

GENESYS

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME FOR ALL SETTINGS



GENESYS



CORE RULEBOOK

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4	Environmental Effects	110
PART I: THE RULES	6	Wounds, Strain, and States of Health	112
Chapter 1: Core Mechanics	8	Critical Injuries	114
The Dice	8	Recovery and Healing	116
Dice Symbols and Results	11	Chapter 7: Social Encounters	118
The Basic Dice Pool	13	Structuring Social Encounters	119
Characteristic Ratings	14	Using Motivations in Social Encounters	123
Skills and Training	16	Chapter 8: The Game Master	125
Difficulty	16	Before Play Begins	126
Building a Basic Dice Pool	19	Player Character Creation	127
Interpreting the Pool	23	Preparation Tips	128
Triumph and Despair	24	Game Mastering Resources	129
Other Types of Checks	25	The Narrative Dice	130
Other Key Elements	27	Adversaries	131
Experience and Development	30	PART II: SETTINGS	136
Derived Attributes	31	Chapter 1: Fantasy	138
Chapter 2: Creating Characters	32	Example Setting: Runebound	141
Step 1: Determine Background	34	Chapter 2: Steampunk	148
Step 2: Select a Character Archetype or Species	35	Example Setting: Sovereigns of Steam	150
Step 3: Choose a Career	40	Chapter 3: Weird War	158
Step 4: Invest Experience Points	44	Example Setting: Tannhäuser	159
Step 5: Determine Derived Attributes	45	Chapter 4: Modern Day	164
Step 6: Determine Character Motivation	46	Chapter 5: Science Fiction	170
Step 7: Choose Gear, Appearance, and Personality	51	Example Setting: Android	173
Chapter 3: Skills	52	Chapter 6: Space Opera	179
Social Skills	54	Example Setting: Twilight Imperium	181
General Skills	57	PART III: GAME MASTER'S TOOLKIT	189
Knowledge Skills	66	Chapter 1: Customizing Rules	190
Combat Skills	67	Create a Skill	190
Magic Skills	70	Create a Species or Archetype	192
Chapter 4: Talents	71	Create a Talent	194
Talent Descriptions	72	Create an Item	197
Chapter 5: Equipment	82	Create an Adversary	202
Rarity	82	Chapter 2: Alternate Rules	204
Encumbrance	84	Nemesis Extra Activation Rules	204
Item Qualities	86	Uncoupling Skills from Characteristics	205
Item Maintenance	89	Item Attachments and Hard Points	206
Weapons	90	Magic Rules	210
Armor	92	Vehicle Rules	220
Gear	93	Hacking Rules	232
Chapter 6: Combat Encounters	95	Chapter 3: Build an Adventure	236
Narrative and Structured Gameplay	95	Constructing Encounters	239
Incidentals	97	Chapter 4: Tones	241
Maneuvers	97	Horror	242
Actions	101	Intrigue	245
Defense	104	Mystery	246
Soak	105	Pulp	247
Range Bands	105	Romance and Drama	248
Additional Combat Modifiers	107	Superheroes	250

INTRODUCTION

Hello, and welcome to **GENESYS**, a roleplaying game designed to empower you to create your own world. In these pages you're going to find the rules to play the game, a wide variety of example settings, and a toolkit that helps players customize the game and make it their own.

But first, if you're new to roleplaying games, let's take a minute to talk about what exactly this book is, and what you're going to do with it.

WHAT IS A ROLEPLAYING GAME, ANYWAY?

So, a roleplaying game is a cooperative, improvisational storytelling experience. You typically play a roleplaying game with a group of friends, and the size of the group can range from two to six people (or more). During the game, you and your friends take on the role of a character in a fictional setting. You and your friends contribute to telling a story in this setting and, in this story, your characters are the main characters. They are the heroes (or perhaps the villains) of the story you create.

What makes this a game, and not just a collaborative storytelling event, are the rules. We call those rules the Narrative Dice System, and we'll get into more about them later. The rules exist so that as you and your friends play, you can introduce an element of risk and randomness into your game. The drama of success or failure at critical points in the narrative make the storytelling more fun. That element of risk (instead of just saying "my character does this, and they succeed!") is the core point of the rules.

I'M THE GAME MASTER! WHAT DO I DO?

Each group of players has one Game Master. If you've decided to take on that role—congratulations! Being a Game Master (or "GM") is a lot of fun. You're going to run the game for your friends. This means you create and present the plot of the story, describe the world, and adjudicate the rules. You'll need to think on your feet, and respond to unexpected actions from your players. Often, you may need to adjust your story when your players make unexpected choices while playing the game. Just remember, your ability to alter the game and the story to take your players' decisions into account is what makes a roleplaying game unique.

Most importantly, your job is to make sure everyone—including yourself—has a good time. This is always more important than the rules.

I'M A PLAYER! WHAT DO I DO?

As a player, you're going to take on the role of an individual character. You'll usually create a character to play at the beginning of the game, and you control their actions as they experience the adventure that your friend the GM invents. It's similar to episodes of a television show or series of movies where you play the part of one of a group of recurring cast members.

Adventures last for one or more game sessions. With each adventure, your character becomes better at what they do, and the story evolves as the characters make choices and alter the world around them.



How Do I Use This Book?

We designed **GENESYS** to work with a wide variety of settings, instead of just one. This can be your science fiction roleplaying game, your fantasy roleplaying game, or even your “fighting airship pirates in Victorian England” game. We organized this book to facilitate these many options.

In **Part I** of this book, we cover the core rules of the game, the Narrative Dice System. These are the rules you’ll need to know to play **GENESYS** in any setting, from space opera to steampunk. With the exception of our chapter on how to be a Game Master (Chapter 8), **Part I** is the section that everyone should read.

In **Part II** of the book, we present five different example settings in which you could run a game of **GENESYS**. This isn’t an exhaustive list; that would require a much larger book! However, we wanted these example settings to show aspiring GMs what would go into creating their own setting, and give them some ideas to get started. This section is mostly for Game Masters.

In **Part III**, we present a whole lot of advice for GMs who want to build their own rules and flesh out their own settings. We also have some alternate rules that you don’t need for all games of **GENESYS**, but should be useful in some settings. This is our toolbox, and while this section is mostly for GMs, we expect players will want to read and learn some of these alternate rules.

You can create your own setting and run your own game just using the material in this book. However, we also designed it to be paired with setting supplements. A setting supplement presents a single setting (with new character options, items, adversaries, and environments) in more exhaustive detail, while relying on this book to provide the core rules for playing the game.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PLAY?

Playing **GENESYS** requires very few materials. Besides at least one copy of this rulebook (which, if you’re reading this, you probably already own!), your group needs pencils or pens and copies of the character sheets found on pages 254-255 to record information about your characters. Your group needs access to one or more standard ten-sided dice. We recommend two ten-sided dice per player, but if you don’t mind sharing, you can get by with having two in the group.

You and your group should also use the custom **GENESYS** Roleplaying Dice designed specifically to manage the unique task resolution system used in the game. We describe all of these dice in detail in **Part I** of this book.

You can buy packs of **GENESYS** Roleplaying Dice at local hobby game retailers or you can purchase them online from www.FantasyFlightGames.com. We also provide a **GENESYS** Dice app for iOS and Android devices.

CORE MECHANICS 8

CREATING CHARACTERS 32

SKILLS 52

TALENTS 71

EQUIPMENT 82

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS 95

SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS 118

THE GAME MASTER 125

THE RULES

In the first part of this book, we introduce the rules. You can think of them as the core of the game, or the Narrative Dice System portion of **GENESYS**. The Narrative Dice System is basically the engine that powers our game.

The rules presented in the first part of this book are the core rules that you'll use no matter what setting your game takes place in. We intend for you to augment these rules with the rules found in each individual setting (**Part II** on page 136). Your Game Master (GM) may further augment the rules with rules of their own devising, created using (or inspired by) the **GM Toolkit** section found in **Part III** on page 189 of this book.

WHAT'S IN THIS PART OF THE BOOK

Let's go over what you're going to find in this part of the book.

- **Chapter 1: Core Mechanics.** This chapter describes the basics of the game. If you want to learn how to play **GENESYS**, start reading here. These rules remain consistent no matter the setting.
- **Chapter 2: Creating Characters.** You need to build characters to play this game. This chapter tells you how with step-by-step instructions. Your game's setting may augment choices in this chapter.
- **Chapter 3: Skills.** From being charming to punching enemies in the face, skills define what your character excels at doing. **Chapter 3** explains how they work, and also lists all the skills you find in our game. We also divide those skills depending on what setting you should use them in.
- **Chapter 4: Talents.** Talents are special abilities that let your character do unique things in the game. If skills define the base of your character, talents are the spice that makes your character interesting to play and further sets them apart from others. Just like skills, we give you a complete list of talents in our game, and also like skills, we call out which talents make sense for particular settings.
- **Chapter 5: Equipment.** From guns and knives to body armor and protein bars, equipment allows your character to do stuff in the game that they can't do with bare hands. Even more than skills

and talents, equipment depends heavily on setting. That's why instead of providing a long list of equipment, we just provide a couple of examples so you can see how the rules for equipment work. Consult your game's specific setting for a more detailed list.

- **Chapter 6: Combat Encounters.** GENESYS, like most roleplaying games, provides a detailed set of rules for resolving combat. These rules remain the same no matter what setting you choose. However, a lot of other rules (such as rules for equipment, skills, and talents) affect how your character fights, so the feel of combat varies depending

on the setting. The fights are always governed by the same basic rule set, though.

- **Chapter 7: Social Encounters.** The opportunity to talk your way out of problems sets RPGs apart from other games. These rules cover how to resolve social encounters. As in combat, the core rules remain the same no matter what setting you're playing in.
- **Chapter 8: The Game Master.** If you'd prefer to run a game, rather than play in it, then pay particular attention to this chapter. It covers all the basics for a Game Master, including how to run adversaries and other non-player characters (NPCs).

NARRATIVE PLAY

GENESYS and the Narrative Dice System ask you to step into your character's role and use dramatic narrative to describe events and advance a story. Through this, you experience the excitement, drama, and epic scope of an infinite variety of settings and adventures from the perspectives of characters you create. While we provide specific rules for how to resolve actions, our game relies heavily on you and your Game Master to use your imaginations—tempered with common sense—to explain what happens.

In GENESYS, we represent combat and other situations in an abstract fashion. Our game focuses on your characters and the heroic actions they take rather than on measurements, statistics, or other minutiae. Instead of taking a ruler and measuring the distance between characters on a map, you simply need to state, "I'm ducking behind the helicopter to get some cover while I pull out my pistol." That sort of description paints a much better picture of the action taking place.

Action resolution also includes a narrative element. The Narrative Dice System determines if a given task succeeds or fails. However, the dice reveal more than whether or not your character succeeds at something. The different dice and their varied symbols tell a larger story, adding depth and detail to the scene your characters occupy.

Many dice resolutions set out to determine whether a task succeeds or fails. However, the Narrative Dice System goes beyond binary pass/fail results. It actually contains six possible results, and most of those results scale as well (for example, you can barely succeed, or you can succeed really well). Even if your characters fail, they may still make something good happen for

PLAYER CHARACTERS AND NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Throughout this book, we talk a lot about **player characters** (or "PCs") and non-player characters (or "NPCs"). Player characters are the characters that players create and control, usually one player character per player.

Non-player characters are everyone else in the setting, from the bystanders in crowds to the evil villain that the PCs have to defeat. The GM controls all of the non-player characters. Most NPCs are governed by rules that are far simpler than the rules that govern a PC. Some are not governed by rules at all, and your GM describes all of their actions narratively. This makes it easier for your GM to run multiple NPCs at once.

themselves or the rest of the party. However, even when characters succeed, they may generate the seeds for something dire later.

All this works to create some really interesting and exciting encounters, and keeps you constantly engaged with the game. Shared storytelling shapes the core of GENESYS. As you become more familiar with the system, you can become as much a storyteller as your Game Master. If you are the Game Master, you get to run a game where your players are just as engaged with creating the narrative as you.

CHAPTER 1: CORE MECHANICS

Whether flying a fighter jet through a storm, sword-fighting with an animated skeleton, or hacking into a computer network guarded by killer AIs, your characters often find themselves performing actions that require skill and no small amount of luck. To determine whether these actions succeed or fail—or if they have any other unforeseen consequences—characters in **GENESYS** perform skill checks. Skill checks are easy to use, and we break them into two key elements:

1. Roll a pool of Narrative dice.
2. After all factors have been accounted for, if at least one Success symbol remains, the task succeeds.

When any character attempts an action, the first step involves gathering a number of dice and assembling the dice pool. Several factors influence the number and type of dice in the pool, including the character's innate abilities, skill training, and equipment, as well as the inherent difficulty of the task being attempted. Your GM may decide that the environment or the situation warrants the addition of certain dice; fixing a car with ample time and the proper tools is one thing, but

attempting repairs in the pouring rain, without tools, and under a hail of bullets is quite different. Once you have assembled all of the necessary dice, you roll all of the dice in the pool.

The second step involves interpreting the results on the dice. After rolling, you look at the symbols on the face-up sides of the dice. Certain symbols work in pairs, one type canceling out another. Other types of symbols do not cancel each other out, and their effects are applied regardless of the outcome of the task. By comparing the first set of paired symbols—Success and Failure—you determine if the task succeeds. You then compare the second set of symbols—Advantage and Threat—to determine any beneficial side effects or negative consequences. Finally, you resolve any other symbols to add the last details to the outcome.

This core mechanic, the skill check, forms the foundation of our game. Other rules and effects either modify or interact with one of the two fundamental elements—the assembly of the dice pool and the interpretation of the results after the dice are rolled.

THE DICE

This section takes a closer look at the Narrative dice and their symbols. When the action starts up, just about anything can happen. Dice symbols provide a narrative framework for the action—did your character hit their foe with a clean shot, or force the opponent to scramble for cover instead of attacking in return? Once you understand these dice and symbols, you gain a better understanding of our game's core mechanic.

This section also tells you how to assemble a dice pool and when to introduce extra dice based on the circumstances. Dice sets can be purchased separately, or players may use the **GENESYS DICE APP** to roll them electronically.

When your character makes a skill check in **GENESYS**, the dice allow you and your GM to quickly determine a task's success or failure, as well as its magnitude and narrative implications. To accomplish



this, **GENESYS** uses six types of dice. Each type fulfills a specific function and purpose. Each die face is either blank or features one or more symbols that represent various positive or negative effects.

A typical dice pool contains somewhere between five and eight dice. This pool size covers the majority of situations. Difficult, complex, or epic situations may include more dice, while mundane situations may

POSITIVE DICE AND NEGATIVE DICE

Each dice pool consists of a number of dice from several different sources. Essentially, these dice pools contain “positive dice” and “negative dice.”

Positive dice are added to the pool to help accomplish a task or achieve beneficial side effects. These may reflect innate talents or abilities, special

training, superior resources, or other advantages that affect the specific task. Negative dice are added to the pool to hinder or disrupt a task, or to introduce the possibility of complicating side effects. These may reflect the inherent difficulty of the task, obstacles, additional risks, or the efforts of another character to thwart the task.

TABLE I.1–1: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE DICE

POSITIVE DICE COME FROM	NEGATIVE DICE COME FROM
The skill used to accomplish a task	The difficulty of the task attempted
The character's characteristic that is linked to the skill	An opponent's special abilities, talents, skills, or characteristics
An applicable talent or special ability	Opposing forces at work
Equipment or gear being used by the character	Inclement weather or environmental effects
Using players' Story Points	Using the GM's Story Points
Tactical or situational advantages	Tactical or situational disadvantages
Other advantages, as determined by the GM	Other disadvantages, as determined by the GM

include fewer dice. If the task facing your character is so easy that success is virtually guaranteed, you may not need to roll dice at all! In fact, we recommend that you limit generating and rolling a dice pool to the important tasks that can influence the story.

In **GENESYS**, you can divide the types of dice into two categories. The first type features dice with symbols beneficial to accomplishing tasks. The second type features symbols that cancel those beneficial symbols and hinder the accomplishment of tasks.

Boost, Ability, and Proficiency dice are the beneficial, positive dice. Setback, Difficulty, and Challenge dice are the negative, disruptive dice (see **Table I.1–1: Positive and Negative Dice** above).

POSITIVE DICE

Three types of positive dice have symbols that improve the odds of successfully completing a task or achieving beneficial side effects.

BOOST DICE

Special advantages, or “boosts,” are represented with light blue six-sided dice. Boost dice represent benefits gained through luck, chance, and advantageous actions



that your character takes. They reflect your character's possession of some sort of benefit or advantage, such as having ample time to complete the task or having the right equipment. Boost dice and Setback dice are thematic opposites of each other. Boost dice are represented by  in text.

ABILITY DICE

Ability is represented with green eight-sided dice. Ability dice form the basis of most dice pools rolled by the players. They represent your character's aptitude or skill used when attempting a skill check. These dice possess positive, beneficial symbols. Ability dice are opposed by Difficulty dice. Ability dice are represented by  in text.



PROFICIENCY DICE

Proficiency is represented with yellow twelve-sided dice. Proficiency dice represent the combination of innate ability and training. They are most often used when your character attempts a skill check using a trained skill. Proficiency dice can also be added to a pool when you spend a Story Point (see page 27) for an important skill check. These dice possess a greater likelihood of success, and they are the only dice that feature the



DICE BREAKDOWN

In the following table, we've provided a breakdown of what faces show what symbol on each die. This information could prove useful for you GMs, especially when you're adapting our game to fit into your own settings.

TABLE I.1-2: GENESYS DICE SYMBOL DISTRIBUTION

DIE TYPE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Boost die (d6)	Blank	Blank	☀	☀△	△△	△						
Setback die (d6)	Blank	Blank	✕	✕	⚡	⚡						
Ability die (d8)	Blank	☀	☀	☀☀	△	△	☀△	△△				
Difficulty die (d8)	Blank	✕	✕✕	⚡	⚡	⚡	⚡⚡	✕⚡				
Proficiency die (d12)	Blank	☀	☀	☀☀	☀☀	△	☀△	☀△	☀△	△△	△△	⚡
Challenge die (d12)	Blank	✕	✕	✕✕	✕✕	⚡	⚡	✕⚡	✕⚡	⚡⚡	⚡⚡	⚡

potent Triumph symbol (see page 12). Proficiency dice are the upgraded version of Ability dice (for more on upgrades, see page 21). Proficiency dice are represented by  in text.

NEGATIVE DICE

Three types of negative dice have symbols that undermine success or introduce unwanted complications.

SETBACK DICE

In **GENESYS**, certain complications, or “setbacks,” are represented with black six-sided dice. Setback dice represent problems or minor obstacles during task resolution. Setback dice represent relatively minor conditions that impair or hinder your character, such as poor lighting, obstructive terrain, or insufficient resources. Setback dice are not as potent as Difficulty dice. Add them to represent additional circumstances or environmental effects that would not in and of themselves increase the base difficulty of the task. Setback dice and Boost dice are thematic opposites of each other. Setback dice are represented by  in text.



DIFFICULTY DICE

Difficulty is represented with purple eight-sided dice. Difficulty dice represent the inherent challenge or complexity of a task your character attempts to accomplish. In simplest terms, the more Difficulty dice in a dice pool, the harder it is to succeed. Difficulty dice possess negative, harmful symbols that cancel out the positive, beneficial symbols found on Ability, Boost, and Proficiency dice. Difficulty dice oppose Ability dice. Difficulty dice are represented by  in text.



CHALLENGE DICE

Challenge is represented with dark red twelve-sided dice. Challenge dice represent the most extreme adversity and opposition. These dice may be featured in place of Difficulty dice during particularly daunting challenges posed by trained, elite, or prepared opponents. Challenge dice can also be added to a pool when your GM invests a Story Point for an important skill check. These dice feature primarily negative, obstructive results, such as Threat and Failure, but they also feature the potent Despair result (see page 24). Challenge dice are the upgraded version of Difficulty dice (for more on upgrades, see page 21). Challenge dice are represented by  in text.



TEN-SIDED DICE

In addition to the Narrative dice described above, the game also uses standard ten-sided dice. We abbreviate these dice as “d10” in the text. Many standard d10s feature a numeral zero (0) on one side. If a zero is rolled, it counts as a ten. This allows the d10 to generate any number between one and ten. You can find ten-sided dice at any hobby game store, or on Fantasy Flight Games’ website.

In GENESYS, a more common roll using d10s is called the percentile roll. When making a percentile roll, you

roll two dice, designating one die as the tens digit and the other die as the ones digit. A result of zero on either die means that the corresponding digit is zero in the two-digit number rolled. A result of “00”—zero on both dice—indicates a roll of 100. The percentile roll is abbreviated as d100. It is used most often as a randomizer, generating a number between 1 and 100. We use Percentile rolls to generate numbers that correspond to particular results on lookup tables. The one you’ll probably be most familiar with (and use most often) is **Table I.6–10: Critical Injury Result** (see page 115).

DICE SYMBOLS AND RESULTS

The dice used in GENESYS feature a number of unique symbols used to determine success or failure, as well as to provide additional context and consequences during task resolution.

We want to explain these symbols not just so you can play the game, but also so you can help contribute to the story. One of the unique aspects of the Narrative Dice System is that you, not just your GM, can have the opportunity to interpret the results of a skill check. You can add subtle narrative flavor (“I heal 1 strain with this Advantage **A**, as I regain my breath and take a moment to take stock of the battlefield”) or even major cinematic changes to the scene (“what if, because of the four Threat **T** I rolled, our ship smashes into the reef and we start taking on water?”)

This section introduces and defines the different symbols, then describes how they are used in play. Just like the Narrative dice, these symbols can be classified into several broad categories. The two types of symbols represent positive results and negative results.

POSITIVE RESULTS

Let’s say your character hacks the internal computer network of a government facility as they’re trying to break in. How successful were they? Did your character barely succeed in unlocking one electronic door, or did they do so well that they quietly deactivated the entire facility’s security systems? You determine these sorts of specific details by interpreting the positive dice results from a skill check.

You can find three positive symbols on the Narrative Dice System Roleplaying Dice. These symbols represent Success, Advantage, and Triumph.

SUCCESS **S**

Success symbols **S** are critical for determining whether a skill check succeeds or fails; basically, the more Success symbols **S** you roll, the more likely the check succeeds.

Mechanically, one Success symbol **S** is canceled by one Failure symbol **F**. Based on the core mechanic, if at least one Success remains in the pool after all cancellations have been made, the skill check succeeds. The other thing to remember is that Success symbols **S** can also influence the magnitude of the outcome. The more Success in a check after any symbols have been canceled out by Failure symbols **F**, the greater the magnitude of the success (the more damage dealt, the more people persuaded, or the more wounds healed).

Success symbols **S** appear on **■**, **◆**, and **●** dice.

ADVANTAGE **A**

The Advantage symbol **A** indicates an opportunity for a positive consequence or side effect, regardless of whether your character fails or succeeds at the task they attempt. Examples of these positive side effects include your character remaining unnoticed when hacking a computer network, finding unexpected cover during a firefight, or recovering from strain during a stressful situation.

It’s possible for a task to fail while generating a number of Advantage symbols **A**, allowing something good to come out of the failure. Likewise, Advantage can occur alongside success, allowing for significantly positive outcomes. Remember, Advantage symbols **A** do not have a direct impact on success or failure; they only affect the potential side effects of the roll.

Advantage is canceled by Threat. Each Threat symbol  cancels one Advantage symbol . If a skill check generates one or more net Advantage symbols , you can spend that Advantage to apply one or more special side effects. These could include triggering a Critical Hit, activating a weapon's special quality, recovering strain, or even performing additional maneuvers. The applications of Advantage are covered in more detail on page 102 and 121.

Advantage symbols appear on , , and  dice.

TRIUMPH

The Triumph symbol  indicates a significant boon or beneficial outcome. Each Triumph symbol  provides two effects:

First, each Triumph symbol  also counts as one Success, in every way Success  has previously been defined. This means that the Success generated by a Triumph symbol  could be canceled by a Failure symbol  generated during the same skill check.

Second, you can spend a Triumph symbol to trigger incredibly potent effects. You could think of this as a “super Advantage,” although sometimes the effects are so impressive that no amount of Advantage could trigger them. Two common uses include triggering a Critical Injury upon a successful attack and activating a weapon's special quality (in these cases, one Triumph can do the same thing as many Advantage). Triumphs may activate other potent effects as well, including effects above and beyond those triggered by Advantage. These effects may be set by the GM, or they may be defined by the environment, a piece of equipment, or a special character ability. See pages 102 and 121 for more information on using the Triumph symbol  to trigger effects.

You gain both effects with each Triumph symbol, so you don't have to choose between the Success and the special-effect trigger. Although the Success aspect of the Triumph symbol  can be canceled by a Failure symbol , the second aspect of the  result cannot be canceled. Multiple Triumph symbols are cumulative: each Triumph adds one Success, and each can be used to generate its own special effect.

The Triumph symbol only appears on the  die.

NEGATIVE RESULTS

While racing away from enemy agents in a stolen sports car, your character unsuccessfully attempts to weave between a pair of slow-moving trucks. Did your character just scratch the paint on their new car's

fender, or did you fail badly enough that your character was forced off the road? Maybe you failed so badly that your character ended up in a head-to-head collision with a twenty-ton semi! You can find out by interpreting negative dice symbols.

The Narrative dice include three negative symbols. These results are Failure, Threat, and Despair.

FAILURE

Failure symbols  are critical for determining whether a skill check succeeds or fails. Basically, the more Failure symbols you roll, the more likely you are to fail!

Mechanically, one Failure symbol  cancels one Success symbol . Based on the core mechanic, if at least one Success symbol  remains in the pool after all cancellations have been made, the skill check succeeds. Fortunately for your character, multiple net Failure symbols  do not influence the magnitude of the failure.

Failure symbols appear on , , and  dice.

THREAT

The Threat symbol  is fuel for negative consequences or side effects, regardless of whether your check succeeds or fails. Examples of these negative side effects include your character taking far longer than expected to pick a lock on a door, dropping their weapon as they sprint for cover, or suffering additional strain during a stressful situation.

It's possible for a task to succeed while generating a number of Threat symbols , which can cause some minor or serious complications! Likewise, Threat can occur alongside Failure, which can worsen an already bad situation with some unforeseen headaches. You should remember, however, that Threat symbols  don't directly impact success or failure, only their magnitudes or potential side effects.

Your GM generally resolves Threat effects (although when a non-player character generates some Threat, you and your fellow players can and should suggest to your GM some creative ways to spend that Threat!) Threat may trigger a wide variety of possible effects. These could include your character being knocked flat on their back, losing the advantage of cover, taking more time than anticipated to complete a task, suffering strain, or giving an enemy an opportunity to perform a maneuver.

Threat cancels Advantage. Each Threat symbol  cancels one Advantage symbol . We cover the applications of Threat in more detail on pages 103 and 121.

Threat symbols appear on , , and  dice.

DESPAIR ☒

The Despair symbol ☒ is a powerful result, indicating a significant bane or detrimental outcome. Each Despair symbol imposes two effects:

First, each Despair symbol ☒ also counts as one Failure ✖, in every way Failure ✖ has previously been defined. This means that the Failure represented by a Despair symbol ☒ could be canceled by a Success symbol ★ generated during the same skill check.

Second, each Despair can be used to trigger potent negative effects. You could think of a Despair as a “super Threat,” although sometimes the effects are so dire that no amount of Threat could trigger them. Two common uses include having a weapon run out of ammo and having a character slip and fall when attempting

to climb a rope or ladder. Despair may activate other potent effects as well, including effects above and beyond those triggered by Threat. These effects may be determined by your GM or defined by the environment, an adversary, or a special character ability. See pages 103 and 121 for more information on using a Despair symbol ☒ to trigger effects.

You suffer both effects of each Despair symbol, so you don’t get to choose between the Failure and the special-effect trigger. The Failure aspect of the Despair symbol can be canceled by a Success symbol ★; however, the second aspect of a Despair symbol ☒ result cannot be canceled. Multiple Despair symbols ☒ are cumulative; each Despair imposes one Failure, and each can be used to generate its own special effect.

The Despair symbol only appears on the ❷ die.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

During the course of your adventures, your characters find themselves in countless situations, attempting a variety of tasks. In everything from seemingly mundane actions, such as repairing a car or negotiating the cost of a box of rations, to extraordinary feats, like balancing on the edge of a skyscraper in a rainstorm while fighting a supervillain, your character is going to be put to the test. When the outcome of your character’s attempt to accomplish a task is uncertain, you need to roll a skill check to determine the task’s success or failure. These skill checks hinge upon a number of different character attributes, including skills, special talents, and inherent abilities.

Your GM decides what type of skill check is required for a given task. Once the type of check and its difficulty

have been set, you assemble a pool of dice based on the different factors involved. The pool can be a combination of many types of dice, which vary depending on the characters involved and the specific situation.

After you assemble your dice pool, you roll all of the dice in the pool. Then, you evaluate the dice results to determine which symbols cancel each other out and which ones are cumulative. Once you’ve finished going over the results, you and your GM resolve the skill check by determining the action’s success or failure. You and your GM use the information obtained from the dice results to describe not only the outcome of the check, but also any additional effects, complications, or surprises.

THE BASIC DICE POOL

GENESYS uses a concept known as a dice pool, which is a collection of the dice needed to determine the outcome of any given situation in the game (see **The Dice**, on page 8). While advanced or complex actions may require a large dice pool, generally your dice pools are going to be fairly simple. You create a dice pool based on four factors: your character’s inherent ability, any specialized training your character has, the difficulty of the attempted task, and the equipment your character uses.

Following a more detailed look at the first three factors (we talk about equipment in **Chapter 5**), this section describes how you assemble and resolve basic dice pools, discusses other types of dice pools, and examines the kinds of checks you might make during a game.

CHARACTERISTICS

In GENESYS, your character’s intrinsic abilities are defined by six characteristics: Agility, Brawn, Cunning, Intellect, Presence, and Willpower.

Brawn and Agility represent your character's physical abilities: strength, flexibility, athletic prowess, skill with weapons, and general toughness. Intellect and Cunning represent mental abilities, reflecting your character's knowledge, analytical skill, cleverness, and deductive reasoning. Willpower and Presence represent your character's personality and force of spirit, including such aspects as charisma, mental fortitude, and facility in relating to and interacting with others.

Your character's species or archetype determines their starting characteristic ratings. Due to quirks of genetics or upbringing, some species or archetypes start with different characteristics than others. You'll have the opportunity to increase these default characteristics during character creation by investing a portion of your character's starting experience points (see page 44). Just note that after character creation, increasing characteristics requires a significant in-game investment and can only be done by purchasing

a specific and expensive talent—something that might happen only a few times over the course of an entire campaign. You need to think carefully about your character's characteristic ratings, and should consider investing a significant portion of their starting experience points (XP) in improving their characteristics. Read more about character creation on page 32.

Although it does make sense to focus on characteristics that improve your character's core skills and talents (if you're going for a character who's charming and friendly, improving Charm and Presence are obvious choices), our game system offers a great deal of flexibility. You don't need to have a 5 in your character's "primary" skill or characteristic to have a very good chance of success. Also, if you devote too much of your character's XP into being great at one thing, you run the risk of your character being terrible at everything else that may happen in the course of the adventure!

CHARACTERISTIC RATINGS

Characteristic ratings for any character (your character or non-player characters) generally range from 1 to 5. Some exceptions can exist, especially in powerful or unique cases. However, for the most part, we try to keep characteristics at 5 or lower, even for those special situations.

Your typical human has an average characteristic rating of 2, so that's what we consider the average baseline. If your character has 2 Brawn, they're about as strong and fit as most people they meet on the street, and if they have a 2 in Willpower, they only lose their temper occasionally and usually stay awake during boring meetings.

Ratings of 1 are below average. A character with a 1 in Presence may be physically unattractive, or may just be a jerk. Likewise, if your character has 1 Agility, they're probably clumsy and not very coordinated.

Ratings of 3 and up are above average, with a 3 being notably above average, a 4 being significantly above average, and a 5 being an exemplar of that characteristic. So if your character has a 3 in Willpower, they're probably going to be more focused and determined than those around them. If your character has a 4 in Agility, they could have a career as a military sharpshooter or a professional acrobat. And if your character has a 5 in Cunning, they could match wits with Sherlock Holmes or other great detectives of fiction and lore.

Your choice of species or archetype determines your character's starting characteristics, as explained on page 35. Now, although we've already talked a bit about the six characteristics, let's go over each one in a little more detail.

AGILITY

The Agility characteristic measures your character's manual dexterity, hand-eye coordination, and body control. Characters with a high Agility have flexibility, a good sense of balance, and deft hands. Agility is used for a number of physical skills, such as Coordination, and it is key in ranged combat.

BRAWN

A character's Brawn represents a blend of brute power, strength, and overall toughness, as well as the ability to apply those attributes as needed. Characters with a high Brawn are physically fit and hardy, rarely get sick, and have strong constitutions. Brawn is used for a number of physical skills, such as Athletics and Melee. Brawn is also used to determine your character's starting wound threshold.

WHY LIMIT CHARACTERISTICS TO 5?

You may be wondering why we have a soft cap on characteristics that keeps them limited to a maximum rating of 5. After all, shouldn't a huge creature such as a dragon have a higher Brawn, or a sentient AI supercomputer have a higher Intellect?

One reason is that characteristics directly influence the size of the dice pool. The higher the characteristic rating, the more dice you roll. So, we try to keep characteristics maxed out at 5 to limit the overall number of dice in the pool and keep the physical act of rolling them from being too awkward.

The other reason has to do with probability of success. A pool with a mix of five Ability  and Proficiency  dice has a very good chance of generating success on most checks you'll encounter in the game, and the probability only increases the more positive dice you add. Since most difficulties in this game are set values, setting a soft cap for characteristics keeps checks from becoming a guaranteed success—which can get boring or terrifying for you, depending on whether your character or your character's adversaries are the ones with the oversized dice pools!

When dealing with creatures that feel like they should break the mold (like the dragon or artificial intelligence mentioned earlier), the important thing is to remember that there are many ways to model inhuman strength, speed, intelligence, and the like without increasing the creature's characteristics. We go into these details more on page 202, where we talk about how to build adversaries.

CUNNING

Cunning reflects how crafty, devious, clever, and creative your character can be. Characters with a high Cunning are savvy, quickly pick up on vital social and environmental clues, and can more readily come up with short-term plans and tactics. Cunning is used for a number of mental skills, including Deception, Perception, and Survival.

INTELLECT

The Intellect characteristic measures your character's intelligence, education, mental acuity, and ability to reason and rationalize. Characters with a high Intellect can extrapolate and interpolate data, can recall details and draw from previous experience, and can think of long-term strategies and envision the ramifications of present actions. Intellect is used for a number of mental skills, including Knowledge, Medicine, Mechanics, and Computers (if these are skills included in your setting).

PRESENCE

A character's Presence characteristic represents their moxie, charisma, confidence, and force of personality. Characters with a high Presence make natural leaders, draw attention when they enter a room, can easily strike up a conversation with nearly anyone, and are quick to adapt to social situations. Presence is the key characteristic for interpersonal skills such as Charm and Leadership.

WILLPOWER

The Willpower characteristic reflects your character's discipline, self-control, mental fortitude, and faith. Characters with a high Willpower can withstand stress and fatigue, remain composed during chaotic situations, and exert influence over the weaker willed. Willpower is used for skills such as Coercion and Vigilance. Willpower is also used to determine your character's starting strain threshold.

CHARACTERISTICS IN PLAY

Generally, most characters focus on some characteristics over others, which helps define who they are. Characteristics also influence skills, a wide variety of character abilities, and some derived statistics. For example, in addition to being used for Athletics and Melee skill checks, Brawn determines a character's starting wound threshold and forms the basis of a character's soak value.

As we mentioned before, characteristics are one of the four factors that affect the composition of a dice pool for a check (the other factors being skill training, task difficulty, and equipment and other incidental circumstances).

SKILLS AND TRAINING

While characteristics create the foundation of your character's abilities, skills and specialized training really make your player character (PC) stand out from the crowd. Skills represent your character's training and experience in performing specific tasks and actions. Although characters can attempt almost anything even without the proper training or skill, they are far more likely to succeed if they have at least a rank or two in the relevant skill.

Skills, the second factor influencing a dice pool, represent specific training, hands-on experience, and

focused knowledge in a certain area. Each skill is linked to a specific characteristic, which is the default ability a character uses when performing a task with that skill. For example, the Athletics skill is linked to Brawn, Deception relies on Cunning, and Knowledge uses Intellect. Proper skill training can compensate for a character's low characteristic rating. However, the most proficient characters have both the proper training and a strong linked characteristic.

For a more in-depth look at skills and their applications, see **Chapter 3: Skills**, on page 52.

DIFFICULTY

The third factor in composing a dice pool (in addition to the relevant characteristic and related skill) focuses on the difficulty of the task being attempted. The characteristic and skill ranks add positive dice to the dice pool. Difficulty adds negative dice, making success less likely. In addition to dice that represent the task's inherent difficulty, other dice are added to reflect further complications based on the environment or specific situation.

While you determine the characteristic and related skill based on the character attempting the task, your GM sets the difficulty of all checks. There are six basic difficulty levels, ranging from Simple (level 0) to Formidable (level 5). Some modifiers and situations may warrant checks higher than the fifth level, Formidable, subject to your GM's discretion (see the **Impossible Tasks** sidebar, on page 18, for information on an optional additional difficulty level).

In addition to providing a general classification that describes a task's inherent challenge, the difficulty level also tells you how many purple Difficulty dice  you should add to your dice pool. We refer to a task attempted against a set difficulty level as a standard check.

DEFINING TASK DIFFICULTY

When used in a check to represent the challenge posed by a task, the difficulty level is indicated with one of the following labels: Simple, Easy, Average, Hard, Daunting, or Formidable. This label is followed in parentheses by the number of Difficulty dice  to be added to the dice pool. For example, you might face an **Easy** ()

Perception check or a **Hard** () **Medicine check**. We've provided some more extensive explanations of each difficulty level in this section.

We've also included the rough chance of success for each difficulty. To calculate this, we're assuming a starting character with a characteristic of 3 and one rank in the relevant skill, which adds two Ability dice  and one Proficiency die  to the pool. This represents a newly created character whose player has invested enough experience in a certain skill and characteristic to be reasonably confident of success. This is our focused character—a character focused on accomplishing this kind of task. We've also provided a starting character with a characteristic of 2 and no ranks in the skill; this is our general character—a character with no particular skill at accomplishing the task.

SIMPLE TASKS (—)

A Simple task represents something so basic and routine that the outcome is rarely in doubt. We assume that your character succeeds at most of the Simple tasks they attempt (our focused character succeeds on a Simple check more than 90 percent of the time, and even the general character succeeds 75 percent of the time). Generally, your character isn't required to make a check if the task is so simple that your character is guaranteed to succeed. However, sometimes there is a slight chance of failure (even a check with no difficulty dice can fail if you don't roll any Success  results), or sometimes there are no consequences for failure, but you need to know the magnitude of your character's success. In these cases, your GM may require you to make a Simple check.



A Simple task adds no Difficulty dice to the skill check's dice pool.

EASY TASKS [◆]

An Easy task poses little challenge to most characters, but something could still go wrong, and failure remains possible. We assume that a character with the proper training and resources for a situation can expect to succeed at most of the Easy tasks they attempt (a focused character succeeds on an Easy check almost 80 percent of the time, and even a general character should succeed about 60 percent of the time). Often, the magnitude or potential side effects are more uncertain than the success itself.

An Easy task adds one Difficulty die (◆) to the skill check's dice pool.

AVERAGE TASKS [◆◆]

An Average task represents a routine action for which success is common enough to be expected, but failure is not surprising. We assume a character with the proper training, resources, and approach to the situation should expect to succeed at Average tasks more often than they fail (our focused character succeeds on an Average check

about two thirds of the time, but our general character succeeds slightly less than half the time).

An Average task adds two Difficulty dice (◆◆) to the skill check's dice pool.

HARD TASKS [◆◆◆]

Characters find Hard tasks much more challenging than Average tasks. Success is certainly feasible, but failure is far from surprising. A typical character with the proper training, resources, and tools for the situation should still expect fail a Hard check almost as often as they succeed (our focused character succeeds at Hard tasks just over half of the time, and our general character only succeeds about a third of the time).

Hard tasks are challenging enough that you that before attempting them, you should consider improving your character's chances by equipping them with specific tools, purchasing specific talents, or purchasing additional ranks in the appropriate skill. You could also spend a Story Point to upgrade the check and increase your character's chances.

A Hard task adds three Difficulty dice (◆◆◆) to the skill check's dice pool.

TABLE I.1–3: DIFFICULTY LEVELS

DIFFICULTY LEVEL	DICE	EXAMPLE
Simple	–	Routine, with the outcome rarely in question. Usually not rolled unless the GM wishes to know the magnitude of success or to add Setback dice ■ to indicate the possibility of complications.
Easy	◆	Picking a primitive lock, tending to minor cuts and bruises, finding food and shelter on a lush planet, shooting a target at short range, convincing a close friend to help you with a difficult task.
Average	◆◆	Picking a typical lock, stitching up a small wound, finding food and shelter on a temperate planet, shooting a target at medium range, trying to punch an opponent while within arm's reach, convincing an acquaintance to help you with a difficult task.
Hard	◆◆◆	Picking a complicated lock, setting broken bones or suturing large wounds, finding food and shelter on a rugged planet, shooting a target at long range, convincing a stranger to help you with a difficult task.
Daunting	◆◆◆◆	Picking an exceptionally sophisticated lock, performing surgery or grafting implants, finding food and shelter on a barren desert planet, shooting a target at extreme range, convincing someone who hates you to help you with a difficult task.
Formidable	◆◆◆◆◆	Picking a lock with no comprehensible mechanism, creating a genetic template to clone a new body, finding food and shelter on a planet without breathable atmosphere, convincing your lifelong nemesis to help you with a difficult task.

DAUNTING TASKS (◆◆◆◆)

A Daunting task taxes a character, pushing them to their limits. Success may be difficult to achieve, but it's certainly possible. We expect that a typical character with the proper training, resources, and tools for the situation likely fails more often than they succeed at Daunting tasks (our focused character succeeds on Daunting checks about 45 percent of the time, while our general character succeeds only a quarter of the time). The typical character also runs a significant risk of generating lots of Threat ☁ even if they succeed.

A Daunting task adds four Difficulty dice (◆◆◆◆) to the skill check's dice pool.

FORMIDABLE TASKS (◆◆◆◆◆)

Formidable tasks seem nigh impossible, and if you don't take them seriously, your character may find them insurmountable. However, with proper planning, a well-trained and well-equipped character has a chance at success. Typical characters often fail at Formidable tasks (our focused character succeeds only one third of the time, and our general character has a less than 20 percent chance of succeeding). Even highly trained characters fail Formidable tasks more often than they succeed. If you need to make a Formidable check, you should make sure your character has all the advantages (in the form of proper gear, aid from others, and maybe Story Points) that they can find.

A Formidable task adds five Difficulty dice (◆◆◆◆◆) to the skill check's dice pool.

IMPOSSIBLE TASKS

Situations exist with impossibly low chances of success. In almost all cases, your GM simply states that any such check automatically fails without your needing to assemble and roll a dice pool.

However, your GM may decide to allow your player character (PC) to attempt a check for which success is extremely improbable: for throwing a grenade in hopes that it puts out a fire, scaling a perfectly smooth wall, or trying to tame a mother bear when you find yourself between her and her cubs, for instance. If you're the GM, you should only allow a PC to attempt an Impossible task during critical moments in a story's arc or in life-or-death situations.

If you want to attempt an Impossible task, you must spend one Story Point just to attempt the check. Your character gains no benefits for doing so, beyond being able to attempt the task in the first place (and you cannot spend any additional Story Points on the check). Once you've done so, an Impossible task adds five Difficulty dice (◆◆◆◆◆) to the pool, the same as a Formidable task.

BUILDING A BASIC DICE POOL

Now that we've discussed the three primary building blocks of a skill check's dice pool, let's go over how you actually assemble the dice pool.

When your character wants to attempt some sort of action that might have a chance of failure, you make a skill check. The skill check uses the character's appropriate skill: Athletics for breaking down doors, Knowledge for recalling facts, or Charm for convincing a guard to let the character enter a restricted facility, for example. Each skill also has a linked characteristic: Brawn for Athletics, Intellect for Knowledge, and Presence for Charm, for instance. To make a skill check, you assemble a dice pool.

There are two sides to every basic dice pool: the side to which you, the player, contribute (in the form of Ability dice  and Proficiency dice ) and the side to which your GM contributes (in the form of Difficulty dice , Challenge dice , Boost dice , and Setback dice ). Additional factors may modify the number and type of dice for a check, but note that the GM sets the difficulty level of the task once, prior to the roll. After creating the base dice pool, either side may have the opportunity to upgrade dice.

APPLYING SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS

A character's ranks in a skill and ranks in the characteristic linked to the skill are equally important in building a dice pool. When your character attempts a task, you and your GM figure out what skill is most appropriate for your character to use to accomplish the task. Note that since skills are linked to characteristics, once you figure out what skill to use, you'll know what characteristic to use. For example, if your character is attempting to bypass a security terminal by cutting some wires, the skill check would use the Skulduggery skill, which is linked to the Cunning characteristic. The ratings for these two attributes determine the number of Ability dice  and Proficiency dice  that you add to the dice pool.

Once you know the proper skill and characteristic, you can start building your dice pool. To add dice to the pool, you compare your character's ranks in the skill to the linked characteristic's rating.

The higher of the two values determines how many Ability dice are added to the skill check's dice pool. Then, you upgrade a number of those Ability dice equal to the lower of the two values. (**Upgrading** means you remove the Ability die  from the pool and replace it with a Proficiency die .) If your character is unskilled (possesses no ranks) in the necessary skill, then the lower value is automatically zero, and your character

does not upgrade any dice. (This also applies if the character has a zero in the corresponding characteristic; however, in practice, it's almost impossible for a character to have a zero in a characteristic.)

EXAMPLE 1: KENDRA'S CHECK

Kendra is trying to climb down a rocky cliff to escape from a vicious grizzly bear. This check uses Kendra's Athletics skill and Brawn characteristic. Kendra has Athletics 2 and Brawn 3. Her Brawn is higher, so the player begins by adding three Ability dice (  ) to the pool. Kendra's Athletics skill is lower, so the player upgrades that many dice (two) to Proficiency dice ( ). To attempt the climb, Kendra starts out with three dice in her pool:    (one Ability die and two Proficiency dice).

EXAMPLE 2: KATIE'S CHECK

Later, Katie must attempt to climb down the same cliff, following Kendra's path. Katie spends more time at the gym training, and she has an Athletics skill of 3 because of it. However, her Brawn is only 2. Katie's Athletics skill is higher, so the player begins by adding three Ability dice (  ) to the pool. Katie's Brawn rating is lower, so the player upgrades that many dice (two) into Proficiency dice ( ). To attempt this action, Katie starts out with three dice in her pool:    (one Ability die and two Proficiency dice).

You may have noticed that both Kendra and Katie have the same size and type of dice pool, even though their Brawn ratings and ranks in the Athletics skill are different. Our system allows a character to compensate for a lack of innate ability by improving their skills, and vice versa.

EXAMPLE 3: REX'S CHECK

Finally, Rex, the wildlife researcher who got the three characters into this mess, tries to climb down the cliff and escape the grizzly bear as well. Rex has Brawn 2, but no ranks in the Athletics skill. His Brawn is higher, so the player begins by adding two Ability dice ( ) to the pool. Since he has no ranks in Athletics, that value is considered to be zero, and no Ability dice are upgraded into Proficiency dice. To avoid being eaten by bears, Rex starts out with only two dice in his dice pool:   (two Ability dice).

APPLYING TASK DIFFICULTY

After determining which skill and related characteristic your character uses to attempt a task, your GM then chooses the level of difficulty for the task by consulting **Table I.1–3: Difficulty Levels**, on page 18. The difficulty level of the task determines the number of Difficulty dice you must add to the pool. For example, an **Average** (◆◆) skill check means you add two Difficulty dice to the dice pool.

In some cases, your GM may upgrade one or more of these Difficulty dice by removing them from the dice pool and replacing them with an equal number of Challenge dice (◆). Difficulty dice are usually upgraded into Challenge dice when your character faces skilled opposition or particularly challenging circumstances, or when your GM invests a Story Point to make a check more challenging.

After your GM sets the difficulty level for the task, you add the corresponding number of Difficulty dice to the task's dice pool. If no other factors influence the outcome of the attempt, the basic dice pool is now complete, and you can roll it to determine success or failure, as well as any potential side effects.

MODIFYING A DICE POOL

It's entirely possible that if nothing else could affect the outcome of the check, the dice pool contains just the Ability dice and Proficiency dice from your character's skill and characteristic, matched against the Difficulty dice determined by your GM. However, any number of other factors can influence your check. Maybe your character is trying to track a foe through a howling sandstorm, or maybe bright lights in a room silhouette the villain, giving your character a clear shot. If an action is important enough to assemble and roll a dice pool, there's a good chance other factors are involved.

These other factors can affect or modify the dice pool in a number of ways. The most common ways are by adding dice, upgrading/downgrading dice, and removing dice. These modifications may be triggered by you or your GM, or they may simply make sense given the environment and situation. Here are a few examples of these factors: obstructing terrain, poor lighting, tactical advantages, time constraints, superior equipment, special talents, unlocked career abilities, investment of Story Points, and Critical Injuries. The following sections describe these modifications in more detail.

It's also important to note that when modifying a dice pool, players perform the modifications in a specific order. First, players assemble the basic pool, and

INCREASE, UPGRADE, OR ADD?

If you're the GM, there may be times when you're not sure whether you should increase the difficulty of a check, add negative dice, or upgrade the existing negative dice.

First, you should set the difficulty based on the task itself, not on the circumstances surrounding that specific attempt at the task. In general, once set, the difficulty level remains the same, regardless of who, what, when, or why that particular task is attempted.

Upgrading (or downgrading) dice is not usually necessary unless a specific rule or ability calls for it. These situations are defined by the individual abilities and are generally not applied arbitrarily by the GM.

There may be some unique or noteworthy circumstances surrounding the task. To represent these circumstances, you may decide to add Boost or Setback dice. Added dice should reflect the elements that make this attempt distinct or special. As a general rule, if the GM feels that a skill check has distinct factors that could modify the outcome, they should consider using Boost and Setback dice.

then they add additional dice. Next, they upgrade dice. Then they downgrade dice. Finally, they remove dice.

ADDING DICE

One way to modify the basic dice pool is to add dice to reflect environmental conditions or various advantages and disadvantages. Generally, we do this by adding Boost and Setback dice.

As a general rule, your GM adds one Boost die (■) to the dice pool for each bonus that could help your character succeed, and one Setback die (■) for each impediment or disadvantage that hurts your character's chances.

A single Boost die (■) represents the benefits provided by such things as useful gear, ample time to prepare, superior position, or the element of surprise. Your GM may add multiple Boost dice if your character benefits from more than one of these advantages.

Likewise, a single Setback die (■) reflects the impact of detrimental or obstructing effects like poor lighting, inferior supplies, a harsh environment, or outside distractions. If your character is unlucky enough to suffer from more than one of these setbacks, your GM may add multiple Setback dice to the pool.

It's important to note that while these dice are essentially mirror opposites in their use, Boost dice and Setback dice do not cancel each other out. If the situation warrants the addition of two Boost dice and one Setback die, you add all three dice (■ ■ ■) to the dice pool.

All players can use Boost dice and Setback dice to help reinforce important elements of the story. You should describe your character's actions in detail, pointing out both advantages and disadvantages that may influence a particular action. As you do, your GM should recognize when a particular detail offers a noticeable advantage and add a Boost die ■. After all, part of the idea is to reward good storytelling on everyone's part.

Of course, sometimes the description you or your GM comes up with makes it more appropriate to add a Setback die ■ to the pool. When that happens, embrace it! If your GM is doing their job right, they're already looking for places where it makes sense to add Setback dice to your checks. So all you're doing is helping your GM make the ■ addition more narratively appropriate.

Some equipment may add Boost dice ■ to a pool to reflect superior craftsmanship, while your character's talents may allow you to add Boost dice ■ to a pool to reflect special training or aptitudes that apply to the situation. Maneuvers like aiming may also allow you to add Boost dice ■ to a pool. Conversely, some effects may specifically impose Setback dice ■, such as the defined effects of a Critical Injury or a penalty for using inferior tools for a delicate task.

While you may (and should!) offer up suggestions for adding Boost and Setback dice to your checks, your GM is the final arbiter, deciding which and how many dice to add to the pool. Your GM bases what dice to add on some helpful guidelines we've provided. The GM should always use common sense, taking into account the way the scene and action have been described. See the **Positive Dice and Negative Dice** sidebar, on page 9, for examples of the types of situations that may warrant the addition of Boost or Setback dice.

UPGRADING AND DOWNGRADING DICE

Game effects can "improve" dice, basically by letting you remove a die with a lower probability of generating results from your pool and replacing it with a die that has a higher probability for results. Likewise, game effects can "degrade" a die, removing a die with a high probability of generating results and replacing it with a die with a lower probability for results. (Note, we said "results," not "success" or "failure." Both of these effects can apply to positive and negative dice.)

We call improving a die upgrading, while weakening a die is called downgrading. Beyond the upgrading based on your character's ranks in a skill or characteristic (see **Applying Skills and Characteristics**, page 19), upgrading and downgrading dice most often occurs when you or your GM spends a Story Point to increase the chances of a skill check succeeding or failing. Your character may also have certain talents or other special abilities that allow you to upgrade or downgrade dice.



UPGRADING AND DOWNGRADING ABILITY AND DIFFICULTY

Certain rules may call for you to upgrade or downgrade the ability or difficulty of a dice pool. For example, the Dodge talent allows you to upgrade the difficulty of a combat check that targets your character by a certain value. Upgrading or downgrading the ability of a pool refers to upgrading Ability dice  into Proficiency dice  or downgrading Proficiency dice  into Ability dice . Likewise, upgrading or downgrading the difficulty of a pool refers to upgrading Difficulty dice  into Challenge dice  or downgrading Challenge dice  into Difficulty dice .

UPGRADING DICE

Upgrading dice is a mechanic specific to Ability dice and Difficulty dice, and these are the only two types of dice that can be upgraded. When you upgrade an Ability die , you remove the die and replace it with a Proficiency die . When you upgrade a Difficulty die , you remove the die and replace it with a Challenge die .

When a special talent or effect calls for one or more dice to be upgraded, first you need to determine how many dice are to be upgraded. Once you determine this, you remove that number of Ability dice  or Difficulty dice  from the pool and replace those dice with an equal number of either Proficiency dice  or Challenge dice . When an effect requires you to upgrade dice, the rules always state whether to replace Ability dice  or Difficulty dice .

UPGRADING MORE DICE THAN AVAILABLE

Sometimes you may need to upgrade Ability dice into Proficiency dice but you have no more Ability dice (the pool has nothing but Proficiency dice in it). In this case, you perform the following steps. First, you determine how many upgrades you still need to perform. Then, using one upgrade, you add one additional Ability die  to the pool. If any upgrade opportunities remain, you then upgrade the newly added Ability die  into a Proficiency die . You then repeat this process until you've performed all of the upgrades you need to perform.

If you need to upgrade Difficulty dice into Challenge dice but you have no more Difficulty dice (the pool has nothing but Challenge dice in it), you're going to follow the same process. First, you add one additional Difficulty die ; then, if any more upgrades remain, you replace the Difficulty die  with a Challenge die , and so on.

DOWNGRADING DICE

Downgrading dice is also a specific mechanic, and it applies only to Proficiency dice and Challenge dice. When you downgrade a Proficiency die , you remove the die and replace it with an Ability die . When you downgrade a Challenge die , you remove the die and replace it with a Difficulty die .

Special talents or effects may call for one or more dice to be downgraded. If you have to perform multiple downgrades, you first determine how many dice you need to downgrade. Once you determine this, you remove that number of Proficiency dice  or Challenge dice  from the pool and replace them with an equal number of either Ability dice  or Difficulty dice . When an effect requires you to downgrade dice, the rules always state whether Proficiency dice  or Challenge dice  are to be downgraded.

DOWNGRADING MORE DICE THAN AVAILABLE

There may be situations where you need to downgrade more Proficiency dice  into Ability dice  or Challenge dice  into Difficulty dice  than are available. If, as you are downgrading dice, there are no more Proficiency dice  or Challenge dice  left to downgrade, any further downgrades are ignored.

This takes a different approach from upgrading, where you continue adding more dice if there are no more Difficulty dice  or Ability dice  left. We did this on purpose; if downgrading dice let you remove Ability dice  or Difficulty dice , it would overlap with the rules for adding and removing dice. We go into those rules later.

UPGRADES AND DOWNGRADES IN THE SAME POOL

Sometimes you end up with various talents or abilities that mean you need to apply both upgrades and downgrades to the same dice pool. When this occurs, you apply all upgrades first. Then, you apply any

UPGRADE VERSUS INCREASE

Upgrading Difficulty dice  in a dice pool is different than increasing a skill check's difficulty. Increasing or decreasing difficulty is simply a measure of how many Difficulty dice  are added to the initial dice pool; we cover this in more detail on page 16. Upgrading Difficulty dice  into Challenge dice  is generally triggered by a special ability or the investment of Story Points by one of the participants.

downgrades second. This is important, since upgrading dice could add more dice to the overall pool, and the higher number of dice would remain the same after you apply any downgrades.

REMOVING DICE

Just like some effects add Boost dice  or Setback dice  to a pool, some effects remove dice from the pool before you even roll them. Most often, this is a result of talents that allow the removal of Setback dice  (for instance, the Knack for It talent on page 73). However,

some talents or other effects may remove  from your skill checks as well; these are just a bit less common.

The individual talent or effect describes under what circumstances you remove the dice, as well as the number and type of dice you remove. If an ability calls for the removal of more dice of a type than there are in the dice pool, all of the dice of that type in the pool are removed, and any additional removals are ignored.

Remove dice after all other dice have been added and all upgrades and downgrades have been applied.

INTERPRETING THE POOL

After you roll a dice pool, you and your GM evaluate the results to resolve the outcomes. The first outcome to resolve is the success or failure of the skill check. Then, you both determine if any significant side effects—good, bad, or both—are triggered. After all, one of the great things about our system is that when you make a check, just about anything can happen!

SUCCESSSES AND FAILURES

When you roll a skill check, if the results include both Success symbols  and Failure symbols , count up the total number of each type of symbol and then compare those two numbers. Each Failure symbol  cancels one Success symbol . After you make all the needed cancellations due to Failure symbols , a pool of one or more Success symbols  or one or more Failure symbols  remains, or those symbols evenly cancel out.

During this step, it's important to note that a Triumph symbol  contributes one Success  to the pool, in addition to any special effects it may trigger. Likewise, a Despair symbol  contributes one Failure  to the pool, in addition to its special effects.

If all Successes  and Failures  in the pool are canceled out, or if any net Failures  remain, the skill check fails. If at least one Success  remains, the skill check succeeds. **Remember, a dice pool must have at least one Success symbol  remaining for a skill check to succeed.**

ADVANTAGE AND THREAT

It's also likely for the results of your skill check to include some Advantage symbols , Threat symbols , or both. If this is the case, you add up the total number of Threat symbols  and compare that number to the total number of Advantage symbols . Each Threat symbol  cancels

one Advantage symbol . After all Threat symbols  have canceled Advantage symbols , a pool of one or more Advantage symbols  or one or more Threat symbols  remains, or those symbols evenly cancel out.

Having one or more net Advantage symbols  indicates a positive side effect or benefit. Having one or more net Threat symbols  indicates a negative side effect or complication. If all the Advantage  and Threat  symbols cancel each other out, then there are no additional effects in your challenge. The positive and negative side effects can occur regardless of whether the check succeeds or fails.

You can use Advantage  and Threat  to activate a wide variety of side effects. Generally, you (the player rolling the skill check) choose how to spend Advantage . Some of the ways you could spend Advantage  include triggering a weapon's special quality, performing an additional maneuver, or recovering some strain. Various weapons, talents, and equipment may have special ways to spend Advantage .

Generally, your GM chooses how to spend Threat  to impose some sort of complication. The more Threat  the GM spends, the more severe the complication. Some of these complications can include suffering strain, providing an opportunity to an opponent, falling prone, being subjected to environmental effects, or having a task take longer to complete than expected. Various talents, environments, and opponents may have special ways to spend Threat .

For more about using Advantage and suffering from Threat, see pages 102, 103, and 121.

ROUNDING UP

Some rules may ask you to calculate a fraction of a result. In these cases, always round up to the next whole number.

TRIUMPH AND DESPAIR

We've mentioned these two symbols before, but let's talk about them in more detail here. Triumph ☉ and Despair ☹ have more powerful effects on the game and work slightly differently than the other symbols. Unlike Success and Failure (★ and ✖) or Advantage and Threat (▲ and ◉), Triumph and Despair (☉ and ☹) do not completely cancel each other out. Instead, each indicates an especially positive or unfortunately dire side effect for your character's check.

Remember that it's possible for a skill check to result in both ◉ and ☹ symbols.

In this case, you should interpret both results separately. As with Threat, it's possible for a skill check to succeed but still impose

a Despair effect, or fail but still trigger a Triumph effect. For more about the specific applications of Triumph and Despair, see pages 102, 103, and 121.

TRIUMPH ☉

A Triumph symbol ☉ has two effects. First, each Triumph symbol ☉ counts as one Success symbol ★. Second, a Triumph result indicates an unexpected boon or significantly beneficial effect related to the check your character just made. Many weapons and talents have side effects that can be triggered using a Triumph result. Otherwise, the scenario or your GM may present further options for using Triumph.

It's important to keep in mind that while a Triumph symbol ☉ does add a Success symbol ★ to the pool, the presence of one or more Triumph symbols ☉ does not automatically mean that the check succeeded.

You can think of Triumph as an enhanced, more powerful version of Advantage. For example, a single Triumph symbol ☉ can trigger any weapon's special quality or inflict a Critical Injury, while without a Triumph, these effects require a certain number of Advantage symbols ▲. Also, while Advantage may allow your character to heal strain, in the right situation, a Triumph ☉ may allow them to heal a wound.

DESPAIR ☹

A Despair symbol ☹ also has two effects. First, each Despair symbol ☹ counts as one Failure symbol ✖. Second, a Despair result indicates an unfortunate consequence, significant complication, or dire effect related to the check your character just made. The opponent's abilities, the environment, or the encounter description may offer different options for using Despair. Otherwise, your GM adjudicates the results of Despair symbols ☹ based on the situation.

It's important to keep in mind that while a Despair symbol ☹ does add a Failure symbol ✖ to the pool, the presence of one or more Despair symbols ☹ does not automatically mean the skill check has failed.



You can think of Despair as an upgraded, more potent form of Threat. For example, a single Despair symbol  may trigger effects that would normally require several Threat symbols . Despair may be significant enough to inflict wounds instead of strain, cause an important piece of equipment to break, make a weapon jam or run out of ammo, or, when coupled with failure, make a grenade explode in the user's hand.

UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES

With the opportunity for success or failure, as well as the myriad side effects made possible through one or more Advantage, Threat, Triumph, or Despair symbols, no two skill checks are the same. Whenever you make a skill check, you have dozens—if not hundreds—of possible outcomes. Your character may achieve a

high-magnitude success with no other complications, a low-magnitude success with Advantage, or a moderate success with Advantage that is tempered with Despair. Likewise, a failed check may have a silver lining if accompanied by Advantage or Triumph, or it may create a truly dire situation when accompanied by both Threat and Despair.

The sheer number of possibilities provides opportunities to narrate truly memorable action sequences and scenes. Nearly anything can happen in the heat of the moment; even a single rocket fired at a futuristic land tank might hit some critical component that results in its destruction. We encourage you to take these opportunities to think about how the symbols can help move the story along and add details and special effects that create action-packed sessions.

OTHER TYPES OF CHECKS

As you play, you'll be using the standard skill check and basic dice pool to resolve the vast majority of tasks your character encounters in a game session. However, there are some situations you'll need other types of checks to resolve. Are the characters involved in a high-stakes negotiation, competing with multiple factions for their goal? Or are they racing to escape the clutches of enemy agents hot on their trail? In addition to the standard skill check, GENESYS uses opposed checks, competitive checks, and assisted checks.

You use opposed checks when the success or failure of a task is strongly influenced by an opponent's skill. You use competitive checks to determine which character performs better when two or more characters are attempting the same task. Assisted checks represent simple variations of other checks, but with two or more characters working together.

OPPOSED CHECKS

An opposed check occurs when someone tries to prevent your character from succeeding, or when your character tries to overcome or get past another character. For example, if your character lies to someone, your character's Deception check may be opposed by the opponent's Vigilance.

You should use an opposed check when a task involves directly opposing the task that another character performs, or when a task involves trying to go unnoticed, undetected, or undiscovered by someone else. This means you most often use an opposed check when your

character tries to influence someone socially (whether that's by lying, charming, or intimidating), when your character tries to avoid notice (perhaps trying to sneak past someone or pick someone's pocket), or in similar situations. Specifically, you use an opposed check when the action your character wants to perform is opposed by a single individual.

Like standard checks, opposed checks add  and potentially  to the check's dice pool. However, instead of being determined by your GM, the difficulty is determined by the skills and characteristics of the opposing character.

To build the dice pool, you start out following the same procedures as those for building a regular dice pool. You add  based on your character's relevant skill or characteristic, then upgrade some  into  based on the other value. You then look at the opposing character, and you and the GM determine what skill that character would use to oppose the task your character is trying to perform. Look at the skill and linked characteristic, then determine which one has the higher value. Add an number of  equal to the higher value to the pool, then take the lower value and upgrade a number of  to  equal to that value (see **Upgrading Dice** on page 22).

In essence, you form the difficulty of the pool in the same way that you would form the ability of a pool, but replacing  with , and  with .

We write out an opposed check as an **opposed Skill Name versus Skill Name check**. The first skill is the skill your character uses, and the second skill is the skill being used to oppose the check.

UNSKILLED ASSISTANCE

If the assisting party does not have a higher characteristic or skill rating, so that using either rating would provide no benefit to the other character, your GM may add  to the dice pool (representing the fact that the additional assistance is still providing some benefit).

ASSISTANCE RESTRICTIONS

The GM can require that certain conditions be met in order for player characters or other parties to offer assistance. To assist in tending to an injury, the assisting character might need to be next to the patient, or to assist with translating an ancient book, the assisting character might need to have access to the book.

OTHER KEY ELEMENTS

Even when things are at their worst, your characters are capable of rising above adversity to face challenges head on. Whether they are shrugging off wounds that would kill lesser folk, manifesting strange magical or psychic powers, or calling on their experiences to do things “regular” people simply couldn’t, your character and the characters of your fellow players are a breed apart. This section describes a number of key elements that help define your character and set them apart from everyone else. These elements include character talents, Story Points, experience and development, and derived attributes such as wound and strain thresholds.

TALENTS

Whereas skills represent what your character knows, disciplines they have practiced, or experience they have applied in a particular area, talents exemplify a much broader class of special ability. Talents represent various tricks, techniques, and knacks that your character has picked up over the course of a career or reflect their sheer determination to get things done. Each talent represents a distinct special ability that provides the PC with an edge in certain situations. Keeping a rickety old airship together with a combination of determination and baling wire, inspiring allies in the face of a hurricane, and knowing just where to hit a rampaging bull in order to take it down are examples of talents at work.

Talents are divided into several categories and are either active or passive. Active talents typically require you to state that your character chooses to use them.

Generally, only one character can provide assistance at a time. However, your GM may decide that certain situations can accommodate more people. In this case, only one assisting character can offer their characteristic or skill rating, and all other participating characters contribute  to the check.

ASSISTANCE AND TIMING

During combat or structured encounters, when Initiative and the order in which characters act is more important, assistance can be accomplished by performing the assist maneuver. The assist maneuver allows an engaged ally to benefit from assistance provided by the acting character on the ally’s next skill check. Assistance lasts only until the assisted character’s next activation.

For more on the assist maneuver, see page 98.

Some active talents have a cost or requirement associated with them, such as investing a Story Point, suffering strain, or using the talent as part of an attack action. Other talents are passive, meaning they are always “on” and don’t need to be activated by you. Passive talents either constantly provide their benefit or automatically trigger under certain circumstances.

Some talents belong to a series of related talents. These series may comprise either lower-level talents and their improved versions or identical talents taken multiple times for a cumulative effect. In the former case, an improved version of a talent completely replaces or upgrades the lower-level version. In the latter case, the talent is measured with a series of ranks. The more times your character takes the talent, the more ranks it has and the greater the magnitude of its effects.

STORY POINTS

Your character (and any other player character) is cut from a different cloth than most NPCs who populate the setting. Not only do they have access to skills and special talents to help them succeed, but PCs are also intimately connected to destiny, fate, or whatever you like to call it. Destiny is that special spark that elevates heroes above commoners, imbuing an individual with enough significance in the game’s events to be a player character. Over the course of the PCs’ adventures, fate, fortune, or destiny can intervene on their behalf for good or ill. Destiny might manifest in a positive way and provide a temporary advantage or boost to your

PC's abilities. Or destiny might prove an ill omen and impose additional hardships and complications. In any case, your characters are the heroes of the story, and we want the game to reflect that.

The concept of fate and the player characters' ability to tap into and influence this resource is represented by Story Points. Story Points are resources that can be invested by you and your GM for a variety of different effects. For example, you can use Story Points to upgrade Ability dice  or Difficulty dice , or to trigger certain talents or special abilities.

THE TWO STORY POOLS

In the game, there are two pools of Story Points. You and your fellow players can spend Story Points from the player pool. Your GM can spend Story Points from the Game Master pool.

PREPARING THE STORY POOLS

Each pool can be delineated on the table by drawing a pair of circles on a sheet of paper, or by simply designating two areas of the table as the player pool and the GM pool. At the beginning of the session, you and your group add one Story Point to the player pool for each player. Then, your GM adds one Story Point to the Game Master pool.

TRACKING STORY POINTS

You can use just about any small items to represent Story Points. Some suitable items are gaming tokens, glass beads, coins, and poker chips. You can also buy suitable gaming tokens from the Fantasy Flight Supply line, found at www.FantasyFlightGames.com.

HOW STORY POINTS ARE USED

You, your fellow players, and your GM can all tap into destiny by spending the Story Points in the right pool. It's important to note that you and your fellow players may only spend Story Points in the player pool, and your GM may only spend Story Points in the Game Master pool.

When you or another player spends a Story Point, you remove it from the player pool and add it to the Game Master pool. Likewise, when your GM spends a Story Point, they remove it from the Game Master pool and add it to the player pool.

The point gets moved after you have resolved the action in which you spent the Story Point. This way, players or Game Masters cannot immediately spend a Story Point that has been added to their pool; they have to wait for the next chance to spend a Story Point.

Another limiter on Story Points is that you can only spend one Story Point during a single action (unless an ability specifies otherwise). If your character has multiple ways to spend Story Points during an action, you'll have to think carefully about which of those ways provides the best opportunity to spend that Story Point. Likewise, your GM may only spend one Story Point per action.

In the following section, we explain some of the ways in which Story Points can be used. Unless noted otherwise in an option's description, both the players and the GM have access to that option.

A HELPING HAND

All characters have the opportunity to call on destiny to enhance any skill check they are about to attempt. You may spend one Story Point to upgrade the ability of your character's starting dice pool once. In other words, you may upgrade one  into the superior . Your GM may spend a Story Point in this way to upgrade an NPC's dice pool. Additional information on upgrading dice can be found on page 22.

RAISING THE STAKES

Destiny can also be used to help keep characters out of harm's way. Players can call on fate and destiny to make an opponent's skill check more challenging. You may spend one Story Point to upgrade the difficulty of any NPC's skill check once. This refers to upgrading a  into the more potent . Your GM may spend a Story Point in this way to upgrade difficulty in a PC's dice pool. Additional information on upgrading dice can be found on page 22.

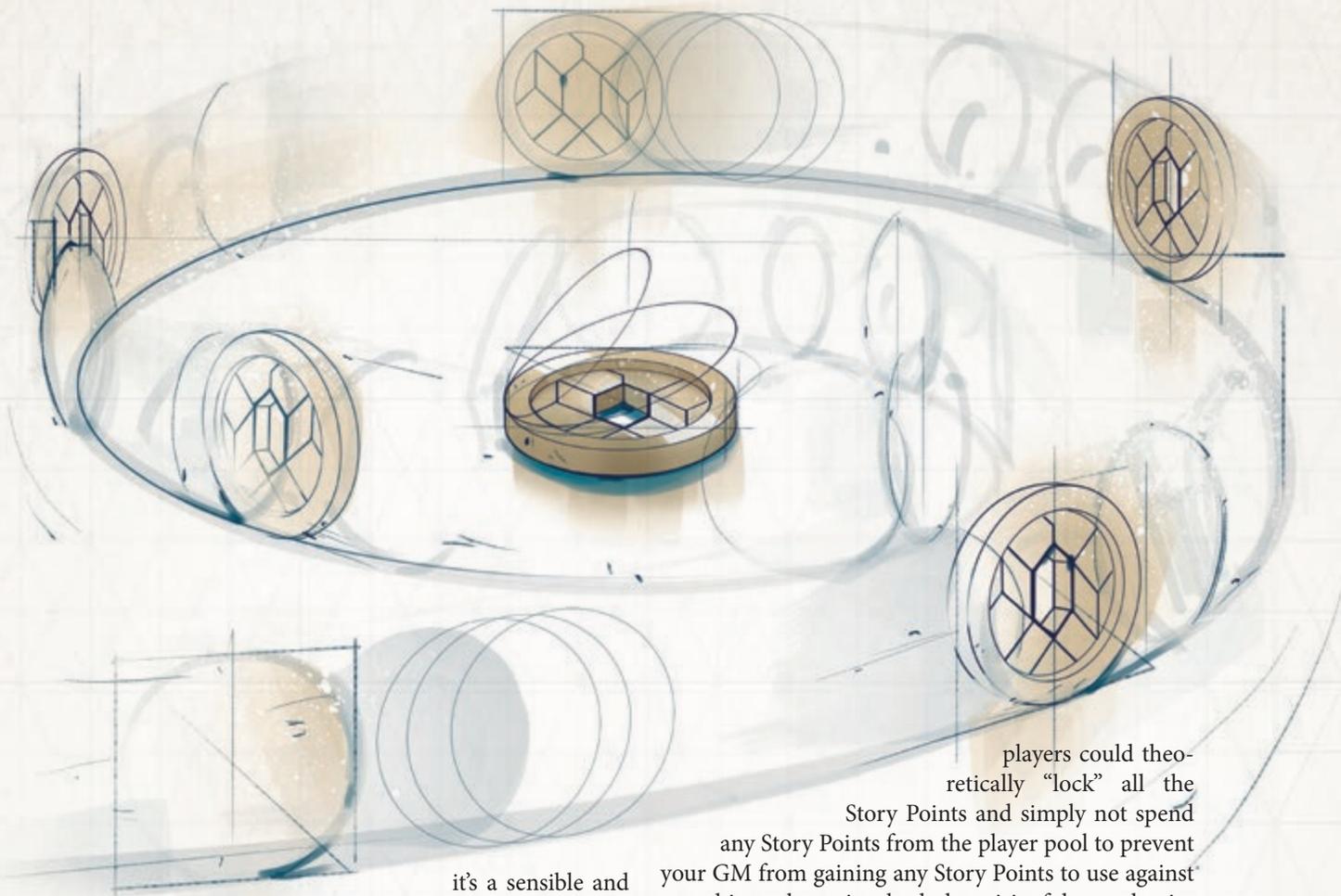
SPECIAL ABILITIES AND TALENTS

Many powerful talents allow your characters to spend Story Points for various effects. See the individual talent descriptions for details, starting on page 72.

LUCK AND DEUS EX MACHINA

You can also use Story Points to introduce "facts" and additional context directly into the narrative. Your GM already does this by managing and directing the story, but this use of Story Points provides you and your fellow players with a means to make contributions as well.

Imagine that your characters (in a science fiction setting) land on a planet they expected to have a breathable atmosphere, only to find that a leak at the gas mining facility has rendered the air toxic. One of the players suggests spending a Story Point, saying "Good thing you remembered to pack those space suits last time we were in dry dock!" While none of you may have specifically mentioned or listed space suits before,



it's a sensible and creative addition to the game. If your GM agrees, the Story Point is spent, and the player's suggestion becomes a true statement—there are space suits handy in the hold of your characters' ship.

Similarly, you may spend a Story Point in this manner to suggest finding a spare first aid kit while quickly scavenging through a medical facility, or to propose introducing a terrain feature that your characters can duck behind for cover.

Using Story Points narratively is a great way to keep all of the players involved and the story moving forward. However, your GM has final say over what is and is not acceptable. You should not abuse this use of Story Points; the more outrageous or unlikely the suggestion, the more likely it is that your GM will curtail Story Point use. Ultimately, narrative use of Story Points allows you and your fellow players to feel empowered as active participants in the game and story by rewarding their creativity and roleplaying. If a requested use of a Story Point would contribute toward this goal, your GM should consider allowing it.

STORY POINT ECONOMY IN GAMEPLAY

We encourage you and your GM to use Story Points regularly, creating an ebb and flow of fate and fortune over the course of a session. While you and your fellow

players could theoretically “lock” all the Story Points and simply not spend any Story Points from the player pool to prevent your GM from gaining any Story Points to use against you, this works against both the spirit of the mechanics and the setting. If your group hoards its Story Points, you may find your GM using other methods of putting pressure on the group, forcing you to reconsider your plan. It's perfectly acceptable for your GM to remind you about using Story Points in play, such as by suggesting the use of Story Points if they are feeling overwhelmed by a tough enemy.

Story Points play an important role in making games in GENESYS seem more exciting and thrilling. When used wisely, Story Points provide tension and excitement by making routine checks more significant, adding an element of drama to the mundane, or helping provide a boost when your characters are overwhelmed.

THE LIMITS OF LUCK

Story Points represent a powerful resource that must be used wisely. Each player (you, your fellow players, or the GM) can invest only one Story Point in any single check. If a player chooses to invest a Story Point to upgrade an  into a , for example, that player cannot also invest a Story Point to trigger one of their character's talents. The GM may also choose to invest one Story Point per skill check. This does introduce the possibility that both player and GM will invest a Story Point in the same skill check, resulting in no net difference in the balance between the two story pools.

The active player (the player or GM forming the dice pool) always has the first chance to use a Story Point. Once that player has decided whether or not to use a Story Point, the other party involved in the check (the targeted player, or the GM in the case of an NPC) has the opportunity to respond and spend a Story Point as well. For example, if the GM spends a Story Point to upgrade an enemy's Ability die  into a Proficiency die  for an attack against a PC, that PC's player has the opportunity to then use a Story Point, either to upgrade one of the pool's  into a , or perhaps to trigger one of the PC's talents.

This order of activation (and the limit of one Story Point per player) is important. First, we don't want people to spend an unlimited number of Story Points, and without the limit of one Story Point per player and not transferring points to the opposing pool until after the situation is resolved, that's exactly what you would have. In addition, forcing the active player to decide whether to spend a Story Point first means that you avoid having the active player change their mind and spend a Story Point after their opponent decides to spend one. In short, these keep the game from bogging down.

EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

As your characters play through their adventures, they learn from their successes—and mistakes—in order to better themselves in preparation for even greater challenges. Experience represents the primary means by which you customize your characters. Each PC starts with a beginning pool of experience points that can be spent during character creation to train skills, improve characteristics, or acquire talents.

During each session of a **GENESYS** game, your player characters receive additional experience, which can also be spent to improve their skills and purchase talents. We talk about that more on page 129. However, our basic guidance is that each character should earn roughly 20 experience points at the end of each session. This allows you to buy an interesting advancement for your character every session or two.

STARTING EXPERIENCE POINTS

Player characters begin with a number of experience points (XP) based on their species or archetype. The experience points used during character creation are the same “currency” as experience points received during play. If you choose to spend fewer experience points than budgeted during character creation, those points carry over into the game, and your PC has more experience points to spend once the adventures begin. More information on spending starting experience points can be found in **Chapter 2: Creating Characters**, on page 32.

IMPROVING CHARACTERISTICS

Raising a characteristic during character creation costs a number of XP equal to ten times the value of the next highest rating. No characteristic can ever be increased

above 5. Characteristics may only be purchased with experience points during character creation, not at any later time. During gameplay, characteristics can only be increased by acquiring specific high-tier talents. For more on raising characteristics, see page 44.

SKILL TRAINING

Each skill has five ranks of training available. A player character may have already acquired a couple of ranks of skill training from their starting career for free. PCs may train additional skills and gain additional ranks during character creation. Regardless of any species or career bonuses, no skill can be raised higher than rank 2 during character creation.

Training a skill costs a number of XP equal to five times the value of the next highest rank. You may purchase ranks in skills for your PC during character creation or later during gameplay.

We should note that non-career skills (skills not listed in your starting career) cost a bit more to advance. In addition to the regular costs for buying a rank of a non-career skill (five times the value of the next highest rank), you must spend an additional 5 XP. See page 40 for more information about careers and career skills.

ACQUIRING TALENTS

Talents can be acquired by spending experience to purchase them. The cost of the talent depends on what tier that talent occupies. A talent costs five times the value of the talent's tier (so a Tier 1 talent costs 5 XP, and a Tier 2 talent costs 10 XP). We have some other prerequisites and rules that govern purchasing talents, so we suggest checking out page 71 for more information.

DERIVED ATTRIBUTES

Some character attributes are based on other choices made during character creation or over the course of a campaign. Some of these attributes may change frequently over the course of play or may be modified by talents, equipment, or various special abilities.

WOUND THRESHOLD

Your character's wound threshold represents how much physical damage they can withstand before they are knocked out. Wounds can be serious and lead to a Critical Injury. They can be treated with the Medicine skill, but it may take time to recover.

Your character's starting wound threshold is based on species or archetype and Brawn rating. After you determine this initial value, increases to Brawn rating after character creation do not increase your character's wound threshold; wound threshold improvements can then be acquired only by purchasing the appropriate talent, such as Toughened.

STRAIN THRESHOLD

Your character's strain threshold represents how much stress they can withstand before becoming stunned, dazed, or otherwise incapacitated. Strain represents psychological or mental damage to a character. Characters can suffer strain more easily than wounds. Strain can even be used as a resource by players to trigger certain character abilities. Thankfully, characters recover from strain more quickly than from wounds.

Your character's starting strain threshold is determined based upon species or archetype and Willpower rating. After you determine this initial value,

increases to Willpower rating after character creation do not increase your character's strain threshold; strain threshold improvements are then acquired only by purchasing appropriate talents, such as Grit.

DEFENSE

Defense determines how difficult your character is to hit in combat situations. Characters have both a ranged defense and a melee defense. A character's default value in both ranged defense and melee defense is zero. If a character's defense value is listed simply as "Defense" and is not specifically defined by separate ranged and melee values, then apply the same value to both ranged and melee defense.

Defense is most commonly gained by wearing armor or by adopting a defensive position in combat, such as taking cover. Some talents may also increase one of a character's defense ratings.

SOAK VALUE

Your character's soak value determines how much incoming damage they can shrug off before taking real harm. Subtract the soak value from any incoming damage to the character. Any damage remaining after subtracting the soak value becomes wounds applied against the character's wound threshold.

A character's default soak value equals their Brawn rating. After determining this initial value, increases to Brawn rating do increase the character's soak value. Additional soak value bonuses are most often gained by wearing armor. Some talents may also increase a character's innate soak value.

CHAPTER 2: CREATING CHARACTERS

Whatever setting or type of roleplaying game you play, you need to make a character to play in it. Creating a character for **GENESYS** takes a few short steps, allowing you to get involved in the action right away. To create a character, you need access to this rule-book, a character sheet (found at the end of this book), and a pencil. You also need access to ten-sided dice (d10) for rolling on certain charts. Finally, a few sheets of notepaper are not necessary but might be helpful.

Character generation uses a point-buy system, meaning you have a budget of experience points you can invest in different aspects of your character. Selecting a character's species or archetype determines the character's starting characteristics and starting experience points. After making that initial choice, you'll invest those experience points to improve starting characteristics, acquire training in key skills, and learn special talents.

CHARACTER CONCEPT

The section that follows provides the rules for creating

a character, both as they exist as a person, and as they interact with the game mechanics. The central core of the idea for your character, however, must come from you. You need to start out with the seed of a concept for a character that fits into the game you're going to play.

At the earliest stages of character creation, you, your fellow players, and your Game Master should have a detailed discussion about the types of characters to create. If your GM has a specific campaign framework in mind, it could require the presence of specific types of skills or even focus on a limited subset of species or archetypes. A campaign that takes place exclusively in a city might have less need for the Survival skill, while one set in a war might focus more on combat skills than on skills related to diplomacy. Sometimes your GM might want to adjust the campaign based on the players' wishes, and you're likely to appreciate the opportunity to tweak your initial character ideas. Information shared at this stage can help you and your Game Master work together to create characters that complement the types of stories envisioned for the campaign.

While some character concepts can be a better fit for a campaign, seldom is a concept truly wrong. Role-playing games often work best when everyone willingly works in a collaborative fashion.

Constructive criticism as well



as meaningful compromises during character creation can lead to a more fulfilling gameplay experience. You and your friends should be open to one another's ideas at this stage. Working together to bring out the most fun and entertaining aspects of different characters can be a great way for you to establish a rapport that lasts throughout a campaign.

GENERATION STEPS

To create a character, follow these six steps. Each step is summarized here and then fully explained later in the chapter.

STEP 1: DETERMINE BACKGROUND

Each character starts as an idea. Do you want to play a noble knight working to save the poor and oppressed, a secret agent skilled at infiltration, or a clever computer hacker? What kind of character you make depends on the type of game and the setting (you're not likely to make a medieval knight in a modern day setting, after all!) So, before starting the game, you should take a few minutes to think about the character you want to build and what you want that character's background to be. Where did your character come from, and what inspired them to leave their former life and pursue a life of adventure?

More information on developing your character's background begins on page 34.

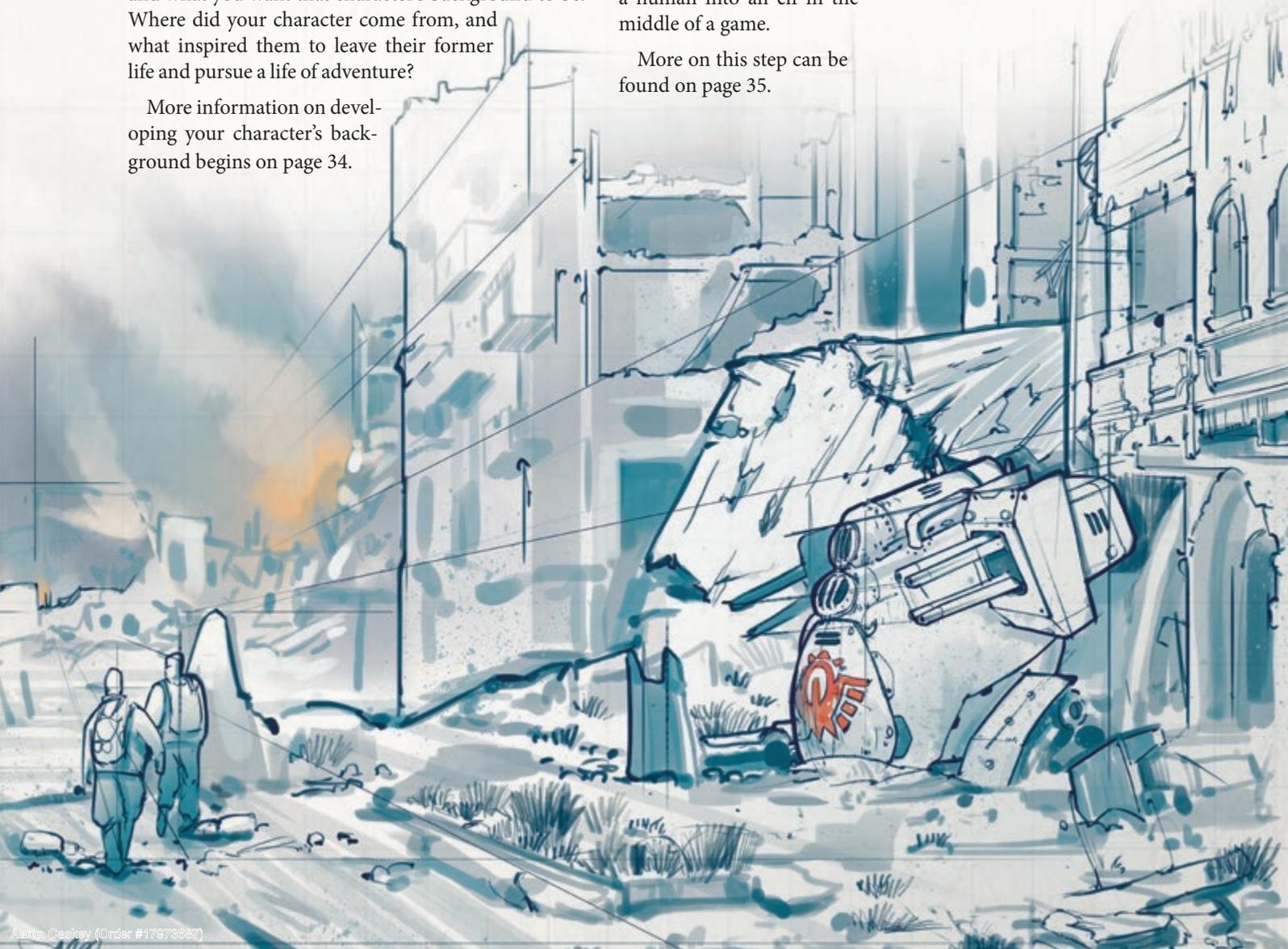
STEP 2: SELECT A CHARACTER ARCHETYPE OR SPECIES

The nature of this step depends a lot on the setting chosen. In a typical fantasy setting, for example, you may choose whether your character is a human, a dwarf, an elf, or an orc. In a space opera setting, you may choose to make your character one of any number of fantastical alien species. However, in the base rule set, you choose between four different archetypes of human: the laborer, the aristocrat, the intellectual, and the average human.

Whether you're choosing an archetype of humanity or an entirely different species, this choice establishes your character's initial ratings in the characteristics of Brawn, Agility, Intellect, Cunning, Willpower, and Presence. This choice also determines secondary characteristics, including wound and strain thresholds. Finally, the choice you make here may also give your character a unique intrinsic ability that would be impossible to get elsewhere.

Needless to say, once you've chosen an archetype, species, or race for your character, that choice is permanent. Your character cannot suddenly change from a human into an elf in the middle of a game.

More on this step can be found on page 35.



STEP 3: CHOOSE A CAREER

Your character's career is both their narrative role within the setting and their mechanical role within the party. You choose one career for your character, and you cannot switch careers later on in the game.

Careers don't rigidly define what your character does, however. They simply make it easier to advance into some skills and harder to advance into others. They also help define characters when they start out, making starting characters more interesting to play.

More on this step can be found on page 40.

STEP 4: INVEST EXPERIENCE POINTS

The species (or archetype, or race) you select for your character establishes an initial pool of experience points (XP). You can spend these experience points to improve certain aspects of the character: to increase characteristics, purchase additional ranks in skills, or acquire talents. You may spend your character's experience points in any combination of these areas, meaning that any two characters can end up very different from one another.

During gameplay, your character earns additional experience points based on their achievements and successes. Those points can also be spent to purchase new skill ranks and talents.

Information about spending experience points begins on page 44.

STEP 5: DETERMINE DERIVED ATTRIBUTES

You should only perform this step after you've completed the previous steps, since several attributes can only be determined after you've fully established your character's starting characteristics and talents. The derived attributes include wound threshold, strain threshold, defense, and soak value.

Full information on calculating these attribute values can be found on page 45.

STEP 6: DETERMINE MOTIVATION

Your character's Motivation reflects their primary call to take action and experience adventures. It represents the driving force or forces in their life. In some instances, a character's primary Motivation depicts an overarching philosophical belief. Other characters focus on more concrete objectives, often associated with the desire to aid family or close allies. A few choose a specific goal that they hope to achieve within their lifetime, possibly moving on to another one should they ever do so.

Four facets define Motivation: Desire, Fear, Strength, and Flaw. Each of these Motivations has a list of specific manifestations. Of course, you can always make up a unique Motivation for your character; the list we provided is meant more as a starting point than an exhaustive set of options.

Motivation is important to your character's progression. Playing to their Motivation can earn you additional XP at the end of a session. Motivations are also very important to social encounters.

Different Motivations are presented on page 46.

STEP 7: CHOOSE GEAR, APPEARANCE, AND PERSONALITY

Once you've defined your character's species or archetype, background, Motivation, and any other important attributes, you begin determining their descriptive details. Height, weight, eye color, hair color and style (or tentacle or horn color), skin color, build, distinguishing features such as scars and tattoos, and choice of clothing are all descriptive details that can be determined narratively. This information can and often should be linked to previous choices you made while building your PC; a character with a high Brawn may be more muscular, for instance, while a character raised in a desert may have skin that's been weathered and deepened by the punishing sun.

Each PC also starts the game with personal gear and weaponry worth 500 currency. At this stage, the PC may select this gear.

This step is presented on page 51. More information on equipment can be found on page 82.

STEP 1: DETERMINE BACKGROUND

Coming up with your character's background is the important first step in inventing and building your character. However, it's also the step with the fewest rules. We figured this is actually appropriate. After all,

this is a roleplaying game, so inventing your character's history should be more of an exercise in narrative storytelling than an exercise in game mechanics.

Nevertheless, we expect that your character's background will inform how you build your character. For example, if your character is a hard-working miner from a frontier planet in a distant galaxy, you'll probably want to build the character to be tough and strong, and to have abilities appropriate for someone living on a frontier world. Likewise, if your character is a scholarly sort from a prestigious university, you'll probably invest in making them smart and cultured.

The other thing about backgrounds is that they're going to be really dependent on the game setting. If you're playing in a medieval fantasy, your character can't be from an alien world. Conversely, if you're playing a game set in the distant future, your character probably doesn't come from a family of blacksmiths.

Now, keep in mind that your character's game statistics don't all need to reflect their background. Instead, the background is meant to provide depth to the character, offering insights on personality and mindset that are not evident in skills, talents, and other abilities. Knowing a character's origin can often provide a useful framework for determining what goals your PC might have as well as the paths they might pursue to achieve those goals.

With that in mind, we've prepared a short list of questions. You don't have to answer them (from a rules perspective, your character doesn't need to have any background at all), or you can pick and choose the ones you like. However, answering some or all of them may help you as you invent your character's background.

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Where does your character come from? This can be specific to the setting (Planet Ebulon in the Delta Cluster) or generic (a small farming town in the hills). But in either case, where are your character's roots, and what does your character think about the place they grew up in?

Who is your character's family? Did your character grow up with a lot of siblings, or were they an only child? Did they have parents? If so, who were they? If not, who raised your character? Is your character still on good terms with their family, or not?

What is your character's social standing? Is your character a respected member of their community and culture? Or are they simply one of the unremarkable masses? Or maybe they're an outcast, shunned by the members of "decent" society? What did your character do before they became an adventurer?

How old is your character? Are they young and brash, or old and wise? (Or maybe old and brash, or young and wise.) If they're middle-aged or older, how have they changed as they've aged?

What does your character think about the world? Your answer could be very general (a cynical attitude toward everyone they meet), or specific to the setting (they hate the unjust rule of the Federation of Sol). You could even ask and answer this question multiple times, picking a different aspect of the setting each time.

Why did your character leave home? Likely, your character is now an adventurer and has left part or all of their old life behind them. Why? What happened?

STEP 2: SELECT A CHARACTER ARCHETYPE OR SPECIES

As we mentioned in the summary on page 33, the exact nature of this choice depends on the game setting. Many settings have fantastical elements, and one of those elements is being able to play other species (we're using "species" as a catchall term to refer to all character types when some of the options aren't human). Traditional fantasy often has elves, dwarves, orcs, and the like, while many science fiction settings have a plethora of intelligent alien life forms.

However, we've built the core Narrative Dice System with humans as your only default starting species (if you want to explore non-human options more, check out our example settings in **Part II**, starting on page 136). To give you an interesting choice, and also flesh

out gameplay options for settings where other species aren't an option, we let you choose between four different archetypes when building your character.

Mechanically, archetypes and species do the same thing during character creation. Your choice among archetypes and species establishes your character's base characteristics as well as your secondary attributes, such as wound and strain thresholds. Once you've set the baseline through your choice, then that choice also provides a budget of experience points that you spend to improve your characteristics and buy skills and talents. We're going to get into that more during **Step 3** (page 44).

So, right now, you need to choose one of the four archetypes for your character (or if you're going to select

a species, choose one instead of choosing an archetype). Keep in mind, this choice is permanent. Your character is not going to be able to adopt a new archetype or species in the midst of a game; you'd just need to build a new character at that point.

ARCHETYPE LAYOUT

We can break an archetype into several different parts to make it easier to understand. The first part consists of the starting characteristics for your character. It's important to note that these are starting characteristics, so you'll have the chance to improve them later on.

The second part consists of the derived attributes we mentioned on page 31. The two that are specifically determined by archetype are your character's wound threshold and strain threshold.

The third part consists of your character's starting experience points. Later on, during **Step 3**, you'll be able to spend those experience points to improve your character.

The fourth part consists of any special abilities that your character starts with because of their archetype. Some archetypes (or species) give your character a free talent, free ranks in select skills, or unique abilities.

ARCHETYPE 1: AVERAGE HUMAN

The average human archetype is our baseline for character creation, and portrays the most customizable example of a person. You should choose this archetype if you prefer to play “generalist” characters, who are never going to be terrible at anything. You should also choose this archetype if you have a very specific type of character in mind, since this archetype has the most customization options of the four choices.

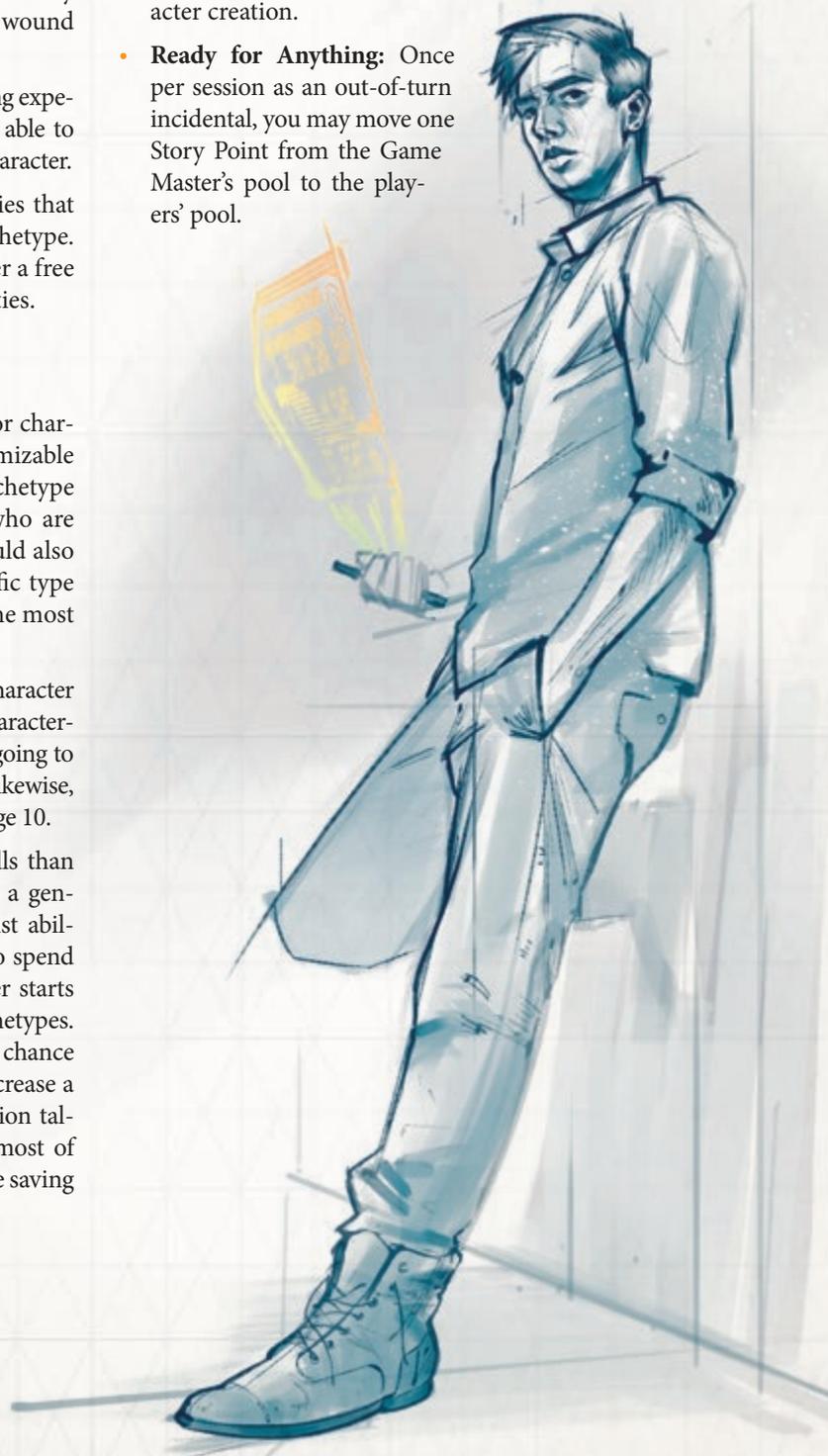
The characteristics all start at 2, meaning your character is going to have a hard time increasing any one characteristic to a 4 or 5, but also that your character isn't going to have any characteristic they are truly lacking in. Likewise, the strain and wound thresholds start at the average 10.

Your character starts with more ranks in skills than anyone else, again playing to the idea of being a generalist. Your archetype ability is also a generalist ability. Effectively, your group gains a Story Point to spend whenever it needs it. And finally, your character starts with the most experience of any of the four archetypes. Just remember, character creation is your only chance to spend XP on characteristics (otherwise, to increase a characteristic you need to purchase the Dedication talent; see page 81). We recommend you spend most of these XP on improving your characteristics, while saving at most 25–35 experience for talents and skills.

ARCHETYPE ABILITIES



- **Starting Wound Threshold:** 10 + Brawn
- **Starting Strain Threshold:** 10 + Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 110
- **Starting Skills:** An average human starts with one rank in each of two different non-career skills at character creation. They obtain this rank before spending experience points, and these skills may not be increased higher than rank 2 during character creation.
- **Ready for Anything:** Once per session as an out-of-turn incidental, you may move one Story Point from the Game Master's pool to the players' pool.



ARCHETYPE 2: THE LABORER

The laborer archetype represents a character who has a background in some form of manual labor, and who is generally strong and tough. You should choose this archetype if you're planning on making a character who focuses on fighting, especially fighting in melee combat. You should also choose this archetype if your character has a background of manual labor and hard work.

This archetype starts with the Brawn characteristic at 3 and the Willpower characteristic at 1. You're starting with a character who has better than average Brawn (which makes it easier to improve Brawn further), with the trade-off that your character has a worse than average Willpower. You'll have to either spend valuable experience points buying that back to 2, or be satisfied with this drawback. Likewise, your character's wound threshold is higher than average, but your strain threshold is lower than average.

Finally, this archetype gets a special ability that lets you turn a single Critical Injury result that your character suffers into the mildest Critical possible. Not only does this protect your character from some debilitating Crit results, but since the only way to permanently die in our game is through some Critical effects, this can even save your character from certain death.

ARCHETYPE ABILITIES



- **Starting Wound Threshold:** 12 + Brawn
- **Starting Strain Threshold:** 8 + Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 100
- **Starting Skills:** A laborer starts with one rank in Athletics during character creation. They obtain this rank before spending experience points, and may not increase Athletics above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Tough as Nails:** Once per session, your character may spend a Story Point as an out-of-turn incidental immediately after suffering a Critical Injury and determining the result. If they do so, they count the result rolled as "01."





ARCHETYPE 3: THE INTELLECTUAL

The intellectual archetype represents a character who has a background grounded in some sort of intellectual pursuit. This pursuit could be science, medicine, teaching, or even magic. You should choose this archetype if you want to make a character who focuses on one of those intellectual pursuits. You should also choose this archetype if your character comes from a highly educated background.

This archetype starts with the Intellect characteristic at 3 and the Agility characteristic at 1. You're starting a character with a better than average Intellect (which makes this characteristic easy to improve further) and good strain threshold, but on the other hand, your character has a worse than average Agility (and is going to have a problem being effective in ranged combat). You also have a worse than average wound threshold.

This archetype makes up for that, however, with a pretty good ability. Their special ability lets your character count their ranks in a skill as equal to their Intellect, and while it only works once per session, it can mean the difference between success and failure on a critical check.

ARCHETYPE ABILITIES



- **Starting Wound Threshold:** 8 + Brawn
- **Starting Strain Threshold:** 12 + Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 100
- **Starting Skills:** An intellectual starts with one rank in Knowledge during character creation. They obtain this rank before spending experience points, and may not increase Knowledge above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Brilliant!:** Once per session, your character may spend a Story Point as an incidental. If they do so, during the next check they make during that turn, you count their ranks in the skill being used as equal to their Intellect.

ARCHETYPE 4: THE ARISTOCRAT

The aristocrat archetype represents any character who has the gift of a silver tongue. This could be a noble of some sort, a politician, a bard, or even a salesperson or merchant. You should use this archetype if you want to build a character who fits one of these molds. You should also choose this archetype if your character is good at communicating.

This archetype starts with the Presence characteristic at 3 and the Brawn characteristic at 1. Unsurprisingly, this means you're starting with a character who already has a good Presence, and whose Presence can be improved easily. However, the low Brawn (and thus low wound threshold and soak) means your character won't be much of a combatant without a major investment in experience points. You also have an average starting wound and strain threshold.

Your character's starting ability is good on its own, but it can be paired with a number of talents or social encounter actions for some really powerful effects. Coupled with the archetype's starting characteristics, this archetype is perfect for characters who want to dominate social situations (even if they're not very good at fighting)!

ARCHETYPE ABILITIES



- **Starting Wound Threshold:** 10 + Brawn
- **Starting Strain Threshold:** 10 + Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 100
- **Starting Skills:** An aristocrat starts with one rank in Cool during character creation. They obtain this rank before spending experience points, and may not increase Cool above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Forceful Personality:** Once per session, your character may spend a Story Point as an incidental. If they do so, during the next skill check they make during that turn, your character doubles the strain they inflict or the strain they heal (you choose before making the check).



STEP 3: CHOOSE A CAREER

Our character creation system mostly lets you build your characters free-form, and it lets you define your characters' roles in the game by the choices you make. However, many players prefer a little structure and definition for their characters. For that, we have careers.

You can think of a career as your character's job or role. It's a broad concept of what your character is going to be especially good at during the game. Careers enable your character to focus on being better at certain tasks at the expense of others. A career is usually defined by the role the character plays in the game, although we do have some careers that may be thematically linked to some element of your game's setting.

Meanwhile, let's move on to choosing your character's career. To do that, we need to go into a bit more detail about what you're choosing.

WHAT DOES THIS DO?

Careers do two things for characters. First, they let the characters count eight skills as career skills. This means that all other skills are non-career skills for your character. Secondly, they let your character start the game with four ranks in four separate career skills of your choosing, representing your character's greater training and focus in matters concerning their career.

CAREER SKILLS AND NON-CAREER SKILLS

Career and non-career skills are simply designations that let us delineate some skills as easier (less expensive) for your character to buy and some as harder (more expensive) to buy. We're going to explain how to use experience points to purchase skills in a lot more detail during **Step 4**, on page 44, where you spend your character's starting XP. For now, we'll give you a very brief overview.

When you purchase a rank in a non-career skill, it always costs five more XP than it would cost to buy the same rank in a career skill. This means that while every character has access to every skill, characters can level up certain skills faster than others. This encourages you and your fellow players to focus on your characters' suite of career skills, and to only purchase non-career skills if you really feel that your characters need them.

STARTING WITH RANKS IN CAREER SKILLS

Not only are career skills cheaper for your character to purchase, but they also let your character start with

some ranks in them. We did this to guarantee that your starting character has training in a few skills when the game begins. Plus, it helps direct your character toward the career focus you chose.

After you select a career, choose four of its eight career skills. Your character starts the game with one rank in each of those four skills, without spending XP.

CAREERS

Now that you know what careers do, you're going to select one career for your character. This is the only time you choose a career for your character, and once you make this choice, the choice is permanent. There's no way to switch careers partway through the game.

However, this isn't all that big a deal. After all, careers just make it cheaper to purchase certain skills, but they don't stop you from buying others. If you find yourself wanting your character to have a few ranks in a non-career skill, go ahead and buy them!

ROLE-BASED CAREERS

These careers are based on roles characters play in a party. They are completely setting agnostic, so you can use them in any game you run. This also means the careers don't have any setting-specific skills, although in some cases, we do call out alternate skills that, if available in your setting, you should use instead of a listed career skill.

ENTERTAINER

For the Entertainer, the whole world really is a stage. Whatever their chosen medium, these artists, actors, and musicians make their living brightening the days of others. However, there can be a lot more to these individuals than meets the eye, as some Entertainers use their acting skills to cover more serious agendas.

The Entertainer counts the following skills as career skills: **Charm**, **Coordination**, **Deception**, **Discipline**, **Leadership**, **Melee**, **Skulduggery**, and **Stealth**. Before spending experience during character creation, an Entertainer may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

(If you are playing in a setting where this skill is available, switch **Melee** for **Melee [Light]**, since most Entertainers don't carry around greataxes or greatswords, but may prefer a rapier or other light blade.)

EXPLORER

The Explorer is at home in the wild, able to handle anything the wilderness throws at them. Explorers tend to excel at surviving in the wilderness, and they often are pretty good with ranged weapons. Explorers may be military scouts, gruff and unsociable hunters, or people who just prefer living in the wild.

The Explorer counts the following skills as career skills: **Athletics, Brawl, Coordination, Deception, Perception, Ranged, Stealth, and Survival**. Before spending experience during character creation, an Explorer may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

(If you are playing in a setting where this skill is available, switch **Ranged** for **Ranged [Heavy]** to better represent the rifles and other long-ranged weapons that an Explorer prefers.)

HEALER

The Healer focuses their efforts on keeping themselves and their friends alive under dire circumstances. Healers are good at keeping cool under pressure, maintaining focus, and—of course—healing. However, these aren't their only capabilities. Depending on their background and personality, Healers can also be good negotiators, tough and durable medics, or even morally depraved surgeons with a penchant for experimenting on their patients.

The Healer counts the following skills as career skills: **Cool, Discipline, Knowledge, Medicine, Melee, Resilience, Survival, and Vigilance**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Healer may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

(If you are playing in a setting where this skill is available, switch **Melee** for **Melee [Light]** to better represent the Healer's skill with small blades like scalpels.)

LEADER

The Leader focuses on leading and directing their fellows, as well as interacting with others. Leaders have a knack for taking charge and overseeing a situation, but their methods of leadership can vary wildly. A Leader can be a kind and caring boss, a soft-spoken politician, or a military commander who believes in absolute discipline.

The Leader counts the following skills as career skills: **Charm, Coercion, Cool, Discipline, Leadership, Melee, Negotiation, and Perception**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Leader may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

(If you're playing in a setting where this skill is available, switch **Melee** for **Melee [Light]** to better represent the Leader's skill with a sword or other weapon that is ceremonial as well as effective.)

SCOUNDREL

The Scoundrel's business is crime in all forms. Whether swindling, burgling, or running a complicated con, the Scoundrel has the skills needed to separate marks from their money and valuables. A Scoundrel could be a cat burglar, con artist, or quick-draw specialist, or just a smooth-talking person who cheats at cards.

The Scoundrel counts the following skills as career skills: **Charm, Cool, Coordination, Deception, Ranged, Skulduggery, Stealth, and Streetwise**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Scoundrel may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

(If you're playing where this skill is available, switch **Ranged** for **Ranged [Light]** to better represent a Scoundrel's preference for pistols and thrown weapons.)

SOCIALITE

Socialites are the consummate social butterflies, at ease in any interactions involving talking to someone else. Whether a rich debutante in the highest circles of society or a good-natured bartender who knows everyone's name, a Socialite can get along with anyone and everyone. More importantly, they always know how to get the best out of any social interaction.

The Socialite counts the following skills as career skills: **Charm, Cool, Deception, Knowledge, Negotiation, Perception, Streetwise, and Vigilance**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Socialite may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

SOLDIER

Soldiers are warriors through and through. At home on the battlefield, they know everything there is to know about surviving the horrors of combat—and making sure the opposition doesn't. Whether your Soldier is a tough legionnaire armed with spear and shield, a modern soldier with an assault rifle and body armor, or a futuristic marine carrying a laser cannon depends on your setting. However, the basics of a career member of the military never really change.

The Soldier counts the following skills as career skills: **Athletics, Brawl, Coercion, Melee, Perception, Ranged, Survival, and Vigilance**. Before spending

experience during character creation, a Soldier may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

(If you're playing in a setting where these skills are available, switch **Melee** for **Melee [Heavy]**, **Brawl** for **Gunnery**, and/or **Ranged** for **Ranged [Heavy]**. Soldiers tend to wield larger weapons, whether those be spears, pikes, muskets, or assault rifles. In addition, the more futuristic the setting, the more likely the Soldier is to be trained in heavy weapons as opposed to fistfighting.)

TRADESPERSON

A Tradesperson can be anyone who has skills in a job that requires special training and some manual labor. The form this career takes depends a lot on the setting. Your Tradesperson could be a medieval blacksmith, modern auto mechanic, futuristic computer customizer, or chief engineer aboard a starship. They could also be a no-nonsense worker who has no time for anything but the job at hand, or a creative craftsperson who delights in building something innovative.

The Tradesperson counts the following skills as career skills: **Athletics**, **Brawl**, **Discipline**, **Mechanics**, **Negotiation**, **Perception**, **Resilience**, and **Streetwise**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Tradesperson may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

SETTING-BASED CAREERS

We've designed setting-based careers to still fit a role or job for your character, but one that may only be appropriate to certain settings. After each career, we mention which settings it is appropriate for. Needless to say, check with your GM before you select one of these careers!

HACKER (SCIENCE FICTION, SPACE OPERA, ANY SETTING USING THE HACKING ALTERNATE RULES)

When we say Hacker, we're talking about the type of computer operator who can do things with computers that are well beyond modern reality. Hackers are a staple of futuristic settings, where they can use their unparalleled affinity for computers to gain access to remote servers, control and override robotic drones, and engage in virtual duels on the Internet or its equivalent.

The Hacker counts the following skills as career skills: **Computers**, **Discipline**, **Knowledge**, **Mechanics**, **Perception**, **Piloting**, **Streetwise**, and **Vigilance**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Hacker may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

Hackers are most common in futuristic settings, where computer capabilities are much more advanced. However, you could have a Hacker in a modern setting as well. It's up to you and your GM whether you want to handle computers more realistically, or the way computer systems get portrayed in the movies!

FIGHTER PILOT (WEIRD WAR, MODERN, SCIENCE FICTION, SPACE OPERA, ANY SETTING USING VEHICLE ALTERNATE RULES)

Though what a Fighter Pilot flies changes a lot depending on the setting, the Fighter Pilot career stays roughly similar. Whether they're flying a prop-driven fighter plane, modern jet fighter, or futuristic starfighter, your Fighter Pilot is probably a cool, cocky, and confident individual with lightning-fast reflexes.

The Fighter Pilot counts the following skills as career skills: **Cool**, **Driving**, **Gunnery**, **Mechanics**, **Perception**, **Piloting**, **Ranged (Light)**, and **Vigilance**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Fighter Pilot may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

A Fighter Pilot's skill set fits into all of the recommended settings, so there shouldn't be any problems using these skills. However, if you want to play this career, you'll probably want to use the optional vehicle rules on page 220.

KNIGHT (FANTASY)

The Knight is a warrior of the nobility. A Knight's title comes with privilege, lands, and wealth, but also a responsibility to defend their liege lord and the common people who rely on the Knight for protection. Knights often train for war from childhood, and they equip themselves with the best arms and armor available.

The Knight counts the following skills as career skills: **Athletics**, **Discipline**, **Leadership**, **Melee (Heavy)**, **Melee (Light)**, **Resilience**, **Riding**, and **Vigilance**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Knight may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

The Knight makes the most sense in a fantasy or medieval setting. However, we could see Knights in other settings that focus on the fantastical and whimsical, especially the steampunk and space opera settings. These Knights may ride to battle aboard steam-powered jet packs or a mechanoid battle-walker, but their focus is still on riding into combat. If you use this career in a more futuristic setting, you should switch **Melee (Heavy)** for the broader **Melee** skill, and **Melee (Light)** for **Gunnery** (their mechanical conveyance may have heavy weapons incorporated). You should also switch **Riding** for **Driving**, **Piloting**, or **Operating** as appropriate.

MAD SCIENTIST (STEAMPUNK, WEIRD WAR)

For a Mad Scientist, the laws of physics are mere guidelines, achieving the impossible is a goal, and the morality of everyday society is a petty annoyance. Mad Scientists could be arcane researchers trying to fuse magic and technology or brilliant inventors crafting terrifying new mechanical creations. They don't have to be truly evil or even amoral, but generally Mad Scientists are a little myopic. They get so focused on their grand goals that they ignore the consequences of their actions.

The Mad Scientist counts the following skills as career skills: **Alchemy, Coercion, Knowledge, Mechanics, Medicine, Operating, Skulduggery, and Ranged (Heavy)**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Mad Scientist may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

If you're playing in a setting that uses the magic alternate rules, switch **Ranged (Heavy)** for **Arcana**.

PRIEST (ANY SETTING USING THE MAGIC ALTERNATE RULES)

Although you can find priests in any setting, this career represents the priest whose prayers to their deity have powerful and tangible results. We represent those results with the magic alternate rules (page 210), so you should only use the Priest career when you're playing in a game with magic. Whether a soft-spoken priest who channels divine energy to heal the wounded, or a raging battle-priest who smites enemies with a mace as often as with holy wrath, a Priest is a devout believer in something greater than themself.

The Priest counts the following skills as career skills: **Charm, Coercion, Cool, Discipline, Divine, Medicine, Melee, and Negotiation**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Priest may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

If you're using this career in a fantasy setting, you should switch **Melee** for **Melee (Light)**.

DRUID (ANY SETTING USING THE MAGIC ALTERNATE RULES)

Druids have a special connection with the primal powers of the natural world. They may be individuals who live in the wilderness, or regular people who have a particular affinity for life and nature. Druids can tap into the primal power of life to summon magic and perform fantastical feats.

The Druid counts the following skills as career skills: **Athletics, Brawl, Coordination, Melee, Primal, Resilience, Survival, and Vigilance**. Before

spending experience during character creation, a Druid may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

If you're using this career in a fantasy setting, you should switch **Melee** for **Melee (Heavy)**.

STARSHIP CAPTAIN (SCIENCE FICTION, SPACE OPERA, ANY SETTING USING VEHICLE ALTERNATE RULES)

The Starship Captain fits into any setting where starships are big, complex, and common enough that you could have a character who makes a living commanding one. Starship Captains are equally adept at repairing, programming, and piloting a starship, but their primary responsibility is leading and directing the crew under their command.

The Starship Captain counts the following skills as career skills: **Computers, Discipline, Gunnery, Knowledge, Leadership, Mechanics, Operating, and Perception**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Starship Captain may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

As with Fighter Pilots, if you want to play a Starship Captain, you should probably make sure your game uses the vehicle alternate rules on page 220. In addition, if you're using this career in a space opera setting, you should switch **Knowledge** for **Astrocartography**, as this more accurately represents a Starship Captain's knowledge specialization. You could also use this career for a Ship or Airship Captain in other settings.

WIZARD (ANY SETTING USING THE MAGIC ALTERNATE RULES)

Magic can be brought into nearly any setting, and the Wizard is the career that really specializes in it. The Wizard focuses on the arcane: magic as a discipline that can be learned through study and practice. Rituals, cantrips, and chanted spells are all means by which the Wizard channels arcane energies.

The Wizard counts the following skills as career skills: **Arcana, Coercion, Discipline, Knowledge, Leadership, Skulduggery, Stealth, and Vigilance**. Before spending experience during character creation, a Wizard may choose four of their career skills and gain one rank in each of them.

The Wizard can fit into any setting that you include magic in, and that can be nearly any setting (even if some settings, such as weird war, fantasy, and steampunk, make more sense than hard sci-fi). If you're using this career in a fantasy setting, you should switch **Stealth** for **Alchemy**, just because between the two of them, we feel Alchemy is more appropriate for the career.

STEP 4: INVEST EXPERIENCE POINTS

In **Step 2**, your character got a budget of experience points based on the archetype or species you chose. Now it's time to spend those experience points (or, as we often call them, "XP"). This section covers both how you spend XP during character creation, and also how you'll spend the XP your character earns later during gameplay (see page 125 for earning XP during gameplay).

STARTING XP

Experience points are what you use to customize your character and make them truly unique. During this step, you can spend all of your character's experience points on improving characteristics, purchasing talents, and buying ranks in skills. If you don't spend all of your character's experience, that's fine; you'll save all the unspent experience points and can spend them at the end of any session during the game. However, keep in mind that your character is going to be earning more experience points during the course of their adventures, so you'll have more experience to spend in the future. You may as well spend it now!

You may spend experience points in the following ways to improve your character. These are also detailed in **Table I.2-1: Spending Starting Experience** on page 45.

IMPROVING CHARACTERISTICS

During character creation, raising a characteristic to the next highest rating costs ten times the value it is being raised to. For example, raising your character's Brawn from 3 to 4 would require 40 experience points.

You must purchase each improvement sequentially. This means that raising your character's Brawn from 3 to 5 would cost 90 experience points: 40 for raising it from 3 to 4, then 50 more for raising it from 4 to 5.

No characteristic can be increased higher than 5, either in character creation or in gameplay. However, this limit only applies to player characters (your character). Non-player characters (also referred to as adversaries) can have characteristics higher than 5. In addition, any character may get access to equipment or special powers that temporarily raise one or more of their characteristics higher than 5. However, your character's base characteristics still max out at 5.

Characteristics may only be purchased with experience points during character creation, not at any later time. During gameplay, however, characteristics can be increased by purchasing specific talents. This means you should plan on spending most (if not all) of your starting XP on improving your character's characteristics.

SKILL TRAINING

The various skills your character can purchase depend on what setting you're playing in. **Chapter 3: Skills**, on page 52, lists both general skills that apply to all settings, and some setting-specific skills. So, when building your character, knows which skills will be in play.

Each skill has five ranks of training available. Your character already has ranks in various skills. At this stage, your character may purchase more ranks in skills using their starting XP. However, regardless of any character creation options, **your character cannot have any skills higher than rank 2 once character creation is finished**, unless a rule specifically states otherwise.

Buying a rank in a career skill follows a cost structure similar to that for buying a rating in a characteristic; training a skill to the next highest rank costs five times the rank to which it is being raised. For example, training a skill from rank 0 (untrained) to rank 1 requires 5 experience points. Improving a rank 1 skill to rank 2 requires 10 experience points. Each rank must be purchased sequentially. This means that acquiring a rank 2 career skill during character creation costs 15 experience points (5 for raising it from zero to rank 1, then 10 more for raising it from rank 1 to rank 2).

Buying a rank in a non-career skill works mostly the same way, but costs a bit more. Each rank of a non-career skill costs five times the rank you're purchasing, plus 5 additional experience points. So, raising a non-career skill to rank 1 costs 10 XP, while raising it from rank 1 to rank 2 costs 15 XP. As with career skills, each rank must be purchased sequentially.

You may purchase ranks in skills for your character during character creation or later during gameplay.

EXPERIENCED CHARACTERS

Our character creation rules focus on creating new adventurers. However, you may want to start with characters who are a bit more experienced.

In this case, you can give your characters some additional XP to spend after character creation. We recommend an additional 50 XP. This cannot be spend on characteristics, just skills and talents. In addition, this XP cannot be used to increase a skill above rank 3. This should make your characters feel more capable but still give them room to improve throughout the game.

TABLE I.2—1: SPENDING STARTING EXPERIENCE

OPTIONS	COST	CHARACTER CREATION LIMITS
May spend experience to increase characteristics. Character creation is the only time players can increase characteristics with experience points.	Ten times the purchased rating in experience. Each rating must be purchased sequentially.	May not raise any characteristic above rank 5 at character creation.
May spend experience to purchase ranks in skills.	Five times the purchased rank in experience. Each rank must be purchased sequentially. (Each rank in a non-career skill costs an additional 5 XP.)	May not raise any skill above rank 2 at character creation.
May spend experience to purchase talents.	Five times the purchased talent's tier. Additional restrictions on talent purchases are listed on page 71.	No special limits; only standard limits apply.

You probably want to buy a couple of ranks of various skills now, but you can spend most of your XP on characteristics and wait to buy more skills with the XP your character earns as the game progresses.

ACQUIRING TALENTS

Talents are something any character can purchase. Like skills, the talents available to your character depend on what setting you're playing in. **Chapter 4: Talents**, on page 71, lists the talents available in all settings and some specific to individual settings. So, as with skills, before you build your character, make sure your GM has decided on a setting and what talents to allow.

Purchasing talents is covered in greater detail on page 71. However, here is a brief summary. Talents are organized into tiers, with each talent costing five XP times its tier level. So, Tier 1 talents cost 5 XP, but Tier 5 talents cost 25 XP. You can buy as many Tier 1 talents for your character as you like, but if you want to purchase talents in higher tiers, you have to follow this simple rule: **after buying a talent in a tier, you must ensure your character has more talents in the tier directly below it.**

Characters may purchase talents during character creation or later during gameplay. Even more so than with skills, you probably want to spend sparingly on talents during character creation. You'll have plenty of chances to buy talents once the game begins.

STEP 5: DETERMINE DERIVED ATTRIBUTES

Once you've spent your character's starting XP, the next step is to determine your character's derived attributes. We call them derived attributes because they are determined by your character's other attributes and your choice of archetype or species.

WOUND THRESHOLD

Your character's wound threshold represents, basically, how many wounds—how much physical damage—a character can withstand before becoming incapacitated. Your character's starting wound threshold is determined by adding the wound threshold for their archetype or species to their Brawn rating (after spending starting XP). After you determine this initial value, further increases to your character's Brawn rating do not increase their wound threshold—wound threshold improvements are acquired by purchasing talents, such as Toughened.

Our system assumes that a starting character with a wound threshold of 15–18 is pretty tough and able to suffer several hits without being incapacitated. A wound

threshold of 11–14 is about average; your character can take a hit or two before going down. A wound threshold of 10 or lower means your character may be incapacitated by one powerful hit, and should be careful in combat.

STRAIN THRESHOLD

Your character's strain threshold determines how much strain—psychological and mental damage—a character can withstand before becoming stunned, dazed, or incapacitated. Your character's starting strain threshold is determined by adding the strain threshold for their archetype or species to their Willpower rating (after spending starting XP). After you determine this initial value, further increases to your character's Willpower rating do not increase their strain threshold—strain threshold improvements are acquired by purchasing appropriate talents, such as Grit.

Our system assumes that a starting character with a strain threshold of 13–16 is going to be generally unconcerned with accumulating strain, except in

the most stressful circumstances or over prolonged encounters without a chance to rest. A strain threshold of 10–12 is about average; you should keep an eye on the strain your character suffers but not worry about it too much. However, a strain threshold of 9 or lower means that strain is your character's weakness. If you're not careful, your character could be incapacitated by accumulating too much of it.

DEFENSE

Defense represents an extra level of protection that makes your character harder to hit in combat. Defense is divided into ranged defense and melee defense. Your character's default value for each defense rating is 0.

Defense is most commonly gained by wearing armor or by adopting a defensive position in combat (such as gaining cover). Some talents may also increase one or both of your character's defense ratings.

Besides using certain types of gear, there is no easy way for your character to have a starting melee or ranged defense higher than 0. So, if your character doesn't have any defense, don't worry! You didn't do anything wrong. Your character has another type of protection, called soak.

SOAK VALUE

Soak value determines how much damage a character can shrug off every time they're hit. When your

character suffers damage (usually from someone attacking them), you subtract your character's soak value from the damage inflicted. Any remaining damage after subtracting soak becomes wounds, which you apply against your character's wound threshold.

Just a note: sometimes damage becomes strain instead, and is applied against your character's strain threshold instead of wound threshold. This comes from certain weapons or attacks, and we'll explain it more later.

Your character's default soak value is equal to their Brawn rating. After you determine this initial value, subsequent increases to a character's Brawn rating do increase their soak value. You can also increase your character's soak by buying armor for that character. Some talents, such as Enduring, increase a character's innate soak value as well.

Our system considers a starting soak value of 5 or higher to be better than average; your character reduces a significant amount of damage from each attack, which is going to help them survive many more hits. A soak value of 3–4 is average, which is fine. Without a significant investment of resources, your character can still reduce damage sufficiently to be effective in combat. If your character has a soak value of 1–2, however, you'll have to play it smart in combat situations. You'll want to try to take enemies by surprise, fight from cover (or a hidden position), or attack them from a long distance away. Basically, you'll want to avoid being hit in the first place.

STEP 6: DETERMINE CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Just as important as a character's physical characteristics are their emotions, beliefs, and faults. Skills and characteristics display the character's aptitude, but the character's Motivations determine when they use those skills and why. The Game Master has dominion over the external journeys of the player characters—where they go, what adversaries they face, and which quests they must complete—but you largely get to determine your character's psyche and social disposition. Characters with identical species and career choices might feel completely dissimilar due to different Motivations.

Motivation includes a character's driving forces: what ultimate goal is your character pursuing? What are they most afraid of? What character trait allows them to persevere in the face of adversity? What flaws hinder their ability to pursue their goals?

Desires, Fears, Strengths, Flaws: these four different facets of Motivation color how your character perceives and interacts with the world. In other words, these

facets affect how you, the player, roleplays the character. The four facets of Motivation can also be leveraged by others when attempting to persuade, coerce, or otherwise influence the character during social encounters. Finally, a Game Master interested in a more character-focused game can look to the player characters' Motivations to craft compelling campaigns that include inner emotional arcs for the characters in addition to their physical journeys.

In the following sections, you have the chance to select or roll randomly for a Desire, Fear, Strength, and Flaw. If you do not care for the sample motivational facets, feel free to craft motivational facets uniquely suited to your character with the help of the Game Master. Whichever route you choose, you should focus on linking your character's archetype or species, career, talents, and background together with Motivation to create a detailed persona. For more information on Motivation and how it's used in play, see page 123.

DESIRE

The Desire aspect of your character tracks most closely with what we typically think of when we hear the term “motivation”: it’s the reason why the character acts. What, more than anything else, does your character want or want to achieve? This is the most important element of your character in a character-driven campaign, because it is how you signal to the GM the types of challenges you want your character to face. Desire is still important in a plot-driven campaign, as it flavors the way your character approaches the story.

Desire represents the thing your character wants, although they might not know what that is just yet. It provides a roleplaying touchstone for your character to help you answer the question “What would my character do?” When your character wants something, it’s easier for them to pursue it because they’re driven—because they’re excited and enthusiastic.

Your character’s Desire need not be a noble or altruistic goal. However, as with the other facets of your character’s Motivation, you should discuss your choices with the GM. Having a negative or evil Desire, such as one that is in conflict with the Motivations of the other PCs or the rest of society, may disrupt the party dynamics or the course of the adventure.

If you do not already have a Desire in mind for your character, you may roll on **Table I.2–2: Example**

Desires to determine one randomly. After rolling, you should work with the GM to come up with specifics surrounding the Desire. Characters typically have one Desire, but players who want a roleplaying-heavy campaign may opt to develop a secondary Desire as well, potentially one that is in conflict with the primary Desire. At some point, the character may have to choose between one and the other, making for a memorable character moment.

Alternatively, you may decide to keep a character’s true Desire a secret, picking a false Desire as a “front” to mislead the other player characters. Again, this should be done in consultation with the GM.

EXAMPLE: DESIRE

For example, Katrina rolls on the chart and determines that her renegade clone character, Akiko, seeks knowledge. Part of Akiko’s character concept is that she possesses minor psychic powers, something that can’t be explained by the scientific understanding of the setting. Katrina decides that the circumstances of Akiko’s creation could be mysterious, so Akiko wants to know who created her and for what purpose. Katrina can’t wait to see to what lengths Akiko goes to find this information during play!

TABLE I.2–2: EXAMPLE DESIRES

D100 DICE ROLL	RESULT
01–10	Ambition: Your character craves power and authority over others. The character may pursue privilege, social status, or rank to achieve this goal.
11–20	Belonging: Your character seeks to be liked by others and goes out of the way to make a good impression. Your character seeks to be accepted by a community or faction.
21–30	Expertise: Your character wants to excel in a chosen field or skill. To achieve perfection, your character practices constantly.
31–40	Fame: Your character seeks the limelight and wants to be famous. They pursue anything that can garner attention and praise.
41–50	Justice: Your character believes in a set of ethics that demands fair treatment for all. Your character is dedicated to righting inequality and protecting others’ rights.
51–60	Knowledge: Your character wishes to uncover knowledge that may have been lost, forgotten, or locked away. This information could pertain to the world, or it could pertain to your character’s past or origins.
61–70	Love: Your character seeks romantic affection and intimacy from another character. Your character might already have a true love or may strive to find someone to love and be loved by.
71–80	Safety: Your character values peace and comfort above all else. Perhaps they seek shelter, a steady source of food, or other material necessities, or they might seek emotional security in a place free from oppression and abuse.
81–90	Vengeance: Someone or something wronged your character in the past, and the character has sworn to exact revenge against the aggrieving party.
91–00	Wealth: Money or material possessions are the prime goal for your character. Your character may be active in business, trade, or the tried-and-true method of theft to increase their net worth.

FEAR

A character's Fear represents the thing they dread. It might be the character's deepest insecurity, their bogeyman, or a deep-seated threat to their culture or life.

Acting against a character's fears and overcoming them makes for challenging encounters and rewarding moments of roleplaying. As we've seen time and again in storytelling, fear can be leveraged against individuals to make them do terrible things or force them to give up on their desires entirely. Your character may succumb by avoiding the thing they fear, refusing to risk confronting their Fear in order to obtain their desires, or doing something terrible because the object of their Fear forces them to.

Playing to your character's Fear can be a bit difficult, but also very enjoyable. While many of us don't like our characters to appear weak or to fail, you should think of your character as the protagonist of a story or a film. Some of the best character arcs come when characters are defeated by their fears early on in a story, only to fight through them at the narrative's climax.

For that reason, having your character succumb to their Fear and having your character overcome their Fear are both great ways to use this Motivation. Just make sure you do a bit of both. Having your character continually fail can be disappointing for everyone, but having them invariably succeed removes any amount of realism or risk from your character's story.

If you do not already have a Fear in mind, you may roll on **Table I.2-3: Example Fears** to determine one randomly. After rolling, you should work with the GM to come up with specifics surrounding the Fear.

EXAMPLE: FEAR

Continuing our example, Katrina rolls on the chart and determines that Akiko fears isolation. Since Akiko is a clone (and thus is one of many, many people who look the same), Katrina decides Akiko's Fear stems from feeling lost in a sea of identical faces and worrying that nobody can recognize her as different from her fellow clones. Katrina decides that one way this shows is in Akiko's preference for outrageous, punk hairstyles and lots of facial piercings that make her look unique and memorable.

STRENGTH

Your character's Strength is one of the best things about them. It's the first thing you'd put on your character's résumé, the one word other people use when praising your character, and the defining feature that they're known for.

A Strength is usually a personality trait, a mental quirk your character possesses that sets them apart. Being rich, athletic, or attractive are all certainly bonuses for a person, but they're not what we're

TABLE I.2-3: EXAMPLE FEARS

D100 DICE ROLL	RESULT
01-10	Change: Your character finds routine and stability comforting, and fears changes that could upend their day-to-day routine.
11-20	Commitment: The idea of making promises or being relied on scares your character, who hates the idea that someone else is relying on them. This fear of commitment could manifest in relationships, on the job, or among family.
21-30	Death: The fear of death is deep and primal, and it drives a lot of our behaviors. There are a large number of ways this could manifest in your character, many of them similar to what you see in real life.
31-40	Expression: Your character has some behavior or means of expressing themselves privately that they do not want the world to know about. The nature of that behavior is up to you. Keep the setting in mind when you come up with it, though.
41-50	Failure: Most people dislike failure, but some actively fear it. That fear may drive them to try to become absolutely perfect, or it may crush them into inaction. Maybe it does both.
51-60	Humiliation: Characters who are especially concerned with how others view them are particularly sensitive to potential humiliation. They go out of their way to avoid ever appearing wrong or foolish, even if that means missing out on exciting opportunities and experiences.
61-70	Isolation: Your character fears being isolated from other people and being doomed to live and die alone. Maybe this drives them to seek out relationships with anyone and everyone, even when a relationship is unpleasant or unhealthy.
71-80	Nemesis: Your character has a deadly foe, someone they fear (even if they don't admit it). The nature of this enemy is up to you, but we suggest you consult with your GM. After all, your GM surely wants to bring this up in the game!
81-90	Obscurity: Your character wishes to be remembered after they are gone and works tirelessly to secure their legacy.
91-00	Poverty: For your character, it's all about wealth and security. They fear being without, and they work hard to amass money, supplies, and other valuable items to ensure their status.

thinking of when we say “Strength.” After all, physical features are advantages that you can add to your character during the rest of the character creation process, and wealth may be something your character earns throughout their adventures (and loses just as easily). What we’re thinking of are personality traits that people are born with.

If you do not already have a Strength in mind for your character, you may roll on **Table I.2–4: Example Strengths** to determine one randomly. After rolling, you should work with the GM to come up with specifics surrounding the Strength.

EXAMPLE: STRENGTH

We continue our example with Katrina rolling on the Example Strengths chart and finding out that Akiko is independent. This fits in with Akiko’s desire to stand out from her fellow clones, and Katrina figures this is also one of the reasons why Akiko is a renegade clone in the first place. Her independent streak caused her to buck authority, break free of her indentured servitude as a clone, and go on the run.

FLAW

Everyone has an element of themselves that they’re not proud of. Why should your character be any different? When someone speaks ill of your character, this is always the first thing they bring up. It’s also what gets mentioned when your character’s friends say “They’re a great person, but...” That “but” is your character’s Flaw.

Just like your Strength, your Flaw is primarily a part of your character’s personality. It is a selfish Motivation, bad habit, or element of personality that your character wishes they didn’t have.

If you do not already have a Flaw in mind for your character, you may roll on **Table I.2–5: Example Flaws**

EXAMPLE: FLAW

Finally, Katrina rolls to figure out Akiko’s Flaw. This turns out to be intolerance. Katrina decides that Akiko has a deep condescension (bordering on dislike) for other clones who follow her genetic template. Because they look like her but are not her, Akiko considers them to be inferior copies and is unable to recognize that each is an individual being.

TABLE I.2–4: EXAMPLE STRENGTHS

D100 DICE ROLL	RESULT
01–10	Adaptable: No matter what life throws at your character, they always rise to the challenge. Your character is flexible and can handle nearly every situation, no matter how grim or strange the circumstances.
11–20	Analytical: Your character’s mind is like a computer, able to absorb a barrage of information and come to a logical conclusion. Your solutions always have the inarguable weight of reason, and you know how to pick your battles and when to bide your time.
21–30	Courageous: Fear has no place in your character’s heart. They laugh at danger and gladly push themselves to confront what others flee from. Note that your character probably still has a Fear Motivation. It’s up to you whether that Fear is the one thing that can undo your character’s courage, or if this Strength pushes them to confront the source of their Fear no matter what.
31–40	Curious: Life is a million mysteries, and your character wants to learn about every one. Whether curiosity drives them to meet new people, explore distant locales, or learn fantastic new truths and ideas is up to you.
41–50	Idealistic: What ideals your character believes in are up to you, but to your character, those ideals are nothing short of sacred. Your character may feel that everyone should live up to those same ideals (and may be disappointed when people don’t), or they may be content to meet the standards they have set for themselves.
51–60	Independent: When everyone else has failed or fallen, your character knows they can still count on themselves. Your character may get along with others just fine but makes sure not to rely on others. That way, when things go wrong, your character is always prepared to deal with the situation and isn’t waiting for someone else to help.
61–70	Patient: Your character is always willing to wait and knows the power of being calm. By waiting for the right opportunity, your character avoids all manner of unpleasant and dangerous situations. However, when such an opportunity presents itself, your character acts swiftly and decisively.
71–80	Spiritual: It doesn’t matter so much what your character believes in: that depends a lot on your game’s setting. What’s important is that your character believes. Their belief gives them a solid mental bedrock they can always rely on.
81–90	Wise: Through years of experience and countless events, your character has developed that rare quality: wisdom. The wise understand the truths of how their world works. Just as importantly, they know that sometimes, with the right effort, those truths can be overcome.
91–00	Witty: Your character is extremely clever, with the right joke for a friend and the perfect insult for a foe. Some may love their company, while others loathe their cutting remarks, but none can deny that your character has the sharpest tongue around.

to determine one randomly. After rolling, you should work with the GM to come up with specifics surrounding the Flaw.

MOTIVATIONS IN PLAY

Motivations exist to offer you an additional framework for how your PC interacts with the world. They establish your character's priorities, but they need not be a restriction. Rather, Motivations help to suggest your character's intuitive response to the challenges they encounter. Notably, your PC's reactions must be colored by mitigating factors, so that a response is seldom based solely on a Motivation.

CHANGING MOTIVATIONS

During play, your character's attitudes, emotions, and beliefs can and should evolve, especially if the GM has been challenging the character's inner state over the course of the campaign. There may be single, dramatic moments where it makes sense for your character to change one or more facets of their Motivation, or it might be a slower process that takes place over the course of several sessions that have engaged your character's emotions. Perhaps your character has achieved their Desire, overcome a Flaw, or gained a new Fear.

When the narrative supports it, your GM should permit you to erase an existing facet of their Motivation and replace it with a new Desire, Fear, Strength, Flaw, etc.

Characters should not be permitted to continue play without a replacement facet of their Motivation, as these facets are essential components of roleplaying and the hero's journey. If the player is struggling to come up with a new Motivation, the GM should work with the player to invent circumstances that warrant a new Motivation. Alternatively, the struggle may be a sign that the character's emotional arcs have been exhausted, and it is time to roll up a new replacement character who has not had a chance to fully mature yet.

SECRET MOTIVATIONS

You can choose to share your characters' Motivations with your fellow players, or to keep them secret. Motivations for different characters can, at times, be in direct conflict. By keeping these secret from one another, you and your fellow players create opportunities for potentially intense roleplaying between your characters. Alternatively, by sharing their Motivations, your group can better focus on the times when their characters can collaborate.

TABLE I.2—5: EXAMPLE FLAWS

D100 DICE ROLL	RESULT
01–10	Anger: Your character lashes out at themself or others with undue cause or with extreme force. They are quick to resort to physical force to solve their problems.
11–20	Compulsion: This could be addiction, fascination, obsession, or another automatic behavior that is self-destructive or otherwise impedes your character's ability to function and be healthy.
21–30	Deception: Your character may be disloyal or a compulsive liar. They are concerned with their own wellbeing first and foremost, and they might always present themselves in the best possible light even when that isn't the case.
31–40	Greed: Your character is never satisfied with what they have, always wanting more. They are willing to flout the law or infringe upon others' rights in order to get what they want.
41–50	Laziness: Your character always seeks the path of least resistance and becomes intimidated by difficult or complex tasks.
51–60	Ignorance: Your character lacks a basic knowledge base or understanding of a society's norms. This may be due to your character's upbringing or their recent travel to another area of the world. This could be more than just being "uneducated"; at some level, your character may be willfully ignorant.
61–70	Intolerance: For whatever reason, your character harbors some prejudices toward a group of people. These may be relatively "minor" biases, or they may give rise to an intense emotion of hatred or revulsion. Whatever form it takes, remember that intolerance is based more in emotion than rationality.
71–80	Pride: Pride does not always have to be a Flaw, but it can easily become one. Your character is arrogant, vain, or self-absorbed, or thinks highly of themself at the expense of others.
81–90	Recklessness: Your character shows little regard for how their actions may affect themself or others, due either to low self-esteem or lack of forethought. They are especially prone to dangerous or inconsiderate actions.
91–00	Timid: Your character is extremely risk averse, opting instead to take more thorough or tried-and-true approaches. They may take too long to act or may be unable to act at all in the face of new or intimidating challenges.

STEP 7: CHOOSE GEAR, APPEARANCE, AND PERSONALITY

By this point, you should have your character's background and Motivations pretty well figured out, and all your starting attributes determined. The only things left to do are purchase gear, come up with a physical appearance, and finalize their personality.

STARTING GEAR

Starting gear depends on the game setting. Obviously, setting determines whether your character can buy plate armor and a warhorse, or a bulletproof vest and a sports car. However, the setting or type of game your GM plans to run may also have an effect on how much starting gear your character has. If your game exists in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, your character may start with the clothes on their back and a knife. On the other hand, if your game involves playing a bunch of mercenaries in a science fiction setting, your character may need to buy powered armor, a Gauss rifle, and a drop ship!

For these reasons, while we offer a default starting gear allowance, we fully expect your GM to change the starting gear options as they see fit. **If you're using the default, your character starts with 500 currency to spend on personal gear.** More on gear can be found on page 82, and in **Part II: Settings** starting on page 136.

Your character may keep any currency you don't spend. In addition, after you've finished purchasing starting gear, roll a d100. Add the value of the die roll to any remaining starting funds. This represents the "pocket money" your character possesses. However, since you generated it after you purchased starting gear, you can't use this currency to buy more starting gear!

APPEARANCE

A physical description is both one of the least and one of the most important parts of your character. From a mechanical perspective, none of our rules depend on how your character looks. A tiny character can still have a high Brawn, an ugly character can still have a high Presence, and so on. However, a physical description is how you and your fellow players are going to visualize your character throughout the game. Spending a little time thinking about a physical description goes a long way toward bringing your character to life.

Inventing your character's description is a process that varies wildly depending on the character, the archetype or species you chose, the way you customized your character, and the gear you purchased—and honestly, it's going to depend more than anything on you and your

mentality. So, we've provided a few things to consider when you invent your character's appearance:

- **What would go on your character's driver's license?** Most driver's licenses ask for things like height, weight, hair and eye color, and age. These are good general starting points for a physical description.
- **If someone was describing your character, what would they say?** When we describe people, we often call out a few notable characteristics. "You remember Jim: he's the short guy with the long white beard." "Sue's the one with dreadlocks and green eyes who walks with a limp." If someone was describing your character, what would they say about them?
- **What's one body modification that would fit your character?** Is there a tattoo, dyed hair, nose piercing, or some other feature your character might have chosen for themselves?

PERSONALITY

Just like physical characteristics, your character's personality is not something that matters for the rules, but is going to do a lot toward defining how you play them during the game. Also like physical descriptions, your character's personality depends a lot on you, the setting, and all the character choices you made. However, two choices define your character's personality more than the rest. Those choices are your character's background and your character's Motivation.

Where we come from and what our childhood was like can do a lot to define our personality traits as we grow older. First, consider your character's background, and then decide how that may have affected them (or, if it didn't affect their personality, decide why that may be the case). Then, consider your character's Motivation. After all, what we want to accomplish can say a lot about how we act while striving for it.

Another way to develop your character's personality is to think of one word that you'd use to describe your character. "Bubbly," "dour," "helpful," "relaxed," "driven," and "sardonic" are all great places for a personality to start.

And that brings us to our final suggestion. Sometimes you should start with a base, then let your character's personality evolve over time. Sometimes the best character personalities start with a single descriptor, then gradually develop over the course of the game from the choices you make. Don't be afraid to leave a character with room to grow and change.

CHAPTER 3: SKILLS

Whether flying through a canyon in a blistering-fast starfighter or dueling a vampire on the rain-slicked roof of a castle, we expect your character to do exciting and dangerous activities in the course of their adventures. Whether those exciting and dangerous actions succeed or fail is determined by your character's skills.

Skills represent what your character excels at doing; the more ranks in a skill, the better your character performs that skill. Anytime your character does something that has a possibility of failure (and that failure has some negative consequences for your character), your character makes a skill check to see if they succeed or not.

As we've discussed previously, skills are used in conjunction with characteristics to make checks. How this works is covered on page 13, but in brief, the higher of the two values determines how many Ability dice  you add to your dice pool, and the lower of the two values is how many of those  are upgraded into Proficiency dice . Remember, in GENESYS, your character never makes a check just using their skill, or just their characteristic.

WHAT ARE SKILLS?

Technically, anything that your character might learn could be considered a skill. However, that would lead to a skill list that is ridiculously bloated and needlessly specific. To avoid this, we've created a list of skills in GENESYS that are fairly broad and focused on activities that can lead to climatic moments in a story.

For instance, instead of having separate skills for running, jumping, and swimming, we have the Athletics skill. Someone with multiple ranks in Athletics excels at all three activities. Likewise, we do not have a skill for cooking, because preparing a well-cooked meal is rarely a life-or-death situation. Instead, we have the Stealth skill, because sneaking up on an unsuspecting guard or trying to escape from a maximum security prison probably is a life-or-death situation.

Skills are divided into four categories based on their general application and use. **Combat** skills deal with how a character may act and react in a physical confrontation. Other skills may be useful during a fight, but generally, your character uses combat skills to commit violence.

Social skills, on the other hand, deal with how your character may act and react in a social setting. They essentially mirror combat skills; social skills are how your character interacts with others (without fighting them).

We classify skills that deal with general actions as **general** skills. This category covers a wide range of activities, from sneaking and picking pockets to healing friends.

Finally, **knowledge** skills are entirely cerebral. They do not govern action—only understanding. We only have one knowledge skill (called, appropriately enough, Knowledge) that covers all topics of information. However, individual settings can have a wider variety of knowledge skills covering a broader range of topics.

SKILL RANKS

When a character chooses to attempt an action, the player begins by forming a dice pool. The higher of the relevant characteristic and skill ranks is used to determine the total number of Ability dice  in the pool. The smaller of these two values indicates how many of those dice are upgraded to Proficiency dice . A character who has no ranks in a skill is considered to be unskilled. This character has a value of 0 for the skill in question, so their checks for that skill are made without upgrading any Ability dice  to Proficiency dice .

Aside from their use in the game mechanics, it may also be useful to consider what skill ranks represent in a more narrative sense. Even a single rank in a skill represents a significant amount of time spent learning and practicing it. We assume that most characters in your game world can do the basic, everyday tasks related to a skill without having a rank in that skill. For example, in a modern day setting, most characters can drive a car but do not have ranks in the Driving skill. The kinds of routine tasks they perform almost never require a skill check (and if they do need to make a skill check, they can still make the check without having any ranks in the skill).

The first and second ranks of a skill represent a grounding in that skill, but limited practical experience. At this point, your character may have just completed a formal education, taken part in an apprenticeship, or begun an entry-level job. At this level of competency, your PC knows the basics of the skill and can routinely succeed at simple tasks, but is often overwhelmed by complex ones.

The third and fourth ranks are indicative of a true professional. These are individuals who have honed the skill thoroughly and can make their living at it. At this level, characters might be talented and capable physicians, respected pilots, or gifted mechanics. Routine tasks are trivially simple, and these characters have the experience

to deal with complex tasks. They can even attempt a truly formidable job with preparation and planning.

Only a handful of individuals attain the fifth rank of a skill. Few can adequately appreciate the artistry of a master's craft, so those who attain this level must deliberately challenge themselves to perfect their expertise. These individuals are generally driven and passionate about the skill that they have mastered.

SKILL DESCRIPTIONS

This chapter details all of the skills used throughout the game. Each skill comes with a basic description of what it is and some brief suggestions for times your character might use the skill and for some times when your character wouldn't use the skill.

When reading the description, remember that the **Your character should (and shouldn't) use this skill if...** sections are meant to be suggestions and guidelines, not exhaustive lists. They should spur your imagination and give you a frame of reference, not limit you.

Finally, each skill entry describes what settings that skill is most appropriate for. Your GM can always decide to use any skill in a setting, of course, but you should check with your GM before you invest in the Computers skill for a campaign in a steampunk setting, for example.

CHOOSING SKILLS

During character creation, you should think long and hard about what skills to select for your character. More than talents or characteristics, skills define what your character is good at doing. If you're making a medieval knight, your character needs the Melee (Light) or Melee (Heavy) skill (and the Riding skill if your setting has a skill for horseback riding), lest they end up in their first combat encounter and can't use their sword very well!

Your choice of careers (see page 40) encourages you to take certain skills over other skills. This can make your choices for skill purchases easier. However, **GENESYS** gives you a lot of freedom in your skill choices overall. Therefore, you should consider what you want your character to focus in before you start spending XP on skills. You may also want to talk to your GM about what kind of game they plan to run, which should help you decide what skills to invest in. However, no matter what kind of game you're playing, there are a few skills you (or at least one person in your group) should consider investing in.

Unless your game is going to be completely devoid of combat, you should probably consider investing in at least one combat skill. If your character concept goes against

TABLE I.3—1: COMPLETE SKILL LIST

SKILL	SETTINGS	PAGE
Alchemy	Fantasy, steampunk, and weird war.	57
Arcana	Any setting using the magic rules.	70
Astrocartography	Space opera.	57
Athletics	All settings.	58
Brawl	All settings.	67
Charm	All settings.	54
Coercion	All settings.	55
Computers	Modern day, science fiction, and space opera.	58
Cool	All settings.	59
Coordination	All settings.	59
Deception	All settings.	56
Discipline	All settings.	60
Divine	Any setting using the magic rules.	70
Driving	Steampunk, weird war, modern day, science fiction, and space opera.	60
Gunnery	Steampunk, weird war, modern day, science fiction, and space opera.	69
Knowledge	All settings.	66
Leadership	All settings.	56
Mechanics	All settings.	60
Medicine	All settings.	61
Melee	Steampunk, weird war, modern day, science fiction, and space opera.	67
Melee (Heavy)	Fantasy.	68
Melee (Light)	Fantasy.	68
Negotiation	All settings.	56
Operating	All settings.	62
Perception	All settings.	62
Piloting	Weird war, modern day, science fiction, and space opera.	62
Primal	Any setting using the magic rules.	70
Ranged	Fantasy.	68
Ranged (Heavy)	Steampunk, weird war, modern day, science fiction, and space opera.	69
Ranged (Light)	Steampunk, weird war, modern day, science fiction, and space opera.	68
Resilience	All settings.	63
Riding	Fantasy and steampunk settings.	63
Skulduggery	All settings.	64
Stealth	All settings.	64
Streetwise	All settings.	65
Survival	All settings.	65
Vigilance	All settings.	65

ADDITIONAL AND CUSTOM SKILLS

Hey, GMs! We chose the skills included in **GENESYS** specifically because they are skills with broad ranges of applications that should show up in nearly every game and setting. Stealth, for example, is important whether you're sneaking up on orcs in a forest or defense robots on a distant planet.

However, there are skills that are very important in some settings, but not in others. Skills for flying spaceships are very important in science fiction settings, but you're not going to need them in a fantasy setting. We've called these skills out as only being appropriate for certain settings.

In addition, one of the great things about **GENESYS** is that you can make up the skills you feel are important for your setting. If you want to look into inventing your own custom skills, check out page 190 in **Part III** of this book.

being a competent fighter, then make sure some other members of your group are investing in combat skills.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills govern social interactions between characters. When your character uses these skills, they try to convince, force, trick, or make a deal for an opposing character to do something your character wants. Thus, social skill checks are often opposed skill checks. Check out the **Social Skill Interactions** sidebar, on page 55, for more about this and **Chapter 7: Social Encounters**, on page 118, for more on social encounters in general.

All social skills work in all settings (after all, basic interactions between people work the same in every setting).

CHARM (PRESENCE)

The ability to compliment, flatter, woo, and generally make other people like you is something that's pretty important to a lot of player characters. For characters who want to be likable, popular, and good at persuading other people to do what they want them to do, Charm is the skill they rely on. A character with a lot of ranks in Charm may be unctuous and insincerely flattering, or maybe they're just a genuinely nice person.

Likewise, unless your game is going to be a constant dungeon crawl, at least some members of your party should invest in social skills. Not everyone has to be a smooth talker, but since social interactions are just as important to roleplaying games as fighting, not being able to interact in social encounters means you won't be interacting with a whole chunk of the game.

During adventures, you can expect characters to get hurt. Medicine is a skill someone in your party should invest in so they can patch up the other characters.

You should also consider investing in Cool or Vigilance, since these skills help protect your character from being affected by an opponent's social skill checks. Characters with high ranks in these skills are also more likely to act earlier during a combat round.

Beyond that, the best piece of advice we can offer you is to make sure your party has a diversity of skills as a whole. It's perfectly fine for characters to specialize, as long as everyone doesn't specialize in the same skill set. By making sure your character doesn't share the same focus as your friends' characters, you help guarantee that everyone in your group gets their own chance to do something awesome during the game, and you ensure there's no challenge that your group can't overcome by working together.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to persuade someone to do your character a favor, especially if it might be inconvenient, expensive, or even dangerous for that person.
- Your character tries to appeal to someone's better nature (even if it doesn't exist!) to get them to do something out of character for that person.
- Your character tries to flirt with, seduce, or make a romantic overture to someone.
- Your character tries to make themselves look better to everyone around them. A lot of politicians and public figures have high ranks in Charm.
- Your character performs in front of an audience, acting, playing music, telling jokes, or giving a speech.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character is not at all sincere about what they are saying or doing. If there's duplicity or lying involved, your character should use the Deception skill.
- Your character is being polite, but subtly implying

SOCIAL SKILL INTERACTIONS

Social skills are an informal category of skills that we've created. These skills are skills that your character uses to interact with other characters, usually outside of combat. Basically, these are the skills your character uses when it's time to talk, rather than fight.

Social skill checks generally use one of the following skills: Charm, Coercion, Deception, Leadership, or Negotiation. When your character is interacting one on one with another character using these skills, the check is usually an opposed check (see page 25). This represents the fact that at their core, these social

interactions involve your character trying to influence the thoughts or actions of another character. The other character is going to try to resist that influence, either consciously or subconsciously.

Generally, the social skill used to interact with someone determines the skill that someone uses to oppose it. In **Table I.3–2: Social Skill Interactions**, we've listed the five social skills, the skills generally used to oppose them, and why. As always, of course, you can make an argument that a different skill might make more sense, but this table should serve as the baseline.

TABLE I.3–2: SOCIAL SKILL INTERACTIONS

ACTING SKILL	OPPOSING SKILL
Coercion, Leadership	Discipline: The mental fortitude to disobey orders, or the mental strength to resist interrogation and face threats without flinching.
Deception	Vigilance: The mental alertness to notice when someone is lying (since lies and deceptions, by their very nature, are not something someone announces).
Charm	Cool: The ability to keep calm and maintain composure when being charmed or flattered, and to respond politely to flattery without giving away something or giving in to someone's requests.
Negotiation	Negotiation: Bargaining is usually a back-and-forth between two sides, with both sides using their negotiating skills to try to get as much of what they want as possible.

violence or some other threat. In those cases, your character should use the Coercion skill.

- Your character uses their authority (either through rank, station, or natural force of personality) to give orders. These are times for your character to use the Leadership skill.
- Your character interacts with someone who is already friendly to them, or asks someone to do something that is not at all an inconvenience for them (generally, you don't need to use Charm to ask your spouse to pick up something from the store on their way home from work).

COERCION (WILLPOWER)

Some people believe that the only way to maintain respect is to be feared. Others have learned that the best way to get what they want is through screaming and the threat of violence. When your character attempts to instill obedience in a target through the use of threats or acts of physical intimidation, they use the Coercion skill. Characters with multiple ranks in Coercion are often intimidating, scary, or even evil individuals. However, even good-hearted people may use Coercion to intimidate opponents so they can win a fight without bloodshed.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character issues a threat, whether or not accompanied by hostile actions. Even an implied threat—such as gesturing toward a weapon—falls under the Coercion skill.
- Your character questions or interrogates a prisoner.
- Your character uses physical or psychological torture.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character issues orders backed by the threat of their authority (such as threatening troops with courts-martial if they don't follow your character into battle). In cases like this, Leadership would be a better skill for your character to use.
- Your character tries to drive a hard bargain with someone. As long as both sides are still getting something out of the deal, Negotiation should be the skill to use.
- Your character interacts with someone who is already terrified of or completely cowed by your character. In these cases, any further threats would be superfluous.

DECEPTION (CUNNING)

When your character needs to lie to someone, they use Deception. In fact, the Deception skill covers most attempts to fool or deceive someone, which makes the skill one of the more straightforward skills to use. One thing you should keep in mind, though, is that although lying is one of the most common ways to deceive someone, it's not the only way. Your character may attempt to trick someone by only telling them certain facts and omitting others, or by using a misleading phrase. But even if you argue that your character technically told the truth, their actions still fall into the category of Deception.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tells a lie.
- Your character tries to mislead someone through clever wordplay or selective omission of certain facts.
- Your character wears a disguise and pretends to be someone else.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character actually believes the things they are saying (even if they are objectively untrue).
- Your character tells a “white lie,” a minor falsehood to make someone feel better.

LEADERSHIP (PRESENCE)

While some may follow out of a sense of duty or fear, good leaders inspire their followers through a combination of charisma, bravery, and forceful personality. We represent this quality through the Leadership skill.

Basically, Leadership is a combination of making smart decisions, being firm and decisive when doing so, and instilling a sense of loyalty and respect in your subordinates. Leadership also represents your character knowing the right decisions to make when authority is called for. Obviously, military commanders rely on Leadership, as do politicians, business owners, and even crime bosses.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character's allies are suffering from fear (see page 243), and you want to try to rally them.
- Your character tries to convince a crowd of citizens to take political action.
- Your character leads troops into battle and wants to make sure they follow your character's orders.
- Your character tries to convince a mob of rioters to stand down and return to their homes.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character threatens to hurt or kill someone if they don't obey. This would be a good use of Coercion, instead.
- Your character tries to convince someone to do something simply by being friendly and appealing. Your character should use Charm here.
- Your character has formal authority and issues routine orders, especially outside of combat or other stressful situations. If there is no good reason not to obey your character (and your character has the rank or station to issue orders), other people are simply going to obey most mundane commands automatically.

NEGOTIATION (PRESENCE)

When your character wants to make a deal, they're going to use Negotiation. If Coercion is threatening someone, Deception is lying to someone, Charm is sweet-talking someone, and Leadership is telling someone what to do, Negotiation is convincing someone to do what you want by giving them something they want in return. The skill in Negotiation comes from getting as much as you can out of a deal while offering as little as possible to the person you negotiate with.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to purchase goods or services and wants to haggle over the price.
- Your character tries to sell goods or services and turn a profit. In this case, your character needs to use Negotiation to raise the price.
- Your character attempts to broker a political agreement or treaty between two parties.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character isn't offering anything in return for what they want. Getting something for nothing is something your character can try to do using other social skills, but Negotiation is predicated on the idea of an exchange.
- Your character tells someone what to do. Negotiation has to be a bargain, so at the end of the interactions, the opposing party has agreed to do something, not been ordered to do it.
- Your character wants to buy something for a previously established price.

GENERAL SKILLS

This group of skills represents the majority of the actions your character attempts, and is probably the broadest category of skills in our game.

Some of these skills fit better in certain settings than in others. We've gone ahead and noted which skills make sense for which settings. GMs, you can choose to ignore this advice for your own games if you like, but make sure you inform your players what skills you've decided to use or not use!

ALCHEMY (INTELLECT)

Alchemy encompasses the knowledge and techniques to brew potions and elixirs. Although Alchemy isn't considered a magic skill, the effects of your concoctions may approximate or even truly be magical, depending on the campaign setting. The limits of alchemical creations are up to your GM, who will assign difficulties to Alchemy checks appropriate to the potency of the brew.

This skill should be used in the **fantasy**, **steampunk**, and **weird war** settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to identify a potion by taste.
- Your character wants to name the ingredients needed for a certain elixir.
- Your character tries to prepare a potion, elixir, poultice, tonic, or similar compound with wondrous or magical effects.
- Your character attempts to prepare a remedy for a disease or illness.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts to enchant an otherwise mundane liquid.
- Your character desires to heal someone directly through medical treatment of their wounds or laying on hands.
- Your character seeks to transmute lead into gold. That would clearly be magic!

DIFFICULTY FOR POTION BREWING

As a guideline for GMs, the difficulty of preparing a potion should generally correspond to its rarity: generally by dividing the rarity by 2 and rounding up. The resulting number should be the difficulty of the check to brew the potion. For instance, if your character wants to make a healing potion (painkillers, page 94) of rarity 2, the base difficulty of the check is Easy (◇). If your character doesn't have the proper equipment or ingredients, the difficulty may be higher.

ASTRO CARTOGRAPHY (INTELLECT)

A galaxy is a big place, and characters in a space opera game often traverse one (or more) quite a lot. The Astrocartography skill covers the understanding, use, and development of star charts, including mapping undiscovered systems. It also covers your character plotting courses for interstellar travel.

You should use this skill in the **space opera** setting.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character needs to set a course for a system that is not easily reachable or widely known.
- Your character tries to make sense of an ancient or damaged star chart (whether physical or electronic).
- Your character plots a course under stressful conditions, such as trying to escape from enemy ships.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character pilots a vessel: your character uses Operating when actually piloting a ship.
- Your character navigates a planet's surface, which calls instead for Piloting or possibly Driving.
- Your character travels a well-known route under normal conditions, which shouldn't need a check at all.

ATHLETICS (BRAWN)

Your group's characters lead dramatic lives filled with constant physical feats. Sometimes they'll be fighting an opponent with a gun, but just as often they'll be climbing mountains, swimming across raging rivers, and leaping across chasms. The Athletics skill determines how well characters perform these actions. It serves as a measure of your character's overall fitness and physical conditioning. Those who actively engage in a regimen of physical training, such as field infantry or scouts, are the most likely to have a high rank in Athletics.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts to climb up or down a structure, particularly when the climb may be tricky or the drop to the bottom is significant.
- Your character tries to swim in difficult conditions. High winds, waves, tides, and currents could all contribute to making swimming difficult enough to require an Athletics check.
- Your character tries to jump, either vertically or horizontally. Leaping across a deep chasm or trying to jump up and grab a fire escape to get away from an angry dog are both situations when your character needs to make an Athletics check.
- Your character attempts to run for an extended time.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts an activity without any chances of failure. If your character swims on a calm day in a shallow pond, goes for an early morning jog, or jumps over a small log, they don't need to bother making a check.
- Your character attempts a physical activity that relies more on hand-eye coordination and general agility than straight strength. Engaging in parkour and freerunning, swinging on a rope and rappelling down a surface, and most forms of gymnastics are activities better represented by the Coordination skill.

COMPUTERS (INTELLECT)

The Computers skill grants your character proficiency in the operation of computers and electronic systems. Possessing a lot of ranks in Computers might allow your character to build computer systems, write complex programs, design security systems, or even (depending on just how advanced your setting is) create lightweight AI for running simple constructs. In addition, the Computers skill allows your character to manipulate computerized systems in ways that might be considered outside of the manufacturer's specs. In other words, it allows your character to do risky, possibly illegal things like hacking, encoding and decoding encryption, and bypassing security systems.

You should use this skill in the **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.



YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts to pick an electronic lock, access a building's computing systems, or disarm a high-tech security system.
- Your character wants to crack the encryption on secure files or messages.
- Your character hacks into a database or computer system, or defends against a hacking attempt.
- Your character remotely pilots a small, hand-launched drone to do more than just fly it around a park. If a drone is big enough, like a Global Hawk or other full-sized uncrewed aerial vehicle, the Piloting skill might make more sense.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character has no risk of failure. Simple day-to-day tasks like checking your email, browsing social media on your phone, or watching a movie on your tablet do not require a Computers check.

HACKING AND SYSOPS

If your setting puts a lot of focus on computers and a futuristic Internet, then you may want to split the Computers skill into two different skills: Hacking and Sysops. Basically, Hacking is a skill that covers all offensive computer actions, while Sysops is the skill used to oppose any Hacking attempts, find problems with a computer server or program, and repair issues.

If this is something that interests you, you can find more information on how to make your own skills on page 190.

COOL (PRESENCE)

Staying calm and maintaining composure, outwitting an opponent, generally being cool: these exemplify things your character does with the Cool skill. Cool is something of a defensive skill in nature, since it most often comes up as the skill your character uses to resist attempts to sway or affect them. Cool also represents how your character appears to other people. If your character doesn't want to show that something affected them, they would use the Cool skill to keep their emotions invisible.

Even though Cool isn't a social skill, it is often used in social encounters. If you want to make a character who

is particularly effective in social encounters, you may want to invest in Cool.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character begins laying a trap, staging an ambush, or otherwise setting up a combat encounter in which your character initiates the combat and has to judge the right time to do so.
- Your character needs to stay calm and unaffected when being flattered or charmed by someone.
- Your character needs to refrain from saying or doing something foolish during a tense situation.
- Your character needs to keep their nerve in a tense situation, such as when piloting one of two vehicles headed toward each other at high speed.
- Your character plays a card game or other game of chance in which bluffing, luck, and gambling are all intertwined.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to prevent being surprised. The Vigilance skill would work better in that situation.
- Your character tries to maintain inner self-control, such as when meditating or resisting the effects of fear. When your character is concerned with inner composure, they should use the Discipline skill.

COORDINATION (AGILITY)

In the course of adventures, characters sometimes find themselves needing to stay stable on unsteady surfaces, crawl through narrow openings, or even land safely after a fall. Overcoming these types of challenges requires a sense of balance and a heightened degree of flexibility, both of which are represented by the Coordination skill. Coordination serves as a measure of your character's flexibility, sure-footedness, and hand-eye coordination.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to swing back and forth on a rope or rappel down a structure.
- Your character walks across a narrow surface while trying to keep their balance.
- Your character tries to squeeze into a tiny or cramped space such as a crawlspace, sewer pipe, air duct, or narrow crevice.

- Your character falls and needs to try to slow the fall or land safely.
- Your character needs to escape from physical restraints (such as handcuffs or ropes) and wants to contort their limbs or hands so that they can slip out of their bindings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to climb up or down a rope or climb up a structure. This activity relies more on strength than agility, and calls for an Athletics check instead.
- Your character falls from a short height or onto something soft enough that they won't suffer damage when they land, or is in any similar situation that has no consequences for failure (is lowered down a structure in a firmly secured harness, for example).

DISCIPLINE (WILLPOWER)

Discipline is your character's ability to focus their mind and quiet their thoughts. Discipline represents your character's maintaining self-mastery and focus, specifically. Your character also uses Discipline to overcome fear or terror and stay calm in the face of the horrifying. In addition, Discipline represents your character's mental fortitude to resist threats or coercion, or to disobey orders. Finally, in settings with psychic powers, characters may use Discipline to control those mental arts.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character confronts something terrifying and wants to avoid fleeing in horror (or to avoid other debilitating effects of fear).
- Your character tries to keep their sanity in the face of something that defies reality and rational thought.
- Your character wants to heal strain they are suffering from at the end of an encounter.
- Your character wants to meditate, calm their mind, and reach a mental equilibrium.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to keep their composure in a social setting and avoid letting their emotions show. Your character would make a Cool check instead.
- Your character catches a lie as it is being told. Noticing a lie depends on your character's Vigilance.

DRIVING (AGILITY)

The Driving skill includes the operation of all ground-based vehicles, from simple automobiles to multi-car locomotives to high-speed futuristic driving pods. The types of vehicles depend a lot on the setting, of course. Regardless, if something uses a motor and traverses land, this is the skill you'll use to operate it.

You should use this skill in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character wants to bring a vehicle to a safe stop after one of its tires is damaged.
- Your character tries to keep up speed while rounding hairpin curves when driving a vehicle.
- Your character attempts to catch up to someone else in a vehicle (if the target is on foot, a check should only be necessary if they try to escape in a crowd or through a narrow space).
- Your character swerves to avoid an animal darting across the road, or tries to avoid a falling rock on a winding mountain pass.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character operates an aircraft of any kind; this would call for the Piloting skill.
- Your character drives a vehicle under normal conditions (and at safe speeds) without any immediate danger, which shouldn't require a check at all.
- Your character attempts to modify a vehicle to improve its speed; the Mechanics skill is more appropriate for this.

MECHANICS (INTELLECT)

The Mechanics skill allows your character to build, disassemble, repair, or modify just about anything mechanical, from a broken radio to a wrecked gyrocopter. In addition, the Mechanics skill is used when salvaging technology, building fortifications, or troubleshooting a malfunctioning water pump, or any time your character needs to swing a hammer or turn a wrench. Depending on the setting, this skill may focus on different elements. In a fantasy or other low-technology setting, this skill may cover smithing and crafting (and could potentially be called something more appropriate).

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character needs to repair a damaged weapon, vehicle, or other piece of equipment.
- Your character needs to identify any parts or tools necessary prior to completing a job. This can save time and money on the project.
- Your character has access to a supply of components and tools and wants to design a completely new device.
- Your character needs to sabotage an enemy's vehicle or find a weak point in their defenses.
- Your character needs to build an item or modify it.
- Your character tries to install and modify cybernetic implants (although if you want, working on a cybernetic implant may require a Medicine and a Mechanics check to represent the fusion of human and machine).

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character has just a simple task like refueling a vehicle, hanging a door, or changing the batteries in a flashlight.
- Your character wants to program an application for a device. That would require a Computers check.

MEDICINE (INTELLECT)

In the course of their adventures, we expect your character to suffer injuries: everything from cuts and bruises to broken bones and bullet wounds. Medicine gets your character and their friends back on their feet. Any attempt to heal an organic character requires Medicine, as do other medical procedures such as elective surgery and installing cybernetics, and working with poisons, diseases, parasites, and drugs.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- They or another character has suffered wounds, and your character wants to heal those wounds.
- Your character tries to counteract or administer a poison.
- Your character needs to cure a disease.
- Your character creates a new pharmaceutical (or recreational) drug.
- They or another character has suffered a Critical Injury, and your character wants to heal it.
- Your character performs a complex medical procedure such as surgery, cybernetic augmentation, or psychotherapy.

MEDICINE CHECK DIFFICULTY

When you attempt to heal a Critical Injury, the difficulty is set by the injury in question (see page 114 for more on Critical Injuries). However, when healing wounds, the difficulty is determined by how badly injured the target is. We did this to mirror real life; bandaging a painful cut is a lot easier than trying to set a broken bone. The more wounds a character suffers, the more injured they are and the harder it should be to repair those injuries.

We also cover the details of healing in **Chapter 6: Combat Encounters**, page 95, but here are the basics. As you can see on **Table I.3-3: Medicine Check Difficulty** in the next column, the difficulty of the check varies depending on how many wounds the target currently has. When your character makes a successful Medicine check, they heal a number of wounds on the target equal to the number of ✨ your character's check generates. The target also heals an amount of strain equal to the number of ▲ generated.

Three final notes: Any one character can only make one attempt to heal a particular Critical Injury per week of game time. Also, any one character can only benefit from one Medicine check per encounter. These limits exist to prevent characters from constantly repeating checks until their patient is in perfect health. Finally, if your character tries to heal themselves, they increase the difficulty of the check by two. Hey, it's a lot harder to set your own broken arm!

TABLE I.3-3: MEDICINE CHECK DIFFICULTY

STATE OF HEALTH	DIFFICULTY
Current wounds equal half of wound threshold or less	Easy (◆)
Current wounds equal more than half of wound threshold	Average (◆◆)
Current wounds exceed wound threshold	Hard (◆◆◆)
Critical Injury	Critical Injury severity rating

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character researches a disease or poison. While studying a disease or poison directly might require Medicine, the act of researching requires a Knowledge check.
- Your character tries to heal their own strain at the end of an encounter. Recovering from strain at the end of an encounter requires Discipline or Cool.
- Your character tries to administer poison through slight of hand, such as by dropping it in a drinking cup or surreptitiously injecting it into an unsuspecting target. The inherent subterfuge in this activity makes that a Skulduggery check.

OPERATING (INTELLECT)

Sometimes, a vehicle is so big that quick reflexes and a steady hand aren't enough to operate it. When using these sorts of vehicles, for which your character needs training, a sharp mind, and the ability to keep track of a lot of information, your character employs the Operating skill. Operating represents your character's ability to drive, pilot, fly, or sail anything big. Ships, dirigibles, and spaceships (really, anything with a crew) all require the Operating skill. In low-tech settings, your character may use this skill to steer and sail a sailing ship. In steampunk settings, Operating could be used to pilot a war zeppelin. In modern day or weird war settings, your character needs this skill to sail a merchant steamer or pilot a submarine. In the science fiction or space opera settings, your character uses Operating to pilot large spaceships.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your clipper must safely ride out a storm without losing speed (or a mast).
- Your character pilots a zeppelin to slip around the stern of an opponent's flying fortress.
- Your character calculates an orbital slingshot maneuver for their starship.
- Your character docks a spaceship with a space station.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character performs routine ship maneuvers in open space.
- Your character wants to upgrade the engines of the ship. That requires a Mechanics check.
- Your character is the captain of a ship and is giving orders. This requires the Leadership skill.

PERCEPTION (CUNNING)

When your character wants to make an active attempt to study their surroundings, notice clues in a crime scene, or search for hidden foes, they use the Perception skill to do so. Perception represents your character's conscious use of all five senses to observe their environment (or, if you're playing some sort of alien species, your character may have more than five). In any case, the most important point is that Perception represents your character's active use of these senses.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character wants to search a crime scene for clues.
- Your character wants to study the surrounding landscape for possible threats.
- Your character conducts surveillance on an unaware target from a distance.
- Your character studies an ancient relic, trying to spot any minute details that could reveal its purpose or construction.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to avoid being surprised during an ambush. Constant, unconscious awareness of your character's surroundings is a function of the Vigilance skill.
- Your character is being lied to, and you're trying to find out if your character noticed or not. Again, Vigilance is the skill for this situation.
- Your character tries to follow a trail or track a foe through the wilderness. The Survival skill covers these activities.

PILOTING (AGILITY)

This skill covers the operation of any aerial vehicle that requires reflexes and hand-eye coordination to operate, from gyrocopters and helicopters, to jet fighters and gliders, all the way up to starfighters and space-capable drop ships. As with the Driving skill, the type of vehicles involved depend on the setting. Regardless, if something flies through the air or through space and requires a pilot with quick reflexes and a hot hand on the throttle and joystick (or their equivalent), then you'll need Piloting to operate it!

This skill should be used in the **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings. (You can also use it in the **steampunk** setting if there are

gyrocopters or other personal flying vehicles other than large, rigid airships.)

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character needs to land an airplane with one (or both!) engines out.
- Your character tries to outmaneuver opponents in a dogfight.
- Your character flies a drop ship through a maze of needle-sharp rock spires to a landing zone.
- Your character attempts to land a personal dirigible while under fire from an enemy airship.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to repair a damaged aircraft propeller or engine, a task that calls for the Mechanics skill.
- Your character drives a car off a precipice and wants to land with as few fatalities as possible; that's still Driving (and likely with a pretty high difficulty!)
- Your character fires a weapon mounted on a vehicle, which requires a Ranged or Gunnery check.
- There is no chance of catastrophic failure when operating the vehicle. Checks are not required for simple tasks like flying in open skies with light wind.

RESILIENCE (BRAWN)

When the going gets tough, the tough rely on their Resilience skill to keep going. Resilience represents your character's ability to overcome pain and fight through fatigue. Characters with ranks in Resilience are also better at resisting poisons and diseases, and surviving hostile environments. When your character stumbles into a small Alaskan town after surviving two weeks on the frozen tundra, they have their Resilience skill to thank.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to go without sleeping for days on end, and you need to see if they stay awake.
- Your character ingests a toxin, and you need to see how bad the effects are.
- Your character endures a hostile environment (somewhere too hot, too cold, or even too polluted) for days on end.
- Your character attempts to recover from a Critical Injury on their own, without medical attention.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to do something that isn't beyond the limits of normal endurance. Going for a day-long hike wouldn't call for a Resilience check unless the hike is through the Rocky Mountains in a snowstorm.
- Your character immediately stops and rests to recover fully at the end of the activity. If there's no need to track lasting consequences, there's no need to make the check.

RIDING (AGILITY)

Sooner or later, characters in a fantasy campaign are going to want to use mounts. These are most likely horses, but the same skill is used for riding anything from donkeys to giant insects. In most settings, it can be assumed that everyone knows the basics of riding a saddled horse, and a skill check is only required for pursuits, races, or riding in dangerous conditions.

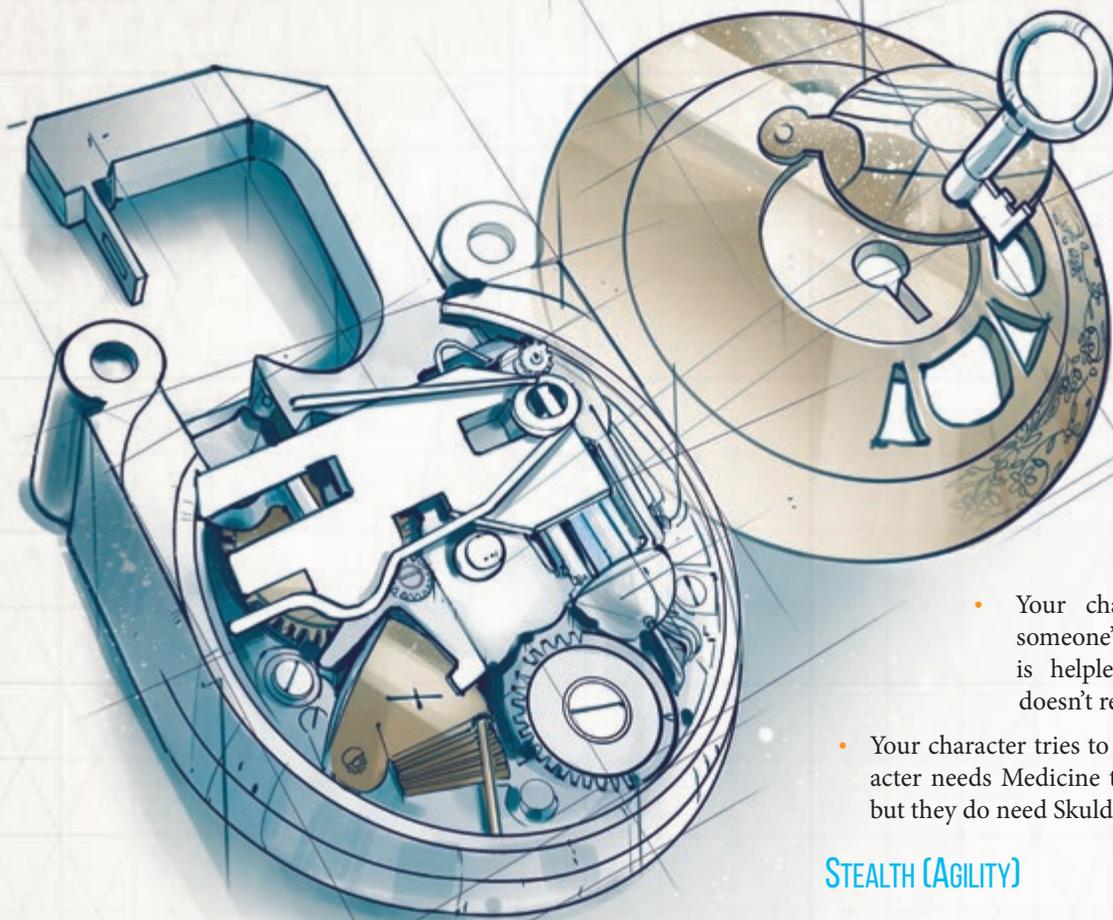
You should use this skill for the **fantasy** and **steampunk** settings (in other settings, where riding is not an everyday occurrence, you can use the Survival skill to ride and handle animals).

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character flees from pursuers who are also mounted, or fast enough to potentially catch up.
- Your character tries to joust at a tournament.
- Your character competes in a friendly (or not so friendly) race.
- Your character tries to catch up to enemies with a significant head start.
- Your character's mount panics during a storm, and your character needs to get the creature under control.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character travels without any immediate danger.
- Your character makes an attack from horseback. The additional difficulty brought about by attacking from a horse should be factored into the combat check's difficulty, generally in the form of one or more ■.
- Your character tries to tame a wild animal. In this case, your character uses the Survival skill.



SKULDUGGERY (CUNNING)

Most roleplaying games have a long and storied tradition of characters disarming traps, picking locks, and (if those tasks fail) breaking out of prison. In our game, characters perform those activities with the Skulduggery skill. Skulduggery covers a combination of skills your character would use to engage in covert or criminal activity. If you're building a character you'd consider a "thief" or "rogue," this is one skill you should pick up.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts to pick someone's pocket or lift their wallet.
- Your character tries to pick a lock or disable a trap. Your character would also use Skulduggery to set a trap in the first place.
- Your character wants to study a security system.
- Your character attempts to distract an opponent through guile or a feint, such as by throwing a handful of dirt in their eyes during a fight.

- Your character tries to surreptitiously slip a poison into someone's food or drink.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts to sneak into a location unnoticed. Your character needs to make a Stealth check instead.
- Your character attempts to pick someone's pocket when that person is helpless or incapacitated. This doesn't require a check at all.
- Your character tries to make a poison. Your character needs Medicine to make poisons or toxins, but they do need Skulduggery to use them.

STEALTH (AGILITY)

When your character wants to act unnoticed by anyone else, they use the Stealth skill. In many ways, Stealth is one of the simpler skills, and it covers a pretty specific set of activities. However, being stealthy is something that comes up in many roleplaying games, so it tends to be a very useful skill to invest in.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts to hide from someone.
- Your character tries to tail someone through a crowd, and to do it without being noticed.
- Your character tries to infiltrate a government installation while avoiding both electronic security and human guards.
- Your character tries to move quietly through a house.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to pick someone's pocket. Your character needs Skulduggery for this activity.
- Your character tries to remain hidden when their opponent has no chance of spotting them, such as if they try to avoid being seen by an aircraft during a blizzard at midnight.

- Your character has no realistic chance of hiding from an opponent, such as if trying to hide from a nearby person while in the middle of miles of salt flats at noon.

STREETWISE (CUNNING)

Some call it the “school of hard knocks,” while others refer to it as “street smarts” or “gut instincts,” but in all cases, the Streetwise skill is your character’s ability to survive and thrive in rough and dangerous urban areas. If your character has ranks in Streetwise, they instinctively know how criminals tend to operate, which locations to avoid after dark, where to go to obtain illicit drugs and services, and other information crucial for making their way in the seedy underbelly of a major city.

In many ways, Streetwise can be thought of as the urban counterpart to Survival. They both represent many of the same activities, but Streetwise applies to urban areas, while Survival applies to the wilderness.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character looks for a merchant who sells black-market goods or illegal services.
- Your character wants to understand particular references or slang in a conversation.
- Your character tries to approach criminals and start up a conversation without appearing like an outsider or a threat.
- Your character tries to find their way around an unfamiliar city.
- Your character tries to track and hunt someone somewhere in a city.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to find their way around a rural or wilderness environment. In this case, your character should be using Survival.
- Your character interacts with the upper crust of society. Charm (or possibly Deception or Coercion) may serve the character better here.
- Your character has already established themselves as a member of the criminal underworld, and is continuing to interact with other criminals. Streetwise lets your character fit in, know how to act, and know what topics to bring up and what to avoid. However, it shouldn’t replace social skills.

SURVIVAL (CUNNING)

There are a thousand tricks your character needs to master in order to survive in the wilderness, and the more ranks in Survival they have, the more likely they are to know them. The Survival skill covers your character’s ability to find food and water, cope with dangerous conditions, hunt and skin animals, and, well, survive in any location that doesn’t have a supermarket on the corner.

In many ways, you can think of Survival as the rural counterpart to Streetwise. They both represent many of the same activities, but Survival applies to the wilderness, while Streetwise applies to the big city.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character is trapped in the wilderness and needs to find food and potable water.
- Your character needs to notice approaching severe weather and know how to prepare for it.
- Your character needs to follow a crude map or directions through a rural area to find a specific location.
- Your character tries to tame or calm a wild animal, or handle a domesticated animal.
- Your character hunts something (or someone!) through a wilderness setting.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character uses a highly accurate and detailed map to find a location.
- Your character tries to find their way around an urban environment. In this case, your character should be using Streetwise.
- Your character interacts with an animal that already likes or respects your character, or your character asks an animal to do something completely within their nature (they wouldn’t need to make a Survival check to get a dog to play “fetch,” for example).

VIGILANCE (WILLPOWER)

Vigilance represents the ability to be constantly aware of your surroundings, often without consciously making the effort. Characters with ranks in Vigilance are more likely to spot threats in their environment, notice important clues out of the corner of their eye, and catch lies as they’re being told.

You probably noticed from the description that Vigilance, more than most other skills, is a bit of a passive

skill. In fact, Vigilance is supposed to be used when your character doesn't expect a threat, isn't looking for a clue, or is otherwise unaware of something important. This is why we use it to determine Initiative in combat when a character is surprised, to see how much that character was paying attention. It also means that when your GM asks you to make a Vigilance check, you may suspect that something is up. Your character, however, shouldn't be suspicious (unless they pass the check!) Vigilance is also one of skills that you use to oppose certain social skill checks (primarily Deception) when those checks target your character.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character just got ambushed, and you are rolling to determine Initiative order. A high Vigilance

means your character has a better chance of reacting quickly to the threat.

- Your character is being lied to; the opponent's Deception check is opposed by your character's Vigilance skill.
- Your character has a chance to notice important details in their surroundings while not looking for them directly.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- You are determining Initiative order when your character is not surprised (such as when they are the ambushers, instead of the ambushed). In this case, your character uses Cool instead.
- Your character actively looks for something. This calls for a Perception check.

KNOWLEDGE SKILLS

Knowledge and information in a roleplaying game can be a tricky subject. Consider how much you know about the world you live in. In a fantasy world, characters should know every bit as much about their fictitious setting as you know about the real world around you.

Realistically, this is impossible unless you memorize a gazetteer or world guide of the same size and level of detail as the Encyclopedia Britannica. To bridge that gap, we have knowledge skills. When the GM needs to determine whether your character knows something, they can have your character make a Knowledge skill check. Success means your character knew it all along, even if you didn't!

Knowledge skills also let you make characters who are smarter than you are. That way, when your character needs to recalculate the orbital trajectory of a malfunctioning ballistic missile in the next five minutes, they can make a Knowledge skill check and scribble out the answer on the back of a cocktail napkin even if you the player wouldn't know where to begin! Knowledge skills let us all make information a bit more abstract and keep games from getting bogged down in technical minutia.

KNOWLEDGE (INTELLECT)

In the core of GENESYS, we only have one knowledge skill. Appropriately enough, we call it Knowledge. Knowledge is a very broad skill that represents your

character's grasp of anything there is to know, from physics and biology, to quantum mechanics, to art history and philosophy.

Not every character is going to be a math prodigy and a philosopher and a historian all in one, so it's up to you to determine what kind of knowledge your character specializes in. Also, you should note that just because a character doesn't have ranks in Knowledge doesn't mean they are completely ignorant. We assume everyone has some basic knowledge of how the world works and, depending on the setting, probably has the equivalent of a primary school education. A couple of ranks in Knowledge may represent some sort of secondary school or apprenticeship, while more ranks may represent the equivalent of a college education. Five ranks may represent being a true prodigy in a specific field.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character tries to find out if they know an important fact about the world around them.
- Your character tries to do something academic, such as calculate a theorem, conduct an experiment, or write a history thesis.
- Your character tries to research a particular topic.
- Your character performs critical thinking or tries to figure out a logic puzzle.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character needs to know information that is fairly simple or trivial. Asking someone to add 2+2 shouldn't require a check, for example.
- The answer your character is looking for can easily be found in an accessible, easily referenced database, perhaps one that is electronic and accessed through a worldwide communications network. Whether or not your character can apply this information, however, may be determined by a Knowledge check.

COMBAT SKILLS

Combat skills feature pretty prominently in most games you'll be playing with **GENESYS**. Basically, when your character needs to punch, shoot, stab, or wrestle someone, they use a combat skill to do so. Combat skills determine how good your character is with weapons, how likely they are to hit a target, and even how much damage they do if they hit.

In the **GENESYS** core game, we have three combat skills. The Brawl skill represents your character's ability to punch, kick, wrestle, and generally fight with their hands. The Melee skill governs your character's ability to fight in hand-to-hand or "close" combat with weapons like swords, knives, and clubs. The Ranged skill is how your character attacks foes from a distance.

These skills are very broad, and deliberately so! We made the skills all-encompassing because what combat skills are applicable in a game is going to depend a whole lot on the game's setting. That's also why the format for these skills is different than in other sections.

The Melee and Ranged skills both have a number of sub-skills listed after the main entry. Most settings focus more either on Melee or on Ranged combat, so in those settings, we break up either the Melee or the Ranged skill into its constituent sub-skills to make combat more interesting (Brawl always stays as a single skill). That way, instead of buying just one combat skill to be good at all elements of a type of combat, you have to specialize your character more. It keeps that skill from becoming an automatic choice for all characters, and helps different fighting characters feel more unique.

Since combat is a big part of structured gameplay (and involves its own specialized set of rules), we include a lot of specifics on how to use combat skills starting on page 95.

ADDITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SKILLS

Although we only provide one knowledge skill in **GENESYS**, we fully expect that you can add your own knowledge skills to your own setting. Simply jot a list of some of the particular topics you think your characters need to know about in your game, then look at our guidelines for creating a skill, on page 190. If you do create new knowledge skills, however, you should get rid of the single, all-encompassing Knowledge skill we present here!

BRAWL (BRAWN)

The Brawl skill is what your character uses to fight anyone who's right in front of them, rather than beyond arm's reach, when your character is fighting without any weapons. Martial arts, wrestling, and unarmed combat are all covered by this skill.

You should use this skill in all settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with their bare hands or a weapon specifically designed to augment an unarmed attack, such as cestus or brass knuckles (or even a roll of coins).
- Your character tries to pin, grapple, or hold someone.
- Your character uses some form of unarmed martial art.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with a projectile weapon or a thrown weapon. If your character is targeting someone who is not within arm's reach, they should be using the Ranged skill.
- Your character tries to fix or modify a melee weapon. Repairing or creating weapons is usually handled by the Mechanics skill.

MELEE (BRAWN)

The Melee skill is what your character uses to fight anyone who's right in front of them, rather than beyond arm's reach, when using a weapon. This skill, in its broadest interpretation, covers any sort of hand or melee weapon.

You should use this skill (instead of one of its sub-skills) in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings (or in any setting where most fighting is done with firearms).

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with a sword, rapier, dirk, mace, axe, spear, halberd, knife...we could go on, but you get the idea.
- Your character fights in a duel.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with a projectile weapon or a thrown weapon. If your character targets someone not at arm's reach, they should use the Ranged skill.
- Your character tries to fix or modify a melee weapon. Repairing or creating weapons is usually handled by the Mechanics skill.

MELEE (LIGHT)

In settings with an emphasis on fighting hand-to-hand, the Melee (Light) skill is what your character uses to fight with pretty much any close combat weapon they can wield in one hand. This includes swords, knives, maces, clubs, and countless similar weapons.

You should use this skill in the **fantasy** setting.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with a rapier, dirk, mace, one-handed axe, light spear, sword, katana, knife, or other weapon easily wielded in one hand.
- Your character wants to hit someone with their shield.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with a halberd, greatsword, flail, maul, or other large weapon that requires two hands to wield.

MELEE (HEAVY)

In settings with an emphasis on fighting hand-to-hand, the Melee (Heavy) skill is what your character uses to fight with large, heavy weapons that take both hands to swing properly. This includes mauls, greatswords, flails, halberds, and countless similar weapons.

You should use this skill in the **fantasy** setting.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with a halberd, greatsword, flail, maul, or other large weapon that requires two hands to wield.

- Your character picks up a heavy tree branch and tries to crush someone's skull with it.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with a rapier, dirk, mace, one-handed axe, light spear, sword, katana, knife, or other weapon that can be swung easily with one hand.

RANGED (AGILITY)

While the Melee skill is what your character uses to fight anyone who's right in front of them, the Ranged skill is what your character uses to fight everyone else. Your character uses this skill to fight with any sort of ranged weapon, from bows and arrows to particle beam cannons. They're also going to use this skill if they want to throw things at someone.

You should use this skill (instead of one of its sub-skills) in the **fantasy** setting (or any setting where most fighting is done beyond arm's reach).

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with a crossbow, longbow, blowgun, pistol, rifle, machine gun, laser pistol, missile launcher...again, you probably get the idea.
- Your character uses the weaponry of a vehicle such as the cannon on a tank, the machine guns on a fighter plane, or the Gauss rifles on a starfighter.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character fights with any kind of close combat weapon. Those are handled by the Melee skill.
- Your character uses a ranged weapon to hit someone within arm's reach, such as by taking the butt of their rifle and using it like a club. Even though they're using a ranged weapon, they're using it as if it were a melee weapon, and the check should be handled by the Melee skill.
- Your character tries to fix or modify a ranged weapon. Repairing or creating weapons is usually handled by the Mechanics or Knowledge skill.

RANGED (LIGHT)

In settings where your characters do most of their fighting with firearms, your character uses Ranged (Light) to shoot pistols, throw knives, and toss grenades at their opponents. This skill covers pretty much every light ranged weapon designed to be fired (or thrown) from one hand.

You should use this skill in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character shoots a pistol, submachine gun, flechette pistol, laser pistol, or a similar weapon.
- Your character wants to hurl a throwing knife.
- Your character wants to toss a grenade.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character is firing a shotgun, rifle, laser cannon, machine gun, or other large, heavy weapon.
- Your character is firing a weapon mounted on a spaceship or vehicle.

RANGED (HEAVY)

In those same firearm-focused settings, your character uses Ranged (Heavy) to shoot rifles, shotguns, assault rifles, laser rifles, and similar weapons. This skill covers pretty much every heavy ranged weapon designed to be fired while carried in two hands, but not large enough that it requires multiple people or a tripod to use.

You should use this skill in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character shoots a shotgun, assault rifle, flamethrower, flechette launcher, sniper rifle, or similar weapon.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character is firing a pistol, submachine gun, flechette pistol, laser pistol, or a similar weapon.

- Your character is firing a weapon mounted on a spaceship or vehicle.

GUNNERY

Your character uses Gunnery, the third of the Ranged sub-skills, to fire machine guns, plasma cannons, heavy railguns, missile launchers, grenade launchers, and pretty much any other weapon large enough that you need a tripod or team of people to use it. Your character also uses it to fire weapons mounted on vehicles.

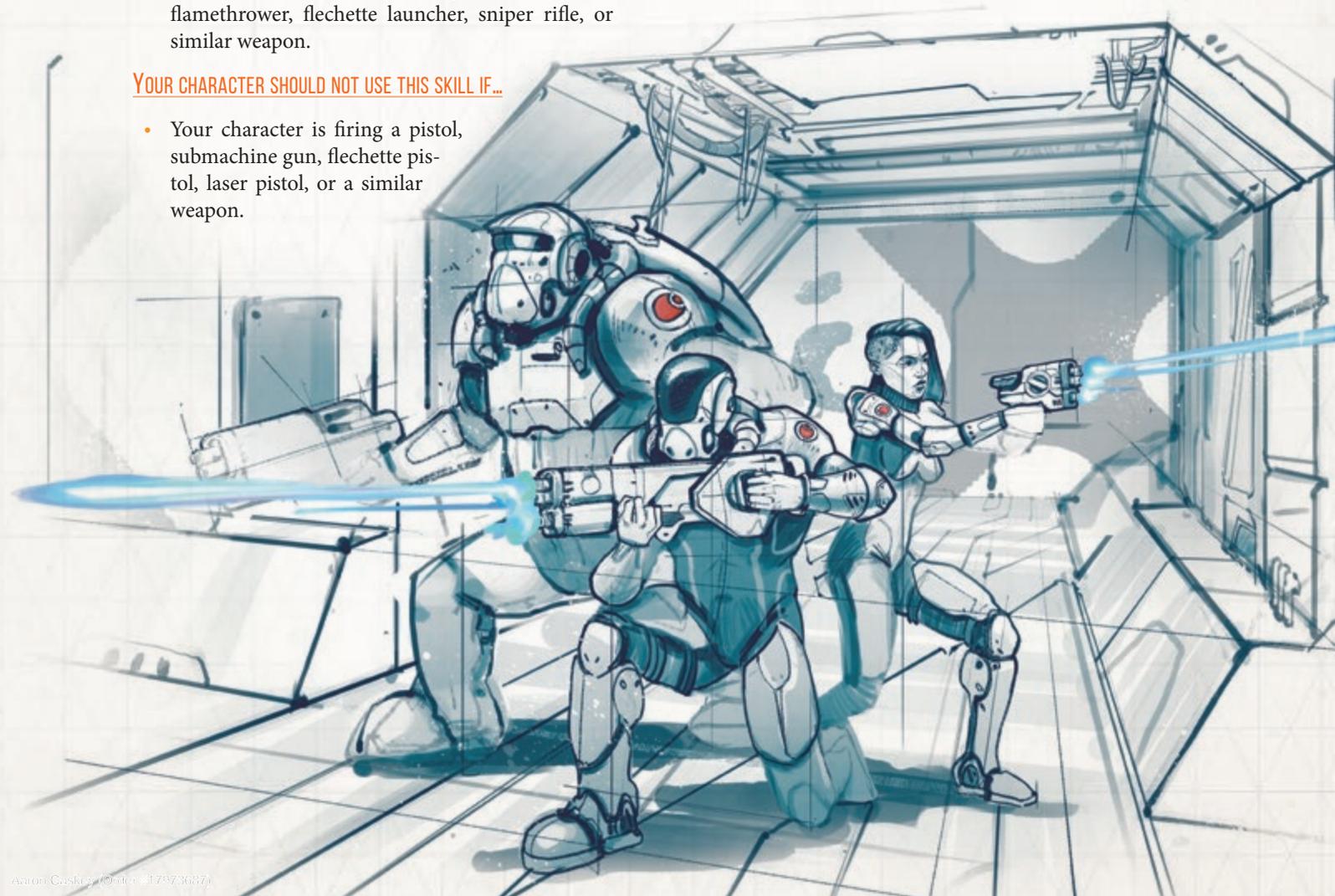
You should use this skill in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character shoots a machine gun, cannon, missile launcher, or other “crewed” weapon.
- While in a vehicle or spaceship, your character wants to fire the vehicle’s weapon systems.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character is firing a pistol, submachine gun, flechette pistol, laser pistol, or similar weapon.
- Your character shoots a shotgun, assault rifle, flamethrower, flechette launcher, sniper rifle, or similar weapon.



MAGIC SKILLS

Magic skills are a unique subset of skills that only work if your setting includes magic and the magic alternate rules found on page 210. Make sure your setting includes these rules before you start taking ranks in these skills!

You should use these skills in the **fantasy** setting. It is not uncommon for the **steampunk** and **weird war** settings to also include magic, so potentially you can use those skills in these settings as well. If you're using the **modern day** setting to emulate the urban fantasy genre, you'll include magic and magic skills in that setting, but you're very unlikely to see magic in other settings.

ARCANA (INTELLECT)

The Arcana skill represents your ability to manipulate magical energies, whether they are the fundamental forces of nature or power drawn from an unnatural source. Magic is used to cast spells and identify sources of magic in the world. It also includes your general knowledge of magic and its function. The Arcana skill is not, however, used for magic derived from the gods or similar divine sources; that would be the Divine skill.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character wants to throw a fireball at a group of enemies.
- Your character tries to use a crystal ball to observe the movements of a distant individual.
- Your character attempts to erect a magical barrier to block a passage.
- Your character wishes to curse a foe and bring misfortune on their actions.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts to invoke the power of a deity to smite their foes.
- Your character seeks to contact the spirits of the dead to consult them in some business.
- Your character attempts to heal an ally.

DIVINE (WILLPOWER)

So-called “divine magic” is the ability of priests, holy warriors, and their like to produce miraculous effects by invoking or channeling the power of their deity or

faith. For many practitioners, this is completely different from magic, but many others see little practical distinction between the alleged sources of the wondrous effects worked by mages and priests.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character lays hands on someone to heal their wounds or disease.
- Your character calls on the strength of their faith to bolster an ally.
- Your character prays to their deity for a sign.
- Your character presents their holy symbol in an effort to turn back the undead.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character wants to fling arcane energy at a living enemy.
- Your character recites scripture in an attempt to sway a crowd. This would require the Charm or Leadership skill.
- Your character tries to counter an enemy's spell.

PRIMAL (CUNNING)

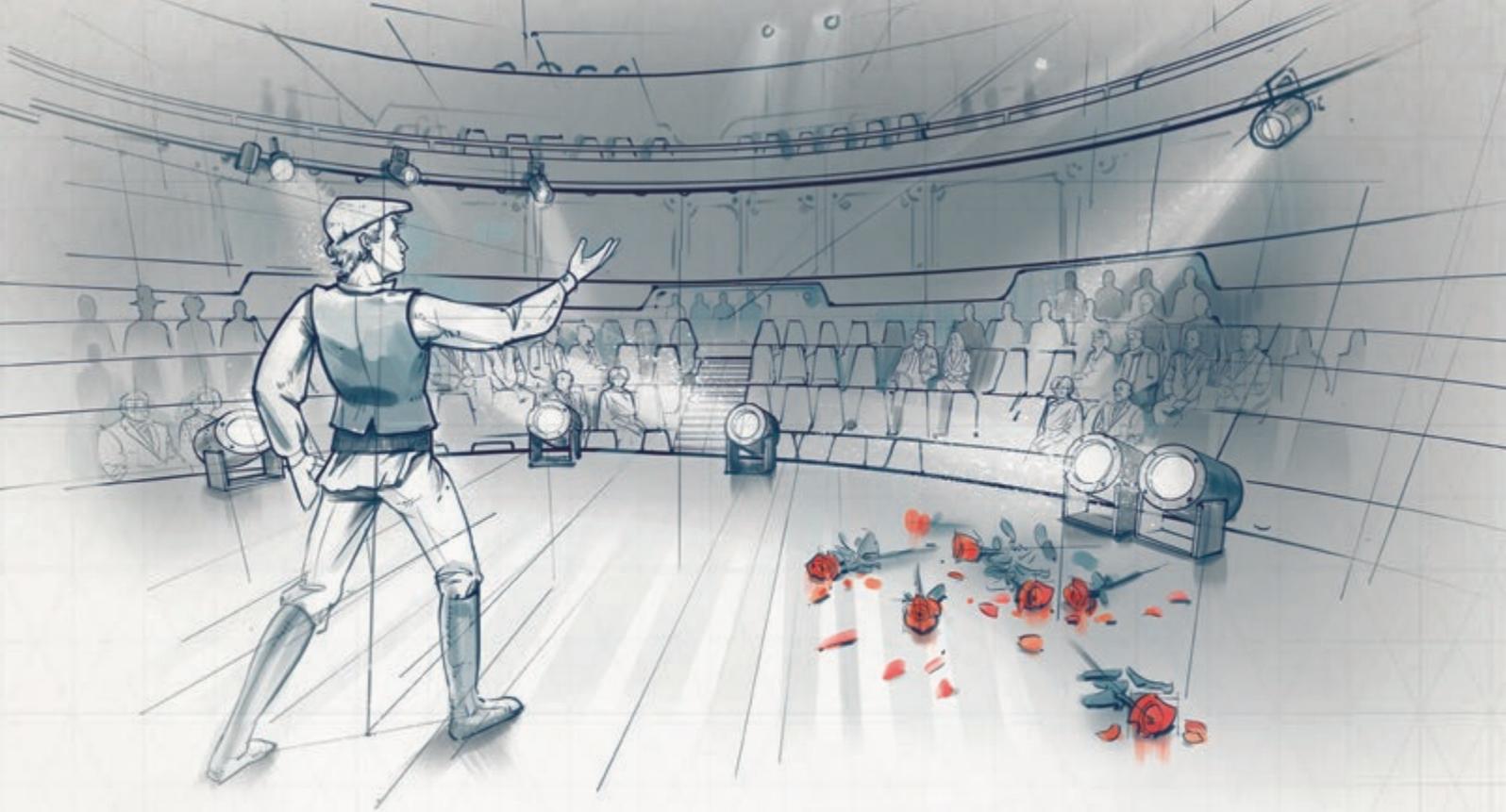
The Primal skill represents the ability to tap into the natural energies that infuse most worlds. Often viewed as primitive and uncivilized, Primal magic still can be incredibly powerful, as it draws on the life-force of every living thing around you.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character wants to heal a friend.
- Your character attempts to communicate with plants or animals or gain the cooperation of natural forces.
- Your character wishes to manipulate or control the weather, including summoning storms or throwing lightning at foes.

YOUR CHARACTER SHOULD NOT USE THIS SKILL IF...

- Your character attempts to fire a magic bolt at an enemy or group of enemies.
- Your character tries to raise or reanimate the dead.



CHAPTER 4: TALENTS

Talents generally represent specialized techniques that a character has mastered, typically through intense practice and study. A character is likely to be more successful when engaged in actions for which they have appropriate skills and talents.

Generally, skills are what your character uses to perform a task. If your character wants to climb a wall, they use the Athletics skill. Talents, on the other hand, modify how a character uses that skill (such as rerolling a failed Athletics skill check when attempting to climb that wall). Talents may also modify some of your character's other attributes (such as changing their wound threshold), or perform actions normally not allowed by the rules (such as ignoring Critical Injuries).

To get a talent, you spend some of your experience points on it. Each talent has an experience point cost based on how powerful the talent is (more on that in a minute).

TALENT TYPES

There are many different types of talents. Some are associated with an individual skill or closely related group of skills. These tend to be particular knacks that a character has acquired through the process of mastering that skill. In many cases, talents represent operational

shortcuts—corners an experienced individual knows can be safely cut or particularly effective methods they can follow. Other such talents are simply natural abilities that fit in especially well with the use of that skill. These could include a certain mental process, a physical technique, or a learned pattern. A number of talents are specifically associated with conflict and fighting. These combat talents represent techniques that a character likely learned through practice and experience.

TALENT TIERS

Some talents are better than others. They may have more exciting abilities or just better mechanical boosts for your character. To balance these talents out and create an opportunity for characters to progress toward better abilities, this system sets different talents at different tiers.

Each tier determines how much a talent costs in experience points.

- Tier 1: Each talent costs 5 XP.
- Tier 2: Each talent costs 10 XP.
- Tier 3: Each talent costs 15 XP.
- Tier 4: Each talent costs 20 XP.
- Tier 5: Each talent costs 25 XP.

When you are buying talents for your character, you must follow one simple rule. After buying the new talent, your character must have more talents in the next lowest tier. So, if your character has two Tier 1 talents, they can only have a single Tier 2 talent, and can't have any Tier 3 talents. But if your character has four Tier 1 talents, they can have three Tier 2 talents, two Tier 3 talents, and a single Tier 4 talent.

The character sheet on pages 254-256 comes with a talent worksheet. As you can see, as your character buys more talents, you create the opportunity to buy more talents from higher tiers.

TALENT RANKS AND PURCHASING THE SAME TALENT MULTIPLE TIMES

Most talents can only be purchased once. However, some talents are ranked, which means they can be

purchased multiple times. These talents have a cumulative effect: the more of them you purchase, the better they become.

However, after you purchase the talent, the talent now counts as being in the next highest tier for the next time you want to purchase it. This means the experience cost goes up (since talents in higher tiers cost more), and this new version of the talent takes up one of your more valuable talent slots in the higher tier (the first version you purchased still takes up its original slot).

If a ranked talent is already at Tier 5 (or has reached Tier 5 after multiple purchases), that talent remains at Tier 5 for any future purchases.

This system is designed to encourage some difficult choices (do you keep buying more ranks in a single talent or buy the exclusive, high-tier talents when you get access to them?), and it helps ensure that every character feels a bit different.

TALENT DESCRIPTIONS

The following is a breakdown of each talent. Each part of a talent entry conveys specific information.

- **Name:** Every talent has a name, making it easy for you to refer to the talent, and hopefully providing a bit of a colorful description as well!
- **Tier:** Each talent belongs in one of five tiers, as we described previously in this section. The higher the tier, the more XP it costs for your character to purchase the talent.
- **Activation:** Some talents, once chosen, constantly apply to your character; these are passive talents. Toughened, which increases your character's wound threshold, is one such talent. Once you buy it, your character always has a higher wound threshold. Other talents are active, which means you choose when your character uses the talent. Natural, for example, lets you reroll one check in a game session, and you choose when your character uses it. If a talent is active, it has additional details in parentheses describing how much time and effort it takes for your character to use the talent (see page 97 for more on actions, maneuvers, and incidentals). Finally, you can use most talents only on your character's turn, but some talents can be used during another character's turn. These talents have the "out of turn" descriptor.
- **Ranked:** Some talents are ranked, which means your character can take them more than once. We described ranked talents in more detail earlier.

- **Rules:** These are the rules that describe what the talent does.

TALENT ENTRIES

The following is a list of talents that are fairly universally usable in the different genres and settings for this game. The talents are grouped by tier, and in each grouping, the talents are listed alphabetically.

If you're a Game Master, keep in mind that this doesn't have to be the complete list of talents for your players. Each talent has a brief descriptor at the end that talks about what settings it may be appropriate for. Most are appropriate for all settings, but not all. You can always rule these talents as off-limits for your game; just be sure to tell your group. Also, be sure to read pages 194-198 for more on how you can build your own talents.

TIER 1

BOUGHT INFO

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

When making any knowledge skill check, your character can instead use this talent to spend an amount of currency equal to fifty times the difficulty of the check and automatically succeed on the knowledge check with one uncanceled ✨ (instead of rolling). At your GM's

discretion, your character may not be able to use Bought Info if the information is particularly sensitive or difficult to find, or buying it doesn't make narrative sense.

You should use this talent in all settings.

CLEVER RETORT

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: No

Once per encounter, your character may use this talent to add automatic 🔄 🔄 to another character's social skill check.

You should use this talent in all settings.

DEFENSIVE SYSOPS

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

When attempting to defend a computer system against intrusion (or when someone attempts to hack a computer owned or programmed by your character) your character adds ■ ■ to their opponent's checks. If your character has access to the computer system when the intrusion takes place, they are automatically aware of the intrusion.

You should use this talent in the **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

DESPERATE RECOVERY

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Before your character heals strain at the end of an encounter, if their strain is more than half of their strain threshold, they heal two additional strain.

You should use this talent in all settings.

DUELIST

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Your character adds ■ to their melee combat checks while engaged with a single opponent. Your character adds ■ ■ to their melee combat checks while engaged with three or more opponents.

You should use this talent in all settings.

DURABLE

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Your character reduces any Critical Injury result they suffer by 10 per rank of Durable, to a minimum of 01.

You should use this talent in all settings.

FORAGER

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Your character removes up to ■ ■ from any skill checks they make to find food, water, or shelter. Checks to forage or search the area that your character makes take half the time they would normally.

You should use this talent in all settings.

GRIT

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Each rank of Grit increases your character's strain threshold by one.

You should use this talent in all settings.

HAMSTRING SHOT

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Once per round, your character may use this talent to perform a ranged combat check against one non-vehicle target within range of the weapon used. If the check is successful, halve the damage inflicted by the attack (before reducing damage by the target's soak). The target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.

You should use this talent in all settings.

JUMP UP

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

Once per round during your character's turn, your character may use this talent to stand from a prone or seated position as an incidental.

You should use this talent in all settings.

KNACK FOR IT

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

When you purchase this talent for your character, select one skill. Your character removes ■ ■ from any checks they make using this skill.

Each additional time you purchase this talent for your character, select two additional skills. Your character also removes ■ ■ from any checks they make using these skills. You cannot select combat or magic skills when choosing skills for this talent.

You should use this talent in all settings.

KNOW SOMEBODY

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: Yes

Once per session, when attempting to purchase a legally available item, your character may use this talent to reduce its rarity by one per rank of Know Somebody.

You should use this talent in all settings.

LET'S RIDE

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

Once per round during your character's turn, your character can use this talent to mount or dismount from a vehicle or animal, or move from one position in a vehicle to another (such as from the cockpit to a gun turret) as an incidental. In addition, if your character suffers a short-range fall (see page 112) from a vehicle or animal, they suffer no damage and land on their feet.

You should use this talent in all settings.

ONE WITH NATURE

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

When in the wilderness, your character may make a **Simple (-) Survival check**, instead of Discipline or Cool, to recover strain at the end of an encounter (see page 117).

You should use this talent in all settings.

PARRY

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: Yes

When your character suffers a hit from a melee combat check, after damage is calculated but before soak is applied (so immediately after Step 3 of Perform a Combat check, page 102), your character may suffer 3 strain to use this talent to reduce the damage of the hit by two plus their ranks in Parry. This talent can only be used once per hit, and your character needs to be wielding a Melee weapon.

You should use this talent in all settings.

PROPER UPBRINGING

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: Yes

When your character makes a social skill check in polite company (as determined by your GM), they may

suffer a number of strain to use this talent to add an equal number of **A** to the check. The number may not exceed your character's ranks in Proper Upbringing.

You should use this talent in all settings.

QUICK DRAW

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

Once per round on your character's turn, they may use this talent to draw or holster an easily accessible weapon or item as an incidental. Quick Draw also reduces a weapon's Prepare rating by one, to a minimum of one.

You should use this talent in all settings.

QUICK STRIKE

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Your character adds **■** for each rank of Quick Strike to any combat checks they make against any targets that have not yet taken their turn in the current encounter.

You should use this talent in all settings.

RAPID REACTION

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: Yes

Your character may suffer a number of strain to use this talent to add an equal number of **✦** to a Vigilance or Cool check they make to determine Initiative order. The number may not exceed your character's ranks in Rapid Reaction.

You should use this talent in all settings.

SECOND WIND

Tier: 1

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: Yes

Once per encounter, your character may use this talent to heal an amount of strain equal to their ranks in Second Wind.

You should use this talent in all settings.

SURGEON

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

When your character makes a Medicine check to heal wounds, the target heals one additional wound per rank of Surgeon.

You should use this talent in all settings.

SWIFT

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Your character does not suffer the penalties for moving through difficult terrain (they move through difficult terrain at normal speed without spending additional maneuvers).

You should use this talent in all settings.

TOUGHENED

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Each rank of Toughened increases your character's wound threshold by two.

You should use this talent in all settings.

UNREMARKABLE

Tier: 1

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Other characters add ✕ to any checks made to find or identify your character in a crowd.

You should use this talent in all settings.

TIER 2

BASIC MILITARY TRAINING

Tier: 2

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Athletics, Ranged (Heavy), and Resilience are now career skills for your character.

You should use this talent in the **weird war** setting.

BERSERK

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Maneuver)

Ranked: No

Once per encounter, your character may use this talent. Until the end of the encounter or until they are incapacitated, your character adds ✨ ▲ ▲ to all melee combat checks they make. However, opponents add ✨ to all combat checks targeting your character. While berserk, your character cannot make ranged combat checks.

At the end of the encounter (or when they are incapacitated), your character suffers 6 strain.

You should use this talent in the **fantasy** and **weird war** settings.

COORDINATED ASSAULT

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Maneuver)

Ranked: Yes

Once per turn, your character may use this talent to have a number of allies engaged with your character equal to your ranks in Leadership add ▲ to all combat checks they make until the end of your character's next turn. The range of this talent increases by one band per rank of Coordinated Assault beyond the first.

You should use this talent in all settings.

COUNTEROFFER

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Once per session, your character may use this talent to choose one non-nemesis adversary within medium range and make an **opposed Negotiation versus Discipline check**. If successful, the target becomes staggered until the end of their next turn.

At your GM's discretion, you may spend ☉ on this check to have the adversary become an ally until the end of the encounter. However, the duration of this may be shortened or extended depending on whether your GM feels your offer is appealing to the adversary and whether your character follows through on their offer!

You should use this talent in all settings.

DARING AVIATOR

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: Yes

Before your character makes a Driving or Piloting check, they may add a number of ☉ to the results to use this talent to add an equal number of ✨. The number may not exceed your character's ranks in Daring Aviator.

You should use this talent in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

DEFENSIVE STANCE

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Maneuver)

Ranked: Yes

Once per round, your character may suffer a number of strain no greater than their ranks in Defensive Stance to use this talent. Then, until the end of your character's next turn, upgrade the difficulty of all melee combat checks targeting your character a number of times equal to the strain suffered.

You should use this talent in all settings.

DEFENSIVE SYSOPS (IMPROVED)

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the *Defensive Sysops* talent to benefit from this talent. Before adding ■■ from *Defensive Sysops* to a check, use this talent to add ✕ to the results of the check instead.

You should use this talent in the **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

DUAL WIELDER

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Maneuver)

Ranked: No

Once per round, your character may use this talent to decrease the difficulty of the next combined combat check (see **Two-Weapon Combat**, on page 108) they make during the same turn by one.

You should use this talent in all settings.

FAN THE HAMMER

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

Once per encounter before making a combat check with a pistol (your GM has the final say on whether a weapon is a pistol or not), your character may use this talent to add the Auto-fire quality to the pistol when resolving the check. If your character does, the weapon runs out of ammo exactly as with an Out of Ammo result (see page 104).

You should use this talent in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, and **modern day** settings.

HEIGHTENED AWARENESS

Tier: 2

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Allies within short range of your character add ■ to their Perception and Vigilance checks. Allies engaged with your character add ■■ instead.

You should use this talent in all settings.

INSPIRING RHETORIC

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Your character may use this talent to make an **Average** (◆◆) **Leadership check**. For each ✨ the check generates, one ally within short range heals one strain. For each ▲, one ally benefiting from *Inspiring Rhetoric* heals one additional strain.

You should use this talent in all settings.

INVENTOR

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: Yes

When your character makes a check to construct new items or modify existing ones, use this talent to add a number of ■ to the check equal to ranks of *Inventor*. In addition, your character may attempt to reconstruct devices that they have heard described but have not seen and do not have any kinds of plans or schematics for.

You should use this talent in all settings.

LUCKY STRIKE

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

When your character purchases this talent, choose one characteristic. After your character makes a successful combat check, you may spend one Story Point to use this talent to add damage equal to your character's ranks in that characteristic to one hit of the combat check.

You should use this talent in all settings.



SCATHING TIRADE

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Your character may use this talent to make an **Average** (◆◆) **Coercion** check. For each ✨ the check generates, one enemy within short range suffers 1 strain. For each ▲, one enemy affected by Scathing Tirade suffers 1 additional strain.

You should use this talent in all settings.

SIDE STEP

Tier: 2

Activation: Active (Maneuver)

Ranked: Yes

Once per round, your character may suffer a number of strain no greater than their ranks in Side Step to use this talent. Until the end of your character's next turn, upgrade the difficulty of all ranged combat checks targeting your character a number of times equal to the strain suffered.

You should use this talent in all settings.

TIER 3

ANIMAL COMPANION

Tier: 3

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Your character creates a bond with a single animal approved by your GM. This animal must be silhouette 0 (no larger than a mid-sized dog). The bond persists as long as your character chooses, although at your GM's discretion, the bond may also be broken due to abusive treatment or other extenuating circumstances.

As long as the bond persists, the animal follows your character, and you dictate the animal's overall behavior (although, since the animal is only bonded with the character, not dominated, it may still perform inconvenient actions such as scratching furniture, consuming rations, and marking territory). Once per round in structured encounters, your character may spend one action and one maneuver during your character's turn. The animal must be within hearing and visual range of your character (generally medium range) to do this. Otherwise, the animal does not contribute to the encounter. The specifics of its behavior are up to you and your GM.

For every additional rank of Animal Companion your character has, increase the allowed silhouette of the companion by one (this may mean your character gets a new companion, or their companion grows in size).

This talent can also change in flavor depending on the nature of your game setting. While an animal companion may make sense in many settings, in a futuristic setting it may make more sense for the "animal" to be a robot or drone, for example.

You should use this talent in all settings.

BARREL ROLL

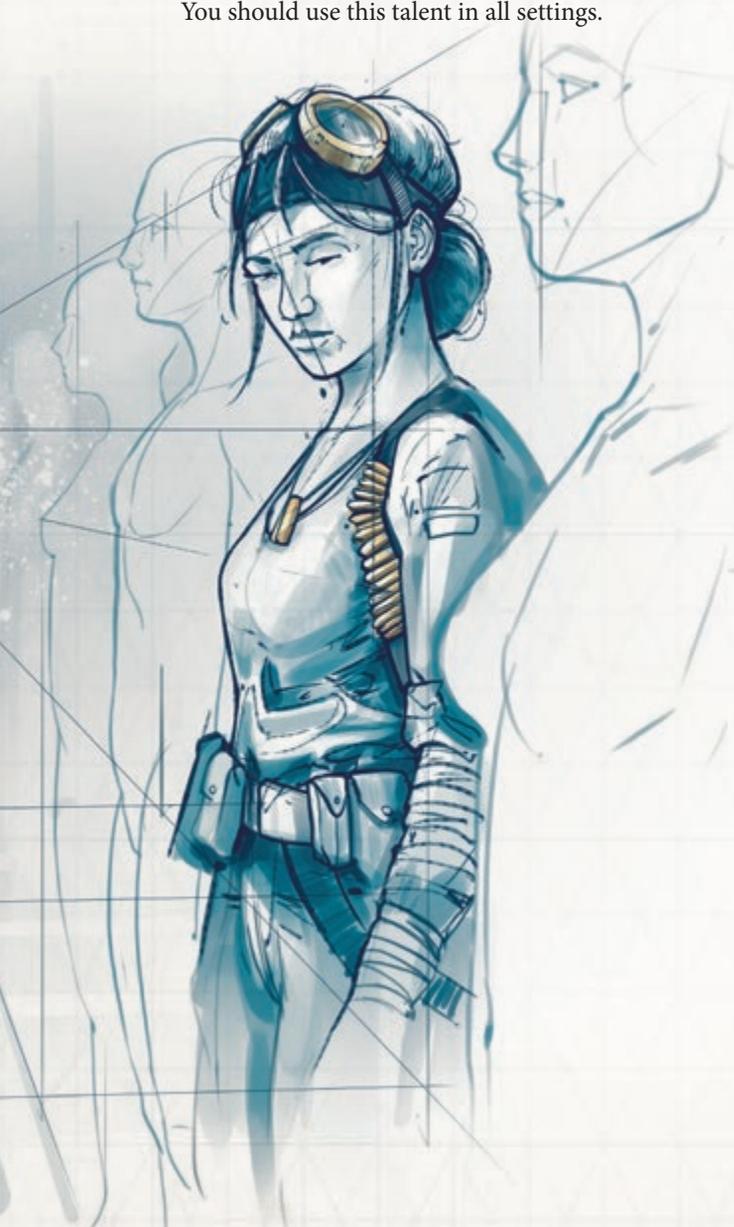
Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: No

Your character can only use this talent while piloting a starfighter or airplane of Silhouette 3 or less. When your vehicle suffers a hit from a ranged combat check, after damage is calculated but before armor is applied, your character may have their vehicle suffer 3 system strain to use this talent. Then, reduce the damage suffered by a number equal to their ranks in Piloting.

You should use this talent in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern**, **hard science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.



DISTINCTIVE STYLE

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

When making a Computers check to hack a system or break into a secured network, before rolling, your character may use this talent to add ✨ ✨ 🔁 🔁 to the results.

If you are using the optional hacking rules on page 232 and your check generates 🔁 🔁, your GM should spend it on the **I Know You!** option in **Table I.2-22** on page 234.

You should use this talent in the **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

DODGE

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: Yes

When your character is targeted by a combat check (ranged or melee), they may suffer a number of strain no greater than their ranks in Dodge to use this talent. Then, upgrade the difficulty of the combat check targeting your character a number of times equal to the strain suffered.

You should use this talent in all settings.

EAGLE EYES

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

Once per encounter before making a ranged combat check, you may use this talent to increase your weapon's range by one range band (to a maximum of extreme range). This lasts for the duration of the combat check.

You should use this talent in all settings.

FIELD COMMANDER

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Your character may use this talent to make an **Average** (◆◆) **Leadership check**. If successful, a number of allies equal to your character's Presence may immediately suffer 1 strain to perform one maneuver (out of turn). If there are any questions as to which allies take their maneuvers first, your character is the final arbiter.

You should use this talent in all settings.

FORGOT TO COUNT?

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: No

When an opponent makes a ranged combat check, you can spend 🔁 🔁 from that check to use this talent to cause their weapon to run out of ammo (see page 89), as long as the weapon can normally run out of ammunition.

You should use this talent in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

FULL THROTTLE

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

While driving or flying, your character may use this talent to make a **Hard** (◆◆◆) **Piloting** or **Driving check**. If successful, the top speed of the vehicle increases by one (to a maximum of 5) for a number of rounds equal to your character's Cunning.

The specifics of this talent require the optional vehicle rules, on page 220. If your game does not use these rules, this talent simply makes the vehicle go much faster than normal, with the specifics up to your GM.

You should use this talent in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

GRENADIER

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: Yes

When your character makes a ranged combat check with a weapon that has the Blast item quality, you may spend one Story Point to use this talent to trigger the weapon's Blast quality, instead of spending ⚡ (even if the attack misses). In addition, your character treats grenades as having a range of medium.

You should use this talent in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

INSPIRING RHETORIC (IMPROVED)

Tier: 3

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Inspiring Rhetoric talent to benefit from this talent. Allies affected by your character's Inspiring Rhetoric add 🟩 to all skill checks they make for a number of rounds equal to your character's ranks in Leadership.

You should use this talent in all settings.

PAINKILLER SPECIALIZATION

Tier: 3

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

When your character uses painkillers (or their equivalent, depending on the setting), the target heals one additional wound per rank of Painkiller Specialization. The sixth painkiller and beyond each day still has no effect.

You should use this talent in all settings.

SCATHING TIRADE (IMPROVED)

Tier: 3

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Scathing Tirade talent to benefit from this talent. Enemies affected by your character's Scathing Tirade add ■ to all skill checks they make for a number of rounds equal to your character's ranks in Coercion.

You should use this talent in all settings.

HEROIC WILL

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: No

When you purchase this talent for your character, choose two characteristics. You may spend a Story Point to use this talent to have your character ignore the effects of all Critical Injuries on any skill checks using those two characteristics until the end of the current encounter. (Your character still suffers the Critical Injuries; they just ignore the effects. See page 114.)

You should use this talent in all settings.

NATURAL

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

When your character purchases this talent, choose two skills. Once per session, your character may use this talent to reroll one skill check that uses one of those two skills.

You should use this talent in all settings.

RAPID ARCHERY

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Maneuver)

Ranked: No

While your character is armed with a bow (or similar weapon, at your GM's discretion) they may suffer 2 strain to use this talent. During the next ranged combat check your character makes this turn, the bow gains the Linked quality with a value equal to their ranks in the Ranged skill.

You should use this talent in the **fantasy** setting.

PARRY (IMPROVED)

Tier: 3

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Parry talent to benefit from this talent. When your character suffers a hit from a melee combat check and uses Parry to reduce the damage from that hit, after the attack is resolved, you may spend ☒ or ☑ ☑ ☑ from the attacker's check to use this talent. Then, your character automatically hits the attacker once with a Brawl or Melee weapon your character is wielding. The hit deals the weapon's base damage, plus any damage from applicable talents or abilities. Your character can't use this talent if the original attack incapacitates them.

You should use this talent in all settings.

TIER 4

CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT THIS?

Tier: 4

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Your character can use this talent to make an **opposed Charm or Deception versus Discipline check** targeting a single non-nemesis adversary within medium range. If the check succeeds, the target cannot attack your character (or perform hostile actions against your character) until the end of their next turn. You may spend ▲ ▲ to increase the length of the effect by one additional turn, and spend ☑ to extend the benefits to all of their identified allies within short range.

The effect ends immediately if your character or a known ally attacks the target. In addition, your GM may rule that some targets are immune to this ability. An automated sentry turret, for example, has no interest in resolving a conflict through talking, nor would someone consumed by rage and the desire for revenge against your character.

You should use this talent in all settings.

DEADEYE

Tier: 4

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

After your character inflicts a Critical Injury with a ranged weapon and rolls the result, your character may suffer 2 strain to use this talent. Then, you may select any Critical Injury of the same severity to apply to the target instead.

You should use this talent in all settings.

DEFENSIVE

Tier: 4

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Each rank of Defensive increases your character's melee defense and ranged defense by one.

You should use this talent in all settings.

DEFENSIVE DRIVING

Tier: 4

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Increase the defense of any vehicle your character pilots by one per rank of Defensive Driving.

The specifics of this talent require the optional vehicle rules, on page 220. If your game does not use these rules, this talent adds ■ per rank to combat checks targeting your character's vehicle or your character while piloting it.

You should use this talent in the **steampunk**, **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

ENDURING

Tier: 4

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Each rank of Enduring increases your character's soak value by one.

You should use this talent in all settings.

FIELD COMMANDER (IMPROVED)

Tier: 4

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Field Commander talent to benefit from this talent. When your character uses the Field Commander talent, your character affects a number of allies equal to twice the character's Presence. In addition, you may spend ⚙ to allow one ally to suffer 1 strain to perform an action, instead of a maneuver.

You should use this talent in all settings.

HOW CONVENIENT!

Tier: 4

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Once per session, your character may use this talent to make a **Hard** (◆◆◆) **Mechanics check**. If successful, one device involved in the current encounter (subject to your GM's approval) spontaneously fails. This can be because of your character's actions, or it can simply be incredibly convenient timing!

You should use this talent in all settings.

INSPIRING RHETORIC (SUPREME)

Tier: 4

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Inspiring Rhetoric talent to benefit from this talent. Your character may choose to suffer 1 strain to use the Inspiring Rhetoric talent as a maneuver, instead of as an action.

You should use this talent in all settings.

MAD INVENTOR

Tier: 4

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Once per session, your character may use this talent to make a Mechanics check to attempt to cobble together the functional equivalent of any item using spare parts or salvage. The difficulty of the check is based on the item's rarity; see **Table I.4-1: Mad Inventor Item Rarity**.

Your GM will modify the check based on the circumstances and might decide that some items simply can't be created with what's available (if you are being held in a prison cell, for instance). Your GM may spend ⚙ on the check to indicate the item ends up being dangerous to the user and anyone around them in some way. For instance, a pistol might explode instead of running out of ammo, or a breathing mask might make the user light-headed.

You should use this talent in the **steampunk** and **weird war** settings.

OVERCHARGE

Tier: 4

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Once per encounter, your character may use this talent to make a **Hard** (◆◆◆) **Mechanics check** and choose one of their cybernetic implants that grants them one of the following: +1 to a characteristic rating, +1 rank to a skill, +1 rank of a ranked talent. If your character succeeds, until the end of the encounter, the

TABLE I.4-1: MAD INVENTOR ITEM RARITY

RARITY	DIFFICULTY
0-2	Easy (◆)
3-4	Average (◆◆)
5-6	Hard (◆◆◆)
7	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)
8	Formidable (◆◆◆◆◆)
9+	Impossible (see page 18)

chosen cybernetic instead provides +2 to the affected characteristic rating (to a maximum of 7), skill (to a maximum of 5), or ranked talent.

Your GM may spend ⓧ or Ⓜ Ⓜ Ⓜ from the check to have the overcharged cybernetic short out at the end of the encounter; it provides no benefit until your character spends several hours making an **Average** (◆◆) **Mechanics check** to repair it.

You should use this talent in the **science fiction** and **space opera** settings.

SCATHING TIRADE (SUPREME)

Tier: 4

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Scathing Tirade talent to benefit from this talent. Your character may choose to suffer 1 strain to use the Scathing Tirade talent as a maneuver, instead of as an action.

You should use this talent in all settings.

TIER 5

DEDICATION

Tier: 5

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Each rank of Dedication increases one of your character's characteristics by one. This talent cannot increase a characteristic above 5. You cannot increase the same characteristic with Dedication twice.

You should use this talent in all settings.

INDOMITABLE

Tier: 5

Activation: Active (Incidental, Out of Turn)

Ranked: No

Once per encounter, when your character would be incapacitated due to exceeding their wound or strain threshold, you may spend a Story Point to use this talent. Then, your character is not incapacitated until the end of their next turn. If your character reduces their strain or wounds to below their threshold before the end of their next turn, they are not incapacitated.

You should use this talent in all settings.

MASTER

Tier: 5

Activation: Active (Incidental)

Ranked: No

When you purchase this talent for your character, choose one skill. Once per round, your character may

suffer 2 strain to use this talent to reduce the difficulty of the next check they make using that skill by two, to a minimum of **Easy** (◆).

You should use this talent in all settings.

OVERCHARGE (IMPROVED)

Tier: 5

Activation: Passive

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Overcharge talent to benefit from this talent. When using the Overcharge talent, your character may spend Ⓐ Ⓐ or Ⓜ from the Mechanics check to immediately take one additional action. This talent can only be used once per check.

You should use this talent in the **science fiction** and **space opera** settings.

RUINOUS REPARTEE

Tier: 5

Activation: Active (Action)

Ranked: No

Once per encounter, your character may use this talent to make an **opposed Charm** or **Coercion versus Discipline check** targeting one character within medium range (or within earshot). If successful, the target suffers strain equal to twice your character's Presence, plus one additional strain per ★. Your character heals strain equal to the strain inflicted.

If incapacitated due to this talent, the target could flee the scene in shame, collapse in a dejected heap, or throw themselves at your character in fury, depending on your GM and the nature of your character's witty barbs.

You should use this talent in all settings.

WHY DEDICATION?

Dedication is the only way to increase characteristics after character creation is over. The reason we did this, instead of letting you increase your character's characteristics by some other means, is because increasing your character's characteristics is probably the best way to improve your character. Therefore, we made it difficult for a character to do; otherwise it would likely be your default choice every time your character got some XP. By doing it this way instead, we make other advancement options more valid.

CHAPTER 5: EQUIPMENT

Whatever adventures your characters go on, we expect they need some items to aid them. These could be spacesuits and laser guns, swords and plate mail, or a laptop computer and protein bars. These things may seem different, but we categorize them all as equipment.

This chapter discusses the rules for equipment, specifically weapons, armor, and items that can't be categorized as either. We explain how to buy and sell these items and some of the details about them (such as item qualities and encumbrance), and then we give you a few example items and explain how they work.

RARITY

Some items are naturally more difficult to purchase than others, depending on where your characters find themselves at any given time. Of course, some items are rare no matter where one goes, and likewise, some items are always common and inexpensive.

Rarity in GENESYS measures how difficult an item can be to find on a scale of 0–10, with 0 being the easiest to track down and 10 being the hardest. However, whether or not an item is available for purchase should never be solely a matter of rolling dice. Instead, your Game Master always has at least partial say as to whether an item is available in a certain location. Nevertheless, for simple items, rarity provides a simple way for your GM to determine whether something is available and to let you easily track items down. We suggest that you make a successful Negotiation, Streetwise, or Knowledge skill check to determine where your character can find an item.

Table I.5–1: Rarity lists rarities, the corresponding check difficulty to find items with those rarities, and examples of items with those rarities. The examples are all modern day examples; if you need to invent rarities for new items in different eras, check out our different example settings starting on page 138. **Table I.5–2: Rarity Modifiers**, on the next page, lists some general modifiers that can be applied to an item's rarity, based on the technological status and general location where your character is looking for the item. We've kept the location descriptions very vague; they could apply to different cities or villages on Earth, or to different planets across a galactic civilization. Modifiers can raise an item's

The one thing this chapter doesn't have is a long list of different weapons, armor, and gear. The reason is that specific items are very setting dependent. While your character may be armed with a laser pistol in a futuristic setting, the same laser pistol doesn't make a lot of sense in a fantasy setting. So, instead of trying to cover every single item you may find in a variety of settings, we've provided a couple of examples to explain how various item profiles work. If you want more extensive equipment lists, check out **Part II: Settings** and the equipment lists in the specific settings.

rarity above 10. For rarities higher than 10, the difficulty remains at **Formidable** (◆◆◆◆◆), but your GM may upgrade the difficulty once for every rarity beyond 10.

SELLING AND TRADING

Although we don't expect your games to constantly involve adventures in commerce, nearly every roleplaying game involves selling items at one point or another (even if your character is just selling items looted from the corpses of their foes).

TABLE I.5–1: RARITY

RARITY	DIFFICULTY	EXAMPLES
0	Simple (-)	Pencil and paper
1		Food supplies
2	Easy (◆)	Pocketknife
3		Smartphone
4	Average (◆◆)	Automobile
5		Semi-automatic pistol
6	Hard (◆◆◆)	High-end computer
7		Construction explosives
8	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	Military machine gun
9		Civilian satellite
10	Formidable (◆◆◆◆◆)	Military strategic bomber

TABLE I.5–2: RARITY MODIFIERS

RARITY MODIFIER	CIRCUMSTANCES
-1	Consumer-driven economy
-1	Major metropolitan area
-1	Trading hub
+0	Mid-sized metropolitan area
+0	Civilized location
+1	Rural or agrarian location
+1	State-regulated economy (modifier may not apply to basic living staples)
+2	Frontier location
+2	Laws prohibiting ownership (modifier only applies to certain items, such as military weaponry or aircraft)
+3	Active war zone
+4	Post-disaster wasteland

When selling an item, your character needs to make a successful Negotiation check. Use the difficulty set by the item’s rarity (as determined by **Table I.5–1: Rarity**). Your characters can generally sell an item for one-quarter of its cost if the check is successful, increasing that to one-half with ✨ ✨ and to three-quarters with ✨ ✨ ✨ or more.

In some cases, the PCs might wish to engage in trade, buying multiple items at one location and then selling them at another location where they are rarer. We generally advise that you handle this narratively. However, if your GM wishes to use some mechanical guidelines for this process, we’ve provided some basic rules that cover trading.

Trade works the same whether with black-market items or with legal items. Selling either type of item follows the rules listed previously with the caveat that trading in legal items requires a Negotiation check, while trading in illegal items requires a Streetwise check. However, when determining the sell price based on the success of the Negotiation or Streetwise check, first multiply the cost of the item by the difference between the item’s rarity where it was bought and its rarity where it is to be sold, referring to **Table I.5–2: Rarity Modifiers** and **Table I.5–3: Increased Costs When Trading**. Then take the new, increased cost and determine the sell price by the results of the Negotiation or Streetwise check.

Of course, these rules do not account for all sorts of details, such as buying in bulk, marketing and advertising, and myriad other factors that may affect prices.

BLACK-MARKET ITEMS

Nearly every setting has its “black market,” an illicit network of merchants and traders who buy and sell whatever happens to be illegal in that setting. Sometimes this commerce happens in an actual market, but more often, such deals happen through a labyrinthine web of contacts, cutouts, and middlemen.

If your characters want to buy something that happens to be illegal, they’re probably going to have to go into the black market to do so. Buying and selling on the black market follows all the same rules as regular buying and selling, except that instead of making a Negotiation check to find items or determine the price your character can sell them at, they need to make a Streetwise check instead.

This is why the rules for buying, selling, and trading are all modifiable by the GM and subject to their judgement. It is also important to note that these rules only apply when engaging in commercial trade. So, if your group sells a load of guns in a town, then later your character buys one of those guns in that town, they’re going to have to pay the usual, listed price for the gun. Don’t try to use these guidelines for trading and selling in bulk to cheat the system!

The final thing to remember is that your GM always has the final say on what can be sold, where it can be sold, and how much it can be sold for. Because this isn’t likely to be a major part of the game, we deliberately made a system that is simple and doesn’t account for a lot of the variables that would normally matter when trying to sell an item. If your GM wants to stop your characters from selling cell phones to a village without any cell service, or have an arms dealer decide that turning your characters in to the government for a reward is a better deal than what you’re offering, they are well within their rights to do so.

TABLE I.5–3: INCREASED COSTS WHEN TRADING

RARITY INCREASE	COST INCREASE
+0 or +1	x1
+2	x2
+3	x3
+4 or higher	x4

ENCUMBRANCE

GENESYS emphasizes sweeping stories, epic tales, and fast action. Keeping track of the weight of every piece of loose change isn't fun, but knowing that your character has to carry a child out of a burning building is an important story element; so is having some idea of how many days' worth of rations your character can carry while journeying in the wilderness.

In general, you and your Game Master won't need to track your character's encumbrance (how much they're carrying on their person). Occasionally, however, it may play an important part in the story, and you need to know if the weight, mass, and collective bulk of the items your character is wearing inhibit their actions.

ENCUMBRANCE VALUES

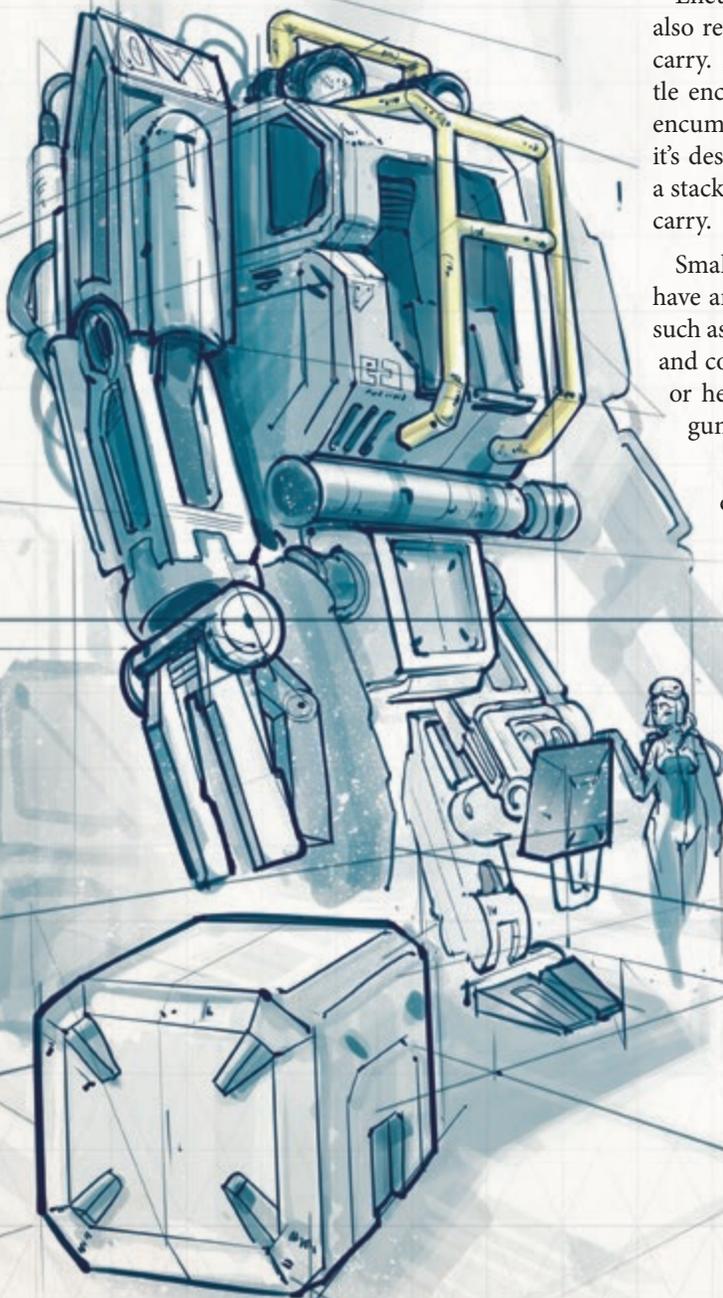
Every item of gear listed has an encumbrance value. Most items that can commonly be carried have a value between 0 and 5—from relatively light objects (such as wallets or light clothing) to heavier items (like hunting rifles or tool kits). We discuss the encumbrance value of armor in more detail later, but the one difference is that when your character is wearing armor, its encumbrance goes down. Just imagine wearing a chain-mail shirt. It's pretty heavy, but now imagine carrying it in your hands. That's going to be a lot more cumbersome since you can't distribute the weight across your torso and shoulders, and you don't have your hands free.

Encumbrance doesn't strictly represent weight: it also represents mass, bulk, and how easy items are to carry. A well-fitting suit of plate mail adds very little encumbrance, while an armful of logs has a high encumbrance. The plate mail may weigh more, but it's designed to be worn and fitted to a person, while a stack of unbound logs is both heavy and awkward to carry.

Small items, such as candles, most pistols, and knives, have an encumbrance value of 1 or 2. Medium items, such as rifles, a satchel of grenades, or a grappling hook and cord, have an encumbrance value of 3 or 4. Large or heavy items, such as cargo crates, light machine guns, or a heavy toolbox, are valued at 5 or 6.

If it becomes critical to the story to have more detail, ten loosely carried incidental items have an encumbrance value of 1. If they are stored in an effective manner—such as keys in a pocket or crystals in a pouch—then twenty incidental items have an encumbrance value of 1. If, for some reason, your character is unable to manage their gear in such a way, the GM may increase the items' overall encumbrance value by several points to reflect the difficulty of managing and carrying items by less efficient means.

When carried, a living being generally has an encumbrance value of 5 plus Brawn. A typical human has a Brawn of 2, and therefore a total encumbrance value of 7.



ENCUMBRANCE THRESHOLD

All characters have an **encumbrance threshold** of 5 plus their Brawn rating, which limits how much they can carry under normal conditions without penalty. A total encumbrance value over the threshold means the character is “encumbered,” and suffers ■ to all Agility and Brawn-based checks for every point of encumbrance over the limit. And of course, this is cumulative with any other ■ the character may be suffering.

Further, if a character is encumbered by an amount equal to or greater than their Brawn rating, they no longer earn a free maneuver each turn. The character can still perform up to two maneuvers, but each maneuver costs 2 strain. With a Brawn of 2, for example, a character would not get a free maneuver each turn if they’re carrying nine or more points of encumbrance.

LIFTING AND CARRYING EXCESSIVE ENCUMBRANCE

Characters shouldn’t typically carry more than their encumbrance threshold. When necessity demands, however, they can do so for a short time (suffering the effects described above).

If your character needs to lift an object with an encumbrance value greater than their encumbrance threshold, such as an ally who has fallen off a gantry or ledge, they must make an Athletics check. The difficulty is **Easy** (◆) if the object’s encumbrance value is one more than your character’s encumbrance threshold. You should increase the difficulty by one for every additional point over, up to a maximum additional encumbrance of 4 and difficulty of **Daunting** (◆◆◆◆). A character with a Brawn of 2 and a threshold of 7, for example, tries to lift a rock with an encumbrance value of 10. That’s 3 over, so the difficulty is **Hard** (◆◆◆).

EXAMPLE: LIFTING EXCESSIVE ENCUMBRANCE

Kara and Grace are trying to steal a box of mining explosives as part of the plan for an upcoming heist. Grace, who is trying to run with the box in her arms, has an encumbrance threshold of 7 (5 plus her Brawn of 2). The box’s encumbrance value is 5. Grace is also trying to carry a shovel (3 encumbrance value) and her pistol (2 encumbrance value), so Grace is carrying 3 over her threshold. She loses her free maneuver and adds ■ ■ ■ to all Agility and Brawn-based checks she makes. Finally, she needs to make a **Hard** (◆◆◆) **Athletics check** just to move the crate, and since Athletics is Brawn-based, she’s going to be adding those three ■ to the check.

Additional characters may help, adding their raw Brawn to the encumbrance threshold of the character trying to lift or carry the object or objects. In the example, a person with a Brawn of 2 adds +2 to the encumbrance threshold for that specific task.

EXAMPLE: HELPING CARRY

Kara, seeing that her friend Grace can’t carry a box of explosives, a shovel, and her handgun, decides to help. She grabs one end of the box, so that now the two of them are carrying it together. Kara has a Brawn of 3, so she adds 3 to Grace’s encumbrance threshold.

CONCEALING GEAR

We assume that your character is going to want to hide items on their person at some point. Maybe they’re concealing a weapon, or maybe they want to sneak a valuable item out of a restricted area. In any case, we do have some simple rules for hiding stuff.

Items with an encumbrance value of 1 or less can be hidden on a person easily. You don’t need to make a check for your character to hide the item. Instead, if another character tries to search your character, the searcher makes an **opposed Perception check vs. your character’s Stealth**. Add ■ to the searcher’s check for every encumbrance value over 1 that is due to the hidden item. If there are multiple items, use the item with the highest encumbrance value to determine how many ■ to add.

In some cases, your character’s opponents may not specifically be checking your character for hidden items, but may just be keeping an eye out for anything odd in general (such opponents could include a sentry at a city gate, or a police officer walking the beat). In these cases, the searcher would make an **opposed Vigilance check vs. Stealth** instead of a Perception check.

The same rules can apply to similar situations—such as hiding a rifle (encumbrance value 4) in a dumpster full of trash. In this case, your Game Master should decide what encumbrance value of object can be hidden without being noticed, and add ■ for every point over that.

ITEM QUALITIES

Some equipment features special qualities that add variety and depth to the weapons, armor, and items your character may encounter. In our game, item qualities are special rules that can change how the item acts. They let us add more variety to an item than we could by only manipulating its raw characteristics. They also make the items more interesting for you, since many qualities may require you to think about your character using that item differently.

Special qualities are generally either passive or active. Passive qualities are always “on” and require no activation on the part of the user. Active qualities must be triggered by the user, often by spending one or more **▲** to activate the effect.

Item qualities usually have a number associated with them. This is their rating. Ratings affect qualities in different ways, depending on the quality in question.

Active qualities require **▲ ▲** to activate unless otherwise stated in their description. Active item qualities on weapons can only trigger on a successful attack, unless specified otherwise.

Finally, we should note that not all of these qualities are appropriate for all settings. However, we have included the complete list of item qualities here, partially because it’s not all that long, and partially because most of the qualities are general enough that with the right tweaks to their flavor, you could actually justify them in more rules settings than you would expect.

ACCURATE (PASSIVE)

Accurate weapons are easier to aim or wield, whether through design or technology. For each level of this quality, the attacker adds **■** to their combat checks while using this weapon.

AUTO-FIRE (ACTIVE)

A weapon with Auto-fire can be set to shoot in rapid succession and potentially spray an area with bolts, flechettes, slugs, or other types of projectiles. The advantage in using Auto-fire is that it has the chance to hit multiple targets or to hit a single target multiple times.

As attacking with a weapon on Auto-fire is generally less accurate, the attacker must increase the difficulty of the combat check by **◆**. The user may choose not to use the Auto-fire quality on a weapon; in this case, they cannot trigger the quality but also do not suffer the aforementioned penalty.

BASE DAMAGE: WHAT IS IT?

Some qualities talk about a weapon’s or attack’s **base damage**. What we mean by that is the damage listed in the weapon’s profile, without any modifiers added from talents or successes.

If the weapon is a weapon that has a damage that is added to one of the user’s characteristics (usually Brawn), then the base damage is the weapon’s damage plus the user’s characteristic.

If the attack hits, the attacker can trigger Auto-fire by spending **▲ ▲**. Auto-fire can be triggered multiple times. Each time the attacker triggers Auto-fire, it deals an additional hit to the target. Each of these counts as an additional hit from that weapon, and each hit deals base damage plus the number of **★** on the check.

These additional hits can be allocated to the original target, or to other targets within range of the weapon. If the attacker wishes to hit multiple targets, they must decide to do so before making the check. Furthermore, if they wish to hit multiple targets, their initial target must always be the target with the highest difficulty and highest defense (if this is two separate targets, the GM chooses which is the initial target). The initial hit must always be against the initial target. Subsequent hits generated can be allocated to any of the other designated targets.

Auto-fire weapons can also activate one Critical Injury for each hit generated on the attack, per the normal rules; the Critical Injury must be applied to the target of the specific hit.

BLAST (ACTIVE)

The weapon has a large spread, an explosive blast, or a similar area of effect, like a detonated grenade or a warhead fired from a missile launcher. If the attack is successful and Blast activates, each character (friend or foe) engaged with the original target suffers a hit dealing damage equal to the Blast quality’s rating, plus damage equal to the total **★** scored on the check.

In a relatively small and enclosed area, the Game Master might decide that everyone in the room suffers damage.

If the Blast quality doesn’t activate, the ordnance still detonates, but bad luck or poor aim on the part of the firer (or quick reactions on the part of the targets) means

the explosion may not catch anyone else in its radius. However, the user may also trigger Blast if the attack misses by spending $\triangle \triangle \triangle$. In this case, the original target and every target engaged with the original target suffers a hit dealing damage equal to the Blast rating of the weapon.

BREACH (PASSIVE)

Weapons with Breach burn through the toughest armor; they are often heavy weapons or weapons mounted on some sort of vehicle.

Hits from weapons with the Breach quality ignore one point of vehicle armor for every rating of Breach (meaning they also ignore 10 soak for every rating of Breach).

BURN (ACTIVE)

Weapons with Burn inflict damage over time. When Burn is triggered, one target hit by the attack continues to suffer the weapon's base damage each round for a number of rounds equal to the weapon's Burn rating. Apply damage at the start of each of the target's turns. If multiple targets suffer hits from a weapon with Burn, the quality may be triggered multiple times, affecting a different target each time.

A victim might be able to stop the damage by performing an action to roll around and make a Coordination check. The difficulty is **Average** ($\blacklozenge \blacklozenge$) on hard surfaces such as the floor of a building, or an **Easy** (\blacklozenge) on grass or soft ground. Jumping into a body of water stops the damage immediately. Both situations assume the flame is from actual combustion rather than a chemical reaction. With the latter, there is usually little the victim can do.

CONCUSSIVE (ACTIVE)

The weapon's attack can leave the target shell-shocked from mighty blows or punishing shock waves, unable to perform any but the most basic actions. When Concussive is triggered, one target hit by the attack is staggered (see page 114) for a number of rounds equal to the weapon's Concussive rating. A staggered target cannot perform actions. If multiple targets suffer hits from a weapon with Concussive, the quality may be triggered multiple times, affecting a different target each time.

CUMBERSOME (PASSIVE)

A Cumbersome weapon is large, unwieldy, awkward, or heavy. To wield a Cumbersome weapon properly, the character needs a Brawn characteristic equal to or greater than the weapon's Cumbersome rating. For each point of Brawn by which the character is deficient, they must increase the difficulty of all checks made while using the weapon by one.

DEFENSIVE (PASSIVE)

An item with the Defensive quality increases the user's melee defense by its Defensive rating.

DEFLECTION (PASSIVE)

An item with the Deflection quality increases the user's ranged defense by its Deflection rating.

DISORIENT (ACTIVE)

A weapon with Disorient can daze an opponent. When Disorient is triggered, one target hit by the attack is disoriented (see page 114) for a number of rounds equal to the weapon's Disorient rating. A disoriented target adds \blacksquare to all skill checks they perform. If multiple targets suffer hits from a weapon with Disorient, the quality may be triggered multiple times, affecting a different target each time.

ENSNARE (ACTIVE)

A weapon with Ensnare binds a foe and restricts their movements. When Ensnare is triggered, one target hit by the attack becomes immobilized (see page 114) for a number of rounds equal to the weapon's Ensnare rating. An immobilized target cannot perform maneuvers. If multiple targets suffer hits from a weapon with Ensnare, the quality may be triggered multiple times, affecting a different target each time.

An Ensnared target may perform an action to attempt a **Hard** ($\blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge$) **Athletics check** on their turn to break free from the effect.

GUIDED (ACTIVE)

A weapon with the Guided quality can track opponents. The Guided quality can only be triggered if an attack misses. If Guided is triggered, the controlling character may make a combat check at the end of the round as an out-of-turn incidental. The difficulty of this combat check is **Average** ($\blacklozenge \blacklozenge$); instead of building the ability of the pool normally, add \blacklozenge equal to the weapon's Guided rating. If the check is successful, the weapon strikes the target, and the attack is resolved normally.

Guided requires $\triangle \triangle \triangle$ to activate, unless otherwise specified in the weapon's description. The Guided quality can activate on any subsequent combat check it makes, representing the projectile continuing to track the target.

INACCURATE (PASSIVE)

Inaccurate weapons are less likely to be accurate or precise. When making an attack with an Inaccurate weapon, add \blacksquare to the check equal to the Inaccurate rating.

INFERIOR (PASSIVE)

An Inferior item is a lackluster example of its kind, representing shoddy and poor craftsmanship. An Inferior item generates automatic  on all checks related to its use.

KNOCKDOWN (ACTIVE)

When Knockdown is triggered, one target hit by the attack is knocked prone. If multiple targets suffer hits from a weapon with Knockdown, the quality may be triggered multiple times, affecting a different target each time.

Unless specified otherwise, Knockdown requires   to trigger, plus one additional  per silhouette of the target beyond 1.

LIMITED AMMO (PASSIVE)

Some weapons fire particularly large or complex projectiles that cost lots of money. Other weapons are expendable weapons like grenades that, once used, are destroyed. A weapon with the Limited Ammo quality may be used to make a number of attacks equal to its Limited Ammo rating before it must be reloaded with a maneuver. In addition, each shot expends one of a limited number of rounds of ammo; more ammo must be purchased or obtained before anyone fires the weapon again. This also applies to grenades and other “one-use” weapons that have the Limited Ammo 1 quality (here, your character is not “reloading” the grenade, but drawing another to use—mechanically, they are equivalent).

LINKED (ACTIVE)

Some weapons are designed to fire together at the same target (turrets housing multiple guns are a good example of this). When a character fires a linked weapon, on a successful attack, the weapon deals one hit. The wielder may spend   to gain an additional hit, and may do so a number of times equal to the weapon's Linked rating. Additional hits from the Linked weapon may only be applied against the original target. Each hit deals the weapon's base damage plus damage equal to the  scored on the check.

PIERCE (PASSIVE)

Any hits from this weapon ignore a number of points point of soak equal to the weapon's Pierce rating. If the weapon has more ranks of Pierce than the target's total soak, it completely ignores the target's soak. For example, Pierce 3 against a soak of 2 ignores two points of soak, but the extra point of Pierce has no further effect.

PREPARE (PASSIVE)

Items with this quality require time to set up before being used. The user must perform a number of

preparation maneuvers equal to the item's Prepare rating before using the item (if the item is a weapon, “using” it would be making attacks with the weapon). At your GM's discretion, moving with the item, being knocked prone with the item, or other disruptions may require the user to perform the preparation maneuvers again before using the item.

REINFORCED (PASSIVE)

Weapons or items with the Reinforced quality are immune to the Sunder quality. Armor with the Reinforced quality make the wearer's soak immune to the Pierce and Breach qualities.

SLOW-FIRING (PASSIVE)

Slow-Firing weapons tend to deal incredible damage, but need time to recharge or cool down between shots. A weapon's Slow-Firing rating dictates the number of rounds that must pass before the weapon can be fired again after attacking. For example, a heavy laser cannon with Slow-Firing 2 must wait two rounds after being fired before it can be fired again.

STUN (ACTIVE)

A weapon with Stun can deal strain to the target. When the Stun quality is activated, it inflicts strain equal to the weapon's Stun rating. Since this is strain, and not strain *damage*, it is not reduced by the target's soak.

STUN DAMAGE (PASSIVE)

A weapon with this quality can only deal strain damage (damage applied to the target's strain threshold). Because this is strain *damage*, not strain, it is still reduced by a target's soak.

SUNDER (ACTIVE)

When activating Sunder, the attacker chooses one item openly wielded by the target (such as a weapon, shield, or item on a belt). That item is damaged one step: to minor if undamaged, from minor to moderate, or from moderate to major. If an item already suffering major damage is the target of a successful Sunder, it is destroyed.

Sunder requires  to activate, and may be activated even if the attack is unsuccessful. Sunder may be activated multiple times in the same attack, but each activation must be applied to the same item, potentially taking it from undamaged to destroyed in a single attack.

SUPERIOR (PASSIVE)

A Superior item is a sterling example of its kind, representing masterful craftsmanship. A Superior item generates automatic  on all checks related to its use.

TRACTOR (PASSIVE)

Instead of firing searing beams of laser fire or crackling ion discharges, this weapon fires relatively harmless electromagnetic beams that ensnare ships and hold them fast in space. Tractor beams, like all weapons, are fired at their target using the appropriate skill check with all suitable modifiers. Once the weapon hits its target, the target may not move unless its pilot makes a successful Piloting check with a difficulty equal to the tractor beam's rating. If the target is an individual character, the character is immobilized while the beam is active.

(Weapons with the Tractor quality are only going to show up in sci-fi settings, and probably only the more fanciful sci-fi settings! However, they are such a staple in those settings that we included the quality here.)

ITEM MAINTENANCE

Invariably, items start to wear down. Rolling  may indicate a item has malfunctioned, misfired, jammed, broken down, or otherwise been rendered inoperable or impaired until it can be repaired.

All items, from low-tech weapons to more sophisticated devices, can be repaired with the Mechanics skill.

Item damage are generally classified as minor, moderate, or major. The magnitude of the required repairs indicates two things: the severity of any penalties applied to the user when trying to operate the defective item, and the difficulty rating of the necessary repairs. Repairing an item requires adequate time and tools, generally one to two hours per difficulty level. If a character attempts repairs in less time, the difficulty increases by one. Likewise, if the character lacks the proper tools, the difficulty increases by one. These factors are cumulative, so if your character tries to repair a pistol without the proper tools and in half the time it would normally take, you should increase the difficulty of the check by two.

The cost of repairs is equal to a percentage of the item's base cost: 25% if it's a minor repair, 50% if it's a moderate repair, and 100% if it requires major work. Reduce the total by 10% for each  received on the repair check if your character is doing the work themselves.

TABLE 1.5—4: REPAIRING GEAR

REPAIR REQUIRED	DIFFICULTY	PENALTY FOR USE
Minor	Easy ()	Add 
Moderate	Average () ()	Increase difficulty once
Major	Hard () () ()	Unusable

UNWIELDY (PASSIVE)

An Unwieldy weapon is a weapon that can be particularly awkward to use for those without impressive dexterity and hand-eye coordination. To wield an Unwieldy weapon properly, the character needs an Agility characteristic equal to or greater than the weapon's Unwieldy rating. For each point of Agility by which the character is deficient, they must increase the difficulty of all checks made while using the weapon by one.

VICIOUS (PASSIVE)

When an attack with this weapon results in a Critical Injury or Hit, the character adds ten times the Vicious rating to the Critical roll. With Vicious 3, for example, you would add +30 to the resulting Critical Injury or Hit result.

TRACKING AMMO

Combat in our game tends to be fast-paced and narrative based, with rounds lasting an unspecified amount of “game-world” time and combat encounters usually wrapping up in a few total rounds. That narrative-driven approach also means that when your character attacks with a ranged weapon, one attack could represent a single, carefully lined up shot, or a few shots snapped off with a pistol.

All this means that we really encourage you and your GM not to worry too much about ammunition. Carefully tallying how many bullets your character has in the clip goes against the GENESYS game experience (and the long-standing traditions of most action movies).

A better way to approach the issue of ammo is to use any  generated on a combat check to make the character's ammo run out (something we suggest on page 104). It's more cinematically exciting, and certainly feels like something that would come from rolling a .

The only exception is when a weapon has the Limited Ammo quality. We reserve that quality for weapons like rocket launchers, grenades, or other weapons that very obviously can only fire once before reloading!

WEAPONS

In our game, weapons have a number of distinct characteristics, which is how we define them in the game and delineate their capabilities. All weapons share the characteristic categories that we cover here.

Some also come with unique rules, which we cover in the weapon's individual entry. Those rules are so specialized that making them universal would just create clutter in our general rules, since they won't come up often.

CHARACTERISTICS

The following are a weapon's characteristics.

NAME

What we call the weapon.

SKILL USED (SKILL)

All weapons require a combat skill to operate, and this entry defines which skill the weapon requires.

Skills also can determine whether a weapon requires one or two hands to wield. The "Heavy" version of the skill means the weapon takes two hands to use, and the "Light" version of the skill means it can be used with one hand. If the setting uses the unspecified version of each skill, the weapon can be used one-handed unless it says otherwise in its entry. Gunnery weapons always require two hands to use.

BASE DAMAGE (DAM)

The base damage the weapon inflicts. This is the minimum damage inflicted if the attack with this weapon hits. Each ★ the combat check generates adds one point of damage to this base damage rating.

Some weapons (including most Melee and Brawl weapons) have a "+" in front of their base damage. This means you add your character's Brawn rating to this value.

CRITICAL RATING (CRIT)

Indicates the number of ▲ required to trigger Critical Injuries using this weapon. If the weapon's Critical rating triggers, the character rolls percentile dice on **Table 1.6–10: Critical Injury Result**, on page 115

to determine the effect on the target. A Critical Injury can only be triggered on a successful hit that inflicts wounds on the target.

Some weapons and talents modify this Critical roll, potentially making a Critical Injury more or less effective. In addition, a character can only generate one Critical injury per hit on a target. However, if the check generates enough ▲ to trigger the Critical rating of the weapon multiple times, the character can choose to add +10 to the Critical roll for each trigger after the first. More on Critical Injuries can be found on page 114.

RANGE

The range of the weapon. Range is measured in several broad range bands. Melee weapons usually require the attacker to be engaged with the target. Ranged weapons have ranges listed as short, medium, long, or extreme. See pages 102 and 105 for more information.

ENCUMBRANCE (ENCUM)

Encumbrance is an abstract measurement of how heavy and awkward something is to carry and transport. The higher the encumbrance, the more difficult the item is to carry. More details on encumbrance can be found on page 84.

PRICE

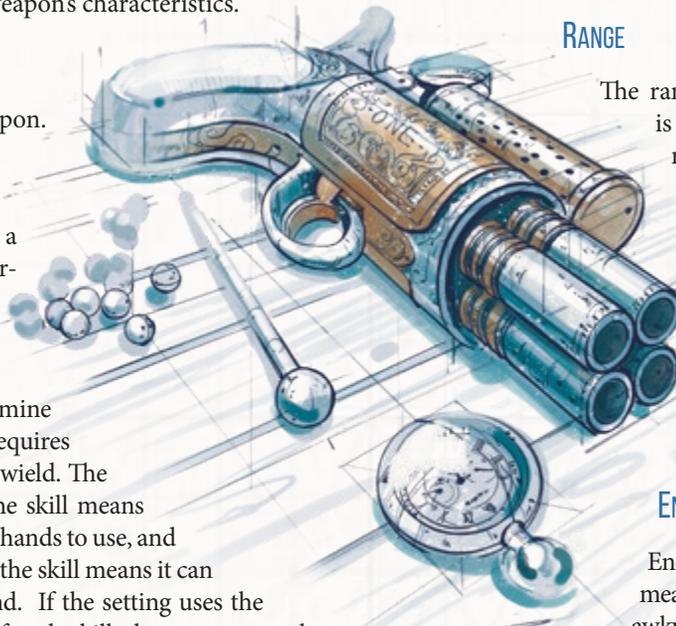
The price of the weapon on the open market.

RARITY

The rarity of the item, before modifiers (see page 82).

SPECIAL

These are the qualities or other special rules each weapon possesses. More in-depth descriptions of these qualities can be found on page 86, while rules specific to a certain type of weapon are detailed in the weapon's individual description.



WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

Here we've included two weapons, a knife and a revolver. As we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, we're not going to include an extensive armory in this section, since weapons depend a great deal on the setting you're playing in. These two, however, are basic enough that they provide us a chance to demonstrate how Melee and Ranged weapon profiles look.

Normally, we present weapon entries in a series of paragraphs with headers. We then present their characteristics in a single, consolidated table to save space.

KNIFE

This is our profile for a standard knife. The profile is general enough that this could work for a knife carried in the belt of a medieval noble, a weapon bought at a sporting goods store today, or part of the gear of an interstellar soldier of the future.

Since the weapon is a Melee weapon, it uses the Melee skill. The damage it can deal depends on the Brawn of the user, so it has a "+" next to the damage entry to signify that you'd add your character's Brawn rating to the number to figure out its base damage. +1 damage means it does not do a great deal of damage, which is appropriate for a knife. A Crit rating of 3 is

what we consider our "average" Crit value. Rolling $\Delta \Delta$ on a check is not too unlikely for a skilled user. And because this is a close combat weapon, it can only be used against enemies your character is engaged with (hence the range of "engaged").

A knife is small, so we gave it an encumbrance value of 1. A knife is cheap and easy to find, hence the inexpensive price and low rarity. It also has no special item qualities, because again, it's a simple knife.

REVOLVER

This is our profile for a standard revolver. Like the knife's, this profile is general enough that it could work for a six-shooter out of the 1800s, a sidearm in a steampunk universe, or something straight out of our own era.

The weapon is a Ranged weapon, hence it uses the Ranged skill. Of course, if your setting breaks up Ranged into multiple skills, this would probably use Ranged (Light) since it's a pistol used in one hand. The damage reflects this: good damage for a pistol, but not comparable to a military rifle's. The same goes for the Crit rating. Rolling $\Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta$ on a check is a bit less likely, so it's going to take a skilled shot to make this weapon effective. We gave this a range of medium, which is typically the maximum range for pistols (some pistols are only useful at short range).

The weapon's a bit bigger and bulkier than the knife, hence the higher encumbrance value of 2. Its cost reflects the higher cost of firearms, but it should still be fairly easy to find one. It also has one item quality, since revolvers tend to be accurate sidearms.

You may be surprised that we didn't give it the Limited Ammo 6 quality (for its six shots). However, we find in games that combat encounters tend to average around three to five rounds.

If a weapon is unlikely to run out of ammo before combat ends, we recommend that it's not worth tracking ammo and that you should use the rules in the **Tracking Ammo** sidebar on page 89.

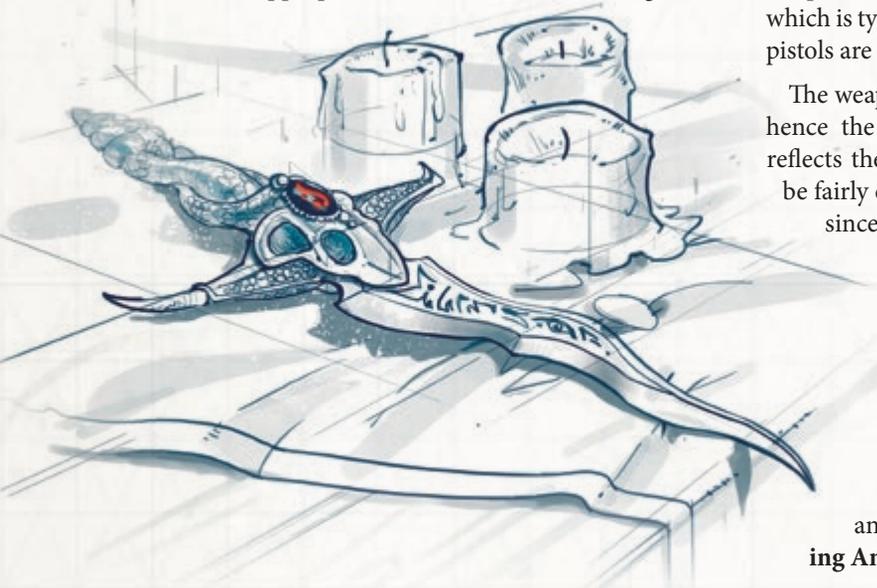


TABLE 1.5-5: WEAPONS

NAME	SKILL	DAM	CRIT	RANGE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY	SPECIAL
Knife	Melee	+1	3	Engaged	1	25	1	
Revolver	Ranged	6	4	Medium	2	350	4	Accurate 1

ARMOR

Now that we've talked about weapons, let's cover armor briefly. What form armor takes in your game is going to depend a lot on the setting. However, mechanically, all forms of armor work the same, whether medieval plate mail or modern ballistic armor.

For our purposes, armor is pretty much anything that your character wears to increase their protection. If your game involves combat, we expect that your character wears some sort of armor. We should emphasize that the game is designed with that conceit in mind, so if your character is getting into fights without any armor, they are taking on more of a risk.

For that reason, we keep our definition of "armor" really broad. Not everyone is going to want their character to be wearing the bulkiest body armor available all the time (after all, most action movie heroes don't!) So, in our game, even a heavy leather jacket or sturdy clothing provides some protection. Often, that's all your character is really going to need, and narratively, it still looks like something they might wear every day.

Your character can only benefit from wearing one piece of armor. Even if they wear two or more pieces of armor, you have to choose which one improves soak and defense and provides any unique benefits.

ARMOR CHARACTERISTICS

Every piece of armor is defined through the following characteristics. Armor also shares some characteristic categories with weapons, notably price and rarity. The descriptions of these characteristics can be found on page 90.

DEFENSE

The armor's defense adds ■ equal to the defense rating directly to the attacker's dice pool. This reflects the armor's ability to deflect damage away from the wearer's body.

The defense rating of armor sets the user's defense at a certain value, while other abilities and talents may then increase the user's defense rating.

TABLE 1.5–6: ARMOR

NAME	DEFENSE	SOAK	ENCUMBRANCE	PRICE	RARITY
Heavy Jacket	0	+1	1	50	1



SOAK

A suit of armor's soak is added to the wearer's soak value and you subtract the total soak from any damage suffered. If an attack causes 10 damage, for example, a soak of 2 plus a Brawn of 2 reduces the damage incurred by four, leaving a total of six points of damage.

Most armor adds +1 or +2 soak, rarely more.

ENCUMBRANCE

Each full suit or discrete piece of armor has a listed encumbrance value. However, armor's *full* encumbrance rating only comes into play when a suit or piece of armor is carried instead of worn. When armor is worn, its encumbrance rating is reduced by three, to a minimum of zero.

ARMOR DESCRIPTIONS

Here we've included one piece of armor, the heavy jacket. As we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, we're not going to include an extensive list of armor in this section, since armor depends a great deal on the setting you're playing in. This, however, is basic enough that it lets us get an overview of how armor works.

You'll also notice that, as we talked about in the beginning of the **Armor** section, this "armor" is something your character could wear in most situations without anyone finding it odd.

Normally, we present the armor entries in a series of paragraphs with headers. We also present their characteristics in a single, consolidated table to save space.

GEAR

Gear is our catchall term for anything that isn't weapons or armor. Generally, gear needs fewer rules than either of those, so we can lump everything together in this third category.

In **Part II: Settings**, we often split gear into subcategories, depending on the type. These subcategories may include communications equipment, medical equipment, tools, or survival gear. However, these subcategories exist just for organization.

GEAR CHARACTERISTICS

Unlike the host of characteristics that come with armor and weapons, only three describe gear: price, encumbrance, and rarity. All three work exactly the same as we've described in the weapon section, on page 90.

THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

Besides their characteristics, most pieces of gear have just one rule. It's a rule we like to call "the right tool for the job."

The rule is this: Due to the narrative-driven nature of our game, not every piece of equipment grants a unique rule or bonus to gameplay mechanics. Instead, most pieces of gear assist your character in performing tasks they might not be able to accomplish without them. A pair of binoculars allow your character

HEAVY JACKET

This is our profile for the heavy jacket. This is general enough to represent a piece of clothing that would fit into a number of eras.

The jacket has no defense, because it has no elements that would deflect a blow. It adds +1 soak to your character, which is in line with heavy clothing, but not at the level of military or police armor. The price is what you'd expect to pay for a rugged, well-made jacket. It also isn't a problem to carry (remember that when the jacket's worn, that encumbrance drops down to 0). However, besides cosmetic customizations, a jacket doesn't do much, so there aren't any other special rules. Finally, jackets are really easy to find, leading to the low rarity.

to spot foes from a long way away, for example; a cell phone lets you communicate over long distances, and a camp stove lets your character cook food in the wilderness. In these cases, your character's equipment makes a task possible. The gear doesn't grant any additional bonus in the rules; it just lets your character do something they normally couldn't.

At other times, a piece of gear helps your character do something better. For example, a compass may not be vital to successfully following a trail through the woods, but it probably would be useful. Likewise, a propane lantern would be helpful in starting a larger fire, since it has a fuel source and igniter. Whenever a character uses a piece of gear to aid in a task that the character could still normally perform without the equipment, you and the GM can agree to add ■ to the dice pool.

That's what we mean by the right tool for the job. The whole thing is a bit of a judgement call for you and your GM, but as is the case in most of these situations, the GM has the final say.

UNIQUE RULES

Other pieces of gear have rules unique to that item described in the item's entry.

GEAR DESCRIPTIONS

Here we've included three pieces of gear: a backpack, rope, and a painkiller. Again, we're not including a longer or more specific list of gear, because what gear is available depends a lot on the setting. However, this section should give you an idea of how gear works.

Normally, we present gear entries in a series of paragraphs with headers. We then present their characteristics in a single, consolidated table to save space, just as with weapons and armor.

BACKPACK

This is a profile for a backpack. Backpacks can take a lot of different forms, but the basics of how one works remains the same. Backpacks vary in price and rarity, and they have one unique rule that lets characters carry more.

While wearing a backpack, your character increases their encumbrance threshold by four.

PAINKILLER

This is the profile for a painkiller, which is the generic term we use for a consumable, quick-healing item. Being able to quickly heal a number of wounds is important to the system; it lets you keep your character moving when they would otherwise be eliminated, and it tempers the lethality of combat. Although these items mechanically heal wounds, thematically they can help your character get back on their feet in any number of ways, depending on the setting. In a **fantasy** setting, these may be *healing potions* that use magic to heal injuries. In the **steampunk** setting, they may be *healing tonics* that rely on some ill-understood scientific or alchemical properties. The **weird war** setting can use *aid packs* that are either scientific or magical. A **modern day** setting treats these as *painkillers*, allowing your character to ignore minor injuries and keep going. **Science fiction** or **space opera** settings could also use painkillers, or they could use *autohealers* that rely on futuristic medicine or even nanotechnology to patch up injuries in moments.

Whatever the name, painkillers work the same way in the game mechanics for every setting. Using a painkiller requires one maneuver for your character to apply it either to themselves or to another engaged character. The painkiller is consumed in the process, and the character

TABLE I.5–7: GEAR

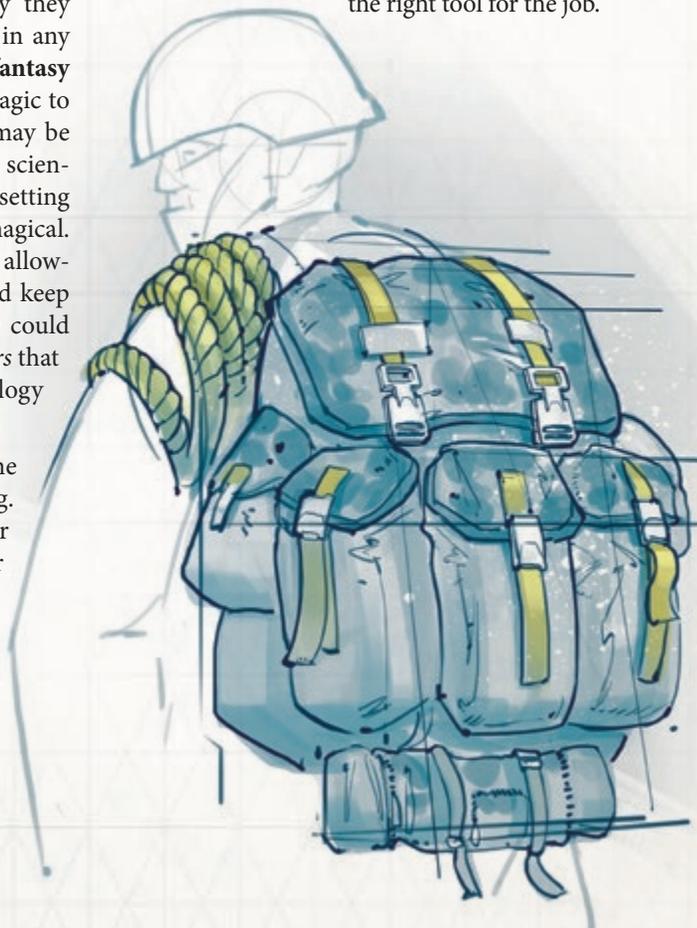
ITEM	ENCUMBRANCE	PRICE	RARITY
Backpack	+4	50	3
Painkiller	0	25	2
Rope	1	5	1

immediately heals 5 wounds. While a character can use multiple painkillers, this provides diminishing returns. Each painkiller after the first heals one wound fewer. A second painkiller heals 4 wounds, a third heals 3, and so on. Using a sixth painkiller in a day has no further effect.

After one day, the lingering effects of the painkillers wear off, and the character may use painkillers again with their normal effect (this means a character can consume up to five painkillers a day, each day). See page 116 for more information on painkillers and healing.

ROPE

This is a profile for a length of rope: maybe a coil of woven hemp, or maybe a high-tech nylon climbing rope. Rope doesn't come with any unique rules. The only rule associated with it is that often it is the right tool for the job.



CHAPTER 6: COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

At some point in nearly every roleplaying game, the time for discussion is over, and it's time for your characters to roll up their sleeves and kick some butt.

Although it doesn't have to be, we expect combat to be a part of many of your games, and this chapter discusses how to make combat encounters happen.

NARRATIVE AND STRUCTURED GAMEPLAY

We expect most of the gameplay in GENESYS to be done on a narrative basis, with your GM describing events and you and your fellow players describing your characters' actions and reactions to those events. Combat, however, requires more structured gameplay rules.

Narrative gameplay does not require the GM or players to keep track of the exact passage of time, and for the most part, this is perfectly acceptable. It's usually enough to know that actions may take a few minutes, hours, days, or weeks (or any other amount of time). Narrative gameplay is most often used in situations for which the precise order of actions is unimportant.

Conversely, structured gameplay is, at its heart, a rules system that breaks up a character's actions into what they could reasonably perform in a predetermined amount of time. It also gives each character in a scene the opportunity to perform actions in turn. It's most often used for playing through combat situations. However, your GM may decide to employ structured gameplay in certain non-combat scenes that they feel would benefit from requiring the players to clearly define their characters' actions within a rule set.

STRUCTURED GAMEPLAY OVERVIEW

When using structured gameplay to describe the sequence of events during a firefight, rapier duel, or hectic chase through busy streets, we break the game down into a series of rounds, each of which is further broken down into a series of turns. During a single round, each player character and non-player character gets one turn, during which that character has the opportunity to accomplish tasks and perform various actions.

Rounds can represent roughly a minute or so in time, although we've deliberately avoided specifying the elapsed time amount. You should keep in mind that a round lasts long enough for your character to move to a new location and perform an important

COOL OR VIGILANCE?

Two different skills in GENESYS can be used to determine Initiative: Cool and Vigilance. The situation at hand determines which skill should be used in a particular circumstance.

Characters should determine their Initiative using the Cool skill when they are aware and ready for combat (or for whatever situation has resulted in the use of structured gameplay). For example, rolling to see who goes first in a quick-draw gunfight or springing an ambush on an unsuspecting enemy would require Cool, as Cool represents a character's ability to remain calm, collected, and focused on the task ahead.

Characters should determine their Initiative using the Vigilance skill when combat (or another situation resulting in structured gameplay) begins unexpectedly. Two enemies walking around a corner and running into each other would each use Vigilance to determine Initiative, for example. Likewise, someone being ambushed would also use Vigilance to determine Initiative (and if they ended up going earlier in the Initiative order than their ambusher, clearly they were vigilant enough to spot the ambush at the last second).

It's important to note that different characters may use different skills to determine Initiative during the same combat, depending on their differing circumstances. Also, if you and your GM are unsure which of the two skills best applies to a given situation, you should default to using Vigilance.

action. You should also remember that although each round is broken up into turns that happen sequentially in gameplay, narratively the turns are occurring at roughly the same time.

Structured gameplay events (also called encounters), such as combat, follow these steps:

STEP 1: DETERMINE INITIATIVE

At the beginning of the first round of combat, all players and the GM need to determine in what order the characters take their turns. Do the soldiers ambush the supply column, or does the hidden sniper get in the first shot? This is referred to as the Initiative order.

To determine the Initiative order, each player character and NPC makes a **Simple (-) Cool** or **Vigilance check** (for more information on which to use, see the **Cool or Vigilance?** sidebar on page 95). Once all Initiative checks have been made, the GM notes the results of each check and ranks them in order from the highest number of ✨ to the lowest. If two checks are tied, the check with more ▲ is ranked higher. If a player character and an NPC are still tied, the player character is ranked higher. This is the Initiative order.

STEP 2: ASSIGN INITIATIVE SLOTS

Once the GM has determined the Initiative order, they note which results were generated by player characters and which results were generated by NPCs. The results generated by player characters become player character Initiative slots. The results generated by NPCs become NPC Initiative slots.

STEP 3: PARTICIPANTS TAKE TURNS

Beginning at the top of the Initiative order, the players and GM fill each Initiative slot one at a time with a character turn. If the Initiative slot is a player character Initiative slot, then the players agree on one player character to fill the slot from among the player characters who have not acted yet this round. That player character then takes this turn. While taking their turn, we refer to this character as the **active character**.

If the Initiative slot is an NPC Initiative slot, then the GM chooses one NPC to fill the slot from among the NPCs who have not yet acted this round. That NPC then takes this turn.

STEP 4: ROUND ENDS

Once all NPCs and player characters have taken a turn, the round ends. At this point, certain effects that last until the “end of the round” may end. The GM also determines if the ongoing encounter warrants additional rounds or if it has been resolved. If the ongoing

CINEMATIC COMBAT

GENESYS strives to capture the pure cinematic thrill found in some of the best action and adventure books, movies, and other media. Combat is frequent and fast-moving, and meant to showcase the talents and abilities of the characters.

The unique dice system of GENESYS helps fuel the story-driven nature of the game. Even a single attack roll generates enough options (some good, some bad) to give your Game Master sufficient information to make combat far more than just a matter of rolling to hit and rolling to wound. In turn, we strongly encourage you to provide interesting detail before rolling on an attack, in order to give your GM ideas for describing the results. Combat is streamlined so the players do not bog down gameplay with too many tactical decisions; descriptions of their actions and the roll of the dice is sufficient to help visualize the violence.

events continue, repeat step 3 using the same Initiative order generated in step 1. If the action has been resolved and the encounter is over, proceed to step 5.

STEP 5: ENCOUNTER ENDS

Once the action has been resolved, the GM ends the encounter. At this point, any character abilities that may only be used “once per encounter” are again available, and any abilities that last “until the end of the encounter” expire. Player characters also have a chance to catch their breath and recover from strain (see page 117), and they may take steps to help heal any incapacitated characters.

THE TURN

Each character (whether a player character or a non-player character) gets one turn to act during each round. During their turn, the character can do any of a number of things, such as dash for cover, attempt to unlock a sealed door, or shoot a pistol at an opponent. The activities the character can perform during their turn are split into three categories: incidentals, maneuvers, and actions.

INCIDENTALS

Incidentals are minor activities characters can undertake that require extremely little time or effort. Dropping a broken radio, speaking to a friend, or switching on a stun baton are all incidentals. There is no hard limit to the number of incidentals a character may perform during their turn, although your GM may veto

excessive numbers of them or decide they are complex enough to warrant counting as a maneuver. The following are examples of incidentals:

- Speaking to another character.
- Dropping an item held in one's hands.
- Releasing someone the character is holding.
- Minor movements such as shifting position, peeking around a corner, or looking behind oneself.

MANEUVERS

Maneuvers are activities that aren't complex enough to warrant a skill check, but still involve time and effort on the part of a character. Characters are allowed one maneuver during their turn, and certain circumstances may allow them a second maneuver as well (see page 98). The following are some examples of maneuvers:

- Aiming a weapon.
- Moving one range band closer or farther away from an enemy (for more on range bands, see page 105).
- Opening a door.
- Diving behind cover.
- Standing up.

INCIDENTALS

Incidentals are anything a character wants to do that takes very little time, or has no measurable effect on the ongoing encounter. This includes dropping something they're holding, letting go of someone, saying something, looking around, gesturing, or making other minor movements. We have no exhaustive list of possible incidentals, because the possibilities for what a character can do as an incidental are so varied, and because, like we said, most of them don't have any mechanical effect.

MANEUVERS

Just as **GENESYS** uses an abstract method of describing combat, we similarly describe movement in broad strokes. Characters often do far more than shooting or swinging weapons in combat, like pulling out medical supplies to heal a wounded comrade, activating the systems to open a door, or scaling a wall to gain an advantage over their opponents.

ACTIONS

Actions are important activities that are vital to a character's accomplishment of a goal. Each character may normally only perform one action during their turn, likely the most important activity they undertake during their turn. Actions almost always involve performing a skill check, although certain character abilities may require using an action to activate them. The following are some examples of actions:

- Hacking a computer.
- Unlocking a locked door.
- Firing a weapon.
- Punching or grappling an opponent.
- Instructing allies with a series of orders.
- Performing first aid on an ally.
- Sneaking up on a vigilant foe.
- Climbing a cliff.

Out of all of these options, the most common during combat are those that involve attacking an opponent. Attacking an opponent requires a combat skill check, sometimes referred to in shorthand as a combat check or simply an attack.

Although we have not created a hard limit on how many incidentals a character can perform during combat, we encourage players to limit the incidentals their character performs during each turn to a few simple things. If they don't, the GM is always free to tell players that the amount of stuff they want their character to do is complex enough that it requires a maneuver, or even an action.

One other note: generally when it isn't a character's turn, an incidental is all they can perform. There are some exceptions, but these are clearly noted in the rules.

Not all undertakings require a check. These minor activities, known as maneuvers, cover a wide range of activities that any character can perform. They require an investment of time and effort on the character's part, but they are simple enough that there is no chance of failure when doing them. Technically, characters perform maneuvers during narrative gameplay as well as

during structured gameplay, or encounters. However, maneuvers are tracked and defined during encounters, because characters' time and efforts are more limited by the frantic pace of conflict.

MANEUVER LIMITATIONS

Whether taking careful aim at an enemy, diving for cover behind a stack of cargo crates, or patching up a wounded friend, a character may perform one free maneuver on their turn. They may perform a second maneuver by voluntarily suffering two points of strain, thereby stretching themselves to their limits in order to get more done. Characters may also perform a second maneuver through a particularly successful skill check (by spending \blacktriangle \blacktriangle generated on that check), or by other means listed elsewhere. However, regardless of the source, a single character may not perform more than two maneuvers during their turn.

MANEUVERS OUTSIDE A CHARACTER'S TURN

In some cases, a character may be able to perform a maneuver when it's not that character's turn. An enemy soldier rolling horribly on a Stealth check to ambush a PC may generate a number of \blacktriangle on their check. The GM may decide that the blunder allows the would-be victim the opportunity to perform a maneuver, even though it's the soldier's turn.

Any bonus maneuvers gained outside of a character's turn do not count toward the limit of two maneuvers a character may perform during their turn—specifically because they occur outside of the character's turn. These additional maneuvers are generally awarded at the Game Master's discretion, and thus there is no hard-and-fast limit to the number of maneuvers that can be awarded in this manner. However, we encourage GMs to limit the number of out-of-turn maneuvers any character performs each round to one or two at most.

TYPES OF MANEUVERS

The following is a list of the maneuvers a character can perform during combat. Please note that this list is not exhaustive. The entire point of maneuvers is that they can cover any activity that is relatively easy to perform but still requires some amount of time and effort. While the maneuvers listed here are deliberately general to cover as many options as possible, if a player comes up with something they want their character to do that is not covered by this list, they should not dismiss the idea out of hand. Instead, they should

explain what they'd like to accomplish to the GM, who can decide if it can realistically be performed in a single maneuver.

Some activities may require multiple maneuvers to perform. Generally, these maneuvers must be performed sequentially, without being interrupted by the character performing other maneuvers or actions, for the task to be successful.

AIM

During combat, a character can use the aim maneuver to steady a weapon or line up a hit before attacking, which grants a bonus to their next combat check. A character only gains the benefit of aiming if they remain in their current position and do not perform any additional maneuvers or actions before their next combat check. Any damage taken that exceeds the character's soak also negates the benefit of aiming.

Aiming provides the character with one of the following two bonuses:

- Gain \blacksquare on the next combat check. If the character spends two consecutive maneuvers aiming, they gain \blacksquare \blacksquare on the next combat check.
- Target a specific item carried by the opponent or a specific part of the target or opponent. This could allow the character to attempt to strike or shoot a weapon from an opponent's hand, for example, or target an opponent's limb to hobble them. If the character spends one maneuver aiming to do this, their next combat check suffers \blacksquare \blacksquare . If they spend two consecutive maneuvers aiming, the combat check suffers \blacksquare instead.

ASSIST

Whether a character is trying to get a truck engine up and running or is using a first aid kit on a wounded comrade, it never hurts to have a little bit of help. Performing the assist maneuver allows an engaged ally to add \blacksquare to their next check. Several characters can use the assist maneuver to add more bonus \blacksquare to the engaged ally's next check. All awarded bonus dice must be used on the assisted character's next turn; otherwise, they are discarded.

The Game Master should use their own discretion when allowing characters to assist one another. Some actions simply do not benefit from assistance. Likewise, it is up to the GM as to how many characters can realistically assist another character.

GUARDED STANCE

When a character is confronted by an angry enemy with a weapon, they may be inclined to defend themselves rather than taking an ineffectual swing at their opponent. In such an instance, the character can take a maneuver to assume a guarded stance, which contributes to their defense against melee attacks. A character who performs this maneuver adds ■ to any combat checks they make until the end of their next turn. However, they also gain melee defense 1 until the end of their next turn.

INTERACT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

Often, a single maneuver is enough to interact with the environment around a character. This is a broad category of possible interactions, such as opening a door, ducking behind a wall, pressing a specific button on a control panel, or grabbing a weapon off of the ground. The following are additional specifically designed examples of interacting with the environment:

- **Moving a large item.** Flipping over a table, shoving a barrel into a pursuer's path, hefting a crate: each of these takes a maneuver to perform.
- **Opening or closing a door.** Whether an electronic blast door or a simple door with latches and hinges, opening or closing it takes a maneuver.
- **Taking cover.** Ducking behind a door jamb, crouching behind a crate, or peeking around a tree trunk: all of these allow the character to gain ranged defense 1 (some cover can grant a ranged defense higher than 1, if particularly sturdy). It takes a maneuver to take cover, but once in cover, the character keeps the bonus unless the circumstances around them change such that they no longer benefit from cover, or they move out of cover.

MANAGE GEAR

Managing items and equipment is accomplished by this maneuver, which can cover the following options:

- **Draw, holster, ready, or load a weapon.** This maneuver covers the basic manipulations of most weapons, such as drawing a longsword from

its sheath, reloading a laser rifle's energy cells (provided the character has additional ammo at hand—see page 89), or drawing and arming a fragmentation grenade for use.

- **Draw something from storage or put it away.** A character can perform a maneuver to retrieve an item from a pouch, backpack, satchel, bandolier, or some other accessible container. This maneuver can also be used to stow items in a similar fashion.

MOUNT OR DISMOUNT

Across the many settings in GENESYS, characters commonly use beasts of burden to get from place to place. Mounting or dismounting from a domesticated animal, such as a trained horse, requires a maneuver. (Successfully mounting an untrained animal, however, requires an **Average** [◆◆] **Survival check** and thus an action, which could be made harder depending on how ornery the GM feels the animal is.) Similarly, entering a vehicle, sliding into a cockpit, or otherwise taking position to pilot a vehicle, crew a gunnery station, or the like requires a maneuver as well.



MOVE

One of the most important maneuvers a character can make is to move—from one piece of cover to the next, to a wounded ally's side, away from the claws of a vicious bear, or out of range of an enemy's crossbow. The game defines several different broad types of movement. When characters move, they do one of the following:

- **Change range increment.** Performing this maneuver allows a character to move between short and medium range relative to another person or object. Performing two move maneuvers allows a character to move between medium and long range or between long and extreme range. When covering long distances, multiple maneuvers do not have to be performed on the same turn, but the character is not considered to be in the new range increment until all required maneuvers have been performed. For more detail on determining range, see **Range Bands**, page 105.
- **Engage or disengage from an opponent.** If a target is already within short range of a character, the character can perform a maneuver to engage that target. If the character is engaged with an opponent or adversary, they must perform a maneuver to disengage from that opponent before moving to any other location. This only changes their range relative

to their opponent from engaged to short and represents the effort of backing away and avoiding their opponent's attacks. Characters do not need to perform this maneuver to leave an engagement consisting only of friendly characters or allies.

- **Move within short range.** Performing this maneuver allows an unengaged character to move to another position that is currently within short range of them.

DROP PRONE OR STAND FROM PRONE

Dropping prone and standing from a prone position each requires a maneuver. Dropping prone allows the character to add ■ to all ranged attacks made against them, although they also must add □ to all melee attacks made against them.

PREPARATION

Some actions require additional preparation to perform safely or effectively. The preparation maneuver is generally performed in conjunction with another ability to confer a bonus, offset a penalty, or fulfill a requirement. The individual talents and abilities that utilize the preparation maneuver define its specific effect. It is sometimes abbreviated under the requirements as “prepare.”

FLYING

Flight in GENESYS is handled in two different ways. Vehicles and starships that fly use the rules found in **Part III: Game Master Toolkit**, page 220, to handle their flight. Some pieces of equipment allow individuals to mimic such flight and use these rules as well.

However, some creatures and individuals can fly, but not at the same speeds as vehicles. In these cases, the creatures or individuals simply move from one place to the other by flying, but still use the rules presented in this chapter for situations such as combat. Their flight is handled mostly narratively, with a common-sense approach. For example, a flying creature could easily fly over difficult or impassable terrain, or fly over water without having to swim. It could cover vertical distances in the same way that individuals cover horizontal ones. However, there are some points to keep in mind concerning flying creatures.

Creatures and species that can hover rely on swiftly moving wings, bags of lighter-than-air gas, or other

systems to move while staying above the ground. This type of movement follows the same game rules as those for other creatures, with the following exceptions: hovering creatures ignore difficult or impassable terrain as long as they can reasonably stay above it, and they ignore the penalties for moving through water. They generally have to stay relatively close to the ground (within medium range) unless noted otherwise.

Creatures that can fly (such as most birds) use aerodynamic principles such as lift to stay aloft. These follow all the same rules concerning terrain as creatures that hover. However, they have to maintain at least some speed to stay aloft, and thus while flying must spend one maneuver every turn to move (they can actually change position, or just circle or wheel in place and effectively remain where they are). Most flying creatures can move faster than hovering or ground creatures, and they can move from long range to short range using a single maneuver.

ACTIONS

During a character's turn, they generally have the chance to perform one primary activity. This is the character's action. Actions include any activity complex enough to warrant a skill check, such as slicing into a computer network, firing a rifle, or leaping across a chasm.

ACTION LIMITATIONS

A character may only perform one action in a turn. Some characters may have abilities allowing them to perform an action as a maneuver. This does not violate the limit of one action per turn, as the action now counts as a maneuver.

TYPES OF ACTIONS

There are four major types of actions a character can perform during their turn: exchanging an action for a maneuver, spending the action to activate an ability or talent, performing a skill check, and performing a combat check. The last, performing a combat check, is actually a variation on performing a skill check. However, enough unique circumstances surround it that it requires its own entry.

EXCHANGE AN ACTION FOR A MANEUVER

A character may exchange their action for an additional maneuver during their turn. They may then perform any maneuver they would be able to perform normally, following all the rules that govern maneuvers. However, they still may not perform more than two maneuvers during their turn, no matter how they gained access to them.

SPEND AN ACTION TO ACTIVATE AN ABILITY

Certain abilities and talents require an action to activate. When a character spends an action to activate an ability or talent (even if spending the action does not require a check or any other activity on the character's part), they have used their action for their turn. They may not take a second action unless they specifically have an ability that grants them a second action.

PERFORM A SKILL CHECK

The most common actions that most characters take during their turns are actions that require a skill check to resolve. In other words, these are activities for which success is not guaranteed or for which the failure of the task may be important to the ongoing story. For example, for most characters, walking from one place

to another does not bring with it any inherent risk of failure. Characters who have no relevant injuries or disabilities are assumed to be able to walking from one location to another. Even if a character could fail, failing would not significantly change the ongoing story. However, trying to cross a chasm on a tightrope to escape pursuit brings an inherent risk of failure (falling and possibly dying), and failing can advance the story (whether or not the character escapes pursuit). Therefore, a Coordination check is called for, and if it occurs during an encounter, it requires an action to perform.

Most skill checks and what they can accomplish are covered in **Chapter 3: Skills**. What a character can do with a skill outside of an encounter is the same as what they can do with it inside of an encounter. The only difference is that inside an encounter, they have certain time limits imposed. In fact, the GM can determine that certain activities may require more than one action to perform, if they would normally take a great deal of time. (If the activity is time-consuming enough that it cannot be performed while the encounter continues, the GM may require the character to wait for the encounter to end before attempting the activity.)

Combat checks, however, are unique enough that they require a separate description.

PERFORM A COMBAT CHECK

A PC makes a combat check when they use a combat skill to attack a target—by firing a gun, throwing a punch, or swinging a sword, for example. This is also referred to as an attack.

First and foremost, keep in mind that a combat check is a skill check. It follows all of the rules and procedures for making a skill check, including the steps for assembling the dice pool. However, there are additional steps included in a combat check. All the steps a combat check follows are detailed here.

STEP 1. DECLARE AN ATTACK AND SELECT TARGETS

The character chooses to make an attack. They select what skill they use to make the attack and, if the skill requires a weapon to use, which weapon they use. They then declare the target of their attack.

STEP 2. ASSEMBLE THE DICE POOL

The character then assembles the dice pool based on the skill, its characteristic, and any applicable talents or other

abilities. Certain conditions, such as the painful effect of a Critical Injury or an environmental effect such as fog or darkness, may also contribute dice to the dice pool. See page 19 for more information on building a dice pool.

The difficulty of a combat check depends on whether the attack is a ranged attack (using the Ranged skill or one of its derivatives, depending on the setting) or a melee attack (using the Brawl or Melee skill or a setting-dependent derivative). Melee attack difficulties are always **Average** (◆◆). Ranged attack difficulties depend on the distance the target is from the active character, or in other words, the range band the target occupies. **Table I.6–1: Ranged Attack Difficulties** lists difficulties as they relate to different range bands. (See page 105 for more information about range bands.) Once the pool is assembled, roll the dice.

STEP 3. POOL RESULTS AND DEAL DAMAGE

Once the player rolls the dice pool for the attack, the player evaluates the results. As with any skill check, the check must generate more ✨ than ✖ to be successful.

When making a combat check, if the check is successful, each ✨ adds +1 damage to

TABLE I.6–1: RANGED ATTACK DIFFICULTIES

RANGE BAND	DIFFICULTY
Engaged	Easy (◆) plus modifiers depending on weapon used; see page 108
Short	Easy (◆)
Medium	Average (◆◆)
Long	Hard (◆◆◆)
Extreme	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)

the attack. If the attack affects multiple targets, the additional damage is added to each target.

STEP 4. RESOLVE ⚡ AND ☹

Just as they can be spent in a non-combat skill check, ⚡ and ☹ can be spent in a combat check to gain incidental beneficial effects. However, just as the rules governing encounters are somewhat more regimented than the rules governing narrative gameplay, so some of the options governing the spending of ⚡ and ☹ are more clearly defined. In encounters, the player controlling the active character determines how the character spends ⚡ and ☹, unless the GM has a specific reason to decide instead.

The first and foremost ways to spend ⚡ and ☹ in an attack are to activate a Critical Injury or active item quality. As described on page 90, each weapon has a Critical rating that consists of a numeric value. The user can spend that many ⚡ to inflict one Critical Injury on the target, in addition to regular effects and damage. Remember, a Critical Injury can only be triggered upon a successful hit that deals damage that exceeds the target's soak value. For more information on Critical Injuries, see page 114.

Item qualities are special effects and abilities that apply only when a character is using that particular weapon—the vicious edge of a sword, say, or the automatic fire capability of a heavy machine gun. Item qualities come in two forms: active and passive. Active qualities require the user to spend a certain number of ⚡ to trigger them. Generally, this is ⚡ ⚡, although some qualities may require more or fewer. Passive qualities always grant their effect. Some qualities may inflict effects on a target that, unless specified otherwise, are always applied in addition to other effects, Critical Injuries, and damage.



RANGED ATTACKS AND MELEE ATTACKS

Ranged attacks and melee attacks are two different types of attacks, meaning they are also two different types of combat checks. A ranged attack is an attack made with a ranged weapon of some sort, most likely using the Ranged skill (or one of its variants). A melee attack is an attack made in close combat with an opponent, and with a weapon designed for use in close combat. Such an attack is most likely to be made using the Brawl or Melee skill (or one of its variants).

In addition to always counting as an additional ⚡, ☀️ can be spent to activate item qualities as well. A ☀️ may be spent to inflict one Critical Injury (no matter what the Critical rating of the weapon is). Alternatively, a ☀️ may be spent to activate one item quality, no matter how many ⚡ it would normally take to do so.

There are other options for spending ⚡ and ☀️ as well. A list of the most common can be found on **Table I.6-2: Spending ⚡ and ☀️ in Combat**, on page 104. Keep in mind that these are not intended to be the only options available. As always, players and GMs may invent other ways to spend ⚡ and ☀️, depending on the specific circumstances of the encounter. Any option that the players and GM agree upon can be viable.

STEP 5. RESOLVE ⚡ AND ☀️

In the same fashion in which the controlling player determines how to spend ⚡ and ☀️ in their combat check, the GM then determines how to spend any ⚡ or ☀️ generated in the check. Much as fortune might favor the player, bad luck and circumstance can conspire against them. By default, the GM determines how ⚡ and ☀️ are spent, although in some cases (such as checks made by NPCs) they may give the players the option to spend these instead.

Although many weapon descriptions include options for spending ⚡ and ☀️, most do not for ⚡ and ☀️; however, this is not always the case. Some particularly volatile or dangerous weapons do have these options, and if they do, the options are detailed in the weapon's description. Specific options for spending ⚡ and ☀️ in encounters do exist, however, and the most common of these can be found on **Table I.6-3: Spending ⚡ and ☀️ in Combat**, on page 104. As with ⚡ and ☀️, keep in mind that these are not intended to be the only

options available. As always, GMs may invent other ways to spend ⚡ and ☀️, depending on the specific circumstances of the encounter, and any option that the players and GM agree on can be viable.

STEP 6. REDUCE DAMAGE, APPLY TO WOUND THRESHOLD, AND APPLY CRITICAL INJURIES

When a character suffers damage, whether from a rifle or claws, they reduce the damage received by their soak value. If any damage remains after this reduction, they suffer that many wounds. If the net result is zero or negative, the character suffers no wounds; their toughness and natural fortitude, in conjunction with any armor they might be wearing, have saved them from being injured. If the character suffers damage from multiple hits in an attack, they apply their soak value to each hit individually. For more information on damage and wounds, see **Wounds, Strain, and States of Health**, on page 112.

An attack may also generate a Critical Injury. This may occur because the weapon's Critical rating is triggered, or because the target suffers a number of wounds greater than its wound threshold. More about Critical ratings is explained in **Step 4: Resolve ⚡ and ☀️**.

When a Critical Injury is inflicted, the attacker rolls percentile dice on **Table I.6-10: Critical Injury Result**, on page 115. The result of the dice roll indicates which Critical Injury is inflicted.

Some weapons and talents modify this Critical Injury roll, potentially making it more or less effective. If an attack generates enough ⚡ to trigger more than one Critical Injury, the character makes a single Critical Injury roll, adding +10 to the result for each additional time the Critical rating is triggered.

OTHER SKILLS IN COMBAT

Although the core rules only have three combat skills, we know that your game is likely going to include more (depending on the setting, or your own invention). In addition, you may have invented your own combat skills.

The most important thing to know about those skills is whether they are used to make ranged attacks or close combat attacks. This determines how you use those skills when making a combat check.

TABLE I.6–2: SPENDING  AND  IN COMBAT

COST	RESULT OPTIONS
 or 	<p>Recover 1 strain.</p> <p>Add  to the next allied character's check.</p> <p>Notice a single important point in the ongoing conflict, such as the location of a door's control panel or a weak point on an armored car.</p> <p>Inflict a Critical Injury with a successful attack that deals damage past soak ( cost may vary).</p> <p>Activate an item quality ( cost may vary).</p>
  or 	<p>Perform an immediate free maneuver that does not exceed the limit of two maneuvers per turn.</p> <p>Add  to the targeted character's next check.</p> <p>Add  to any allied character's next check, including that of the active character.</p>
   or 	<p>Negate the targeted enemy's defense (such as the defense gained from cover, equipment, or performing the guarded stance maneuver) until the end of the current round.</p> <p>Ignore penalizing environmental effects such as inclement weather, zero gravity, or similar circumstances until the end of the active character's next turn.</p> <p>When dealing damage to a target, have the attack disable the opponent or one piece of gear rather than dealing wounds or strain. This could include hobbling them temporarily with a shot to the leg, or disabling their radio. This should be agreed upon by the player and the GM, and the effects are up to the GM (although Table I.6–10: Critical Injury Result, on page 115, is a good resource to consult for possible effects). The effects should be temporary and not too excessive.</p> <p>Gain +1 melee or ranged defense until the end of the active character's next turn.</p> <p>Force the target to drop a melee or ranged weapon they are wielding.</p>
	<p>Upgrade the difficulty of the targeted character's next check.</p> <p>Upgrade the ability of any allied character's next check, including that of the current active character.</p> <p>Do something vital, such as shooting the controls to the nearby blast doors to seal them shut.</p> <p>On an Initiative check, perform an immediate free maneuver before combat begins.</p>
 	<p>When dealing damage to a target, have the attack destroy a piece of equipment the target is using, such as blowing up their assault rifle or slicing their sword in half.</p>

TABLE I.6–3: SPENDING  AND  IN COMBAT

COST	RESULT OPTIONS
 or 	<p>The active character suffers 1 strain.</p> <p>The active character loses the benefits of a prior maneuver (such as from taking cover or assuming a guarded stance) until they perform the maneuver again.</p>
  or 	<p>An opponent may immediately perform one free maneuver as an incidental in response to the active character's check.</p> <p>Add  to the targeted character's next check.</p> <p>The active character or an allied character suffers  on their next action.</p>
   or 	<p>The active character falls prone.</p> <p>The active character grants the enemy a significant advantage in the ongoing encounter, such as accidentally blasting the controls to a bridge the active character was planning to use for their escape.</p>
	<p>The character's weapon immediately runs out of ammunition and may not be used for the remainder of the encounter.</p> <p>Upgrade the difficulty of an allied character's next check or the next check of the current active character.</p> <p>The tool, Brawl, or Melee weapon the active character is using becomes damaged (see page 89).</p>

DEFENSE

Defense, or specifically, defense rating, is one of the factors determining how difficult it is to land a successful attack during combat. Defense ratings represent the abilities of shields, armor, or other defenses to deflect attacks entirely, or to absorb or lessen incoming blows.

A character adds a number of  equal to their defense rating to all combat checks directed against them.

No character can have a defense rating higher than 4.

MELEE AND RANGED DEFENSE

A character's defense rating can be classified as one of three types: general defense rating, melee defense rating, or ranged defense rating. A general defense rating applies against all combat checks directed against the character. A melee defense rating only applies against close combat checks directed against the character (Brawl, Melee, Melee [Light], and Melee [Heavy] checks). A ranged defense rating only applies against ranged combat checks directed against the character (Gunnery, Ranged, Ranged [Light], and Ranged [Heavy] checks).

There are two sources of defense: sources that stack, and sources that do not stack. You can think of this as sources that *provide* defense, and sources that *increase* defense.

Sources that provide defense (such as most armor)

list the defense provided as a number, or say that they “provide” defense. Some examples include:

- Armor
- Cover
- Certain talents
- Guarded Stance maneuver

These sources do not stack with each other. If a character could benefit from more than one of these sources of defense, you choose the best one.

However, other sources increase defense. These sources say they “increase” defense, or they list the defense provided as a number with a “+” sign in front of it. These sources of defense stack, both with each other and with any sources that provide defense.

If multiple sources that increase defense would increase a character's defense higher than 4, the rating remains at 4.

SOAK

A character's soak value helps protect them from incoming wounds. Most creatures and characters have a default soak value equal to their Brawn rating. Most types of armor and other forms of protection provide additional soak (see **Chapter 5: Equipment**).

When taking damage from attacks (actions involving a combat skill check) or other sources of physical damage (such as being struck by a falling rock or being hit by a speeding car), the character may reduce the damage taken by their soak value. After calculating the total amount of damage inflicted, subtract the total soak value from that damage total. The result is the number of wounds the character suffers. If the

soak reduces the damage to zero or less than zero, then the character takes no damage. If the character suffers multiple hits from a single attack (such as from a weapon with Auto-fire), they apply their soak to each hit separately.

Soak stacks when it is from different sources, such as heavy assault armor and subdermal plating. Multiple applications of the same source do not stack, however. A character cannot wear three suits of heavy assault armor and stack the soak bonuses from each.

Soak does not reduce strain inflicted on a target, except in specific instances (such as when hit by a weapon with the Stun Damage item quality).

RANGE BANDS

GENESYS relies on broad terms to describe ranges and distances. Rather than have a player's attention focused on a grid, counting squares, **GENESYS** uses more abstract means to represent positions, distances, and ranges, thus allowing the players to focus on the action and the adventure.

The distance between two points—people, objects, or adversaries—is defined by general range categories.

These range categories are used to determine how far a ranged attack can reach, how far apart two people are from each other, how much effort is needed to move between two places, and so on. The most common ranges are short, medium, long, and extreme range. Another relative position—engaged—exists to represent characters who are in extremely close proximity to each other.

THE FIVE RANGE BANDS

For ease of play, distance in **GENESYS** is divided up into five different bands, from engaged to extreme. As always, the GM has the final say in determining the range between the attacker and the target.

With the engaged status and the other range bands, the GM is free to describe things dynamically and set scenes without having to worry about exact distances. Exact distances in meters do not matter. The details and adventure come first, creating a vivid picture in the minds of the players while allowing the GM to quickly provide the mechanical information they need to use their actions and build strategies.

ENGAGED

To reflect two or more targets who are grappling or otherwise engaged in hand-to-hand combat, there is a special range status called engaged. Two characters engaged with each other are in very close proximity. A warrior needs to be engaged with a target to hit them with their sword. When two or more characters are engaged with each other, it is called an engagement.

Engaged is also used to indicate that a person is close enough to an item to use it. A hacker needs to be engaged with a security terminal to attempt to hack it. A pilot needs to be engaged with their fighter jet to board it. A hunter needs to be engaged with a tree if they want to hide behind it for cover while tracking their target. The engaged status simply indicates that two things are close enough to each other to directly interact.

Consider engaged as a subcategory of short range. Obviously, someone can be slightly farther away if they're at short range, instead of being engaged with someone else. However, the difference in distance is relatively minor. Thus, spending a maneuver to move to engage someone or something is as much a matter of moving into combat cautiously enough to avoid receiving a blow unnecessarily as it is moving a physical distance.

SHORT RANGE

Short range indicates up to several meters between targets. Many thrown weapons and small firearms are most accurate at short range. Two people within short range of each other can talk comfortably without raising their voices. Moving to another spot within short range is usually easy to do and generally only requires one maneuver.

MEDIUM RANGE

Medium range can be up to several dozen meters away. More reliable pistols can reach to medium range, but few thrown weapons can reach this far. Two people within medium range of each other need to talk loudly to hear each other. Moving from short range to medium range takes little exertion and generally requires one maneuver.

LONG RANGE

Long range is farther than a few dozen meters. Rifles, mounted weapons, and weapons that use the Gunnery skill can reliably reach this far without too



much trouble. Two people within long range of each other need to yell loudly to hear each other. Moving from medium range to long range requires two maneuvers, as it involves a greater distance and takes more time than moving between medium range and short range. This means that in most cases, a character cannot close the distance between short and long range in a single round, as it would take three maneuvers (one for short to medium, plus two for medium to long).

EXTREME RANGE

Extreme range is the farthest range at which two targets can interact. High-tech sniper weaponry and some vehicle-mounted armaments may reach out to this range. Two people at extreme range may not be able to hear each other even if they shout. Moving between long range and extreme range can be time-consuming and exerting, and it requires two maneuvers. This means that in most cases, a character can move the entire distance between long and extreme range in a single round, but suffers strain or gives up their action to do so.

RELATIVE POSITIONING

Because of the narrative, abstract way in which distance is measured, both the players and Game Master must be aware of how positioning relative to two or more targets is measured. Once combat begins, the Game Master tells each player where their character is relative to the opponents. It's then up to the player to track their character's range relative to those opponents as the battle progresses.

For example, during a battle within a huge hangar bay, the PCs are ambushed by four security guards. Two approach from one side and two from the other. The GM indicates that each pair of security guards is in the medium range band with respect to the characters. During their turns, the PCs split up to attack. Two of the PCs move toward one group of guards, getting within short range, and the other group moves to the opposite set of guards. Both groups of characters are now within short range of their respective targets, but at medium range from the other group of targets.

ADDITIONAL COMBAT MODIFIERS

The prior sections cover the fundamentals of making a basic combat check. However, combat rarely occurs in a vacuum. Any number of things can modify a combat check, from environmental factors to actions the character chooses.

This section discusses those modifiers. Here we're going to cover conditional and situational modifiers. After that, the next section will discuss environmental effects, which can modify combat and non-combat encounters.

CONDITIONAL AND SITUATIONAL MODIFIERS

Character choices can modify combat checks in many ways, some good and some bad. These choices often provide additional benefits as well.

MAKING RANGED ATTACKS AT ENGAGED TARGETS

Sometimes, characters may want to attack a target engaged with another character. If the target and the character with whom they are engaged are both enemies of the attacker, the attacker may not worry about whom they might hit. However, if one of the characters is an ally, then things become more dangerous.

When attacking a target engaged with an ally, the attacker upgrades the difficulty of the check once (for more on upgrading difficulty, see page 22). In addition, if the attacker's check succeeds but generates at least one ⚔, that ⚔ is automatically spent to make the attacker hit one of the individuals engaged with the target (of the GM's choice), instead of hitting the target.

MAKING RANGED ATTACKS WHILE ENGAGED

Sometimes, a character may want to make a ranged attack even though they're locked in hand-to-hand combat with an enemy. Such an action can be risky; a character may find it hard to take the time to line up a shot while an opponent is swinging an axe at them!

Any opponent engaged with a character when the character makes a ranged attack (no matter who the target is) may add ■ to their next Brawl or Melee check against that character. They automatically lose this bonus if they and the character are no longer engaged with each other.

In addition, the difficulty of some ranged attacks increases while the attacker and an enemy are engaged,

TABLE I.6–4: RANGED MODIFIERS

SCENARIO	DIFFICULTY INCREASE
Engaged with opponent while armed with a one-handed ranged weapon (like a pistol or a throwing knife)	+1 difficulty (+◆)
Engaged with opponent while armed with a two-handed ranged weapon (like a rifle or bow)	+2 difficulty (+◆◆)
Engaged with opponent while armed with a heavy ranged weapon (like a cannon or ballista)	May not make combat checks when engaged with an opponent

and other ranged attacks become impossible. See **Table I.6–4: Ranged Modifiers** for more information. You should note that this chart differentiates based on types of weapons, because in the core rules, there is only one kind of combat skill that lets you attack at range. If your setting has multiple ranged combat skills (such as separate skills for “light” and “heavy” ranged weapons), then the ranged modifiers can be determined by skill, rather than weapon size. Generally, it should be obvious which of your combat skills match up with which ranged modifiers.

ATTACKING PRONE TARGETS AND ATTACKING WHILE PRONE

A character who is knocked down, unconscious, or willingly drops prone is considered prone.

Prone characters are easier to hit with certain combat checks and find it harder to use certain combat skills. A character gains ■ when attacking a prone target with a Melee check (or any other close combat check). A prone character suffers ■ when making a melee attack from a prone position.

Prone characters are harder to hit with ranged attacks but suffer no penalties when making ranged attacks. When a character attacks a prone target with a ranged attack, they suffer ■.

Some attacks or weapons may cause a character to become prone. This is indicated in the individual weapon, talent, or creature attack entry. Getting knocked prone may be the result of a failed Coordination check or of the activation of a weapon’s item quality.

TWO-WEAPON COMBAT

A character may opt to carry a pistol or a one-handed Melee weapon in each hand, increasing their volume of attacks at the expense of accuracy.

When attacking with two weapons, the character must be using weapons that can each be reasonably held and wielded in one hand. Generally, these

weapons are Ranged (Light) weapons—such as pistols and grenades—and one-handed Melee weapons or Brawl weapons. If it’s unclear whether or not a weapon can be wielded one-handed, the GM makes the final determination.

To make the attack, the player performs a combined check. First, the player designates one weapon as the primary weapon. When making the combined check, the character attacks with this weapon. The player then determines which skills and characteristics the character uses when making attacks with the primary weapon and which are used with the secondary weapon (the other weapon wielded). Finally, they determine the target.

To assemble the dice pool for this check, the player compares the skills that would be used to make an attack with each weapon by itself, and then compares the characteristics that would be used to make an attack with each weapon by itself. They then take the skill that they have fewer ranks in, and the characteristic that they have fewer ranks in, and use this skill and characteristic to assemble their dice pool. It’s very possible that the ranks in either the skills or characteristics are equal, in which case they can use either. If both checks would use the same skill or characteristic, they simply use that skill or characteristic.

They then compare the difficulty of the two combat checks they would make with each of their two weapons to hit their target, and select the check with the higher difficulty. Then, they increase the difficulty of the combat check by one. Finally, they make the check.

If they succeed, they hit with their primary weapon in the normal manner. They may spend ▲ ▲ or ⊕ to hit with their secondary weapon as well. If both weapons hit, they may spend additional ▲ or ⊕ to activate item qualities from either weapon. Each hit deals its weapon’s base damage plus one point of damage per uncanceled success.

UNARMED COMBAT

Although most characters probably feel more comfortable going into a fight with a good gun in their hand, there are times they must rely on their fists, feet, or other appendages.

Characters fighting unarmed generally use the Brawl skill. Unlike other combat skills, the Brawl skill is designed to be used independently of any weapon (although some weapons can be used in conjunction with the Brawl skill).

TABLE I.6–5: IMPROVISED WEAPONS

SIZE	DAM	CRIT	RANGE	ENCUM	SPECIAL	EXAMPLES
Small	+1	5	Engaged	1	–	Bottle, fist-sized rock
Medium	+2	5	Engaged	3	Cumbersome 2	Two-handed rock, chair
Large	+3	5	Engaged	4	Cumbersome 4	Shovel, large tree branch, table, crate

When a character makes an unarmed combat check using Brawl, the attack has a base damage of their Brawn rating, a range of engaged, a Critical rating of 5, and the Knockdown item quality. Finally, when making a Brawl attack, the attacker can choose to deal damage to the target's strain threshold instead of its wound threshold, still reducing the damage by the target's soak.

Unlike other weapons, Brawl weapons augment this basic attack. Brawl weapons can add damage to the attack (as indicated in the **Brawl** profile, on page 67) and may have an improved Critical rating and additional item qualities. When using a Brawl weapon, the user can choose to use its Critical rating instead of the standard Brawl Critical rating. They also add any additional item qualities to the qualities already provided by the Brawl attack. If the weapon provides an improved version of an existing quality, the character uses the improved version.

IMPROVISED WEAPONS

Sometimes a character doesn't have a real weapon available and must make do with anything that is on hand. Swinging a broken bottle, heavy tool, large rock, or tree branch at a target are all examples of using an improvised weapon.

Improvised weapons use the Melee skill, and as with all Melee weapons, the attacker adds their Brawn to the damage dealt. Just like weapons with the Inferior quality, improvised weapons generate one automatic ⚔ on any check. Improvised weapons deal damage based on their size and general weight, as described in **Table I.6–5: Improved Weapons**. Any attack roll that results in a ⚔ or ⚔ ⚔ indicates that the improvised weapon breaks and is useless in further rounds of combat. Large improvised weapons require two hands to use if the user is silhouette 1 or smaller.

SIZE DIFFERENCES (SILHOUETTES)

Generally, it's a character's skill that governs their chances of hitting a target. However, some targets are easier to hit than others, usually because of their size. Size, or silhouette, is important in the alternate rules for vehicles (see page 220). However, silhouettes can affect attack difficulties in standard combat as well.

When a character makes an attack against a target with a silhouette two or more points larger than they are, they decrease the difficulty of the check by one. When a character makes an attack against a target with a silhouette two or more points smaller than they are, they increase the difficulty of the check by one.

Table I.6–6: Silhouettes and Characters has a list of example silhouettes that covers the size of most creatures the PCs may encounter. The most important thing to remember is that most characters are silhouette 1.

TABLE I.6–6: SILHOUETTES AND CHARACTERS

SILHOUETTE	EXAMPLES
0	Gnomes, cats, dogs
1	Humans, dwarves, elves, motorcycles, and everything else that's roughly human-sized
2	Most riding animals, bears, trolls, cars, trucks, civilian single-engined aircraft
3	Drakes, giants, tractor-trailers, dirigibles, jet fighters, starfighters
4	Dragons, zeppelins, three-masted sailing frigates, long-range space-going patrol craft
5	A sailing "ship of the line," modern destroyers, space-going transport ships
6	Modern <i>Aegis</i> cruisers, space-going star-frigates
7	Oil tankers, ocean-going battleships, aircraft carriers, space battleships
8+	Star-dreadnoughts, orbital defense platforms

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Your characters may end up adventuring in countless environments, from the frozen wastes of the icy tundra, to lost ruins in steamy jungles, to the bustling streets of busy cities. Characters can often find themselves fighting in hazardous or exotic circumstances, ranging from the cold, hard vacuum of space to the infernal heat of a volcanic planet. The following sections cover rules imposed by those environments.

CONCEALMENT (DARKNESS, SMOKE, AND INTERVENING TERRAIN)

Concealment is a situation that occurs when a character is hard to spot because of environmental effects such as darkness, smoke, tall grass, or mist. Concealment imposes penalties on ranged attacks and sight-based skill checks such as many Perception checks. Conversely, it can provide bonuses for checks on other skills, such as Stealth.

The exact bonuses and penalties can be modified by the GM if needed. However, in general, concealment can be divided into levels based on how obscuring the concealment is. See **Table I.6–7: Concealment** for examples of different types of concealment. In each case, the type of concealment adds a number of ■ equal to the “Dice Added” entry to any ranged combat checks, Vigilance checks, or Perception checks against targets with concealment. Conversely, it adds a number of □ equal to the “Dice Added” entry to any Stealth checks made by a character with concealment. These Boosts or Setbacks may also be added to other skill checks if the GM feels it’s appropriate.

COVER

When the guns start firing, most characters dive for cover. To keep things simple, being behind some sort of cover—a rock, crate, wall, or vehicle, for example—allows the character to gain a ranged defense of 1 and adds ■ to certain skill checks, such as Perception. A single ■ is sufficient for most situations, although the GM may add additional ■ if the target is particularly well covered, such as if they are within a trench, blockhouse, bunker, or any other prepared position. The same holds true for the increase in ranged defense.

DIFFICULT AND IMPASSABLE TERRAIN

Difficult terrain is a catchall description of terrain that is hard to move through or over. It can include tight passageways, slippery ice, thick undergrowth, loose rubble, shifting sand, or waist-deep water (or any

TABLE I.6–7: CONCEALMENT

DICE ADDED	EXAMPLES
+1	Mist, shadow, waist-high grass
+2	Fog, the darkness of early morning or late evening, thick, shoulder-high grass
+3	Heavy fog; thick and choking smoke; the darkness of night; dense, head-high underbrush; thick grass

number of other circumstances). Essentially, it’s terrain that characters move through with difficulty. Characters entering or moving through difficult terrain must perform twice as many maneuvers to move the same distance they would in normal terrain.

Impassable terrain is a description of terrain that is simply impossible to move through via maneuvers. This includes sheer cliffs, walls higher than a character can jump, and deep pits. Impassable terrain is not always an insurmountable obstacle, but it’s an obstacle that requires special skills to circumvent. Depending on the impassable terrain in question and the resources at the character’s disposal, the GM may allow the character to overcome impassable terrain by using a skill, probably the Athletics or Coordination skill (see **Chapter 3: Skills** on page 52). During an encounter, this means the character must spend at least one action (and possibly give up one or more maneuvers) to accomplish this.

GRAVITY

If your game takes place in a futuristic setting, characters might find themselves in a situation where they are away from an artificial gravity device, floating in open space, or walking in the crushing gravity of a supergiant planet.

Normal gravity is the default and does not affect any skill checks, attacks, or the like. However, sometimes the characters end up in an environment without normal gravity: a starship with artificial gravity that has been disrupted by damage (or, depending on the setting, a starship without artificial gravity at all) or a large planet with a higher-than-normal gravitational pull, for instance.

Stronger-than-normal gravity adds up to ■ ■ ■ to any Brawn-based skill checks (except Resilience checks) and to Coordination skill checks, depending on how strong the gravity is. Weaker-than-normal gravity adds up to □ □ □ to any Brawn-based skill checks (except Resilience checks) and Coordination skill checks, depending on how weak the gravity is.

Zero gravity, on the other hand, does not grant any ■ or ■ to skill checks, because moving in zero gravity is completely different from moving in a gravity field. Characters can move in three dimensions in zero gravity, but they count all movement as movement through difficult terrain, due to having to constantly grab handholds, evaluate angles, and so forth.

A character's encumbrance threshold does not change due to different gravity, and items still maintain their usual encumbrance. This is because an item's weight may change, but its size and mass (and therefore its inertia) do not. Those pesky details can prove an unpleasant surprise to inexperienced spacers who attempt to shift something large and heavy while in zero gravity.

WATER AND SWIMMING

Bodies of water such as lakes, rivers, oceans, and swamps are pretty common in most locations, and sometimes characters need to cross them. Luckily, most individuals can swim, although some may be a lot better at it than others! Unless otherwise noted, characters treat any body of water as difficult terrain. The GM may also decide that some bodies of water, such as a river with a swift current or an ocean in a storm, are so difficult to move through that they require a successful Athletics check to swim in. In this case, it requires at least one action as well as any number of maneuvers to swim through the water from one location to another.

If completely submerged in water, a character can hold their breath for a number of rounds equal to their Brawn characteristic. Once this number is reached, the character starts to drown and is treated as suffocating (see **Suffocation**, page 112) on each successive round until they surface or find some other source of air.

VACUUM

For astronauts, vacuum is an all-too-familiar and extremely dangerous environment lurking just outside the protective hull of their starship. Vacuum is not just the lack of breathable air; the lack of pressure and extreme heat or cold can cause veins to rupture, blood to boil, and delicate membranes to freeze or tear.

When exposed to vacuum without protective gear, a character may hold their breath for a number of rounds equal to their Brawn characteristic. Once this number is reached, the character begins suffocating (see **Suffocation** on page 112). Furthermore, during each round in which a character is exposed to vacuum, they also suffer 3 wounds. When the character exceeds their wound threshold, they are incapacitated and suffer one Critical Injury as usual, plus one additional Critical

Injury during each additional round in which they are exposed to vacuum (which likely and quickly results in death). This is in addition to the Critical Injuries they suffer from suffocating.

FIRE, ACID, AND CORROSIVE ATMOSPHERES

Fundamentally, the effects of fire, acids, and corrosive atmospheres are treated with the same rules. When characters are exposed to a fire, acid, or a corrosive atmosphere, the GM determines how dangerous the situation is by applying a rating. This rating is generally between 1 and 10, although higher ratings may also apply. A lower rating typically indicates minor, low-heat fire or mildly corrosive liquid or atmosphere. The higher the rating, the hotter the fire or the more corrosive the atmosphere. See **Table I.6–8: Fire, Acid, and Corrosive Atmospheres** for some examples of different ratings.

Each round at the beginning of their turn, a character subjected to one of these hazards suffers wounds equal to its rating. This damage persists until they are no longer exposed to the hazard. With some corrosive atmospheres, the GM may decide they do not cause damage unless inhaled. In such cases, the character can hold their breath for a number of rounds equal to their Brawn before having to breathe and suffer damage.

It's primarily up to the GM to decide how long the damage from one of these sources lasts. Acids usually neutralize themselves after a certain period of time (as few as several rounds, or as long as several minutes or hours). Fires burn for as long as they have a fuel source, which again could be very briefly or for a very long time. A corrosive atmosphere, on the other hand, usually deals damage as long as the character is exposed to it.

Putting out fire/neutralizing acid: A victim might be able to stop the damage caused by fire by rolling

TABLE I.6–8: FIRE, ACID, AND CORROSIVE ATMOSPHERES

RATING	EXAMPLES
1–2	Campfires, mildly caustic substances such as concentrated industrial cleansers, air filled with ash and fumes from a heavy fire
3–5	Flammable liquids and flamethrowers, dangerous substances such as industrial acids, air contaminated by chemical leaks
6–9	Welding torches, weaponized acids, atmospheres with substantial parts dangerous gases such as ammonia or chlorine
10+	Lava, blast furnaces, atmospheres completely made of unbreathable and hazardous gases such as ammonia-methane mixes with acid vapors

around on the ground and making a Coordination check. This is an **Average** (◆◆) check on hard surfaces such as the deck of a spaceship, or an **Easy** (◆) check on grass or soft ground. Jumping into a body of water stops the damage immediately. In the case of acid, it's up to the GM to determine if the same procedures negate the damage, or if the character must apply some neutralizing substance instead. The only way to stop taking damage from a corrosive atmosphere is to leave it.

SUFFOCATION

A suffocating character suffers 3 strain each round at the beginning of their turn, until they are no longer suffocating (how to stop suffocating depends entirely on the circumstances that led to the suffocation in the first place, but it usually involves reaching a breathable atmosphere or removing something preventing the character from breathing). Once the character exceeds their strain threshold, they are incapacitated. In addition, at the beginning of each of their subsequent turns, if the character is still suffocating, they suffer one Critical Injury. This continues until the character stops suffocating or dies.

TABLE I.6–9: FALLING DAMAGE

RANGE	DAMAGE	STRAIN
Short	10	10
Medium	30	20
Long	Wounds equal to wound threshold +1, Critical Injury at +50	30
Extreme	Wounds equal to wound threshold +1, Critical Injury at +75 (or death at GM's discretion)	40

FALLING

Gravity kills. If a character falls from a height, the GM should determine the distance between the location from which the character fell and their point of impact below, then apply the closest comparable range band. Next, the GM consults **Table I.6–9: Falling Damage** to determine the damage suffered. Damage is reduced by soak; however, the strain suffered is not.

A character can reduce the damage taken from falling by making an **Average** (◆◆) **Athletics** or **Coordination** check. Each ✨ reduces the damage suffered by one, while each ▲ reduces the strain suffered by one. A ⚙ could, at the GM's discretion, reduce the overall distance fallen by one range band as the character grabs onto a handhold or does something else to arrest their fall.

WOUNDS, STRAIN, AND STATES OF HEALTH

In the fast-paced, high-action setting of **GENESYS**, characters are sure to find themselves in the thick of things, and they are likely to pick up a few cuts and bruises along the way. A character's health is tracked using two separate yet similar systems: strain and wounds.

WOUNDS AND WOUND THRESHOLD

A wide variety of items and actions can inflict physical damage: gunshots, an angry bear's claws, frag grenades, falling, etc. Damage to a character's physical body is tracked using wounds. Each point of damage inflicts 1 wound on a character. A character can only withstand so many wounds before becoming incapacitated. This is represented by the character's wound threshold.

EXCEEDING WOUND THRESHOLD

When a PC suffers wounds greater than their wound threshold, they are knocked out and incapacitated until

their wounds are reduced so that they no longer exceed their wound threshold (likely through healing). They also immediately suffer one Critical Injury. In some rare and dire circumstances, this could result in the PC's death.

When non-player characters and creatures suffer wounds greater than their wound threshold, they are defeated (unless they are a high-level opponent such as a nemesis). Being defeated by exceeding their wound threshold usually entails death, but the overall interpretation is up to the GM. The GM can decide that they pass out due to shock, are so injured that they can no longer fight, are knocked unconscious, or suffer any other option that fits the GM's plans for the ongoing narrative. Since non-nemesis NPCs do not track strain separately, but apply strain damage as wounds to their wound threshold, what happens once they are defeated may also depend on whether they were defeated due to strain damage or wound damage.

When wounds exceed a character's wound threshold, the player should track the number of wounds by which their character has exceeded the threshold, to a maximum of twice the wound threshold. The character must heal wounds until the number of wounds they are suffering is below their wound threshold before the character is no longer incapacitated.

STRAIN AND STRAIN THRESHOLD

While wounds and Critical Injuries represent potentially life-threatening damage, a number of other stressors and effects can also impair a character. Collectively, this is referred to as strain.

Any effect that impairs the character, but does not inflict physical harm or wounds, is considered strain. Spending hours wandering through blistering deserts, suffering a minor shock from an electric console, being battered around the inside of a moving shipping crate—all of these could represent types of strain. Weapons with a Stun or Stun Damage quality or other effects that impair or hinder a character also inflict strain.

Additionally, effects that cause stress, fear, anxiety, or emotional turmoil also generate strain. Losing one's cool in combat during a bombardment, being berated by a superior officer, waking up to realize one has been imprisoned by slavers, or having one's ship boarded by

an armed search team while smuggling goods are all incidents that could result in strain on a character.

Strain can accumulate slowly as environmental effects or be gained in chunks when a PC is rattled by an effect that doesn't cause damage but still impairs them.

Characters can also voluntarily suffer strain to trigger certain effects. The most common use is to voluntarily suffer 2 strain to gain one additional maneuver during a character's turn.

Some talents may require the character to suffer 1 or more strain to activate.

EXCEEDING STRAIN THRESHOLD

When a character has suffered strain greater than their strain threshold, they become incapacitated until their strain is reduced so that it no longer exceeds their strain threshold. They are likely unconscious, or they may just be so dazed and staggered that they're completely unaware of their surroundings and unable to interact with them.

When non-player characters and creatures suffer strain, they generally apply the strain directly to their wound threshold (unless they are nemeses and track strain separately).

STATES OF HEALTH

Player characters may pass through several states of health over the course of their adventures. State of health is a general representation of overall fitness or well-being.

A character is **unwounded** and operating at peak performance if they are currently suffering from no wounds and have no Critical Injuries.

A character is **wounded** if they have any number of wounds below their wound threshold. At this point, they have suffered a few cuts, bruises, and scrapes. However, they have not taken any permanent or incapacitating damage. They're a bit battered, but they are still hale and hearty overall.

A character is **critically injured** if they are currently suffering from any number of Critical

Injuries, regardless of how many wounds they may have. Critical Injuries are actual injuries that have some sort of detrimental effect. A character may be critically injured and wounded.

A character is **incapacitated** once they have suffered more wounds than their wound threshold or more strain than their strain threshold. Incapacitation means that a character is unconscious and no longer able to act until the number of wounds or strain they are suffering is decreased below their wound or strain threshold.

Since exceeding a character's wound threshold triggers a Critical Injury, it's possible (and often likely!) for an incapacitated character to also be critically injured.

CRITICAL INJURIES

A particularly dangerous type of harm is a Critical Injury. A Critical Injury is often the result of an attack during combat, but characters can also suffer one from exceeding their wound threshold or through other means. Each time a character suffers a Critical Injury, the player rolls d100 on **Table I.6–10: Critical Injury Result**, on page 115, to determine the injury's severity rating and effects.

The short-term effects of some injuries are temporary, and may only disorient or afflict the character for a brief amount of time. Other injuries are more serious and represent some sort of long-term debilitation or impairment. These injuries continue to affect the character until they receive the proper medical treatment to recover from the injury.

Regardless, a Critical Injury remains with the character until properly healed; even if the short-term effect of the Critical Injury has passed, the status of having a Critical Injury remains. Each Critical Injury a character suffers from adds +10 to any subsequent Critical Injury roll. Essentially, Critical Injury is cumulative, and left untreated, even a number of relatively minor Critical Injuries can lead to devastating results.

STRAIN DAMAGE AND CRITICAL INJURIES

Although not always likely, some attacks that deal strain damage (notably weapons with the Stun Damage quality) can also trigger Critical Injuries. Although this may seem odd, it actually makes sense. When a player character inflicts a Critical Injury on an adversary that can be incapacitated by a single Critical Injury (such as a minion), then the adversary is simply incapacitated by being rendered unconscious. If a PC or nemesis NPC suffers a Critical Injury from a weapon dealing strain damage, the outcome can be anything from adverse long-term effects from the weapon, to tangential injuries from being stunned (for example, the character could be knocked off balance and take a nasty crack on the skull when they hit the ground). Of course, since these Critical Injuries would have to be triggered by the players or GM, both parties can always decide that a Critical Injury would not make sense in that narrative, and choose not to trigger them.

OTHER ONGOING STATUS EFFECTS

Characters can suffer status effects beyond being wounded or incapacitated. These status effects can change what a character can do during an encounter, and can be very dangerous.

Conversely, the power to inflict them on others can be a very potent ability indeed.

STAGGERED

A staggered character cannot perform actions (including downgrading actions to maneuvers). Most effects that stagger a character last for a set duration. If a set duration is not specified, the staggered effect lasts until the end of the character's next turn. If a character is staggered multiple times, each instance increases the total duration of the effect by the instance's specified duration, but may not increase the total duration beyond the scope of the present encounter.

IMMOBILIZED

An immobilized character cannot perform maneuvers (including maneuvers purchased via strain or by spending **▲**). Most effects that immobilize a character last for a set duration. If a set duration is not specified, immobilization lasts until the end of the character's next turn. If a character is immobilized multiple times, each instance increases the total duration of the effect by the instance's specified duration, but may not increase the total duration beyond the scope of the present encounter.

DISORIENTED

A disoriented character adds **■** to all checks they make. Most effects that disorient a character last for a set duration. If a set duration is not specified, disorientation lasts until the end of the character's next turn. If a character is disoriented multiple times, each instance increases the total duration of the effect by the instance's

TABLE I.6—10: CRITICAL INJURY RESULT

D100	SEVERITY	RESULT
01–05	Easy (◆)	Minor Nick: The target suffers 1 strain.
06–10	Easy (◆)	Slowed Down: The target can only act during the last allied Initiative slot on their next turn.
11–15	Easy (◆)	Sudden Jolt: The target drops whatever is in hand.
16–20	Easy (◆)	Distracted: The target cannot perform a free maneuver during their next turn.
21–25	Easy (◆)	Off-Balance: Add ■ to the target's next skill check.
26–30	Easy (◆)	Discouraging Wound: Move one player pool Story Point to the Game Master pool (reverse if NPC).
31–35	Easy (◆)	Stunned: The target is staggered until the end of their next turn.
36–40	Easy (◆)	Stinger: Increase the difficulty of the target's next check by one.
41–45	Average (◆◆)	Bowled Over: The target is knocked prone and suffers 1 strain.
46–50	Average (◆◆)	Head Ringer: The target increases the difficulty of all Intellect and Cunning checks by one until this Critical Injury is healed.
51–55	Average (◆◆)	Fearsome Wound: The target increases the difficulty of all Presence and Willpower checks by one until this Critical Injury is healed.
56–60	Average (◆◆)	Agonizing Wound: The target increases the difficulty of all Brawn and Agility checks by one until this Critical Injury is healed.
61–65	Average (◆◆)	Slightly Dazed: The target is disoriented until this Critical Injury is healed.
66–70	Average (◆◆)	Scattered Senses: The target removes all ■ from skill checks until this Critical Injury is healed.
71–75	Average (◆◆)	Hamstrung: The target loses their free maneuver until this Critical Injury is healed.
76–80	Average (◆◆)	Overpowered: The target leaves themselves open, and the attacker may immediately attempt another attack against them as an incidental, using the exact same pool as the original attack.
81–85	Average (◆◆)	Winded: The target cannot voluntarily suffer strain to activate any abilities or gain additional maneuvers until this Critical Injury is healed.
86–90	Average (◆◆)	Compromised: Increase difficulty of all skill checks by one until this Critical Injury is healed.
91–95	Hard (◆◆◆)	At the Brink: The target suffers 2 strain each time they perform an action until this Critical Injury is healed.
96–100	Hard (◆◆◆)	Crippled: One of the target's limbs (selected by the GM) is impaired until this Critical Injury is healed. Increase difficulty of all checks that require use of that limb by one.
101–105	Hard (◆◆◆)	Maimed: One of the target's limbs (selected by the GM) is permanently lost. Unless the target has a cybernetic or prosthetic replacement, the target cannot perform actions that would require the use of that limb. All other actions gain ■ until this Critical Injury is healed.
106–110	Hard (◆◆◆)	Horrific Injury: Roll 1d10 to determine which of the target's characteristics is affected: 1–3 for Brawn, 4–6 for Agility, 7 for Intellect, 8 for Cunning, 9 for Presence, 10 for Willpower. Until this Critical Injury is healed, treat that characteristic as one point lower.
111–115	Hard (◆◆◆)	Temporarily Disabled: The target is immobilized until this Critical Injury is healed.
116–120	Hard (◆◆◆)	Blinded: The target can no longer see. Upgrade the difficulty of all checks twice, and upgrade the difficulty of Perception and Vigilance checks three times, until this Critical Injury is healed.
121–125	Hard (◆◆◆)	Knocked Senseless: The target is staggered until this Critical Injury is healed.
126–130	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	Gruesome Injury: Roll 1d10 to determine which of the target's characteristics is affected: 1–3 for Brawn, 4–6 for Agility, 7 for Intellect, 8 for Cunning, 9 for Presence, 10 for Willpower. That characteristic is permanently reduced by one, to a minimum of 1.
131–140	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	Bleeding Out: Until this Critical Injury is healed, every round, the target suffers 1 wound and 1 strain at the beginning of their turn. For every 5 wounds they suffer beyond their wound threshold, they suffer one additional Critical Injury. Roll on the chart, suffering the injury (if they suffer this result a second time due to this, roll again).
141–150	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	The End Is Nigh: The target dies after the last Initiative slot during the next round unless this Critical Injury is healed.
151+	–	Dead: Complete, obliterated death.

specified duration, but may not increase the total duration beyond the scope of the present encounter.

DEATH

Sometimes, characters die. A time may come when a PC faces their ultimate fate and perishes.

If a character ever rolls (or, through multiple or untreated Critical Injuries, otherwise suffers) a result of

151 or higher on **Table I.6–10: Critical Injury Result**, they die (they also have a chance of death with a 141 result). A dead character cannot be brought back to life. Similarly, a destroyed robotic or android character may not be restored—their central processing unit has been irrevocably damaged. Either way, the player should move on and create a new character to continue the adventure.

For more on the death of a player character, see **Chapter 8: The Game Master** on page 125.

RECOVERY AND HEALING

While characters can be afflicted with various ailments and types of damage, there are thankfully several options for recovery. Recovery can vary in time and effectiveness, based on the resources and expertise available to the characters. With the proper resources and sufficient time, characters can recover from virtually any encounter.

HEALING WOUNDS

There are several ways that characters can heal wounds. Some allow for natural, if slow, healing; others require access to high-tech medical facilities.

NATURAL REST

For each full night's rest, the character heals one wound, regardless of the character's current state of health. At the end of each full week of rest, the character may attempt a Resilience check to recover from one Critical Injury. The difficulty is equal to the Critical Injury's severity rating (see **Table I.6–10: Critical Injury Result**, on page 115). On a successful check, the character recovers from the Critical Injury and is no longer affected. On a failed check, the character retains the Critical Injury, but still heals one wound. A 🎲 result means the character can heal one additional Critical Injury.

TABLE I.6–11: MEDICAL CHECK DIFFICULTY

STATE OF HEALTH	DIFFICULTY
Current wounds equal half or less of wound threshold	Easy (◆)
Current wounds equal more than half of wound threshold	Average (◆◆)
Current wounds exceed wound threshold	Hard (◆◆◆)
Critical Injury	Critical Injury severity rating

MEDICAL CARE

A character may attempt a Medicine check to help a character heal wounds. Each character may only receive one Medicine check each encounter, as there is only so much good that first aid can do to help a character.

The difficulty of the check is based on the target's current state of health (see **Table I.6–11: Medical Check Difficulty**). On a successful check, the target heals a number of wounds equal to the number of ✨ generated by the Medicine roll and heals an amount of strain equal to the number of ▲ generated.

A character may also attempt to help someone recover from a Critical Injury by making a Medicine check with a difficulty equal to the severity rating of the Critical Injury (see **Table I.6–10: Critical Injury Result**). A character may attempt one Medicine check per week per Critical Injury.

A character may attempt to heal their own wounds or Critical Injuries with Medicine, but doing this themselves increases the difficulty of the Medicine check by two. In addition, attempting a Medicine check without medical equipment of some kind (such as a first aid kit or doctor's tools) increases the difficulty of the check by one.

PAINKILLERS

Painkillers are our generic term for consumable auto-healing items (see page 94). Regardless of the setting or their name, they all work the same way.

The first painkiller used on a character automatically heals 5 wounds. The second painkiller only heals 4 wounds, the third painkiller heals 3 wounds, and so on. The sixth painkiller has no effect (we say the target is too oversaturated with medicine or healing magic or whatever to benefit from anything else).

Administering a painkiller requires one maneuver, and the character doing the administering must be engaged with the target to treat them. This also means that a character with a free hand can administer a painkiller to themselves by spending a maneuver.

Painkillers (in any of their variants) can never heal Critical Injuries.

RECOVERING FROM STRAIN

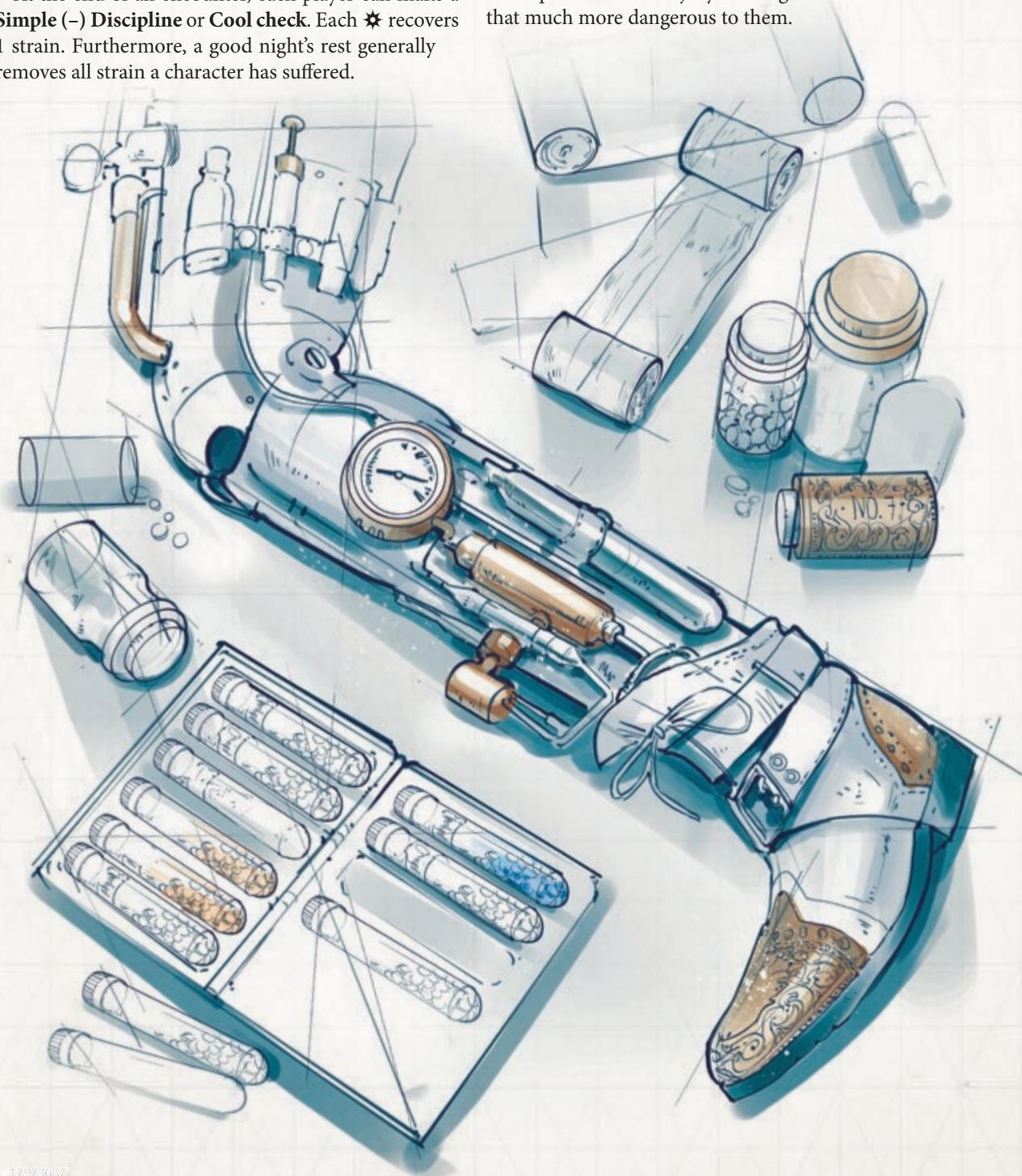
Fortunately, recovering from strain is fairly easy. Taking a moment to catch one's breath, eating a good meal, and spending time relaxing with friends are all ways a player character might recover from strain.

At the end of an encounter, each player can make a **Simple (-) Discipline** or **Cool check**. Each **★** recovers 1 strain. Furthermore, a good night's rest generally removes all strain a character has suffered.

RECOVERING FROM CRITICAL INJURIES

Since lingering Critical Injuries make subsequent injuries increasingly dangerous, they should be treated as quickly and efficiently as possible. Critical Injuries vary in severity, which represents the difficulty of any corresponding Medicine check to treat and remove the injury.

It's important to note that even if the effect of a Critical Injury has expired, the Critical Injury still persists until treated. For example, with a Critical Injury result of 23, which indicates the Off-Balance Critical Injury, the character adds **■** to their next skill check. Even after this effect has been applied, the Off-Balance Critical Injury still exists and lingers until treated, making subsequent Critical Injury rolls against the character that much more dangerous to them.



CHAPTER 7: SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

In the previous chapter, we went over the rules for combat encounters. Just as combat is a common part of roleplaying games, social encounters are also common. So, in this chapter, we discuss what a social encounter is and some rules for running social encounters.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL ENCOUNTER?

Whereas combat encounters are fairly well defined, social encounters are slightly less so. The primary reason for this is that social encounters use narrative gameplay, while combat encounters use the structured gameplay rules. Since structured gameplay is essentially a defined subset of rules—your characters roll for Initiative to enter it, and stop using those rules when your opponents are all dead or defeated—it’s easy to determine when a combat encounter takes place. Social encounters don’t have those clearly delineated boundaries.

For our purposes, a social encounter is an encounter that primarily focuses on your party of player characters engaging with non-player characters in discourse or dialog. The encounter likely focuses on the PCs trying to accomplish some sort of goal, while the NPCs are directly or indirectly opposing them.

For example, a social encounter could take the form of your characters trying to buy a new car for the lowest possible price, while the car dealer (an NPC) tries to make them pay as much as possible. In a different social encounter, your characters might try to convince a gang of battle-hardened mercenaries to turn on their employer. The mercenaries (all NPCs) may not initially be willing to do so and might need to be persuaded. In yet another social encounter, your characters might try to charm the mayor of a local town. Whatever the PCs’ goal, perhaps the mayor is in opposition to it, and his neutral opinion of them needs to be changed to a favorable one if he is to change his mind about the issue at hand.

That’s the basic overview of a social encounter. Now, let’s get into some more details.

NARRATIVE GAMEPLAY

We discussed the difference between narrative and structured gameplay on page 95 in **Chapter 6**:

Combat Encounters. There, we talked primarily about structured gameplay. In this chapter, we focus on narrative gameplay instead, particularly its use in social encounters.

Narrative gameplay is not broken into rounds and turns, with each of your characters limited to a set number of actions and maneuvers. Instead, gameplay flows narratively, by which we mean that you and the other players have your characters act when it makes sense as part of the ongoing story, and your GM does the same with their NPCs.

In short, narrative gameplay is a lot more flexible, making it the obvious mode of play for the majority of a roleplaying game. The one element of structure that narrative and structured gameplay shares, however, is that gameplay is still broken up into encounters.

Just like scenes in a movie, encounters serve as useful organizational blocks, with the breaks between them offering a helpful pause in the action. That’s why we designed the game to incorporate them. Many character abilities can only be used “once per encounter,” meaning that encounters need to end and new encounters need to begin so that your characters get a chance to refresh those abilities. Characters also get the chance to recover strain (see page 117) at the end of any encounter, not just combat encounters. So, those encounter endings are important to ensure your characters aren’t passing out from the strain they’ve accumulated.

Here are a few brief suggestions as to when an encounter can end and another encounter can begin.

- When the party leaves a location. Traveling always provides a good pause to the narrative.
- When the narrative skips ahead (or back) in time. Most games don’t follow a strict chronological progression, and we’ve found that it’s pretty common for a GM to say “Ok, does anyone else have something they want their characters to do? If not, let’s move the game ahead to this evening, when the next event is going to happen.”
- When the group finishes interacting with an individual or group of individuals.

STRUCTURING SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

In this section, we talk about how to organize a social encounter, and then cover some rules you should use when running one.

Because social encounters use narrative gameplay, not structured gameplay, they're a lot more free-form than combat encounters. This is good for you if you're the GM, because it means you are able to run these encounters as you like, without having to worry about incorporating a lot of rules. However, this also means you have to do more planning in advance, because you don't have the rules to fall back on!

DETERMINE THE GOAL

If you are the GM, the first thing you should do when building a social encounter is figure out what your party's goal is going to be. Remember, we talked earlier in this chapter about social encounters focusing on characters trying to accomplish some sort of goal. That goal can be something simple (get the best price possible for that car) or complex (negotiate peace between two feuding crime families).

If the goal is really complex (say, negotiating peace between two warring interstellar empires), then you may want to break that goal down into several sub-goals, and make each one a separate encounter.

SET A START AND END

Once you have the goal figured out, you need to determine a start and end point for the encounter. The easiest way to do this (and thus, the one we recommend) is to start the encounter when your party first meets the character or characters whom they're going to be interacting with. Then, end the encounter when the party has either accomplished their goal or failed so thoroughly that accomplishing the goal is no longer possible.

MANAGE TIMING AND ABILITY USE

A lot of player characters in your party (and a lot of non-player characters) have abilities such as talents or archetype abilities that your players are going to want to use during a social encounter.

Some of these abilities are limited to being used once per encounter, or sometimes once per session. You don't have to worry about managing the timing of these abilities, since they work within your existing timing structure (you've already defined when the

current encounter begins and ends, and once-per-session abilities are designed to be used at any point during a session).

However, a lot of abilities simply require the character to spend an action or a maneuver to use them. These can prove tricky in a narrative gameplay encounter like a social encounter. Narrative gameplay doesn't track a character's turn or the number of actions and maneuvers they can perform the same way structured gameplay does. This means that you, as the GM, may need to establish some limits.

USING ROUNDS IN SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

One way to establish those limits—and also ensure that each of your players has a chance to participate in a given encounter—is to use rounds.

In narrative encounters, rounds work similarly to the way they work in structured encounters. Essentially, they serve as a limiter. Every character gets to act once during a round, and does not get to act again until the next round. This ensures everyone gets a chance to participate, and no one character dominates the encounter.

If you use rounds in a social encounter, you don't need to track Initiative or turn order. Each character should simply take their turn when it makes the most narrative sense to do so. If a character has nothing to contribute to the encounter at that time, the character's player can just have them pass (but at least they had the opportunity to contribute, even if they didn't take it). The amount of game-world time each round takes is much more open to GM interpretation than it is in structured encounters; it may cover only a few minutes or an entire hour of activity.

When a character acts, their player doesn't have to worry about being too precise regarding what that character does. If the group is attending a fancy dress ball, for example, a player may say their character starts wandering through the ballroom, dancing with random people. In this case, you shouldn't track the exact distance a character moves, or how many maneuvers they spend dancing.

However, when a character acts, they are limited to using only one ability that requires spending an action, and using only one ability that requires spending a maneuver. If the character makes a skill check, this replaces their chance to use an ability that requires spending an action.

TABLE I.7–1: DIFFICULTIES BASED ON GROUP SIZE

NUMBER OF TARGETS	DIFFICULTY
2–5	Average (◆◆)
6–15	Hard (◆◆◆)
16–50	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)
51+	Formidable (◆◆◆◆◆)

When to use these rules is up to you, the GM. Keep in mind that they do impose some additional structure on a social encounter, and some limits on what your players can do. Therefore, we recommend you only use these rules in complex or lengthy social encounters or in ones involving a lot of PCs and NPCs.

In short, if your players are buying that used car, don't bother using these rules. But if your players are negotiating peace between two rival crime families, consider using them.

SKILL CHECKS IN SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

Just like in every other aspect of our game, your characters and your players' characters make skill checks to resolve the success or failure of their actions. In social encounters, those character's actions are likely to be some sort of discourse or dialog, so the skills they'll use are most likely social skills (see page 54).

Often, your character is going to try to charm, coerce, deceive, lead, or negotiate with a single individual. This means your character is going to be making opposed skill checks (see page 25). Sometimes, your character may try to influence a group of people, which requires skill checks with a set difficulty. However, expect most social skill checks to be opposed (see **Table I.3–2:** on page 55).

If your character tries to influence a group, we do provide a table (**Table I.7–1: Difficulties Based on Group Size**) suggesting some difficulties for the check. You'll note the difficulties start at **Average** (◆◆). Generally, it shouldn't be easier to influence a group than to influence an individual. Thus, the GM should consider the audience and use Story Points or add ■ to make the check more difficult if the group is unlikely to be receptive.

TABLE I.7–2: SPENDING ▲ AND ⊗ IN SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

COST	RESULT OPTIONS
▲ or ⊗	Recover 1 strain. Add ■ to the next allied active character's check. Notice a single important point in the ongoing encounter, such as an overly curious waiter or some drapes your character can stand behind to avoid being recognized.
▲ ▲ or ⊗	Learn the Strength or Flaw of the targeted character. Add ■ to the targeted character's next check. Add ■ to any allied character's next check, including that of the active character.
▲ ▲ ▲ or ⊗	Learn the Desire or Fear of the targeted character. Successfully conceal your true goal in the encounter. Learn the true goal of your target, if your target has one.
⊗	Learn any one Motivation facet of any character in the encounter (with the GM's approval). Upgrade the difficulty of the targeted character's next check. Upgrade the ability of any allied character's next check, including that of the current active character. Do something vital, such as getting everyone's attention, or distracting all the guards so your character's friends have a chance to do something important.

TABLE I.7–3: SPENDING ♻ AND ⊗ IN SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

COST	RESULT OPTIONS
♻ or ⊗	The active character suffers 1 strain. The active character gets distracted or sidetracked momentarily. This can result in their being unable to activate an ability that requires spending a maneuver on their next turn, or it may just result in their being dragged into a lengthy and boring conversation.
♻ ♻ or ⊗	The active character accidentally reveals their own Strength or Flaw. Add ■ to the targeted character's next check. The active character or an allied character suffers ■ on their next action.
♻ ♻ ♻ or ⊗	The active character accidentally reveals their own Desire or Fear. The active character accidentally reveals their true goal in the encounter.
⊗	The active character accidentally reveals a Motivation facet of one of their allies. Learn one false Motivation facet of the target character (the active character believes it to be true). Upgrade the difficulty of an allied character's next check or the next check of the current active character. The active character becomes so embroiled in irrelevant events in the encounter that they cannot do anything important during the next round.

SPENDING ▲, ♻, ⊗, AND ⊗ IN SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

Just like combat encounters, social encounters offer some unique ways to spend the ▲, ♻, ⊗, and ⊗ that your checks generate. You can find these in **Table I.7–2: Spending ▲ and ⊗ in Social Encounters** and **Table I.7–3: Spending ♻ and ⊗ in Social Encounters**. Just remember, these are options and suggestions, but they aren't an exhaustive list. If you have another idea for spending these resources, suggest it to your GM. If you are the GM, then go for it!

WINNING SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

While “winning” in a combat encounter is pretty straightforward (just defeat the opponents), how to “win” a social encounter can seem less clear. Obviously,

characters want to accomplish their goal, but how you, the GM, can do that without making it seem like an arbitrary decision can be a bit trickier.

Given that, we have three suggestions as to how you can determine if a character accomplishes their goal successfully.

PROPOSING A MUTUALLY AGREEABLE SOLUTION

Since this is a roleplaying game, we think it should always be possible for a character to accomplish goals in a social encounter without rolling any dice at all. Therefore, one option for successfully “winning” a social encounter is for your character to offer a solution that is completely satisfactory to the other characters involved in the encounter.

A simple example of this would be your character agreeing to pay full price for an item in a store. No check is needed, because of course a shopkeeper will accept full price. This option can apply to more complicated situations as well. However, the more complex the solution, the more it relies on you, the player, to argue or explain your character's reasoning. Your GM can always decide that the situation is complex enough that it needs to be resolved with a skill check (though they might give you a ■ for good roleplaying!)

SUCCESSING ON AN OPPOSED SOCIAL SKILL CHECK

This is our recommended method for resolving simple social encounters. Your character makes the appropriate social skill check, opposed by the target's skill. If the check is successful, your character accomplishes their goal. If they fail, they do not.

This resolution works best for simple goals, such as negotiating over the price of an item, attempting to charm one's way past a guard, or lying about the whereabouts of one's friends. For more complex social situations, we recommend the following option instead.

TARGETING THE OPPONENT'S STRAIN THRESHOLD

In more complex social encounters, we expect that one successful check isn't enough to accomplish your character's goals. In such cases, your character needs to inflict strain on their target. This represents them wearing the target down over time with constant arguments, negotiations, threats, or even relentless flattery. Your goal could be to inflict enough strain on the target to convince them to reach a compromise with your character, or you could push them to exceed their strain threshold and completely capitulate.

If your target is a rival or minion group, your strain targets their wound threshold (since they don't have a strain threshold). However, if you incapacitate them, your GM should still have the target capitulate, not mysteriously drop dead!

COMPROMISE: STRAIN EXCEEDS HALF OF THE TARGET'S THRESHOLD

Often in complex social encounters, you don't need someone to completely capitulate to your character's demands. A compromise where your character gets the most important elements of what they want while giving up as little as possible in return can be just as rewarding, and far easier to obtain.

To force a target to reach a compromise with your character, your character must inflict strain on the target greater than half of their strain threshold. At this point, the target becomes willing to compromise with regard to your character's goals.

The exact nature of the compromise is up to you and your GM. Your GM should know what your character is trying to achieve, and have the target offer to agree to some portion of those goals. In return, your character has to offer something to the target as well. For example, if your character is negotiating the surrender of an alien species, the alien negotiator may agree to a cease-fire and favorable trade concessions but require that the species retain its sovereignty. If your character is trying to get on good terms with a target, the target may ask them to perform a minor favor to prove their good intentions.

Generally, what the target is willing to agree to shouldn't be at odds with their core principles or completely against their own interests. For that reason, your GM has final say as to what the target is willing to offer. No matter what, though, it should be more than what the target would be willing to offer normally.

CAPITULATION: STRAIN EXCEEDS THE TARGET'S THRESHOLD

If your character wants to push for complete capitulation instead of compromise, they can try to inflict enough strain to exceed the target's strain threshold.

Once a target exceeds their strain threshold, they agree to your character's goal or goals. In a series of delicate negotiations, they may agree to your character's terms instead of theirs. If your character was threatening to exterminate their home world, they may completely surrender to avoid destruction. If your character was trying to ingratiate themselves into the target's good graces, your character convinces the target that they're a true and loyal friend and ally.

Generally, capitulation means that the target gives in completely. However, capitulation doesn't mean you get to completely dictate the target's actions, nor is it mind control. Your GM can determine that some goals are just too extreme for anyone to agree to (although you probably should have realized that before your character chose that goal in the first place).

FAILURE: YOUR CHARACTER EXCEEDS THEIR STRAIN THRESHOLD

If your character exceeds their strain threshold, then they fail to accomplish their goals. They may just give up trying to interact with their opponent and leave. However, your GM could decide that, depending on the circumstances, your character is forced to concede to one of your target's goals, instead.

Since your character is a PC, and not a non-player character, you can choose whether your character would be open to compromise if their strain exceeds half of their strain threshold. This can be a good roleplaying cue to follow, but since PCs are the protagonists of an adventure, they get more freedom in their choices than NPCs.

“CRITICAL REMARKS” IN SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

In combat, your character can inflict and suffer Critical Injuries from particularly powerful or lucky blows. In social encounters, the same thing can happen when someone makes a particularly good point, powerful argument, or painful insult.

One way we represent this is by allowing all characters to inflict “critical remarks” in a social encounter. They do this the same way they inflict a Critical Injury in combat: by spending ☉ and ▲. In this case, when a character makes a social check, they can spend ☉ or ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ to inflict 5 strain on the target.

The player controlling the PC or NPC (you or your GM) also has to come up with some idea of what the remark, argument, or insult was and why it had such a powerful effect.

USING SKILLS TO INFLICT STRAIN

Many characters have special talents or abilities that allow them to inflict strain on a target. However, everyone can default to making a social skill check as an action in order to inflict strain. If they succeed, they inflict 1 strain, plus 1 additional strain per uncanceled ☀. If they fail, they suffer 2 strain.

Remember, the social skill check your character uses needs to be appropriate to the situation and their goals. Your character can't use Coercion when they're trying to charm and flatter someone, for example. Also, it's never enough to just roll some dice: you always need to explain what your character is doing and why the check makes sense. It can be enough to say “my character is complimenting the target's appearance, so I'm going to make a Charm check,” but you do have to explain your character's actions.

Further, and this should go without saying, you can't use weapons or combat checks to inflict strain in a social encounter. Once your character starts throwing punches, the time for talk is over.

USING MOTIVATIONS IN SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS

Motivations are a big part of anybody's character, so we expect them to come into play throughout a game session. That's certainly true in social encounters. These rules apply to all characters, both PC and NPC, so they matter for players and GMs.

INCREASE OR DECREASE YOUR CHANCES

Engaging with a target's Motivation is one of the most common ways for your character to increase their odds of success in a social encounter. Likewise, working against a target's Motivation makes failure more likely for your character.

A simple and effective way to represent those increased odds of success or failure is through adding ■ or ■ to a skill check. Let's talk about adding ■ to your character's check first.

When your character is able to work with a target's Strength or Flaw, your character adds ■ to their next social skill check targeting that character. By “working with,” we mean working some reference to that Strength or Flaw into what your character says or does, or simply choosing words or an action that plays on those Motivation facets.

EXAMPLE: USING STRENGTH AND FLAWS

For example, let's take Katrina's character Akiko, the renegade clone (see page 46). Akiko's Strength is independence, and her Flaw is intolerance (in this case, of other clones). Akiko is at a fancy dinner party when she's approached by the host (an NPC controlled by the GM). The host wants to get on Akiko's good side so that he can ask her for a favor later. If he wants to play to Akiko's Strength, he might compliment her on her wealth and financial independence. If, instead, he wants to play to the clone's Flaw, he might make some disparaging comment about how dull and uninteresting most other clones are. Both of these are attempts to use the Charm skill to influence Akiko (and both add ■ to the subsequent skill check). However, narratively, both are very different approaches.

If your character is able to work with the target's Fear or Desire, the effect is the same, but amplified: add ■ ■. Fears and Desires are powerful Motivation facets that govern many of a character's choices, so playing to them can have a greater effect.

DETERMINING NPC MOTIVATIONS

For those of you who are Game Masters, Motivations can present a bit of a challenge. This is due to the sheer number of NPCs that you're managing. Just figuring out Motivations for every NPC would be an impossible task, not to mention remembering all of them! For this reason, we have a few suggestions for GMs as to the best way to manage NPC Motivations.

Ignore minion Motivations: In a movie, minions would be the extras. Anyone important enough that their Motivations matter should not be a minion.

Minor characters only have Strengths and Flaws: This applies to any character your group is going to interact with once or twice at the most. Don't worry about their deeper Desires or Fears. Strengths and

Flaws are good cues for how to roleplay the NPC so that your group can interact with them.

Improvise Motivations: Since your players can only learn NPC Motivations by spending resources or deliberately trying to discover them, don't be afraid to improvise Motivations for minor NPCs on the spot as needed instead of determining them beforehand. You can roll on one of the tables in **Chapter 2: Creating Characters**, or you can just make something up! The important thing is to give something for your group to work with.

In the end, you should only determine all four Motivations facets ahead of time for NPCs who are going to be recurring characters in your adventures.

EXAMPLE: USING DESIRES AND FEARS

Going back to our example, let's say the host tries to play on Akiko's Desire for knowledge, specifically any information about her creation. He suggests that he has purchased some top-secret data concerning the cloning process. Or perhaps the host wants to play on Akiko's Fear of isolation. He makes some conciliatory comments about how hard it must be to be an individual who shares the same face as countless other clones, and on the effort Akiko makes to look visually distinct. Again, these are different narrative approaches, but they result in the same Charm skill check (adding ■ ■ to the pool).

However, sometimes your character's approach are going to work against an opponent's Motivation. This most likely happens because your character isn't aware of their target's Motivations. By "working against," we mean making some reference to the Motivation during an interaction that rubs the target the wrong way, or simply conflicts with the Motivation.

EXAMPLE: WORKING AGAINST MOTIVATIONS

Revisiting our example, let's say that when our host approaches Akiko, he suggests that she really needs his help to escape the authorities. This conflicts with Akiko's Strength of independence, and she won't react well to the idea that she needs anyone's help. Or perhaps he wants to hire Akiko for a job posing as an "ordinary" clone again. He doesn't realize it, but this is going to play against Akiko's Fear of being lost in the "sea of sameness." In the first case, the host must add ■ to his Charm check. In the second, he adds ■ ■.

As we illustrate in our previous example, when your character works against a target's Strength or Flaw, your character adds ■ to their next social skill check against that target. When your character works against the target's Desire or Fear, they add ■ ■ to their next social skill check against that target.

DISCERNING OTHER CHARACTERS' MOTIVATIONS

Discerning another character's Motivations can give your character a major advantage in a social encounter. Generally, your character accomplishes this through spending ▲ or ☉ on skill checks (see page 121). This is the way we recommend learning Motivations, since it's a logical way to spend these resources in a social encounter, and it encourages characters to interact with each other.

However, if you want to have your character study their target and try to discern one of the target's Motivations that way, your GM could allow you to make an **opposed Perception versus Cool check** (representing the target's ability to maintain an even tone and neutral affectation, and not let their internal thoughts tinge their words or demeanor). If you are successful, your GM can let your character learn one of the target's Motivation facets.

Keep in mind, however, that if your character does this, they'll be spending time in the social encounter quietly but intently studying the target character, something that probably isn't going to escape notice. Basically, it's not a good approach if your character is trying to be subtle. Also, the GM should only let your character attempt this once or twice per encounter, and only once per target.

CHAPTER 8: THE GAME MASTER

So, you and your friends decided you wanted to play GENESYS, and for one of any number of reasons, you ended up being the Game Master. What do you do now? We assume you've already read through the basic rules, so

you know how our game works. But being a good Game Master (or GM) takes a lot more than that. This section is going to walk you through some of the basics of being a GM, and specifically a good GM, when playing our game.

GAMING THE SYSTEM

Or more accurately, game mastering the system. The Narrative Dice System offers an incredible amount of flexibility throughout the players' adventures. This section provides guidelines, tips, and tricks to help you, as the GM, manage those adventures and get the most out of the system. For ideas on developing stories, building campaigns, or planning adventures, see **Part III: Game Master's Toolkit**, starting on page 189.

The Narrative Dice System offers GMs a lot of resources to work with. These resources reduce pre-game preparation time, provide rich opportunities for storytelling, and make your role fun and easy. You should enjoy the adventures as much as everyone else!

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

As the GM, your goal is to make sure everyone is enjoying the experience and having fun. Just like each and every other player, you've taken time out of a busy schedule to get together and play a game, tell a story, and enjoy each other's company.

If someone isn't having fun, the GM is the player best suited to fix things. And the Narrative Dice System provides a lot of ways to do just that.

RULE ZERO

If having fun is the most important thing, then "Rule Zero" is the most important tool the GM has to work with. Rule Zero is a concept that has been around since roleplaying first began, often assumed but not always clearly stated.

Rule Zero means the GM has the power to change whatever needs to be changed for the benefit of the story or the player experience.

Rule Zero can take many forms. If a game rule is more nuisance than helpful, don't use it. If a situation starts to derail, set it back on its course. If you don't like the outcome after a particular dice roll, rules call, or

previous decision, change it. While everyone is playing the game together, as the GM, you are the director and producer, and you have say over the final cut and edits.

This is a pretty powerful concept, and it should be used carefully. Be careful to avoid arbitrary or random use of Rule Zero to completely rewrite history on a whim or force things to unfold exactly the way you want. If you abuse Rule Zero, the players may not feel their actions are meaningful or that their choices have consequences. But applied at the right time, Rule Zero can help speed up play, resolve arguments, and keep the focus on the story and having fun.

For example, if you can't remember the specific rules for a situation that doesn't come up often, instead of stopping the flow of the story to search for something in a book, you might say, "I can't remember the exact rule, but here's how we're going to handle it this time—we can look it up after the session for next time."

AWARDING EXPERIENCE POINTS AFTER EACH SESSION

One of the fun things about RPGs is how characters grow and improve over time. We do this by awarding experience at the end of each game session. Players receive this experience, and then can spend it to improve their characters.

At the end of a 3-5 hour game session, we recommend you give each of your players 20 XP. If you want your players to improve their characters more quickly, you can increase that to 25, and likewise if you want slower improvements, you can drop that to 15 XP per session. Shorter sessions should also award 5 less XP, while longer sessions can award 5 more XP. We explain how to spend that experience on page 44.

BEFORE PLAY BEGINS

To get the most out of the entire play experience—from a single session to an entire campaign—there are several steps you can take with the players to ensure everyone is having fun. Taking time at the outset can save time down the road and can prevent a number of issues before they can even start.

SOCIAL CONTRACT

Every day, we follow a social contract whether at work or at play, often without even knowing it. Social contracts are simply the written and unwritten rules of acceptable conduct and behavior in different situations or environments—like when gaming with a group of friends, for example.

Many groups don't specifically talk about social contracts or acceptable behavior. A certain behavior is assumed based on the situation, or potential conflicts and issues are rare. However, talking about game behavior and guidelines up front ensures everyone is on the same page and that you are playing in a welcoming environment that is enjoyable for everyone.

BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES

Behavior directly impacts the player experience. What one player considers edgy or fun another may consider rude and insensitive. Sorting this out beforehand is better than having something occur during a session where feelings may be hurt or players become frustrated or angry.

Whether you discuss this with your players in person or through email, everyone should understand the expectations or guidelines that need to be respected. This also gives a player the opportunity to back out gracefully if it's not the sort of social environment in which they would feel comfortable and have fun.

You might consider discussing some of the following questions with your players:

- Is swearing and adult language acceptable? If you were to assign a movie rating, a PG game environment would handle swearing and sexual innuendo in a completely different way than a group comfortable with a more mature, R-rated setting.
- What is your cell phone policy? This applies to phones, tablets, laptops, and other electronic devices that distract people throughout the day. Should people turn their phones off? Step outside if they need to take or make a call? What about checking email, status updates, or messages? You

may want to consider some regularly scheduled breaks to allow players to check their phones.

- Is smoking allowed? What about alcohol? These two guidelines can be serious deal breakers for some players, and the answers may differ based on where you are playing.
- Is eating allowed at the table? Gaming doesn't always revolve around a physical table, but some people are leery about having food and beverages around their gaming stuff, while others view gaming as a more casual, social event where offering food may be the best way to get everyone together.
- Are certain topics or themes off-limits? Everyone has a different level of tolerance toward the events that bombard us in the news every day. Some people may be comfortable with playing in games that involve aspects of racism, sexism, oppression, abuse, or particular forms of violence. For other people, however, certain topics may make them feel uncomfortable or vulnerable. People who have experienced highly traumatic events may have trouble if similar issues come at them without warning in the game. It can be helpful to give players a chance to privately ask for certain topics to be off-limits or to be given warning if those topics are going to come up, so that such issues won't end up accidentally derailing a game session.

MINDFULNESS MATTERS

Discussing these issues and questions are great opportunities not only to establish a safe, comfortable environment, but also to help the players get to know one another better. This can be especially useful if the group is relatively new, or when new players are invited to join an established group. Just remember that some players may want to discuss sensitive issues privately, so be sure they have a chance to do so as well.

Knowing a bit more about each other, the players are better prepared to work together as a team, have each others' backs, and ensure everyone is having fun. Each player is responsible for their own behavior, but it may fall to the GM (or the host player) to remind everyone about these guidelines.

FUN FOR ALL

The bottom line is to make sure everyone is having fun and feels involved. It's hard to have fun in the game if you don't feel comfortable while playing it.

SETTING THE STAGE

While social contracts manage behaviors and expectations outside of the game, there are also a number of considerations that impact what goes on inside the game.

PLAYER PARTICIPATION

Everyone should be encouraged to participate during a session. This applies to both the player and the characters they control in-game. Each group features a unique mix of personality types. Sometimes having introverts and extroverts gaming together can introduce some potentially awkward moments. In particular, there are three game-related behaviors to consider.

- **Speaking for other players or characters.** Players should be allowed to voice their opinions, offer ideas, and manage their own characters. Someone

may ask for suggestions or advice, but one player should not dictate or direct another player's actions at the table without permission.

- **Dice etiquette.** People love dice, which are the heart of the Narrative Dice System. Some players are very protective of their dice. Someone should not use another player's dice or make a skill check or important roll for another player without permission.
- **Resolving outcomes.** GENESYS offers countless ways to resolve and describe nearly any task a character may attempt. Someone might think they have the perfect way to interpret or explain another player's dice rolls, but players tend to enjoy having a level of personal control over the story—especially how it relates to their own character. Again, players may seek suggestions or advice, but otherwise, one player should not mandate or dictate dice results for others. This includes the GM!

PLAYER CHARACTER CREATION

When it comes to creating characters for a game, whether for shorter adventures or longer-term campaigns, consider how player characters should be created. Two of the main considerations are:

- Do the players build their characters as a group or individually?
- Is character information public or private knowledge?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but they can have a significant impact on the game's mood or player interactions.

CHARACTER BUILDING

If players build their characters individually, you may end up with an incredibly wide range of character concepts with skills or abilities you hadn't considered—while running the risk that players might duplicate roles or create concepts that don't mesh well with the setting or direction of the story. Creating characters individually lets players personalize backgrounds and Motivations without worrying how they fit with the other characters.

Building characters together allows the group to fill specific roles, make sure a wide range of skills and abilities are covered, collaborate on why the characters are adventuring together, and establish relationships or backgrounds that connect them to each other. The trade-off is that players may find themselves sticking to previously played character concepts or established

archetypes for a particular setting—the fighter, the diplomat, the support person, etc.

What drives the story and these characters? Are they a group of strangers learning how to cope with each other? Or do the characters know each other and already work well together? Are they a ragtag collection of misfits? A hand-selected task force? How your players create their characters, whether individually or as a group, can help set the tone for the adventures to come.

PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

In the game, each character has a unique background, personality, mix of relationships, Motivations, hopes, and dreams. Some of these may not be known at the outset and develop over the course of play. However, it's important to decide just how much the characters—and their players—know about each other.

Characters with a secret background or hidden agenda can provide some great storytelling opportunities, but who else knows about it? Will some characters have access to this personal information that others do not?

This applies to the players as well. Some groups prefer to have secret information remain secret, to add a sense of mystery or allow a surprise turn of events. Others would rather let all players in on the "secret" so they can enjoy both sides of the story, while making sure their characters do not act on any secret information they wouldn't have access to.

PREPARATION TIPS

GENESYS makes it easy for you to prepare for a game session, offering a number of quick tips and tricks to help you get ready. Game prep does not need to be a long, complex task. It can often be done with just a bit of time and something for taking notes, such as a pad of paper, some index cards, or a text program on a tablet.

BULLET POINTS

Spend some time highlighting key events, topics, or outcomes from previous sessions, as well as any notes on what you want to include or keep an eye out for during the next session. An easy way to do this is by making a series of short bullet points that summarize these thoughts.

A recap of the previous session can be as simple as noting the three most important events that took place and asking the players if they feel anything else stands out that should be mentioned. You don't need an exhaustive list or paragraphs of information; the highlights are sufficient.

You might want to maintain a list of key events, characters, or locations that come up during the campaign, adding new details as they develop. Even if you can't remember every single detail, the bullet points cover the

most important ones. Don't forget that the players can always help fill in the blanks, if necessary.

REMINDERS AND NOTES

Manage your notes using whatever format you are comfortable with, whether physical or digital. You can also write yourself reminders—things not to forget, people making an appearance, or possibly the consequences for certain actions the characters may take. As these notes are used or reminders have triggered, the GM can put the cards away, cross off comments, or delete items.

For especially important reminders, consider setting a timer. Cell phones and mobile devices are great tools for this; you can set a timer and have your notes pop up in a message or alert, right in front of you when you need them. If you're not GMing digitally, a timer can remind you to pull up an index card with key notes, open an envelope filled with important handouts, or flip to that page you bookmarked earlier.

NPC ROLL CALL

Take a moment to consider any non-player characters (NPCs) the player characters may encounter over the course of a session. Are there key villains or important people in the story? Will the group face off against an assassin, dangerous monster, or mysterious stranger?

NPCs can be important to add to a list of bullet points or reminders. The GM can write down their names and think about how they may appear or act during a session. Adding a detail or two about each can make these NPCs memorable. The assassin bears a scar, the monster is cloaked in mist, or the stranger has a foreign accent.

During the session, those notes are then at hand just in case that NPC comes into play. With a bullet list, you can cross off NPCs that have already served their purpose, or add details to a minor NPC the players suddenly latch onto who becomes a recurring character.

If there is a main antagonist in the story, don't forget to consider their plans and machinations. Even if the player characters never encounter this adversary face-to-face, the actions the players take still have an impact. Do they foil plans? Set into motion a dangerous chain of events? Gain a new, as-yet-unknown enemy? Thinking about the antagonist's actions and goals beforehand and taking a few quick notes during play may be all you need to keep them involved in the story.

NPCs AND SKILLS

Even if an NPC is in a combat encounter or has important skills, you don't need to have a full stat block memorized. As a rule of thumb, make note of one or two key stats and assume everything else is average. For example, a street enforcer may have Brawn 4 and a Melee skill of 2. Then for simplicity, you can assume all the other characteristics are average (2) and all other skills are untrained.

For more important NPCs, like adversaries and nemeses (see page 131), you may wish to create full character stats. You should use the guidelines on page 202 that explain how to build adversaries.

Some NPCs fall in between these two categories. To quickly manage an NPC on the spot, you can choose which player character that NPC is most like and use that PC's stats and abilities as a baseline. Once you're familiar with the PCs, you won't even need to look at their character sheet—or can get the information you need with a quick glance across the table.

GAME MASTERING RESOURCES

GENESYS puts a lot of resources at your fingertips. You can leverage these resources to reward players, reinforce important plot points, or help establish how the players' choices have in-game consequences.

BOOST AND SETBACK DICE

Two of the most useful tools available are the Boost  and Setback  dice. These dice replace countless charts and modifier tables with a simple way to reflect the context of a situation. Adding  or  dice to skill checks provides a tangible way to establish details of the story.

If it's cold outside, just how cold is it? Chilly enough to warrant mention? Cold enough that it impairs the characters by providing a ? Or so dangerously cold that   or more are added?  and  help establish the magnitude of an effect.

When players describe their PCs' actions or make interesting plans, you can reward this by providing  to represent the impact and importance of different parts of their descriptions. Similarly,  reinforce the severity of disruptive or distracting conditions.

STORY POINTS

You can show the importance of a situation or the power of an adversary by using Story Points. Spending a Story Point establishes a certain tension or raising of the stakes. For example, spending a Story Point to upgrade an NPC combat check shows that the situation calls for extra effort or special emphasis. Things feel less arbitrary when a cost has been paid (by spending a Story Point) to help achieve the effect.

Feel free to use Story Points liberally. Not only do Story Points allow you to upgrade dice or trigger key events and abilities, but each time you use a Story Point, it puts a Story Point back in the hands of the PCs.

MOTIVATION

Few things motivate a character better than their own self-interest. Having a Motivation can create an immediate relationship, often with some sort of cause-and-effect impact. If you owe money to a loan shark, they're going to want it back. If you're motivated to protect your family, they reach out to you in their time of need. If you want to get rich, you're going to want to call in any favors owed, preferably in the form of money.

Bringing up a Motivation can help your players feel that their characters have a connection to the game world and that things happen offscreen. More goes on in the story than just what's described during a session.

STRAIN

Characters get battered and bruised in more ways than physical injury. Strain represents stress, fatigue, desperation, worry, lack of focus, or being pushed to the limit. Since characters recover from strain quickly, you can have them suffer strain liberally to reflect these situations.

If a character hasn't slept in a while, they might suffer a certain amount of strain until they get a good night's rest. If the player wants to push their character to get just "a little bit more" out of an action, you might rule that they can do it if they're willing to suffer 2 strain.

Minor injuries and inconveniences such as twisting an ankle or falling out of a tree are better resolved with strain instead of wounds. Strain is also a great general-purpose use for extra  or  during skill checks, and can be described in a way that fits almost any situation.

INITIATIVE

The Initiative system is flexible, but it can feel even more dynamic when you adjust the order of characters in a scene. Perhaps due to long delays in their planning or as an added effect of a terrible roll, you move a PC Initiative slot down a slot or two. If the NPCs become highly motivated or you have a  to spend, you might decide to move an NPC slot higher in the Initiative order. Changing the order in which characters act can affect their decision-making or prompt them to rethink their strategies.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Awarding experience points is covered on page 125, and it is another powerful resource. Receiving experience points during pivotal moments, upon unraveling a mystery, or after defeating a powerful enemy gives players a tangible sense of accomplishment. Providing small bonuses here and there can also be used to reward clever play, neat ideas, or excellent roleplaying.

TIME AND TIMING

Having time pass is one way to help a game seem more real. Things happen even when the characters aren't

directly involved. The passage of time also creates more context. Saying a character is injured but that they are ready to head back into action the day after a Medicine check creates a very different feeling than saying it takes days—or even weeks—to recover.

Player and character actions can have time-related consequences as well. If players delay making decisions, it could reflect uncertainty in their characters and make certain character actions take longer to accomplish. Poor planning, causing scenes in public, or a ☒ result on a check might give an enemy the time

they need to slip away. Tampering with time by having an action take longer or resolve more quickly than expected is also a great use for ▲ and ⚙.

To create a sense of tension, you can take time away from the characters. The PCs have only moments to prepare before meeting an important diplomat. They thought they had a month to recover the stolen painting, but their contact demands it by the end of the week. They are ambushed by an enemy. Limiting time can force the players' hands, trigger a sense of urgency, or create a spark of excitement if things start to drag.

THE NARRATIVE DICE

These special dice are a key feature of the game. They provide a wide range of possible outcomes, making each roll of the dice unique. The Narrative dice offer a lot of opportunity for enhancing the story with a deeper narrative, but they won't get in the way when you want to focus on fast-paced action.

ideas for using, ask the players for help. If the dice roll results in something bad happening to the PCs, let the players come up with a number of ways their plans might have gone wrong or offer various worst-case scenarios.

GET EVERYONE INVOLVED

As the GM, you may feel a certain responsibility to describe the outcome every time dice are rolled. But you don't need to take this on by yourself—get all the players involved! Everyone is there to have a good time and tell a story, and sometimes ideas other players come up with fit perfectly or offer options you hadn't even considered.

INTERPRETING SYMBOLS AND COLORS

Since each die goes into the dice pool for a specific reason, you can use that information when narrating a check's outcome. If a player gains a Boost die ■ for planning ahead, and they end up succeeding because of that ■, then you know it's because they planned ahead and can use that when describing the outcome.

Each player should be encouraged to describe their actions. The reason behind the dice roll (hacking a computer, negotiating with an alien species, climbing a sheer cliff face) often suggests a number of possible outcomes, consequences, or side effects. Hacking a computer could involve a lot of things: you might be thinking about how quickly the computer gets hacked, while another player describes the amount of data they get, and another mentions inserting their own special subroutine to track other users, or... you get the idea. The more creative minds involved, the more interesting options available.

Keep this in mind when determining the success or failure of a given roll. As you cancel symbols out to see if you have at least one net ✨, you can even narrate what the cancellations reflect.

Generally the person making the roll offers their ideas first, and if the ideas sound sensible, you might go along with them. If the player is struggling, or you want to hint at a possible outcome the players would find desirable, getting the other players involved is also very valuable.

Imagine a character is climbing down a sheer cliff at night. The cliff is slick with water and overlooks an ancient temple far below. The PC needs to make a skill check, and you decide it is a **Hard** (◆◆◆) **Athletics check**. There are far more possible outcomes than simply succeeding or failing, and you can do more than just describing why success or failure occurs. In this case, let's assume the character succeeds.

This applies to your own dice rolls as well. You don't need to control every aspect of the outcome when you roll the dice. If you end up with more ▲ than you have

If one or more ✨ appear on the Proficiency dice ◐, while the Setback dice ■ you assigned for climbing down a slippery slope and darkness have ⚙, you could describe the scene this way:

Despite the slippery conditions, your training and experience in climbing help you navigate your way down. While it's dark outside, the moon provides just enough light to help you find handholds and keep your footing.

If the ✨ appear on the 🟩 you assigned for planning ahead and the assistance of another character, while ✖ appear on the 🟥, the scene may be described like this:

The sheer cliff is even steeper than you expected, but thankfully you prepared for this and planned out the best way down. You were about to falter when a rock gave way beneath your hand, but Alex was there to steady you.

In both cases, the skill check was a success, using the same dice and with the same results, but choosing which dice to reference in your description influenced how the scene unfolded.

DYNAMIC DICE

As you narrate scenes and describe situations, you can reinforce the details or drive home a point by physically adding or removing dice as details come up.

Imagine the cliff-climbing scene described above. As you set up the scene, you describe how steep the cliff

is as you push forward three Difficulty dice 🎲🎲🎲. Adding a a Setback die 🟩, you mention how the nearby waterfall creates a fine mist, leaving the cliff face wet and slippery. Finally, you remind the players that the PCs got lost on the way and arrived in the dark of night, and you push forward a second 🟩.

You could easily describe the scene first, then assemble a dice pool afterward. But associating details with specific dice helps create a richer context. The mist is a nice touch, but adding a die with the description tells the players the mist is thick enough to leave the cliff face slippery.

When you say it's dark outside, there could be a wide range of answers to "How dark is it?" Dark enough to warrant a Setback die 🟩 tells players it's dark enough to impact the scene. Or maybe it's really dark and you add two Setback dice 🟩🟩, making it feel much harder to see or navigate than just one Setback die.

The same can be done when assigning positive dice. Adding dice while describing actions and scenes is a great way to reinforce important details and encourage creative, descriptive play.

ADVERSARIES

As a GM, one of your major jobs is running the various non-player characters that your group's PCs encounter throughout their adventures. Many of these NPCs are going to be so minor to the story that they only merit a brief description. However, you're going to have plenty of NPCs who play a bigger role in your game.

We use the name **adversaries** to describe these more important NPCs. Basically, adversaries are NPCs important enough to have a profile of their characteristics and skills. Even if an NPC isn't adversarial to your group, if they have a profile, it's because we figure they're important enough to be targeted by skill checks or make checks of their own. These are the same guidelines you should use when figuring out which of your NPCs need profiles.

ADVERSARY PROFILES

Think of an adversary profile as a stripped-down version of one of your player characters' profiles. The goal is the same—to let the adversary function within the framework of GENESYS's rules—even if the adversary's rules are a lot simpler than the PC rules. In GENESYS, there are three types of adversary profiles. We call those three types minions, rivals, and nemeses.

THE ADVERSARY TALENT

NPCs have access to a talent that PCs do not: the Adversary talent. This is a combat talent that makes them harder to hit in combat. We created this talent to replace other defensive talents such as Dodge and Side Step. This way when you're running a game, most of your NPCs have a passive defensive talent instead of active talents that you have to keep track of, which keeps things simple.

ADVERSARY

Activation: Passive

Ranked: Yes

Upgrade the difficulty of all combat checks targeting this character once per rank of Adversary.

MINIONS

Minions are the most common NPCs in most games. As their name implies, minions are faceless individuals who provide the numbers to bulk out encounters. Squads of enemy soldiers, groups of back-alley

criminal enforcers, and a gathering of angry citizens are all examples of groups of minions. If you think of your game in movie terms, minions are extras the heroes or villains deal with to show how powerful they are.

We designed minions to only be a major threat in numbers; a single minion shouldn't prove too dangerous to most PCs. However, your players aren't going to confront minions on their own very often. Minions operate in small groups to increase their effectiveness. This allows you to populate your encounters with lots of NPCs without bogging down the game with tracking or rolling dice for each NPC individually. Because they work in groups, you only need to track what the group is doing.

You don't have to deploy minions in groups, of course. Just remember that they're going to be fairly incompetent if you don't, unless they have high characteristics.

HOW DANGEROUS ARE THEY?

A single minion is a negligible threat to a PC, unless the PC is significantly impaired, heavily wounded, or otherwise weakened. However, a group of two or three minions should be a reasonable threat for a single starting PC, and a group of three to four should be a reasonable threat for a PC who has spent at least an additional 100 XP.

If you extrapolate that out, two groups of two or three minions should be a reasonable threat for a starting party, and two groups of three to four minions should be a reasonable threat for a party of PCs who have spent at least 100 XP. However, make sure you review the minion profiles! Minions with soak values of 5 or higher, wound thresholds of 7 or higher, or weapons that do 9 or more damage increase that threat level from reasonable to very challenging.

MINION RULES

Minions have several unique rules that reflect their status as disposable adversaries.

- **Unless otherwise specified, minions do not suffer strain.** Anything that normally inflicts strain inflicts wounds on a minion instead. Minions also cannot voluntarily suffer strain. This means that when a minion is taken out of combat due to exceeding their wound threshold, it is up to you whether the minion was incapacitated or killed, depending on the circumstances. (It also means that minions can be taken out of a social encounter for exceeding their wound threshold due to suffering strain. You should play this as you would play a non-minion NPC in the same situation, not by having a minion spontaneously drop dead at the grand ball!)
- **Minions do not possess skills.** One thing that makes minions significantly weaker than your PCs

is their lack of skills. They can compensate for this by operating as a group. A minion's profile lists several skills in which that minion type gains ranks when acting as a group.

- **Minions can fight as a group.** As noted previously, you do not have to deploy minions as groups. However, deploying them in a group has several advantages. It simplifies combat and makes minions more dangerous while allowing you to include large numbers of NPCs in encounters. You only deploy minions of the same type in a single group.
- **A minion group has a single wound threshold, shared by all members of that group.** A minion group's wound threshold is equal to the sum of the wound thresholds of every member of the group. (For example, a group of three street toughs, each with a wound threshold of 4, has a wound threshold of 12.) Each time any member of the group suffers wounds, you apply the wounds to the group's wound threshold. Individual members of the group are defeated one at a time, each time the total wounds suffered exceeds a group member's share of the group's wound threshold. For example, when the street tough group exceeds 4 wounds, one street tough is defeated.
- **When characters attack a group, they attack the group as a whole, not an individual.** Narratively you may describe them as attacking an individual, but mechanically they're attacking the group.
- **Working as a group also allows minions to use skills.** A minion group gains one skill rank for each member of the group beyond the first, as long as the skill is on the minion's profile. So, our group of three street toughs would count as having two ranks (for the two toughs after the first) in any skill checks the group makes for skills listed on their profile.
- **Critical Injuries kill minions.** If a minion suffers a Critical Injury, it is immediately incapacitated. If a group of minions suffers a Critical Injury, it suffers one minion's worth of wounds plus one (so that one of the minions in the group is incapacitated).

RIVALS

Rivals are more dangerous than minions but usually less powerful than a PC. Most of your named NPCs should be rivals: characters important enough to have a personality and some meaningful interactions with your PCs.

We designed rivals to be simplified versions of player characters. Unlike minions, they operate alone, and they have skills just like PCs do. Generally, we expect them to be about as skilled as a starting player character, so they probably don't have more than two ranks in a single skill (exceptions can and do exist, of course).

HOW DANGEROUS ARE THEY?

A single rival should be reasonably dangerous for a single PC, so your party should find an equal number of rivals to be a reasonably dangerous threat. More rivals should generally equate to more danger, and if your group outnumbers the number of rivals they face, the threat should be more manageable.

Even more than with minions, the threat of a rival can vary greatly depending on their stats. Rivals with soak values of 5 or higher, wound thresholds of 14 or higher, three or more ranks in combat or social skills (depending on the type of encounter), or weapons that do 9 or more damage increase that threat level from reasonable to very challenging. In cases like these, a rival may prove a reasonable threat to two of your PCs.

RIVAL RULES

Rivals follow most of the same rules as player characters, except as noted here.

- **Rivals suffer Critical Injuries normally.** However, when a rival exceeds their wound threshold, they can be

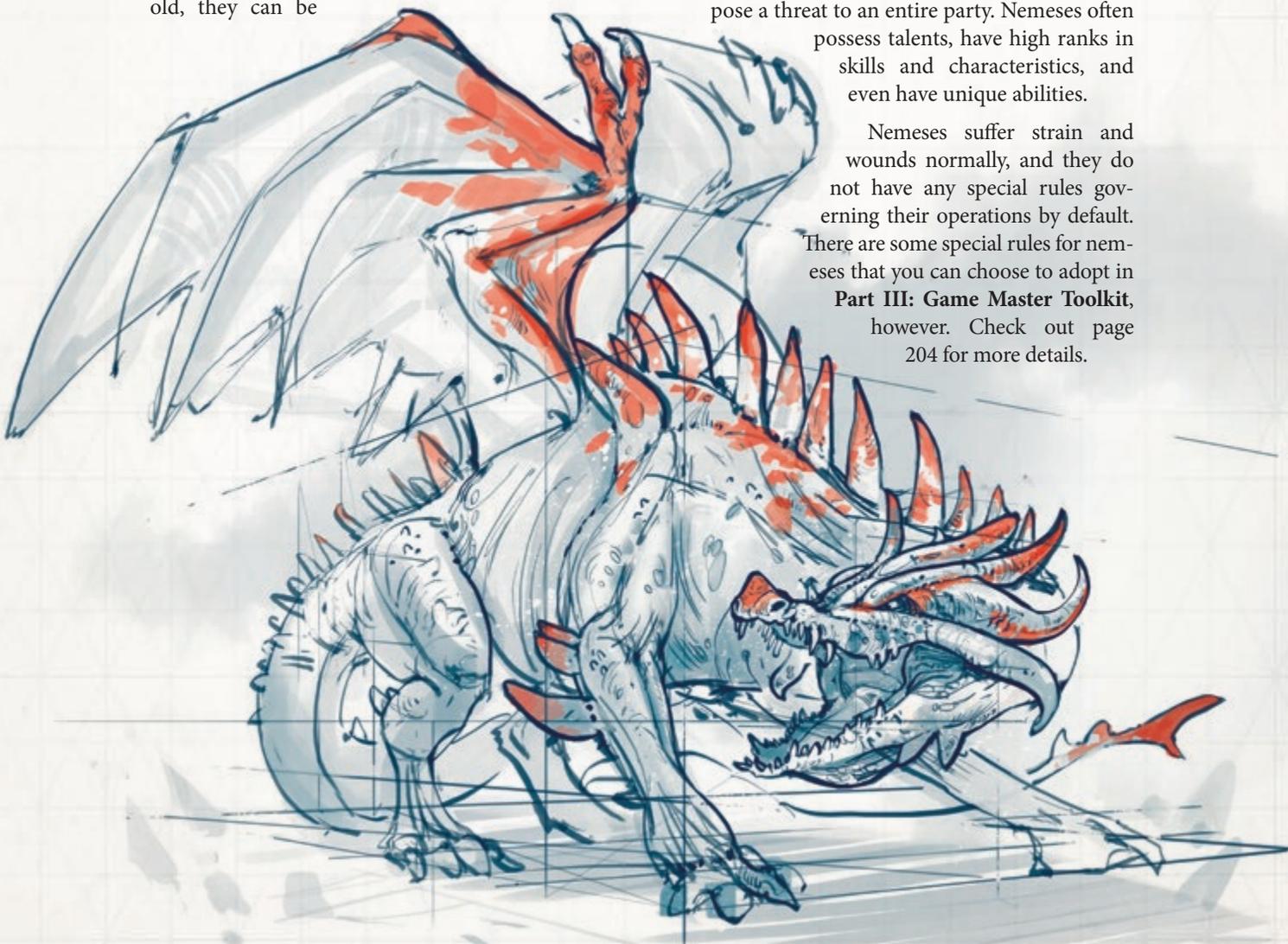
killed outright (instead of incapacitated) at your discretion. **Table I.6–10: Critical Injury Result**, on page 115, is designed to not kill player characters easily, but often when it comes to NPCs, you're going to want to be able to eliminate them once they're no longer a threat.

- **Rivals cannot suffer strain.** Anything that normally inflicts strain inflicts an equivalent number of wounds on rivals instead. Rivals can use abilities or invoke effects that inflict strain on the user; this simply causes them to suffer wounds instead. Remember, because they do not suffer strain, they cannot recover from it, either. As with minions, if a rival is incapacitated due to suffering strain, you can rule on whether they were killed or rendered unconscious based on the circumstances.

NEMESSES

The nemesis is the player character's opposite number. Nemesis are, well, nemesis, and thus identical to PCs in pretty much every respect. They may even be more powerful; this is necessary to ensure that they can pose a threat to an entire party. Nemesis often possess talents, have high ranks in skills and characteristics, and even have unique abilities.

Nemesis suffer strain and wounds normally, and they do not have any special rules governing their operations by default. There are some special rules for nemesis that you can choose to adopt in **Part III: Game Master Toolkit**, however. Check out page 204 for more details.



ADVERSARY PROFILE

Overall, we've kept adversary profiles in the various setting sections, since adversaries are going to vary wildly from setting to setting. However, we've provided a couple of generic adversary profiles here, so that we can go over each section of the adversary profile in turn.

- **Name:** The adversary's name or type, plus whether they are a minion, rival, or nemesis.
- **Description:** A brief description of the adversary.
- **Characteristics:** The ratings of the adversary's six basic characteristics.
- **Soak, Defense, and Thresholds:** These are the adversary's soak, their melee and ranged defense values, and their wound and strain thresholds. Only nemeses have strain thresholds.
- **Skills:** The skills (if any) that the adversary possesses. If the adversary is a minion, these skills only apply when the adversary is in a group (and we add the "group only" reminder text to the entry).
- **Talents:** The talents (if any) the adversary possesses.
- **Abilities:** These are special abilities that are not skills or talents. Many are unique to a specific adversary or type of adversary.
- **Equipment:** This is the adversary's equipment. The entry only lists important equipment such as weapons, armor, and vital pieces of gear. Items such as clothing, spare change, phones, pocket-knives, flashlights, and so forth (pretty much anything you might throw in your own pocket without thinking about it) are not listed. However, they can be present if you think it makes sense. Any bonuses from equipment are already added to the profile.

You should note that adversaries do not always follow the same rules that player characters do. Our intention is for the profiles to be easy for you to reference and use during your game, so we tend to omit nonessential information. For example, some adversaries may have equipment that would cause a similar PC to be encumbered, but the adversaries don't suffer penalties for it. This lets us give an adversary the right equipment (such as weapons or armor) to make them interesting and diverse opponents. Perhaps the weapon they carry is modified to weigh less, or perhaps they're wearing a backpack that we didn't list on their profile.

We also never list talents like Grit, Toughened, Enduring, or other talents that provide permanent stat increases. We just modify a profile accordingly.

STREET TOUGH (MINION)

The street tough is one of the go-to villains of any setting. These belligerent petty criminals are a reasonable first opponent for your PCs to beat up without your having to worry that they may kill the group by accident. If you're worried they may be too tough, however, have them use their studded gloves and deal damage to your PCs' strain threshold.



Skills (group only): Brawl, Coercion, Melee.

Talents: None.

Abilities: None.

Equipment: Studded gloves (Brawl; Damage 4; Critical 4; Range [Engaged]; Disorient 2, Knockdown), club (Melee; Damage 5; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]), heavy clothing (+1 soak).

GANG LEADER (RIVAL)

Your groups of street toughs can be led by the gang leader, another go-to opponent who fits into all settings. The gang leader is a tough individual who runs small-time criminal operations with an iron fist. This can be a good opponent for a group to face off with at the climax of their first or second session, especially if the gang leader is backed up by a minion group of street toughs.



Skills: Coercion 1, Cool 1, Leadership 1, Melee 2, Streetwise 3, Vigilance 1.

Talents: Adversary 1 (upgrade difficulty of all combat checks against this target once).

Abilities: None.

Equipment: Really big and sharp knife (Melee; Damage 5; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]; Pierce 2), heavy leather clothing (+2 soak).

LOCAL OFFICIAL (NEMESIS)

This generic local official could be the mayor of a small town, the councilmember representing a borough, or any other government official low-ranking enough

to encounter your players' characters but powerful enough to be a problem. The local official is primarily a threat in social encounters, not combat encounters, so use them accordingly (or accept that they'll be a pretty minor threat in a fight).

2	2	3	3	2	3
BRAWN	AGILITY	INTELLECT	CUNNING	WILLPOWER	PRESENCE
SOAK VALUE	WOUND THRESHOLD	STRAIN THRESHOLD	M/R DEFENSE		
2	12	16	0	0	

Skills: Charm 2, Cool 1, Coercion 3, Deception 1, Leadership 2, Negotiation 1, Vigilance 3.

Talents: Improved Scathing Tirade (use this talent to make an **Average** [◆◆] **Coercion** check; for each ☆, one opponent within short range suffers 1 strain; for each ▲, one affected opponent suffers 1 additional strain; all opponents affected add ■ to all skill checks they make for the following three rounds).

Abilities: Good at Needling (if this character knows an opponent's Flaw Motivation, when this character inflicts strain on the opponent, the opponent suffers 4 additional strain).

Equipment: Fine clothing, official credentials or badge of office.

MAKING SURE ADVERSARIES ARE APPROPRIATE CHALLENGES

When designing challenges for your party, your goal is almost always going to be a "reasonable" threat. This is a threat that makes your group feel challenged but is unlikely to incapacitate anyone and is very unlikely to defeat the entire group.

However, since GENESYS uses a free-form character leveling system, determining what is a reasonable threat can be tricky. We have some advice that can make figuring that out easier and applies to both social and combat encounters.

THE GOLDEN RULE: ERR ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION

One thing to remember as the GM: it's always better for your PCs succeed with a crushing victory than to be overwhelmed in a bitter defeat. To put it another way, your players probably won't care if they defeat an opponent without much effort, but they are going to care if you wipe out all their characters.

So, when building encounters (especially before you have a good idea of your group's capabilities), don't be afraid to make the first couple fairly easy. If they are combat encounters, put your group up against a single minion group or a number of rivals less than the

number of PCs in your party. If the encounter is a social encounter, have it be against an adversary with no ranks in any social skills, and then use Story Points to upgrade the ability of the adversary's checks if things seem to be going well for your PCs.

COMPARING SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS

A good way to gauge an adversary's strength versus your characters' is to compare the ranks they have in skills and characteristics. For example, a starting character likely has only one characteristic at rank 4, and the rest at rank 3 or 2. Likewise, they probably have a couple of skills at rank 2 and a couple more at rank 1. When you choose an adversary for these characters, select one with equal or lower characteristics and equal or lower skills.

This is especially important in social encounters, where your PCs are often going to be making opposed skill checks against the adversaries. This means that if an adversary has high skills and characteristics, it doesn't just make them good at succeeding at their own skill checks. It also means that any opposed checks targeting them have a higher difficulty, too.

MINION GROUP SIZES

When putting minions in an encounter, keep in mind that the size of their group goes a long way toward determining how dangerous the group is to your PCs. This is most obvious in light of a minion group's combined wound threshold, but it's probably more important with regard to the skill checks they'll be rolling.

First, let's look at wound thresholds. Minions with wound thresholds of 2–4 are the least dangerous, because a single hit from a weapon with low damage can eliminate a minion from the group, and every minion eliminated makes the group less dangerous. Minions with wound thresholds of 5–7 are more dangerous, because unless your PCs have a weapon that does at least 9 damage, it is often going to take two hits to eliminate a minion from the group. Minions seldom have a wound threshold higher than 7, and one that does probably should be a rival instead.

Now, let's look at group sizes and skill checks. Remember, a group's size effectively determines its ranks in a skill. To gauge how dangerous this makes it, determine how many minions it will take to get the dice pool for a particular skill to at least three ◆ and/or ◐. Once they have three Ability or Proficiency dice in their pool, minion groups are much more likely to succeed than fail when attacking a PC.

Finally, keep minion group sizes around two to four individuals, and never more than five.

FANTASY 138

STEAMPUNK 148

WEIRD WAR 158

MODERN DAY 164

SCIENCE FICTION 170

SPACE OPERA 179

SETTINGS

Now that you know the rules for playing GENESYS, let's talk about the settings you can play in. Many players find a roleplaying game's setting to be just as interesting as its rules, and sometimes more so. For that reason, we designed GENESYS to work in as many settings as possible, and we included six of them as examples.

Creating a truly exhaustive list of settings would have required a much larger book than this one, so we chose six that we thought covered a wide range of options and were all broadly appealing. Most of them (the **modern day** setting being the obvious exception) also have examples among Fantasy Flight Games' own settings, making it even easier for us to talk about them. These example settings are not "complete," but we intend for them to give you a good starting point when designing a setting for your own game.

WHAT'S IN THIS PART OF THE BOOK

Let's go over what you're going to find in this part of the book:

- **Chapter 1: Fantasy.** In many variants, this setting is one of the most popular settings in fiction (and certainly in roleplaying games).
- **Chapter 2: Steampunk.** Mad science, invention, and the spirit of adventure exemplify this setting.

- **Chapter 3: Weird War.** This setting takes historical warfare and adds a dash of occult horror to make it more interesting.
- **Chapter 4: Modern Day.** Playing in a modern setting can be just as fun as playing in a fictional one.
- **Chapter 5: Science Fiction.** Generally taking place in the future, these stories have a solid grounding in scientific fact.
- **Chapter 6: Space Opera.** This type of sci-fi doesn't let the facts get in the way of a good story!

THE SETTING WORKSHEET

On the next page, you can find our setting worksheet. As we said before, our example settings aren't complete settings. Instead, we intend for them to be frameworks you can use to build your own settings for your own games.

The worksheet has places to record the principle information about your setting—both the descriptive details and the setting-specific game mechanics. You can photocopy it or get a copy from our website.

The worksheet should be enough for you to get started and serves as a good reference for your players. A word of warning, though. As you continue working on developing your setting, you may find that you need to upgrade this worksheet for a notebook!

SETTING

WORLD:

BASE SETTING/GENRE:

tone:



OVERVIEW:

Three horizontal lines for overview text.

GENRE/SETTING TROPES AND THEMES

WHAT TROPES/THEMES ABOUT TECHNOLOGY, HUMAN NATURE, MORALITY, OR REALITY ARE YOU INCLUDING?

Text box with a dashed line for including tropes/themes.

WHAT TROPES/THEMES ARE YOU EXCLUDING?

Text box with a dashed line for excluding tropes/themes.

WHAT TROPES/THEMES ARE YOU SUBVERTING?

Text box with a dashed line for subverting tropes/themes.

SETTING SPECIFIC SKILLS

Vertical list of 20 rounded rectangular boxes for setting specific skills.

FACTIONS & ORGANIZATIONS

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR FACTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SETTING, AND WHAT ARE THEIR OBJECTIVES?

Table with 4 numbered rows for factions and organizations.

MOVERS & SHAKERS

WHO ARE THE MAJOR PERSONALITIES IN THE SETTING, AND WHAT ARE THEIR OBJECTIVES?

Table with 4 numbered rows for major personalities.

MAJOR SPECIES TYPES

Table with columns for NAME and DESCRIPTION, containing four rows for species types.

TECHNOLOGY LEVEL

Vertical list of 5 rectangular boxes for technology level.

SETTING SHEET

CHAPTER 1: FANTASY

Magic, monsters, heroic warriors, and evil overlords—fantasy has all the makings of a good adventure. There's a reason it's the basis for so many games and central to the roots of roleplaying.

Despite being instantly recognizable and familiar, fantasy is an incredibly varied genre, with numerous subdivisions. However you decide to style your fantasy game, **GENESYS**'s customizability makes it perfect for tailoring to the game you want.

TROPES

Since you are reading an RPG rulebook, we're going to bet you're familiar with the tropes of the fantasy genre. But whether you're a sword and sorcery aficionado or your experience comes from popular films or video games, a quick refresher never hurts. Often, the tropes of a setting or genre sink

into our minds, but we don't always think about them on a conscious level. Actively considering the common aspects of fantasy and how you want to integrate them into your campaign is a worthwhile exercise that's bound to pay off. Not only will you be prepared should someone ask you to describe your campaign, but awareness of these tropes helps you determine what makes your campaign unique.

Really, though, don't be too unique; one of the advantages of a fantasy setting is its familiarity for so many players, even those who have never played an RPG before. Without delving into the details of your campaign setting, simply recognizing it as a medieval-type fantasy world (which is the assumption we're going with) should allow most players to jump right in with minimal briefing.

That said, here we've tried to encapsulate some of the common tropes we believe help define a fantasy setting. Still, we understand if you want to skip to the new character options and review this later. They're on page 142.

MAGIC

It's quite possible that magic is the defining characteristic of a fantasy setting. Even when they aren't on Earth, fantasy settings often approximate a historical period, whether a medieval or far future one. Still, some fantasy settings might be on a world with few recognizable technological or cultural ties to real-life history. Regardless, the constant among these radically varied fantasy settings is magic, whatever name it goes by. The addition of magic turns science fiction into science fantasy, and historical fiction into historical fantasy.

Magic is a broad, nebulous term, yet most people have a pretty good idea of what you mean as soon as it's mentioned. Even if you can't define magic, you know



it when you see it. Fundamentally, magic is a force that breaks what we think of as the natural rules of the universe. It may be wielded by wizards or occur on its own. Magic allows humans to create fire from nothing, heal fatal wounds in moments, read the thoughts of others, control the elements, and accomplish pretty much anything else you might think of.

MONSTERS

Monsters, in the literal sense—goblins, trolls, ghouls, gorgons, dragons, and so on—are a staple of fantasy. Entire books have been written on the subject of fantasy monsters, often for the express purpose of including them in fantasy games for PCs to fight! While you might be able to run a fantasy game without the PCs ever slaying a monster, the lack of dangerous creatures would be one of the defining characteristics of such a game. Often, fighting monsters is a primary objective of heroes in fantasy stories, whether to protect a village, claim a bounty, or simply get at the treasure the monster's guarding.

We've included profiles for a few monsters on page 146, but you're certain to need more. Fortunately, the rules for creating NPCs, on page 202, apply to fantastical creatures of all types. Often, all it takes to make a monster stand out is the addition of a single special rule, or even just an interesting quality, to its attacks.

Of course, monsters in the figurative sense are also common in fantasy, but we cover that under the **Good and Evil** trope.

QUESTS

Some games define a quest as, well, pretty much anything your character tries to accomplish. While we have no issue with this nomenclature, traditionally speaking, a quest is something a bit more than fetching a potion for an NPC who can't be bothered to leave their house.

What we're talking about is a quest in the original sense: a journey, probably long and at the very least dangerous, to achieve an important goal. With any quest worthy of the name, lives—and often entire civilizations or worlds—hang in the balance. The consequences for failure might not entail simple destruction, but enslavement at the hands of some evil entity or force. Likely, the quest focuses on a particular object that must be found, brought to a specific place, destroyed, or some combination of the above. Any of this sounding familiar? That object is called a MacGuffin.

THE MACGUFFIN

A MacGuffin is (quite literally, you could say) a plot device. It's an object that serves the primary, if not sole, purpose of getting the protagonists engaged with the plot and, likely, of keeping it moving. Really, a MacGuffin can be a great tool for GMs to use in any game, but it's particularly relevant for the fantasy quest. Player characters might or might not be able to actually use a MacGuffin, and they might not even lay eyes on it. Perhaps the most famous MacGuffin is the Holy Grail of Arthurian legend—the quest for which leads to all number of, honestly, quite unrelated adventures. Regardless of the form it takes, a MacGuffin gets the PCs embroiled in the events that really constitute the adventure. The MacGuffin may lose significance, fade into the background, turn out not to exist, or even get successfully resolved. What's important is that it gets the protagonists caught up with events and non-player characters compelling enough to keep the heroes involved regardless.

GOOD AND EVIL

Good and evil are distinct, black-and-white concepts. More than mere ideas, good and evil are very real forces in a traditional fantasy setting. Although heroes may engage in some vices, and probably have weaknesses of character, they are ultimately good, and oppose the suffering of innocents at every turn. On the other end of the spectrum, villains tend to be power hungry and unambiguously evil; they may delight in causing misery for its own sake while concocting grandiose plans to conquer or simply destroy. Fantasy worlds are shaped by the actions of great heroes and villains. Entire kingdoms, continents, or planets may be threatened by evil forces, and saved by the heroes who vanquish them.

FAMILIAR HISTORICAL ELEMENTS

Most fantasy settings resemble the real world at a roughly identifiable point in history. Perhaps the most common influence, and what comes to mind first for many people when they think of fantasy, is western Europe in the medieval era. You can see this influence in weapons and armor, architecture, religious practices, social hierarchy and titles, and other facets of many fantasy settings. Of course, there are plentiful works of fantasy that resemble other regions or periods of history just as strongly. Many of the more developed fantasy worlds also include many nations and regions that strongly resemble actual historical cultures.

This familiarity can actually be pretty helpful in a campaign. Although unique and intricately defined

fictional cultures can be fascinating, in the interest of helping players to jump in and keep the game moving, it's perfectly okay to admit that, yes, the inhabitants of the Northern Isles of Hjorn are basically Vikings. You can always get into the details that set them apart later.

Of course, we've already covered many of the unique elements that make a fantasy setting in other tropes. The addition of magic, monsters, and absolute and tangible forces of good and evil turn a seemingly historical setting into a fantasy setting. Fantasy settings' resemblance to the real world varies; some are little more than medieval Europe with the map relabeled and the creatures and magic from folklore assumed to be true. At the opposite end of the spectrum, a fantasy world might have technology from disparate periods of Earth's history, magically powered spaceships, and anthropomorphic animals instead of humans and elves.

KEEPS AND DUNGEONS

Exploring and battling through castles, subterranean ruins, and crypts is a hallmark of fantasy, particularly when it comes to RPGs. Heroes may descend into ancient and forgotten passages, or defend the battlements of a castle against the forces of evil. Keeps, ruins, dungeons, and the like are often an important factor in quests—a MacGuffin might be located deep in an ancient catacomb—and, of course, are often home to all sorts of nasty monsters, vicious traps, and ancient treasures.

Dungeons provide an excellent location for adventures far from civilization (whether physically or thematically) and even the relatively understood dangers of nature. Dungeons are confining, even claustrophobic—characters encountering deadly monsters in the wilds may have many avenues of escape, a luxury not often found in dungeons. This provides for a harrowing adventure with unknown dangers behind every door and limited avenues for retreat or rest. In this way, dungeons are ideal for challenging characters and forcing them to rely on their own abilities and ingenuity.

DIFFERENT STYLES OF FANTASY

While the previous tropes find their way into nearly all fantasy settings, the extent to which they do so varies. One way to make a fantasy setting feel different and unique is to upend one of the familiar tropes in some way. For instance, perhaps in your setting, magic of all kinds is outlawed. Or, at the other extreme, perhaps “monsters” of all intelligent sorts commingle in cities, with individual creatures just as free to choose good or evil as any human—sure, some mummies are evil, but this one just wants to run their tavern in peace!

Aside from such twists, there are already distinct styles of fantasy largely defined by their own tropes. Narrowing in on a particular style can help you decide how to craft your own setting, and just makes it easier to communicate the setting to players. Some of the best-known and most recognizable styles of fantasy include high fantasy, sword and sorcery, low fantasy, and contemporary fantasy. Even within a particular style or genre of fantasy, there is plenty of room for different tones. Sword and sorcery, for instance, is well known for oscillating between adventure and horror.

In high, or epic, fantasy, magic is evident in the world, if not exactly common, and mighty heroes battle powerful villains and fearsome monsters. High fantasy features all the tropes we've already described. Our Runebound setting, for example, very much represents high fantasy.

The bulk of the information in this chapter addresses the high fantasy subgenre, but we'll give you a quick overview of the other subgenres we mentioned. In each overview, we'll discuss how you might tailor the information in the rest of this chapter to the subgenre being discussed.

SWORD AND SORCERY

Sword and sorcery is an enduring style originating in the pulp fiction magazines of the early to mid-twentieth century. Sword and sorcery stories heavily feature the dungeons and castles trope and familiar historical elements, even while they lack many of the fantastical elements that distinguish high fantasy. Sword and sorcery stories focus on human protagonists, and if other humanoid species do exist, they are likely rare, mysterious, and strange or downright evil. Magic, too, is rare in sword and sorcery worlds, and likely the province of evil individuals. That's not to say magic is rare in sword and sorcery *stories*, only that within the context of the fictional world, it's a remarkable presence.

Without their own access to magical power, sword and sorcery heroes tend to rely on their swordsmanship and wits to overcome challenges. We use “heroes” loosely, here—while sword and sorcery stories might feature clear depictions of evil, particularly in association with decadent sorcerers and their ilk, the protagonists are often of questionable morals. Still, when contrasted with villains who make human sacrifices to unspeakable gods in exchange for power, they look pretty heroic.

There's a strong element of action-adventure in sword and sorcery, which helps differentiate it from low fantasy, which tends to feature more mundane conflicts. From a rules perspective, it's simple to convert the material in this chapter to sword and sorcery. Don't give players access to all the new character options, and think carefully before letting them take magic skills.

LOW FANTASY

Low fantasy worlds are characterized by moral grey areas and a grittier, more authentically medieval feel. True, low fantasy may skew close to sword and sorcery in this regard, but sword and sorcery settings typically feature more of the fantasy humanoids and magic familiar to high fantasy. Whereas high fantasy stories often feature epic quests and huge stakes, low fantasy tends to focus on more personal conflicts.

Like sword and sorcery, low fantasy has no assumption that protagonists are “heroes” in any moral sense, and it’s likely the PCs are looking out for their own interests above anything else. Low fantasy also frequently focuses on political intrigue and conspiracy. Like other characters, nobility and rulers are rarely good or evil, simply selfish and power hungry. Characters in these settings tend to have more “realistic” levels of ability. If you’re running a low fantasy game, you may want to award XP at a slower rate.

CONTEMPORARY FANTASY

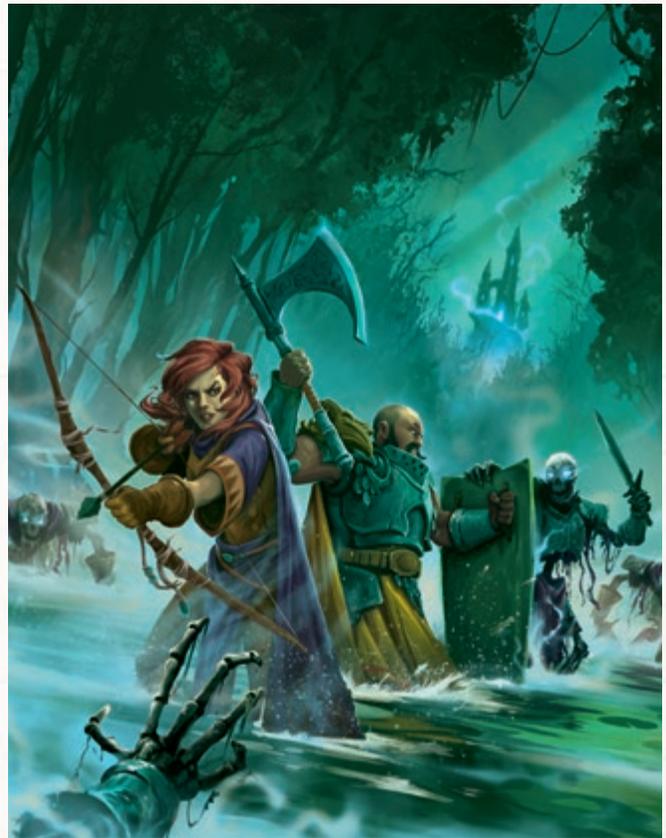
Contemporary fantasy, sometimes known as urban fantasy, is perhaps the most different of all. Rather than a medieval-like world of limited technology or a purely fictional setting, contemporary fantasy takes place on Earth as we know it today—just with magic and monsters. Running a contemporary fantasy game requires the most deviation from the material presented in this chapter, although really, that just means taking the equipment and some other setting information from the **modern day** setting, described on page 164 and mixing it up with the magic rules from page 210, along with monsters like those on page 146 and possibly the non-human fantasy species character options on page 142. Whether these fantasy peoples and magic users coexist openly with humans or dwell in a hidden realm of magic invisible to everyday folk is up to you.

EXAMPLE SETTING: RUNEBOUND

Fantasy Flight Games’ own Runebound setting is a classic example of a high fantasy world. One reason it is a good setting for a wide number of board and miniatures games, from **DESCENT** to **RUNEBOUND** to **RUNEWARS**, is because it includes many of the recognizable fantasy tropes, making it easily accessible to players. At the same time, it has a rich and deep lore that new games and expansions continually add to.

The Runebound setting is based on the world of Mennara, with most of the action set on the continent of Terrinoth. This region alone presents plenty of variety for adventures in terms of environments, cultures, and creatures. The civilized regions of the continent—and there is plenty of dangerous wilderness between—are primarily the domains of the Daqan Baronies and the Free Cities. The Aymhelin, the forested domain of the Latari Elves to the south, is a vast woodland, and the hidden city of Lithelin is a shining pinnacle of civilization hidden in the trees. Nevertheless, the forest is certainly no safe place for outsiders.

Threats of all kinds lurk in the darker places of Terrinoth, from the desolate and haunted Mistlands to the forgotten ruins scattered across the continent, some dating from before the First Darkness. To the east are the desolate and deadly plains of the Ru, but the evil of the Uthuk Y’llan has not been witnessed in centuries, and is surely nothing to worry about...



Yes, a great evil threatens Terrinoth, but the world of Runebound is not an overly dark setting. Beauty and wonder abound, and the alliances of humans, Elves, and Dwarves have vanquished evil in the past. Perhaps the defining event of Terrinoth's history was the creation of the Orb of the Sky following the First Darkness, that time when the three races united to repel and destroy the demon-tainted Uthuk Y'llan. This victory was only possible thanks to the unifying efforts of Timmorran Lokander, the greatest wizard to ever live. In creating the Orb, an object formed of pure magic, Timmorran hoped his gifts could outlive him and continue to serve the civilized peoples of Terrinoth.

Tragically, the legendary general and Timmorran's close friend Waiqar Sumarion attempted to seize the Orb for his own power. Before his death at Waiqar's hands, Timmorran shattered the Orb and ensured the thousands of resulting shards would be hidden across the land. Waiqar swore that he would gather the shards

for himself, and he was granted undeath by dark forces in order to pursue his dark aims for eternity.

The shards—the Stars of Timmorran—contain incredible power, but only a mighty wizard could hope to harness it. When the dragonlords invaded Terrinoth during the Third Darkness, they gathered as many of the Stars of Timmorran as they could, and inscribed potent runes on the stones. The resulting runebound shards, which the dragons gifted to their mortal servants, lack the raw potential of the Stars, but they exhibit narrow magic effects that nearly anyone can employ.

Although the dragons are gone, the runebound shards remain scattered across Terrinoth. From his seat of power in the Mistlands, Waiqar the Undying commands his legions of undead in an endless effort to gather the stones and command the power Timmorran denied him over a millennium ago. Still, Waiqar is but one threat, the runebound shards only one source of power, and this story only one of many.

NEW STARTING CHARACTER OPTIONS

A staple of fantasy is the presence of not-quite-human species who coexist in the world, with varying degrees of cooperation and good will. The three included here cover some basic fantasy species, and you can find information for creating your own species on page 192.

ELF

Whether tall or short, with pointy or really pointy ears, most elves are known for their grace, longevity, and connection to the natural world. This profile is based on that common conception of an elf, with high Agility (and an innate defense) but a lower wound threshold.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 9+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 10+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 90 XP
- **Special Abilities:** Elves begin with one rank in Perception. You still cannot train their Perception above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Nimble:** Elf characters have a melee and ranged defense of 1.

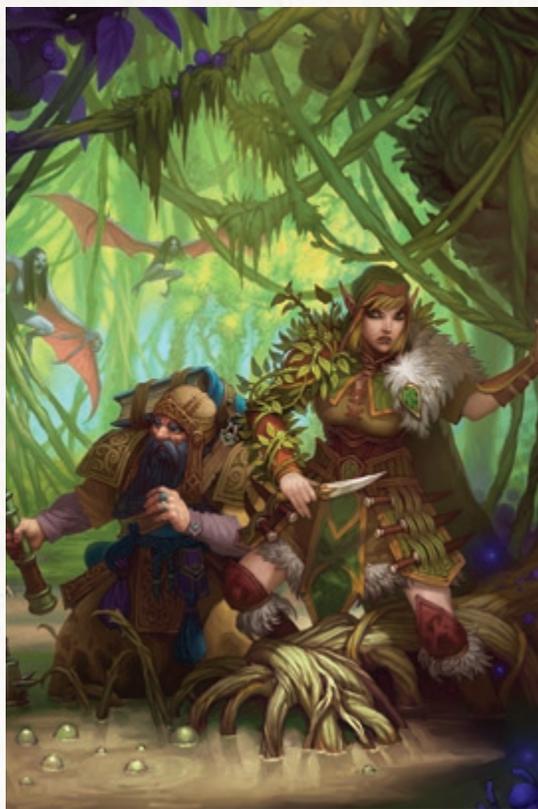
DWARF

The archetypal fantasy dwarf is tough, dour, eager to fight, and almost as eager to down inordinate quantities of ale. This profile presents just such a dwarf, with high wound and strain thresholds and, with a rank in Resilience, an ability to drink more than their share.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 11+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 10+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 90 XP
- **Special Abilities:** Dwarves begin with one rank in Resilience. You still cannot train their Resilience above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Dark Vision:** When making skill checks, dwarves remove up to ■■ imposed due to darkness.
- **Tough as Nails:** Once per session, a dwarf character may spend a Story Point as an out-of-turn incidental immediately after suffering a Critical Injury and determining the result. If they do so, they count the result rolled as "01."



ORC

In many fantasy worlds, orcs are inherently evil or violent. But PCs are known for defying expectation, and this profile could also easily represent a half-orc who lives among civilized society. Your setting may also have orcs who are not evil or violent by default, making this a reasonable character choice. As you might expect, this orc is strong and tough, but not the friendliest character.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 12+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 8+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 100 XP
- **Special Abilities:** Orcs begin with one rank in Coercion. You still cannot train their Coercion above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Battle Rage:** When making a melee attack, an orc can choose to add ■ to the check to add +2 to the damage dealt by one hit of that attack.

SETTING-SPECIFIC GEAR

In the next few pages, we present a number of weapons and items that you're likely to find in Terrinoth or any other fantasy setting. This list isn't complete, but it should serve as inspiration if you make your own gear.

To help you design your own equipment, in the description of each item, we explain a bit about why it has the profile it does, including most of its item qualities. Of course, when it comes to magical items, the options really are limitless. If you're designing your own magic item, you should consult the item creation rules on page 197. You can make it do more damage, offer more protection, and generally be better than equivalent items. However, we recommend you increase the price and rarity to compensate, and make it unique in your world. You should also give it a name!

WEAPONS

The weapons we provide here aren't a full and exhaustive list of weapons for fantasy settings, but they do cover most of the broad strokes. As you might expect, the majority of the weapons are melee weapons.

COINAGE

Treasure, and the acquisition thereof, are important parts of many fantasy stories and games. Depending on your game, the physical transportation of gold pieces or other coins might be something you prefer to ignore in order to get on with the action, but if you want the transportation of treasure to be a part of gameplay, we suggest following the standard encumbrance rules for incidental items described on page 84. You can also decide that a single gold coin has a monetary value of 10 in our generic currency system, and silver coins or their equivalent have a monetary value of 1. This means you can carry more money with less coins.

Clearly, these are solid, weighty coins. The heft is certainly satisfying after slaying or outwitting monsters to get the loot, but moving large quantities can be an issue. That's why canny adventurers look for gems, jewelry, art objects, and other treasure items worth more than their weight in gold.

TABLE II. 1—1: FANTASY WEAPONS

NAME	SKILL	DAM	CRIT	RANGE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY	SPECIAL
MELEE WEAPONS								
Axe	Melee (Light)	+3	3	Engaged	2	150	1	Vicious 1
Greataxe	Melee (Heavy)	+4	3	Engaged	4	300	4	Cumbersome 3, Pierce 2, Vicious 1
Greatsword	Melee (Heavy)	+4	2	Engaged	3	300	4	Defensive 1, Pierce 1, Unwieldy 3
Halberd	Melee (Heavy)	+3	3	Engaged	5	250	3	Defensive 1, Pierce 3
Light Spear	Melee (Light)	+2	4	Engaged	2	90	1	Accurate 1, Defensive 1
Mace	Melee (Light)	+3	4	Engaged	2	75	1	
Shield	Melee (Light)	+0	6	Engaged	2	80	1	Defensive 1, Deflection 1, Inaccurate 1, Knockdown
Sword	Melee (Light)	+3	2	Engaged	1	200	2	Defensive 1
RANGED WEAPONS								
Bow	Ranged	7	3	Medium	2	275	2	Unwieldy 2
Crossbow	Ranged	7	2	Medium	3	600	4	Pierce 2, Prepare 1
Longbow	Ranged	8	3	Long	3	450	4	Unwieldy 3

AXE, MACE, OR SWORD

Although all are equally capable of inflicting fatal blows, we've given these common weapons somewhat different profiles to reflect particular strengths of each.

Axes are vicious weapons that can leave painful, incapacitating wounds. Therefore, we gave them the Vicious 1 quality so that any Critical Injuries your character inflicts will be worse than expected. Maces are simple weapons, so they didn't get any item qualities. Instead, they are cheaper than other weapons. Designed to let the wielder block and parry blows, swords can be defensive, as well as offensive. To reflect this, swords get Defensive 1. Their sharp blades also make it easier to inflict Critical Injuries, giving them a better Critical rating.

GREATSWORD OR GREATAXE

Almost any hand weapon can be found as a great weapon, although swords and axes are the most common. As you see from their stat lines, great weapons are devastating, but require impressive physical strength to swing (the greataxe) or coordination to keep their blade in the right place (the greatsword). The greataxe and greatsword also have some of the characteristics of their smaller cousins (Defensive and Vicious, respectively).

HALBERD

A halberd is a basic infantry weapon, basically an axe blade mounted on a long pole. It requires two hands to wield and is pretty heavy, but it's cheap, it keeps an

opponent at arm's length, and the cutting head can shear through armor.

LIGHT SPEAR

Although a simple weapon, a spear is easy to wield and allows the user to keep some distance from an opponent. Hence, spears don't have very high damage, but the Accurate 1 quality represents their ease of use. In addition, the Defensive 1 quality represents their usefulness at keeping someone at arms' reach.

SHIELD

Whether crafted from wood, steel, or hide, shields are common among warriors of all cultures and skill levels for a simple reason: they keep you alive. The utility of a shield for blocking and parrying blows cannot be overstated, and thus shields are a staple of most ancient cultures.

We represented these elements of a shield by giving it the Defensive 1 and Deflection 1 qualities. It also has the Knockdown quality, since nothing beats a shield for bowling someone off their feet. However, a shield can't be used to hit someone as easily as a sword or axe, hence the Inaccurate 1 quality.

BOW AND LONGBOW

The primitive appearance of the bow and longbow belies their effectiveness. In the hands of a skilled archer, a bow can volley arrows into targets quickly and at range. Nocking an arrow and drawing a bow takes

How Much Ammunition?

You may have noticed that details aren't provided here for arrows or crossbow bolts. For most fantasy campaigns, we recommend using the standard rules for ammunition found on page 89. Your character is assumed to have adequate ammunition for the adventure and that they retrieve and reuse arrows and quarrels when possible. A \otimes spent for an Out of Ammo result could mean your character simply lost count of their arrows, wasn't able to recover as many as usual, or even spilled their quiver.

However, suddenly running out of ammunition can be anticlimactic and may not even make sense—it's pretty easy to see how many arrows you have left in a quiver, after all. As an optional rule, when a PC receives an Out of Ammo result, you may allow the player to spend \wedge to have only a single arrow or bolt left after the current attack, and therefore have one more opportunity to shoot. Better make it count!

Of course, you can keep track of individual arrows, bolts, or other applicable pieces of ammunition if you prefer. If you do this, every five arrows or quarrels should cost 1 currency.

virtually no time for a trained user, so we don't think bows need Prepare or any other qualities to reflect that. However, bows do require a certain innate skill and coordination to use, hence the Unwieldy quality.

CROSSBOW

Crossbows can never match the effectiveness of a well-crafted bow in the hands of a talented archer, but they are simple to use and powerful. The strength of a crossbow's mechanism is represented by the Pierce quality. The downside of a crossbow is the additional time it takes to ready it for firing versus simply nocking an arrow, hence the Prepare quality.

TABLE II.1–2: FANTASY ARMOR

TYPE	DEFENSE	SOAK	ENCUMBRANCE	PRICE	RARITY
Chainmail	0	+2	3	550	4
Heavy Robes	1	+0	1	45	0
Leather	0	+1	2	50	3
Magic Plate	2	+2	3	2,400	8
Plate Armor	1	+2	4	1,250	6

ARMOR

Fantasy armor runs the gamut from boiled leather sewn into a mildly protective jerkin or vest to plates of steel and iron.

CHAINMAIL

Chainmail is good at absorbing a hit and dispersing the force over a broader area. We've represented such armor with a solid soak value, but no defense.

Mail armor is somewhat noisy, so your character adds \blacksquare to Stealth checks they make while wearing it.

HEAVY ROBES

Swirling robes in the midst of combat can entangle an attacker's weapon and make it hard for an attacker to pinpoint your vital areas. To represent this, robes don't provide any soak but do add defense.

LEATHER ARMOR

Leather armor, whether soft or boiled and hardened, might absorb some of the impact from a blow, but it won't turn a blade entirely. That's why we've given it a low soak value, but no defense.

PLATE ARMOR

Plate armor absorbs a considerable amount of damage, and the angled plates can turn aside blows entirely. Hence, the armor both has a high soak value and provides some defense.

Plate armor is heavy and very noisy. Your character adds \blacksquare \blacksquare to Stealth checks they make while wearing it.

MAGIC PLATE

The addition of shielding enchantments worked directly into a suit of plate armor provides a supernatural level of protection, hence the high defense and soak. It also is lighter and less restrictive than other types of armor, so it has none of regular plate's penalties.

GEAR

Included here are a few of the more notable items that people may encounter in a lot of iconic fantasy settings.

BACKPACK OF HOLDING

A backpack of holding is a deceptively normal-looking leather backpack whose interior is substantially larger than its exterior. How this is possible is a secret known only to the most learned wizards. It is, obviously, magical.

A backpack of holding can carry items of up to 12 encumbrance total. The backpack is always encumbrance 2, regardless of how much it's holding.

FINE CLOAK

A fine silk or embroidered wool cloak not only protects the wearer from the elements, it also elevates their stature in the eyes of others.

When wearing a fine cloak, your character removes ■ from any Charm, Deception, or Leadership checks they make. When worn, a fine cloak's encumbrance is 0.

HERBS OF HEALING

Herbs or poultices with ill-defined but powerful healing effects are a staple of many settings. These are often slightly magical in nature.

When making a Medicine check, your character may use herbs of healing to add automatic ✨ ⚡ to the results. Herbs of healing are consumed when used.

THIEVES' TOOLS

This is a collection of lockpicks, files, wires, and oil contained in a small leather pouch, used for quietly opening locks. Needless to say, adventurers find these useful.

TABLE II.1—3: FANTASY GEAR

TYPE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY
Backpack of Holding	2	600	8
Fine Cloak	1	90	4
Herbs of Healing	0	50	6
Thieves' Tools	1	75	5
Torch	1	1	0
Winter Clothing	4	100	3

Thieves' tools allow your character to attempt to open any mechanical locks or latches, even complicated ones. In addition, when making a Skulduggery check to open a lock or latch, your character adds automatic ⚡ to the results.

TORCH

Torches are wooden sticks with oil-soaked cloths wrapped around one end. When lit, they burn for a long time and help illuminate your surroundings.

A lit torch provides light and removes ■ added to checks due to darkness. (If it becomes important to determine how far the light reaches, a torch can provide light out to short range.)

WINTER CLOTHING

Made of thick wool and furs, winter clothing consists of heavy coats, leggings, sturdy boots, and thick cloaks, keeping adventurers warm in the coldest environments.

When wearing winter clothing, your character removes ■ ■ from any Survival or Resilience checks they make due to cold weather. When worn, winter clothing's encumbrance is 1.

SETTING-SPECIFIC ADVERSARIES

We've included a few classic fantasy monsters to pit against the PCs in your campaign. This is only a starting point, of course, and you are sure to want to invent additional creatures for your game. Human adversaries from other settings can easily be included by simply changing their equipment and ignoring any skills or talents that don't apply.

We used creatures and adversaries that you'd find in the Runebound setting. However, we deliberately chose

adversaries like skeletons and giant spiders that have variants that are found in most fantasy settings.

SKELETON (MINION)

In Runebound, most animated skeletons serve in the undead legions of Waiqar the Undying. However, a few lurk in ancient tombs and battlefields across Terrinoth, their bones given a profane semblance of life as magic seeps into these dark and evil places.



Skills (group only): Melee (Light), Perception, Ranged, Vigilance.

Talents: None.

Abilities: None.

Equipment: Rusty blade (Melee [Light]; Damage 5; Critical 4; Range [Engaged]), old bow (Ranged; Damage 6; Critical 3; Range [Medium]).

BEASTMAN (MINION)

Beastmen are awful hybrids of human and animal. Although their particular features vary, most resemble predatory mammals, with thick fur, long claws, and big fangs. There are countless legends about the origins of beastmen, many attributing their inception to a curse for angering the gods. All are ferociously violent and almost impossible to communicate with.



Skills (group only): Brawl, Perception, Vigilance.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Bestial Rage (a beastman or beastman minion group that has taken damage reduces the Critical rating of its attacks to 1.)

Equipment: Fangs and claws (Brawl; Damage 6; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]).

RAZORWING (RIVAL)

Although these large, vaguely humanoid, bat-like creatures will eat almost anything, they really prefer the meat of humans and other intelligent races. With some alterations, you can use this profile for other winged monsters, such as harpies and griffons.



Skills: Brawl 2, Coordination 2, Perception 2, Vigilance 3.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Flyer (can fly; see page 100), Swoop Attack (after making a Brawl combat check, can move from engaged to short range of the target as an incidental).

Equipment: Fangs (Brawl; Damage 6; Critical 3; Range

[Engaged]), buffeting wings (Brawl; Damage 4; Critical 4; Range [Engaged]; Disorient 3, Stun 3).

BANE SPIDER (RIVAL)

Giant spiders are a mainstay of the fantasy genre. As horrifying as any huge arachnid, bane spiders have the added ability to spit globs of acidic venom. This venom, which bane spiders can also inject with their fangs, conveniently allows them to start digesting their prey before even closing to striking range.

Most bane spiders are roving hunters, but you might prefer one that shoots bundles of sticky webbing instead of (or in addition to) venom.



Skills: Brawl 2, Cool 2, Coordination 2, Ranged 1, Stealth 2, Vigilance 3.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Skitter (can move across walls, ceilings, and giant spider webs without penalty).

Equipment: Venomous fangs (Brawl; Damage 5; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]; Burn 2, Pierce 3), acid spit (Ranged; Damage 4; Critical 4; Range [Short]; Burn 2, Pierce 3) or webbing (Ranged; Damage 1; Critical 6; Range [Short]; Ensnare 3).

OGRE (NEMESIS)

These huge brutes lair in ancient ruins and caves, eating whatever poor creatures they can get their massive hands on. We've included the ogre as a powerful monster able to challenge even experienced characters on its own. However, if you're looking to make the ogre less challenging, remove Regeneration from its abilities.



Skills: Athletics 2, Melee (Heavy) 2, Perception 1, Ranged 2.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Regeneration (at the beginning of its turn, this creature automatically heals 3 wounds), Sweep Attack (may spend ⚔ on a successful melee combat check to inflict one hit dealing the weapon's base damage on everyone [except the ogre!] engaged with the target).

Equipment: Cudgel (Melee; Damage 10; Critical 4; Range [Engaged], