FATE
SYSTEM TOOLKIT ™

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RULES, GLORIOUS RULES!

The **Fate Core** system is flexible, hackable, and adaptable to any world you can dream up. This **Fate System Toolkit** is packed with system ideas to bring those dreams to life.

Learn how to hack the skill system to better suit your terraforming campaign. Get ideas on how to create races and societies for your woodland elves, subterranean aliens, or afterlife police force. Customize our magic starters to create your own system, and use our gadget starters to bring your gear to life (only not literally).

Whatever genre you're gaming, you'll find a wide array of customizable concepts and optional rules in the **Fate System Toolkit** to take your campaign to the next level.
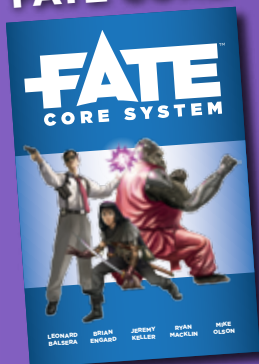
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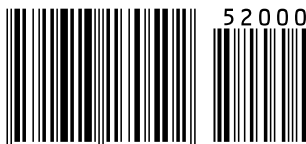
FOR USE WITH **FATE CORE**

FATE
CORE SYSTEM

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FATE
CORE SYSTEM

FATE™

SYSTEM TOOLKIT

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FOREWORD: "A" NOT "THE"

This book is *a* Fate System Toolkit. It is not *The* Fate System Toolkit.

What do we mean by that?

This Fate System Toolkit began as a stretch goal for the Fate Core System kickstarter. Originally, it was only the magic system section of the book. As the funding for that campaign grew, so did this book. And close on its heels, far outstripping the capacity of this book, came the requests for what *should* go into this book.

It was damn flattering to think folks thought we could take on all those topics. Impossible, mind you—but damn flattering.

That said, we knew we had to fulfill the *spirit* of all those requests, even if we couldn't match the *letter* of them. And so, expanding outward from our magic toolkit, is this Fate System Toolkit.

True to its name, our Toolkit is not a device that does exactly what you want right out of the box. But it is a collection of ideas, approaches, and other fiddly bits that can get you there. To put it another way, when folks asked us for the moon, we decided instead to offer them a variety of methods for building rockets. (We build rockets now. Rockets are cool.)

When looking for the right fit for your game, don't get suckered by appearances. Say something in here talks about handling giant monsters as maps or as collections of characters, rather than as a single "scaled-up" character. While it says on the tin "this here's a method for handling giant monsters," that's just how the idea was packaged. It *also* offers you a method for how to handle "boss fights" in general. Or a strafing run against an orbital death satellite. Similarly, ways to take on the topic of superheroes in your Fate game are covered by a variety of concepts and sections within this book—only one of which is labeled "superheroes."

This is not to say that every tool out there could be in here, but there are enough ideas and hard surfaces to push off of that you're sure to find something that gets you going. And when you do find yourself with a new idea, *please* don't keep it to yourself. There are many places where great, excited conversation is happening *right now* that could use your voice and ideas, whether it's the FateRPG Yahoo Group, the Fate Core community on Google+, the tabletop gaming forums on RPG.net and RPGGeek, or elsewhere online or off. Fate's audience is thousands strong and full of smart people, a whole passel of whom are way smarter than the folks who made Fate in the first place.

More than anything, this Fate System Toolkit is a training guide for your brain. In this kit you'll find dozens of ways to add something new, something else, something different to your Fate Core game. In a few cases it will be exactly the right thing. In the vast majority of circumstances, it will be a starting point for further tinkering. Roll up your sleeves. You've got a master collection of tools to work with here. Now let's see what you can make with them!

— Fred Hicks
July 15, 2013
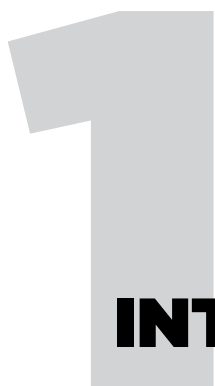
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INTRODUCTION

WHY WE'RE HERE

Think of Fate as a machine, built to produce a specific outcome. Like many machines, Fate can be adjusted to produce other outcomes; it contains a system of dials, a network of rules that can be adjusted up, down, and to the sides to achieve the result you're looking for. It's robust, flexible, and—most importantly—hackable.

What does that mean, that it's "hackable?" First, it means that you can change rules. This is true of any game—if you're playing Monopoly, allowing players to collect money when they land on Free Parking would be a hack. It changes the nature of the game's economy and makes the game a little more forgiving, so it's a little harder to lose the game early due to lack of funds. Fate is like that—it can be altered. Do you want the GM to have more fate points? The players to have higher skills? Want to change the way aspects work? All of these things are possible with a little effort on your part.

The second part of being hackable is that Fate doesn't resist your changes. In fact, it's adaptable enough that it can take smaller changes in stride without anything breaking, and even major changes require only a few tweaks to other parts of the game. It's not just that you *can* hack Fate, it's that Fate is *easy* to hack—if you're willing to do the work.

To get the feel you want, some changes may be necessary. Fate is a system of dials, and Fate Core presents default settings for all of those dials. Maybe those settings aren't right for your game. Maybe you need to adjust some of those dials or even add new ones, but you're not sure what changes to make, or what other parts of the system those changes might impact. Don't worry—that's why we're here.

The Fate System Toolkit is a book about how to hack Fate, what happens when you do, and what you can do when you start monkeying with the way stuff works. If that sounds like your kind of thing, then this book is for you.

RULES VS. RULINGS

Sure, you *can* hack Fate, but should you? Sometimes the answer is yes. If you're playing a supers game, you'll need to add some super powers. If you're playing a game about street racing, it might be good to have a few rules regarding vehicles.

Sometimes you don't need a new rule, though. Sometimes all you need is a *ruling*.

A ruling is a decision that your playgroup makes—usually guided by the GM—about how something works in your game. Rulings cover special cases that aren't explicitly covered by the rules of the game, cases that require some interpretation. A new *rule*, on the other hand, is a change to one or more of the sub-systems within the game, or the addition of a new one. Where a ruling is an interpretation of how the game works, a new rule is a change to how the game works.

For example, when you tell a player that his character can't take that long-range sniper shot because the boat he's on is bobbing up and down too much, you're making a ruling. When you explicitly state that *no one* can make long-range sniper shots from a boat, you're adding a rule. See the difference? One affects the current situation and may have ramifications later on, the other affects all such situations.

So when do you use one or the other? Use a new rule if you're addressing something that comes up a lot. Whether you're finding something problematic or you want to be able to do something new, if it happens a lot, it's often a good case for a rule. Use a ruling if you're not sure a situation will come up again, or if you think it'll be rare.

If you make a new rule for every situation, you'll wind up with so many rules that you can't keep track of them all. If you make rulings for the edge cases, on the other hand, you're freer to change them later. Sure, you can change a rule later, but some players will call foul on this—and rightly so! Worse, you make your rules even harder to remember and keep track of, especially if you're changing them all the time.

Here's the secret—rulings can *become* rules. If you make a ruling about sniper shots on boats, and you find that situation comes up again and again, turn it into a rule. If you've made a ruling multiple times, your players will probably remember it, so there's less chance of a rule that just gets forgotten.

THE BRONZE RULE

There's one more thing you should ask yourself before you make an entirely new rule for something—can I represent this with the Bronze Rule (Fate Core, page 270)?

In Fate, you can treat pretty much anything as if it were a character. Your gun? Sure. The storm outside? Absolutely. The scene itself? Why not? You can give anything aspects, skills, stunts, and stress boxes, and here's the thing that makes this technique really cool—they don't have to be the same ones the PCs get. It doesn't make sense for the storm outside to have Fight and Physique, but what about Cold and Sleet? Your gun doesn't need a physical or mental stress track, but what about an ammo stress track? And scenes already have aspects all over the place!

If you can represent a new thing as a character, it's typically easier to do that than to create a new rule out of whole cloth. Not *everything* works this way, and there are some things you might not want to represent this way, but it's a powerful tool that you can apply to a wide variety of situations.

There's another extension of this technique—new rules for characters can be represented using the existing components of a character. You can represent magic through skills, super powers using aspects or stunts, and being corrupted by an ancient and seductive force with a stress track.

2 ASPECTS

ASPECTS

Aspects are what make FATE *go*. They're the clearest, most interesting method for describing who your character is, and they form the basis of the fate point economy. Invoking an aspect gives you a certain amount of control over your destiny, a way to mitigate the caprice of the dice. Compels are the GM's best friend when it comes to creating story and situation, injecting drama into a scene, or just plain throwing a wrench into the players' plans.

FATE CORE gives you the basic ways to use aspects and, for most groups, those will be enough. If you're looking to squeeze a little more out of your aspects, crank up the complexity, or just do something different, read on.

Invoking for Effect

FATE CORE talks a little bit about this concept, explaining that what was previously known as "invoking for effect" is just a fancy compel. That's true, but maybe that's not *all* it means to invoke for effect.

When you invoke for effect, you're spending a fate point—or a free invocation—to create a specifically defined mechanical effect, something other than what a typical aspect is capable of. When you create an aspect, look at it and decide whether or not it needs a special effect attached to it. Maybe your earth mage can invoke **One with the Earth** to avoid falling down or being moved against his will, or maybe your psychic detective can invoke **Mental Eavesdropper** to read someone's surface thoughts.

Mechanically, an aspect effect should be worth the fate point you're spending—the equivalent to two shifts' worth of potency, just like any other effect of invoking an aspect. Aspect effects should *do* something, like in the examples above, rather than provide a static bonus. A regular aspect invocation already provides a bonus, so you don't need a special effect that does that, too. An aspect effect is a bit like having an extra rules-exception stunt that you always have to pay for, both in terms of what the effect can accomplish and the amount of complexity it adds to your character.

HOW MANY EFFECTS?

Speaking of character complexity, GMs need to decide how many of these effects each player character gets. The simplest way to use this rule is to allow each player to add a special effect to her high concept, since that's the aspect that's most likely to be big and character-defining. You can give PCs more aspect effects, but give them too many and it's like having too many stunts—they're not all going to get used and the volume of choices can lead to analysis paralysis.

NPCs can have aspect effects too, but it's best to give them only to your main NPCs and *maybe* a really important supporting NPC.

In both cases, it's best to limit the number of aspect effects per character to one or two at most.

In terms of cost, it's okay for PCs to have one or even two of these effects for free. They're on par with a normal invocation in terms of power, and they're more situational so they're less likely to be used often. GMs, more than that and you're within your rights to ask PCs to spend refresh on additional effects.

Aspect: *Always Armed*

Effect: Spend a fate point to reveal a small, concealable weapon—like a knife or a holdout pistol—secreted away on your person somewhere, even if you've recently been disarmed.

Aspect: *Ninja of the Serpent Clan*

Effect: Spend a fate point to vanish from sight, even if people are looking at you. This gives you justification to make a Stealth roll to hide.

Aspect: *Sharp-Eyed Elvish Scout*

Effect: Spend a fate point to be able to see distant things—up to a mile away—clearly and in great detail, even at night.

Scaled Invocation

When you invoke an aspect, it provides you with a +2 bonus or a reroll. This is fine most of the time, but it provides no mechanical advantage for invoking aspects that apply particularly well to a situation, nor does it provide any disincentive for invoking aspects that apply only tenuously. Another option is scaled invocation.

Scaled invocation divides aspects into three categories—tenuous invocations, relevant invocations, and perfect invocations.

Tenuous invocations only barely apply to the situation at hand, like invoking *Strong Like Bull* in a drinking contest or using a *Pile of Garbage* to break your fall from a second-story window. If an invocation is tenuous, you can only use it for a reroll. This means you'll never get to use it to increase your roll beyond what you'd be able to roll on the dice, but you can use it to mitigate a truly disastrous roll. It also means that multiple tenuous invocations aren't usually all that useful.

When you make a **relevant invocation**, you're invoking something that clearly applies to the current situation without requiring too much justification. Maybe you're using *Fastest Gun in the West* in a gunfight, or maybe you're hiding behind a *Concrete Wall* for cover. It gives you exactly what an invocation normally would—a +2 or a reroll.

A **perfect invocation** is one that makes everyone say "Awesome!" or smile and nod enthusiastically when you announce it. It's perfectly suited to the situation, clearly the right choice in that instance. There's little else that might motivate your character as strongly as invoking *Udru Khai Killed My Family* when you're trying to tackle him as he's getting away. When you invoke a perfect aspect, you *automatically succeed* on your action, no roll necessary. If you invoke after the roll, just ignore your roll. If you need to know how many shifts you generated, assume you generated 1. This *does* mean you can invoke a second aspect to succeed with style, if it's relevant.

The exception here is an attack. When you invoke a perfect aspect on an attack, you don't have to roll. Instead, your attack is set at your skill rating plus 3. Thus, if you were attacking with your Good (+3) Fight and invoked a perfect aspect, your effort would be a Fantastic (+6), which your opponent can then defend against. If you've already rolled, and invoking a perfect aspect would get you a *better* result, take your result and add 1 to it.

Detonating Situation Aspects

Some situation aspects imply destructibility or finite use, such as *Pallet of Propane Tanks* or *Rotted Support Columns*. They can have an effect on the narrative but not necessarily a mechanical effect. If you'd like such aspects to be mechanically distinct from aspects like *Inky Darkness* or *Cover Everywhere*, you can allow PCs to detonate these situation aspects.

When a player detonates a situation aspect, he declares his intent to do so and explains how he's using that aspect such that no one will be able to use it again. If he can do this to everyone's satisfaction, he gets to invoke the aspect once for free.

Once he's done invoking the aspect, it goes away and the situation changes for the worse—or at least the more dangerous. Detonating an aspect creates a new situation aspect, which represents how the old aspect was destroyed, and how it wrecked things. That last bit is the key—it has to wreck things, to complicate things. It's no fair to detonate that *Pallet of Propane Tanks* and replace it with something boring like *Scorch Marks*. Replace it with something big and flashy and destructive, like *The Building Is on Fire!* or *The Ceiling Is Collapsing!*. The new situation aspect must always make things more tenuous for *everyone*, and should always be an imminent threat.

GENRE ASPECTS

There are times you might want to reinforce something about your game's genre. Creating issues that underscore the genre's themes is a good way, and you can get a lot of mileage out of encouraging your players to create characters tied to the genre. Sometimes you want something mechanically unique, though.

When you use genre aspects, you're making a change to the way aspects work in order to reinforce your chosen genre. Sometimes you'll apply these changes to all aspects in the game, while other times you'll want to restrict these changes to a specific subset of aspects, or even a single specific aspect. The ways in which you can change aspects are too varied to simply list here, so instead we'll provide a few examples.

Low-Powered Aspects

This is a sweeping change to all aspects in the game, and it's good for emulating genres where the PCs are weaker than the forces arrayed against them, such as in horror or noir. The change is simple: when you invoke an aspect, you can reroll the dice you rolled or you can get a +2 to the roll, but you cannot choose the +2 option more than once per roll if you invoke multiple aspects. This means that an aspect only increases by a small number the *maximum* effort a PC can exert. This is going to cause failure to be more common, which means that failure needs to always be interesting, and it needs to move the action forward just as much as success does.

If you want to allow the PCs to get multiple aspect bonuses in certain situations, consider tying such things to a stunt, such as:

Keen Senses: When you invoke aspects on a Notice roll, you can invoke any number of aspects, provided you have the fate points to cover the cost.

Quest Aspects

This is a small change, but one that can reinforce the PCs' shared goals. It works well in fantasy settings, or any other setting where the PCs act as a group toward some sort of large goal, such as slaying the dragon or rescuing the village from bandits.

Whenever the PCs accept a quest, the group works together to create a good aspect representing that quest. For example, if the PCs are trying to save the village from a bandit king, the group might create the quest aspect ***Martin Half-Heart Must Be Stopped!***. Any PC in the party can invoke this aspect, and it can be compelled as if it were on each PC's character sheet, earning everyone a fate point.

If the PCs resolve a quest aspect, it's a milestone. The scope of the milestone depends on the difficulty and length of the quest. Check out page 256 of FATE CORE for more info on milestones.

GEAR ASPECTS

In FATE, gear is in the background. Your skills take center stage when it comes to what you can do; gear is simply there to enable you to use your skills. Do you have a high Shoot? Then you've got a gun! Did you prioritize Drive? You've probably got a car. These things are assumed, and have no mechanical effect. The *Extras* chapter in FATE CORE tells you how you can give gear mechanical teeth, adding Weapon ratings or giving a piece of gear its own aspects or skills. There's a middle ground, though, one that doesn't require any reduction in refresh and that allows all significant gear to be *significant*.

If you want to tread that middle ground, keeping gear simple and in the background but increasing its mechanical weight, you can use **gear aspects**. In this method, most gear behaves like it does in default FATE—it enables skill use and provides justification for actions. However, if a piece of gear has the potential to be significant to the story at some point, it becomes an aspect.

A gear aspect can be as generic or as descriptive as you desire. If you're the sort for whom guns are important but interchangeable, maybe you just have a ***Revolver*** or a ***Sniper Rifle***. If you want to get a little more specific, maybe it's a ***Pristine Colt .45*** or a ***Silenced XM21***. Want to drill down even more? Give yourself ***My Father's Service Revolver*** or ***My Well-Used, Modified XM21***. The point is that, if it's important, it gets an aspect. Things like your jacket and shoes, your sunglasses, your car keys—maybe even your car—don't need aspects, *unless* they become important to the story.

A gear aspect functions like any other aspect: you can invoke it, and other people can compel it—or invoke it—against you. You can invoke a gear aspect any time it would be useful: invoke your ***25 Karat Watch*** when you want to flash a little bling and impress someone, or invoke your ***Press Pass*** to get a little closer to that crime scene.

There's one final rule when it comes to gear aspects, GMs—you can take them away. If a PC is starting to rely a little too much on a piece of gear, or if it just feels like time to shake things up, find a reason for that aspect to go away. Doing this is a compel, so the player *can* refuse it—and that's fine—you don't want to take away your players' favorite parts of the game. Also, getting rid of the aspect doesn't necessarily mean that the player loses that piece of gear permanently. A *Press Pass* can lose its aspect when the PC gets suspended, and a *Revolver* can be shut down when it runs out of ammo. In both cases, there's a narrative way to get the aspect back, and sometimes that can kick-start an adventure on its own!
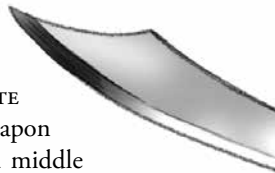
TOO MANY ASPECTS?

If each PC has five aspects and maybe four or five gear aspects, plus there are scene aspects and consequences and what have you, isn't that too many aspects? It sure can be! Here's a secret: gear aspects are basically portable situation aspects. As such, they can do a lot of the heavy lifting that situation aspects can, if you feel like there's too much going on in a scene. You don't want to *eliminate* situation aspects altogether, but if each PC has a number of gear aspects, start with fewer situation aspects.

It's also a good idea to limit the number of gear aspects each PC has. Not every piece of gear needs its own aspect, so limiting PCs to three, two, or even one signature piece of gear is perfectly fine.

Finally, in a game focused on gear rather than PC relationships or previous adventures, gear aspects might replace the "phase trio" aspects (page 38 of *Fate Core*).

CONDITIONS

Consequences are a great way to handle injuries, emotional scarring, and other persistent conditions within the fiction of your game. They're not for everyone, though. Some people have trouble coming up with good consequences on the fly, while others want something more defined and concrete. Still others just want something different.

Conditions are like consequences, except that they're pre-defined, like this:

CONDITIONS

FLEETING

1 ☐ Angry

1 ☐ Frightened

Goes away when you get a chance to catch your breath and calm down.

STICKY

2 ☐ Exhausted

2 ☐ Hungry

Stays checked off until a specific event occurs (get sleep, eat food).

LASTING

4 ☐ 4☐ Broken

4 ☐ 4☐ Wounded

Takes a recovery action to begin removal. Second box may be checked only if the first isn't.

There are three kinds of conditions: fleeting, sticky, and lasting. A **fleeting condition** goes away when you get a chance to catch your breath and calm down. In the example above, Angry and Frightened are fleeting conditions. A **sticky condition** stays checked off until a specific event happens. If you're Exhausted, you're Exhausted until you get some sleep. If you're Hungry, you're Hungry until you get a good meal. Wounded and Broken are both **lasting conditions**. These stick around for at least one whole session, and require someone to overcome an obstacle with a passive opposition of at least Great (+4) before you can start to recover from them. Lasting conditions have two check boxes next to them, and you check them both off when you take the condition. When recovery begins, erase one check box. Erase the second one (and recover from it fully) after one more full session. You can take a lasting condition only if *both* of its check boxes are empty.

You suffer from a condition when the GM says you suffer from a condition—usually as a result of your narrative situation—but you can also use them to soak stress. When you take stress, you can reduce that stress by 1 if you check off a fleeting condition, by 2 stress if you check off a sticky condition, or by 4 stress if you check off a lasting condition. You can check off as many conditions as you'd like for a single hit.

Once you're suffering from a condition, that condition is an aspect on your character sheet like any other. In this way, conditions are a lot like consequences—you can invoke them, and they can be invoked or compelled against you. As with a consequence, when you take a condition, someone else can invoke it against you for free once.

If you're going to use conditions in your game, one thing you can do to reinforce the theme or style of your game is to come up with your own conditions. You don't have to stick to the same spread of two fleeting/two sticky/two lasting as presented here, but you should stick to the same total number of shifts of stress-soaking: 14. Also make sure to follow the guidelines for the different types of conditions—fleeting conditions go away quickly, sticky conditions require a narrative trigger, and lasting conditions require treatment. The conditions above are non-specific enough to be used in a wide variety of settings, but tailoring conditions to your setting can be an effective way to make the characters feel more like a part of that setting.

As an example, here are alternate conditions from Jason Morningstar's FIGHT FIRE (found in FATE WORLDS: WORLDS ON FIRE):

CONDITIONS

FLEETING

1 ☐ Winded   **1** ☐ Panicked

1 ☐ Bruised   **1** ☐ Disoriented

Goes away when you get a chance to catch your breath and calm down.

STICKY

2 ☐ Dehydrated

Stays checked off until a specific event occurs (drink enough water).

LASTING

4 ☐ **4** ☐ Injured

4 ☐ **4** ☐ Broken

Takes a recovery action to begin removal. Second box may be checked only if the first isn't.

3 SKILLS

CHANGE THAT LIST!

The skills in Fate Core are designed to offer a wide range of actions, broadly applicable to a number of different settings. That said, the skill list is the thing we expect you to change first. Your skill list should be rooted in your setting and should reinforce it; if the default skill list works for this, you're in luck! In some cases it might *mostly* work for you, but you might have to add a skill or two, take one out, or rename a few. If you're looking to make more extensive modifications to the skill list—or even the system itself—then this chapter is for you.

USING SKILLS AS WRITTEN

The easiest thing to do in most cases is to simply tweak the skill list to reflect the needs of your specific game, and there are a few ways to approach that.

Adding or Removing Skills

Is making stuff not an important part of your game? Get rid of Craft. Do you want people to be able to maneuver in zero-G? Add a skill to do that. This is one of the easiest ways to hack the skill list because all you're doing is going skill by skill and deciding what isn't necessary and what needs to be added.

There are a couple of things to keep in mind here. First, if you subtract too many skills then the players might have access to too much of the skill list. If there's too much overlap between PCs, you can wind up with PCs getting too little spotlight time. Conversely, if you add too many skills you might wind up with PCs who don't have access to *enough* of the skill list, meaning they're often missing a critical skill in a given situation. An easy fix is appropriately increasing or decreasing the number of skills each PC gets during character creation.

Consider that Fate Core has 18 skills. As a rule of thumb, the pyramid allows a character to really stand out in 3 of them and have rankings in 7 more, leaving 8 unaccounted for. It's not a precise ratio, but it's worth keeping in mind when deciding if you need to change the pyramid. See *Structural Changes* on page 26 for more details.

Finally, keep in mind that changes to skills have repercussions on stress tracks and turn order.

Reskinning and Making Alterations

If all of the default skills work for you from a mechanical perspective, but some of them don't quite work with the themes of your game, change a few details. Lore might become Academia or Knowledge, Drive becomes Ride or Pilot, and so on. Doing this might also alter what a given skill can do. For example, if you reskin Lore to become Arcana and then determine that it's the skill for spellcasting, suddenly it makes sense for you to be able to attack or defend with it.

Expansion and Compression

One handy trick for altering the skill list is to look at the skills in terms of their sphere of activity and how important they are to your game. If a particular sphere is less important, then you can compress the skills within that sphere into a single skill—in a non-violent game, you might compress Shoot and Fight into a single fight skill. On the other hand, if a particular sphere is very important, you might want to split that skill into finer gradients. If martial arts are important to your game, you might want to expand Fight into multiple skills, perhaps Armed, Hard Styles, and Soft Styles. The advantage of this approach is that the general guidelines for the skills are still in effect—you're just adjusting the level of focus.

OTHER SOLUTIONS

Sometimes the skill list as presented just won't work for you. Maybe you want another list entirely, or maybe you're looking for a different approach. The good news is that even if you do something drastically different, the guidelines of the existing skills can still be helpful to you, because the underlying *action* can still work the same way as the original skill. Whether the skill is called Fight, Kung Fu, or Existential Badass, the basic mechanics of punching someone are going to remain more or less the same.

New Skill Lists

If you're looking to make another skill list in the same style as the existing one—simply with new skills—then the guidelines are going to depend a lot on why you're making the change, and no one's going to know that better than you. The guidelines for adding and removing skills are your best reference for this.

Professions

While skills normally reflect *what* you do, professions reflect *who* the character is, and infer capabilities from that. If, for example, the professions are Fighter, Scholar, Woodsman, Thief, Craftsman and Diplomat, then you might roll Fighter in situations where you might roll Fight or Shoot, Thief where you might normally roll Stealth or Burglary, and so on. Profession lists tend to be shorter and more open ended than skill lists, which may mean a very reduced pyramid. It's possible to use a fixed list of professions, or use them in in a free-form manner, which we'll get into below.

Approaches

If the normal skill list is what you do and professions reflect who you are, approaches reflect *how* you do things. That is, instead of more typical skills, a character may have a rating in Forceful, Graceful, Clever, and Resolute, and which he rolls depends upon the situation. In a swordfight, are you hammering at your opponent's guard (Forceful!), swinging down from a chandelier (Graceful!), feinting and maneuvering as you seek an opening (Clever!) or biding your time until your opponent makes a mistake (Resolute!)?

Fans of Fate Accelerated Edition will recognize this method as the one FAE uses, with the approaches Careful, Clever, Flashy, Forceful, Quick, and Sneaky.

Freeform Skills

So, what if there were no skill list at all, and players were able to simply name their skills? It might seem a little bit chaotic at first, but most likely you'd see a lot of familiar patterns, with new and interesting names. Such an approach is absolutely playable, with only one real caveat—everyone needs to be on the same page regarding what skills mean. Otherwise it's possible that one player may end up with a super-skill that's useful in every situation, leaving the rest of the group out in the cold.

The easiest way to avoid this is make sure everyone understands the difference between a skill, a profession, and an approach. Most problems will emerge if you have one player choosing skills while another is choosing a profession or approach, because professions and approaches are much more broadly applicable than individual skills. Approaches and professions might be a little more interchangeable, but it is still something to tread carefully with.

In addition to opening up opportunities for player creativity, this approach allows for a particular trick—using aspects as skills.

Skills and Aspects

If you're using freeform skills, one of your skills could share a name with one of your aspects. If you're a **Knight of the Chalice** and also have Knight of the Chalice: Good (+3), there's a certain sense of completeness to that. It's far from mandatory, but sometimes it just feels like the right choice. It's also possible to use aspects to forgo skills entirely, but that's a bit more fiddly, and we'll get to that further along.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

So far all of these systems still assume something that looks like the current skill list in most important ways—there's a list arranged in a certain way, and a progressive set of bonuses. But those assumptions need not be universal—you can do some crazy stuff by stepping outside of the normal bounds.

Pyramid Alternatives

The most obvious hack is to replace the pyramid, with a column system—as is used in advancement—with a point-buy system, or even something like skill packages from specific backgrounds. This is really something you can change quite freely, but before you do, just be sure you understand why the pyramid is in place. It is fast, it demands characters be capable (the apex) but well-rounded (the foundation), and it makes sure that not every character can do everything (the skills you can't buy). It's not unreasonable to change these—a superspy game, for example, might have characters with very broad skill bases—but make sure you know what problem you're solving when you make the change.

Larger Steps

Nothing says skills need to progress smoothly. Suppose that each "rank" of a skill was actually two steps on the ladder—you might now have a pyramid of 1 Superb (+5), 2 Good (+3) and 3 or 4 Average (+1), and if you're feeling mean, move the default down to Poor (-1).

Why do this? Suppose you have a small skill list, as you might for professions or approaches. You get a heroically potent pyramid—more so than the default, even—for a smaller list. It also strongly separates the "tiers" of skill level, something that may be thematically appropriate in certain genres.

Aspects Only

If you want to take a very extreme step, you can forgo skills entirely, and use aspects for everything. This requires a single change to the way aspects work. Now, in addition to everything else, they provide a passive +1 bonus in situations where they apply. Thus, if my aspects are *Acrobatic*, *Ladies' Man*, *Strong*, and *Swordsman*, I can count on a +2—effectively a Fair skill—in most sword-fighting situations involving strength, which bumps to a Good (+3) if I do something acrobatic.

If taking this tack, some extra thought will need to go into aspect selection so that everyone has a good understanding of when their aspects are and aren't applicable. The first instinct of many players will be to gun for broad, simple aspects, like strong or smart, because they're so easy to apply in most situations. However, the real advantage will go to players who take the time to put a bit more story into their aspects. *Knight* covers a lot of ground, but *Knight of the Stars* covers even more, and *Renegade Knight of the Stars* covers even more. As is so often the case, the most interesting characters will be the most mechanically potent.

OTHER SKILL FUNCTIONS

Skills already let you do a wide range of things, but they can be even more flexible than they initially appear. If you take a look at the skill list, you can see that every single skill has the overcome and create an advantage actions checked. This opens a lot of possibilities, even for skills that don't seem to have a lot of interesting uses.

If a character has a high rank in a skill, Good (+3) or higher, this means that they are an expert in that particular area of endeavor. They possess deep knowledge within the narrow range covered by the skill. This knowledge covers the tools and trappings used by the skill and knowledge of other people who use the skill at the same high level.

The three attack skills—Fight, Shoot, and Provoke—are most often used in combat. That doesn't mean combat is the only situation where these skills are useful. A character with the Shoot skill can identify ranged weapons, knows details about their care and maintenance, and knows where to obtain them. The same goes for Fight, regarding hand-to-hand weapons.

This opens up lots of possibilities for overcome or create an advantage actions. A Shoot expert could use their skill in an overcome action to find a gun seller in a new place, for example. Shoot could be used to create an advantage by identifying the type of gun by the sound of its shot and filling in details on the limitations of the model, or by noticing that an enemy's weapon has not been properly cared for and could possibly malfunction.

Provoke might seem to be a harder skill to expand, but with Provoke, an expert could create an advantage to discover an opponent is bluffing, or to identify which person in a group of opponents is the biggest threat.

You can use other skills in a similar way. Burglary experts can find tools or other practitioners of the trade, or even identify the trademark techniques of other burglars they know by the traces they leave behind. Drive experts can identify vehicles and use create an advantage to talk about the subtle edges or disadvantages a particular make has when compared against another vehicle.

Skills that normally do not allow you to attack or defend—Burglary, Crafts, Investigate, Lore, and Resources—have lots of options for additional actions, and in the right circumstances might be used to attack or defend. In the right situation, Crafts could be used to create an attack through the construction of a dangerous trap, for instance. Burglary could be used for defense, if a character sets up countermeasures based on their detailed knowledge of security precautions. These should be very specific and very limited applications, but it can be quite rewarding to allow players to use these skills in a way that stretches their capabilities a bit.

Creativity is the order of the day. In almost any skill, a high level of ability opens up many possibilities. As a GM, it's important to allow flexibility and logic to guide you, as your players are sure to surprise you. They should get the chance to feel exceptionally competent in their character's area of expertise. When a player tries something new with a skill, consider the option carefully, and be open to a creative interpretation of the skill. As a player, let yourself try new things with your skills. If a situation arises where you think you would be able to use your skill in an unusual way, give it a shot! Fate is more interesting when the unexpected arises and players use an unexpected method to overcome the situation at hand.

SKILL MODES

A **skill mode** is a bundle of several skills that represents a broad area of competence. Modes are great for speeding up character creation even more than Fate Core already does. Instead of picking and rating 10 individual skills, players pick and rate three modes, and the skills come along for the ride.

Take a look at your game's skill list and think about archetypes you'd like to see in your setting. For each of these archetypes, choose five or six relevant skills. Each of these skill groups is a mode. It's okay if some skills show up in more than one mode, but if any are so common that they're in nearly *every* mode, be aware that it's going to lead to a certain sameness between characters.

Ideally, you want between four and eight modes—enough for variety, but few enough that picking three is still fast.

Ben is planning a classic fantasy game of dungeon-delving, treasure-grabbing, and the occasional dragon-slaying. This game's skills are Athletics, Burglary, Contacts, Deceit, Empathy, Intimidation, Melee, Missile, Physique, Rapport, Stealth, Survival, and Will. Based on that list, he comes up with four modes:

BATTLE	TALK	THIEVERY	WOODCRAFT
Athletics	Contacts	Athletics	Athletics
Intimidation	Deceit	Burglary	Lore
Melee	Empathy	Deceit	Notice
Missile	Rapport	Notice	Stealth
Physique	Will	Stealth	Survival

Ben notices that Athletics shows up in three of the four, but it's such a broadly applicable skill that he can't imagine any of those modes doing without it, either. Besides, the tomb-robber PCs are going to need it.

Ratings

The usual Fate Core skill pyramid doesn't apply to skills in modes. Instead, each player picks three modes and rates them—one at Good (+3), one at Fair (+2), and one at Average (+1)—and the mode's rating becomes the default rating for all of its skills. Skills at this rating are **trained**. Skills one step above their mode's level are **focused**, and skills two steps above are **specialized**.

One of Ben's players, Will, wants to play a thief-type, so he picks Good (+3) Thievery. This means Athletics, Burglary, Deceit, Notice, and Stealth all start out trained, with a rating of Good (+3).

Reinforced Skills

If two or three of a character's modes contain the same skill, it's **reinforced**. When this happens, write it down under its highest-rated mode, but not under any other. No skill should appear more than once on a character sheet.

If a skill is reinforced once—meaning it's shared by two modes—improve it from trained to focused. If it's reinforced twice—shared by all three modes— improve it from trained to specialized.

In addition to his Good (+3) Thievery, Will's also picked Fair (+2) Talk and Average (+1) Battle. Both Battle and Thievery have Athletics, so it goes from trained to focused—from Good (+3) to Great (+4) under Thievery. Likewise, Talk and Thievery share Deceit, so that skill's also focused under Thievery. So far, Will's modes look like this:

	GOOD (+3) THIEVERY	FAIR (+2) TALK	AVERAGE (+1) BATTLE
+5			
+4	Athletics, Deceit		
+3	Burglary, Notice, Stealth		
+2		Contacts, Empathy, Rapport, Will	
+1			Intimidation, Melee, Missile, Physique

Improving Skills

After that, each player has 7 points to further improve skills.

