery or creating assets for the heroes) or negative ones (inflict stress and complications or bring in new threats to the Scene).

WHEN IS A THREAT A THREAT?

A threat usually is a set of traits that represents something capable of taking action during a Scene. If you want to create something that can hurt or hinder heroes, but you can't quite imagine it taking actions, like a pit trap for instance, you should consider making it a Scene complication. See Scene Traits on page 215 and Adding Trouble to Scenes on page 232.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THREATS

All Threats and NPCs share a common template for their game stats. Like heroes, they are made of traits separated in distinct categories. And like heroes, threats' dice pools are made by picking one die from each.

All threats are based on the following template:

THREAT NAME

Level (die rating)

Distinctions: DISTINCTION 1, DISTINCTION 2…

Power Name: POWER TRAIT 1 (die rating), POWER TRAIT 2 (die rating)…

SFX1: *Name.* SFX Mechanic.

SFX2: *Name.* SFX Mechanic…

SFX3: …

Limit1: *Name.* Limit Mechanic

Limit2: …

Skills: SPECIALTY 1 (Expert or Master), SPECIALTY 2 (Expert or Master)…

Level is the first category and represents the overall power of a threat. Its rating ranges from D4 to D12 and is explained in more details below.

Distinctions work exactly like they do for heroes; they act as background, significant features and quirks that can work for or against the threat. Refer to Distinctions on page 204 .

Power traits should be taken or derived from the list found in Power Traits on page 196.

SFX need to be formulated from the GM's perspective with the expenditure of doom dice instead of PP. A list of some examples to use and derive from is provided below.

Limits, which shutdown specific Power Sets or traits, also need to be formulated so they add or step up dice in the doom pool. A list of example Limits is also provided below.

Skills represent Specialties that the threat or NPC possesses and can use in action. These are drawn from the list found on page 205 and are rated Expert (D8) or Master (D10). Expert Specialties can be broken down to 2D6 in a dice pool and Master ones can be broken down to 2D8 or 3D6.

The Bestiary and NPC sections shows many examples that can be used directly in your games or adapted into new types of threats and characters. These examples also provide many SFX and Limits you can use or adapt.

THE LEVEL DIE

Each entry has a Level die that measures the relative prowess of each threat. These range from D4 (Minion) to D12 (Epic). Unless noted otherwise, these entries represent a solitary monster or trap. See below for rules on modifying any of these entries into a Mob. In addition to the guidelines below, a threat's Level die determines what level of stress is required to stress it out: any stress greater than a monster's Level die removes it from the scene. A Complicaton always requires a stepped up D12 to remove a threat from the scene.

A Level die of D4 is called a **Minion** threat. They usually have one or two Distinctions, typically don't have powers that exceed D6, and have one or two Specialties rated at Expert.

A D6 threat is deemed to be a **Standard** threat. They usually have two Distinctions and often have powers at D8. They also have two to three Expert Specialties.

A D8 threat is called an **Elite** threat. They usually have two to three Distinctions and feature a wider variety of powers including some powers at D10. They usually have two to three Specialties, most at the Expert level, although some may have a Specialty at the Master level. They often have specific SFX that combine well with their powers to present a more significant threat to heroes.

A threat with a D10 Level die is called a **Boss**. It has three Distinctions, a diverse Power Set including D12 traits with powerful SFXs to complement them. Boss threats have enough Specialties at the Expert and Master level to deal in all the types of Scenes they may be encountered in. Bosses are more than a match for a single hero. When planning adventures, Bosses are big enough threats to be the main villain of a session, or a series of sessions. Bosses are meant to make an impression, and the doom pool should be used liberally to allow Boss monsters to survive major attacks from player characters and dish out great punishment in return.

At the D12 Level, a threat is deemed **Epic.** Epic threats have three Distinctions, a multitude of powers, and Specialties including many of them at D12. An Epic's SFX should be numerous and powerful. Epics eclipse heroes by at least an order of magnitude, at least in their early career. Epics can serve as a catalyst for an entire campaign. Epics typically have a host of resources to insulate themselves from the nuisance heroes and often hide their nature from the world at large. The doom pool exists to power the unbelievable abilities of epic attacks and give Epics the ability to endure some of the heroes' best shots.

THREAT AND NPC SFX AND LIMITS

The following is a list of the most common SFX associated with Heroic characters and foes. Feel free to adapt them when you create your own. You can rename them to something evocatively tied to your threat and tweak the effects to suit its needs.

Absorption: On a successful reaction against a TYPE OF ATTACK action, convert your opponent's effect die into a POWER SET stunt or step up a POWER SET power until used in an action. If your opponent's action succeeds, spend a doom die to use this SFX.

Afflict: When inflicting TYPE complication on a target, add a D6 and step up your effect die.

Area Attack: Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a D6 and keep an additional effect die.

Berserk: Add a doom die to your next attack action. After your action, step back the doom die and return it to the doom pool.

Boost: Shutdown your highest-rated POWER SET power to step up another POWER SET power. Spend a doom die to recover the power.

Burst: Against a single target, step up or double a POWER TRAIT die. Remove the highest rolling die and use 3 dice for your total.

Counterattack: On a reaction against a STRESS TYPE attack action, inflict STRESS TYPE with your effect die at no doom pool cost. Spend a doom die to step it up.

Dangerous: Step back the highest die in your attack action pool to add a D6 and step up STRESS TYPE inflicted.

Focus: If your pool includes a POWER SET power, you may replace two dice of equal size with one stepped-up die.

Healing: Add POWER TRAIT to your dice pool when helping others recover stress. Spend a doom die to recover your own or another's STRESS TYPE or step back your own or another's TRAUMA TYPE.

Immunity: *(use this one sparingly, mostly with Boss and Epic Threats)* Spend a doom die to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from SPECIFIC ATTACK TYPE(S).

Invulnerability: *(same here)* Spend a doom die to ignore STRESS TYPE or TRAUMA TYPE unless caused by SPECIFIC ATTACK TYPE.

Multipower: Add more than one POWER SET power die to your pool. Step back each POWER SET power die in your pool once for each die beyond the first.

Second Chance: If your pool includes a POWER SET power, spend a doom die to reroll.

Second Wind: Before you make an action including a POWER SET power, you may spend a doom die the same size or larger than your STRESS TYPE die to recover it and step up the POWER SET power for this action.

Unleashed: *(Assign one to a threat)*

- » Step up or double any POWER SET power for one action. If the action fails, shutdown POWER SET. Spend a doom die to recover.
- » Step up or double any POWER SET power for one action. If the action fails, shutdown POWER SET. Activate an opportunity to recover.
- » Step up or double any POWER SET power for one action. If the action fails, step back that power. Spend a doom die to recover.
- » Step up or double any POWER SET power for one action. If the action fails, step back that power. Activate an opportunity to recover.

Versatile:

- » (For a power rated at D12) Split POWER TRAIT into 2D10, or 3D8.
- » (For a power rated at D10) Split POWER TRAIT into 2D8 or 3D6.
- » (Do not use for a power rated D6 or D8.)

The following is a list of common Limits associated with threat and NPC Power Sets. Feel free to adapt them to fit your own requirements.

Exhausted: Shutdown any POWER SET power to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add d6 to the doom pool. Activate an opportunity to recover the power.

Gear: Shutdown POWER SET to gain step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add d6 to the doom pool. Spend a doom die to recover POWER SET.

Growing Dread: If your pool includes a POWER SET power, both 1s and 2s on your dice count as opportunities, but only 1s are excluded from being used for totals or effect dice.

(Origin): When affected by (origin)-specific complication or magic item, step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add d6 to the doom pool.

Mutually Exclusive: *(*This one is perfect monsters with two forms*)* Shutdown POWER SET A to activate POWER SET B. Shutdown POWER SET B to recover POWER SET A.

Uncontrollable: Change any POWER SET power into a complication to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add d6 to the doom pool. Activate an opportunity or remove the complication to recover.

MOBS AND LARGE SCALE THREATS

Threats in this chapter are presented by default as singular, "average" representations of their kind. You can, however, multiply the level of danger and mayhem by making a threat into a Mob or a Large Scale Threat.

Mobs and Large Scale Threats (LSTs) have some common mechanics, mainly having multiple Level dice to represent their number or power. For example, a large group of kobolds could have 5d4 Level dice while a single, ancient Fire Dragon could have 7d10. When you perform an action with such a type of threat, you would pick up all the Level dice at the same time in your roll, on top of dice coming from the other threat categories like Distinctions, Powers Sets, and Specialties. Mobs and LSTs also have specific Limits that spell out the mechanics to defeat them.

MOBS

A Mob is a group of threats (usually monsters or NPCs) that act as one. They're built with the Threat Template with the following changes:

The Level die gets a multiplier placed in front of it. That multiplier usually varies between 3 and 6 depending on the threat's Level dice and the relative power that the Mob represents in a Conflict.

Mobs also gain the following Limit (which you can rename as you see fit):

Limit: *Mob Cohesion*. Defeat (Threat Name) Level dice (with dx Stress) to reduce (Threat Name). Each Level die may be treated as a separate target for Area Attack SFX.

The dx Stress represents an effect die that's one step over the Level dice of the Mob. For example, a 4d6 Mob of Angry Peasants requires a d8 effect die to defeat each of its d6 Level dice. Once the fourth dice is taken out, the Mob is stressed out.

Mobs should also gain one or two additional SFX to represent their approach to fighting heroes. Mobs that concentrate their attacks on single targets could have the *Focus* SFX. Those that swarm all over the party should have the *Area Attack* SFX. Mobs that grapple or slow down heroes should have the *Afflict* SFX.

Here's an example Mob made from the Shambling Skeleton Minion threat:

SHAMBLING SKELETON HORDE

Minion 6d4

Distinctions: Boney, Mindless

Bonehead: Grasping Hands d6, Stamina d8

SFX: *Afflict*: When inflicting a grappling complication on a target, add a d6 and step up your effect die.

SFX: *Undead Immunities*. Spend a doom die to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from negative energy and poison.

Limit: *Mob Cohesion*. Defeat Shambling Skeleton Horde Level dice (with d6 Stress) to reduce Shambling Skeleton Horde. Each Level may be treated as a separate target for Area Attack SFX.

Limit: *Undead Vulnerabilities*. Step up stress from positive energy attacks to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Specialties: Melee Combat Expert

Note that in spite of its numerous Level dice, a Mob can still be taken out of a Scene through a complication that gets pushed past d12 like all other characters in the game.

LARGE SCALE THREATS

A LST is a single threat (any kind) that is so massive, complex or powerful, it requires multiple effect dice to stress out. Like Mobs, they possess multiple Level dice that must be removed.

An LST also gains the following Limit:

Limit: *Large Scale Threat*. Defeat a (Threat Name) Level die for each dx stress effect die applied to (Threat Name).

Once again, the dx is an effect die that is at least one step higher than the LST's Level dice. If the heroes are unfortunate enough to be facing an Epic (d12) LST, they need to obtain both d12 effect dice AND obtain extraordinary successes (win a total by 5 or more) to knock the LST's Level dice.

LSTs should also have powerful SFXs that make them a challenge for a whole party of heroes, including *Area Attack*, *Absorption*, *Berserk*, *Immunities*, and *Invulnerabilities*. Just be careful not to make them absolutely undefeatable. Thus, you may decide to make some of their SFX conditional to having one of their powers not being shutdown (see example below).

Like Mobs, LST can be taken out of a Scene through both stressing out and being subjected to a complication stepped up past d12. If you want to make such an occurrence more challenging for heroes, you should consider adding the following SFX (or a similar one) to the threat

SFX: *Shake It Off*. Remove one Level die from (Threat Name) to remove a complication rated d12 or less affecting it.

Here's an example of a Large Scale Threat:

ICE ELEMENTAL TITAN

Boss 6d10

Distinctions: Living Iceberg, Oblivious, Restless

Dreadlord of Ice: Ice Blast d12, Water Mastery d12, Exceptional Strength d10, Godlike Durability d12.

SFX: *Feed Me, Do You*? On a successful reaction against a water-based action, convert your opponent's effect die into a Dreadlord of Ice stunt or step up a Dreadlord of Ice power until used in an action. If your opponent's action succeeds, spend a doom die to use this SFX.

SFX: *You Annoy Me; Dodge This*! Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *I Freeze You!* When inflicting water-based complication on a target, add a d6 and step up your effect die.

SFX: *That Tickles*! Until Godlike Durability has been shutdown, spend a doom die to cancel an effect die of the same size targeting Ice Elemental Titan unless action is magic- or fire-based.

Limit: *Elemental Origins*. When affected by elemental-specific complication or magic items, step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add d6 to the doom pool.

Limit: *Large Scale Threat*. Defeat an Ice Elemental Titan Level die for each d12 stress effect die applied to Ice Elemental Titan.

Specialties: Melee Combat Master, Ranged Combat Expert, Mystic Master

STRESS AND TRAUMA RECOVERY FOR MONSTERS AND NPCS

Monsters and other threats that have recovery and Healing powers can recover their own stress and that of their allies during Scenes according to the same recovery rules heroes follow (see page 195). In between Scenes, threats may be allowed to recover from stress and trauma if the story calls for it and it makes sense to do so. Significant NPCs will likely recover, but chances are a damaged trap won't fix itself if no one is left to tend it.

Between two Scenes, threat and NPC stress may be removed by spending a doom die equal or larger than the stress. It can also be stepped back by spending a smaller one. Once all of a threat's stress is recovered, trauma may be stepped down by spending a dice of any size from the doom pool; it cannot be recovered instantly by spending a dice of equal size or more.

In the same vein, Mobs and LSTs may recover Level dice by spending dice of the same size or more from the doom pool. One Level die is recovered for each die spent that way. Remember, unless a threat has a specific SFX to allow this, you can't spend doom dice to recover Level dice during a Scene.

For example, after a climactic confrontation, an Ancient Dragon has lost four of its original 5d10 Level dice. The GM takes two d10 from the doom pool and makes a note that the Dragon is now at 3d10, licking its wounds somewhere deeper in its lair.

CREATING AND ADAPTING THREATS

Creating threats (and NPCs) is a simple mechanical process that consists of filling the template (see "The Building Blocks of Threats") with traits that fit thematically together. It can, however, be a challenging creative exercise that requires balancing a concept with useful Distinctions, existing power traits, and enough SFXs (basic or custom made) to make the threat exciting without making it unwieldy. The same also holds when you wish to adapt threats from other games and settings.

The first concept you should consider when making or adapting a new threat is "What category best describes my concept?" You should then determine what power level it should sit at.

As a reminder and a rough rule of thumb, you should consider the following as a starting point:

Minion: 2-3 Powers, Most at d6, 1-2 SFX, 1 Limit, 1-2 Specialties.

Standard: 3-4 Powers, spread between d6 and d8, 1-3 SFX, 1-2 Limits, 1-2 Specialties.

Elite: 4-5 Powers, spread between d8 and d10, 2-4 SFX, 1-2 Limits, 2-3 Specialties (consider non-combat ones).

Boss: 5-7 Powers, a few at d12, 3-4 SFX, 3-5 Specialties (including non-combat ones).

Epic: 6-9 Powers, Many at d12 and d10, as many SFX as required (including Multipower), as many Specialties as required, possibly all of them.

As you add more Powers to a monster, you should consider dividing them in two or three Power Sets. On top of granting larger dice pools to a monster, you can create thematic groups of powers that more developed monsters can use in various types of situations.

A threat's power level should depend on the relative power of the party and the number you plan to unleash at the same time in a Scene. See "Adventure and Scene Creation" (page 228) for advice on threat power.

MONSTERS

Monsters are your rank and file threats for your Combat Scenes. Most of the time they play a simple role: fight the heroes. Thus their abilities should be focused on combat abilities. If you think a given monster stands a good chance of interacting with heroes in a more diverse manner, you should consider making it a NPC; see "NPC Creation Tips" on page 240 for more details.

Monster Distinctions should be simple and straightforward. They should represent their background, their general outlook, and possibly a catchphrase or a war cry that both can be roleplayed to rally them and that makes a clever reference to what the monster is all about.

Examples: Deep Orc of the Blind God, Bloodlust, "You Were Born My Enemy!"

Monsters can have any type of power traits, but you want to keep them as simple to play as possible. Are they significantly stronger, faster, or more agile than humans? If so, consider traits like Strength, Reflexes, and so on. They should either have some form of melee weapon (Sword, Spear, Bow, Sling) or natural attacks (Claws, Fangs, Pincers, etc.). Some can also have ranged attacks (Bow, Daggers, Flying Spikes, or Blasts of Arbitrary Elemental Energy). You should then consider what kind of protection they have. Do they evade attacks or have ways to resist attacks like natural defenses and armor. In such cases, consider reactive powers like Speed, Resistance, and Durability.

You should then decide if your monster has any SFX. The rule of thumb is that the more powerful a monster is, the more numerous and complex its SFX should be. If your monsters are mostly cannon fodder, you should limit yourself to few or no SFX. This is especially true if you plan to have multiple monsters of the same type in a Scene. If you do, you should band them together as a Mob and add one or more SFX that represents how they fight heroes.

The SFX provided in the list found on page 234 allows for a large range of effects. When you begin designing monsters, use them as a base. As you gain experience, start experimenting with them. The general guideline is that a SFX usually grants a free, basic ability that would otherwise cost a die from the doom pool (for example, grant an extra effect die, step up a die, or add additional dice to a total). When an ability goes beyond that range, a cost is added to the ability, usually in the form of a doom die of varying size (the larger the effect, the bigger the die), or through the shutdown of one of the monster's powers.

Very simple monsters should not need Limits. This is one case where realism can take a break and let verisimilitude do the same job. You don't have to give each Weapon power a *Gear* Limit. Chances are, heroes won't focus on that, and if they do, just call up the Limit.

As monsters grow in power, you should add Limits that act as counterbalances to some of that power. On top of adding great flavor to monsters, Limits like *Vulnerabilities* provide ways for heroes to gather and use lore against the creature to turn the tide when things get tough.

Finally, you should select Specialties that you know your monsters are likely to use. Usually these will be combat skills (Melee and Ranged), and possibly stealth related ones (Scouting and Skullduggery). Should your monster find itself in a situation it was not prepared for, you can always pick a d6 to represent its basic training and experience.

TRAPS

Traps are unintelligent threats whose function is to hurt and hinder opponents in the most direct way possible. Traps created with the threat templates are those capable of action during a Scene, performing repeated attacks, or inflicting complications more than once. These range from repeating darts, scything blades, and fireball launchers to paralysis runes and more somber curses. If you want to have more static traps like PIT TRAPS, TRIP LINES, and one shot ensnaring lines, consider creating them with Scene complications at the onset of a Scene. See Adding Trouble to Scenes on page 232.

Traps are built exactly like monsters but they should be even more focused in function. Limit the number of Distinctions, powers, and Specialties to an absolute minimum. Distinctions should cover how the trap functions and its potential features and issues. Things like HIDDEN, NOISY, SLOW TO RESET, IMMOBILE, ENRUNED, and STEAM-POWERED are all examples you can use. As usual, try to find Distinctions that can use both for and against the trap.

You should give traps one Power Set with one, possibly two, power traits. The main one should be an active power, like a BLAST, WEAPON, or CONTROL power that can cause stress or create complications against heroes. The second one should be a reactive one that represents any type of defensive systems the trap might possess. MAGICAL RESISTANCE, INVISIBILITY, and DURABILITY are good examples of such powers.

The choice of SFX is where you make a trap stand out as an exciting threat. Once again, you should focus on picking as few as you need that marry themselves to the singular function of the trap. You should consider *Area Attack*, *Berserk*, *Boost*, *Berserk*, and *Unleashed* for traps that deal stress. In a similar way, if a trap creates complications, you should give it the *Afflict* SFX.

In terms of defense against being disarmed, destroyed, or dispelled, you may consider granting traps some forms of counterattack (it triggers when being tampered with) or *Invulnerability* if they can't be targeted by certain types of actions (like some forms of enchantments). Depending on the form and power of the trap, you might forgo the necessity of having to spend doom dice to prevent stress and complications. In such cases, make sure that the trap can be acted upon by at least one form of attack or action.

Traps can have Specialties, but they'll likely be limited to either melee or ranged combat ones. The rating of such Specialties should range from Rookie (D6) to Master (D10) depending on craftsmanship and power.

Like monsters, you can make traps into Mobs (imagine several mechanisms or magical traps triggering at the same time). You could even create some forms of doomsday devices in the form of LSTs.

Dealing with traps depends on the type. Physical traps can be destroyed or disabled by stressing them out or shutting down its main attack power trait (see "Targeting Traits," page 216). Magical traps might be disrupted through targeting its trait with SORCERY and MAGICAL APTITUDE. Similarly, magic circle and runic-based traps may be disarmed through damaging runes (possibly triggering countereffects) or through dispelling with SORCERY. Think of a few ways the traps you designed may be defeated, but leave room for the creativity of your players.

In some cases, if a hero wants to take possession of a disarmed threat, you should treat it like a magical item and follow the rules found on page 211.

TRICKS

Tricks are the staples of the classic fantasy roleplaying game experience. Certain objects, contraptions, and locations have abilities that can help or (more often) hurt heroes, usually in unexpected ways. From strange altars made of pulsating purple marble that spout tentacles to Arcs that teleport those that cross it, tricks can liven up a Scene by adding elements of mystery and wonder to the usual fare of exploration and conflict. In fact, powerful tricks can become the centerpieces of some Scenes, with the heroes having to deal with it above and beyond having to fight monsters and power-mad NPCs.

Tricks exist in the game to cover the wide range of threats (and helpful features) that possess SFX that use doom pool or PP triggers to produce unique effects.

> Tricks have been around since the earliest roleplaying games, especially in Dungeons and Dragons. Appendix H of the 1st Edition of the Dungeon Master Guide is a goldmine of ideas for tricks, Scene complications, and complications you can inflict on your players. In the same vein, 4e Edition Dungeon Master Guide 2 presents several new forms of traps and interactive terrain that can serve as further inspiration.

These include PORTALS that bring new monsters to a Combat Scene, STEAM POWERED TURBINES that electrify its immediate surroundings and periodically sends ELECTRICAL PULSES to stun everyone, and even pools that can heal the stress of heroes if they are courageous enough to bathe in it.

Tricks are designed exactly like traps, but they can have a more diverse set of functions (and therefore powers and SFXs). Distinctions should play into a trick's mysterious or hidden nature. For example, it could be NON-DESCRIPT, MUNDANE, ALIEN, OUTERWORLDY, MISTY, or INTANGIBLE.

Powers are chosen like they were for monsters and traps. You should, however, focus on the nature of the trick. You need to identify the devious (or beneficial) purpose it serves. Tricks that take active roles in Scenes should be more focused on creating complications and assets than inflicting stress. Elemental Control powers are perfect for tricks, as are Mimic, Psychic Powers, Size Changing, Sorcery, Teleport (see "Forceful Teleportation" Sidebar), and Transmutation.

In most cases, the effects of such powers should be focused on either granting monsters useful assets (if the trick helps them) and/or inflict complications on heroes (see "Persistent Complications: Curses, Poison and Other Corruptions" below). In the case of beneficial tricks, or tricks that the heroes figure out a way to exploit, they may be used to generate useful assets for them.

For example, an Altar of Hope trick could be found, all dusty and cracked in an empty Dungeon room. As the heroes explore it, a horde of Ratmen pour into the room, attacking. As the heroes fan out to fight, the Cleric decides to tap into it, spending a PP (see below). At that point, the Altar activates as an ally and generates blessed assets for individual heroes. Since a GM-controlled "character" can't roll against the doom pool, these actions would be resisted by the Ratmen.

While tricks should have some of the basic SFX that help create assets (Construct) and/or complications (Afflict) depending on their functions, they should all have tailor-made SFXs that require either doom pool or PP spending to trigger particular effects. These effects can be quite varied and a given trick might have more than one such trigger.

For example, a trick could bring new monsters to the Scene, either by summoning them from a Portal, facilitating the arrival of reinforcements, or something more exotic like giving flesh to beings of shadows. Such additions should cost doom dice equivalent to the Level die of the monsters brought.

Alternatively, a device could inflict complications out of turn order (like at the beginning of every turn) by spending doom dice to roll the doom pool against all other heroes (for example, an *Area Attack*). Finally, a beneficial trick could have SFX that require the expenditure of PP to allow heroes to recover from stress or certain complications.

All these examples are but a few possibilities of what you can do with tricks. You'll find a few examples in the Bestiary on page 243.

Tricks should have the same types of limits as traps do. They can be defeated and targeted, once heroes figure out what they are. Limits can provide some story fuel to provide lore about them when heroes make inquiries, try to recall details about the origins of a given trick, or when they create an asset to help deal with it.

Some tricks don't take active actions in a Scene, relying on their SFX triggers to contribute to the Scene. Such tricks have the following Limit:

Limit: *Passive* (Threat Name) does not take an action during a round. It can react when it is the target of an action [and may spend Doom Dice to trigger its SFXs].

FORCEFUL TELEPORTATION

Some heroes and threats and have the ability to teleport other objects or characters. In some cases, when there's no real opposition to the action and the destination is familiar, the action should be allowed without a roll. However, in cases where there's active opposition or a question of timing is involved, an action roll should be made. The same applies if the destination is nebulous or when massive numbers of people and/or objects are concerned.

Like any regular action, if there's a clearly defined opposition to the forceful teleportation, the teleporter rolls against it. Otherwise, the roll is against the doom pool. Also note that unless otherwise mentioned in the teleporter's stats, the teleporter ends up at the same location as the teleported target(s) until his next action.

Finally, tricks can have Specialties, but it should be limited to the actions they take, possibly Mysticism. Most likely, it will just have a Rookie d6.

PERSISTENT COMPLICATIONS: CURSES, POISON, AND OTHER CORRUPTION

Most of the time, complications disappear at the end of a Scene. If you want to have threats that can deal lasting effects on heroes that don't involve stress or trauma, you can use the following option:

A complication can be made persistent by spending a doom dice equivalent or less than the complication to make it last until the heroes deal with it through some action. The persistent complication remains in play at the same rating as the doom die you spent. This can represent a particular Curse, a Poison, or any other form of encroaching Corruption that heroes will need to recover from. The persistent complication can be targeted like any other trait (see page 216) and may require special knowledge, rituals, or ingredients to treat as decided by the GM. Such complications can also be targeted by threats to be made stronger when appropriate. If ever such complication get pushed past d12, you may decide that the character is taken out of play until a cure is found.

ADAPTING THREATS FROM OTHER SOURCES

Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying provides an overview of many of the threats that players and GMs know and love from fantasy gaming. It is not meant to offer a comprehensive list of potential threats. Converting a beloved monster to *Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying* is relatively simple and relies on gauging the threat level (expressed by the Level die) of what you want to convert. Once you establish how relatively powerful a threat is, you should identify its main purpose (or role in a Combat Scene). You create a combination of Distinctions, Powers, SFXs, Limits, and Specialties to best represent that purpose. You should not seek to replicate the threat exactly but rather try to get its feel and flavor across.

For example, if Hobgoblins are highly trained, disciplined soldiers trained to take tactical advantages whenever they can, you could focus on that and make something like:

HOBGOBLIN LEGIONNAIRE

Standard d6

Distinctions: Iron Discipline, Cruel

Dark Claw Legion: Bronze Spear d6, Bronze Scale Mail Armor d6, Tower Shield d8

SFX: *Push Forward*. On a successful reaction, you may step up your effect dice to create a tactical complication.

SFX: *Shield Wall*. Add or double Tower Shield on any reaction roll involving Melee Combat.

Limit: *Set for Charge*. Shutdown Tower Shield to step up Bronze Spear. Spend an action to recover that power.

Specialties: Melee Combat Expert

USING MARVEL DATAFILES

In addition to the threats in the following Bestiary, the *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* basic game and its sourcebooks feature hundreds of datafiles for heroes and villains. You can use them to place a character directly from the world of comics into the game or you can use them as a shortcut to creating a whole new monster. When converting between the systems keep the following in mind.

First, the Affiliation category is replaced by the Level die. To gauge the threat's relative power, look at the dice ratings of the various power traits of the hero or villain you want to adapt. Use the rule of thumb provided on page 233 to reverse engineer the Level die. Furthermore, threats in *Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying* often only have one Power Set. Consider combining *Marvel* Power Sets into one. If they narratively could use both Power Sets at once, either keep them separate or include the *Multipower* SFX.

Next, compare the datafile's Specialties to the *Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying* Specialty list on page 205. Make sure that each Specialty's capabilities are allowed to shine with a *Fantasy Heroic Roleplaying* Specialty. In particular, Science and Technology Specialties can be represented with the Mystic Specialty. Many of the Powers, SFX, and Limits can be used in both games with little to no change.

NPCS

As the name implies, Non Player Characters (NPCs) represent the whole cast of characters that the GM controls and uses to interact with the heroes. The difference between NPCs and monsters is mostly a question of semantics. In the context of this game, NPCs are considered to be those that can play active roles in both Combat and Social Scenes. NPCs aren't limited to being humanoid; they can be any type of intelligent creature whose goals and motivations can potentially come into conflict with those of the heroes.

NPC CREATION TIPS

Rules wise, NPCs are treated as threats and follow the same rules and template for their creation. The type of powers, Specialties and SFX they have will often be tailored to the type of Scene they are expected to be found in; refer to "Creating Threats" on page 236. Thugs and minions will have more combat abilities, while NPCs that feature in Social Scenes will likely possess traits that are focused on verbal interaction as well as fighting. Recurring villains will likely have a mixed set of traits to be more flexible in your adventures, making them capable of facing the heroes in a dank cave or in front of the Grand Council.

NPCs can be categorized by their Level die; the lower the die, the less important a role they play in the setting, unless present in very large numbers. A Mob of Enraged Serfs can be quite troublesome. The following is a breakdown of NPC types with hooks to create your own.

Minion NPCs (d4) are the unnamed, faceless incompetent or untrained NPCs. Whatever action they attempt will likely result in failure and grant opportunities to heroes. They often get in the way of their allies more than help them. If you play a more cinematic type of game, having a significant number of Minion NPCs in a scene (especially as a Mob) is a good way to make the heroes look more competent.

Concept hooks for Minions NPCs (with suggested traits):

- Listless Serfs (Hungry, Resentful, Improvised Weapons)
- Untrained Conscripts (Tired, Scared, Cheap Shield, Spear)
- Nosy Servant (Gossipy, Greedy, Scandalous Secrets)
- Street Urchin (Sly, Survivor, Skullduggery)

Standard NPCs (d6) are the average Joe and Joan that populate your game world. From city streets merchants to orcish cultists, they are everywhere and usually blend in the background until either a hero expresses a need to interact with someone (including fighting) or the NPCs are mobilized to do so.

Concept hooks for Standard NPCs:

- City Guard (Corrupted, Massive Truncheon, Chainmail)
- Pirate Sailor (Fugitive, Sea Monkey, Rusty Claymore)
- Elven Hunter (Terse, Impulsive, Longbow, Ranged Expert)
- Orc Diplomat (Impatient, Dense, Intimidate, Diplomacy)

Elite NPCs (d8) are the lieutenants and highly competent people of your game setting. They are very good at their craft and can give significant trouble for heroes when confronting them in their arena of expertise. Many recurring characters start out as Elite NPCs and may grow as the heroes do. You should consider naming your more significant Elite NPCs to bring your gaming world to life.

Concept hooks for Elite NPCs:

- Imperial Guards (Disciplined, Fanatical, Steel Axe, Plate Armor, Melee Expert)
- Willikins, the Butler (Unfazable, Connected, Razor Sharp Mind, Mental Fortitude)
- Cultist Leader (Ruthless, Ambitious, Ceremonial Sword, Summoning)
- Fae Councilor (Trickster, Obtuse, Flight, Sorcery)

Boss NPCs (d10) are the movers and shakers of your world. They pull the strings and implement schemes that can start wars or destroy whole kingdoms. You should name your Boss NPCs and consider making them recurrent features of your adventures. Making a Boss NPC into a Large Scale Threat is the best path to creating an Adventure's main villain.

Concept hooks for Boss NPCs:

- Grud'zar the Firedrake (Pyromaniac, Greedy, Flight, Firebreath, Scales)
- Anki Al'Sibim the Genie (Lamp-Bound, Gaseous Form, Wind Control, Conjuration)
- Pit Demon (Cruel, Chaotic, Flight, Claws, Fire Whip, Fire Sword)
- Lich King (Scholar, Uncaring, Sorcery, Lore Master)

Epic NPCs are the Gods, Progenitors, and Devourers of your game worlds. The heroes mostly don't register on their senses, until they become troublesome enough. By that time, the heroes understand what real trouble means.

Concept hooks for Epic NPCs:

- Fruzg'Gor'Mez, Elder Brain (Alien Overlord, Mastermind, Mind Control, Thralls)
- The Maker (World Forge, Star Splitter, Transmutation)
- The Eater of Stars (Eternal Hunger, Born of Time, Cosmic Control)
- The Everman (Unaging, Forgettable, Reality Control)

NPCS IN COMBAT SCENES

NPCs in Combat Scenes can play a variety of roles. The most likely will be crossing steel and magic against the heroes. Like mentioned before, the distinction between monster and NPCs is blurry at best. In a Combat Scene, NPCs are those smart enough to have free will, specific goals (or orders), and, most likely, a will to survive.

When you stage a Combat Scene with hostile NPCs, you are playing the role of sentient beings with more or less developed senses of self-preservation. They will start the conflict with a plan to defeat the heroes. While mindless or bestial foes attack to inflict physical stress on heroes, some NPCs might instead focus on dealing complications or other forms of stress to make it harder for the heroes to prevail. For example, the Necromancer might order his Skeletal Archers to pepper the heroes with arrows and his Zombie Hulks to charge them. During that time, he inflicts mental stress on the party's Cleric by fogging his mind with necromantic spells.

A key element of using hostile NPCs in Combat Scenes is that communications can be pursued during the conflict. NPCs will throw threats around, may gloat, and possibly even start ominous monologues. However, when the tide turns for or against them, NPCs can also be reasoned with, or influenced through physical, magical, or mental manipulation. This is a powerful tool to prevent Combat Scenes from stretching far past their point of usefulness. At a certain point, self-preservation should take over and NPCs should start looking for an alternative way to achieve their goals, or attempt to flee so they can fight another day, cutting short Combat Scenes that heroes would eventually win given enough time.

Combat Scenes may also bring in allied NPCs. Their role will depend on the context. If they are combat capable, they may actively join the heroes and take combat actions. Feel free to let players control such NPCs during combat if it makes your job easier. Other types of allied NPCs may play a less direct role. Some may provide support, like stress recovery or support asset creation. Since NPCs don't play against the doom pool, have the NPC play against the most likely source of opposition. Finally, some allied NPCs may have found themselves stuck in the Scene and don't play an active role. They may however be play a significant part in the story. If that is the case, you can consider such NPCs as Scene traits.

For example the heroes might have been escorting the Royal Ambassador (rated as a d8 Scene trait) when they were waylaid by orcish mercenaries. The orcs may focus their actions on killing the ambassador (using the ambassador's die to represent the threat they pose); heroes will roll to prevent the orcs from killing him (i.e., applying their effect die on the ambassador's d8).

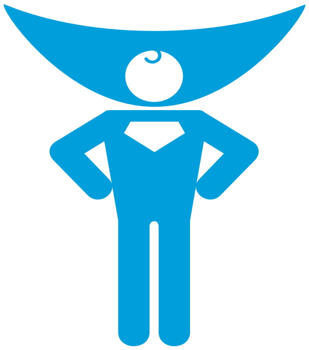
NPCS IN SOCIAL SCENES

NPCs in Social Scenes usually play two types of roles: antagonists or secondary NPCs. Antagonists are the doubtful Princes, covetous Viziers and curious Demon Lords that either want something from the heroes or actively resist them. Antagonists also represent other types of opposition like rioting crowds, an invading hive mind from an alien universe, or the ghostly, lingering anger that haunts the site of a grisly massacre. Antagonists can be any type of NPCs, but will often be Elite or Boss characters. They can also be a Large Scale Threat (like an Angry God) or a Mob (like a Lynching Mob). Antagonists have clearly defined goals and objectives in a Social Scene. Dealing with them successfully is the most likely path to achieving the Scene's objectives.

Secondary NPCs complete those kinds of Scenes. They are the antagonists' sycophants, the audience, and the milling crowd converging toward whatever trouble the heroes are brewing. They can also be the heroes' allies, hirelings, and friends. Whether such NPCs play active or passive roles depends on the Scene's context and how things turn out.

Passive characters are treated like Scene assets (see below). They also play a role as fodder for complications. Both heroes and antagonists can create complications that play off the presence of passive characters. For example, heroes could reveal a truly shocking piece of evidence against the Royal Counselor (an antagonist) during an audience with the King (another antagonist) in front of the court (represented as a passive secondary character). The heroes could then create an Outraged Courtier complication to help them sway the King's opinion and destabilize the counselor.

The Scene might also have secondary characters become active in the Scene or be added by spending a certain amount of dice from the doom pool. If heroes are having a screaming match with a well-respected merchant, the Scene might allow spending d8 from the doom pool to attract the attention of the Captain of the City Guards that wants to put an end to the ruckus.



The following is a sample of monsters, NPCs, traps, and tricks you can use directly in your games, adapt to fit your game world's particular flavor or use as a springboard to design your own. They are categorized by their Level die.

MINIONS (LEVEL DIE D4)

COWARDLY KOBOLD

Minion d4

Distinctions: Dragonkin, Not Worth The Trouble

Cannon Fodder: Primitive Weapons d4, All Claws and Teeth d4

SFX: *In the Way*. Stress out Cowardly Kobold to step down stress from a successful action against another GM character.

SFX: *Gang Up*. Step up Cannon Fodder power when attacking a foe already engaged by a Standard or greater threat.

Limit: *Ooops, It Broke*. Shutdown Primitive Weapon to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. Spend a doom die to recover that power.

Specialties: Scouting Expert

Kobold physiology and culture suggests that they are a radical offshoot of dragons. Often used and abused by the legendary creatures, Kobolds typically lack the organization or power to sustain much more than subsistence living on their own. Their predisposition to taking orders, and their terrible luck when working alongside more powerful threats, makes them useful, albeit weak, henchmen.

HALFLING MINUTEMEN

Minion d4

Distinctions: Determined, Wee

Pint Sized Militia: Reflexes d6, Sling d6

SFX: *Dead Eye*. Step up or double Sling die. Remove the highest rolling die and use three dice for the total.

Limit: *Shaky Morale*. Step up mental stress from hunger, tiredness, or confusion to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Specialties: Ranged Combat Expert, Skullduggery Expert

Halflings are not known for their military or force of arms, but they will rise to defend their lands from interlopers. For a minion, Halfling Minutemen have the ability to produce respectable dice pools and reasonably large effect dice. They are not known for combative or predatory ways, and can often be negotiated with.

SHAMBLING SKELETON

Minion d4

Distinctions: Brittle, Mindless

Bonehead: Rusty Blades d6, Stamina d8

SFX: *Undead Immunities*. Spend a doom die to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from negative energy and poison.

Limit: *Undead Vulnerabilities*. Step up stress from divine magic to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Specialties: Melee Combat Expert

Skeletons are shaky bothers barely worth noticing. Rather than truly threaten the hero, a sprinkling of these monsters can give faith-based characters an opportunity to flex their muscle while rapidly building a moderately sized doom pool to challenge the heroes later on. Considering using them to foreshadow more powerful threats with connections to necromancy and undeath.

SHIFTY GOBLIN

Minion d4

Distinctions: Cunning, Opportunistic

Mean and Green: Crude Bucklers d6, Primitive Weapon d6

SFX: *Harbingers of Bad Luck*. On a successful reaction against a physical attack action, add a d6 doom die to the doom pool.

Limit: *Ooops, It Broke*. Shutdown Primitive Weapon to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. Spend a doom die to recover that power.

Specialties: Melee Combat Expert, Skullduggery Expert

Goblins are fantasy villain's cannon fodder of choice. Their Harbingers of Bad Luck *SFX reflects the ill omens that their presence brings.*

INSECT SWARM

Minion Mob 5d4

Distinctions: Blinding, Erratic

Stingers: Stingers d6, Intangibility d8
SFX: *Poison*. If a Poison complication has been inflicted on a target, at the start of their turn you may spend a die from the doom pool to step up that complication.

Limit: *Swatting*. Defeat Insect Swarm Level dice (with d6 stress) to reduce Insect Swarm. Each Level die may be treated as a separate target for *Area Attack* SFX.

Specialties: Melee Combat Expert

Frustrating foes notable for their avoidance and poison, mundane Insect Swarms lack the potency to do significant harm to an adventurer. Insect swarms may be commanded by powers tied to nature or antagonized by unsuspecting adventurers. Nonetheless, with a bit of luck or generous doom pool spending, poison can potentially threaten most adventurers.

SURLY CONSTABLE PATROL

Minion Mob 3d4

Distinctions: By the Book, Drunk with Power

Crown Approved: Nightstick d6, Standard Issue Breastplate d6

SFX: *Whistle*! Spend a d6 from the doom dice to add two new Surly Constable Level dice to the Mob.

SFX: *I am the Law*. When using a Crown Approved power to create law-based complications, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

Limit: *I'm Not Corrupted*! Shutdown a Crown Approved power to add a doom die or step up the smallest die in the doom pool. Recover by activating an opportunity.

Limit: *You Can't Do That, We're the Law!* Defeat Surly Constable Level dice (with d6 stress) to reduce Surly Constable. Each Level die may be treated as a separate target for *Area Attack* SFX.

Specialties: Melee Combat Expert, Intimidation Expert

A mainstay in settlements of all sizes, the average constable has a bit of a superiority complex. Overworked, jaded, and able to exercise great discretion, the average constable's greatest weapon is his backup. Running afoul with the law makes it hard to operate in civilized lands, even if it tempting to put the beat down on a smug lawman.

PEASANT MOB

Minion 5d4

Distinctions: Fickle, Gullible

Torches and Pitchforks: Durability d6, Farm Implements d6, Psychic Resistance d6

SFX: *Dey Took Err Jeeorbs*. When inflicting a Grappling complication on a target, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

Limit: *What Have We Done*? Shutdown any Torches and Pitchforks power to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. Activate an opportunity to recover that power.

Limit: *Go Back Home*! Defeat Peasant Mob Level dice (with d6 Stress) to reduce Peasant Mob. Each Level die may be treated as a separate target for *Area Attack* SFX.

Specialties: Melee Rookie (d6), Intimidation Expert

Peasant Mobs represent a unique problem for heroes. Unlike traditional monsters to be vanquished, laying waste to a mob of peasants is not typically going to garner accolades. Consider using a Peasant Mob as a social threat. Defeating peasants is less the issue than overcoming them without the heroes ruining their reputation.

POISONED DART TRAP

Minion 8d4 (Trap)

Distinctions: Ancient, Hidden, Noisy

Repeating Dart Throwers: Poisoned Darts d4

SFX: *Accurate*. Spend a doom die to reroll any or all dice in an action or a reaction.

SFX: *Poison*. If a Poison complication has been inflicted on a target, at the start of their turn you may spend a die from the doom pool to step up that. You can only do so once per turn

Limit: *Jammed Mechanism*. Shutdown a Repeating Dart Thrower power to add a doom die or step up the smallest die in the doom pool. Recover by activating an opportunity.

This classic trap is the staple of dungeon adventures and the scourge of amateur tomb raiders. It represents a series of hidden mechanical dart shooters arranged over a large area. While not overly effective, it becomes problematic when used in conjunction with other threats that know about its workings and can work around it easily (like kobolds).

STANDARD MONSTERS (LEVEL DIE D6)

BANDIT AMBUSHER

Standard d6

Distinctions: Greedy, Outdoorsy

Highwayman: Crossbow d8, Leather Armor d6

SFX: *Trapspringer*. On a successful action gain an additional effect die to create a Trap complication.

Limit: *Busted Weapon*. Shutdown Crossbow to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. Spend a doom die to recover that power.

Specialties: Ranged Combat Expert, Skullduggery Expert

Bandits set ambushes along roads travelled by merchants to extort money and valuables. They also set headquarters in ruins and other locations bound to be visited by adventurers. The Bandit Ambusher excels at peppering foes with crossbow bolts while baiting them into one of many traps and snares set around the Ambush site or camp.

PUTRID ZOMBIE

Standard d6

Distinctions: Braaaains, Rotting, Mindless

Walking Dead: Durability d6, Stamina d8, Strength d8,

SFX: *Relentless*. Against a single target, step up or double Walking Dead power. Remove the highest rolling die and use three dice for the total.

SFX: *Undead Immunities*. Spend a doom die to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from negative energy and poison.

Limit: *Undead Vulnerabilities*. Step up stress from divine magic to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Zombies serve as shock troops for evil entities with access to corpses. A step up from Skeletons, Zombies still fail to pose a significant threat to heroes unless they possess overwhelming numbers. Consider making them into a Mob (see page 235) if you want them to be a challenge in their own right. Combining them with a trick that generates new ones is also an idea.

CURSED GRAVEYARD

Standard d6

Distinctions: Eerie, Misty, Necromantic Nexus

Aura of Restlessness: Sorcery d8, Magical Resistance d8

SFX: *The Risen*. At the start of any round, spend d6 from the doom pool to add Putrid Zombies to the Scene for each die spent. You may break down additional dice (d8 = 2d6, d10 = 3d6, d12 = 4d6) to add zombies.

SFX: *Curse of the Necromancer*. When inflicting Necromantic complication on a target, add a d6 to your dice pool and step up your effect die.

SFX: *Intangible Threat*. Cursed Graveyard can't be the target of actions that inflict stress.

Limit: *Indirect Influence*. Cursed Graveyard cannot perform actions that inflict any type of stress.

The Cursed Graveyard represents a typical example of a trick used to represent a large area under the influence of a somber, hostile power. The heroes can't beat it with battle axes and fireballs. They need to find ways to shutdown its power traits while at the same time dealing with the mindless undead swarming them.

RAGING ORC

Standard d6

Distinctions: Bloodthirsty, Crude, Me No Like Talk Much

Smashy Upbringing: Crude Greataxe d8, Strength d6

SFX: *Berserk*. Add a doom die to an attack action. After that action, step back the doom die and return it to the doom pool.

Limit: *You Broke My Axe*! Shutdown Crude Greataxe to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Specialties: Intimidation Expert, Melee Combat Expert

Larger, more threatening, and more imposing than Goblins, Orcs typically follow the lead of the strongest of their number. They work well as a threat with Goblins. Orcs are offensively minded threats. Their best defense is attacking, but can quickly deplete the doom pool with their powerful but costly Berserk SFX. Should they end up in a Social Scene, portray their penchant for bullying and intimidation.

SCYTHING BLADES TRAP

STANDARD D6

Distinctions: HIDDEN, MECHANICAL, SHARP

Watch Your Step: BLADES D8, DURABILITY D8

SFX: *Deadly Sharp*. Against a single target, step up or double BLADES die. Remove the highest rolling die and use three dice for your total.

Limit: *Broken*. Shutdown BLADES to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die.

Specialties: MELEE COMBAT EXPERT, SKULLDUGGERY EXPERT

Simple yet effective, Scything Blades hinder the exploration of intrepid adventures. They oftentimes are used to give devious creatures an edge in a fight. Consisting of a hidden pressure spot triggering sharp rotating blades that extrude from walls, floors and/or ceilings, this trap is an enduring classic that will make adventurers groan.

DOPPELGANGER

STANDARD D6

Distinctions: CLEVER, GREEDY, LAZY

Perfect Copy: MIMIC D8, SHAPESHIFTING D8, STRETCHING D6, TELEPATHY D6

SFX: *Adaptable*. Step up any Social Scene asset in your dice pool.

SFX: *Intrigue*! When inflicting social stress or complication on a target, add a D6 to your dice pool and step up your effect die.

Limit: *How Much Damage Has It Caused?* Shutdown any Perfect Copy power to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die. Activate an opportunity to recover that power.

Specialties: DIPLOMACY EXPERT, SKULLDUGGERY EXPERT

Doppelgangers are rarely seen in their natural alien form. Instead, they prefer to assume the identities of other humanoids and mooch off a community's labors. Their inclination towards the path of least resistance can be overcome by their greed and want for creature comforts. In these instances, they may work as assassins and spies, potentially with more combat training. They are social chimeras and are highly adept at seizing advantage of any social opportunity to escape danger or continue leeching off others.

LARGE ANIMAL

STANDARD D6

Distinctions: INTIMIDATING, WILD, HUNGRY

Au Naturel: DURABILITY D6, SENSES D8, STRENGTH D8 and/or REFLEXES D8 (choose based on the animal)

SFX: *Dangerous*. Step back the highest die in an attack action pool to add a D6 and step up physical stress inflicted.

SFX: *Natural Fighter*. When inflicting a TRIP or GRAPPLE complications on a target, add a D6 and step up the effect die.

Limit: *Spooked*. Shutdown any Au Naturel power to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die. Activate an opportunity to recover that power.

Specialties: MELEE COMBAT EXPERT, SCOUTING EXPERT

In the wilds of the world, natural predators can pose a threat to the most seasoned of adventurers. Although lions, tigers, and bears prey on living creatures for sustenance, they typically shy away from noisy, well-armed, and intimidating adventurers. Circumstances can force them to do otherwise, but often, savvy adventurers can use non-violent methods to drive off naturally evolved beasts.

INSECTOID HORROR

STANDARD D6

Distinctions: DUMB, HULKING, SUBTERRANEAN

Digging Bug: BURROWING D6, STRENGTH D8, CRUSHING PINCERS D8, MIND CONTROL D8

SFX: *Clobber*. Against a single target, step up or double Digging Bug power. Remove the highest rolling die and use three dice for the total.

SFX: *Confusion*. When inflicting a CONFUSION complication on a target using MIND CONTROL, add a D6 and step up the effect die

Limit: *Confounded Confuser*. Shutdown any Digging Bug power to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die. Activate an opportunity to recover that power.

Specialties: MELEE COMBAT EXPERT, SCOUTING EXPERT

Dwelling in the caves, lairs and dungeons of the world, Insectoid Horrors have a passing resemblance to the creatures of surface, but the twisted powers that created them warped their bodies into something resembling human. They lack basic intelligence, but their multifaceted gaze can *befuddle strong minds and their huge claws are incredibly strong and made for digging. Perhaps these creatures once had a peaceful purpose, but if encountered, adventurers should be prepared for a fight.*

FROSTPEAKS WYVERN

Standard d6

Distinctions: Icy, Reptilian, Screeching

Ice Drake: Fangs d6, Flight d6, Elemental Stinger d8

SFX: *Ice Venom*. If a successful cold complication is inflicted on a target at the start of his turn you may spend a die from the doom pool to step up the complication.

SFX: *Stinger*. When inflicting a Cold complication on a target, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

Limit: *Overheated*. Shutdown any Ice Drake to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. Activate an opportunity to recover that power.

Specialties: Melee Combat Expert, Scouting Expert

Wyverns are flying reptiles resembling dragons, but lacking their legendary cousins' intellect, magic, or breath weapons. Instead, they have poisoned stinger-tails and a terrible disposition. Their poison, when not properly treated, can incapacitate the hardiest foes. Wyvern's size and flying ability makes them prized mounts among some groups, but their darker urges make them more suitable for evil-inclined sentients. This particular specimen is a regional variant found in the icy, elemental-tinged foci at the top of the world.

ELITE MONSTERS (LEVEL DIE D8)

WASP NEST

Elite d8 (Trick)

Distinctions: Fragile, Immobile, In a Hollowed Log

Buzzing Nest: Stingers d6, Durability d8
SFX: *Leave It Alone*! At the start of a round, spend d6 from the doom pool to create a 3d4 Insect Swarm or add 3d4 to an existing one.

Limit: *Inflammable*. Add a d6 to the doom pool or step up the lowest die to step up any stress or complication caused by fire.

HAUNTING WRAITH

Elite d8

Distinctions: Cold Disposition, Life Hating, Between Worlds

Negative Energy Being: Chilling Touch d10, Flight d6, Intangibility d10

SFX: *Energy Drain*. When inflicting a Life Drain complication on a target, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Undead Immunities*. Spend a doom die to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from necromancy and poison.

Limit: *Undead Vulnerabilities*. Step up stress from sunlight and divine magic to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Specialties: Intimidation Expert, Melee Combat Expert

Wraiths are terrible undead whose spirits linger as malignant entities seeking to feed on the life energy of the living. Spiteful and hateful, Wraiths only exist partially in the mortal realm. Their tenuous connection makes their touch painful to the living and affords them protection against normal attacks. They are vulnerable to sunlight and divine magic, as these are antithetical to their tortured existence.

BRIDGE TROLL

Elite d8

Distinctions: Not That Bright, Toll Taker, Horrifying Appearance

Troll Metabolism: Claws d8, Durability d10, Strength d10, Stamina d10

SFX: *Rapid Regeneration*. Spend a doom die to ignore physical stress or trauma unless caused by fire or acid.

Limit: *IT BURNS*. Step up any stress from fire or acid to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. While affected by a fire or acid-based complication, Bridge Troll may not use *Rapid Regeneration* SFX.

Specialties: Intimidation Expert, Melee Combat Expert

Bridge Trolls are large and powerful creatures capable of surviving the most terrible of physical injuries. They also possess an inexplicable and nearly pathological need to guard, maintain, and charge for the use of bridges. Trollish notions of value and fair tolls differ a great deal from most heroes, which can lead to hilarity, bloodshed, or mayhem.

GIANT/HYBRID BEAST

Elite d8

Distinctions: Imposing, Unnatural, Magical Origin

Large and in Charge: Durability d8, Movement power d8, Natural Weapons d10, Senses d10, Enhanced Strength d8 and/or Enhanced Reflexes d8

SFX: *Berserk*. Add a doom die to an attack action. After that action, step back the doom die and return it to the doom pool.

SFX: *Dangerous*. Step back the highest die in an attack action pool to add a d6 and step up physical stress inflicted.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Large and in Charge power die to a pool. Step back each Large and in Charge power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

Limit: *Mind of the Beast*. Step up mental stress from magical attacks to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Specialties: Acrobatics Expert, Melee Combat Expert, Scouting Master

*Mysterious circumstances sometimes cause new breeds of hybrid animals to emerge, such as owlbears, chimeras, and manticores. In other circumstances, mundane animals such as lobsters, wolves, and eagles reach tremendous size. These animals are dangerous, versatile foes and excellent hunters. Choose a movement power (*Swimming, Flight, Speed*, etc.) to best suit the type of animal you wish to represent.*

WERE-BEAST

Elite d8

Distinctions: Cursed, Man or Monster?, Social Stigma

Lycanthropy: Claws d8, Durability d8, Enhanced Senses d10, Shapechanging d8, Strength d8, Stamina d10

SFX: *Beast Recovery*. Before making an action including a Lycanthropy power, spend a doom die the same size or larger than current physical stress to recover it.

SFX: *Mark of the Beast*. Spend a die from the doom pool after making a successful physical attack. Activate Curse of Lycanthropy trick into the action order.

SFX: *Wild Surge*. Step up or double any Lycanthropy power for one action. If the action fails, step back that power. Activate an opportunity to recover that power.

Limit: *Reckless*. If a pool includes a Lycanthropy power, both 1s and 2s on those dice count as opportunities, but only 1s are excluded from being used for totals or effect dice.

Limit: *Silver Bullet*. Step up physical stress from silver to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. Shutdown the *Beast Recovery* SFX.

Specialties: Melee Combat Master, Scouting Expert, Skullduggery Expert

Some poor mortals are cursed to straddle the line between man and beast. The werewolf is the most famous lycanthrope, but reports exist of were-rats, were-foxes, and countless other creatures. Adjust the Power Set accordingly to reflect the nature of the were-beast you wish to use. Please also note the entry Curse of Lycanthropy below to see how the curse can affect heroes.

CURSE OF LYCANTHROPY

Elite d8

Distinctions: Full Moon Frenzy, Half Something Else, Transformative

Beast Curse: Mind Control d10, Magical Resistance d12

SFX: *Call of the Moon*: When inflicting a Lycanthropy complication on a target, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Give in to Your Savage Anger*. If a Lycanthropy complication is pushed beyond d12, you may spend a d12 from the doom pool to permanently turn the hero in a were-creature. See GM suggestions below.

Limit: *Infected*. Only bring Curse of Lycanthropy in play whenever a hero is affected by a Lycanthropy complication or has become a were-beast.

Limit: *Dormant*. While in an area without moons or where magic does not function shutdown Beast Curse. Leave the area to recover Beast Curse.

Specialties: Mystic Master

Lycanthropy is a curse that may cause permanent and potentially irrevocable change. It plays two different roles in a Scene depending on the degree of infection of a hero. When a hero is inflicted with a Lycantrophy complication at d12 or below, the Curse tries to knock the hero out of the Scene by pushing the complication past d12. At that point, the hero loses all sense of higher conscience and can't act. When a hero has become a were-beast, the curse creates Mind Control-based complications to take over the hero's body and turn it into a hostile beast for the rest of the Scene.

Should a hero wish to embrace lycanthropy (as opposed to giving in to the inner beast), they gain a new Power Set. Add it as a new Power Set that with the *Mutually Exclusive* Limit linked to the hero's Background Power Set. They gain all the SFX and Limits that the Were-Beast had, but adjusted to fit a hero instead of a monster.

Curing someone permanently inflicted with Lycanthropy should be the object of a Quest and should involve a Scene targeting a Lycanthropy d12 trait, possibly a hard to destroy one (See Targeting Traits, page 216).

STUBBORN MINOTAUR

Elite d8

Distinctions: Hates Mazes, Strong as an Ox, Stubborn

Bovine Beast: Big Axe d8, Bigger Horns d10, Durability d8, Strength d10

SFX: *Bull Rush*. Step up or double any Bovine Beast power for one action. If the action fails, step back that power. Spend a doom die to recover that power.

SFX: *Horny*. Step back the highest die in an attack action pool to add a d6 and step up physical stress inflicted.

Limit: *Bullheaded*. Change any Bovine Beast power into a complication to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. Activate an opportunity or remove the complication to recover that power.

Specialties: Intimidation Expert, Melee Combat Master

Minotaurs are half-human/half-bull humanoids that lust for conquest. They also have a bad history with mazes. Minotaurs are tough and unrelenting foes. Although often employed as shock troops by evil overlords, Minotaurs are intelligent and capable of reasoning. Should a Minotaur have a reason, they will resort to parlaying over their preferred tactic of violence.

BLOODTHIRSTY OGRE

Elite d8

Distinctions: Bully, Dumb as a Box of Rocks, Unending Hunger

Massive Monster: Big Club d10, Durability d10, Strength d10

SFX: *Bellowing Charge*. Against a single target, step up or double Big Club die. Remove the highest rolling die and use three dice for the total.

SFX: *Ogre Special*. Step back the highest die in an attack action pool to add a d6 and step up physical stress inflicted.

Limit: *Me Too Hungry*. Shutdown any Massive Monster power to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die. Activate an opportunity to recover that power.

Specialties: Intimidation Master, Melee Combat Expert

Ogres respect nothing but physical violence and strength. This often makes them ringleaders and bullies that gather other warlike monsters to them as underlings. Ogres lack the cognitive capacity to carry out well-reasoned attacks or campaigns, but that does not stop them from attacking vulnerable targets. Ogres hit hard, and alongside other monsters to absorb damage and ramp up the doom pool can pose a challenge to the most prepared heroes.

CURSED RUNE

Elite d8

Distinctions: Awfully Intriguing, Ominous Glow, Very Magical

Read Me: Fire Blast d12, Magical Resistance d8, Mind Control d8

SFX: *Boom*! Against multiple targets in an attack action using Fire Blast, for each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Come Closer*. If a successful attack is made with Mind Control, the GM may forego dealing any stress and immediately trigger an attack with Fire Blast.

Limit: *Fine Print*. Fire Blast starts Scene shutdown. Activate when rune is read or when it is targeted by an action.

Specialties: Mystic Master

A calling card of powerful and secretive spellcasters, Cursed Runes preys on the very curiosity that fuels adventurers. Enticing, obviously magical, and laden with perilous energy, Cursed Runes lure unsuspecting victims as close as possible before exploding in a tremendous blast of energy. They also react violently to tampering. Typically, spellcasters leave Cursed Runes with a signature marking or design.

EYE OF THE DEEP SEAS

ELITE D8

Distinctions: ELDEST AMONGST RACES, MASTER OF ILLUSION, UNDERSEA RULER

Deep Horror: INVISIBILITY D8, SORCERY D10, SWIMMING D8, MIND CONTROL D10, TENTACLE D8

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a D6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Illusionist*. When inflicting an ILLUSION complication on a target or creating ILLUSION assets, add a D6 and step up the effect die.

Limit: *Separated from the Source*. A dice pool containing SORCERY cannot be used to inflict physical stress.

Limit: *Water Breathers*. Step up physical stress from lack of breathable water to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die.

Specialties: LORE EXPERT, MYSTIC MASTER, MELEE EXPERT

The Eye of the Deep Seas appears to be a large, tentacled eel. Its mental prowess and need to breathe water keeps it away from the surface. It makes use of illusions and MIND CONTROL *to befuddle, confuse, and control foes. The Eyes of the Deep Seas believes their existence and sentience predates that of all other races and holds all other in contempt. Their ability to dominate foes allows them to turn the odds of battle very quickly, and have agents operating in the surface world.*

LAND SHARK

ELITE D8

Distinctions: SURPRISE SHARK!, PREDATOR, UNIVERSALLY SHUNNED

Malevolent Carnivore: BITE D10, BURROWING D8, DURABILITY D10, LEAPING D8, SENSES D8

SFX: *Berserk*. Add a doom die to an attack action. After that action, step back the doom die and return it to the doom pool.

SFX: *Dangerous*. Step back the highest die in an attack action pool to add a D6 and step up physical stress inflicted.

SFX: *Death from Below*. You may include BURROWING for free alongside BITE if Land Shark is not within sight of its target.

Limit: *Solitary*. While fighting alongside a creature that is not its mate, Land Shark can only use Distinctions as a D4.

Specialties: INTIMIDATION EXPERT, MELEE COMBAT EXPERT

Land Sharks are predators without any shred of natural restraint. They possess an insatiable hunger. They are utterly without reason, and attack regardless of the odds. Land Sharks prey on the weakest foes first, like any predator, but they will not shy away from creatures that ought to intimidate them. Excelling at ambushing unsuspecting food sources that are unfortunate enough to stumble into their territory, Land Sharks must be quickly slain or they decimate civilized regions.

UNDERDARK BRAIN DEVOURER

ELITE D8

Distinctions: ARROGANT, CAVE DWELLER, EATS BRAINS

Horrifying Misanthrope: MIND BLAST D10, MIND CONTROL D10, RESIST MAGIC D10, TELEPATHY D8, SENSES D8, TENTACLES D6

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a D6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Dominate*. If an Underdark Brain Devourer inflicts a MIND CONTROL complication past D12 on a target, the Underdark Brain Devourer chooses its next action and then steps down the complication.

SFX: *Mind Consumption*. Whenever Underdark Brain Devourer causes mental stress to a character step back Underdark Brain Devourer's physical stress.

Limit: *Alien Mind*. Step up mental stress after any Social interaction the Underdark Brain Devourer fails to understand. If you do, add a D6 to the doom pool or step up lowest die.

Specialties: INTIMIDATION EXPERT, MYSTIC MASTER

Deep beneath the earth in a hidden subterranean environment exists a society of dark outerwordly creatures that sustain themselves eating the brains of other creatures. Tall, with the face resembling a tentacled squid, these slimy creatures view all but themselves as expendable. They have no spoken language and rely entirely on their immense mental powers. In combat, they prefer to blast all of their foes with their powerful mind blasts before they eat their stunned prey's brains.

BOUND ELEMENTAL

Elite d8

Distinctions: Contractually Obligated, Highly Specialized, Out of Their Element,

Extraplanar: Durability d8, Elemental Affinity Control d8, Elemental Affinity Blast d10

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Constructs*. When using an Extraplanar power to create assets, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Elemental Affinity*. On a successful reaction using Elemental Affinity Control, convert opponent's effect die into a Power Set stunt or step up a Extraplanar power until used in an action. If opponent's action succeeds, spend a doom die to use this SFX.

Limit: *Elemental Weakness*. Step up any stress from elemental weakness or from Extraplanar-related effects to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Specialties: Lore Expert, Melee Combat Expert, Mystic Master

Elementals are creatures of energy alien to the prime material plane. However, powerful spellcasters can and do contact elementals and bring them to this plane. This can be done against their will, or for a term of service, but, regardless, elementals do not stay indefinitely. When using this monster, choose an energy type for their elemental affinity and narratively sensible energy for their elemental weakness and use them when indicated in the datafile.

BOSS MONSTERS (LEVEL DIE D10)

LUMBERING GIANT

Boss d10

Distinctions: Freaking Huge, Thunderous Voice, Slow as Molasses

Huge-Mongous: Big Freaking Club d12, Durability d10, Long Stride d8, Strength d10

SFX: *Om Nom Nom*. When inflicting a Put in Mouth complication on a target, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Smash*. Step up or double any Huge-Mongous power for one action. If the action fails, step back that power. Spend a doom die to recover that power.

SFX: *The Bigger They Are...* Add a doom die to an attack action. After that action, step back the doom die and return it to the doom pool.

Limit: *...The Harder They Fall*. If a pool includes a Huge-Mongous power, both 1s and 2s on those dice count as opportunities, but only 1s are excluded from being used for totals or effect dice.

Specialties: Intimidation Master, Melee Combat Expert

Giants are massive humanoids. They come in many varieties, but the most common giant looks like an oversized human and behaves like the poorest humanity has to offer. Giants view smaller sentient species as a perfectly reasonable source of nutrition. Giants need to eat a great deal and they are not shy about violently procuring their favorite foods.

EXTRAPLANAR AUTHORITY

Boss d10

Distinctions: Arrogant, Beyond the Ken of Mortals, Slave to Their Nature

Extraplanar: Durability d10, Elemental Affinity Control d10, Elemental Affinity Blast d12, Shapechanging d10, Speed d10

SFX: *Ancient Wisdom*. When in their lair or place of power, any doom dice the GM spends to add to the Extraplanar Authority's dice pool is then stepped down and returned to the doom pool.

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Constructs*. When using an Extraplanar power to create assets, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Elemental Affinity*. On a successful reaction using Elemental Affinity Control, convert opponent's effect die into a Power Set stunt or step up an Extraplanar power until used in an action. If opponent's action succeeds, spend a doom die to use this SFX.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Extraplanar power die to a pool. Step back each Extraplanar power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

Limit: *Elemental Weakness*. Step up any stress from elemental weakness or from Extraplanar-related effects to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die.

Specialties: CRAFTING EXPERT, DIPLOMACY EXPERT, LORE MASTER, MYSTIC MASTER

Extraplanar Authorities represent powerful creatures from other planes such as angels, demons, djinn, efreets, and elementals. A Boss threat level indicates that they typically have a domain or realm in which they are in charge, but they still have to answer to higher authorities. When using this monster, choose an energy type for their elemental affinity and a narratively sensible energy for their elemental weakness and use them when indicated in the game stats. It may also make sense to change their speed for another movement power such as FLIGHT *or* BURROWING.

EYE TYRANT

BOSS D10

Distinctions: GENOCIDAL XENOPHOBE, HORRIFYING, HYPERINTELLIGENT

Eye See You: BITE D8, MAGICAL BLAST D12, DURABILITY D8, FLIGHT D6, NULL MAGIC RAY D12

SFX: *Anti-Magic Cone*. Spend a doom die to remove a magical complication or asset. The doom die must match or be larger than the removed trait.

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a D6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Random Eye Blast*. Remove your largest die from the doom pool. On your next Eye See You attack roll, whenever you roll the maximum result on any die, you may roll another die of equal value and add it to your total.

SFX: *Versatile*. Replace MAGICAL BLAST die with 2D10 or 3D8 on your next roll.

Limit: *Solitary*. While fighting alongside a creature that is not its mate, Eye Tyrant can only use Distinctions as a D4.

Limit: *Ponderous Movement*. When a player characters purchases an opportunity to create a stunt against Eye Tyrant, step up the stunt created and add a D6 to the doom pool or step up any die in the doom pool.

Specialties: INTIMIDATION MASTER, LORE EXPERT, RANGED COMBAT MASTER

Although their origins remain a mystery, the Eye Tyrant's alien appearance suggests that it is not natural. An orb of flesh liberally covered with eyestalks, each of which is capable of a different powerful magical effect, makes them the stuff of nightmares. Eye Tyrants' ability to bring multiple destructive effects to bear at the same time makes them a terror to behold on the battlefield.

TREANT

BOSS D10

Distinctions: ANCIENT, PLANT LIFE, SPIRIT OF NATURE

Elder Vegetation: DURABILITY D10, PLANT CONTROL D12, SENSES D10, STRETCHING D10, STRENGTH D10, STAMINA D12

SFX: *Animate Trees*. When using an Elder Vegetation power to create plant-based assets, add a D6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Entangle*. When inflicting a CONSTRICTED complication on a target, add a D6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Elder Vegetation power die to a pool. Step back each Elder Vegetation power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

SFX: *Superior Armor*. On a successful reaction against a physical action, convert opponent's effect die into an Elder Vegetation stunt or step up an Elder Vegetation power until used in an action. If opponent's action succeeds, spend a doom die to use this SFX.

Limit: *Let's Not Be Hasty*. Step up social stress from any interaction indicating the Treant slow grasp of rapidly changing events.

Limit: *Vegetation*. Step up any stress from plant-specific effects or fire to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die.

Specialties: DIPLOMACY EXPERT, LORE MASTER, MELEE COMBAT EXPERT, MYSTIC EXPERT

Treants are massive, sentient, and mobile trees. However, their unusual ecology and alien valuation of vegetable life can offer cause misunderstandings between Treants and other races. Powerful combatants, Treants are not opposed to peaceful resolution of problems. Often, they come into conflict with heroes when a foolish mortal harms a Treant's grove. In these situations, peace may not always be possible.

ANIMATED STATUE

BOSS D10

Distinctions: FORGED BY MAGIC, INERT MATERIAL, MINDLESS

Animated: DURABILITY D12, HAMMERING FISTS D10, MAGIC RESISTANCE 10, STRENGTH D10

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a D6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Burst*. Against a single target, step up or double HAMMER FISTS die. Remove the highest rolling die and use three dice for the total.

SFX: *Invulnerability*. Spend a doom die to ignore physical stress or trauma unless caused by a D10 or higher magic item.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Animated power die to a pool. Step back each Animated power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

Limit: Vulnerability. Step up physical stress or complications from spells transmuting the Animated Statue's body to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die.

Specialties: MELEE COMBAT EXPERT, INTIMIDATION EXPERT

Animated Statues are created by powerful spellcasters to serve specific functions. Often crafted from clay, iron, stone, or other abundant materials, these monsters have no will but the simple commands their creators give them. They are extraordinarily resilient to all forms of attack and perform their assigned tasks relentlessly. Adventurers have to use a bit of luck and ingenuity to force their way through Animated Statues' incredible toughness and unceasing effort.

GELATINOUS SPHERE

BOSS D10

Distinctions: AMORPHOUS, TRANSPARENT, HIGHLY ACIDIC

Ooze: DURABILITY D10, IMMENSE BULK D12, SHAPESHIFTING D8, STRETCHING D10

SFX: *Absorption*. On a successful reaction against a fire or lightning attack action, convert opponent's effect die into an Ooze stunt or step up an Ooze power until used in an action. If the opponent's action succeeds, spend a doom die to use this SFX.

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a D6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Enveloping*. On a successful reaction against a physical attack action, inflict physical stress with the effect die. Spend a doom die to step it up.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Ooze power die to a pool. Step back each Ooze power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

SFX: *Unleashed*. Step up or double any Ooze power for one action. If the action fails, step back that power. Activate an opportunity to recover that power.

Limit: *Vulnerability*. Step up physical stress or complications from spells curing disease to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die.

Specialties: MELEE COMBAT EXPERT, INTIMIDATION MASTER

Oozes are nominally living creatures that absorb, dissolve, and destroy biological matter by pure instinct. The Gelatinous Sphere is one of the largest and most intimidating of all these entities. Anyone near the Sphere is in terrible danger of being dissolved. Gelatinous Spheres lack the ability to scheme or manipulate, but as they run amok, their presence can disrupt entire regions and be the impetus for political and social upheaval.

COLOSSAL WURM

BOSS D10

Distinctions: BESTIAL INTELLIGENCE, SUBTERRANEAN, WORM

Big Bad Worm: BURROWING D8, POISONOUS BITE D12, DURABILITY D10, SENSES D10, STRENGTH D12, SWIMMING D6

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a D6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Big Bad Worm power die to a pool. Step back each Big Bad Worm power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

SFX: *Poison*. If a successful POISON complication is inflicted on a target at the start of their turn you may spend a die from the doom pool to step up the complication.

SFX: *Swallow Whole*: If you stress a foe out with physical stress from a die that includes BITE, you may spend a die from the doom pool to inflict trauma equal to that die.

SFX: *Virulent*. When inflicting a POISON complication on a target, add a D6 and step up the effect die.

Limit: *Vulnerability*. Step up physical stress or complications from sonic or audible attacks to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die.

Specialties: MELEE COMBAT MASTER, INTIMIDATION MASTER

Colossal Wurms live deep within the earth, churning through rock, dirt, and precious metals with equal vigor. The Colossal Wurm can find nutrition in the stuff of the earth, though it prefers live prey. Acting without malice, these massive creatures can clear out underground tunnels for other races to use, but such places are dangerous with Colossal Wurms looking at those moving in as food.

CHARMING VAMPIRE

BOSS D10

Distinctions: CREATURE OF THE NIGHT, SOPHISTICATED TASTE, SECRET IDENTITY

Blood Fueled: DURABILITY D10, INTANGIBILITY D10, MIND CONTROL D10, SORCERY D10, REFLEXES D8, SPEED D8, CLAWS D10, STRENGTH D8, TELEPATHY D8,

SFX: *Necromantic Creature*. When using CLAWS to inflict a LIFE DRAIN complication on a target, add a D6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Your Blood, My Power*! Whenever Charming Vampire causes physical stress to a character step up a Blood Fueled power until the end of the scene or step down Charming Vampire's physical stress.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Blood Fueled power die to a pool. Step back each Blood Fueled power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

SFX: *Undead Immunities*. Spend a doom die to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from Necromancy and poison.

SFX: *Vampiric Embrace*. Spend a die from the doom pool after making a successful physical attack. Activate Curse of Vampirism into the action order.

Limit: *Need Blood*. Shutdown any Blood Fueled power to step up the lowest die in power.

Limit: *Vampiric Vulnerabilities*. Step up any stress from divine energy, sunlight, stake, garlic, or running water complications to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a D6 doom die.

Specialties: DIPLOMACY MASTER, LORE EXPERT, MELEE COMBAT MASTER, MYSTIC EXPERT

Vampires have centuries of lore and fiction surrounding them. The Vampire presented here assumes many fantasy gaming norms liberally borrowed from classic movies and literature. To customize your vampires to fit a different archetype, consider replacing a Distinction and changing their set of vulnerabilities to things reflecting your preferred vampire myths.

CURSE OF VAMPIRISM

BOSS D10

Distinctions: BLOOD FRENZY, NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS, TRANSFORMATIVE

Blood Mark: MIND CONTROL D12

SFX: *Call for Blood*. When inflicting a VAMPIRIC complication on a target, add a D6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *The Embrace*. If a VAMPIRIC complication is pushed beyond D12, you may spend a D12 from the doom pool to permanently turn the hero into a Vampire. See GM suggestions below.

SFX: *Invulnerability*: Curse of Vampirism can't be the target of any action.

Limit: *Infected*. Only bring Curse of Vampirism in play whenever a hero is affected by a VAMPIRISM complication or has become a Vampire.

Limit: *Dormant*. While in an area blocking Necromantic Magic, shutdown Blood Mark. Leave the area to recover Blood Mark.

Specialties: MYSTIC MASTER

Curse of Vampirism works exactly like the Curse of Lycanthropy. It plays two different roles in a Scene depending on the degree of infection of a hero. When a hero is inflicted with a VAMPIRIC complication at D12 or below, the Curse tries to knock the hero out of the Scene by pushing the complication past D12. At that point, the hero is drained of life force and falls unconscious. When a hero has become a vampire, the curse creates MIND CONTROL-based complications to take over the hero's body and turn it into a hostile foe for the rest of the Scene.

Should a hero wish to embrace vampirism they gain a new Power Set. Add it as a new Power Set with the *Mutually Exclusive* Limit linked to the hero's Background Power Set. The hero should choose new powers that the infecting Vampire possessed with a set of die values equal to the hero's other background choice. They gain all the SFX and Limits that the Vampire had, but adjusted to fit a hero instead of a monster.

Curing someone permanently inflicted with Vampirism should be the object of a Quest and should involve a Scene targeting a Vampirism d12 trait, possibly a hard to destroy one (see "Targeting Traits," page 216).

EPIC MONSTERS (LEVEL DIE D12)

GREAT WYRM DRAGON

Epic d12

Distinctions: Ancient, Immense, Unfazable

Elder Scales: Bite d12, Claw d10, Durability d12, Elemental Affinity Control d10, Elemental Blast d12, Flight d8, Senses d10, Strength d12, Telepathy d10

SFX: *Bite/Claw/Claw*. Against a single target, double Claw dice and include with Bite power. Remove the highest rolling die and use three dice for the total.

SFX: *Breath Weapon*. Against multiple targets, if you include your Elemental Blast, for each additional target add a d8 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Dragon Fear*. Against multiple targets, if you include your Telepathy to create fear-based complications, for each additional target add a d8 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Elemental Immunity*. Spend a doom die to ignore stress, trauma, or complications from elemental affinity.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Elder Scales power die to a pool. Step back each Elder Scales power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

Limit: *Elemental Weakness*. Step up any stress from elemental weakness or from extraplanar-related effects to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Limit: *Recharge*. If you use *Dragon Fear* or *Breath Weapon* SFX and roll any opportunities, shut down that SFX. Recover by spending a die from the doom pool equal to Telepathy die or Elemental Blast die, respectively.

Specialties: Diplomacy Expert, Lore Master, Melee Combat Expert, Mystic Master

Dragons are intelligent foes and will use Breath Weapon *and* Dragon Fear *against groups they feel threatened by. Dragons' motives and natures vary wildly but often dovetail with an element they utilize. When using a dragon, choose an energy type for their elemental affinity and a narratively sensible energy for their elemental weakness and use them when indicated in the datafile. Their immunity and attacks should coincide with their affinity.*

WRATHFUL TITAN

Epic d12

Distinctions: Before There Were Gods..., Larger Than Life, Mercurial

Primordial Powerhouse: Durability d12, Leaping d10, Maul d12, Reflexes d10, Senses d10, Sorcery Supreme d12, Strength d12, Telepathy d10, Titanic Stature d12

SFX: *Maul of the Titans*. Against a single target, step up or double Maul die. Remove the highest rolling die and use three dice for the total.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Primordial Powerhouse power die to a pool. Step back each Primordial Powerhouse power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

SFX: *Intimidating Appearance*. Step back the highest die in an attack action pool to add a d6 and step up Social Stress inflicted.

SFX: *Titanic Pride*. Spend a die from the doom pool to add a die of any Wrathful Titan's stress to a pool including Primordial Powerhouse.

Limit: *Hubris*. Step up social stress from being outsmarted or proven wrong by a mortal to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Once, Titans ruled the cosmos. Now, they have been cast down from heaven. Physically imposing, master spellcasters, and unnaturally beautiful, Titans represent a threat on the battlefield or in a negotiation. Prideful to the extreme, Titans actually perform better when they are under pressure or threatened. The temperament and motivations of each individual Titan are complex and reasoned, but oftentimes escape the understanding of mere mortals.

KRAKEN

Epic d12

Distinctions: Big Fish Big Pond, Tentacular, Terror of the Deep

Deep Horror: Bite d10, Durability d12, Ink Blast d12, Immense Size d12, Strength d12, Swimming d10, Tentacle d12

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Grab*. When inflicting a Grapple complication on a target, add a d6 and step up the effect die.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Deep Horror power die to a pool. Step back each Deep Horror power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

SFX: *Ruler of the Deep*. Doom pool dice spent to create new threats result in double the threats.

Limit: *Clumsy*. If a pool includes a Deep Horror power, both 1s and 2s on those dice count as opportunities, but only 1s are excluded from being used for totals or effect dice.

Specialties: Diplomacy Expert, Intimidation Expert, Lore Master, Melee Combat Master

Krakens are immense, intelligent, and nefarious creatures that live in the deepest recesses of the ocean. They possess considerable strength and can physically dominate virtually anything under sea, but they also have towering intellects that allow them to manipulate and control entire oceans. Typically they keep to the depths, but when they emerge, the Kraken can easily destroy the hardiest of ocean-going vessels. You should create various oceanic threats like sharks and giant octopuses to respond to the Kraken's call.

THE TERROR THAT WALKS

Epic d12

Distinctions: Evil to the Core, Ravenous, World-Eater

Terroresque: Bite d12, Claw d12, Durability d12, Immense Size d12, Strength d12, Telepathy d12

SFX: *Area Attack*. Against multiple targets, for each additional target add a d6 and keep an additional effect die.

SFX: *Deific Regeneration*. Spend a doom die to recover or ignore any form of stress or trauma.

SFX: *Horrifying Aura*. The Terror that Walks always goes first in Scene and attempts to create a Telepathy-based complication as an area attack against all creatures that see it. It then may then take action as normal.

SFX: *Multipower*. Add more than one Terroresque power die to a pool. Step back each Terroresque power die in that pool once for each die beyond the first.

SFX: *Reflective Carapace*. On a successful reaction against a ranged attack action, convert opponent's effect die into a Terroresque stunt or step up a Terroresque power until used in an action. If opponent's action succeeds, spend a doom die to use this SFX.

Limit: *Vulnerability*. Step up stress or complications from sleeping and calming spells to step up the lowest die in the doom pool or add a d6 doom die.

Specialties: Melee Combat Master, Intimidation Master

The Terror that Walks is a creature that thankfully spends most of its time dormant. When it wakes it is a nearly unstoppable killing machine capable of laying waste to entire kingdoms. The longer it hunts, and eats, the greater its power becomes (consider using "Large Scale Threats" on page 235). Only the most powerful of magics, the fabled magic of Wish, can hope to defeat such a beast for good.

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Rosario, John Nichols, John Sussenberger, Jon Mierow, Jordan Raymond, Joseph Barnsley, Josh Fishman, Josh Leavitt, Josh Medin, Joshua Cameron, JP Sugarbroad, Julien Delabre, June Carmody, Justin Cummings, Justin Evans, Justin Schmid, Keith Martin, Keith Pare, Keith Tarrant, Ken Arthur, Ken Hart, Kennon and Elizabeth Bauman, Kerry Harrison, Kevin Carboni, Kevin Chauncey, Kevin Kulp, Kevin McCormick, Kevin Scott, Kirill, Kun, Larry Paull, Legandir, Lester Ward, Loris Gianadda, Luis Velasco, Luke Moran, Mads Halling, Malcolm Coull, Manu Marron, Marc Majcher, Marcus Burggraf, Mario Dongu, Mark, Mark Diaz Truman, Magpie Games, Mark Farias, Mark Green, Mark Leymaster of Grammarye, Mark Miller, Mark W Roy, Mark Widner, Markus Pfeil, Markus Schoenlau, Markus Wagner, Marshall Smith, Martin C. Howard, Martin Wagner, Matt Adams, Matt Coote, Matt Jett, Matt Schillinger, Matt Wetherbee, Matthew Clarke, Matthew D. Gandy, Mauro Ghibaudo, Max Kaehn, Maxwell Thiemens, Megan O’Malley, Michael, Michael Andrew Reed, Michael Cambata, Michael Emanuel, Michael Grady, Michael Hertling, Michael Hill, Michael Huven-Moore, Michael Johnson, Michael Kosteva, Michael ‘Minder’ Riabov, Michael Platt, Michael Ramnarine, Michael Schulz, Michael Woodcock, Mikael Andersson, Mikael Dahl, Mikael Vikström, Mike D., Mike Jones, Mike Lafferty, Mike Linke, Mike Olson, Mike Sugarbaker+, Mike Thompson, Mikhail Bonch-Osmolovskiy, Miklos Pomper, Miles Gaborit, Miles Nerini, Minheack Choi, Morgan Ellis, Myles Corcoran, Nat “woodelf” Barmore, Nate Gorham, Nate Miller, Nathan Bruinooge, Nathan Duby, Nathan Panke, Nathan Turner, Nathaniel Egan, Neil C Ford, Neil Gow, Neil Smith, Nick Davis, Nick Riggs, Nick Warcholak, Noah Lockwood, Noam Rosen, Nolan Segrest, Olav Müller, Oliver Korpilla, Olivier Darles, Olivier Murith, Ollie Gross, Osye E. Pritchett III, P. J. Hightower, Pablo Doba, Pablo Iglesias, Pablo Palacios, Paolo Cecchetto, Pascal “Plageman” Pflugfelder, Pat Estes, Patrice Hédé, Patrick O’Duffy, Paul Bendall, Paul Byers, Paul C. Cook, Paul D. Storrie, Paul Drussel, Paul Fiero, Paul Mansfield, Paul Stefko, Paul Truman, Paul Wilson, Pavel Zhukov, Pedro Leone, Perry Snow, Pete Griffith, Peter Blake, Phil Chandler, Phillip Bailey, Pierre Gavard-Colenny, PiHalbe, PK Sullivan, R2R, Rafe Ball, Raja Doake, Ralf Wagner, Ralph Mazza, Randy Hurlburt, Raven Walker, Ray Brooks, Ray Chiang, Ray Nolan, Renato Ramonda, Reverance Pavane, Ricardo Tavares, Richard Almaraz, Richard Hirsch, Richard J Rogers, Richard

Morris, Richard Schwerdtfeger, Rick Ferraro, Rick Hair, Rick Jones, Rob Collingwood, Rob Hanz, Rob Plante, Rob Tillotson, Rob Voss, Rob Wieland, Robby Anderson, Robert Biskin, Robert Clayton Wyatt, Robert Daines, Robert G. Male, Robert Kern, Robert Nolan, Robert Schulz, Robert Stehwien, Robert van Wijk, Robert W. Calfee, Roger Gray, Roman, Ron Frazier, Ron Müller, Ron Roberts, Ron Sago, Rose Bailey, Rowan Cota, Roy of the RooSackGamers, Ruben Smith-Zempel, Ryan Lee, Ryven Cedrylle, Sam Chupp, Sam Hock, Sam Roberts, Samuel Steinbock-Pratt, Scott Boehmer, Scott R. Hall, Scott Schmitt, Scott Wachter, Sean Curtin, Sean Nicolson, Sebastian Dietz, Serin Hale, Seth A. Roby, Seth and Rachael Blevins, Seth Johnson, Severian, Shan Lewis, Shane Harsch, Shane Mclean, Shannon "@rycaut" Clark, Shawn Lamb, Silent, Silvio Herrera Gea, Simon Withers, SKINer, Sophia Brandt, Stephen Figgins, Sterling Bates, Steve Darlington, Steve Furtwangler, Steve Ironside, Steve Kunec, Steve Moore, Steve T, Steven Robert, Stuart Dean, Susan Davis, Sy Labthavikul, T. Campbell, T.W.Wombat, Taelsin, tavernbman, Terry RW Whisenant "texaspoet", The Encaffeinated ONE, Theo, Thom Kiraly, Thomas Clegg, Thomas Deeny, Thomas Ryan, Thomas Zuliani, ThuleX, Tim Jensen and Willow Palecek, TJ Gile, Tobie and Rocky, Todd Roy, Tom "The Monster" Hoefle, Tom McCarthy, Tony Hoyt, Tony Love, Tony Pi, Topher Gerkey, Tore "Hafwit" Nielsen, Tracy Barnett - Sand & Steam Productions, Travis Bryant, Trip the Space Parasite, Tristan Coulson, ushamaru, Ville Makkonen, Vince "digiconda" Arebalo, Virgilio Benavides H., Warren Sistrom, Wayne Sisson, Wesley Cole, Xavier Aubuchon-Mendoza, xiangh, Yehuda Halfon, Yoshi Creelman, Z Pavic, Zalzator, Zippy Schindler

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Aaron Bandstra, Aaron Coover, Aaron Paul, Adam Barnum, Adam Boisvert, Adam Dean, Adam Easterday, Adam Ford, Adam Hegemier, Adam Hennebeck, Adam Longley, Adam Muszkiewicz, Adam Oldershaw, Adam Rajski, Adam Surber, Aidan Sullivan, Alan jackson, Albert Gonzalez, Alden Strock, Alex Greenfeld, Alexander Graefe, Alexandre Coscia, Ami Harper, Amy Tichy, Andre Braghini Ramalho, Andre Canivet, Andres Ramirez, Andrew Cummings, Andrew Gatlin, Andrew Hauge, Andrew Rosenheim, Andrew Ross, Andrew S Androwick Jr., Andy Eaton, Angel Brian, Anthony Indurante, Anthony M Franchini, Antoine Boegli, Antoine Gonzalez, Aragorn Weinberger, Ariel Pereira, Arthur McMahon, Axel GOTTELAND, Beal Jeremie, Benjamin Davis, Benjamin R Menard, Bez Bezson, Bill Kokal, Bill White, Bjorn Sigurdson, Blake Hutchins, Bo Williams, Bob Fanelli, Bob Hanks, Bourcy Mark, Boutigny Guillaume, Brandon Brylawski, Brendan Conway, Brennan Dawson, Brennan O'Keefe, Bret Anderson, Brian Allred, Brian Kreuzinger, Brian O'Carroll, Brian Patterson, Brian Rock, Bruce Turner, Bruno Pereira, Bryan Hilburn, Bryce Perry, Calaway Rohloff, Caleb Davis, Caleb Gamble, Calvin Chow, Cameron Corniuk, Carl Gilchrist, Cassandre Lee, Cédric Ferrand, César Luz David, Chad A. Crayton, Charles DeVault, Charles Little, Charles Paradis, Charlie White , Che, Chris Allen, Chris Allison, Chris Challacombe, Chris Coates, Chris Czerniak, Chris Groff, Chris Lackey, Chris Moore, Christian Beier, Christian Nord, Christian Theriault, Christopher Coulter, Christopher Cowger, Christopher Crossley, Christopher Fong, Christopher Olson, Christopher Scott, Christopher Tavares, Christopher W. Reynolds, Christy Everette, Claes Florvik, Clayton Wick, Clem Powell, Colin Matter, Colin Peacock, Connor Alexander, Courtney McDowell, Craig Duffy, Craig Judd, Craig Oxbrow, Craig Payne, Craig Slee, Curtis Hay, Curtis Hooper, Dan Bacon, Dan Behlings, Dan Luxenberg, Daniel Fidelman, Daniel Gonzalez da Costa Campos, Daniel Ley, Daniel Outhier, Daniel Rides, Daniel Stack, Darrel Hutchins, Darrell L. Sisson, Darren Bulmer, Dave Morgans, Dave Shramek, David A Hill Jr, David Borne, David Campbell, David Farcus, David Gallo, David Grey, David Lockwood, David Miessler-Kubanek, David Sherrick, David Silberstein, David Stern, David Sullivan, David W. Bowers, David Wendt, David Wilson Brown, Dean Gilbert, Declan Feeney, Dennis Chapman, Dennis M Twigg, Devon Kelley, Douglas Bailey, Douglas Raxworthy, Doyce Testerman, Dr. Matthew R Broome, Dustin Curtis, Dustin Rector, Dylan Boates, Ed Oviedo, Edouard Contesse, Edward Brodie, Edward Lopez, Elmer Tucker, Eric Brenders, Eric Brouillet, Eric Coates, Eric Franklin, Eric L. Anderson, Eric Lohmeier, Eric Paquette, Erik Menard, Estevan Garcia, Evan Franke, Ewen Cluney, Felipe Augusto Lopes Mascarenhas, Florian Dufour, Forrest Franks, Francis Dickinson, Francis Helie, Franck Bouvot, Franck Vidal, Francois Jauvin, Frank Jarome, Franko Francevich, Fred Hicks, Garrett Rooney, George Pitre, George Wilcox, Ghislain Morel, Gilbert Isla, Glynn Butler , Grant Davis, Greg Leatherman , Greg Roy, Gregory Bowes, Guillaume Branquart, Guillaume Carré, H. M. Lybarger, Hamish Liston, Hans-Joachim Maier, Håvard Krugerud, Heath Row, Henning Pfeiffer, Henrik Collin, Henry A Driskill, Herman Duyker, Holly Page, Ian Shannon, Igor Toscano de Almeida, Ingo Beyer, Irven Keppen, Jack Gulick, Jack Kessler, Jack Norris, Jake Fitch, James Ballard, James Barlow, James Bowman, James Carpio, James Cunningham, James Dawsey, James Hardie, James John, James Miller, James P Sauers III, James Priebnow, James Ross, James Rouse, James Smith, Janne Korhonen, Jason Breti, Jason Childs, Jason Corley, Jason Dettman, Jason Flowers, Jason Gagnon, Jason Marks, Jason Pasch, Jason Wilson, Jean Fridici, Jeb Boyt, Jeff Johnston, Jeff Pamenter, Jeffrey Fuller, Jeffrey Wikstrom, Jennifer Fuss, Jeph Lewis, Jere Manninen, Jeremiah Ganner, Jeremiah McCoy, Jeremy Forbing, Jeremy Friesen, Jeremy Handler, Jeremy Kostiew, Jeremy Morgan, Jeremy Morris, Jeremy Puckett, Jeremy Tidwell, Jerome Isnard, Jerome Larre, Jerry Ha, Jerry L. Meyer Jr. CWT, Jesse Burneko, Jesse Pudewell, Jesse Rusin, Jesse Thacker, Jim Sensenbrenner, Jim Sweeney, Jimmy Newell, Jody Kline, Joe Beason, Joe Cohen, Joe Connelly, Joe Salisbury, Joerg Bours, John A McGuckin, John

Carrington, John Donoghue, John Gorsuch, John Kelbaugh, John M. Campbell, John Mehrholz, John Morgan, John O’Brien, John Patrick, John Perich, John Portley, John Santin, John W Taylor, Jon Osborne, Jon Robertson, Jonathan Abbott, Jonathan Davis, Jonathan Desilets, Jonathan Grimm, Jonathan Holding, Jonathan Lavallee, Jonathan Lee, Jonathan M. Thompson, Jonathan Simms, Jonathon Mohon, José Luis Nunes Porfírio, Jose Miguel Gimenez Garcia, Joseph Harney, Joseph Le May, Joseph Provenzano, Josh Albritton, Josh Drobina, Josh Mannon, Josh Rensch, Josh S Pearce, Joshua Gillis, Joshua James Gervais, Joshua Kronengold, JT Huber, Judie Cooper, Julien Rothwiller, Justin Melton, Justin Smith, Karl Sackett, Kate Kirby, Keith E. Cripe, Lelly van Campen, Kevin Cook, Kevin J. Maroney, Kevin Mowery, Kim Miller, Kirk Foote, Kirt Dankmyer, Kurt McMahon, Kurt Rauscher, Kyle Varneke, Lars Erik Larsen, Leath Sheales, Lee Davis, Leif Erik Furmyr, Leigh Johnson, Leonard Balsera, Leray-Bontemps Charles, Les Simpson, Liam Collins, Liam Jacobs, Lillian Cohen-Moore, Lisandro Nieva, Logan Bonner, Lukas Myhan, Luke Meyer, M. P. O’Sullivan, Marcos Bolton, Marcus Alebrand, Mark Argent, Mark Crump, Mark Delsing, Mark Somogyi, Mark Sponholtz, Mark Woolley, Marshall Scott Veach, Martin Deppe, Mathieu Miron, Matt Blair, Matt Doidge, Matt Dukes, Matt Petruzzelli, Matt Sheridan, Matt Shoemaker, Matthew Edwards, Matthew McFarland, Matthew Miller, Matthew Newby, Matthew Orwig, Matthew Sullivan-Barrett, Matthew Wiser, Maxwell Heath, Megan Douros, Mendel Schmiedekamp, Michael, Michael Anderson, Michael Bowman, Michael Bristol, Michael Hasko, Michael Hughes , Michael Lord, Michael Mattei, Michael McDowell, Michael Ostrokol, Michael Schloss, Michael Thompson, Michael White, Michael Wight, Mike Musteric, Mike Selinker, Mike Shea, Moreau Emmanuel, Morgan Stinson, Morgan Weeks, Nathan Dowdell, Neal Dalton, Neale Carter, Nestor D. Rodriguez, Nicholas Palmer, Nick Bate, Nick Keyuravong, Nicolas Laden, Niles Smith, Oh Seung Han, Oliver Graf, Orion Cooper, Paillet Olivier, Panagiotis Grigorakakis, Paride Papadia, Pat Bellavance, Patrick Clapp, Patrick Cox, Patrick Gamblin, Patrick Odell, Patrick O’Shea, Paul Catalano, Paul Cooper, Paul Nielsen, Paul Saldarriaga, Paul Weimer, Perrot Claude-Arnaud, Peter Hurley, Peter Lamson, Peter Perkins, Philippe Marichal, Phillip Lewis, Quinn Murphy, Rafael Carvalho Ferreira, Rafael Ortiz, Rafael Rocha, Ralph Dukes, Randall Wright, Raun Sedlock, Reed Little, Reed Zesiger, Renam Philippi Antunes, Ricardo Signes, Rich Palij, Rich Wilcox, Richard N. Ingram, Richard Plemons, Richard Steinfeldt, Rick Neal, Rishi Agrawal, Rob Deobald, Rob Donoghue, Rob Justice, Rob Ritchie, Robert Durand, Robert Ferency-Viars, Robert Harrison, Robin Farndon, Roderick Edwards, Romeo Capriotti, Ron Beck, Ronald Nealy, Ross Ramsay, Rouxel Gaetan, Rukesh Korde, Russell Hoyle , Ryan Percival, Ryan Thomas Goodman, Sacha Clayton, Sam Gorton, Sam Takara, Samwise Crider, Santiago Mendez, Sarah Toney, Sarah Williams, Scott Acker, Scott Alvarado, Scott Anderson, Scott Carter, Scott Galliand, Scott Raby, Scott Rehm, Scott Smith, Sean Butler, Sean DeLap, Sean Gore, Sean M Abbey, Sean M Dunstan, Seth Clayton, Seth Hartley, Shane Gregory, Shane Phillips, Shawn Craig, Shawn Koch, Shawn M Schmitting, Shawn P Ausherman, Shawn Penrod, Shawn Ploeger, Shelton Windham, Shoshana Kessock, Simon Jones, Simon Sangpukdee, Stacie Winters, Stan Mackie, Stan Shinn, Stefan Behrendt, Stefan Ohrmann, Stephen Esdale, Stephen Holder, Stephen Hood, Sterz Sebastian, Steve Jakoubovitch, Steve Lord, Steve White, Steven Carroll, Steven Clark, Steven Douglas Warble, Steven K. Watkins, Steven Marsh, Stirling Headridge, Strahinja Acimovic, Stuart Broz, Svend Andersen, T. Rob Brown, Tablesaw Tablesawsen, Tadeusz Cantwell, Ted Childers, Ted LeBeau, Teresa Oswald, Terrell Scoggins, Thiago Goncalves, Thomas Bagley, Thomas Kollman, Thomas Ladegard, Thomas Lullier, Thomas Reynolds, Thomas Sias, Tim Carroll, Tim Everson, Tim Rudolph, Timothy Rodriguez, Tom Cadorette, Tom Lommel, Toshihiko Kambayashi, Tracey Michienzi, Trampas Whiteman, Travis Stout, Trent Boyd, Troy Pichelman, Ulf Andersson, Valentine, Vasco A. Brown, Vincent Furstenberger, Wade Tripp, Walter F. Croft, Wayne Wyant, Wendy Kuehr-McLaren, Will Goring, Will Johnson, Willenberg Computersysteme, William Beaver , William Curtis, William K Taylor, Xander Guzman, Yragaël Malbos, Zachery Gaskins, Zemerli Eric

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Abel Menechella, Adam Caverly, Adam J. Solis, Adam Lawrence, AJ Real, Alan Dumling, Alan Twigg, Alexander Hawson, Alexander R. Corbett, Alexey Kreshchuk, Allan Morstein, Amy Sutedja, Andrew Crosher, Andrew Rogers, Andrew Wilson, Andy Leighton, Angela Hanie, Anna Short, Anne Wiesner, Anon Adderlan, Anthony Deming, Antoine Lemay-Joly, Arnaud Ball, Attiqah, Austin F. Frank, Barac Wiley, Ben McKenzie, Bernd Pressler , Bill Keller, Bobby Walker, Bowie W Sessions, Brett Achorn, Brett Ritter, Brett Veasey, Brian Ballsun-Stanton, Brian Dorion, Bruce Laing, Caoimhe Snow, Carlos, Rivera, Cedric Jeanneret, Charles Myers, Chris Colbath, Chris Collins, Chris Fedak, Christopher Chisholm, Christopher Hatty, Christopher Tatro, Claes Svensson, Clay Lewis, Coiffier Christophe, Corey Reid, Dan Martland, Dan Rael, Daniel Stanke, Daniel Steadman, Daniel Westheide, Daniel Worthington, Darren Hansen, David Chart, David Lystlund, David Paul, David Scharf, David Terhune, Derek Cardwell, Derek Guder, Donald Roberts, Drew Wendorf, Elizabeth Verbraak, Elmeri Seppänen, Eric Greve, Flavio Mortarino, Frederic Cloutier, Frost Holliman, Gareth Willcock, Gareth Williams, George Heintzelman, Gina Ricker, Grady Victory, Grant Chen, Greg Matyola, Håkon Gaut, Halsted Larsson, Heather Johnson, Henrique Cabral de Souza Rodrigues, Ignacio Rodríguez Chaves, Imad’eddine Gael, J. Quincy Sperber, Jade Meskill, Jahmal Brown, James Herbert, James Husum, Jamie Reid, Jason Anderson, Jason Blalock, Jason

Pitre, Jean-Christophe Cubertafon, Jeroen van Lier, Jim Henley, Jody Smet, John Benner Jr, John Eddy, John Hoyland, John Rogers, John Rudd, Jon Edwards, Jon Thorvaldson, Jonathan Carr, Jonathan Korman, Joseph Kennedy, Joshua Ramsey, Jyan Delamotte, Keith Baker, Ken Finlayson, Kevin Schantz, Kevin Weaver, Kris Holland, Kristopher Pring, Kyle Miller, Lee Jae Hak, Leo Wilson, Lyal Clough, M. Sean Molley, Marian L. Hilliard, Matt Rock, Matteo Cesari, Matthew Jackson, Matthew Perez, Matthew Petty, Matthew Rietman, MC1 Donald P. Rule, USN(FR), Michael Curry, Mike Browne, Mike Fontana, Nathan Henderson, Nathan Smela, Nathaniel Lawrence, Nicholas Walker, Nicole Mezzasalma, Nolan J Hitchcock, Nora Last, Owen Milton, Patrick Brewer, Patrick Chapdelaine, Patrick Chapman, Patrick Ley, Paul Arezina, Paul Gilbertson, Paul Watson, Peter Brunton, Peter Meilinger, Petri Leinonen, Philip Adler, Philippe Debar, Raymond Beckmann, Rebecca Plush , Richard Greene, Richard Stubbs, Robby Reissig, Robert Bassett, Robert Bretz, Robert Sanderson, Roger Eberhart, Ross, Sage LaTorra, Sam Wong, Satu Nikander, Scott Hamilton, Scott Shupe, Sean Blakey, Simon Ward, Stephanie Turner, Stephen DiCocco, Stephen Rider, Steven Ness, Stew Wilson, Thaddeus Ryker, Theodore T. Posuniak, Timothy Bannock, Travis Johnsen, Tristan Jusola-Sanders, Triston Thorpe, Turner, Val Beyer, Val Ruza, William Huggins, William Koch, William Lee, Zachary Donovan

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Chris Haddad, Danny at the Compleat Strategist, Jason Cox, Joseph Blomquist, Kairam Ahmed Hamdan, Mark Garbrick, Michael Weinand, Philip Campbell, Sphärenmeisters Spiele, Trollune, Wendy Claypool