IMPROVEMENT	COST
Focus a trained skill	1
Specialize a focused skill	2
Specialize a trained skill	3

No skill can ever be improved beyond specialized.

Will wants to be especially sneaky, so he spends 3 points to specialize Stealth, from Good (+3) to Superb (+5). He'd also like to be capable in combat, so he spends another 3 to specialize Melee as well, from Average (+1) to Good (+3). With his last point, he focuses Contacts, from Fair (+2) to Good (+3), so he can be a little better connected.

	GOOD (+3) THIEVERY	FAIR (+2) TALK	AVERAGE (+1) BATTLE
+5	Stealth		
+4	Athletics, Deceit		
+3	Burglary, Notice	Contacts	Melee
+2		Empathy, Rapport, Will	
+1			Intimidation, Missile, Physique

Modes with Extras

Some modes offer access to **extras**—either because it contains a skill extra, or because it unlocks an aspect extra. For each such extra associated with a mode, the mode has one fewer skill than normal. For example, if standard modes in your game have five skills, a mode with a skill extra would have only four. Aspect extras are in addition to the usual number of aspects for your game.

Ben adds four modes to his list: Arcana and The Gods, for two different kinds of magic, and Dwarf and Elf, for...dwarves and elves. The first two have two extras each—a skill and an aspect, both related to magic—and the second two only have one—an aspect.

ARCANA	THE GODS	DWARF	ELF
Lore	Favor	Intimidation	Athletics
Magic	Lore	Lore	Lore
Will	Will	Melee	Missile
Skill Extra	*Skill Extra*	Physique	Notice
Aspect Extra	*Aspect Extra*	*Aspect Extra*	*Aspect Extra*

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STUNTS

NEW STUNT RUBRICS

Stunts as presented in FATE CORE provide numerous ways to customize your character, adding fun mechanical tweaks to the game. You get a little more out of each skill when you pick up stunts, and this can be a lot of fun. If you want to tweak your stunts even more, this section's for you!

Flexible Stunts

This is the easiest option to implement, as it's merely a shift in how you think about stunts. In FATE CORE, stunts are tied explicitly to skills. What if you want your stunts to be skill-agnostic, or tied to multiple skills, or tied to something else entirely different, like an aspect or piece of gear or a stress track? Some examples:

Ally's Shield: You can invoke ***Dwarven Shield-Maiden*** when a nearby ally suffers an attack. When you do, redirect that attack to yourself. Your defense is Average (+1) against that attack.

Berserk Rage: When you suffer a physical consequence, you can invoke that consequence for free on your next attack. If you suffer multiple physical consequences, you get a free invocation for each.

Useful Little Things: Your pockets are full of useful little things. Whenever you need something, you have it, provided it's not something *too* unusual (like a map to Jimmy Hoffa's body) or too large to fit in a pocket, belt pouch, or backpack. When you say you have something, the GM should be likely to agree.

This isn't really a mechanical change, just a shift in how you approach stunt design. Any of the above three examples could be tied to a skill—Provoke, Fighting, or Resources, for instance—but not thinking about which skill to tie your stunt to frees you up to be a bit more creative with your design, moving beyond +2s and skill swaps.

Aspected Stunts

For stunts which are tied to aspects, you might view some of their effects as narrowly defined free invocations. Other aspected stunts might require an invocation, as Ally's Shield (above) does, but give something extra or particularly unusual when the aspect is invoked. Such effects should be more potent than a "vanilla" invocation. You could even design a stunt that triggers under particular kinds of compels—just be careful you don't end up neutering the downside with the resulting benefit.

Charge Like Ox: Because you are ***Strong Like Ox***, once per scene, as a single action, you may move two zones in a straight line then make a physical attack.

Teflon Troublemaker: When your ***Can't Keep His Big Mouth Shut*** aspect is compelled to make you the target of an attack, you may immediately clear any mild consequences you currently have, instead of taking a fate point.

Triggered Effects

When you use this stunt mechanic, you create stunts that trigger under a specific narrative condition, require a skill roll, and have a specific effect as a result. Stunts like this are a great way to encourage players to do the kinds of things you want to see them do in the game, as those stunts directly reward doing those things.

A Friend in Every Port: Whenever you enter a settlement, you may declare you've visited it before and roll Contacts against Fair (+2) opposition. If you succeed, you have a friend there who owes you one favor—nothing costly or life threatening. If you succeed with style, your friend will do any one thing for you that is within his power.

Not to Be Trifled With: When you make it clear how dangerous you are, roll Provoke against your target's Will. If you succeed, that target will not attack you or willingly come near you unless you take action against him first. If you succeed with style, neither will anyone with a lower Will than your target.

Whirlwind Step: When you assume the stance of the whirlwind, roll Athletics against Fair (+2) opposition. If you succeed, you may run on vertical surfaces and leap unlikely distances without making rolls to do so, until your next turn ends. If you succeed with style, you may instead gain these benefits for the rest of the scene.

You probably noticed that none of these stunts say what happens when you tie or fail; this is deliberate. These triggered effects tend to be powerful, so their drawbacks should be equally so. A tie should be similar to a success, but at some sort of minor cost. On a failure, feel free to apply appropriate repercussions.

Broad Stunts

If you're looking for more variety in your stunts than a +2 or its equivalent, consider the idea of a broad stunt that offers a +1 to two or three things. These could be three different actions within the same skill, or could branch across multiple related skills. If you're going to allow broad stunts like this, watch out for the overlaps in stunt combinations: you don't want two broad stunts giving the net effect of three +2s for the price of only two stunts.

Combined Stunts

If you want to offer particularly potent stunts, consider bundling the benefit of multiple stunts together to produce a single big effect. For example, you could create a stunt that provides a monstrous 4-shift effect—that's a combination of two stunts, and as such would cost two refresh. (You may recognize this as the method used for constructing the supernatural powers in The Dresden Files RPG.) This kind of focused benefit can throw a game out of whack quickly, though. Consider limiting access to such "super-stunts," either in quantity—*e.g.,* "everyone only gets one double-stunt"—or in selection and permission—"only these stunts are available to werewolves."

STUNT COSTS

In FATE CORE, you get three free stunts, three refresh, and you can buy up to two additional stunts at the cost of one refresh each. This is the default way to handle stunts, but it is by no means the *only* way. Each of these components—number of starting stunts, starting refresh, and cost of each stunt—is a dial you can turn in either direction, making stunts more or less common as you do. How you turn those dials will determine, in part, what kind of game you're playing, as well as having an impact on Milestones.

More stunts means more powerful PCs. A PC with more stunts can bring to bear larger bonuses on rolls, use her peak skills more often, and break the rules more frequently. It leads to a more pulpy, larger-than-life, even fantastical feel. If that's what you want, great! Consider, though, that giving PCs more stunts also gives them more conditional benefits and exceptions to the rules, which makes for more complex characters. If the players aren't used to this complexity, this can slow down play at the table and make things *less* exciting rather than more.

On the flip side of things, giving the PCs fewer stunts makes their characters simpler and easier to run at the table, but also makes them a little less competent. A PC with only one stunt, for example, has one "schtick" that he can call upon, one signature move. That can mean a grittier game or a game where the PCs have clearly defined roles and a lot of niche protection, but it can also bore players that like a lot of rules or disappoint players that want to be good at a lot of stuff. PCs will still be competent, but not *as* competent.

Adjusting Starting Stunts

This is the easiest way to give PCs more or fewer stunts. Reducing it to zero means that a PC starts with no stunts, and will have to pay a dear price for each stunt she wants to pick up. This can make stunts feel more expensive, but it can also make individual stunts more important to PCs. Adjusting it in the other direction—giving PCs more starting stunts—gives players a lot of fun choices to make about their characters right out of the gate at no cost. It also brings up the baseline power level for each PC, making it more likely that your PCs will be highly competent at a wider variety of tasks, or seriously good at one or two. In addition, it has the effect of making stunts seem less expensive, which can encourage players to take even more.

One thing to keep an eye on when you're adjusting starting stunts is what your players want. Are all of your players okay with a less powerful baseline character, or a more complex one? Not everyone wants to struggle for every victory or make a dozen choices before play begins.

Adjusting Starting Refresh

Of these three options, adjusting refresh has probably the most profound impact on gameplay, because it directly affects the fate point economy that powers the game. Giving players more fate points each session means they're likely to resist compels more often and invoke aspects more often. It gives players more control over the story, which can be a good thing, but also makes it a little harder to challenge them.

Reducing refresh has the opposite effect—players have less control over the story, because they have fewer fate points on hand. They have to accept more compels and they don't get to invoke their aspects as often. It also means they'll rely more on free invocations from creating advantages, which might lengthen big fight scenes.

Adjusting Stunt Cost

Making stunts cost one refresh is one way to do things, but not the only way. You can adjust this dial slightly by increasing or decreasing the amount of refresh a player must pay for a stunt. Maybe stunts cost two refresh, or maybe a single refresh buys the player two stunts.
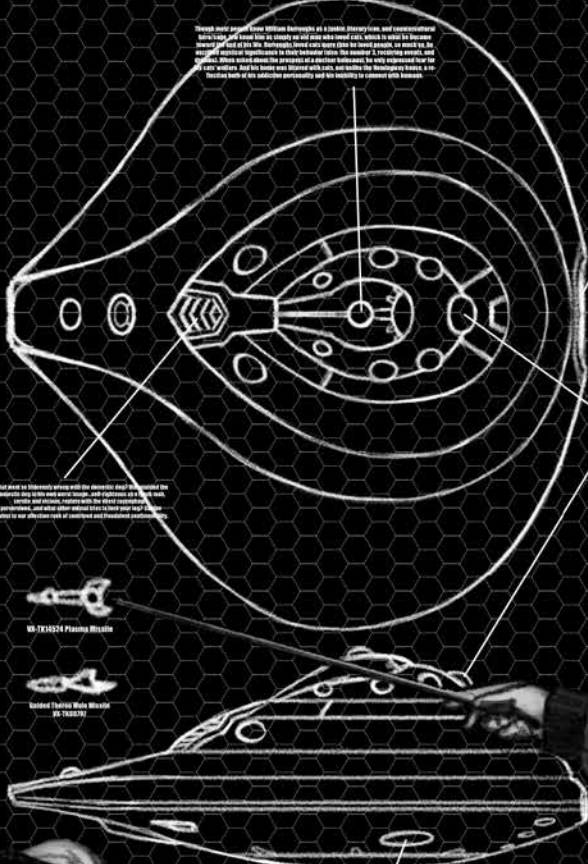
There are other ways to fiddle with stunt costs, though. Maybe a player has to give up a skill point in order to buy a stunt, lowering a Good (+3) skill to Fair (+2) in order to pick up that stunt he wants. Maybe he has to give up an aspect or devote an aspect to that stunt in order to get it. Having to tie an aspect to a new stunt can make for stunts players are more attached to, and sets a nice upper limit on the number of stunts they can have.

Another way to do it is to make stunts free or very low-cost, but build the cost into each stunt. Maybe each stunt costs a fate point to activate, or requires you to take stress, or costs an action to activate, or gives an enemy a boost. You can build any number of costs into the use of a stunt.

Keep in mind, stunts are priced the way they are, giving the benefits they do, because they *permanently* cost the character a fate point by reducing refresh. That's a fate point that can't be spent flexibly to get a +2 or similar benefit during play. So if you're planning to change what stunts cost, you should also think about tweaking the benefits gained to match what's been "lost" to the cost.

Somewhere In Between

Most solutions will require adjusting multiple dials to find the sweet spot for a particular group. That's totally fine. This is your game, and it's up to you and your group to determine what works for you.
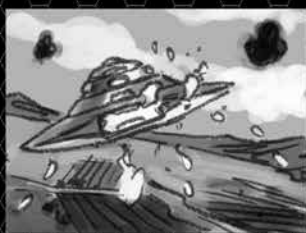
VX-TK14524 Plasma Missile

Guided Thermo Mole Missile
VX-TK00797

Photon Emission Vent
CX1056756-877 Some kind of
crazy science fictional land

5

THE BIG GAME

GIMME SOME DRAMA!

Sometimes a small change is enough, but then again, sometimes it's not. Sometimes you need a big, dramatic change to the system, something that really shakes things up.

CHARACTER GENERATION OPTIONS

The character generation system in Fate Core presents a particular style of character creation, one that presents a lot of freedom but also provides structure and guides the players into creating a coherent group of individuals. Maybe you want something a little less open-ended, or something a little more guided.

Professions and Races

Anyone who's played fantasy RPGs is at least passingly familiar with these ideas. For those who aren't sure what we mean, a **profession** is a broad group of skills and abilities that follows from a particular character concept, often linked to what you *do* in the world. A **race** describes what you *are*—where you come from, who your people are, and where your natural talents lie.

THE WORD "RACE"

The term "race" is both inaccurate and problematic in this context. We're not describing a race as modern people use the word; what we're describing is more akin to a species. When you're making a race in *Fate*, what you're really doing is making rules for a type of being other than human, not a nationality or ethnicity.

So why do we use the word 'race'? It's familiar in the context of a role-playing game. People know what it means because of numerous games that have come before, and it imparts an immediate understanding of what we're talking about. Is it the best word? No. But we don't have a better word with the same level of history within the hobby, so we're using it here, with the understanding that it's a problematic term.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT

In FATE, a profession is represented as a collection of skills arranged in the pyramid, with specific values. Some slots are left open, some are defined. When you pick a profession, you get the pyramid provided. Fill in any blanks with whatever you want. A profession also includes a few aspects; pick at least one of these, or create new ones based on the theme represented by the aspects provided. Don't take more than two aspects from your profession. Finally, a profession has a list of stunts available. These are profession-exclusive stunts; if you're a member of a profession, you can take its stunts. If you're not a member of the profession, those stunts are off-limits.

A race in FATE provides a number of aspects; choose at least one but not more than two. Just as with your profession, you can make your own if you want to. Your race also gives you a racial skill in a few different flavors. (See example below.) Slot your racial skill into whichever empty slot on the pyramid appeals to you and pick the flavor that most appeals to you; it'll tell you how you can use your racial skill. You can take additional flavors of your racial skill as if they were stunts.

PROFESSION: FIGHTER

ASPECTS

Hardened Mercenary, **Knight of the Realm**, **Master at Arms**, **Stout Defender**, **War Veteran**.

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight
Good (+3): Athletics or Physique, one other
Fair (+2): Shoot or Provoke, two others
Average (+1): Any four skills

STUNTS

Armiger: Whenever you take a mild physical consequence, you can choose to instead destroy your armor or your shield, provided you're using the appropriate item. Once your armor or shield is destroyed, you'll have to get it repaired or get a new one.

Bend Bars, Lift Gates: You may spend a fate point to automatically overcome a Physique obstacle, even if you've already rolled for it, provided you're trying to accomplish something through brute strength.

Bounty Board: Whenever you enter a settlement, you can look for work. After an hour or so, you find a job that either pays well but is dangerous or is not too dangerous but doesn't pay that well. If you spend a fate point, it both pays well and is not too dangerous.

Defend the Weak: When someone is attacked physically while within your zone, you can spend a fate point to redirect that attack to yourself. You may defend against that attack at +1.

PROFESSION: THIEF

ASPECTS

Acquisition Specialist, *Cunning Swindler*, *Guild Thief*, *Knife in the Dark*, *Second-Story Man/Woman*.

SKILLS

Great (+4): Deceive or Stealth

Good (+3): Athletics or Provoke, one other

Fair (+2): Fight or Shoot, two others

Average (+1): Any four skills

STUNTS

Backstab: When you can surprise an enemy or attack from a place of hiding, you can attack with Stealth. If you succeed, you create a boost. If you succeed with style, you get to invoke that boost for free twice.

Cover: You have a cover identity you can assume. Describe your cover identity, choose a high concept and a trouble aspect for your cover identity, and choose an apex skill for your cover identity. You can assume that identity with enough preparation and the expenditure of a fate point. While you're in that identity, its high concept and trouble replace yours and you can use Deceive in place of its apex skill. You lose these benefits as soon as your cover is blown, and you may have to spend some time creating a new cover identity.

Criminal Underbelly: Whenever you enter a settlement for the first time, you can spend a fate point to declare that the local criminals know you. Choose one of the following: they have a lead on a promising job, they'll give you and your companions free room and board for a few weeks, or they'll help you with something *right now* but you might owe them afterward.

Not a Threat: Choose Deceive or Stealth when you take this stunt. When you create an advantage with that skill to make yourself as non-threatening or unobtrusive as possible, enemies will find other targets for as long as that aspect exists. As soon as you successfully attack someone, the aspect goes away.

RACE: ELF

ASPECTS

The Experience of Centuries, *"I Know These Woods."*, *The Long Game*, *Magic in the Blood*, *Perfection in Everything*.

RACIAL SKILL (ELF)

You may use the Elf skill to recognize useful flora and fauna, know your way through the woods, or notice hidden dangers. In addition, pick one of the following flavors; you may pick more at the cost of one stunt or refresh each.

Elven High Magic: You can use Elf to cast spells relating to nature or growth, even if you have no other magical ability.

Perfection in Battle: Choose Shoot or Fight. When you're using the traditional armaments of your people, you can use Elf instead of the chosen skill.

RACE: ORC

ASPECTS

Blood and Glory, *Everyone Fears the Horde*, *"Pain Is for the Weak."*, *The Spirits Guide Me*, *Warrior of the Seven Clans*.

RACIAL SKILL (ORC)

You may use Orc to resist pain, call upon the spirits for aid, or perform feats of brute strength. In addition, pick one of the following flavors; you can pick more at the cost of one stunt or refresh each.

Blood Rage: When you use Orc to create an advantage representing an overpowering battle-fury, you get an extra invocation on that aspect if you succeed or succeed with style.

Thick Skin: You may use Orc instead of Physique to determine your physical stress and consequences, and you get one additional minor physical consequence.

The Origin Story

The origin story is a method to kick-start character creation through play, using vignettes that target each player. Before playing through an origin story, a character needs two things: a high concept and an apex skill. Most players will have at least a general idea of who they want to be, but they may be fuzzy on the details. The high concept and the apex skill define a character in the broadest possible terms, providing a starting point for an origin story vignette.

When you play through an origin story with a player, it's just like playing the normal game except that you're playing with an eye toward defining who that character is. Start *in medias res*—when you start with action, you give the player opportunities to make choices about their character.

A character starts her origin story with one fate point.

Choosing New Skills

During the origin story, call for a lot of skill rolls. Spotlight the character's apex skill to some extent, but also call for other skill rolls. Whenever the player must make a skill roll and doesn't want to roll at Mediocre (+0), she can assign that skill to one of her empty slots. Once assigned, it's part of the character.

Choosing New Aspects

Throw the player into a variety of different situations, pit her against a variety of different difficulties. When the player runs into trouble, when she needs a +2 or a reroll for example, suggest an aspect to her. If she takes you up on your suggestion or comes up with her own aspect, let her invoke it once for free and give her a fate point!

Choosing New Stunts

You can offer the player new stunts the same way you offer her new aspects—offer her something that might get her out of a tight spot, or allow her to do something she needs to do. Just like in Fate Core, the character gets three free stunts and may take additional stunts by reducing refresh—unless you changed these dials, of course. If it's a stunt with a limited number of uses or that costs a fate point, let her use it once for free.

Involving the Other Players

Playing a character's origin story is a communal activity! Other players can jump in to play NPCs—you can suggest they do this, too, if you need some-one to play a particular character. They can even jump in with their own characters, whether or not they've gone through their own origin story yet.

Other players can also suggest aspects, but only if those aspects define a relationship with their own characters. If the two players define a relationship during an origin story, they both get an aspect and a fate point—which the other player can use in his own origin story!

Ending an Origin Story

Follow an origin story to its logical conclusion, but try not to let it last longer than fifteen or twenty minutes before you move on to the next origin story. The idea is to play through an origin story for each player at the table during a single session.

PRE-COMPELS AS ADVENTURE DESIGN

If you're stuck for an adventure idea, you need look no further than the PCs' aspects! Here's a neat trick to kick-start an adventure and also start the players off with some extra fate points.

First, take a look at all of the PCs' aspects and see if any jump out at you. If you see one that seems to have an interesting adventure hook, particularly something that's tied to the world or an organization within the world, tell the player you want to use it as the seed of an adventure and offer him a fate point. Most players will accept this compel without much convincing, but if the player isn't interested, don't charge him a fate point for refusal—just come up with a different aspect to compel.

Once you've got your seed, open it up to the table. Suggest other aspects and solicit suggestions from the players. Talk with them about what's going to show up in the adventure and hand out fate points for good suggestions. These suggestions don't *have* to be tied to aspects, but it's best if they are. After all, if you're tying multiple aspects into the story, you can keep compelling that aspect later!

If you do take suggestions not based on existing aspects, turn those suggestions *into* aspects. They can be situation aspects or they can be aspects placed on the entire adventure.

Once you've got a good starting point, start playing! Now you've got a starting situation with a lot of player buy-in, and the players have some extra fate points so that they can be extra-awesome from the start!

ASPECT EVENTS

This is a trick you can use to create the framework of an adventure—you can even combine this technique with the previous technique to inject events based on player input.

An aspect event has two components: the event list and the crescendo aspect. The **event list** is a series of things that will happen, leading up to the crescendo aspect. Think of the **crescendo aspect** as what will happen if the players don't intercede. A good event has three to six aspects plus the crescendo aspect.

When the adventure starts, check off the first aspect and bring it into the story. This is the inciting incident, the thing that gets the PCs involved. It's an aspect like any other—you and the players can compel it or invoke it as appropriate. It stays in play until it's no longer relevant, at which point you simply cross it off.

Whenever the story suggests that things should move on, or whenever there's a lull in the action, check off the next aspect and bring it into the story. It's now an aspect that can be invoked or compelled, and it's a new element to the story. Keep doing this for as long as you need to. Accelerate the rate at which you bring in aspects, if the players are getting distracted or not getting involved, or slow it down if they're being really proactive.

If the crescendo aspect gets checked off, things have gotten really, really bad. This usually indicates that the bad guys are on the verge of winning, and that the players need to step up their game!

If you don't check off all the aspects by the time the PCs wrap things up, that's fine! It just means the PCs were on their game, and that they got to be awesome and win big. If you check off all the aspects and things go badly for the PCs, that's also fine! You can snowball what happened in this story into the next one, and up the ante a bit.

Here's an example:

- *Explosions and Fire!*
- *A Rash of Murders*
- *Citywide Panic*
- *Under Terrorist Threat*
- *Three Hours to Detonation*
- *Smoking Crater*

POWER LEVEL

Fate Core provides a default power level that emulates a specific kind of action. It's heroic and action-oriented, but it's also a bit gritty, with heroes that are fragile enough to get hurt badly after a few good hits but tough enough to stay alive for a while. It also provides a certain level of competence in the form of the skill levels and fate points you get.

That power level isn't right for every game, though. Sometimes you want to emulate high-octane pulp or gritty noir, and the default settings for those dials aren't quite right. Well, no problem—just adjust those dials!

Skills

In Fate Core, characters have ten skills in a pyramid ranging from Average (+1) to Great (+4). This emulates highly competent individuals with a small number of things that they're very good at and a wider variety of things that they're pretty good at. There are two things you can adjust when it comes to skills: number of skills and skill cap.

When you increase the number of skills available, you're making the characters competent at a wider variety of things. When you increase the skill cap, you allow PCs to become very good at a few things, possibly reaching into superhuman levels. Decreasing these things tends to push things into a grittier area; fewer skills means the heroes have more niche protection but also increases the chance that the group won't have a specific, important skill. Decreasing the skill cap makes the PCs less competent, which can be good if you're trying to emulate a group full of regular folks.

Most games increase or decrease both; adjusting one without adjusting the other can result in skill bloat or the upper limits of capability going unused.

Refresh

Adjusting refresh up or down impacts PC competency and versatility directly. More importantly, it also affects how often the PCs have to accept compels. Higher refresh means the PCs get more fate points every session, which means they can refuse more compels. Lower refresh means compels are more important, but it also means the players are more at the GM's mercy.

Refresh also affects how many extra stunts a player can buy, which has a direct impact on specialization, niche protection, and competency.

Stunts

It should come as no surprise that handing out more free stunts makes PCs more powerful, and handing out fewer makes them less so. This will also have an impact on refresh—fewer free stunts means players might need to spend some of their precious refresh on more stunts, and vice versa.

A second way to adjust power level through stunts without affecting the number of stunts a PC gets is to adjust the power level of the stunts themselves. In Fate Core, a stunt is worth about 2 shifts. Adjusting that up to 3 or 4 means that each stunt has more individual impact, while adjusting it downward makes each less important.

Stress

Fate Core sets stress tracks at 2 each, adjusting them upward based on certain skills. You can increase this to make characters tougher if you want them to be able to take more of a beating, while adjusting stress downward makes them more fragile. This change has a direct impact on how long fights last. More stress means PCs can shrug off more punishment, which makes fights less risky and probably more common. Lower stress means fights are a lot more dangerous, which means that players will think twice before starting one. It also means they'll need to consider conceding more often in order to avoid getting taken out.

Aspects

Adjusting the number of aspects upward or downward from five doesn't have as much effect on power level as some of the other dials you can turn, but it does have an impact on character versatility. More aspects means there are more tricks the players can call upon to pull their bacon out of the fire, while reducing the number of aspects gives them fewer. However, be careful about adjusting the number of aspects. The more aspects there are, the less important each aspect is and the more likely it is to be forgotten or ignored. Reducing the number of aspects means that each individual aspect becomes more important and less likely to be overlooked, but it also means you'll have to make up for it to some extent with extra situation aspects. In general, more than seven aspects leads to aspect bloat, while fewer than three gives characters too little depth.

You'll also want to think about adjusting refresh if you adjust the number of aspects. If you have a ton of aspects but low refresh, most of those won't get invoked.

Examples

Here are a few examples of power levels you can use for your own games.

GRITTY NOIR	PULP ADVENTURE	SUPER-HEROIC
Eight skills: 3 Average (+1), 3 Fair (+2), 2 Good (+3) (15 skill points equivalent)	Fifteen skills: 5 Average (+1), 4 Fair (+2), 3 Good (+3), 2 Great (+4), 1 Superb (+5) (35 skill points equivalent)	Eighteen skills: 5 Average (+1), 4 Fair (+2), 3 Good (+3), 3 Great (+4), 2 Superb (+5), 1 Fantastic (+6) (50 skill points equivalent)
Skill cap at Good (+3)	Skill cap at Superb (+5)	Skill cap at Fantastic (+6)
Refresh 2	Refresh 4	Refresh 6
1 free stunt	5 free stunts	5 free stunts
2 stress boxes to start	4 stress boxes to start	Stunts are worth 3 shifts each
5 aspects	7 aspects	4 stress boxes to start; stunts can provide more
		5 aspects

These starting skill spreads are suggestions, made with Fate Core's default 18-skills-long list in mind. If you use a longer skill list, the relative breadth of the starting skill sets changes. Look at the above in that light. Gritty Noir's eight skills cover about 45% of the available skills, Fate Core's default covers about 55%, Pulp Adventure's is about 80%, and Super-Heroic's is 100%.

This is a competence dial. It measures not only how well a PC can take on a specific kind task, but how many different kinds of tasks a given PC can excel at.

URANIUM CHEF!

6
SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

CHASES

In any adventure story, you're going to have a big chase scene eventually. This is an adventure trope and Fate Core is aimed at the adventure genre. What you want is to make a chase exciting. It's no fun—and it drains out a lot of the drama—to have a single roll determine who escapes. There are a couple of different ways to approach this type of action.

Using just the standard rules, you can simulate a chase as a challenge (Fate Core, page 147). For a basic chase that you don't want to spend a lot of time resolving, this is perfectly adequate. Set some obstacles for the rolls the players need to make and let them resolve those obstacles. If they succeed in enough rolls, they either escape or, if they are pursuing, catch their quarry. Simple, but not too interesting.

If there is more active opposition, the contest rules (Fate Core, page 150) are the next option and can work quite well. There is a bit of tension here, and the way to set this up so that every player character doesn't need to make rolls individually is to frame the contest as occurring between two teams. The first team to achieve their three victories wins. If it's the fleeing group, they get away, and if it's the chasing group, they catch up, bringing whatever consequences that implies. Getting caught often triggers a conflict.

The contest rules work fine, but three victories is often pretty easy to achieve if you've got a reasonably sized group of characters, and sometimes you want some more drama in your chase scene. Here's an alternative method, called the chase track. It's a hybrid of the contest and conflict rules.

To start, set up a stress track for the chase. This is your timer for the scene. The fleeing party is trying to empty the stress track, while the pursuers are trying to fill it. The length of the stress track determines how long the scene lasts, and where you start on the track sets the difficulty of the escape.

You first need to decide how long you want your chase scene to go on. If you are looking for an average-length scene, a stress track of 10 should be the baseline. If you want to go less than 10, you should probably make the chase a regular contest. If you want the chase to be longer or more involved, add more stress. A 14-stress chase scene is a major event in the session, and an 18 or 20 stress scene could be the main focus of a whole session of play. You probably don't want to go longer than that, or you risk your chase scene stretching out so far that your players get bored.

Setting how many stress boxes are already checked off determines how close the pursuers are to catching the fleeing group. Usually you are going to want the stress to start right in the middle (5 on a 10-stress track). You can make it harder for the fleeing party to escape by setting the stress closer to the top of the range, like 7 stress on a 10-stress track. By the same token, you can make the escape easier by setting the starting stress at a lower level. It's probably best to avoid this, unless the player characters are the pursuing party. If the chase is less complicated, just use a challenge or contest instead of the chase stress track.

Once you've got your stress track set, determine who gets to go first. This can be a judgment call, or it can be based on which individual character on each side has the highest relevant skill. Each side will take turns, so who starts has a slight advantage, but that's about it.

In turn, each side makes skill rolls to attempt to increase or diminish the stress track. This is an overcome action, and it can be opposed by either a passive defense or, more likely, by an active opposition from the other side in the chase. These actions can be all sorts of things, and it's most exciting if they are varied and inventive. Drive rolls for vehicular chases should describe how the character is dodging through barriers or oncoming traffic, for example, and Athletics for foot chases would be about how the characters climb up on to the rooftops and parkour across dangerous hazards. A variety of other skills can come into play for different sorts of actions. You can use Deceive to fake out your opponent, Fight to knock someone down, Notice to spot hazards and avoid them while allowing your opponent to get entangled, Physique to knock obstacles into your opponent's way. If a player comes up with a good action for just about any skill, you should allow it.

When making your roll, the outcome determines what happens to the chase stress track.

- If you fail, your opponent has the choice to either create a boost that works against you, or to move the stress track one check in their direction.

- If you tie, you may choose to move the stress track one check in your direction, but if you do so, your opponent gains a +1 on their next roll.

- If you succeed, you move the stress track one check in your direction.

- If you succeed with style, you get to move the stress track two checks in your direction, or one check and you gain a boost that you can use against your opponent on your next roll.

Each side takes turns making moves and rolling against their skills. Make sure each of the player characters gets a chance to contribute to the escape attempt. Sometimes the rolls will go really well or really poorly and you won't get to everyone, but that's okay. Keep the tension up with good descriptions, going into detail about each move and its results. When one side or the other has either eliminated or filled the stress track, the chase is over. Someone has either been caught or escaped.

SOCIAL CONFLICT

The social skills in Fate Core (Deceive, Empathy, Provoke, Rapport) already give groups a variety of ways to approach social conflicts, but your group can also implement a system of **motivations** and **instincts** to provide PCs more opportunities to engage NPCs in social interactions.

Motivations and Instincts

Any NPC—even a nameless guard—has two components to their social logic: a motivation and an instinct that follows from that motivation. For example, a teacher may want to safeguard his students (*Motivation: Protect His Students from Harm*) by keeping the players' characters from interrogating a particular student (*Instinct: Deny the PCs Access*). Any attempts to produce a change will require the PCs to either alter the NPC's motivation or convince them that a different instinct better serves the motivation itself.

> You might notice that most motivations double as situation aspects that can be invoked and compelled using fate points. Remember the Bronze Rule!

Discovering and Modifying Motivations

Of course, motivations are sometimes difficult to detect. While some NPCs will clearly announce why they are opposing the PCs—"I've come to avenge my father!"—most people don't run around shouting out their internal monologues to the world. In order to discover an NPC's motivations, the PCs need to create advantages using an appropriate social skill. Characters can pick up on small clues (Empathy), challenge the NPC through taunts or provocative statements (Provoke), or even pretend to be someone the NPC can trust (Deceive), in order to discover NPC motivations.

Once the PCs know an NPC's motivation, they can try to alter that motivation using a variety of social skills, replacing the motivation with a urgent concern based on new information (Rapport) or attempting to falsely convince the target that their motivation is based on bad assumptions (Deceive). For example, a loyal guard (***Motivation: Follow My Boss' Orders***, ***Instinct: Kill the PCs***) might be scared off by a sufficiently impressive threat (Provoke) designed to change his motivation to ***Save My Own Skin***.

Modifying Instincts

Rather than attempt to sway an NPC's motivations, PCs may also create situations that demand more immediate attention or suggest that a different instinct would better serve the original motivation. For example, the PCs might start a fire (Provoke) in the lobby of the hotel to distract a hotel concierge (***Motivation: Keep the Hotel Running Smoothly***) or try to convince a drug lord to part with the drugs for less (Rapport) on the promise that future shipments will make up the loss on volume (***Motivation: Make Lots of Money***). These attempts to change the NPC's instincts might move an NPC from ***Instinct: Keep the PCs Out*** to ***Instinct: Put Out the Fire!*** or from ***Instinct: Sell the Drugs at Market Prices*** to ***Instinct: Sell the Drugs Cheap***. Ultimately these social interactions rely on the PCs' ability to sell the new instinct as better serving the original motivation instead of changing the original motivation completely.

Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts

For most attempts to modify NPC motivations or instincts, the PCs will need to make overcome rolls against an active opposition; the NPC rolls an appropriate social skill to see through the deception or resist the fast talk. In some cases it may make sense to use the contest mechanics—trying to convince a judge to let someone out of jail before the judge moves on to the next case—or conflict mechanics—union and management representatives conducting a hard-nosed negotiation that leaves both sides exhausted. Players should also keep in mind that their opponents have social strengths and weaknesses: it's easier to convince a dim-witted, loyal guard with Average (+1) Empathy and Great (+4) Will that his boss wants him to let you in to the secret meeting (Deceive to modify instinct) than it is to convince him that he should abandon his boss altogether (Rapport to modify motivation).

Michael Romero and Amarika Davis are Los Angeles homicide detectives investigating the murder of a wealthy socialite, Richard Bentley. After digging through the case, they discover that Bentley's wife, Sandra Orastin, is the killer. Yet when they show up to arrest her, one of her security guards keeps them from getting close enough to close the case (**Instinct: Stop the Cops from Arresting My Boss**).

Knowing that a physical conflict would give Orastin a chance to escape, Amarika tries to talk her way past the guard, beginning with a Provoke roll to learn the guard's motivation (create an advantage with Provoke). She has a Good (+3) Provoke and rolls well (+3), bringing her total up to Fantastic (+6). The guard, a nameless NPC with an Average (+1) Deceive, rolls decently (+2), but can't help but reveal his motivation: he doesn't want to get fired by letting his boss get arrested. The GM adds the aspect **Motivation: Keep My Job** with two free invocations, since Amarika succeeded with style. Amarika asks him why he wants to protect a killer and the guard sputters something about doing his job even though he doesn't like it.

Michael, seizing on the aspect Amarika discovered, decides that he's going to try to alter the guard's instinct. He suggests that if the guard wants to keep his job, he should help the police arrest Orastin. After all, the guard will definitely lose his job if Michael and Amarika have to arrest him, too.

Michael has a stronger Rapport (+3) than Provoke (+1) skill, so he focuses on convincing the guard instead of scaring him (overcome with Rapport). Michael's roll is average (+0), but he uses the free invocation on **Motivation: Keep My Job** to bring his roll up to a Superb (+5) result. The guard, with Fair (+2) Will rolls poorly (-2), and Michael convinces him that working with the police is the best way to fulfill his Motivation. Michael gains an additional boost **Led by the Guards** for succeeding with style.

7

CUSTOMIZED TOOLS

STRESS

Stress boxes have a pretty specific purpose and use in Fate Core, but that's hardly the only way to go. Here are some other options.

One-Shift Boxes: Every stress box absorbs only one shift of harm, but check as many as you want at a time. This option makes characters significantly more fragile.

Check Two: Check up to two boxes at once, add their values together, and reduce the hit by that many shifts. This option makes characters significantly tougher—a character with five stress boxes can take up to 9 shifts of harm in a scene without resorting to a consequence.

Step Down: Stress goes away gradually rather than all at once. Instead of clearing a stress box automatically at the end of a scene, erase it and check the box to its left (assuming there is one).

Bonus Only: Characters have zero stress boxes to start, but still get bonus boxes from skills like Physique and Will. This makes characters more fragile and emphasizes consequences.

Extra Effort: Voluntarily check a box anytime for a bonus on a roll. The bonus equals the value of the checked box. This can have unpredictable effects on your game. Not only can it result in some swingy rolls, it can also partially supplant the usual fate point economy. When combined with any of the above options, though, it becomes a little more viable.

Stress-Free: Characters have no stress boxes and don't receive bonus boxes from skills. Instead, those skills grant one bonus mild consequence (physical or mental) at Good (+3) or two at Great (+4). This is the most dangerous and dynamic option—every hit results in a consequence and has narrative impact—but can potentially mean an unmanageable number of aspects in play.

CONSEQUENCES

Just like stress, consequences can serve a variety of roles in your game, apart from the default presented in Fate Core.

Extreme Effort: Voluntarily take a consequence anytime for a bonus on a roll equal to the consequence's value—mild grants +2, moderate +4, or severe +6. This can be dangerous, both to the PC and to the fate point economy, as with *Extra Effort*, above.

Group Consequences: Instead of tracking them individually, supporting and main NPCs share a *pool* of **group consequences**. This gives you the option to "sacrifice" a supporting NPC now to make a main NPC more challenging later. For every two supporting NPCs you expect to include in the scenario, add two mild and one moderate group consequences, to a maximum of three moderate group consequences. For each main NPC, add another mild, moderate, and severe group consequence. If a supporting or main NPC concedes, base the concession reward on the total number of consequences that NPC used during that scene.

The antagonists in Will's superhero game all belong to a terrorist organization called CHIMERA. Minotaur and Scylla are the main NPCs, while Cerberus, Talos, and Cerastes are all supporting NPCs. That gives Will a pool of four mild, three moderate, and two severe group consequences for the lot of them.

In an early scene, the PCs face off against Cerberus, Talos, and Minotaur. During the course of the conflict, Cerberus and Minotaur each use a mild consequence—then Cerberus is taken out, Talos concedes, and Minotaur manages to escape. Will could have chosen to use some more consequences to keep Cerberus and Minotaur in the fight, but he chose to save those for a later scene. Plus, he gets a fate point for the concession—and only one, as Talos didn't use a consequence.

By the time they hit the climactic battle, Will has one mild, one moderate, and two severe group consequences remaining to use for Scylla, Minotaur, and Cerastes, the three major NPCs in the scene, as they attempt to bring their nefarious machinations to fruition.

Collateral Consequences: In addition to their usual complement of consequences, the players can also make use of three communal consequences, one of each degree of severity. These represent damage to the environment or new complications in the story, such as *Injured Bystanders* or *Anti-Mutant Hysteria*. Players can effectively use them to offload harm from themselves onto the world around them. A **collateral consequence** can be cleared just like a regular one, using an overcome action with whatever skill seems most appropriate, with two exceptions. One, it must be done during the scene in which the consequence is incurred. Two, there's no delay—with a good enough skill roll it clears immediately. This option is best suited for genres, such as supers, in which the PCs are likely to care a great deal about the world around them.

ZONES

Using zone maps during conflicts breaks up the physical space of a fight, giving characters with high Athletics and Physique scores the opportunity to dominate the battlefield. Here are a few ideas to make zones an exciting part of your game:

Moving Through Zones

In games with quite a few zones, you may want to allow characters to sacrifice their turn in order to move a number of zones equal to their Athletics or to remove a number of physical obstacles equal to their Physique. Fast and strong characters want to be fast and strong, but rolling dice isn't always the best way to represent that in Fate.

Tight Zones Can Create Drama

While zones divide up big areas like parking lots and stadiums—showing how difficult it is to run across a football field quickly—they can also be used to divide up small areas in interesting ways. For example, a fight on a ship might take place in tight quarters that require allies to cross several zones in order to offer support to a friend in trouble. By forcing players to choose between spending actions on moving or offering help from afar, zones can make ordinary conflicts dramatic.

Dangerous Zone Aspects

Zones can also create drama by restricting movement and providing threats the characters have to overcome. For example, a zone on a battlefield might have the aspect *Taking Heavy Fire*, requiring characters to make an Athletics roll to avoid taking damage as they run through the firefight. Some zones might also disappear after a specified number of turns. Collapsing bridges, sinking ships, and closing doors all push characters to move quickly as the battlefield shifts around them and give the players a chance to force NPCs into those zones to contend with the threats as well.

Mental or Social Zones

Not all conflicts happen in the physical world; Fate characters are often drawn into social or mental conflicts that can be mapped out in interesting ways. For example, a psychic surgeon may find her way through a patient's dreamscape blocked by situation aspects that must be overcome though a series of Investigation and Empathy rolls. The zones could detail the obstacles that are keeping the patient from accessing old memories, traces of trauma and abuse that the PCs must punch through before they help the patient overcome his or her past. Similarly, a GM might detail several different social groups in a high school, indicating which groups the PCs have to impress before they can gain access to the more popular students. In essence, these mental and social zones serve to constrain the players, directing them toward conflicts by limiting their movement.

REFRESH

If you want to build more character development into your game, you can let characters devote a scene to activating their refresh, adding some drama in between the scenes of exciting action. Refresh scenes might be:

Flashback scenes: Whenever appropriate, a player can declare that an event triggers a flashback scene. With help from the group, the player narrates a flashback to their character's past, revealing a surprising or interesting detail that connects to the present, renewing the character's focus or giving them the strength to keep going.

Recovery scenes: At the GM's discretion, the group's characters step out of their normal active lives to rest and recuperate, splitting up to pursue their own interests and refocus their energies. These are fantastic scenes for the GM to add new NPCs to the story.

Reflection scenes: One player declares a reflection scene and the other characters ask questions that reveal important and interesting information about the reflecting character's backstory. These are perfect for action-filled stories where actual time away from the adventure is unrealistic.

These scenes can get PCs additional fate points in the middle of a session to keep things exciting or to replace the start-of-session refresh completely. Feel free to use one type exclusively, or open up all of them to your players to use.
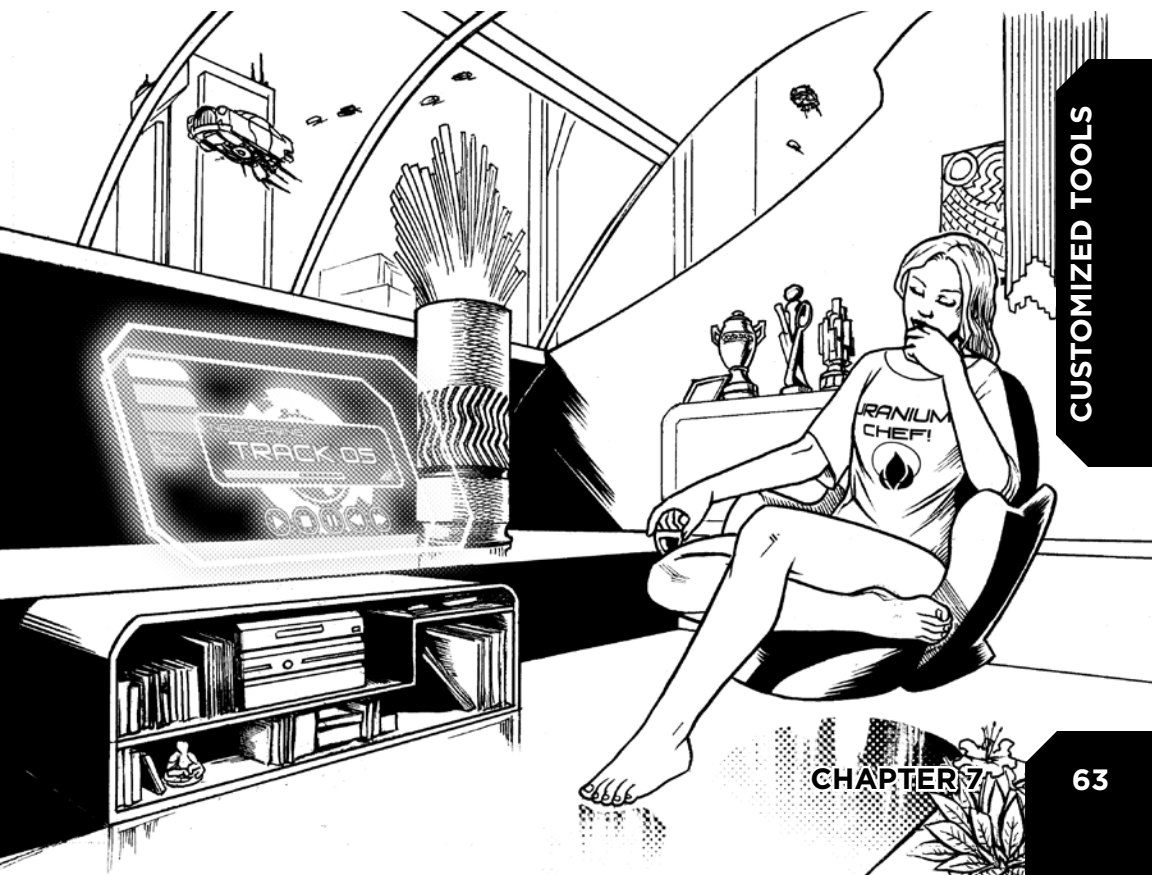
MODIFYING THE SETTING: MAKING BIG CHANGES

While FATE characters are always protagonists, sometimes the players decide they want to modify the setting itself, cleaning up the mean streets of a crime-ridden town or securing a military fortification against future attacks.

Discover the Problems Before You Solve Them

First, the players must gather the information they need to do the job. Perhaps the characters need to collect their existing experience—"Isn't Bastion the main drug runner in town?"—or maybe they need to make new Contacts, Investigate, or Lore rolls to uncover old alliances and lost knowledge. Either way, the group should construct a series of **setting aspects** that represent the existing problem.

To clean up the streets, a group might list:

- *Local Drug Pushers*

- *Midlevel Drug Mules*

- *Drug Financiers*

- *Corrupt Cops*

- *Crime Kingpin, Marty O'Banner*

Episode by Episode

For each setting aspect the group wants to reform, the group must roll against an appropriate difficulty for resolving that problem. For example, arresting all the *Local Drug Pushers* might require the characters to make a Resources roll to mobilize the existing police officers, or a Physique roll to actually capture the bad guys themselves. While the characters can invoke their own aspects, the GM can pay fate points to invoke the existing setting aspects—such as *Corrupt Cops*—complicating the players' progress.

For each roll, use the outcome to drop the characters into the middle of a situation—like a TV episode—that reflects the results of the roll. On a losing roll, the *Local Drug Pushers* have gone to ground, and it's going to take some digging to get them out. On a successful roll, the group has rounded up the bad guys, but needs to get them to start talking. Either way, if the characters manage to resolve the situation, flip the setting aspect to a positive, turning *Local Drug Pushers* into *A Few Clean Streets*.

Once they start to make progress, let the group freely invoke previously resolved setting aspects that apply, as the job might get easier when they work their way up the chain.

We Need a Montage!

If you're less interested in playing out the day-to-day changes needed to reform a criminal justice system or fortify a castle, you can instead construct montages for your characters' progress. Set a time limit—including a limited number of actions—that represent that time and resources the characters have available to resolve the situation before the story picks up in full.

For each roll, the characters attempt to resolve one of the discovered aspects using appropriate skills. Characters can work together, or they can split up to try to solve multiple problems. In this style of making big changes, narrate the group's success like a movie montage, pausing only long enough at each roll to see the group succeed or fail to improve the situation.

OTHER DICE

Don't have your Fate dice or Deck of Fate handy? Here are some alternatives to get your game going.

D6-D6

Take two six-sided dice of different colors. Designate one as the positive die and the other as the negative, and roll. Subtract the negative from the positive to get a result of -5 to +5. Doubles are always a zero. It's "swingier" than four Fate dice, and the range is broader, but it's close enough for jazz.

Connect the Dots

This technique was first seen in "Baby's First Fudge Dice" by Jonathan Walton. You can Google up a more extensive explanation of the idea—look for the link that leads to sinisterforces.com.

With a permanent marker and some pipped six-sided dice, you can make your *own* Fate dice by connecting the dots. The 2 and 3 sides become your ⊟ sides, the 4 and 6 sides become your ◼ sides, and the 5 and 1 sides become your ⊞ sides—you'll have to freehand the 1. Ta-da—artisanal Fate dice!
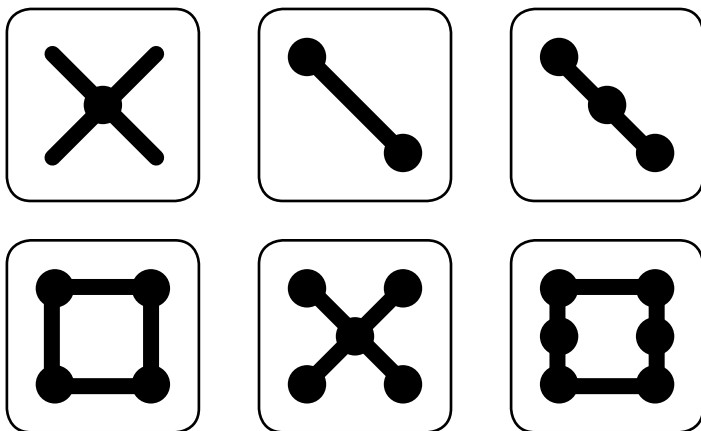
3d6

If you go in for tables, or if you just have a good memory, you can roll three six-sided dice.

3	4	5-6	7-8	9-12	13-14	15-16	17	18
-4	-3	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2	+3	+4

4d6

This one's the least work, but maybe not the most intuitive: roll four six-sided dice and treat 1s and 2s as ⊟, 3s and 4s as ◼, and 5s and 6s as ⊞.

SCALE

If you expect your game's themes and issues to give rise to conflicts between entities of different size or scale—dragon vs. knight, snub fighter vs. space station, or start-up vs. multinational corporation, for example—consider making use of these rules. If not, you're probably better off giving this section a pass.

First, establish how many **scale steps** you'll need. Three or four should do it. What those steps represent is going to depend on the nature of the setting and the stories you expect to tell, but they'll always reflect incrementally larger or more potent things in the setting and will commonly be involved in conflicts.

> Mike's game about warring secret societies of varying size and influence has scale steps called Local (confined to a single city), Regional (multiple cities), and Widespread (*all* cities).

When two entities enter into a conflict with one another, the differences in their scale come into play. For every step that separates them, apply one or both of the following effects to the larger of the two:

- +1 to the attack roll *or* +1 to the defense roll

- Deal +2 shifts of harm on a successful attack *or* reduce incoming harm by 2

How to apply these effects depends on what makes sense in context.

> If the Hatchet Gang (scale: Local) stages a daring raid against the Benevolent Association of Celestial Wanderers (scale: Regional), the Hatchet Gang will have a harder time of it, in terms of resources and personnel, against the better funded Association. It's reasonable to give the Association a +1 bonus to its defensive Fighting roll.

Of course, if the conflict is between two entities of roughly equivalent size or scale, then none of these effects applies. They only come into play when the scale is *unequal*.

Scale as an Extra: Most things in your setting will have a scale rating just based on what they are as a matter of common sense—all small gangs are Local, for example—but you can give players the chance to alter the scale of their characters, possessions, or holdings as an extra they can take, if it fits with their high concept.

SIDEKICKS VS. ALLIES

Players can select both sidekicks and allies as extras, but differentiating a boy wonder from a squad of professional agents can be tough. Here are a few ways to distinguish **sidekicks**, who work closely with the PCs, from trained **allies** that they may call upon in specific situations.

Permissions and Costs

While both sidekicks and allies are extras (see *Extras*, page 269 in FATE CORE), sidekicks tend to be unlocked through personal relationships and allies tend to arise from organizational or resource-driven permissions. For example, Sherlock Holmes might select the aspect **Good Friend of Dr. Watson** to add Watson to his sheet as a sidekick, while selecting the aspect **Patron of the Baker Street Irregulars** would add the mostly nameless children he uses as spies and couriers. As for costs, sidekicks tend to impose social and relational costs on the characters—asking them to contribute to important causes or aid them in times of need—while allies usually require more direct payment, favors, or other resources.

Stress Tracks and Consequences

One great place to differentiate sidekicks and allies is with stress tracks and consequences in conflicts. Sidekicks are like supporting characters—give them a limited stress track with one mild (or perhaps moderate) consequence slot and one extreme consequence that might change the character's sheet in a dramatic moment.

Allies, on the other hand, are usually faceless mobs that have a stress box for each member of the gang. Stress inflicted on allies typically knocks them out of the fight completely instead of leaving them with consequences that carry from scene to scene. This distinction makes it harder to take out a gang of allies in a single attack, but makes sidekicks more flexible and resilient across a variety of social and physical situations in which they can utilize their consequence slots to protect or defend the PCs.

Permanent vs. Temporary Allies

Sidekicks are almost always permanent parts of a character's sheet, but allies might be temporary, depending on the needs of the PC. For example, an intelligence officer might take the aspect **Sent by the Feds** to have a set of Federal Agents on call, at the cost of a point of refresh. It's equally feasible that such a character could forgo such permanent allies in favor of creating an advantage for an upcoming scene, using Contacts or Resources. Of course, permanent allies should be much more powerful, with more stress boxes, additional aspects, and additional stunts, than temporary allies who are little better than a weak nameless mob.

WEALTH

The importance of money in a game depends greatly on its genre. Fate Core suggests a Resources skill, but for genres in which the *acquisition* of wealth is often a prime motivator, such as cyberpunk or classic dungeon-crawling fantasy, you might want something a little more flexible.

Wealth Stress

One alternative is introducing a new stress track—**Wealth**. When you attempt something that would be made easier by the liberal application of cash, you can check a Wealth stress box for a bonus to your roll (see the *Extra Effort* stress variant on page 60).

For example, if you're haggling over the price of a hover-speeder using Rapport—or Provoke, if you're being a real jerk about it—and you fail your roll, you could check a Wealth stress box to pay too much for it. Or perhaps you're planning a heist and fail your Burglary roll? Check a Wealth stress box to get—or have gotten—the expensive gear you need to pull it off. Can't find the assassin you're looking for with Contacts? Maybe checking a Wealth stress box will improve your informants' memories. And so on.

In other words, it's succeeding at a serious cost, where that cost is literally a *cost*.

Starting Wealth

This will vary depending on your game—are the PCs professionals with steady work, or are they living sword-hand-to-mouth?—but starting off with a base of two Wealth stress boxes is a happy medium. PCs get +1 stress box for each aspect they have that relates to how well off they are, to a maximum of +3 stress boxes.

Gaining Wealth

Wealth stress doesn't go away on its own. Instead, you can only clear a checked box when you gain more loot—gold, credits, barter, or whatever else works for your game. Acquiring a parcel of Wealth lets you clear any number of stress boxes whose total values don't exceed the parcel's value. If you have one or more checked boxes of a value greater than that of the Wealth parcel you've received, do nothing to the boxes that exceed the parcel's value—it's not enough Wealth to make a difference to you. For example, if you acquire 3 Wealth, you can clear your first, second, or third stress box, if any one of them is checked, or both your first and second stress boxes—but not your fourth, if you're lucky enough to have one.

The only way to *add* stress boxes is at a milestone, by swapping out an existing aspect for a wealth-oriented one.

WEAPONS AND ARMOR ALTERNATIVES

By default, FATE abstracts weapons and armor—along with all gear—into flavor. Having a gun allows you to attack someone with Shoot, but doesn't do anything more. If you want weapons and armor to matter more, the Extras chapter in FATE CORE (page 277) presents rules for Weapon and Armor ratings. If *those* aren't to your liking either, here are a few more alternatives.

Damage Floors and Ceilings

In FATE CORE, weapons are *dangerous* if you use the rules in the *Extras* chapter. A relatively unskilled swordswoman who gets a lucky hit with a two-hander can cleave a man in twain without trying too hard, and that can be scary. It lends itself to a gritty, lethal game, and if that's not your cup of tea, you might want weapon and armor ratings that provide less lethality but still matter.

When you use these rules, Weapon ratings still start at 1 and go up, but they can go up a bit further (say to 5 or 6, for the most lethal of weapons). Instead of simply adding a weapon's rating to the shifts you generate on a hit, though, a Weapon rating provides a *minimum* number of shifts of stress you can score with that weapon. For example, a longsword with Weapon: 3 does 3 shifts of stress if you tie, or if you roll 1, 2, or 3 shifts on your attack. Even for a grazing hit, you'll still always deal at least 3 shifts of stress. If you roll shifts beyond that, you simply deal that much stress and ignore the Weapon rating.

Armor ratings do the opposite; they tell you what the *maximum* number of shifts of stress you'll take from an attack is. Armor ratings start at 4 (for light armor) and go down to 1 (for the heaviest plate or most advanced powered tactical armor). The exception to this is when the attacker succeeds with style—if this happens, ignore the Armor rating. The attacker does *full damage* when she succeeds with style.

Armor ratings trump Weapon ratings. This means that someone with Weapon 5 attacking someone with Armor 3 will still only deal 3 stress at most, unless they succeed with style.

Armor and Weapon Aspects

Earlier in this book (page 16) we told you that you could model important gear as aspects. This works for most gear, but some people may still want a little more when it comes to weapons and armor. This rules mod is meant to be layered on top of that system, though there's no reason you couldn't use it on its own—it would just mean that *only* weapons and armor are aspects, and other gear isn't.

Weapons are divided into **light**, **standard**, and **heavy**. A light weapon could be a small knife or truncheon, a standard weapon is something like a sword or pistol, and a heavy weapon might be a shotgun, sniper rifle, or massive two-handed sword.

When you successfully attack with a weapon, you may make a special invocation with it. It costs a fate point as usual, but provides neither a +2 nor a reroll. Instead, you can force your opponent to take a consequence instead of stress. With a light weapon, you may force someone to take a mild consequence. A standard weapon forces a moderate consequence, and a heavy weapon forces a severe consequence. If you succeed with style, move the consequence up by one level of severity—minor to moderate, moderate to severe, severe to either taken out or an extreme consequence (~~victim's~~ defender's choice). If the appropriate consequence slot is already in use, move the new consequence up by one level of severity.

This special invocation also acts a little bit like a compel. When you invoke a weapon aspect in this way, you offer the fate point to your target. If he takes the fate point, you deal the consequence. He can *refuse* the fate point and pay you one of his own to not take the consequence, but then he takes the stress he would have taken normally anyway.

Armor aspects are similarly divided into light, medium, and heavy, and also allow for special invocations. You can invoke light armor to absorb a single mild consequence; you don't take the stress it would have absorbed, and you don't fill the consequence slot. Medium armor can absorb a moderate consequence. Heavy armor can absorb a severe consequence, or two mild or moderate consequences in any combination. You can use your armor to absorb consequences beyond these limits, but if you do so, the armor aspect immediately changes to represent the fact that it's broken and no longer able to absorb attacks. You'll have to get it repaired, which might cost you and might take anywhere from a few hours to a few days depending on the armor and the place you take it.

Red and Blue Dice

If you have at least three colors of Fate dice and want something that isn't quite so predictable for your weapons and armor, you can use Red and Blue dice in place of Weapon and Armor ratings. We're using "Red" and "Blue" here for convenience—you can use any two colors of dice you want, as long as they don't get used for anything else.

Red is for weapons: The more Red your weapon has, the bigger and/or deadlier it is. A Red:1 weapon could be a dagger, a goblin's claws, or a very low-caliber pistol, while a Red:4 weapon could be a greatsword, a dragon's bite, or a close-range blast from a combat shotgun.

When you attack, for every point of Red your weapon has, replace one of your usual Fate dice with a Red Fate die. If your attack outcome is a tie or better, each of your Red dice that comes up ⊞ increases the hit by +1 shift of harm.

Blue is for armor: The more Blue armor your armor has, the more protective it is. Light armor, like cured leather or tough hide, is Blue:1. Heavy armor, like a mail hauberk or plate armor, is Blue:2 or 3.

When you defend, for every point of Blue your armor has, replace one of your usual Fate dice with a Blue Fate die. If your defend outcome is a failure or a tie, each of your Blue dice that comes up a ⊞ absorbs 1 shift of harm.

Because you're always rolling four Fate dice, the maximum number of Red or Blue dice you can have on a roll is four.

To mix things up even more, you can give defensive weapons Blue, like a quarterstaff or main gauche, and "offensive" armor Red, like plate armor with big nasty spikes or an electrostatic force field. You could also have stunts that let you swap Blue dice for Red when you defend—for example, a fencing master with a killer riposte, or a magical flaming shield.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT

SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIONS

Supplemental actions don't appear anywhere in FATE CORE, despite having appeared in previous versions of FATE. We did this for two reasons. First, we feel it's better to use bonuses than penalties, and supplemental actions imposed a penalty. Second, supplemental actions are there to make things more "realistic," but they don't necessarily make things more fun or more like an exciting story. They make it harder to do cool things, not easier.

That doesn't mean that the concept doesn't have value, though. If you want to use supplemental actions, you can simply use them as they appear in previous versions of FATE—performing an action that would distract from your primary action imposes a -1 penalty on your primary action. Most of these actions are free actions in FATE CORE. We leave it to you to determine which free actions should be supplemental actions.

If you want something that's a little more in keeping with the ethos of FATE CORE, and that doesn't impose a penalty, try this out.

> ## SUPPLEMENTAL ACTION
> When you perform some minor action in addition to your primary action—moving a zone, drawing a weapon, ducking behind cover, or anything else that the GM deems is a supplemental action—you create a boost such as *Distracted*, *Obscured View*, or *Shaky Aim*, which lasts until your next turn starts. You can perform only one such action, so you'll create only one such boost. Anyone acting against you or defending against your action can use this boost— at which point it goes away, like a normal boost. Also, the GM may compel you with it once for free—meaning that she doesn't have to offer you a fate point, but you may still pay one to resist the compel—at which point it disappears.

8 MAGIC

INTRODUCTION

When your character takes an action in play, hopefully it makes sense to you. You can imagine it with some clarity, and you have an instinctive sense of how things work that allows you to have fun without overthinking it. Consider the number of calculations that go into punching someone: are your hands free? Can you move them? Are you close enough? Have you balled your hands into fists in preparation?

We don't stop and talk through those steps in play because we understand them implicitly to be part of the act of punching. This clarity thins as we move into areas outside common experience, but by and large, you can grasp the chain of action that goes into things.

> Sufficiently misunderstood action is indistinguishable from magic.

Magic upends this. We don't have the same foundation of experience to reference when we start throwing around thunder and lighting. So we try to find rules and logic that make the magical more familiar to us, and that's something of a paradox. Magic is, by its nature, a creation of fiction, and writers and creators are more interested in how it helps them tell stories than any kind of internal rules.

Games, on the other hand, need rules. The consistency of rules makes behavior—without rhyme or reason, it's just madness.

The good news is that there's a sweet spot that you can aim for. While it's true that magic is a convenience of authors, those who use it willy-nilly produce tepid, mushy fantasy. Giving magic rules is not just good gaming, it's good fiction. If you can find the spot where those two priorities overlap, then you've got the workings of a great magic system.

The Basics

The simple test for this is whether or not your magic system makes sense without the game.

This is backwards from the way a lot of games feel. Coming up with the mechanical basis for a magic system is a lot of fun, and it is often the first thing we do with a new system, but this largely ends up perpetuating magic systems we already know from games where ideas and rules don't mesh.

The greatest example of a magic system is "Vancian" magic, called such because it's based off the books of the late, great Jack Vance, where wizards memorize spells, then forget them after casting. This should be familiar as the basis for magic in D&D, and whatever one thinks of its implementation in D&D and related games, it definitely instituted a number of rules—spellbooks, spells per level, and so on—to capture that *idea*. If you want to base your magic on Vance, then you're picking some great source material. The trap to avoid is not to base your magic on *someone else's* interpretation of Vance.

To put it another way, magic is not just an excuse to add spells to your game. Magic says incredibly important things about your game and your setting, and if you don't think those things through, you are going to end up with a thinly painted-on layer of magic that will quickly chip and fade.

What Is Magic?

So what is magic and how does it work?

There's no single answer to that, and while that's rather the point, it's also intensely frustrating. You could say magic is a way to do things that are otherwise impossible, or an alternate means of doing things that are possible, but that falls short. You could bust out some Arthur C. Clarke and just treat it as a different kind of science. You could treat it as a system of prices, risks, and rewards. You could consider it something that comes from someone else—someone horrible or wonderful, depending.

You'd still be missing things, but for ease of application we're going to seize upon a few key threads and boil it down to these five factors:

- **Tone:** Is magic a neutral force, a flavored force, or something with opinions?

- **Cost:** Does magic demand a price, a risk, or neither?

- **Limits:** Does magic follow strict rules? Is it flexible and open-ended? What are the limits on magic?

- **Availability:** Is magic universally available, so everyone in a setting might have it? Is it rare enough that only some people have it, possibly including all the PCs? Or is it rare enough that only one or two PCs might have access to it?

- **Source:** Where does magic come from?

Tone

The first factor speaks to the nature of magic itself. *Neutral* magic is a force, like electricity or gravity, which is simply implemented like a tool, while a *flavored* force either responds to or is inclined towards certain outcomes. The most common example of this is a magic that tends towards the dark and the light, and which perhaps operates differently at each end of the spectrum. In this case, the magic is not necessarily an intelligent force, but it has tendencies. For example, fire tends to burn, earth tends to be stable. *Opinionated* magic comes from someone. Maybe it's a god or angel, maybe it's a horrible monstrosity outside of time and space. Whoever they are, they have agendas, and magic is a tool for them to drive those agendas. There's a lot of room for nuance here—the magic might be neutral in its use, but the source might be opinionated. On the other hand, if magic actually summons or channels these beings, then the actual manifestation of magic may be shaped by their opinions.

Cost

The second factor is one that speaks to the cost of magic use. For some, it is essential that magic have a *cost*, that there be tradeoffs made for power. They might be literal or symbolic, but when they're present then the subtext is usually that power has a price. Contrast that with magic having some *risk* associated with it. As with price, this puts a natural limiter on the use of magic, but it speaks to a very different set of priorities, especially if magic is easy to come by. It might be blatant—such as spells having a risk of blowing up in your face—or it might be subtle—a steadily accruing toxicity—but it makes each choice to use magic a conscious one. As an aside, costs work well with flavored or opinionated magic, risks work better with neutral or opinionated magic— where the risk is "attention from the beings with opinions".

No cost is a curious option, and one to not take too literally. There's usually *some* cost, even if it's the price of a pointy hat and the opportunity cost of studying magic rather than getting that MBA. These are familiar, mundane costs. That's why this approach works best with highly regimented neutral magic. It lines up well with "magic as science" thinking or very concrete lists of spells or effects—or rules for things like cyberware, which are basically differently skinned magic systems. Whatever the case, if there is neither cost nor risk, there is usually some other limiting factor at work, even if magic is fairly ubiquitous—such as limits to the types of magic a given person may use.
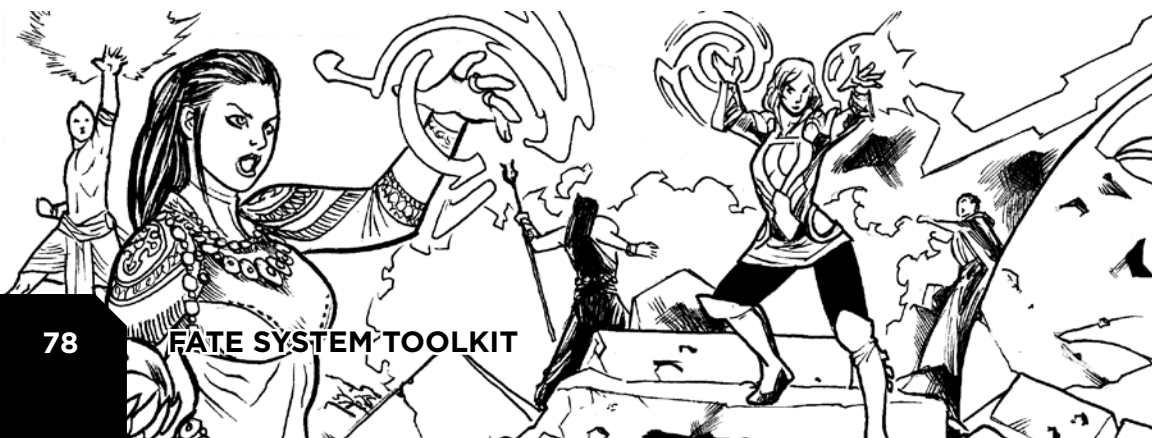
Limits

The third factor is a little bit of a cheat because it also speaks to the tolerances of your table. Strict magic systems, with spell lists and direct effects, appeal to some players, while more loose interpretive systems appeal to others. There's also lots of room in the middle for systems that are open-ended in effect, but constrained by something like elements or spheres.

Whatever the answer, this should help you think about is what magic can't do. It is mechanically easy to make a system where magic can do anything—create a magic skill then let players roll it for *everything* that they can describe magically—but that tends to be very boring. Limits are a big part of what makes magic feel magical, and in turn are a big part of how they can be flavorfully implemented in play.

Availability

The fourth factor tells you something about the setting, sure, but it also answers a critical question about game balance and spotlight time. A magic system that is available to all players can be designed very differently from one that only one player is going to use. If only one character has access to magic, then it's important that magic not be so potent that the character overshadows other players and steals all the spotlight, but also not so useless that the player feels like she made the dumb choice. If, on the other hand, everyone has magic, you have a lot more leeway. When everyone gets to be awesome, "balance" is less of a bogeyman.

Source

The final factor is the most and least important—it doesn't matter much what the answer *is*, but it matters that you *have one*. The better you understand where magic comes from, the better you can understand what it can do and—sometimes more importantly—what it *can't* do.

You're under no obligation to share this explanation with your players, and in fact this is an area where we actually encourage a little discretion. Not because you can't trust players with this information, but because your magic system is going to feel a hell of a lot less magical after you've explained it all. A little bit of mystery is essential to the magical feel.

Notice that none of these factors ask "What does magic do?" since the answer to that is another question: What does it *need* to do? Hopefully you have a grasp on that, because if you don't know that, nothing else is going to work. "Because I need to have a magic system" is not a good enough answer.

Magic and Fate

The purpose of rules is to give you the tools to translate your speaking and imagining into a structure that lets them be shared. That presupposes that you have something you *want* to share.

Fate is a representational game. That is, if you have an idea in your head, it provides you the tools needed to express that in play. Need characters to be able to do something? Make sure there's a skill for that. Have a trick you want them to do? Create a stunt. Want to drive home a thematic element? Put an aspect on it.

These same tools are available to you when you want to add magic into your game. But just like the rest of play, there is no one single right tool. Depending upon what magic looks like in your game, different mechanics may be the right way to capture it.

The magic systems that follow serve two purposes. First, each one is a functional magic system that you can drop into your game or hack to serve your own purposes. That's important, but it's almost secondary to the other purpose. Each of these systems is also an illustration of how to apply mechanics to deliver a certain kind of effect.

And that's how we end up back at punching. If you know Fate's rules well, then it's easy to adjudicate a punching scenario, and only slightly more complicated to come up with your own system for fisticuffs. By the time you get to the end of this, the goal is that you will feel equally comfortable taking a magical idea that you're carrying around and be able to translate it into mechanics with the same ease that you do more mundane challenges.

Skills as Magic

The skills are an easy avenue into magic, whatever skills you use. The main question to ask is whether it repurposes existing skills or demands the creation of a new magic skill. Each approach has specific strengths, and it's worth thinking about them when designing a system. If you're going to soup-up existing skills, then you end up with a bit of a challenge in covering all skills. You can, of course, opt to only make certain skills magical, but you need to be careful not to create super-skills this way.

Creating a new skill can solve a lot of problems, especially since you can create multiple skills if you want to differentiate between magical disciplines. There's also a subtle cost to it, since buying up that skill is going to mean some "real" skill gets neglected.

While there's no right answer, when in doubt, go with a new skill. Converting existing skills to magic is more labor intensive, and it's something you should only do when you already have a clear vision you're acting to serve.

Aspects as Magic

Aspects have two important roles in most magic systems, both as a gateway and as an expression.

As a gateway, almost any magic system will demand that the character have at least one aspect that reflects their magical tradition or power source. While there are exceptions—such as those where "magic" is just a different coat of paint on technology—magic is usually important enough to the character to merit reflection as an aspect.

Aspects are also a great way to represent the effects of magic. At the simplest level, it's easy to do a magic system where magic simply expands the range of aspects that you can create through advantages and boosts.

Stunts as Magic

Stunts can absolutely serve as the basis of a magic system, especially if stunts simply do explicit things. More often, however, this is a good model for a **powers** system. This is a pointed difference, but powers are better suited to monsters and superheroes. Still, stunts can be a useful way to jazz up a magic system, but cost must be carefully considered. Often, a magic system has an intrinsic refresh cost, which makes picking up stunts dangerous. Either the cost should be adjusted or the stunts should really be worth it.

Extras as Magic

Extras are basically their own magic system as written. A magic system may provide explanations and justifications for specific extras, but the system itself is robust and easily used for any number of effects.

SYSTEMS

You want magic? We gotcher magic right here!

Stormcallers

Design Notes

Fans of The Dresden Files RPG will notice some similarities between this magic and the DFRPG's Evocation rules. This is not a coincidence.

This is a mostly-structured system with a bit of interpretive leeway within structured bounds. It depends upon a "Stormcalling" skill and at least one aspect. The source of magic is quite explicit, but the use is limited. As such it's balanced so that it works even if only one player chooses to play a Stormcaller, but could still support multiples in a group.

The default assumption is that non-Stormcallers use the optional Weapon and Armor ratings rules (see Fate Core page 277). If you're looking to balance a Stormcaller against a group of non-Stormcallers, the Stormcaller forgoes such bonuses. If your game does not use the Weapon and Armor ratings rules, increase the Refresh cost from 1 to 2.

Description

Five Great Storms rage at the heart of creation, each large enough to shatter suns, but held in check in a precise dance of creation and destruction. Earthquake, Flood, Glacier, Inferno, and Thunder each represent limitless fonts of power, and mortal sorcerers have found ways to tap into these storms to power their own ambitions.

The 30-Second Version

Don't want to read all the rules? Use this shorthand version:

- If your game uses Weapon/Armor ratings rules, reduce Refresh by 1. If not, reduce Refresh by 2.

- Pick a Storm type such as Earthquake, Flood, Glacier, Inferno, and Thunder, and take the aspect *[Storm]caller*—e.g. *Earthcaller*, *Icecaller*, etc.

- Buy the Stormcaller skill.

- Use the Stormcaller skill to attack, defend, and create an advantage, so long as the description of your action includes the element of your storm.
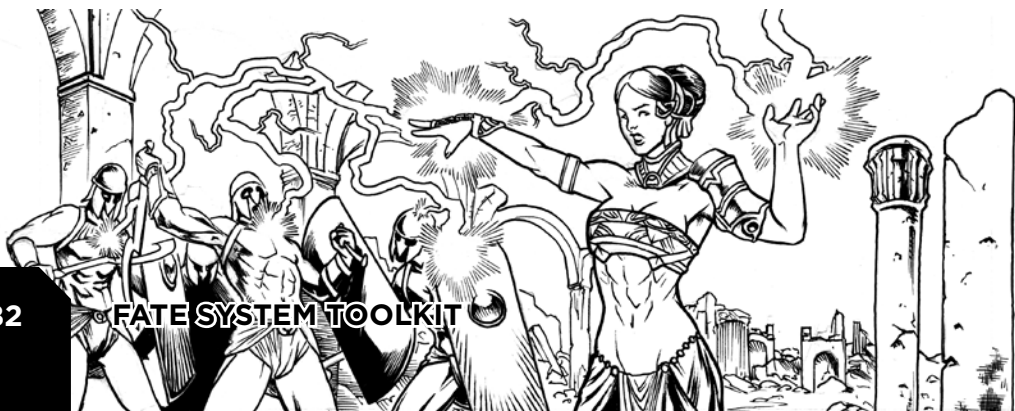
Mechanics

Characters able to tap into the Storms for power must do the following:

- If your game uses Weapon/Armor ratings rules, reduce Refresh by 1. If not, reduce Refresh by 2.

- Pick an aspect that reflects which Storm he is attuned to: Earthquake, Flood, Glacier, Inferno, or Thunder. This could be as simple as "Attuned to the Earthquake," but it's not limited to that. So long as the aspect clearly calls out the storm the character is tied to, the precise terminology is flexible.

- (Optional) Purchase ranks in the "Stormcaller" skill.

ASPECTS OF STORM

The Storm aspects are obviously useful when making Stormcaller skill rolls, but they also carry some of the resonance of their specific storm. This takes the form of a passive effect, as well as specific things that aspect may be invoked or compelled for.

EARTHQUAKE

Earthquake topples mountains and thrusts new ones into the sky. To tap the Earthquake requires a deep core of personal stability, and while this can promote strength, it also can make it a little hard to pick up momentum.

- **Passive Effect:** Character never loses their footing, no matter how precarious, unless actively knocked down.

- **Invoke:** Endure—Any action depending on patience, resolve or endurance can benefit from the Earthquake.

- **Compel:** Delay—When quick action is called for, the Earthquake can compel a delay.

FLOOD

The Flood cannot be contained. It strikes from every direction with overwhelming force, subtlety, or infinite patience, always conforming to the needs of the situation. Nothing can stand against the Flood, and the only hope is to go along with it and hope for the best. Those attuned to its power share some of that flexibility.

- **Passive Effect:** So long as swimming is possible, the character can easily stay afloat as long as necessary, even sleeping in the water.

- **Invoke:** Flexibility—When doing something outside of the box, such as using a skill for something bizarre, use this for a bonus.

- **Compel:** Messy—Water is subtle and potent, but it also makes a mess. Compel to leave traces of passage when most inconvenient.

GLACIER

Where earth stands, Glacier pushes ever on, inevitable and unyielding, shattering itself a thousand times until it breaks the thing in its path. Attunement to the Glacier gives the Stormcaller a portion of that inevitability.

- **Passive Effect:** Cold temperatures within the normal range do not bother the character.

- **Invoke:** Push—Whether it is to open a door or brush aside an underling, the character benefits when moving forward and pushing things out of his path.

- **Compel:** Overcommit—The Glacier does not corner well, and a Stormcaller of Ice may find himself staying too long with a given course of action.

INFERNO

The Inferno consumes. Its appetite is endless, and there is nothing that is not fuel for its endless, roiling flames.

- **Passive Effect:** Hot temperatures within the normal range do not bother the character.

- **Invoke:** Destroy—Not fight or hurt, destroy. The Inferno is interested in nothing less.

- **Compel:** Consume—Resources, food, good opinions, and fortune, an Infernocaller has a bad habit of using them up without thinking about it.

THUNDER

Those who distinguish between the Thunder and the lightning reveal they do not understand. Thunder is the sudden, powerful expression of force, be it the bolt that cuts the sky or the clap that makes it ring. Its callers share in that potency.

- **Passive Effect:** Your voice carries. If you can see someone well enough to identify them, you can shout loudly enough to be heard by them—and anyone in between—no matter the conditions.

- **Invoke:** Act Decisively—When quick action is called for due to a change in circumstances—not just round-to-round in a fight—then invoke this for a bonus.

- **Compel:** Overwhelm—Sometimes, delicacy, restraint, and precision are called for. Sometimes, a Stormcaller underestimates that.

The Stormcaller Skill

The Stormcaller skill is used to summon the power of the storm to do all manner of interesting—often harmful—things. The exact form this takes depends on the storm being called, but in general the Stormcaller summons the energy of the storm in question into being, then shapes it to his will. This could take the form of a cage of lighting, a hurled spike of frost, a ripple of force through the earth, or anything else that the player can think of.

While there are specific rules and limitations on what Stormcalling does based on which storm is called, they share some basics in common.

In each case, the force that is summoned must be expressed **externally** to the character doing the summoning in a **literal** fashion. That means Stormcalling **does not** allow a user to give himself the "Strength of Earth" to land a mighty blow, but it does let him hit something REALLY hard with a rock. Any description of effect must be couched in terms of how summoning, projecting, and crudely shaping the force in question can get said effect.

Overcome: Stormcalling tends to be a bit crude for all but the most direct of overcome actions, such as knocking something down. But it definitely excels at that.

Create an Advantage: The creation of advantages is a common effect of Stormcalling, summoning up walls of fire or opening up pits in the floor. The more concrete storms—Earthquake and Glacier—tend to be strongest at this sort of effect, as their efforts tend to be more durable.

Most effects can be treated as a normal roll to create an advantage, using an aspect on the scene to reflect that advantage, but there are some special cases. Specifically, Stormcalling can be used to create a barrier of the appropriate element. In this case, the caller picks two zones and makes a check against a difficulty of 0. The result of the roll indicates the difficulty to bypass the created barrier.

Other advantage effects depend on the specific element invoked.

Attack: All the Storms are good at this. As a rule of thumb you can make an attack in-zone at no penalty, -1 per zone distance. These are normal attacks, but may have additional effects based on the Storm used.

Defend: Elements may also be used to defend against attacks, parrying with weapons of ice or throwing up a momentary wall of water to intercept a blow. Specifics depend on the Storm used.
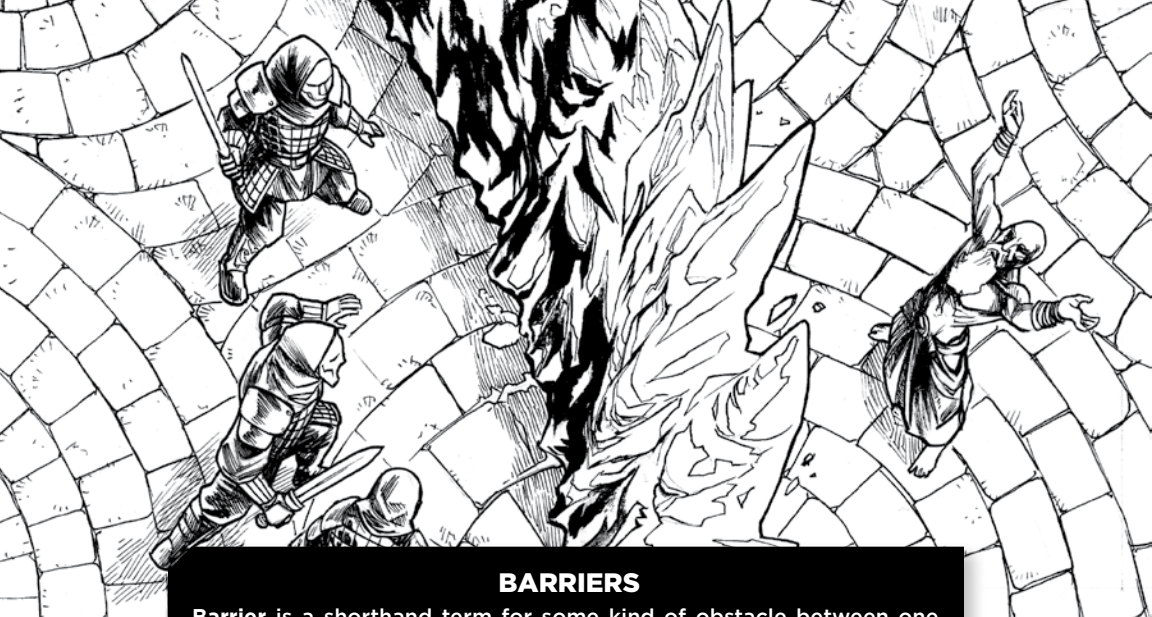
BARRIERS

Barrier is a shorthand term for some kind of obstacle between one zone and the next, such as a wall of ice. When a character attempts to penetrate, circumvent, or destroy a barrier, the value of the barrier is the difficulty to do so.

In general, a barrier exists between two zones, but it is possible that a barrier might be longer, even completely encircling a zone. The creation of a barrier is a special case of creating an advantage using the Stormcaller skill. It creates a barrier equal to the result of the Stormcaller's roll. So, if the character rolls a Good (+3), then the barrier has a value of 3. A character who rolls less than a +1 fails to generate a substantial barrier. Specific storms may modify this roll, or offer extra options.

When an attack is made through a barrier, the defender may use the barrier's value in lieu of a defense roll. The defender must decide before rolling, and using the barrier forgoes the possibility of a success with style. If the attack includes an attempt to bypass the barrier—by, say, jumping over it—then the attacker uses the lower of the two skills involved (the bypassing skill and the attacking skill) to make the attempt (unless, of course, an appropriate aspect is applied to streamline the bypassing).

For example, a substantial wall of Ice (Great Barrier, +4) is thrown up between a Stormcaller and the angry Voidcaller one zone away. If the voidcaller throws a shadowbolt, the Stormcaller may forgo the die roll and effectively roll a Great (+4) defense result. If the Voidcaller leaps over the barrier and attacks with his sword, then he rolls the lower of his Athletics (jumping) or Fight (attacking), and the Stormcaller can still use his Great (+4) barrier defense to protect himself.

One other important note: Barriers cut both ways, and the creator gets no special benefit attacking targets on the other side of his barrier—they benefit from the barrier as much as he does.

EARTHQUAKE

Overcome: If what's being overcome is a physical barrier, and the caller beats the target to overcome by 2, then the barrier may be removed.

Create an Advantage: Gain a +1 to rolls to create any barriers using the Earthquake. When creating a barrier, you may opt to take a -4 to the roll—making it a net total of -3—to create a barrier that completely surrounds a zone. Take an additional -1 if you also want to seal the top.

Attack: You may only attack targets that are on or near the ground—low level fliers can still be struck with debris, so anything a standing person could hit with his hands is fair game. You may take a -1 to your attack to attack all targets in your zone (except yourself). For an additional -2, you may attack all targets in your zone and one adjacent zone. You may extend this effect indefinitely, so long as it is contiguous and you keep taking -2s.

Defend: Earth is slow to respond, and is at a -1 to all defense actions.

FLOOD

Overcome: Receive a +1 to any attempt to overcome a physical barrier.

Create an Advantage: Any barrier created with water diminishes by 1 per exchange unless the caller concentrates on it, taking -1 to all subsequent actions so long as the barrier is maintained.

Attack: Damage from your attacks ignores any armor. You may take -2 to the attack and attack all targets in a zone (excluding yourself).

Defend: No special rules.

GLACIER

Overcome: If what's being overcome is a physical barrier, and the caller beats the target to overcome by 2, then remove the barrier completely.

Create an Advantage: Gain a +1 to rolls to create any barriers using the Glacier. When you create a barrier, you may actually create multiple contiguous barriers. Each additional length of the barrier—a "length" being a barrier between any two zones—reduces its rating by 1. So, if you got a +6, and wanted to create a 3-length barrier, it would have a rating of 4 (6 – 2, remembering the first one's free).

Attack: You can opt to do half damage, rounded up, to freeze the target in place. This creates a barrier to their movement with a difficulty to overcome equal to the damage dealt.

Defend: If you succeed with style on defense, you may forgo the boost to increase any of your active barriers by 1.

INFERNO

Overcome: If you overcome a physical barrier, reduce it by 1.

Create an Advantage: Any barrier created with the Inferno diminishes by 2 per exchange unless the caller concentrates on it, taking -1 to all subsequent actions so long as the barrier is maintained. Anyone who fails to overcome an inferno barrier has the option to force their way through, taking damage equal to the number of additional shifts that a successful roll would have required.

Attack: You may take -1 to the attack and attack all targets in a zone (excepting yourself).

Defend: No special rules.

THUNDER

Overcome: No special rules.

Create an Advantage: Any barrier created with Thunder vanishes after 1 exchange unless the caller concentrates on it, taking -1 to all subsequent actions so long as the barrier is maintained.

Attack: Thunder actually has two modes of attack:

Chain Lighting: Bolts arc from target to target with precision. For each -1 you take, you may add an additional target to the attack. Range penalty is determined by the most distant target, -1 per zone from the starting zone.

Thunderbolt: When hitting a single target, thunder claps as lightning strikes. If you gain a boost on your attack, you generate an extra boost of ***Stunned***.

Defend: No special rules.

Variations and Options

DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Perhaps each Storm also has a corresponding Calm—Blaze, Mountain, Sea, Snowfall, and Wind. Some who have mastered a Storm may in time gain another aspect—costing 1 refresh—to reflect that Calm, which will allow them to internalize the strengths of the Storm to enhance themselves in a variety of ways as well as generate more subtle effects.

MULTIPLE STORMS

Nothing prohibits a Caller from attuning to multiple Storms; it simply costs one refresh for each aspect he takes.

RITUAL MAGIC

It is possible to have the Stormcaller skill but no attunement to a storm. This is the status of many hedge practitioners. The advantage to this is that they may work with whatever storm they wish. The downside is that it takes a few minutes to do what a true Stormcaller can do in a single exchange.

SUMMONINGS

The Storms are not empty spaces. Beings native to each storm swim within them comfortably, and can be summoned to serve those who know how to call. See the *Storm Summoners* system on page 107 for an exploration of this.

LIGHT AND DARK CALLERS

Those who study such things suggest that there is an arc to the great Storms. Born of almost pure energy (Thunder), they coalesce (Inferno) and thicken (Flood) before hardening (Glacier) into something concrete (Earthquake). Or perhaps it is the reverse, beginning with base matter and ascending toward energy. In either case, it is theorized that there exist a sixth and seventh "Storm," bookending the great Storms. Energy and Light at one end, with Stasis and Darkness at the other. There have been those who have claimed to tap these forces in a fashion similar to the storms, but they are a rarity, and much of their effort has been spent in conflict with one another over the question of which is the beginning and which is the end.

VOIDCALLERS

For all their destructive fury, the Storms are part of reality, for they are both destruction and creation. On a cosmic level, they stand against the Void, the nothingness that seeks to consume all. Light- and Darkcallers tend to characterize their opposite in this manner, and there's no telling what truth there is or isn't to it. The Void is a force for destruction, and while it may not be malicious, those who dwell in it are, for it is the home to demons and monsters that would like nothing more than to consume the Storms, and with them, our world. See the *Voidcallers* section on page 115 for more ideas on this.

The Six Viziers

Design Notes

The Six Viziers system assumes a flavored system of magic, for each nominal Vizier has its own priorities and tendencies, but they do not manifest concretely as beings with opinions. By and large, magic has no intrinsic cost, though there are social elements to it. This is balanced by its relative rarity (though it's freely open to PCs) and the fact that it's potent, but not overly flexible. It's also a strongly structured system, with magical effects strictly outlined by the thematic boundaries of each Vizier (expressed through skills).

The source of magic is the nominal Six Viziers. What exactly they are is an interesting question, and the answer to that could direct a campaign. In this setting, they're the six constellations that serve the Empress, and they grant power to those with an affinity to them.

Mechanically, this system hangs largely off skills, as the expression of the magic is in the enhancement of those skills. There are other elements—aspects act as a gateway to power, and the magical effects themselves are stunt-like—but this is basically a model for enhanced skills.

Description

The people of the Endless Steppe accept no dominion but that of the sky. Their people are scattered so far and wide that some wags say that this truth is the only thing they hold in common. And perhaps they are right—from the onion-domed towers of the River Cities to the Tent Nations of the Horselands to the walking towns of the southern jungles, the Folk of the Stars all direct their prayers and curses to those same stars.

Most often, these are directed to the Six Viziers, the constellations that dance around in the court of the Empress, whose place in the sky is always fixed. Each one holds divine responsibility, and each carries righteous petitions to the Empress.

While the constellations that make up the Viziers and their titles are generally agreed upon, there are many opinions beyond that point. They are named and represented differently from place to place. Depending where you are, the Giant might be depicted as a giant man crafted of stone, a maiden whose axe carries the fury of winter, or even an elephant. The tales of the Viziers—and even that name is contested in places—speak volumes about a people.

From time to time, someone is blessed by one of the Viziers, and carries its mark in the form of a pattern in the shape of the appropriate constellation. The nature of these blessings varies. For a family in Achinst, the firstborn daughter of a particular family is always born marked by the Giant. A western monastery is run by a chosen of the Soldier, and it is said that mantle passes to any who defeat him in combat. There are stories aplenty, and little real sense of the truth of it.

What is known is that each of the blessed gains power in accordance with the domain of the Vizier in question. The chosen usually seem to be well suited by temperament to the Vizier that chooses them, but it's unclear whether that is a cause or effect of selection.

The 30-Second Version

Don't want to read it all and just want to wing it? Do the following:

- Replace the Drive skill with Ride.

- Reduce your Refresh by 1.

- Pick which Vizier you're marked by (Eye, Giant, Shadow, Soldier, Steward, or Villager) and take the aspect ***Marked by [Vizier]*** (as in ***Marked by the Giant***).

- Describe where the physical mark is on your character's body.

- When you use a skill associated with that mark, your efforts are magical, more like deeds out of legend than mundane efforts. This does not translate into a bonus, but it just means a generally more awesome outcome, depending on the situation.

  - **Eye:** Investigation, Lore, Notice
  - **Giant:** Athletics, Physique, Will
  - **Shadow:** Burglary, Deceive, Stealth
  - **Soldier:** Fight, Ride, Shoot
  - **Steward:** Provoke, Rapport, Resources
  - **Villager:** Contacts, Crafts, Empathy

Mechanics

SKILLS

This assumes a fantasy leaning, though not necessarily the standard European one. As imagined, it is more in the spirit of Russia—all of it—than anything anchored in Europe.

In any case, this does require that the Drive skill be replaced with a Ride skill, which works much the same way, but with a different sort of vehicle.

THE VIZIER'S MARK

If your character is marked by a Vizier, reduce your refresh by 1.

Characters marked by a Vizier need to have an aspect that reflects this, like **Chosen of the Steward** or **Marked by the Villager**. The exact naming of the aspect is up to the player, and if the player has a complicated relationship with the Vizier, this is a great way to account for it.

Exactly what the aspect means depends upon the mark, but all marks have a few things in common. First and foremost, the character gains a physical mark somewhere on their body, in the shape of the Vizier's constellation. The exact form and location varies—it might be scars, birthmarks, a silvery tattoo, or virtually anything else—but the shape is fairly consistent. Cosmetic and temporary marks are also popular among the unmarked in some places, but a true bearer of a mark can recognize another genuine mark with a single glance.

The marked also always know where their constellation is, whether it's daytime or even if it's beyond the horizon. By itself, this is not much use for navigation, but combined with a little bit of knowledge, it can allow for an uncanny sense of direction.

There are also social elements of being marked, though those vary from place to place. Usually, it's a good thing, but being marked by an unwelcome Vizier may carry some bad baggage along with it.

The Marks

Each Vizier is summarized below. Some of the information is self-explanatory, such as other names and ways in which the Vizier is represented. Other elements have rules impact.

Each mark has a virtue and a vice, and those are relevant to the use of the mark as an aspect. For example, the Giant's virtue is Strength and its vice is Rage. The aspect **Marked by the Giant** can be used as if it was the aspect **Strong** or **Rage**.

Each mark also has three "domains"—these are the skills that are tied to this particular Vizier. They provide the framework for which blessings—aka Stunts—the Vizier provides. They don't have any strict mechanical meaning beyond sketching the shape of the Vizier's domain—and providing some guidance for games that use different skill lists.

The blessings themselves are self-contained rules elements. Characters choose two blessings from their Vizier. These do not cost any additional refresh, but remember that characters already spent 1 refresh to be chosen.

The Eye

Virtue: Observant
Vice: Inaction
Also Called: The Auditor, The Inquisitor, The Sage, The Spy, or the Watcher.
Often Depicted As: A genderless robed figure, a male magistrate, a female wise woman, a female librarian, an owl, or an eye.
Domains: Investigation, Lore, and Notice.

The Eye observes and reports to the Empress. He sees all, and gives others the knowledge and insight they need to act appropriately. The Eye himself rarely acts directly. In some stories, it is because he is an agent of law—an investigator—who solves a mystery so that the appropriate authorities may act. In others, he is paralyzed by a desire to maintain his neutrality, or by knowledge of the potential harm of his own actions.

BLESSINGS

INVESTIGATION

The Pieces of the Puzzle: When you take a few minutes to study a particular item and its position, you can reasonably reconstruct the chain of events that led to it being there. This reconstruction will be accurate, though it will not reveal any more than the necessary details. For example, it might reveal that it was carried by hand at some point, but not by whom.

The Vault of the Eye: You may look at a scene and recall it in perfect detail. In practice, this allows you to ask the GM questions about that memory long after the fact, and take your time performing Investigation rolls. This includes *anything* you might ask about if you were still in the same place and time, such as the contents of containers. If the answer to the question would require a skill roll—such as picking a lock to see a chest's contents—you may try normally, as if you were still there.

You may keep more than one scene in memory, but the cost of doing so is one fate point per scene already memorized.

The Blessing of a Thousand Tongues: You may learn any language quickly. With tutelage, it takes only a day. With only the opportunity to read or listen, it takes a week. If the source material is especially sparse, it may take as long as a month.

The Eye Sees All Paths: You may not know everything, but you always know how to find out. When looking for a fairly specific piece of information, you may give the GM a fate point to be told the closest place you can go to find out, no matter how obscure or lost the information is. In short, you can never hit a wall when trying to find something out.

There are no guarantees of how easy it will be to get the knowledge, but that's what adventure is for.

NOTICE

The Eye Gazes in All Directions: You are never surprised. Even if it's only by a moment, you are always forewarned of the unexpected.

Stars Illuminate the Night: So long as there is the faintest amount of light, you can see as if it were a bright day. In the rare case of utter darkness, you can see as well as if you had a light source.

The Giant

Virtue: Strength
Vice: Rage
Also Called: The Earthshaker, The Laborer, The Pillar, The Titan.
Often Depicted As: A stone statue, a frost maiden, an ogre, an elephant, or an ox.
Domains: Athletics, Physique, and Will.

The Giant represents strong hands put to good effort, but also represents strength going unchecked. Most often this strength is physical, but it goes deeper than that. It is said that it is the Giant who sets the heavens in motion at the behest of the Empress. In tales, the Giant is often portrayed as well intentioned and powerful, but not always in control of the power in those great hands. He is often in a secondary role to another Vizier—often the Steward or the Eye—acting in the service of greater discernment.

BLESSINGS

ATHLETICS

By My Hand, Set the World in Motion: Through a combination of speed, dexterity, and uncanny timing, you always have a path forward. In a static environment, this means that you are capable of crazy parkour-like movement to get almost anywhere that could be physically accessed. In a more fluid environment you are impossible to pin down or fence in, as you'll always find the gap.

Strides of the Giant: You run as fast as a horse, have a vertical jump equal to your own height, and can run for a day and night without stopping for rest—though you need to crash hard and eat a lot when you're done.

PHYSIQUE

Giant's Appetite: You can eat *anything* without harm. Not just foodstuffs—if you can chew and swallow it, or drink it, you can safely consume it, and even gain sustenance from it. You may casually ignore poisons, decay, shards of glass, and similar inconveniences. As a bonus, flavors are very distinctive and memorable to you, which allows for disgusting tricks like comparing the taste of blood samples to see if they're from the same source, as well as more useful tricks like identifying a familiar poison.

None May Bind The Giant: If you are restrained or shackled, you may break those bonds, so long as they are natural or manufactured. No door or lock may withstand more than a single blow from you. Barriers with no opening take longer, but you are effectively an entire sapping team with nothing more than fists and feet and anything else you can bring to bear.

WILL

The Mind Is the Greatest Mountain: So far as social skills are concerned, you do not exist. You cannot be swayed, befriended, intimidated, or otherwise moved. Your speech reveals nothing about you or the veracity of your words. For purposes of the Villager's ability, your Deceive score is higher than the Villager's Empathy.

Never Broken: You gain a -8 physical consequence which recovers in the same way a -2 consequence does.

The Shadow

Virtue: Secrecy
Vice: Greed
Also Called: The Assassin, the Spy, the Taker, the Thief, the Trickster.
Often Depicted As: A cloaked figure of either gender, the night wind, a humanoid shadow, a snake, a rat, or a raven.
Domains: Burglary, Deceive, and Stealth.

Depending on the time and place, the Shadow is either a roguish trickster or an ominous threat, and both views have some truth to them. The hidden hand of the Empress, the Shadow encompasses needful things best left unspoken. The place for such things is always uncertain, and unwelcome until the day they are needed, when their welcome is deep indeed.

BLESSINGS

BURGLARY

The Accounting of Small Things: Once you have successfully stolen something small enough to fit in a pocket, it is gone until you choose to reveal it again. No amount of searching—or even stripping—will reveal the purloined item. You may only have one such item at a time hidden in this fashion.

The Supplication of Locks: You need only whisper your name into a lock to attempt to pick it, as if using a full set of tools. If successful, the attempt takes only a moment. If unsuccessful, you may try again the old-fashioned way.

DECEIVE

Corroboration of Coincidence: Fate favors your lies with minor coincidences and circumstantial evidence that seem to lend them credence. You may apply a boost to the scene **before** you roll Deceive, so long as you can describe how it helps you look more honest. If successful, the boost turns into an aspect on the scene.

The Name Is a Mask to the World: Any time after you hear someone's name from their own lips, you may duplicate their face, voice, and manner until the sun has risen twice. You may never mimic the same person twice.

> ### THE POWER OF NAMES
> Even those who don't fully understand the nature of the Shadow understand that giving a stranger your name is a gesture of trust. How careful people are about this varies from culture to culture, but it is usually at least a consideration.

STEALTH

Only the Wind Will See Me Go: At the cost of a fate point, you may exit a scene, passing from sight.

Stealing Words from the Wind: You make no noise you do not wish to be heard. Not only does this allow you to move in absolute silence, but you can also use it selectively, such as speaking so only one person can hear you.

The Soldier

Virtue: Discipline
Vice: Servitude
Also Called: The Horseman, the Sword, the Warlord.
Often Depicted As: A culturally appropriate warrior of either gender, a weapon, a lion, or a tiger.
Domains: Fight, Ride, and Shoot.

The Soldier serves through violence and war, with virtues of steel. The Soldier values cunning, bravery, and loyalty, but is perhaps a bit too easily led. Heroic stories of the Soldier tell of battles fought and won, but other stories put him on the other side from heroes for no reason other than blind adherence to an order.

BLESSINGS

FIGHT

Army on the Edge of My Blade: You take no penalty—and grant no bonus—for being outnumbered, no matter how preposterous the numbers.

Spears of Green Wood: You may train a body of troops—unnamed characters in a group of up to approximately 100—for a week and increase their Fight Skill by +1. You can repeat this multiple times, improving any given unit to a maximum of your Fight -2.

RIDE

Only the Wind Beneath Us: So long as you maintain a good clip, any steed you ride may ride across water as if it were solid land, and may even ride across open air for a few hundred yards—after which the descent is akin to riding down a gentle slope.

We Ride as One: You fight and act on horseback without penalty, and nothing can knock you off. Any time you would take a physical consequence, you can opt for the horse to take it instead—the horse having a similar consequence track to your character.

SHOOT

To the Horizon: Anything you can see is effectively one zone from you when you shoot.

To the Stars: Any missile fired into the air can land any place you know or near anyone you can name. Messages and small items can be delivered in this fashion. This cannot be used to launch an attack directly, but if fired with ill intent, it is entirely possible to kill a horse or unnamed NPC nearby.

The Steward

Virtue: Leadership
Vice: Stubborn
Also Called: Grandfather or Grandmother.
Often Depicted As: A wise elder of either gender, a mastiff, or a snake.
Domains: Provoke, Rapport, and Resources.

The Steward is the ear that everyone speaks to and the voice that everyone listens to. While the Empress may rule the stars, the Steward is the one who makes things go on a daily basis. In stories, he's an advisor or leader more often than a hero, though at times the Steward falls into the role of the wise traveller, teaching the community he visits lessons they should have already known.

BLESSINGS

PROVOKE

Crown of Menace: You are too terrifying to be attacked. Until you make a physical attack in a scene, characters with a Will lower than Good (+3) simply cannot attack you. Those with sufficient Will to attack still flinch on their first attack, though, automatically missing.

Walking with Storms: The mood of a town—or similar-sized locale—is what you want it to be.

RAPPORT

All Things in Their Place: You always know the power dynamic in the room, and you may insert yourself within it anywhere you desire. Use this with caution—while it impacts how people interact with you, it does not equate to actual authority, and placing yourself too highly—especially over people not used to being anything but top dog—can inspire an unpleasant response.

The Truth of Who You Are: Every two minutes of conversation you have with someone reveals one of their aspects. However, for every two aspects you learn, you reveal one of your own to that person and anyone listening. Round down, so the first one you learn is free.

RESOURCES

Rivers of Gold: Money is just a detail to you. Stripped naked and cast on a desert island, and you'll be living in luxury in short order. Cast into prison, and you'll be bribing guards in no time. No situation will restrict your access to your Resources skill.

War of Papers: You can take action against organizations through indirect measures. Effectively you can fight on the level of any organization smaller than a nation without the need to recruit allies or have any organization of your own. Yes, this means you can effectively "kill" a city, or even an army, given enough time.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT

The Villager

Virtue: Endurance
Vice: Short-Sighted
Also Called: The Peon or the Citizen.
Often Depicted As: A farmer, a milkmaid, a rower, a hammer, a plow, a mule, or a monkey.
Domains: Contacts, Crafts, and Empathy.

While the Steward is a wise leader, the Villager represents the wisdom and virtues of common citizens. His stories are those of the seeming fool who ends up triumphing in the end through simple, common values. His is the strength of the community.

BLESSINGS

CONTACTS

The Bonds of Man Stretch to the Horizon: There is no place where you do not know someone, including places you have never been before. You will find a friend wherever you go.

The Strength of One Becomes the Strength of Many: Once you begin a contacting effort, it becomes self-sustaining, as people you talk to talk to other people, who talk to others in turn. In effect, you will always get an answer; it is only a matter of time.

CRAFTS

The Conjunction of Form: You may combine materials in impossible ways, giving one the attribute of another. You may make paper with the strength of steel, or steel with the weight of paper. Doing so requires the two aspects—one for the material, one for the additional attribute—to be invoked simultaneously on the Crafts roll to create the finished product.

The Tools Are Lesser than the Hand: You can produce master-craftsman-level work with the crudest of tools. With a proper workshop, you can create impossibly amazing devices in the finest da Vinci style.

EMPATHY

Architecture of the Heart: Reading a room is a triviality to you. Even more, you can spot the emotional lynchpins in a room and easily understand how actions would impact the mood. If you roll Empathy to read a room—difficulty Mediocre (+0)—count how many shifts you accrue. Over the course of the scene, you may ask the GM to tell you how people would react to any hypothetical scenario. You can do this a number of times equal to the number of shifts generated.

The Inner Eye Sees Inner Truth: Without rolling, you can tell if another character is lying so long as the target's Deceive is equal to or lower than your Empathy. In the case of high Deceive, you will know that you cannot tell, but will never receive a "false positive."

Advancement

If a character succeeds in some great service in the ethos of the Vizier—no small thing, such a task could be the hub of an entire campaign—she may take a second aspect tied to the Vizier. She loses another refresh, and may choose two more blessings.

Variations and Options

As a baseline, this is a fairly mythic model of powers. Those marked by the Viziers are heroes of legend, but there are several options for how to alter this for other effects.

POWER LEVEL

The easiest way to power down these blessings is to make them require the expenditure of a fate point. If you want to increase their power, remove the refresh cost, and simply allow players to take more blessings—or possibly even carry more than one mark.

STRUCTURE

Six is a fairly arbitrary number of Viziers. The same skill-based blessings/stunts could be redistributed according to other schema. Perhaps, for example, there are eighteen major Arcana equivalents, each tied to one skill—characters bound to their Arcana might have the blessings for that skill. On the other hand, the Viziers could be discarded entirely, allowing players to simply pick a number of blessings.

ACTIVE VIZIERS

If the Viziers are actually active, thoughtful forces, the entire tone of the game changes. Not only will the Viziers be interacting more directly with their chosen, they'll be engaged in their own internal politics. Active Viziers can be a potent driver of play.

OTHER VIZIERS

Perhaps there are other Viziers out there—secret constellations with powers and knowledge unknown to the world at large. Perhaps they are hidden enemies or lost allies. Or perhaps they are both.

DARK VIZIERS

The Viziers as presented are mostly positive forces, with their negative elements serving largely as a natural consequence of their strengths. But perhaps each Vizier is paired with a dark reflection, one who embraces the darker nature and only has some redeeming characteristics as an extension of that nature. These Dark Viziers may have their own agendas and champions, and best of all, there's no guarantee that those bearing the mark are even aware of any difference.

The Subtle Art

Design Notes

Mechanically speaking, this system is an elaboration of creating an advantage. That is, it simply expands the scope of when, where, and what kind of advantages can be created. Because it's much more low-key than other magic types, it doesn't answer a number of the big questions. This makes it a magic system better suited to a game that is not itself primarily magical. In fact, it's best suited to games where there is some question of whether magic is real or not, though in other games it may be a way to represent a "lesser" path of magic.

Description

When you imagine magical societies, the first thing to spring to mind may be ancient lodges and secret orders. Certainly those exist, but they don't have much magic left in them—their own success tamped it out. Consider that the benefits of magic are ephemeral, while the benefits of collaboration, conspiracy, and partnership are concrete. For the kind of important, successful folks who meet in smoky rooms with dark woods and deep carpets, the magic is just window dressing. They don't need to believe anymore, and in most cases, they haven't needed to for a long time.

There are exceptions. Most of these established organizations started out full of belief and strong intentions, but that belief faded under the weight of their own success. It's easy to believe that your prosperity charms are helping your stock picks when you have no idea what you're doing, but as you succeed—and learn—then the tendency is to start attributing your successes to your talent and smart picks. That means, as you get better, magic helps you less.

As a result, most practicing magical groups are much more informal. Networks of friends, friends of friends, or loosely connected strangers sharing a common interest. Meetings mostly revolve around drinking, hook-ups, and couch surfing in cheap rented apartments.

The simple reality is that magic has its strongest roots in the rootless. People who are smart and capable, but lack direction or any real purpose, gravitate to magic for the quick fix solution it represents. It's an underground, and for some, it's the best weapon available.

MAGIC AND REALITY

What's important is that there is no "real world" proof that this magic works. The introduction of these aspects does not change reality in any real, repeatable way. Certainly, they tilt the scale a bit, but they do so within the realm of reasonable outcomes. To an outside observer, this "magic" looks a lot like confirmation bias. If you put a curse on someone and something bad happens to them, then it's easy to take credit for it, but a cynic will note that bad things happen to people all the time.

This can be rough, and as a result, believers tend to cluster together. They form subcultures where they can nerd out about what they've done, swap tips, and generally reinforce their belief that this is something that matters. In many ways, these groups are more important than the magic itself, but they are not what one might expect.

The 30-Second Version

Don't want to read it all? Just do this:

- Buy a skill called "Magic."

- Take a half hour in a dark room with someone's name, a voodoo doll, or similar accouterments, and make a Magic roll to create an advantage against the target of the spell.

- Put an aspect appropriate to a curse or blessing on the target. It lasts for three days, seven if you succeed with style.

Mechanics

This system adds one skill: Magic. Its description follows.

Skill: Magic

Magic is the skill of placing blessings and curses upon a person or place. While the skill itself is generic, its specific manifestations are not. A practitioner must have a set of rules and trappings that they follow to use magic. Those rules may be based on a real-world practice, be totally made up, or anywhere in between, but they must be consistent and they always demand time, effort, and ritual. There are other limitations listed below.

Overcome: There are few useful obstacles that magic may overcome, though many practitioners think otherwise. It's a common misperception that the Magic skill can be used to "detect" magical workings, but this is really no more reliable than guessing.

The one concrete use for overcome is to overcome the skepticism of others. The Magic skill also represents how well you "sell" the idea of magic, or at least your belief. This works like a very specific sort of use of the Deceive skill—even if the character doesn't feel he's deceiving anyone.

Create an Advantage: The primary activity with the Magic skill is creating an advantage. Assuming a single target—a person, or a thing perhaps as large as a house—about a half hour's time, and the appropriate ritual trappings, the roll is made against a difficulty of Average. So long as the character gets a success, then the target gains the aspect of the blessing or curse—see below for details—for three days and three nights. Further modifications follow:

- If the target is not present, then the difficulty is increased from between +1 to +3. +3 if the target is merely named, +1 if a powerful symbolic tie to the target is present—their blood, a treasured possession—and if it's not clearly either, then a +2 is appropriate.

- If the target is large—a small group of less than a dozen or a large place like an office building or park—difficulty increases by +3. That's the maximum size that a spell can actually work at, though most practitioners are unaware of this, and every year, hours of magic get wasted targeting the GOP, the Dallas Cowboys, and hipsters.

- Some spells have a secondary target, such as a spell that makes your boss mad at someone. The absence of that secondary target similarly impacts the difficulty—+0 if present, +3 if you only have a name, as above. The one qualifier is that if the secondary target can be made to accept some token of the spell—a potion, a trinket—then they are effectively "present". Such tokens must be used within three days.

- Success with style extends the duration to a week.

- No target can be the subject of more than one spell at a time. The newest spell replaces the existing ones.

- Some blessings and curses have their own additional modifiers.

- A spell on an area effectively creates a scene aspect that can be used normally by anyone in the location.

Attack: There is no such thing as a magical attack.

Defend: There is no such thing as a magical defense.

SPELLS

Aspects put on a target are generally referred to as blessings or curses, depending on their intended effect, but collectively, they are all considered spells. These are not an open-ended list—there are a fixed set of spells, and the knowledge of them is the currency of the magical community. Spells are complicated enough that they are very difficult to commit to memory and still get exactly right, so they are kept in notebooks, databases, and other archives. Poaching another magician's spellbook can be informative, but it can also be about as useful as their organic chemistry notes—even if they haven't actively obscured them, they can be very idiosyncratic to understand. And, of course, there's no real way to distinguish between a spell that's a dud and a real one.

For clarity, the **target** of a spell is the person, place or thing it's being cast on. Sometimes a spell will also have a **subject**, a person, place or thing which will be the focus of the spell's effect on the target. For example, a love spell to make Jake fall for Andy would be cast on Jake (the target) focused on Andy (the subject).

Annoyance: The target rubs people the wrong way. If the spell has a subject, then the target of the spell is more easily annoyed by that subject.

Charisma: While related to love, this turns it on its head by improving the target's general presence and demeanor. It's sometimes a subject of ridicule—specifically, ridiculing those who would need such a spell—but it sees a lot of quiet use.

Clarity: Popular among those who fancy themselves sophisticated magi, for many this spell is their morning cup of coffee, sharpening their thoughts and senses. It's also a popular "counterspell," used to remove curses.

Clumsiness: You know those days where you dropped a glass, spilled your coffee in your lap, and ripped your shirt on a latch? This makes for that kind of day.

Confusion: People tend to misunderstand the target—or get easily lost if it's a place.

Love: One of the most well known but also most contentious spells, especially when used with a subject. Without a subject, it simply makes the target more friendly towards the world, but with a subject, it inclines the subject toward the target. A lot of people view this as skeezy at best, and date rape at worst. It's a touchy topic, and a number of magicians get around this by explicitly casting dud spells.

Health: The magical equivalent of fizzy tablets with vitamin C and zinc.

Luck: This is the most common spell in circulation, and it can take the form of good or bad luck.

Obscurity: The target is easily overlooked—by the subject, if appropriate. Whether this is a blessing or a curse depends a lot on your perspective.

Prosperity: Another popular blessing, financial things fall the target's way. It's rare that this turns into a large windfall, but it can show up as a loan extension or a free beer.

Rage: Small things annoy the target more than usual, as if they'd woken up on the wrong side of the bed. If the spell has a subject, then the target of the spell is more easily enraged by that subject.

Safety: Keeps the target—or area—safer than it would be.

These are not all the spells available, but they should provide some insight into the tone of any additions.

MAGIC STUNTS

By Rote: You may pick three spells that you know well enough that you don't need to consult your notes to cast.

Evil Eye: You can attempt to put ***Bad Luck*** on a target with nothing more than an obvious gesture. This lasts only a day.

Interior Decorator: You may call it *feng shui* on your invoices, but it's all just decor. If you put a spell on a place, you may arrange the furniture and decorations just so. If you do, the effect lasts for up to a season—or until someone rearranges the furnishings.

Variations and Options

BUT DOES IT WORK?

It is entirely possible that this "system" is a lie. Magic doesn't actually do anything, and it's all wish fulfillment and confirmation bias. A GM could even pull this on a player, by quietly not accounting for the aspects they appear to create. That is, by and large, a terrible idea. It really hoses the player and undercuts their concept—unless they also like the idea of it being fake.

If you want to emphasize this idea—even if you don't want to embrace it fully—then things that make the magic impossible to prove make great compels.

JAZZING IT UP

It's also possible for this to be a more overtly magical system. In that case you can introduce odd, improbable, or super weird effects. This will require expanding the spell list to include more concrete things like "food rots when you touch it," and it also makes spells something that can be concretely perceived by the magic skill. In this case, the duration of effects should be extended to a lunar month.

COMBAT CURSES

Assuming a more overt style of magic, a variant on this would allow for "combat casting" of blessings and curses. This is very different from the traditional image of the mage casting lightning bolts, but it suits lower magic settings very well. In this case, spells can be cast on any target in sight, and by and large, this allows for colorful create an advantage effects.

By default, these must be invisible effects, but can still cause bad choices to be made, weapons to miss and so on. However, if the GM deems it appropriate, then certain color may be allowed to make these overtly magical—such as a fire priest creating fiery advantages.

WIZARDS' DUELS

If combat curses are supported, then so are wizards' duels. A wizards' duel occurs when two wizards meet and choose to lock eyes, entering battle, which uses Magic in lieu of Fight and inflicts mental damage until one or the other is taken out. To an external observer, all that happens is they lock eyes, then one collapses—possibly dead, depending on the decision of the victor. To the two wizards, the battle can take any form.

Sometimes, beings of greater power can be drawn into a duel by mortal magic. This requires some preparation on the part of the human practitioner, such as the creation of a focus object. These clashes still occur mostly in the ether, but they might involve a flashier exchange of energies or other effect. In such a case, if the greater power loses, the result is rarely fatal, but the being may carry a consequence forward.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT

Storm Summoners

Design Notes

This is an expansion of the "Five Storms" magic system described in the *Stormcallers* section on page 82. It's a self-contained system, so it can easily be pulled out into its own game, but it can just as easily be used along with other Five Storms magic systems to create a more complete system.

Description

Each of the Five Storms—Earthquake, Flood, Glacier, Inferno, and Thunder—at the center of reality is home to a myriad of beings who call those deadly environments home. To the layperson, this means elementals—beings composed of the element of the Storm but possessed of intelligence and intent. While these are the most numerous beings of the storms, they are only the beginning.

Elementals make up the foundation of what passes for an ecosystem within the Storm. Most numerous are the barely intelligent wisps, tiny beings of elemental nature. Each successive tier is more potent but less numerous, until a threshold is reached where the creatures begin taking on distinct forms and natures. These often resemble fantastic versions of mundane creatures, while some of the most potent resemble humans. There are princes and queens among these beings, and the most potent of them are said to rival the gods themselves.

With the right skill and tools a Conjuror can summon elementals to do his bidding, with a danger that corresponds to the potency of the being summoned. However, the greater beings of the Storms are out of reach of any mere Conjuror.

Summoners are distinct from Conjurors because they have struck a bargain with one of the great powers of a Storm, and may use that bargain as leverage with the greater beings of that Storm. However, all such bargains come with a price.

The 30-Second Version

Don't want to read all the rules? Use this shorthand version:

- Buy a Conjuration Skill.

- Do some rituals to summon an Earth, Fire, Ice, Lightning, or Water elemental at a difficulty from Average (+1) to Great (+4). That's the difficulty you need to reach, and that's the skill it operates at. It will last for a week. You may keep one at a time.

- Elementals come in 4 sizes:

  º **Wisps** (Average, 0 stress, no consequences) are little fist-sized orbs. They're not bright, but they're fast and sneaky and follow simple directions.

  º **Drudges** (Fair, 0 stress, 1 mild consequence) are dog-sized, stronger than they look, and able to carry heavy loads or do simple work.

  º **Servitors** (Good, 2 stress, 2 mild consequences) are human-sized and roughly human-shaped, take orders well, and make adequate soldiers.

  º **Attendants** (Great, 3 stress, 1 mild and 1 moderate consequences) are powerful beings that take on aspects of the Storm, so they look kind of awesome.

- If you make a bargain with a great being to be more powerful, then:

  º Reduce your refresh by 1.

  º Take an aspect ***Bargain with the Prince of [pick a storm]***.

  º Change your Conjuring Skill to a Summoning Skill.

  º You can now summon a Superb (4 stress, 2 armor, -2/-4/-6 Consequence) elemental creature of your description with a successful roll. You can still do regular conjuration with your bargained element, but why would you?

Mechanics

This system adds two skills, and a number of aspects to reflect summoning magic. It also adds a number of specific aspects to reflect bargains with the powers of the Storms.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT

Skill: Conjuration

Conjuration is the art of summoning elementals from the Five Storms. It is a slow practice, and demands the creation of a summoning circle and the use of appropriate sacrifices to gain the service of one of these creatures.

Anyone may take the Conjuration skill with no refresh cost.

Overcome: Conjuration can be used as a Lore skill related to the creatures of the Five Storms. It can also be used to renew the bond of an already-summoned elemental without the time and effort spent on the initial summoning. This simply requires an overcome roll against the rating of the creature—see the elemental summary table on the next page.

- **Fail:** The creature is immediately released, and it will flee or fight, depending on the situation and how it has been treated.
- **Tie:** The bond is not renewed, and will expire normally.
- **Success:** Renew the bond for a week.
- **Success With Style:** Renew the bond for a month.

A Conjuror can also dismiss a bound elemental at will, so long as it is within his presence.

Create an Advantage: Summoning an elemental is a specific sort of advantage creation. Doing so requires a summoning circle and an amount and type of sacrifice based on the being to be summoned. For a Wisp, a handful of interesting material will suffice, but an Attendant will be much more demanding.

Roll against a difficulty based on the type of creature being summoned—see the next page.

- **Fail:** The creature is summoned, but immediately breaks free. Wisps and Drudges tend to run for it—causing problems elsewhere—while Servitors and Attendants may turn on the Conjuror if they sense an opportunity.
- **Tie:** The elemental appears, but will only perform a single service taking less than a night.
- **Success:** The elemental appears and is bound to your service for a week.
- **Success With Style:** the elemental appears and is bound for a month.

Attack: Conjuration may be used as an attack skill against summoned creatures, with "damage" serving as progress towards banishment.

Defend: Conjuration may be used to defend against attacks by summoned creatures. This defense may be enhanced by staying within a circle, with the value ranging from +1 to a hastily drawn circle of dirt or salt to +4 for a mathematically perfect circle of precious metal covered in ancient runes of power.

The character's rating in Conjuration is also the limit on the number of elementals that he may have bound at any one time. Their combined difficulties cannot exceed his conjuration score, so a Great (+4) Conjuror could control four Wisps, or one Wisp and one Servitor, or some other combination totaling up to four. It is common—if noisy—for a Conjuror to have multiple elementals summoned at a time.

Elementals

ELEMENTAL SUMMARY

ELEMENTAL	RATING	STRESS	CONSEQUENCE
Wisp	Average	0	None
Drudge	Fair	0	-2
Servitor	Good	2	-2/-2
Attendant	Great	3	-2/-4
Named	Superb	4	-2/-4/-6

ELEMENTAL BONUSES

ELEMENT (STORM)	WISP	DRUDGE, SERVITOR, OR ATTENDANT	NAMED
Earth (Earthquake)	None	+2 Stress	+4 Stress
Ice (Glacier)	None	Armor:1	Armor:2
Fire (Inferno)	None	Weapon:1	Weapon:2
Water (Flood)	None	Additional mild consequence	Additional mild consequence, Armor: 1
Lightning (Thunder)	None	Attack range 1 zone	Range 2

For most actions, most elementals have only a single skill: [X] Elemental, and its level is equal to their rating, so a Wisp of Fire's default skill is "Wisp of Fire: Average (+1)". Certain elementals have other specific skills, but in the absence of those, an elemental rolls either its core skill or its core skill -2 for other actions.

All elementals have the ability to blend into their native element, gaining a +4 to Stealth so long as there is some present for them to vanish into. Additionally, they receive benefits based on their element as outlined in the *Elemental Bonuses* table.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT
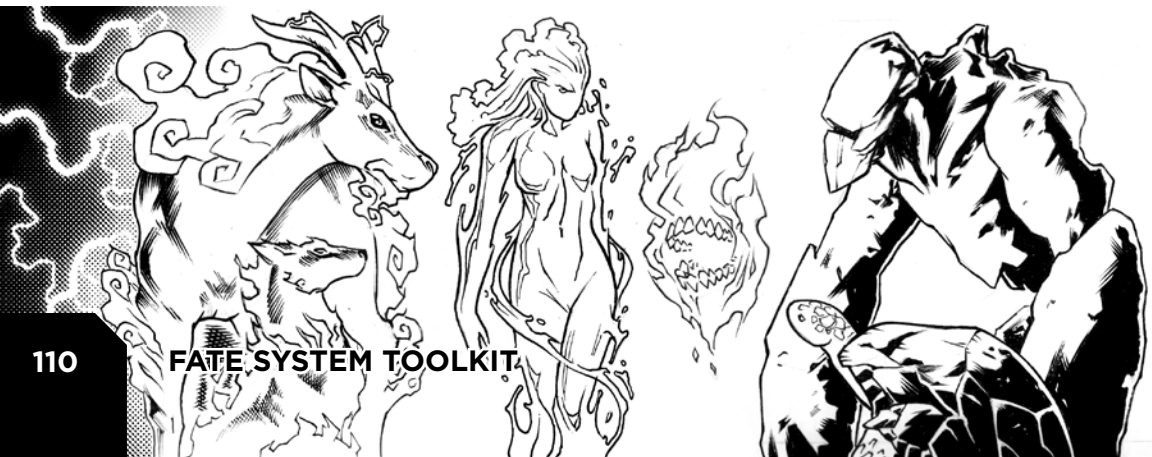
WISP

Looking like a fistful of their element, Wisps possess little power or intelligence. However, they are the simplest of elementals to summon, and they are well suited to simple tasks, especially those where Athletics or Stealth are called for—they receive a +4 to both. They are almost useless in a fight, however, having no stress boxes and no ability to take consequences.

Differences by element are largely cosmetic between wisps, but their variations can get quite exotic. Wisps are the elementals most likely to be found in nature, and many who have lived away from the storms for too long have "gone native," adopting characteristics of native flora and fauna. These "native" wisps can be bound like any others.

DRUDGE

An elemental body the size of a dog, the Drudge is not any brighter than the Wisp—and is often dumber—but is substantially stronger and more patient. They receive a +2 to Endurance and to any Physique roll related to carrying loads. They are well suited to performing long, boring tasks, but are not great combatants, having no stress boxes and only able to take a -2 consequence.

SERVITOR

Servitors are human-sized and often a rough approximation of humanoid in shape, having some number of arms and legs, though rarely any kind of head. While not geniuses, they are smart and capable of following complicated instructions or of fighting on their master's behalf. Servitors have 2 stress boxes and can take two -2 consequences.

ATTENDANT

Attendants are what most people imagine elementals to be, some element of the Storm given life. Larger than a person, they look to be a walking whirlwind of the Storm they come from. They are also intelligent, able combatants. Attendants have 3 stress boxes and can take a -2 and a -4 consequence.

MAGIC

Elemental Bargains

A Conjuror can enter into a bargain with one of the powers of the Storm. Doing so allows him much greater power over the elementals of that domain, but it also comes with a steep price. The Conjuror is now a Summoner, limited to only that element, and he is now obligated to an alien being of great power and questionable motives. Despite these prices, the power that comes with these bargains means there is never a shortage of those seeking them, though not all who do so survive the process. Tread carefully with the Princes of the Five Storms.

Mechanically, the bargain takes the form of an aspect that reflects the bargain. It can be invoked to assist with summoning and conjuration—as well as name dropping, in certain quarters—and it can be compelled in any way that serves the interest of the other party in the bargain. This may vary from arbitrary-seeming stipulations—like the necessity of carrying a particular token—to taboos—the Prince of Magma hates baths!—to visitation rights. The player may choose to break a bargain—losing benefits, and immediately getting jumped by any summoned being he has bound—but doing so makes an enemy—and just for reference, ***The Enmity of a Prince of Thunder*** is a great replacement aspect!

The player and GM should work out the details of the other end of the bargain. The generic option is that it be with a Prince or Queen of the Storm, with titles like "Prince of Magma," "Lady of Icebergs," or "Countess of Forked Skies," but the options are genuinely endless.

A bargain reduces the character's refresh by one. It is possible to cut more than one bargain, but doing so pretty much guarantees that from that point forward you will be ground zero for proxy fights between those two Storm Courts.

Skill: Summoning

The Summoning skill replaces the Conjuration skill when a character makes a bargain. It is at the same level, and works in a manner identical to the Conjuring skill with the following changes:

- The character may only summon creatures from the Storm that he has a bargain with.
- Summoned elementals no longer demand a price.
- Failed summonings now always result in the creature fleeing.
- The character's skill is treated as 4 higher for the purpose of how many elementals he may have bound at a time.
- The character may now summon and bind a named elemental creature based on the patron of his bargain. The nature of this creature is part of the identification of the patron. Named creatures are specific sorts of fantastical beasts—firebirds, lightning armadillos, or whatever else the player and GM agree seems cool.
- These named elementals are of Superb rating, have 4 stress boxes and -2/-4/-6 consequences, as well as their elemental bonus—see the table, above.

Elementals in Combat

Handling a single elemental in addition to the character is not too onerous, but an accomplished Summoner or Conjuror may be running around with several elementals, and trying to handle each one in combat invites huge bookkeeping hassles. For this reason, a Conjuror can use a variant on the Teamwork rules as follows:

- The basic attack and defense is determined by the most powerful elemental the character controls. It receives an additional +1 for being under the direction of the character.

- Creating advantages and overcoming difficulties still use the character's skill, but +1 per non-Wisp elemental in the fight, if it's an effort the elemental could help with.

- Elementals act as an additional pool of consequences for the player. Any time he would take a hit, he may lose elementals as if he were taking on consequences as follows:

     º Drudge: -2

    º Servitor: -4

    º Attendant: -6

    º Named: Any single value

Variations and Options

BORROWED POWER

A Summoner with a Storm Bargain may buy the Stormcaller skill as if she were a Stormcaller and use power borrowed from her patron. However, there are limits on this. She cannot use Stormcalling while her named creature is summoned, and any time she use Stormcalling they forgo the +4 benefit to the number of bound creatures she can have. On the upside, she can sacrifice any non-Wisp elemental for a +1 to a Stormcalling roll, though this bonus does not stack. This does not require any additional refresh.

WISP MASTERS

It is possible that some Conjurors forgo the broader aspects of conjuration in favor of specialization on Wisps, both for their utility and for the underground culture of Wisp battles that has become so popular.

In this case, replace Conjuration with a Wisp Training skill that still governs how many wisps a character can control but does not allow the summoning of wisps. Instead, it allows the binding of "wild" wisps, those who have been trapped in the mortal world long enough to adopt creature-like forms. A Wisp Master finds and captures these Wisps then domesticates them into Battle Wisps and trains them to fight.

In an example of the Bronze Rule, Battle Wisps are still Average creatures with no stress boxes and no consequences so far as their interaction with the rest of the world goes, but within their own ranks they are finely gradated. That is to say, each Battle Wisp can have a full set of skills, powers, and abilities usable in battle with other wisps, and within those battles, those differences matter a great deal. But to an external observer, the most potent and least potent Battle Wisp are about on par.

TRAINING YOUR BATTLE WISPS

Battle wisps start with 2 stress boxes, one mild consequence, and 4 skills at Average (+0): Strength, Speed, Skill, and Toughness. (Yes, there's a skill called Skill. Cope.) These are, respectively, used to make attack, overcome, create an advantage, and defend actions in Wisp combat. Toughness is also the defense against attacks.

Wisps may earn advances by winning battles, or through training. Exactly how advances are earned depends on the situation, but each advance may be spent to:

- **Increase a skill.** All skills can be increased to Good (+3). One skill can be increased to Great (+4) and one may be increased to Superb (+5).

- **Increase resilience.** An advance can be spent to add a -2 consequence, increase a -2 consequence to a -4, or increase a -4 to a -6. The maximum consequences for a Battle Wisp are -2/-4/-6.

- **Buy an upgrade.** Upgrades include:

   º **Shell:** +1 Armor.

   º **Tough Shell:** (Requires Shell and Good Toughness) +1 Armor.

   º **Breath Attack:** Can attack two targets at once.

There are many more upgrade possibilities. In general, treat them as a simple sort of stunt.

In any situation except battling other wisps, the wisp still effectively has an Average skill level, no stress, no consequences, and no upgrades—except in a purely cosmetic sense. This remains true no matter how many advances the wisp has earned.
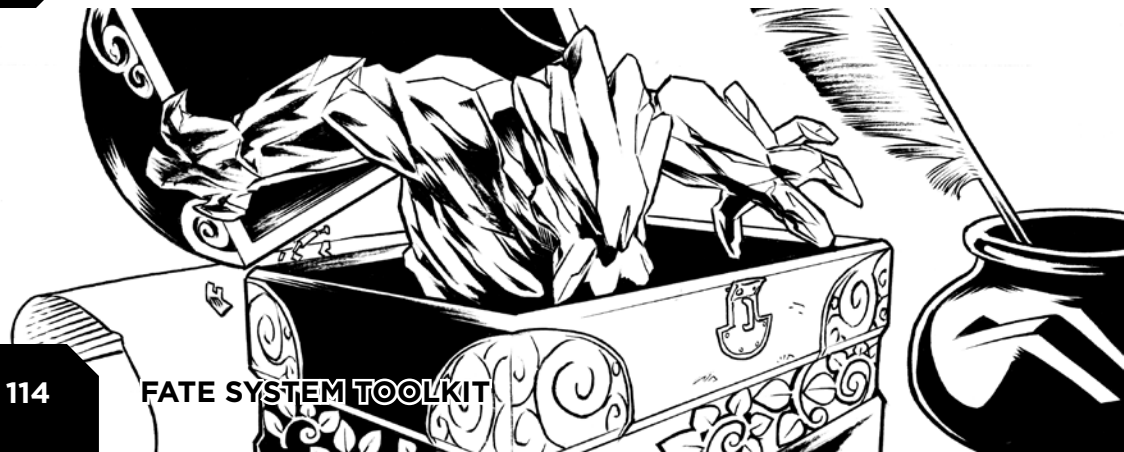
Voidcallers

Design Notes

As with Storm Summoners, this is nominally tied to the larger Five Storms magic system, and similarly, it's designed to easily stand alone. Although in this case, it may stand somewhat further afield. This is the magic of the dark and terrible things that lie outside the boundaries of reality. Classically, it's the space for unimaginable yet clearly tentacled horrors, but the hope here is to ground it a little bit more. Drawing on sources like Harry Connolly's TWENTY PALACES novels, the idea is that one does not need to lean so heavily on the crutch of the "unknowable" to come up with disturbing stuff.

It would be easy to say that this is magic for villains, but that would be doing you and yours a disservice—to say nothing of the disservice to the villains. This is magic that comes at a horrible, nigh-inhuman cost, but nigh-inhuman is not quite the same thing as inhuman. The cultists who summon dark things are not simple nutjobs looking to destroy everything. They *want* something, and there's a price they're willing to pay.

What they want and the price they pay can make them very hard to distinguish from some heroes.

Description

No one is sure what the Void is. There's some literature that suggests that it's everything that's not the universe, while other works suggest that it's the end of the universe at the scale where time and place are indistinguishable. To some it's simply hell. Whatever it is, it's a bad place. Dark in every sense of the word. Sometimes someone trips into the edges of it, and if it doesn't kill them outright, it marks them terribly.

Thankfully, this is rare. The Void doesn't interact with the world unless one really goes seeking it out, and even then it's pretty hard to find. In fact, it would probably be utterly impossible to find except for one dangerous truth: there are things there that want to get out.

There is no one description of what these things are and what they want. Some are little more than animals, albeit animals possessed of horrific powers. Others are clearly possessed of some level of intellect, from sub- to trans-human.

The smart ones are an obvious threat—they seek means to make it easier for humans to find the Void, offering bargains and seeking to spread knowledge best left hidden. Their endgames differ. Some clearly move toward crossing the threshold into our world, others seem to seek to draw others into their own dark courts. Others are simply a mystery.

Still, the threat of the animals is not to be underestimated—the threat they present is often ecological. A single creature may be no great threat, but given time to breed and spread, they could represent an extinction-level event.

But they're just so darn useful.

Power from the Void takes a number of shapes. Most commonly, it is in the form of summoning and binding some useful creature. So long as proper precautions are taken, these creatures can usually be kept quite safely, but precautions often have limits. This is doubly true for very powerful creatures. They are no harder to summon—though binding them is another matter—and they will actively seek to circumvent whatever restrictions are put upon them.

Sometimes actual power can also be gained from dealings with the Void. This can take the form of knowledge, such as a spell or trick, or more direct power, usually through the form of some sort of infection. That latter can be just as bad as it sounds—there is no guarantee that the power you received today is not the thing that makes you explode in a flurry of flesh-eating worms tomorrow.

The 30-Second Version

- Find the instructions for performing a dark summoning.

- Roll Lore against the difficulty of the summoning. After the fact, you add whatever bonus you need to the roll to make it a success. The GM gets 1 Doom Point for each +1 so granted.

- You use the horrible thing you have summoned to your own benefit and the detriment of the world.

- GM spends Doom Points to make your bad idea even worse.

Mechanics

There are two different mechanical considerations for dealing with the powers of the Void. The first is the question of how contact is made, how things are summoned, and so on. The second is how the effects of those things are expressed.

Summoning

It sounds mundane, but summoning something from the Void is roughly comparable to assembling a big piece of furniture. You have extensive directions, and if you follow them exactly and have all the right tools, they should produce the result promised. Unfortunately, in even the best of circumstances, this stuff can be confusing. The author is rarely a skilled technical writer and, let us not forget, is the kind of guy who writes a book about how to summon unholy monstrosities.

This is actually why anyone who knows anything is skeptical of "spellbooks." Anyone who is trying to make a book out of this stuff has got pretty suspect priorities, and there's no real guarantee that any of it is going to work. There are a handful of known spellbooks that are floating around in numbers enough to be recognizable, and it's a useful survival skill to know which ones are bogus. And even then caution is called for—it's far from uncommon for practitioners to seed their books with known bad rituals.

The real treasures are notebooks. The reality is that sloppy practitioners are dead practitioners, and the ones who survive for any period of time document the hell out of everything—success, failure, and otherwise. Unfortunately, notebooks tend to be personal chicken scratch at best and enciphered at worst, so nothing is ever easy.

All of which is to say that in many cases, the difficulty in figuring out how to summon something is less about the actual difficulty of the task, which is usually fairly easy, and much more about getting a good, reliable set of instructions. This limitation is the big reason that even successful practitioners usually only have a few tricks up their sleeve. Each new summoning they learn requires a period of basically playing Russian roulette, with escalating stakes.

So, the actual act of summoning is a Lore roll to see how well you follow instructions, as well as how well you take precautions, apply your judgment to the proceedings, and generally proceed with caution. Assuming the ritual that you're using is correct—and there's no guarantee of that—then there are two difficulties in play: the difficulty of the actual ritual, and the difficulty of parsing the ritual from the text. For tracking purposes, these are the **summoning difficulty** and the **parsing difficulty**.

As a rule of thumb, the summoning difficulty is usually fairly low, even for powerful creatures. Remember, they *want* to come here, and the only real challenge is doing so safely. The much higher difficulty is parsing the directions.

Summoning difficulties tend to be consistent, but parsing difficulties totally depend upon the source material. The lowest parsing difficulty can be equal to the summoning difficulty. In either case, both difficulties are unknown to the player.

To actually perform a summoning, the character must make all appropriate steps as laid out in the ritual, and then make a single Lore roll against both difficulties.

After the roll:

- If the player beats neither difficulty, the spell either doesn't work, or it works without proper safeguards, and whatever you summoned is now on the loose. This is totally the GM's judgment call, depending upon how much fun she would have with that.

- If the player beats the summoning difficulty but doesn't beat the parsing difficulty, the spell works! Just like it's supposed to! More or less.

Make a note of how much the player missed beating the parsing difficulty by. That value is converted into the GM's Doom Points. Note that this is explicitly *beat* the difficulty—a tie will still accrue one Point. Doom Points are the currency of things that went wrong. They might be small or subtle, they might be big and painful, but they're not immediately evident, and they can be revealed at the GM's leisure.

> For example: Dave attempts a ritual with a summoning difficulty of Fair (+2) and a parsing difficulty of Fantastic (+6). He rolls a Great (+4) so the spell works, but the GM accrues 3 Doom Points, because Dave would have needed to roll 3 higher to beat the difficulty.

If you succeed with style on a ritual, you succeed without Doom and the parsing difficulty drops by one point for subsequent efforts at the same ritual. This cannot reduce the parsing difficulty below the summoning difficulty, and it only applies to you. Anyone else must still use the parsing difficulty of the original notes—or your notes, if appropriate.

So why is summoning so "safe" for PCs? Basic game design. Don't make a magic system where the spells might kill you, but are useful if you succeed. That's a totally reasonable control from the perspective of "realism," but it's terrible from a play perspective. Magic is Chekov's gun—if you introduce it, someone will use it, and then it's on you to try to make it work, either way. In this specific case, it is much more interesting to have players deal with the consequences of success. That can be worse than dying, and no one needs to roll up a new character. At least, not right away.

HUGE RITUALS

The rules so far presuppose summoning small- to medium-scale beings from the Void. There are bigger creatures, and they can also be summoned and bound. The actual rules and difficulties do not change, but the requirements for the ritual are usually far more extravagant. Isolated mountaintops, circles of gold chain, a thousand paper cranes with their wings dipped in the menstrual blood of a killer, stuff like that. As with normal summons, the roll is not the essential part of the process—and, in fact, the rules are the same—it's all the stuff getting to that point that matters.

This may seem counterintuitive—if bigger things are trying to come through, why do their rituals take more componentry? It's just a practical consideration—think of the ritual as scaffolding. The bigger the thing you want to bring across is, the stronger the scaffolding needs to be—and that's before you start considering the binding element.

Of course, many of these things are big, smart, and powerful enough to find loopholes. Some have created, or lead to the creation of, artifacts—mirrors, statues, monkey paws, puzzle boxes and the like—that can open the way for them. Thankfully, these usually are limited in some way; otherwise, the creature would probably have already come through. But they make excellent fishing lures, so to speak.

BINDING

A summoned creature can't do much of anything. Part of the summoning is binding it, at least if things are done right. Basically, the Summoner must release it—in whole or in part—to benefit from its abilities. For dumb creatures, this just means breaking the circle and letting them do their thing. For more intelligent creatures, it means releasing them to use their powers under strict ground rules.

Technically, these things are pretty Faustian about their bargaining. They generally can't negotiate—unless, of course, they *can*—but they will try to exploit any holes in the limits placed upon them. However, nothing is less fun than coming up with precise wording for these things, so don't demand it. GMs should ask for player's intent, and then respect it. Doom Points and natural consequences should provide more than enough complications.

MAGIC

DOOM POINTS

Doom Points are a rough currency to keep track of all the things that the character didn't account for. Think of them as infernal loopholes, a bucket of things just waiting to go wrong with a summoning. Basically, they give the GM carte blanche to make the situation worse—not that she can't do that anyway, but spending a Doom Point shifts the blame nicely. A few things that might be done with a spent Doom Point:

- Allow the creature to use a power outside the scope of the binding, even if only a little at a time.

- Allow the creature to summon other creatures.

- Allow the creature to establish contact with someone else, someone who might be interested in a better deal.

- The creature's mere presence imposes a scene aspect on its environs, in a steadily growing radius.

RITUALS AND ASPECTS

Aspects seem like a great way to guarantee a safe ritual and avoid that whole GM doom thing, and they technically are. But there are a few things to consider.

When you do one of these summonings, you are doing something terrible. Every possible thing you could bring across is an abomination, and a threat to the world. When you invoke an aspect to help you do that, you may well be tainting that aspect.

We all understand doing bad things for good reasons, and that may be the motivation that drives someone to summon. But when you make that decision, you cross a line, and you are saying something profound about that aspect. That says something about your character, and it also says something about how that aspect shows up in play. Once you open the door to doing abominable things in the name of love, you have invited the GM to see how far you are willing to go.

And maybe that's awesome. That may be exactly what you want to see in play—it's a great, powerful theme. But we mention it here so that you walk through that door with both eyes open.

Creatures and Powers

And here's the harsh reality—there is no way to fully catalog all the possible expressions of these horrible things. We're going to provide a lot of examples, but the reality is that for this, you should look at *every* FATE build you can for ideas. These are all one-offs, and if the rules for a particular creature don't work with the rest of the game, this will be one context where this **makes sense**. This is your opportunity to go absolutely nuts.

The only limiter is that you want to include some checks to prevent a total party kill as soon as the nasty thing gets loose. This may mean limiting the range of bad things to ones that can be dealt with. It may mean making sure your characters have certain defenses. It's just something to be mindful of.

SAMPLE CREATURES

WOUND-EATING BEETLES

Summoning Difficulty: Fair (+1)

A little bit longer than a man's thumb, these beetles have white, soft shells, like they've just emerged from some cycle of growth, but it never hardens. To use it, simply let it walk around on your skin for a while—it's gross for a few moments, but then you won't even notice it's there. Literally. Unless you really, actively put some effort into trying to find it, you're simply not aware of it, no matter where it crawls. If you don't know to expect it, it's just one of those creepy momentary sensations that passes quickly.

The beetle gets its name for its ability to eat wounds. It undoes things on a small scale, and it mechanically has a very potent effect: once per day, its owner can remove one physical consequence, effectively erasing the injury. After it's eaten three such wounds, it will lay a little egg somewhere on your body—which will go similarly unnoticed—and in a week, another beetle will hatch and be walking around unnoticed—and able to eat additional wounds.

If, on the other hand, a beetle goes for a week without a wound to eat, it finds sustenance elsewhere, and eats one of its host's aspects. This doesn't cause any direct change—things aren't forgotten or removed, they just matter a lot less. Once all of a person's aspects are eaten, they pretty much yield to a listless ennui punctuated by occasional moments of intense activity or self-harm—quickly eradicated—in an attempt to get a grasp on something they lost and cannot find.

Their homes grow messier and more crowded with stuff, coming to resemble nests with paths radiating out from the glow of the television. Not coincidentally, such waste-filled environments are friendly to the beetle, which use the mess to travel more safely away from their host—as they are easy prey for boots and predators—to find new hosts, preferably sleeping ones who will never notice their new guest.

Beetles are not a huge threat on their own—even an unchecked infection rarely extends beyond a single building. However, they are also symbiotic with many more aggressive invaders or infections. A human turned monstrous killing machine is dangerous, but one covered in wound-eating beetles is a whole other problem.

Summoning Difficulty: Good (+2)

There's a longer name for this thing, but it's a mouthful. It looks like a cross between a lightning bolt and a centipede that never slows down enough so you can get a good look. It cannot sustain itself for long in stasis, though it can be kept in a properly prepared glass jar. Released, it is a flash and a bang, dangerous as a lightning strike, then gone.

If, however, it's released into something it can travel through, like a power line, it can maintain itself indefinitely. It can crudely manipulate electronic devices in this fashion, and can strike like a cobra from any point of electrical exposure—light sockets, outlets, and the like. Such a strike—Superb (+5) vs. Notice, Weapon:7—is a potent weapon, but disperses the creature, and many practitioners use them as fire-and-forget weapons.

If one gets free, it tends to occupy a "nest" of wires, such as a house or office—they seem to have trouble travelling long distances across the grid. The only obvious sign of this is bizarre electrical oddities, at least until the creature spawns. A small lightning worm is the size of a true centipede and will crawl out of outlets, make its way into any electronics it can find—usually small gadgets—and stay there until connected to another grid where it can grow and eventually produce its own brood. If not, it will grow until its bonds can no longer contain it, then kill the next person it sees. Either way.

Setting aside the infrastructure threat these things represent, they have one other bad habit—fresh corpses make for a *really interesting* set of wires to them. Living things don't hold much interest to them, but a recently deceased body possessed of a sophisticated nervous system? It's like a party. A shambling, not-dead, crackling, taser-touch undead party—at least until it burns out.

The worms can be rough to spot, but completely cutting off the electricity kills them dead.

MAGIC

LAZARUS EYES

Summoning Difficulty: Good (+2)

A white sphere, roughly the size of an egg, this creature is harmless and inert much of the time. If, however, it is put in the eye socket of a recently deceased person, it will extend tendrils into the brain and cause the body to begin regenerating. Provided that the flesh—and most importantly, the brain—is largely intact, then over the course of the next 12 hours, the person will be restored to life. If the brain is not intact, then the body will reanimate and just shamble about until it starves and dies again. Creepy, but mostly harmless. But if the brain is intact, then the person is really back—personality, memory, the works. The only different is that the Lazarus Eye can never quite match the original eye color, so the eyes are mismatched.

The problem is, the Lazarus Eye lives on brain matter, and there are only two possible ways to get it—from the host or from someone else. The primary method is to drive the host to eat brains—or, secondarily, eat the host's brain. This hunger may start with animals, but eventually they'll be driven to cannibalism to get human brains. The brains of the recently deceased will suffice for a while, but will never sate the hunger like a fresh kill—or better yet, a still living meal.

However, this doesn't change the essential nature of the person doing this—they are doing this monstrous thing, fully aware that it's monstrous, but they *need* to do it. They can't stop, they can just take steps to not go after their friends and loved ones. And the Lazarus Eye supercharges their adrenal system, enhancing their reflexes and generally helping them become the apex predator they need to be—+1 to all Physical skills, -1 to all non-sensory Mental ones. It also lays a few eggs in their stomach, which can come up through the mouth should the host need it, such as to save a loved one or to help a loved one join them, so they can be safe.

If the Eye isn't fed regularly—once a month at the outset, but more and more frequently as time goes on—then it starts turning to the only food source at hand, eating its host's brain, usually starting with memories and higher functions. When this happens, the result is a primal killing machine—+3 to all Physical skills, -3 to all non-sensory Mental ones—cracking skulls with its bare hands and scooping out the innards. If starved further, the Eye and the host both burn out.

Summoning Difficulty: Great (+3)

A corruption of ifrit, these beings look like toads made of fire, but their fire rots and darkens as it burns, the opposite of purifying flame. As beings of energy, they are hard to physically harm, but are damaged or dispersed by clean water. It has no stress boxes or consequences, but it ignores any damage except immersion or heavy splashing, like a fire hose—it's akin to putting out a bonfire (albeit one that's trying to eat your face), though doing so will profoundly pollute the environs. When summoned, a Freet is usually sent after a target to kill them. Freets have effectively Great (+4) Fight and Stealth skills. If they successfully attack a target, they inflict a ***Burning Rot*** aspect on the target—a terrible, painful infection that slowly consumes the target. Until the aspect is removed, the character takes 1 stress every day, and cannot naturally recover stress or consequences. The only way to remove the aspect is to destroy the Freet and any spawn.

Speaking of spawn, Freet lay their eggs in fires, little sparks that add a bit of bad odor to the flame. After three hours, the fire extinguishes, spawning a number of unbound Freets based on the size of the fire. A fireplace might produce one, while a forest fire could produce dozens.

MAGIC

Summoning Difficulty: Poor (-1)

He goes by many names, and summoning him is simply a matter of saying the right one in the right context. He will, however, only appear on his timetable, and once you have summoned him, he may visit you any time you're alone.

The Gent is the subject of many stories, but they have a few threads in common. He's not physically present, and he may often appear only in reflections, as a shadowy outline, or in other impossible ways, though sometimes he simply appears normally. He is thin, though his complexion is a matter of some debate, and he is always dressed well, if oddly. He comes to a Summoner when they are alone, though the meaning of this has more to do with who notices them than literal solitude. He has appeared at parties and other large events where it is possible to be lost in a crowd, though no one but his erstwhile partner ever sees him.

The Dapper Gent would like to help. He can't physically *do* anything to help, mind you, but he knows a lot. He has a bottomless well of secrets, both arcane and mundane, and he's happy to share. And he's equally up front that he will require the occasional favor in return.

The favors are fairly benign-seeming, though savvy practitioners have noted that they usually revolve around preserving and protecting information and rituals about the Void that might otherwise be lost. It is rare that he points his partner at those rituals directly, possibly because he benefits more from keeping his partner in the dark. One common favor is to "make an introduction" and teach someone else the Dapper Gent's name. One may always refuse to do the favor, and the Gent will politely take his leave and not return. Unless, perhaps, you find yourself in very dire straits sometime later, at which point you may find the price has gone up substantially.

For some, this is the extent of this slightly disturbing relationship, a little tit for tat, and nothing more. But it grows more complicated for those who he finds *interesting*. If you interest the Gent, he grows all the more helpful, and his help opens big doors, and with those come big problems. And those problems have a way of getting worse and worse until what you really want is a way out.

And that is something the Dapper Gent is happy to provide. No one knows what happens after that.

MAGIC

Summoning Difficulty: Good (+3)

When summoned, it's a remarkably ugly, pustule-covered toadstool, perhaps a foot high. Rest your hand on it, and a similar pustule will appear on your hand – painless but disgusting. Lay that hand upon a sick person—or yourself—and the sickness will leave them, as the pustule seals up, and a smaller Toadstool grows on the back of your hand. It may be removed—painfully—and planted, where it will eventually grow as large as the first. So long as the Toadstool is planted and remains healthy, the disease remains in remission, though the health of all subsequent toadstools depends on the health of the first.

One unpleasant addition—the diseases still run their course while within the Toadstool—their abrupt return includes all progress of the disease from the intervening time, often to terrible and dramatic effect.

The Toadstool can also heal injuries, even repair traumatic injuries, but this is somewhat more problematic. The cured character looks fine on the outside, but internally, the "healing" is in the form of spongy yellow fungal growth that functions as the replaced flesh. This is not directly harmful—unless it has replaced brain matter, in which case the results are unpredictable, but rarely good. However, those healed in this fashion constantly generate spores. Mushrooms grow where they sleep. These are mundane, if poisonous, mushrooms, but they speed the general decay that the Mineo Toadstool brings.

The mere presence of a Mineo Toadstool is unhealthy—not for the summoner, but for the general area. One is not so dangerous—flu might be a bit nastier in town, but not really noticeably. With each additional Toadstool, it gets worse. And as a bonus, if anyone dies while receiving the benefit of a toadstool—that is, while their disease is in remission—another Toadstool grows on their grave.

Variations and Options

KEEPING IT IN CHECK

So, if the Void is so dangerous, why haven't we lost the numbers game yet? Sooner or later *something* is going to come through, multiply exponentially, and scourge the planet. It's just math.

There are a couple of possible answers, any or all of which could be true.

First, the world itself moves to reject the Void. Gaps heal over time, old summonings become useless through overuse, and there's just a steady tendency toward keeping the Void out, which offsets its continual efforts to get in.

Second, the world is not just humans. In a magical world, this might mean fae, spirits, or even gods who take steps to stop the worst incursions, but even in a reasonably modern world, it's true. The big giant brains that humans are so proud of are also a reason that we're vulnerable to so much of this stuff. A creature that can drain the color from your soul and leave you craving human flesh to fill the Void might be absolutely devastating to a small town, but to a coyote it's still a delicious snack. Animals are less impressed by existential threats, and it would be disturbing to count the number of times the world has been saved by rats and spiders.

Last, there may be people who actively work against this stuff. Stamping out information is hard, but not impossible, and this has all the earmarks of a good secret war. The need to control and destroy information while still staying aware of it and capable of responding is almost paradoxically hard. From such things, great stories are born.

MAKING YOUR OWN

Now that you've seen a wide array of examples, here's your opportunity to make the game your own. This should be a simple process, but that's never the whole story—it's one of those things that seems complicated at first, but gets easier and easier each time you do it, until you get to the point where it's so instinctive that it's hard to grasp how it was ever a problem. Wherever you are on that arc, hopefully we've got something here to help you out.

Balance

First, set aside your notions of balance. It's an important concept, but not the way it's usually used. Balance does not exist in the abstract—it is a specific element of play, and should always be looked at through the lens of play. Nothing is imbalanced on its own, it is only context that makes it so. A power that makes one character an omnipotent god might seem unbalanced, but when all the characters have it, that's the foundation of a really neat game. It's all about context.

If so, how do you balance your power designs? Think about three things—balancing them within the group, within the setting, and within play.

Group Balance

When you design a power system, you need to make one of the following assumptions:

- Only some characters will use it.

- Every character will use it.

If you are designing a power that only some characters will use, then you need to think about how that power compares to other things that characters can do and what characters are trading off to get that power. At its simplest, this means you must have a compelling answer to the question "Why *wouldn't* I buy this power?"

Stormcallers is designed with this in mind. The reason you wouldn't buy Stormcalling is because you'd need to sacrifice a skill slot—and an aspect—to buy in, and since Stormcalling is mostly combat-applicable, it's a fairly equitable tradeoff. Even that carries the assumption that there are also things like weapon and armor rules in play. Without that assumption, Stormcalling is just a superior combat skill, and there's no reason not to take it.

But notice that the trick of balancing that came from another part of the game itself. This is illustrative of something important about balance within the group—the purpose is to make sure that each player remains active and engaged. If you make one part of the game much cooler than the rest, then you should expect players to gravitate to it, and either support that or find other ways for them to be cool.

If you go the other way and assume that all your players will take a power, the sky's the limit. You've diminished the risk of any one player overshadowing the others. *Six Viziers* is designed this way, and it illustrates the strengths and dangers of this approach. The abilities of the system are incredibly potent, and would be horribly spotlight-hogging in a game where only one character had them, but since everyone has similar potency, that's not a danger. However, because the powers are so potent and diverse, care has to be taken that none of them dominate the game.

Nothing makes either approach better than the other—the logic of your power system will usually reveal whether it should be some-characters or all-characters. But that distinction needs to be clear to *you* when you design it. A system that tries to do both is one begging for abuse and inconsistent results.

Setting Balance

Setting balance may seem like a strange idea, but it's critical to good power design, because power design *is* setting design. Your power rules are an assertion about how the world works, and you need to think them through as such. Questions you need to consider include:

- Who can use the power system?

- How many users are there?

- How proficient/potent are they?

- How does the power impact the role of people who wield it?

- What are common results of the power in the setting?

- What are large-scale results of the power in the setting?

Obviously, the more tightly you constrain the power, the less you need to worry about these things, but that runs the risk of the power feeling like an overlay on the setting rather than a true part of it. As a bonus, the more you think through the logical ramifications of the power, the better you will be able to balance it—in every sense of the word.

Voidcallers is a great illustration of a magic system balanced against the setting. Note that there are very few mechanical checks on the use of magic in *Voidcallers*—it's almost all setting elements, both in terms of the behavior of practitioners and the impact of powers. Anyone can use the power, so practitioners put up hurdles to keep others from using it, and in doing so, hide information about their numbers and proficiency. The impacts of the power are all pretty terrible, but are—so far—held in check by luck or good intent. Change that, and you change the power.

Pro tip: Want to shake up a game idea? Look at the answers to your setting balance questions and change one of them, and see what it does. For example, there's no large-scale result of power in *Voidcallers* by default, but what if you change that? What if something ate Manhattan? Something so big and awful that it could not be covered up or hidden? What changes then?

Balance in Play

This is largely an extension of balance within the group, but it hinges on the question of how the powers drive play. Some games with powers are largely about the powers in question, such as supers games, or magi games in the tradition of Ars Magica. Other games, like classic adventuring or horror games, simply fold powers into the larger shape of play. Figure out which one your system does, and tune your powers appropriately.

On a more practical, mundane level, pay attention to how the actual *play* of your system works at the table. If the mechanics demand more of your attention—because they require more rolls, for example—then it's a good chance that power is sucking attention away from non-powered players. This can be addressed through thoughtful GMing, but better if it's not a problem in the first place.

YOUR TOOLBOX

What follows are a number of incomplete magic system components. Some are ways to generate power, others are potential effects and outcomes. Strip them for parts, add them together, or take them apart to see about building your own systems.

Limits

Channeling

For skill-based magic, add a "Channeling" skill. When you want to do something magical, you use the channeling skill to summon up the power and—hopefully—release it. To do this, use a create an advantage action. In this case, the advantage you're looking to create is a **Summoned Power** aspect. When it comes time to cast the spell—presumably on your next action—make a roll with a skill of Mediocre (+0), but use whatever bonuses you accrued in the advantage creation step—so, generally, you'll get a +2, +4, or +6 through stacked free invocations and potentially paying a fate point. So far, so good—generate mana, generate an effect. Now to get a little bit more fiddly.

- If you want to cast the spell *in one action*, then you need to use an aspect—either for free, or by spending a fate point—*without* gaining the +2 bonus. This makes fast casting pretty shaky business. There may be a stunt that allows you to fast cast for free.

- Difficulty for channeling is Mediocre (+0), difficulty of actually casting depends on the spell. In either case, a result less than Average means the power has gotten out of control. The character takes mental stress equal to the difference between the roll and 0.

- Optional rule (Burnout): Casters may opt to pre-emptively take a consequence as part of the roll. In this case, the consequence box is checked, and the spellcasting roll gains a bonus equal to the amount of stress that consequence would usually prevent.

- Another optional rule: If you want the risk to be on the channeling side rather than the spellcasting side, then do the following. Have the channeler's player declare a level of success, anywhere from Fair (+2) to Epic (+7), then roll an overcome against that declaration as a difficulty. If his roll falls short, he takes stress equal to the difference between his roll and his declared level of success. If the roll succeeds, then he uses that level of success for his actual spellcasting roll. The rule about needing an aspect or a stunt for fast casting is still in effect, so he'll want to generate a boost, buy a stunt, or have a fate point handy for that.

Fated Mana Points

For a system that requires the expenditure of a fate point to do something magical, change the way refresh rules work. Each time refresh reduces by one, offset it by granting the character one mana point (MP). MPs refresh the same way that fate points do, and can be used to fuel spells or enhance magical skills, but cannot otherwise be used as FP.

"Magical" aspects can generate MP rather than FP when used as ritual limitations. Exactly what those limitations are depend on the nature of the magic, but they might include things like saying daily prayer or forgoing armor.

If the magic system uses more mana points, it's easy change the refresh conversion rate—so a single drop in refresh might pay out 2 or 3 MP.

Blood Magic

Every point of physical stress a character takes generates one MP. Each physical consequence taken increases MP by its shift value—so a mild consequence generates two MP—as long as the consequence is a suitably bloody injury. MP remain until used for magic or until the stress or consequence is recovered.

Borrowed Power

Humans have the ability to manipulate magic, but not the ability to generate it. Power must come from other things, such as items, places, or beings of power, but each has its own unique prices and requirements. In this model, the term "magi" is used generically to represent those who use power, but it could just as easily be priests, sacred warriors, mystics, druids, or whomever else is appropriate for the setting.

In all the cases below, pairing the source of power with an aspect makes it more robust. Non-aspected power sources are far more subject to disconnection at a GM's whim.

Items of Power can contain a small amount of mana, but must be kept on hand and used in conjunction with spellcasting. The vast majority of these are expendable trinkets or components, which provide their charge and then are useless. The creation of such trinkets takes a day's effort in an appropriate environment—such as a lab for an alchemist, a forest for a druid and so on—a moderate cost, and a roll at Great (+4) difficulty. Success fills the item with one MP, and success with style fills it with 2 MP. A character can only maintain a number of such items equal to the numeric value of their magic skill. And yes, this means that stealing rival magic foci and locking them away is a great way to steal a rival's power. It is also possible to create a more powerful item, one that replenishes itself daily. Doing so requires a month's effort at great cost, and a similar difficulty. A magi may only have one such item, which makes it even worse if it is stolen.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT

Places of Power grant mana to those who are attuned to them according to the specific rules of the place. Most often, they grant a single MP at sunrise each day, which must be used that day or lost at the next sunrise. However, certain places of power have unique benefits (such as granting extra MP, allowing the mage to keep a reservoir of 3MP, or allowing the attuned mage to breath underwater) or limitations (MP only usable for fire magic, all MP lost if you kill a seagull, etc.).

Once the character has attuned to a location, the benefit remains in effect indefinitely, though many locations grant extra benefits if the character is actually present, most often with accelerated mana gain. However, getting and keeping attunement is rather tricky.

Places of power are hotly sought after by magi and other magical beings, so there is usually a current owner with a vested interest in the place, especially since most places of power have a limit on the number of people who can attune to it. But even without worrying about such guardians, it is not always obvious how to attune to a particular place, so knowledge and research may be required.

You will lose your attunement to a place of power if someone else attunes and kicks you out, either by taking your slot—if the place is at capacity—or by actively removing your connection. Details will depend on the location.

As such, places of power are greatly valued by mages, but are also drivers of much magical politicking and bargaining. No one wants to spend all their time protecting their places of power, but everyone wants as many attunements as they can manage to get, and that balance is the linchpin of many a magical cabal.

Beings of Power offer many of the benefits and qualifiers of places of power, but they skip the middleman. The mage cuts a deal with a being of power, agrees to abide by its rules, and gets a certain amount of power—and possibly other benefits—in return for the being getting constant insight into that power's use, and allowing the being a constant connection to the mage—a connection that may well see use in further bargaining.

The exact nature of beings of power can vary—gods, spirits, totem beasts, fae lords, axiomatic universal constructs, or nearly anything else might be a being of power. The trick with such beings is figuring out how to get in touch with them. For some, it's easy, but for others, it may involve uncovering some deep secrets.

There is nothing that keeps a magi from forming pacts with multiple beings, at least until those pacts come into conflict with one another. At that point, the player may discover that breaking these pacts also has a price.

Effects

A lot of these make reference to rolling a magic skill, but take that with a grain of salt—it doesn't mean that there must be a magic skill. Rather it means that whatever skill you determined to control magic should be used here.

What's in the Hat?

Whether it's because the hat is magical or because its wearer has talent is unimportant—the key is that the wearer reaches into the hat and pulls out something. The rules for it are straightforward:

Effect 1: At no cost, the character can pull out useless, color items. If the character spends an action pulling out useless things, they get a +1 bonus on any roll related to practical conjuration on their next action.

Effect 2: At a cost of 1 MP, the character can produce something useful but unexceptional, such as a weapon or the right tool for the job at hand. There's no skill roll associated with this, it's just an enabler for subsequent skill rolls.

Effect 3: At a cost of 2MP, the character may pull out something large, dangerous, or strange, which allows him to use his magic skill in lieu of another skill so long as he can physically describe how the object allows for the specific roll. For example, a giant hammer might make an attack, a spring might allow a jump, a cloud of smoke might allow for stealth, and so on. If you've used a particular trick before, take a –2 to the roll.

Effect 4: At a cost of 3MP or more the character can draw out a creature or automaton capable of independent action. This is a skill-based extra—the caster selects the form of the creature and its primary skill, and the GM fills in any secondary skills as needed. At 3MP, this creature will have a Fair (+2) apex skill, which can be increased on a one-for-one basis by spending extra MP. Once the level is settled on, the caster makes a magic roll with a difficulty equal to the level of the creature. If the caster fails, the creature is still summoned, but it has a number of unexpected complications equal to the margin of failure. One or two complications might be inconvenient, but three or more is likely to produce an out-of-control threat or other big problem.

Effect 5: A character may also spend all remaining MP (minimum 1) and make a "blind grab." This pulls out something big, dramatic, and one way or another, it ends the current scene, but the GM determines the exact details. When this happens, the GM secretly rolls a single dF. On a ⊞, the resolution works out in the player's favor—a whirlwind carries them to safety, her enemies are turned to frogs, and so on. On a ⊟, it works out against the player in some way—she ends up capturing herself, or making the situation worse. On a ■, the situation changes dramatically, though not necessarily for the better or worse—enemies are turned into different kinds of enemies, the landscape turns into candy, and so on.

TWEAKS

While this is traditionally a hat, there's no reason it can't be a cloak, a pouch, or something similar.

It's also possible to use this model to represent large, glowing energy constructs of the sort favored by comic books. In this case you remove effect 5, the bonus from effect 1, and make a failure of effect 4 require more MP (on a one-for-one basis).

To cosmic it up, you could reduce the cost of effects 2 and 3 by one step. This is very close to sorcery as an all-purpose skill, but for certain genres—like supers—that may be apt.

With a change in color, this also becomes an excellent system to handle certain sci-fi gadgets, especially ill-defined, all-purpose tools, even those with a bit of sonic to them. In this case, the physical manifestation is replaced with technobabble and interaction with technology. Effect 0 is an array of accidental electronic effects, effect 1 is largely unchanged, but effect 3 basically allows for "magic" to be used as super-hacking, doing anything that the local equipment is capable of. Effect 4 only applies when there's an existing unit to take over—like a robot or cargo loader—and Effect 5 is pretty much off the table, unless the GM really likes "what happens if I push *all* the buttons?" scenarios.

The Six Profanities

Contrary to the crude suggestion, the six profanities are actually the names of six of the greatest devils of hell. Their names cannot be sufficiently encompassed by tongue or pen, but each has a distinct icon that can grant a fraction of their dark power. The power is easy to use—it need only be permanently inscribed onto living skin via tattoo, branding, or scarification to grant the power—but the knowledge of such marks is wrapped in secrecy. It is rumored that only the devils themselves know the secret, and they take the form of mortals to share it, in the hopes of snaring souls. The profanities have many names, most unprintable—we'll use the more common names here, though that does not guarantee that everyone will call them that.

Arrow allows the user to perform line-of-light teleportation to a maximum range of about 100 feet (3 or 4 zones). The character's body needs to be able to traverse the distance, so the teleportation may go up, or over a pit, but it cannot go through a wall or grating, and will stop short of hitting an obstacle. This process only requires one to take a step, so a character may actually cover great distance by "skipping" along multiple jumps in sequence. Each jump costs one MP.

Ironskin provides protection from physical harm. When the character takes physical damage, he may retroactively spend MP to gain armor equal to the number of MP spent. Additionally, if the character knows a blow is coming with more than a moment's notice, he may spend 3 MP to steel himself against it and ignore all damage. While this is of no use in a fight, it can be useful for hard landings or staying the executioner's blow, but beware that the protection only lasts for a heartbeat. He may survive the impact of an oncoming train, but that doesn't guarantee he'll survive the landing as it knocks him off the tracks, or worse, drags him under the train.

Pomp grants the power, for 1MP, to converse with any dead body that is still in good enough physical shape to speak. Convincing the corpse to do anything other than scream is a different problem entirely.

Rider allows a character to spend 1 MP to "jump" into the mind of any mammal in her line of sight. While in its mind, she has no access to its thoughts nor control of its actions, but she has access to its senses, and may ride along for about two minutes. The player may opt to spend an additional MP to perform another "jump" to another target within her line of sight. This also extends the ride for another 2 minutes. Additional 2-minute periods cost 1 MP each. While this is happening, the character's body stands helplessly, staring into space, making her easy prey.

Sight grants awareness of supernatural phenomena, though it's erratic. When magic is afoot, the character gets a tingle, and may spend 1 MP to get details regarding what is going on. The sight can also carry prophetic visions or dreams, though those are usually more disturbing than useful.

Terror generates an aura of terror around the character for 1 MP. The aura lasts for the duration of the scene, and the character's attacks may inflict physical or mental stress, as desired. Animals with any level of self-preservation will not enter the same zone, and will do whatever they can to leave it. For an additional MP, the character may look a thinking target in the eye and use intimidation to create a *Fear of [Character]* aspect on them. If successful, he may freely invoke that aspect for the remainder of the scene.

If a character doesn't have enough MP to use a power, they can still do so, but at risk to their soul. Pick an aspect and underline it—the character gets the MP they need, but that aspect is now tainted. In the fiction, this means it twists in dark ways when it comes up, and mechanically it no longer produces fate points when compelled, instead granting one MP. Such tainted aspects offer up dark compulsions at times, so the power that comes with the taint comes at a great risk.

TWEAKS
There may be more powerful versions of each mark, though what is required to get them is best not discussed.

Arrow: For 2 MP, range can be increased as far as can be clearly seen.

Ironskin: Unarmed blows now strike like a metal weapon, and the character may add +2 per MP spent to any feat of pure strength.

Pomp: For 3 MP the character may animate any body in physically good enough shape to move for a scene. It will follow basic instruction, and while it's not much in a fight, it's pretty freaking creepy.

Rider: At a cost of 3 MP per jump, the character's physical body disappears. It reappears behind the last subject.

Sight: For 1 MP, a character may discover something hidden about a person or thing. There is no guarantee it's what she wants to know, and it's only one use per target.

Terror: By spending an additional 1 MP (2 MP total), the character can increase the intensity of his aura of fear. He now inflicts mental damage equal to any physical damage he inflicts when he attacks.

MAGIC

PIECES OF POWER

Let's assume you've got an idea for a magic system, and it makes sense on its own. You can explain it in normal language, and you have a rough sense of how it's going to work in your game. Now it's time to start thinking about mechanics, and how to represent your system in the game.

As a first word of caution, don't feel obliged to solve every problem with a mechanic. If your magic system is easily described and clearly understood, it may require nothing more than a skill or two to represent facility with it. Be careful about immediately jumping to the mechanics—make sure there's a real problem before you introduce a mechanic to solve that problem, and your finished product will be much stronger.

When it comes time to introduce a mechanic, there are two things that the mechanic needs to do—or at least consider—an **outcome** and a **limitation**.

Outcome is obvious—you want to be able to throw around fireballs, so the effect handles things like how you target them, how big they are, how much damage they do, and so on. The limitation is less sexy, but more important: it answers the question of why you would do anything *but* throw fireballs.

What's important to note is that the entire effect may not exist in only one place in the rules. It will often be threaded into other rules in ways that are often obvious once you look for them, but are easy to overlook if you don't think about them.

Magic systems tend to be constructed with limitations serving as a frame for outcomes. That is, there will be a broad set of rules that control when and how magic can be used—what spells are known, how often they can be cast, who can cast them, and so on—while the rules for outcomes, like blowing things up with fireballs, are often smaller pieces of rules-text, limited to that particular spell and those like it.

This may seem like a very fiddly distinction, but if you're designing your own magic system, then this is something you really need to get your head around. The second dial gives you immense power and flexibility when you do your own design, because it lets you choose the axis of change.

As an example, consider the classic system of memorizing spells to cast them. The container—and by extension, the biggest limiter—controls what and how many spells a character can cast, while the outcomes are the individual spells. This allows for a lot of versatility, because you can change the limitations without changing the outcomes—perhaps by introducing another character class that gets the same spells at a different rate—or change the outcomes without changing limitations, by adding or removing spells.

Changing outcomes is no big deal. Swapping out a spell is easily done and easily fixed, and it's a great way to do cool things. Changing the limitations is a *much* bigger deal, full of potentially unexpected consequences. It's also where the real power of hacking lives. Perhaps more importantly, if you understand this division, you understand how you can build an entirely new magic system by changing one or the other, rather than needing to rebuild entirely from scratch.

Limitations

Limitations usually take one of two forms—use or opportunity. **Limitations of use** impact *who* can use magic, while **limitations of opportunity** speak to *how* and *when* magic can be used.

The first thing to consider when thinking about a magic system is who can use it. In fiction, the answer might be "anyone," but even then it will probably need some form of representation. Setting aside limitations within the fiction, the gateway for using magic usually takes the form of one or more of the following:

- A new skill
- A specific aspect
- A stunt
- Refresh cost
- Opportunity
- Resource cost

STUNTS AND REFRESH

Notice that we treat stunts and refresh as two separate things. This is because they are separate building blocks, and while the default build says a stunt costs one refresh, that's just one build. If you're constructing your own system, then you have the freedom to handle them differently.

This opens up a lot of doors in terms of what a stunt is. Practically, a stunt is its own little rule—or rule exception—and while their number and nature are restricted by refresh cost in the baseline, you can break free from that structure. As an example, *Stormcallers* and *Six Viziers* both effectively give a bundle of stunts, and only charge refresh for the bundle, basically providing a discount for the thematic grouping.

New Skills

Although adding a "magical" skill seems like the least expensive option to allow magic, bear in mind the opportunity cost—the character is giving up some other skill to pursue magic, so there is a tradeoff. It is possible to fold magic into one or more existing skills, but if you do that, then you'll probably also be demanding some other cost.

Specific Aspect

Requiring a specific aspect is both very potent and rather trivial. Obviously, aspects say a lot about a character, but unless the required aspect is particularly boring—and why would you want that?—then it's not much of a cost.

That is not to say there's no point in requiring an aspect. Magic often has a setting component, so an aspect can reinforce elements of the fiction. Aspects can also be used to illustrate a choice in a setting with multiple favors of magic, especially if your expectation is that all characters will have magic of some sort. In this case, aspects are less about cost and more about differentiation, which can be very robust.

A Stunt

Stunts make for a nice, obvious gateway into any system of magic, and much like different aspects might be gateways into different styles of magic, so might different stunts. For example, if you're using a magic system that requires magic points, different stunts might represent different ways to generate those points.

Of course, since stunts can also be the outcomes of a magic system, you get the potential for some sophisticated interplay. It is entirely possible to build a "tree"-style magic system using nothing but stunts that depend on other stunts as prerequisites. Such systems are fun, but they often take a lot of bookkeeping to construct well.

Refresh

Refresh is probably the most serious cost, and it carries a lot of potential meaning—specifically, what does the loss of refresh mean?

When we introduced the idea of refresh in THE DRESDEN FILES RPG, it served two purposes—it provided for characters with a wide range of power by trading freedom for that power, but it also underscored that the line between man and monster was a slim one, and that it was possible to be consumed by your power—that is, reduced to zero refresh. While there is no obligation to make zero refresh mean the exact same thing, the key is that a zero refresh represents a loss of agency. Mechanically it means the character is basically unable to do anything but what their aspects dictate.

Something implicitly part of a magic system are the different meanings loss of agency can have. It could mean character death to go to zero refresh, certainly, but it is often more interesting if it means the character is swept up in their magical nature, as such characters make great villains or foils down the road.

The catch is that while refresh as a cost should *feel* like the danger of the slippery slope, that's not the reality. Dropping to zero refresh is basically a player choice to retire the character, not something that actually comes up in play. If you're okay with that, then cool, but if you really want it to be a danger in play, then you're going to need to find a way to make the choice come up more often.

> In a system where each magical aspect reduces refresh by one but increases magic points, you might rule that a character can always choose to "sell out" one of their aspects, converting it to a magical one, thereby increasing their mana pool. Additionally, at the moment this happens, have a character's stress track and mana pool restored to full. Now you have a reason for this to happen in play, as the character surrenders to their power to win an unwinnable fight.

Opportunity

One interesting option for limits on effects is to require that they are not universally available, but rather depend upon the appropriate opportunity. Opportunity may be defined in a wide variety of ways, but largely fall into one of two categories.

World opportunities are those that depend upon elements in the game setting. Spells might only be cast at certain times or places, or in response to certain events. This is a classic trope for a lot of horror fiction, where things may be called "when the stars are right."

World opportunities tend to operate more like plot hooks than anything else, because they drive play toward those opportunities. If the dead can be revived in the Lap of Shialla, then that's a great reason to go there. If the Dark One can only be summoned during a lunar eclipse on the Plains of Blood, then the adventure pretty much writes itself.

However, world opportunities are pretty restrictive for players—world opportunity is a very high cost of magic, and if it's the only way to do things, then you probably need no other costs. Not to say that it's unplayable—it can work very well in conjunction with high Lore characters—but it's got very specific restrictions.

Alternatively, world opportunities can be used in conjunction with another magic system to transcend the usual limitations of magic—so spells that are more powerful, or otherwise impossible, might be castable under the right circumstances. Structurally, this is still pretty much just using magic as a plot hook, and that's fine.

Gameplay opportunities are another approach entirely. In this case, something involving game rules must happen before magic is possible. This could be intentional, such as spending an action summoning power, or incidental, such as an ability that makes boosts do something unique.

Intentional opportunities tend to just be speed bumps to magic, and as such, they're very popular as balancing mechanics. The thinking goes that if magic can be used less often, it's okay if it's more potent. Sadly, this approach has some hidden weaknesses. Frequency is a poor thing to rely on for balance because it's feast or famine—it tends to mean that a caster's player is either bored, doing nothing but gathering power, or overwhelming. If you pursue a model like this, try to find a way to make the non-casting part of casting to be fun and engaging as well. One trick is to allow "charge" to accumulate throughout more interesting action.

Alternately, magic can be a colorful expansion to the existing rules. Consider using magic to expand default outcomes. If you attack with Earth Kung Fu, then a boost might get you an aspect, but it might also knock your opponent back a zone. This can seem a little counterintuitive, if a player thinks in terms of "I want to knock him back," but it makes much more sense when you think of it in terms of expanding normal capabilities.

There is also the matter of **access opportunity**, which exists more in the realm of character creation. Magic might require a magic skill or an appropriately magical aspect, as have been discussed previously.
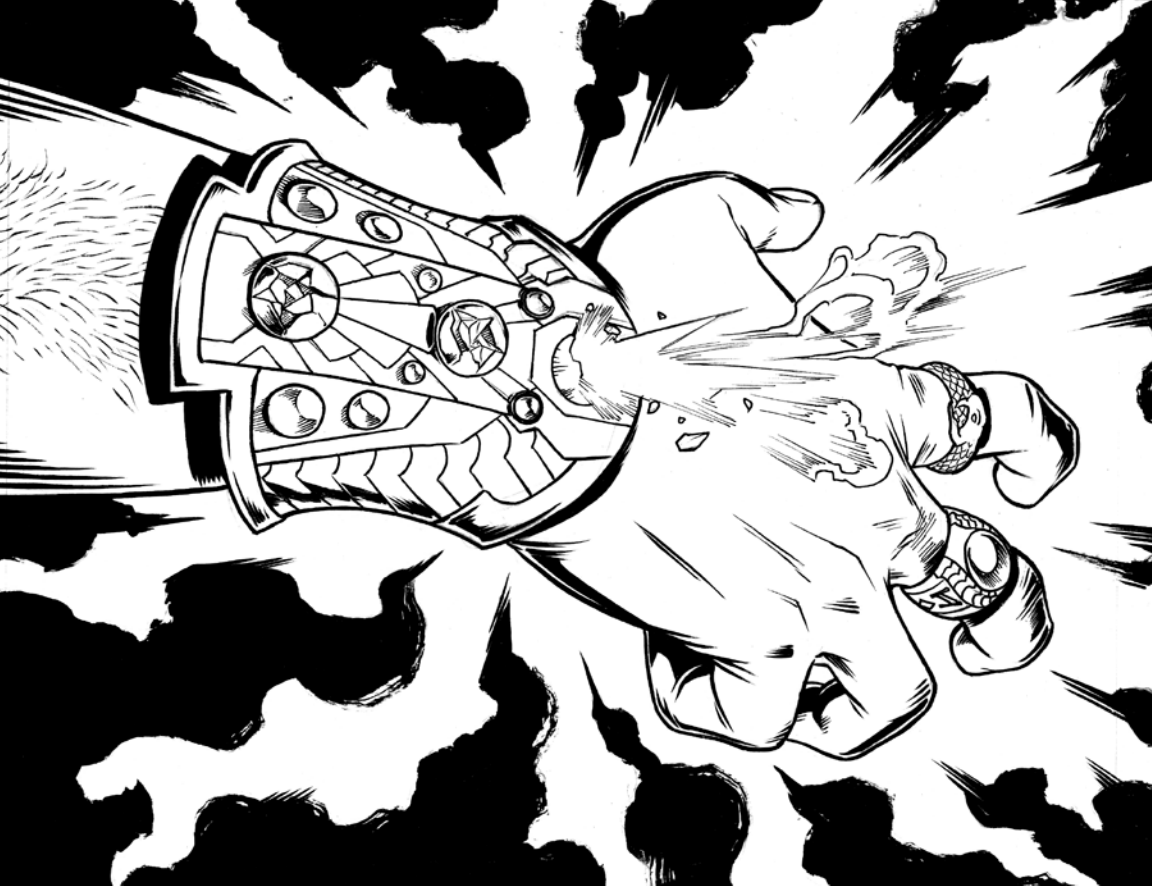
Resources

Resources involve a more literal cost to casting spells. The classics include mana, spell points, or expendable spells, but are not limited to that. A spell might require invoking an aspect—and casting the spell rather than taking the +2 bonus—taking stress, or even taking consequences. Obviously, the price tag will impact the frequency of magic use.

Resources can also add an extra level of color to a magic system—perhaps resources aren't always needed, but can be used to make magic more potent. Things like stress and consequences can be fun for this, representing powerful, dangerous magic. One caveat, though—try not to hook this into explicit combat magic. When it becomes a math problem of "I can take X stress to do Y stress to opponents," then it feels a little less magical.

Resources and opportunities can overlap a bit in the area of player skills. A secondary skill roll to generate mana requires both a resource (mana) and an opportunity (the secondary skill roll). This may seem muddy, but it's actually a good thing—tying more of the character's elements together is a good thing.

One other obvious resource is fate points, and it's reasonable that they fuel magic just the same way that they do aspect invocations. You might even make "mana" into a subcategory of fate points.

Effects

We've talked through all the things that can control the use of magic, but what can magic do once you use it? In terms of fiction and color, the range of possibilities is broad indeed, but for the moment we're looking at the mechanical tools we have for expressing mechanical effect. Although it's possible to create entirely new mechanics for these things, it's best to start with the building blocks that we already have. As with limitations, there's a core list of elements we can build from:

- Fiat
- Aspects
- Skills
- Stunts
- Stress & Consequences
- Extras

Fiat

This is a fancy way to say "you describe something and it happens." There are huge swaths of magic that can be covered by this. In some cases, this may be all that's necessary, especially if the table is comfortable with it, but it's a potential source of discomfort when expectations begin to differ. Still, there are a lot of effects that are best handled as fiat, even if they're mechanically important—the magical effect may be a gateway to other rules.

For example, if magic allows a character to breathe underwater, that's a fiat effect—it's simply true. There's no need to assign an aspect or a skill to represent it, unless some other element of the spell—like an inability to breathe out of water—comes into play. You could assign an aspect that never gets invoked or compelled, but the effect is much the same. That said, once the character is underwater, there are still other mechanical elements to engage—athletic skills, for example.

Magic with *mechanically* trivial fiat effects can still be insanely potent or important in a *setting*. Consider something like eternal youth—there aren't a lot of mechanics involved, but it's an effect that could drive an entire campaign. The fact that fiat effects don't require you to think about mechanics means that you should think all the more about the non-mechanical elements.

Aspects

Aspects can be a lot like fiat, but carry just a little bit more weight. If all the aspect does is reinforce the "officialness" of a fiat element, then that's fine, but you can also hang mechanical effects off of them.

A lot of these effects can be covered with the usual rules for invocations and compels. Magic just tends to allow for greater flexibility in terms of the logic and color of aspect use, and while that may not seem like a lot on paper, it can actually be incredibly robust at the table.

That said, it's entirely reasonable to use magic to add additional effects to an aspect invocation or compel. These additional effects may be fiat, or have specific mechanical effects. An aspect like **Shadow Step** might be invoked to cross many zones at once. An aspect like **Armor of the Light** might be invoked—and used up—in lieu of taking a consequence.

One thing to consider is whether or not the effect creates a new aspect or adds a new effect to an existing aspect. Sometimes the logic of the effect makes the answer obvious, but when in doubt, try to extend an existing aspect. Not only does this reduce aspect bloat, it strongly encourages engaging with existing aspects.

Skills

Magic can be used in lieu of skills, and in fact one of the most common simple systems of magic is to use a magic skill in place of another skill, such as throwing around bolts of force as the functional equivalent of a weapons skill. This is fine as far as it goes, but it only holds up so well as a general-purpose tool.

More interestingly, magic can be used to expand the scope of existing skills, moving them into the realm of the supernatural. These might be simple expansions of capability, such as perception skills extending awareness into the infrared or spirit realm, or they might be mechanical hooks, like "The Hammer of Terror," altering the weapon skill so that when you generate a boost, you also inflict mental stress.

Stunts

Magic can add stunts or alter existing stunts, but the most common use you're going to see for stunts is the addition of magical stunts—stunts that have magical effects that are often more potent than normal stunts, but which are offset by costs or requirements.

The most obvious example of this is a stunt that lets you do something magical, like line-of-sight teleportation or turning into a rat, but at a cost. The cost may be as simple as the expenditure of mana points or may be something complex and ritualistic. Because stunts are such self-contained rules elements, the components of cost and balance are much closer to the surface than in other approaches, so it's important to think about them from square one.

Stress and Consequences

An easy and obvious effect of magic is to fiddle with stress and consequences. Healing magic may recover them or protection magic may increase capacity. Just be careful that this doesn't make magi into bulletproof juggernauts—unless that's your intent.

Extras

Magic is a great way to get permission for an extra. Whether it's summoning a hound of fire or calling lightning down to crackle along the length of your sword, extras can be a reasonable way to handle them.

If you do this, it's a great illustration of how to "plug in" a magic system. The extras rules are quite robust, but they're also very open-ended. If the entirety of the magic system was just the ability to create extras, they would quickly get out of hand, so some sort of limitations are in order. The limitations that you use should be consistent enough to feel like a coherent magic system. If you make sure that each new extra makes sense in the context of existing ones, you will find that the logic of your magic system can emerge quite organically.

9
SUBSYSTEMS

KUNG FU

There is regular, real-life kung fu, but that's pretty much covered by the Fight skill. What we're talking about here is cinematic kung fu, the high-leaping, acrobatic, melodramatic style of Hong Kong martial arts movies.

This sort of kung fu is so dramatic that it doesn't fit into a game aiming at a more realistic style, and it definitely changes the tone of even a pulpy action adventure setting. It can be bit overwhelming. If you're going to include this crazy, over-the-top style of martial arts in your game, make it clear to your players up front that this is something characters—PCs *and* NPCs—can do.

> The overarching term in this section is "kung fu," but that is just one of the many martial arts of the world. The rules here can apply to savate or ninjutsu just as easily, or whatever crazy martial art they practice on Mars.

In a kung fu movie, practitioners of the art are on a higher level than regular schmoes. If your game is going to concentrate heavily on kung fu masters, it makes sense for most—if not all—player characters to have this ability. If only one character practices kung fu, make sure the other characters have their own area in which to shine. Also, you may want to tone down some of the crazier stuff described in this section. You don't want just one character dominating the action scenes by jumping all over the place. If everyone has the ability, then there is less danger of this spotlight hogging. Movie kung fu is a pretty powerful thing. If you introduce it, it threatens to dominate your setting.

Kung fu masters can run along walls, leap incredible distances, catch missile weapons in midair or deflect them with a weapon, fight on the most precarious of footing, and sometimes even walk on the surface of water. Pretty much anyone who has trained in the martial arts can do this. If a character has kung fu training, then these actions are treated just like regular running and jumping. A player can describe their character performing these actions without any special difficulty. The GM can still call for rolls, but these kinds of action are not exceptionally difficult or even unusual. Just adding these details to your game will create a lot of the feel of a kung fu movie.

There are two ways to approach kung fu in Fate. One method is to use existing skills to cover kung fu abilities and fighting. The second is to create a dedicated Kung Fu skill. Which method to take depends on the nature of your game. If there is only one kung fu master in your game, the Kung Fu skill may be appropriate. If everyone is practicing kung fu, it probably makes more sense to have everyone use the existing skills to perform kung fu stunts. If you go this route, a kung fu practitioner must have an aspect related to their training in order to unlock the kung fu abilities within their existing skills—something like **Trained at the Wudang Monastery** or **Master of the Mantis Style**.

Using Existing Skills

If you are using the existing skill method, then Fight obviously takes on a lot of the duties. Any attacks, bare-handed or with weapons, depend on the Fight skill, and Fight can also be used for defense. Since a kung fu master can also deflect arrows and other missile weapons, Fight is the appropriate skill for performing this feat. If you have a modern-day game, or just have guns in your setting, you need to make a ruling regarding how to handle a kung fu defense against them. It is not out of genre to say that a kung fu practitioner can deflect or even catch bullets, especially if they use a sword or other metal weapon.

Wall-walking and leaping are covered by Athletics. Any sort of physical stunt outside of fighting falls under Athletics or possibly Physique. Kung fu practitioners traditionally have training to resist damage or survive falls, which would be Physique actions. Lore can be used to identify rival schools or opponents' techniques. A Lore roll can create an advantage, if you correctly guess the opponent's teacher or school of fighting.

The Kung Fu Skill

If you add a specialized Kung Fu skill to your game, any abilities that fall outside the norm of Fight or Athletics, like leaping and wall walking, require a Kung Fu roll instead. This can be useful if you really want to differentiate Kung Fu actions from regular activity.

Kung fu practitioners often have specialty moves or secrets known only to them and their masters. In a game with a lot of martial artists, these special moves are a good way to make characters unique and create a sense that there are many different styles. Special moves can be modeled using stunts and aspects.

While most kung fu moves probably have names, a kung fu master has one or two signature moves that exemplify their personal style. These can be represented by aspects, like ***Dim Mak Touch*** or ***Hidden Blade Style***. When invoked, a player can describe in detail the mystical or amazing nature of the action. These aspects should make the character look especially cool, and you can use them to show that NPCs know the character and their style, like "Don't get too close, she's a master of the Hidden Blade Style!" They can be compelled if an opponent knows an opposing move, just as a player can use his own character's kung fu knowledge to analyze an opponent's style and come up with counters of his own.

For a more mechanically robust version, use the stunt system to create moves. You can create a whole school of kung fu using stunts, with earlier, easier stunts required to unlock more advanced ones. Use the description of your stunts to create an evocative kung fu fighting style, with the names and effects of the moves driving home the theme of your fighting style.

DRUNKEN FIST

Here's an example of a kung fu stunt tree, for the Drunken Fist Style of kung fu.

The Drunkard's Stagger: You sway and stagger on your feet, evading enemy blows seemingly by chance. When you succeed in a defensive Athletics roll using this technique, you gain +1 on your next attack against the opponent who tried to hit you. If you succeed with style, gain +2.

The Drunken Shove: Your rude and artless push contains a greater power than seems possible. You gain +2 to use Physique to create an advantage on an opponent by knocking them off balance.

Drinking from the Jug: You pause to take a swig of wine from your jug, fortifying yourself for the battle. When you have a drink during a fight, clear your lowest stress box. This requires you to take an entire action drinking.

The Falling Drunkard: (Requires Drunkard's Stagger) When an enemy attacks, you lose your balance and fall to the ground, rolling back to your feet quickly, but your enemy now finds himself dangerously overextended. Roll Athletics to dodge. On a success, place a boost on your opponent such as *Overextended* or *Off-Balance* that anyone may use against him. On a success with style, place a second boost on your opponent.

The Drunkard Swings Wide: (Requires Drunken Shove) Your blows are crude and telegraphed, but in dodging, your opponent seems to be struck by an elbow or a knee by accident. Make your Fight roll as normal. If you strike your opponent, you do stress as normal. If you miss or tie, your opponent takes one physical stress anyway.

Pouring Wine: (Requires Drinking from the Jug) You take out a cup and pour a drink from your jug. This elaborate and difficult task causes a pause in the battle. No one may attack you while you pour, and you remove your lowest stress mark. This technique requires an entire action, and you may not perform the technique more than once in a row.

The Drunkard Stumbles: (Requires Falling Drunkard) You stagger and stumble without control, but your enemy always seems to miss you and strike a nearby obstacle, causing damage to themselves. When you dodge a blow with Athletics, your opponent takes one stress, or two stress if you succeed with style.

Steady the Drunkard: (Requires Drunkard Swings Wide) You stagger and seem about to fall, so you reach out and grab your opponent's arm to steady yourself. This seemingly unintentional grip blocks chi and paralyzes your opponent. You may place a *Chi Blocked* situation aspect with a free invocation on your opponent. Your opponent may not use any kung fu stunts until they remove this aspect.

CYBERWARE

The easiest way to handle cyberware in a FATE game is with the existing tools. Want to be a cyborg? Tie an aspect or two to the fact that you've got some augmentations. Do your cyber-arms make you superhumanly strong? Make Physique or Fight your peak skill. Do your eyes grant you thermal imaging? A stunt can do that for you.

If you want a system for cyberware that stands on its own rather than reskinning existing systems or a justification for things you were going to take anyway, that's what this section is for.

Prostheses vs. Augs

Cyberware takes a toll on a person, it has a cost. Plenty of people out there have the odd cyber-prosthesis, a simple limb meant to mimic the functionality of its human counterpart, attached to compensate for a loss or injury. All these new pieces will cost you is some money and time spent in a rehab facility, and you'll be right as rain, back to your old self—mostly. If all you want is a prosthesis or two, you don't need to pay any refresh and you don't need to tie any aspects to your cyber-prostheses unless you want to.

Augmentations, or **augs**, are quite another matter. Where a prosthesis is designed to integrate into the body, mimicking natural function as best it can, an aug is meant to *improve* the human body, making a person stronger, faster, more durable, bristling with natural weaponry, or capable of things that humans just can't do on their own. Where a person usually gets a prosthesis to replace a lost piece and become whole again, many people get body parts *cut off* to have augs installed.

These augs need a power source, something beyond the normal bio-electric energy that the human body produces. To that end, people who get augs first get a cyber-heart. A cyber-heart isn't a literal heart. It doesn't replace your human heart unless you need it to, though it does work as a decent backup, if you've already got a functioning ticker. What a cyber-heart is, first and foremost, is a power source. It's a capacitor that charges from your own bio-electric currents, can be supplemented by plugging into a wall outlet, and allows you to power one or more augs.

This means two things in-game. First, it means that you *must* tie at least one of your aspects to the fact that you're a cyborg. You've willingly transcended your human limitations—that's a defining feature of any person who chooses this path. The second mechanical cost is that you must reduce your refresh by 1, in exchange for the following aug.

Cyber-Heart: You can install and use other cyber-augs. The heart also acts as a backup for your natural heart and filters impurities and toxins from your blood. If you're subject to a poison or toxin, spend a fate point to ignore it. If you're ever killed by something the cyber-heart could conceivably save you from, spend a fate point to concede instead of being taken out.

Types of Augs

There are two types of augs: minor augs and major augs. Getting either installed costs you both money and time, and might cost you refresh as well.

Minor augs are small changes, things that don't tax the body overmuch or require huge changes to your underlying biological systems. A new eye, a hand, a skin implant, or an upgrade to an existing aug—these kinds of things are all minor augs. If you buy and install a minor aug in-game, it requires a Resources roll at Average (+1), +1 for each additional minor aug you're having installed. You'll also need to recover from surgery. Doing so puts a moderate consequence on you, from which you recover normally. Whether you pick up your minor augs at character creation or during play, every three minor augs you take cost you 1 point of refresh. Once you take your first minor aug, drop your refresh. When you hit four, drop it again, and so on. Getting a prosthesis installed carries the same Resources and consequence costs, but doesn't carry the refresh cost.

A **major aug** requires major surgery and replacing a large part of your body. Limbs are always major augs, as are organs and anything that jacks into your brain. When you get a major aug during play, it requires a Resources roll at Good (+3) for *each* major aug you get. In addition, having a major aug surgically installed also puts a severe consequence on you, from which you recover normally. Whether at character generation or during play, *each* major aug costs you a point of refresh.

Example Augs

Cyber-Eye (minor): You get a +1 bonus to sight-based Notice rolls. In addition, choose one of the following aspects. Adding an additional aspect is another minor aug.

Image Filtering • Low-Light Vision • Sonar Imaging • Targeting Interface Thermal Imaging • Visual Net Interface • Zoom Magnification

Cyber-Legs (major): Both of your legs have been replaced by much more powerful cybernetic legs. You can move two zones as a free action, and you get a +2 to Athletics rolls made to run or jump. In addition, pick one of the following add-ons. Additional add-ons are each a minor aug.

- **Hidden Compartment:** You've got a compartment where you can hide things, like a hand gun or a brick of cocaine.

- **Magnetic Grip:** If you're standing on a metallic surface, you can't be knocked down. You can also walk up steep or even vertical metallic surfaces, albeit clumsily.

- **Pneumatic Kick:** If you kick someone, your kick is Weapon:2.

Neural Interface (major): You can access the Net from anywhere, with a thought. You can hack low-security systems automatically—they just do what you want them to do. Even high-security systems are easy—you get a +2 to Computers rolls to get through them.

Razor Nails (minor): You've got one-inch, razor-sharp blades that pop out of your finger tips; you can retract them at will. These blades are Weapon:1.

Subdermal Plating (major): You can oppose most physical attacks using Physique—fists, blades, truncheons, and small arms fire have trouble getting through the plating beneath your skin. In addition, once per scene you may ignore any one mild or moderate physical consequence from such an attack.

Thermoptic Camouflage (minor): You can spend a fate point to become invisible to the visual and thermal spectrums, for as long as you don't move.

The Downside of Augs

Though not explicitly stated above, every aug has drawbacks. A neural interface can be hacked, giving a hacker access to your brain. Thermoptic camouflage might short out when you're doused in water, delivering a nasty electric shock. That's why you have an aspect tied to the fact that you're a cyborg.

GMs, feel free to enforce the downside of an aug—whatever your group determines that might be. Doing so is a compel on the cyborg's aspect, which means that a player you put in such a situation can refuse your compel or take a fate point for the trouble you put her in.

GADGETS AND GEAR

Equipment in Fate Core can be as simple as an aspect, like ***Magnetic Grapnel Gun***, or a stunt, like "*Magnetic Grapnel Gun:* +2 to overcome with Athletics by climbing or swinging when there's a metal anchor around." But for a little more depth, you can combine those into a single extra as a **gadget**.

Functions and Flaws

Gadgets come with two aspects for free—a **function aspect** and a **flaw aspect**. The function tells you the gadget's purpose, and the flaw tells you what's wrong with it. You can think of its function as its high concept and its flaw as its trouble or a consequence that never goes away. These do not take up any of your character's personal aspects.

> ### MAGNETIC GRAPNEL GUN
> **Function:** *High-Powered Electromagnetic Swingline*
> **Flaw:** *Still Working Out the Bugs*

Stunts

Give the gadget one or more stunts to reflect the reliable mechanical advantages it confers on its user. These stunts cost one refresh apiece.

> ### MAGNETIC GRAPNEL GUN
>
> **ASPECTS**
> **Function:** *High-Powered Electromagnetic Swingline*
> **Flaw:** *Still Working Out the Bugs*
>
> **STUNTS**
> **CLANG!:** Spend a fate point to secure the magnetic grapnel to a metallic object in a dramatic way, grabbing a swiftly moving vehicle, a falling pulse rifle, or the wall on the other side of a yawning chasm in an oddly built space station.
> **Trick Shots:** +2 to create an advantage with Shoot when you use the grapnel gun to swing around, disarm an opponent, or create a barrier.
>
> **COST: 2 REFRESH**

Gadgets don't have to be literal "gadgets," either. For example, you can just as easily use these rules to create magic items in a fantasy setting.

THE RING OF TRUTH

ASPECTS
> **Function:** *Magical Lie Detector*
> **Flaw:** *Wearer Is Cursed to Tell the Truth*

STUNTS
> **Pierce the Veil of Lies:** Spend a fate point. Three times during the scene, you can ask the GM if someone is lying, and she must answer you truthfully.

COST: 1 REFRESH

Additional Flaws

You can take additional flaws to reduce a gadget's refresh cost, at a rate of one refresh per additional flaw. The minimum cost for a gadget with any stunts is 1 refresh, regardless of how many flaws it has.

GMs, it can't be some weaksauce flaw, either, like ***Kinda Glitchy on the Ocean Floor***. And if you do let something like that slip by, make sure the player knows they can expect to spend a surprising amount of time underwater. Deep, deep underwater.

An additional flaw for the Magnetic Grapnel Gun might be ***Heavy and Unwieldy***.

The Ring of Truth could have an additional flaw of ***Hunted by the Servants of Ssask, God of Lies***.

MONSTERS

The rules for NPCs in the Fᴀᴛᴇ Cᴏʀᴇ book are great for creating people—other humans whose goals put them into conflict with the PCs—but as the GM, you might also want to include a few monsters in your game. With these tools, you can create monsters that are inhuman and tricky, challenging players to find clever approaches when dealing with monstrous antagonists.

Instinct Aspects

To create interesting monsters, start by laying out some of the core drives that spur the monsters to action. What makes them take risks and chances? What do they care enough about to get in fights with the players about? It's likely they have inhuman drives—desires that ordinary humans would probably never have.

Take your initial thoughts and condense them down into an **instinct aspect**. Monster characters can use their instinct aspect as normal, but they may add +3 to their roll instead of +2 when they invoke it. Monsters are often singularly driven to obtain their goals, and the players will have to work to overcome these foes.

> Rey is running a game of urban horror. When he writes up a set of zombies, he gives them the instinct aspect **Hungry for Brains**. Anytime that he invokes their aspect, they get a +3 to their roll.

Monster Abilities

Monsters are distinct from other NPCs because their abilities tend to challenge the rules and disrupt the normal flow of conflicts. Many monsters are entire fight scenes waiting to happen, as the players have to figure out how to defeat an enemy that is changing up the rules on them.

Some examples of interesting monster abilities:

- **Hard to Kill:** Monsters can survive much more damage than other characters, either because of longer stress tracks—like Frankenstein's monster—or because they can regenerate quickly—like the Hydra.

- **Immune to Damage:** Monsters are often immune to all damage save one type—such as vulnerability to silver—or until a specific condition has been met—such as destroying a specific magic item.

- **Prone to Change:** Monsters tend to transform themselves—like vampires who turn into bats to flee—or the environment—such as summoning additional minions in the middle of a fight.

While it's easy to see how these traits could be turned into stunts, they are often too powerful to be activated without spending a fate point. However, if you add such a cost, the players can grind down an enemy like the Hydra, waiting for you to run out of fate points. In addition to making your monsters weak, such costs make conflicts a drag. Who wants to play until the GM runs out of fate points?

Rather than add a cost, you can instead add a **weakness** to a monster in order to be able to activate a stunt without paying the fate point cost. If you add a **lesser weakness**, you must still pay a fate point at the start of the scene in which the monster uses the power, but if you add a greater weakness, you don't have to pay any fate points at all to use the stunt.

When the PCs discover and use a lesser weakness, the monster can still use the stunt, but must now pay each time that it uses the stunt. If the PCs discover and use a greater weakness, however, the monster loses the stunt completely.

Rey decides to create a demon named Masabra. He gives Masabra a stunt that makes the demon immune to physical stress at the cost of a fate point. Rey wants Masabra to be extremely dangerous, so he gives him a greater weakness of blessed weapons, allowing Masabra to use the stunt without paying a fate point cost. If the PCs ever acquire blessed weapons, Masabra would lose access to this stunt when he faced them.

Multiple Zone Monsters

For very large monsters (VLM), you can go even further by treating the monster itself as a map with several zones. In order to defeat such a monster, the characters need to defeat each zone independently, while navigating the obstacles between the zones. By statting up the monster in pieces, you can split up the PCs and give the monster a number of extra actions—one per zone—to convey the size of the foe and keep the conflict interesting.

> The Elder Dragon of Ormulto is a VLM in Rey's game. He's so large that he has four separate zones: his two claws, his head, and his tail. When the players try to keep him from destroying an apartment building, they will need to deal enough stress to his head to bring him down. However, if they don't do anything about his claws or tail, he will quickly rain destruction down upon the people the heroes are trying to protect. They will have to split up among the zones to keep him in check.

In addition to the size of VLMs, you can also create stunts that help to convey the theme and style of the monster. Many of these involve transformations, stunts that fundamentally alter the monster or change the nature of the fight, changes that are familiar to players who have previously fought video game boss monsters. As with smaller monsters, you can tie these stunts to weaknesses if you'd like to be able to activate them for free.

In order to mark the importance of the intermediary steps needed to defeat a gigantic monster—such as destroying a part of it or closing a portal from which it draws strength—VLMs gain an additional transformation stunt tied to their partial defeat.

> Since his claws and tail are much weaker than his head, the Elder Dragon of Ormulto has a transformation stunt tied to the destruction of those zones on the map called Breath of Fire. If the PCs destroy one of his appendages, the Dragon activates the stunt to deal two stress to each character on the map, regardless of zone, and adds the situational aspect *(Name) Is On Fire!* where (Name) is an important building or person near the fight.

> Many of the rules here can also be used to add interesting features to nonhuman characters that aren't antagonists in the story. You could give the player's familiar a stunt with a weakness that human NPCs could attempt to discover, or map out a spirit guardian the players summon across multiple zones.

SQUAD-BASED ACTION

What if you want to play a squad of characters who are conscripted to storm the beaches at Normandy on D-Day? Can you use FATE to play a squad of space marines?

Yes, sir. Yes, you can.

> These rules, like everything in *Fate*, are flexible enough to work with a variety of skins, accommodating modern military units, World War II squads, high fantasy armies, and futuristic bug-hunting mechs.

Creating Squads

First, create characters normally (see FATE CORE, page 30). While you're writing up your characters, name your squad and describe the role it plays in the greater force. Is it a ragtag bunch of ex-felon soldiers? Or a highly trained force of well-equipped professionals?

Whatever you decide, turn the description into two aspects, a **squad concept** for your squad, and a **squad trouble** that always seems to plague your unit. Any player in the unit can invoke these aspects and be compelled by them.

> Lara, Antonio, and Michelle decide that their squad is a boot-strapped group of survivors who are fighting back after alien forces nearly destroyed New Orleans. After creating individual characters, they name their squad the Ninth Ward Defenders, giving it the squad concept **Dogs of War** to represent their scrappy resilience and the squad trouble **In Over Our Head** to show that the aliens are dominant.

Squad Skills

Unlike individual skills, squad skills can be used to reshape the whole battlefield. For example, your soldier might lead a charge against the enemy's line or call in reinforcements to soften hardened defenses.

After creating the unit aspects, give your unit:

- One Fair (+2) squad skill

- Two Average (+1) squad skills

- One Squad Stunt

> If you want to emphasize the squad over the individual characters, reduce your characters' starting stunts and refreshes from three to two, and cap your skills at Good (+3) instead of Great (+4).

Operations

The Operations skill measures your unit's ability to work together on the battlefield, eliminating enemy units and securing key strategic positions.

Overcome: Operations allows you to overcome obstacles as a unit, such as when you lay down cover fire to reach a wounded soldier safely or work together to climb over a wall.

Create an Advantage: When you create an advantage with Operations, your unit is setting traps (*Ambush!*) or charging directly at the barricades (*Panicked Grunts*).

Attack: Operations allows your squad to launch coordinated attacks against targets and should be rolled instead of an individual character's Fight or Shoot whenever the squad acts as a unit.

Defend: Operations is rolled for defense when your unit attempts to retreat from the larger combat zone or otherwise avoid an enemy attack as a group.

OPERATIONS SAMPLE STUNTS

Hard to Pin Down: Take a +2 on any Overcome roll made to retreat from a combat zone.

Blitzkrieg: Your squad is fast, light, and deadly. Take +2 on all Operation rolls in which your attack focuses on catching the enemy off-guard.

Equipment

The Equipment skill represents the resources your squad has available to pursue its objectives.

Overcome: Like the Resources skill, Equipment can be used to get the squad through a situation that requires some additional gear. The squad might call in some trucks to carry them over rough terrain or even call in a bombing run.

Create an Advantage: Your squad might use Equipment to get some high-powered weaponry for a particular mission (*Flamethrowers!*) or to procure resources that are crucial for navigation (*Topographical Maps*).

Attack / Defend: Equipment isn't used to attack or defend.

EQUIPMENT SAMPLE STUNTS

Hi-Tech Gear: You can use Equipment instead of Operations in any situation where raw technological superiority would win the day.

Well-Stocked: You gain a +2 on all Equipment rolls made to create an advantage when you are accessing your preexisting supplies.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT

Recon

Overcome: Recon isn't used often to overcome obstacles, but it can be used, like Notice, to give the squad a chance to head off ambushes or traps.

Create Advantage: Your squad can use Recon during a battle to pierce the fog of war, gathering information beyond your immediate location.

Attack / Defend: Recon isn't used to attack or defend.

RECON SAMPLE STUNTS

Codebreakers: On a successful Recon roll to create an advantage while monitoring enemy communications, you can discover or create one additional aspect (though this doesn't give you an extra free invocation).

Counterprogramming: You can use Recon instead of Operations to set a trap when you use the enemy's communications system against them.
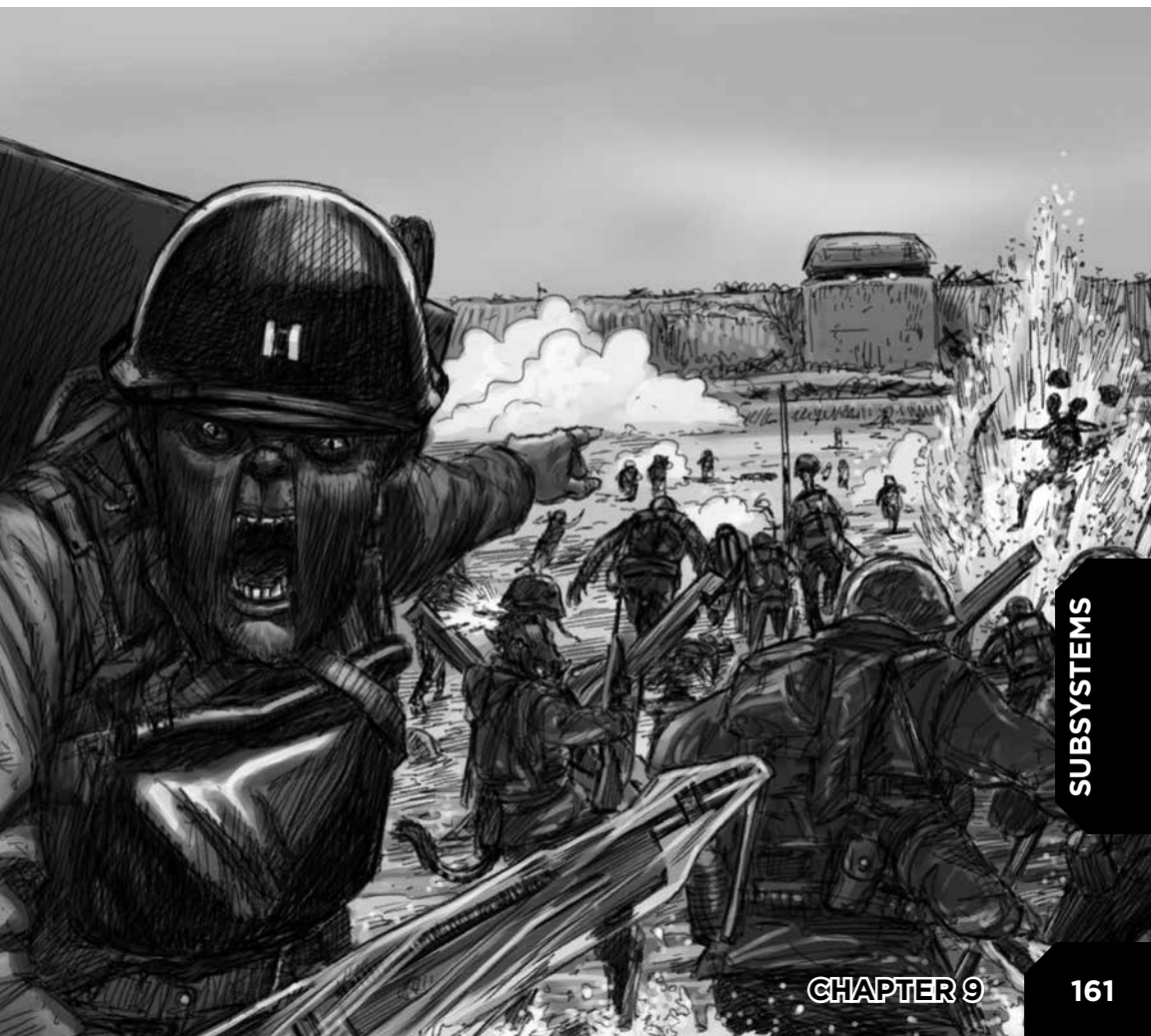
Rolling Squad Skills

In order to make a squad skill roll or use a squad stunt, one player must decide to give up his personal action to rally the group. The nature of rallying will depend on the situation—military units typically follow orders—but generally the player will need the support of most of the other player characters.

If he's successful in directing the squad, the difficulty of the task drops by 1 for each additional squadmate who sacrifices their next action to the new goal, as the group turns all its attention to accomplishing the goal. In addition to reducing the difficulty, the success or failure of the roll is carried across the whole unit, as the squad's skills have the potential to reshape the battlefield and win the day—or cause the squad to suffer together. As such, stress inflicted on the squad as a whole is inflicted on each squadmate equally.

> Rather than make a roll to try to breach an alien barrier by herself, Lara decides to rally the Ninth Ward Defenders to knock it down together. The difficulty of accomplishing the task falls from Fantastic (+6) to Great (+4). If she succeeds, the whole unit will get the benefit of breaching the enemy barrier without having to roll a second time. If she fails, the whole unit will suffer stress from the alien counterattack.

Squad-Based Combat

To run a great squad combat, use Operations rolls to move directly to the heart of the action. Rather than start at the beginning of the fight—when the conflicts are boring—get the squad to develop a plan of attack and roll Operations as an Overcome with a difficulty appropriate to the target to see how things turn out.

If they are successful, the players should narrate one good outcome for every shift above the target. If they fail, the GM will narrate one negative outcome for every shift below the target. Either way, jump straight to the exciting action. Repeat when things start to drag in the middle of the fight.

> After breaching the alien barrier, Lara is pretty sure that her PC can get close enough to the alien queen to kill her before the rest of the aliens regroup. She rallies the Ninth Ward Defenders to charge the enemy line, rolling their Fair (+2) Operations against a difficulty of Great (+4) set by her GM. She gets a +2 on her roll, but invokes the **Dogs of War** to get another +2 for a total of Fantastic (+6). For her first shift, she narrates that they charge the line successfully, and for her second, she states that her character gets close enough to kill the queen.

THIS MEANS WAR: MASS COMBAT

Suitable for inserting into any FATE CORE game or for playing on its own as a minigame while waiting for the pizza guy to show up, this hack gives you simple tools to play out conflicts on a grand scale. These rules are not compatible with the squad-based rules presented above, as they encompass the actions of groups larger than a handful of people.

Basic Training

Combatants are **units** on a **battlefield** made up of **zones**. All three of these are fairly abstract concepts, mutable enough to suit your particular game and conflict.

Units are built like characters, with skills, aspects, and consequences, but no stress boxes or stunts. A unit might consist of a few battleships, a dozen biplanes, or a thousand shrieking orcs, but they all act as one in battle.

Represent each zone of the battlefield with an index card, or **zone card**. Represent every unit with an identifying token or miniature of some kind, and place it on a zone card to indicate its current location on the battlefield.

A unit can have a **leader** attached to it, in the form of a PC or a supporting or main NPC. Leaders make their units more efficient, and can engage each other one-on-one in the midst of battle.

Unit Actions

When activated, a unit can move one zone for free, as long as there isn't an obstacle in the destination zone, such as an enemy unit or obstructing terrain. It can also take one action—overcome, attack, or create an advantage, detailed below.

If the unit has a leader attached to it, the leader may give up their action to give the unit a *second* action. A player can also spend a fate point to give one of their units *without* a leader a second action.

Regardless, no unit can take the same action twice in a turn, and attacking always ends a player's turn.

If you have a unit with a leader attached, it can move one zone and attack, create an advantage and attack, and so on, but it can't attack twice, create an advantage twice, or attack and *then* create an advantage or move.

⊕ Create an Advantage

This can take the form of scouting the terrain, intimidating another unit, using the environment, or anything else that makes sense in context. Here are some specific ways to use this action to make your battles more dynamic.

Ambushing: A unit can use Stealth to put a situation aspect like *It's a Trap!* into play. This can't be attempted if the unit has an enemy in its zone.

Intimidating: A unit can use Provoke to put a situation aspect into play, such as *Frenzied Berserkers*, *The Might of the Imperial Fleet*, or *Hesitant*.

Pinned Down: Use Shoot to put a *Pinned Down* situation aspect on one enemy unit. A unit with this aspect can't move into another zone unless it succeeds on an overcome action opposed by the attacker's Shoot skill. The aspect goes away if the defender successfully moves or if the attacker doesn't use an action to maintain it from turn to turn.

Scouting: A unit can use Notice to put a new zone aspect in play in an adjacent zone that doesn't already have a unit in it. The difficulty is Fair (+2), +2 for each aspect the zone already has. For example, if a zone has the aspect *Tangled Woods*, the difficulty to give it a second aspect would be Great (+4).

Surrounded: A unit can put a *Surrounded* into play if it has more allies than enemies in its zone. Each allied unit in the zone gets a +1 to its attacks as long as this aspect remains in play.

⊕ Overcome

Use a skill to move into a zone with an obstacle or enemy unit:

If the zone has an aspect that would hinder movement, such as *Dense Forest* or *Asteroid Field*, the difficulty equals twice the number of hindering aspects. For example, the difficulty to enter a zone with *Rocky Terrain* and a *Raging River* would be Great (+4).

If the zone contains one or more enemy units, one of them can actively oppose the attempt with a defend action, usually using Athletics, Drive, or Pilot. Each additional unit in the zone allied with the defender gives the defender a +1 to their roll.

Either way, use the usual outcomes for overcome to resolve the action.

Use a skill to move one or two additional obstacle-free zones:

On a tie or success, move one zone (with a minor cost, in the case of a tie). On a success with style, the unit can forgo the boost to move a second zone instead.

Attack

If your battle uses both Fight and Shoot, attacks against enemies in the same zone use Fight, and attacks against enemies in an adjacent zone use Shoot. If your battle only uses Shoot—as is typical in a dogfight—then all attacks are made with Shoot, regardless of range. Attacking an enemy two zones away gives the defender a +2 to their defense roll.

Provoke can't be used to attack, only to create an advantage. See *Intimidating*, on the prior page.

Depending on the venue of the battle, you may want to tweak the way defenses work. For example, in medieval warfare, maybe the only defense against Shoot is Will—you don't *dodge* arrows, you stand your ground and keep your wits about you. This takes some functionality away from Athletics, but applies to all units equally, so no one's especially disadvantaged.

Unit Quality

A unit's quality—Average, Fair, or Good—determines how many skills, aspects, and consequences it has.

- **Average:** Conscripts. One Average (+1) skill. One aspect. No consequences—a single hit takes out an Average unit.

- **Fair:** Grunts. One Fair (+2) skill, two Average (+1) skills. Two aspects. One mild consequence.

- **Good:** Elites. One Good (+3) skill, two Fair (+2) skills, three Average (+1) skills. Three aspects. One mild consequence, one moderate consequence.

UNIT SKILLS

Here's a sample list of skills taken from *Fate Core* that units might have.

- Athletics
- Drive/Pilot
- Fight
- Notice

- Provoke
- Shoot
- Stealth
- Will

Not all of these skills will be appropriate for every unit in every conflict, of course. If it's a spaceship battle, you're not going to have much use for Fight or Drive, and a subterranean battle between dwarves and undead probably won't involve Pilot. Use common sense.

Unit Aspects

A unit's first aspect is its name, which doubles as its high concept: ***Rebel Starfighters***, ***Dwarven Grenadiers***, ***27th Heavy Infantry***, etc.

If the unit is Fair or Good, define those extra aspects however you want.

Building Units

Each player gets a "battle chest" of build points for the battle—the higher

> **Average unit:** 1 build point
> **Fair unit:** 2 build points
> **Good unit:** 3 build points
> **Fate point:** 3 build points

the number, the more units and the bigger the battle. Spend build points to create units or to buy additional fate points to spend during the battle. Five build points would make for a small battle with relatively low-quality units, while 20 would be fairly epic. 10-12 is a good middle ground. Leftover build points can be spent during the battle, but any remaining go away afterward, as do any fate points purchased with build points.

Write each unit's particulars on its own index card. If it's defeated, turn it over—but hang onto it, so you can use it again in a future battle.

Zones

A zone might be a single hill, a hundred yards of open meadow, or a sector of space. The specifics depend on your game and the scale of the conflict.

Number of Zones

As a rule of thumb, give the battlefield a number of zones equal to one more than the number of players you have. That includes the GM, so a game with a GM and three players would have five zones. If that feels claustrophobic for the number of units you have in play, throw in a couple more index cards.

Adding Zone Aspects

For a fate point, a player can write an aspect on an empty zone card after it's been placed on the battlefield but before the battle begins. Put the zone card back on the battlefield *face down*. When a unit moves into the zone, or scouts it, turn it face-up to reveal the aspect.

If a player puts a new aspect on a zone by creating an advantage during play, write it on the zone card for everyone to see.

Creating the Battlefield

Players take turns placing zone cards, starting with whoever has the most fate points left in their battle chest. Each zone card must be adjacent to an existing zone card. Try to avoid an overly linear battlefield—multiple ways in and out of most zones will make for a more interesting battle.

Leaders

Any PC or a supporting or main NPC can be a leader. Use a miniature or some other marker to represent each leader—something that can be attached to a unit card as well as placed directly on the battlefield, if their unit is defeated or when they are otherwise acting independently. Defeating a unit doesn't defeat its leader—only a leader can directly attack and defeat another leader.

Attaching a leader to a unit, or detaching one *from* a unit, doesn't require an action, but a leader can't do both in the same turn.

An attached leader can take their action whenever their unit does. They can give this action to their unit, to let it take two actions, or they can do something else, like engage another leader in combat or remove a consequence from the unit.

An attached leader provides several other benefits to their unit.

- All of a unit's skills with a rating below the leader's Will get a +1 bonus as long as the leader's attached. If your game has another, more suitable skill for this, use that instead.

- The leader can invoke their aspects on behalf of their unit.

- The leader can use Will to remove a consequence, at the usual difficulties outlined in Fate Core. This counts as the leader's action for the turn.

- The leader can use their action to put a boost on their unit, such as *Charge!*. This doesn't require a roll unless the unit's taken a consequence, in which case the leader uses Will with a difficulty equal to twice the number of consequences the unit has.

An independent leader has to be activated to do anything, just like a unit.

Sequence of Play

1. Pick one of your leaders and roll their Will. Highest roll goes first, and so on, down the line. In the case of a tie, highest Will wins. If that's a tie, too, then the player with the most units wins.
2. When it's your turn, choose and activate one of your units or independent leaders. If you choose a unit with a leader attached, the leader gets to take their action as well. If you choose an independent leader, they can't affect units, but they can interact with other leaders (violently, in all likelihood). Every unit and leader on a side must act before any unit or leader on a side may act again.
3. When all non-allied players lose all their units or concede, the battle's over.

Winning

Everyone on the winning side gets a fate point. Every player who defeated an enemy leader—whether in battle, by persuading them to surrender or switch sides, or whatever—gets a fate point for each leader they defeated.

SWASHBUCKLING DUELS

The kind of cinematic, heroic action that typifies swashbuckling stories is near and dear to Fate Core's heart—that's just the nature of the game. But those climactic one-on-one fights between our hero and a dastardly villain almost always involve a lot of back-and-forth before one of them lands a blow. In the meantime, they might trade witty repartee or provocative insults, swing from chandeliers, leap off balconies, baffle their opponent with their cloak, or a thousand other things. Look at D'Artagnan and Jussac in The Three Musketeers, Errol Flynn and Basil Rathbone in the 1938 film The Adventures of Robin Hood, Cyrano's poetry-laden duel with Valvert in Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac, or Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader's duel in The Empire Strikes Back.

The create an advantage action in Fate Core makes it easy to model these sorts of conflicts, but most players will still gravitate toward the most efficient means of dispatching the opposition, especially if there aren't other PCs around to give them an excuse to create situation aspects. That's what this hack does—require players to rely on skills other than Fight in a conflict, with colorful results.

These one-on-one dueling rules introduce something called the **upper hand**. Only the duelist with the upper hand can actually use a skill with the attack action to inflict harm. The other duelist can take any *other* action, but cannot attack—until *they* get the upper hand, of course.

How does one get the upper hand? By succeeding with style with a skill *other* than one that deals harm in physical conflicts (Fight or Shoot, or whatever the equivalent is in your game). As soon as one combatant succeeds with style with one of these other skills, they get the upper hand. This *replaces* the action's usual reward for succeeding with style, such as getting a boost or an extra free invocation. You get either the upper hand *or* the usual reward, but not both.

Use a token of some kind to represent the upper hand. Whatever it is, it should be something that can easily be handed back and forth, like a coin, a little plastic cocktail sword, an index card with a hand drawn on it, a fencing glove—whatever works for your group.

At the beginning of a physical conflict between two (and only two) participants, determine the turn order, as usual. If this involves a skill roll, and one of the two succeeds with style, they start the conflict with the upper hand—they got the jump on the other guy.

After that, the combatants can do any of the following every turn:

- Attack, if they have the upper hand

- Try to get the upper hand, if they don't

- Do something else—put down situation aspects, try to escape the conflict, etc.

It's highly recommended that you use the *Stress-Free* variant (page 60) with these rules. Otherwise, there's a real risk of combats dragging out, instead of knocking *down* and dragging out.

Dekka, an Imperial Lawkeeper of Porthos V, is facing off against her arch-nemesis Xoren, the scheming cyborg and would-be usurper of the Celestial Throne, in the midst of the coronation ceremony. Each is a master of the photon blade, as they've demonstrated to one another multiple times in the past. Their high-tech weapons flicker brilliantly with a copyrighted hum. It's on.

Dekka wins initiative with a +5 to Xoren's +3—a success, but not one with style. She starts things off with a little patter, hoping to discover one of his aspects using Empathy. "What's your damage, Xoren? Is there an algorithm for evil somewhere in your neuro-matrix? Or do you actually think this ploy is going to work?" She gets a +6, while Xoren gets a +2. Success with style!

"Evil?" he spits back. "Spend one day as a cyborg in this wretched wreck of an empire and you'll gain a new appreciation for *true* evil!"

She discovers the aspect ***All Shall Suffer for My Pain!***, and chooses to gain the upper hand instead of taking the extra free invocation.

Now it's Xoren's turn. Being an evil cyborg, he grabs a bystander and flings him at Dekka, hoping to create an advantage with Physique. He beats Dekka by 4 shifts—enough to gain the upper hand—but she uses that free invocation on ***All Shall Suffer for My Pain!*** to reduce that to 2 shifts. Her player explains that Xoren, in his righteous rage, accidentally telegraphed his move. The GM buys it. Xoren puts a situation aspect of ***Civilians in Danger*** in play, with one free invocation.

Dekka still has the upper hand, and she means to use it. Shoving the poor onlooker to one side and springing forward at Xoren with her photon blade, she attacks with Fight at +4, beating his Fight defense of +3. He capitalizes on the fact that she's distracted by those ***Civilians in Danger***, using his free invocation to bump his total up to +5. After trading a couple more fate points, Dekka comes out ahead by a single shift. Since they're using the Stress-Free variant, that means a mild consequence for Xoren—***Faltering Confidence***.

VEHICLES

In a game that largely revolves around personal activity, vehicles occupy a strange space. They extend the character's capabilities like tools or weapons, but they're external to the character, in the manner of allies and resources. It's a space that is easily overlooked, but which can be utterly essential, depending on the priorities of the player or campaign.

In describing vehicles, this section generally assumes cars and trucks, but many of these ideas are easily extrapolated to horses, chariots, spaceships and beyond.

Incidental Vehicles

In many games, vehicles are merely *incidental* to play. That is, they come up when the situation demands, but otherwise aren't given a lot of thought. In this case, vehicles are frequently just an enabler for using the Drive skill. When the bad guys are getting away in a car, and you hop in a car to pursue, it's all about the skills from there.

If there's ever a need to differentiate vehicles in this context, it should most often take the form of aspects. A vehicle will usually have between one and three aspects, the specifics of which depend very much on your table's interest in cars. Aspects like ***Big***, ***Fast***, ***Off-Road***, or ***Clunker*** are totally valid, as are ***Hemi***, ***Canted Wheels*** or ***Five-Speed, Fuel-Injected***.

For most games this is enough, but in a game where driving is critical, there's a good chance that vehicles may end up being more or less disposable.

Personal Vehicles

A personal vehicle is most likely to be represented by an aspect, but details beyond that depend a lot on your game. A more down-to-earth game may simply have a signature vehicle, like a detective's sports car, but some games might be better suited to gadget-festooned supercars.

The basic rules for vehicles need be no more complicated than the incidental vehicles rules, and for more complicated vehicles, extras start becoming appropriate.

Repair

An item represented by an aspect cannot usually be destroyed, yet despite this, it can stretch credulity to have a vehicle prove entirely immune to damage. As a rule of thumb, allow a personal vehicle to be damaged normally, but say that the damage was repaired without difficulty between sessions.

Unless, of course, the player *wants* to work with the damage. Having a car in need of repair is a great scene frame and occasional motivator—perhaps it requires a particular part. If a player opts to treat the car as damaged, then the first time in a session they expressly touch on the necessary repairs—such as having a conversation while working on the engine—that is effectively a compel, and grants the player a FP.

FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT

Group Vehicles

An idea that sees frequent use in fiction and gaming is that of a common vehicle, usually some sort of ship, van, car, or the like that serves as group transportation and often as a mobile base of operations.

An easy way to do this is to make the vehicle in question an aspect for everyone in the group—or at least everyone tied to the vehicle. Doing so makes a strong statement about the centrality of the vehicle to the game.

It's also possible to take a more nuanced approach, and have each character take an aspect that reflects their relationship with the vehicle—a spaceship's captain and her engineer may have very different perspectives on the nature of their ship.

Whatever the case, a group vehicle can have aspects like an incidental vehicle, but there's a lot more leeway in terms of what exactly those aspects should be. Each player aspect related to the vehicle allows that player to assign an aspect to the vehicle. This allows for differing levels of investment built organically from player interest.

Quick and Dirty Vehicle Rules

Vehicle Mismatches

The quick and dirty hierarchy of speed goes as follows:

- Foot

- Bike/Horse

- Car/Motorcycle

- Helicopter

- Airplane

When a chase involves a speed mismatch, the faster driver gets a number of free invocations of vehicle aspects equal to the difference between the tiers. This can be mitigated by circumstances—feet and bikes can outpace a car in a traffic jam, and a car might help you catch up with a plane before it's airborne—but it should be enough to cover edge cases.

Stealing a Car

Attempting to steal or otherwise acquire a car should be treated as an overcome action, with the appropriate skill—usually either Burglary or Resources—against a difficulty based on the situation, taking into account both security level and range of options. Upon success, the aspects created are the aspects of the stolen vehicle. This assumes the character is just taking what they can get—trying to steal a specific car will be an overcome roll against the specifics of that situation.

Custom Cars

Car customization is an application of the Crafts skill that requires a shop and appropriate tools. Baseline difficulty of the overcome roll is 0, +2 for each aspect on the vehicle. With a success, an aspect can be added to the vehicle, or if it's feasible, removed. The maximum number of aspects a vehicle may have is 5.

Vehicle Damage

Vehicles don't have stress, but *can* take consequences—usually to turn a failed Drive roll into a success using the Extra Effort optional rule (see page 60). An average vehicle—3 or fewer aspects—can take one mild consequence. An exceptional vehicle—4 or 5 aspects—can take one mild and one moderate consequence. A vehicle with an aspect like **Rugged** or **Military Grade** may be able to take one severe consequence.

Vehicle Stunts

Car Thief: When stealing a car, use Drive in lieu of Burglary.

SUPERS

Fate characters are already incredibly competent and accomplished folks, but sometimes your group might want to push the system even further, telling a story of actual superheroes who fight crime and supervillains who want to conquer the world. This section will give you a few tools to make superheroes work for your group!

Origin Stories

FATE superheroes are a lot like regular FATE characters, but they can replace the trouble phase of character creation with an origin story, an aspect that quickly summarizes how the character acquired superpowers and/or why those powers cause the hero problems. Remember that aspects should always be double-edged, noting the character's strengths and weaknesses. For example, a hero might take the high concept *Genetically Engineered Supersoldier* to represent his superhuman strength and agility and the origin story *Dimensional Traveler* to simultaneously note that he's a fish out of water in our world.

Super Skills

One way of creating superpowers in FATE is to allow players to designate skills as superpowers, instead of taking stunts. A hero born on an advanced alien world might take Super Lore. A teen touched by the powers of an ancient, primordial god might take Super Athletics. Heroes that use technology or magical items can invest the skills into the item itself as skill extras, carrying Spears of Destiny (Physique) or building fantastic clockwork robots (Shooting).

Heroes can use the skill as normal, but can also opt to make use of the power by spending a fate point. When activated, the superskill allows the hero to attempt fantastic feats, doubling his current skill bonus. After rolling, the characters must step back the skill by one. As long as the skill is not reduced to zero, the power refreshes next scene. If the power is exhausted, however, the hero will have to find some way to rest or recharge before using it again.

> Maxine, a Valkyrie with Superb Physique (+5), can spend a fate point to throw a car at a supervillain—adding 5 extra shifts to her roll—but after the roll the skill steps back to Great (+4). If she continues to use her superstrength to the point that her Physique is exhausted, she will need to journey to Valhalla to drink from the Horn of Might to regain her strength.

This system lends itself to Golden Age-style heroes who achieve amazing feats with few downsides beyond getting tired or running out of power. It also gives the GM a chance to set up interesting refresh scenes (see *Refresh*), when the heroes have to recharge their powers, reconnect with their human lives, or rest for long enough to face the villain at full strength. For example, a teenage hero might need to head back home to connect with her dad, while a shapechanging nightstalker might retire to his lair to sleep through the day before resuming his hunt.

Creating Super-Powered Stunts

If your group prefers more defined superpowers, you can allow players to purchase superpowers as stunts, perhaps even giving them an extra stunt or two for free. For a low-powered superhero game, emulating gritty 1980s anti-heroes, the existing stunts in FATE CORE are probably fine—the heroes aren't empowered paragons, just extraordinary people who put on costumes.

If you want to tell more epic superhero stories, you can also write stunts that allow for stronger powers but require the player to bid fate points. Static obstacles may be defeated by spending a single fate point, but other superpowered characters can accept, cancel, or raise the action by bidding a fate point back and narrating opposition. This goes back and forth until one character is unwilling to spend any more points. If the action ends in a tie, the points are given to the GM, but if one character clearly wins, the loser gets all the fate points bid. Note that this might result in dramatic swings in the fate point economy, as one player is going to catch a windfall of fate points at the end of a conflict.

Sergio is a hero with Bend Bars, Lift Gates, a stunt that allows him to destroy physical impediments by bidding a fate point. If no superpowered characters oppose him, the action is successful without a roll. However, if Maxine uses her Norse powers to shock him through the metal bars he's trying to bend, she can spend a fate point to cancel his action or spend two fate points to try to apply her power (Lighting Storm) in addition to canceling his stunt. If she spent two fate points, Sergio would get a chance to bid back to cancel or raise, or he could accept her action and claim the two fate points she bid.

The *Fate Worlds* setting *Wild Blue* has some awesome ideas for creating powers as stunts with narrative costs, such as time travel that a hero can't quite control, or telepathy that always uncovers unwanted information. Check it out for another way of creating powers in *Fate*!

Similarly, superpowers by any other name might be called *magic*. Have a look at the previous chapter to get an idea of how you could do something more involved and intricate with your superpowers by way of building them as a "magic" system.

Villains and Sidekicks

Fate already has great rules for generating NPCs (starting on page 213 of Fate Core). For superhero stories, the GM can designate these as minions, villains, and supervillains to better signal to the heroes the level of danger each group poses.

Pay particular attention to the suggestions in Fate Core for grouping up minions and treating them as obstacles. Sometimes the best way to portray a hero beating up on a group of low-level thugs is a single roll or expenditure of a superpower.

Villains should look a little more like the heroes themselves, probably picking up a superpower or two. Ideally you want a group of villains to be able to take on your heroes toe-to-toe for long enough to make a contest interesting, but they probably aren't the real threat your heroes face.

Supervillains, however, can be full-fledged characters, complete with high concepts, origin stories, superpowers, and extras of their own. Don't skimp on origin stories for your supervillains; they are a great place to get the flavor of the character across to the players. An evil cultist might have the origin story *I've Lost the Only Man I Could Ever Love* while a demonic supersoldier might have the origin story *Doomed to Wander the Earth by Forces Infernal*.

Heroes can also pick up sidekicks (see *Sidekicks vs. Allies*) and minions of their own as your story goes on, purchasing them as extras when they achieve milestones.

THE HORROR PARADOX

At face value, FATE is a bad fit for the horror genre. It's right there in the opener of FATE CORE: "…works best with any premise where the characters are proactive, capable people leading dramatic lives." Horror does its dark work by placing characters in deadly, inescapable circumstances beyond their control. In horror, characters are often forced to react, rather than act. Despite their capabilities, characters face threats that outclass them; their competence isn't enough to win. Defeat seems inevitable, and success comes at a high cost. Rather than charge in and win the day, characters focus more on surviving the next few minutes and making good on an escape.

How do we reconcile these two realities? How do we take a system built for proactive, capable characters and make it serve the needs of the horror genre?

That's the Fate-plus-horror paradox. This is how we solve it.

The Elements of Horror

Horror is really all about the visceral, emotional response the players have to the game. System is absolutely able to drive this, with your help. For our toolkit purposes, horror is a combination of **oppressive atmosphere**, **impossible circumstances**, and **stark desperation**.

Oppressive Atmosphere

Compels Aplenty: While compels aren't tools for *forcing* outcomes, they are tools for *making things go wrong*. So make them abundant. Place aspects on the scene, the story, the campaign—and compel them to make things go wrong for everyone. Simply dropping **Death Comes for Everyone** onto the story and compelling it at the exact worst time (for the players) to make things that much worse will get lots of traction. Yeah, the players affected will walk away with some fate points—which they'll need in order to survive—but they'll also feel the emotional gut-punch of the moment—and will wonder when the next compel is going to land. Make them hurt. Make them worry.

Every Path a Dark One: Aspects aren't the only way to evoke atmosphere. You can deliver, too, with obstacles and zones. It's never easy to run away from horror, so clutter the path to salvation with obstacles. (Read more on obstacles, below.) And when you're drawing your zone maps, make it all more claustrophobic than usual: more zones covering less space. While the physical distances aren't any different, it's just plain harder to get away from the dangerous places in horror—in a regular house, the front door might just be a zone away. In a haunted house? Try more like five or ten… and *never* let them sprint the full length.

Impossible Circumstances

Just because the characters are empowered protagonists doesn't mean things have to be easy for them.

Any obstacle's difficulty set at two higher than the skill to overcome it is likely to need an invoke. With players' best skills topping out at Good or Great, that means your starting level for difficulties should be in the same range, and go up from there. Don't skimp on this. Really turn the screws!

With high difficulties come higher chances of failure. Rather than turn this into player paralysis and apathy, make heavy use of "succeed, but at a cost" as an alternative—and give the potential costs some real teeth. Make the price uncomfortable. When paying you your due, the players will feel horror's bite. Every step forward spills just a little more blood. It's death by degrees.

In fights against impossibly tough foes, the players will be inclined to concede, to try to wrest some control of the situation. There's no reason not to accept these concessions, but you should always advocate, hard, for concessions that truly hurt. Here, too, is where they will pay a price, and feel the teeth bite down.

All of this drives towards a feeling of desperation. And so…

Stark Desperation

Desperation arises from threatened, sparse resources and hard choices made under pressure. A player character's finite resources include fate points, stress, and consequences. Limit these without making them absent. Consider:

- **Low refresh:** If the players only have a few fate points, those fate points will feel precious. They'll need to spend them if they want to succeed cleanly—or at all. The tension in this choice heightens anxiety.

- **Minimal stress tracks:** Don't give them more than a box or two, if you give them any. In horror, characters shouldn't have much of a buffer before they start to break and bleed. Additionally, if you use a mental or sanity stress track, lasting trauma, terror, and madness are just moments away.

- **Weaker consequences:** Consider making consequences soak less damage. The default dial is -2/-4/-6 for mild, moderate, and severe, which is pretty hefty. For horror, think about halving all those numbers, or trying -1/-2/-4. It won't take much of a hit to really hurt the characters, making any kind of conflict all the more dangerous.

Pair your system design with hard choices for the characters that they'll have to make under pressure. This will take away clean, easy victories. After all, the PCs themselves are finite resources: they can't be in two places at once. And pressure arises from a lack of time. Time is the final finite resource that you as the GM can control. In horror, there should never be enough time.

So give your players too much to do and not enough time to do it. The people and things characters care about are also finite resources—and for a GM, they're often easier to threaten than the character himself. Save your husband *or* your child: but never both—there's only one of you, and two bombs at opposite ends of the house.

Your players will hate you for it. And if they came to all this to really revel in the horror—they'll love you for it, too, screaming all the way.

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FATE CORE SYSTEM

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Name

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ASPECTS

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SKILLS

Superb (+5)

Great (+4)

Good (+3)

Fair (+2)

Average (+1)

STUNTS

EXTRAS

PHYSICAL STRESS (Physique)

1 2 3 4

MENTAL STRESS (Will)

1 2 3 4

CONDITIONS

FLEETING

1 Angry

1 Frightened

Goes away when you get a chance to catch your breath and calm down.

STICKY

2 Exhausted

2 Hungry

Stays checked off until a specific event occurs (get sleep, eat food).

LASTING

4 4 Broken

4 4 Wounded

Takes a recovery action to begin removal. Second box may be checked only if the first isn't.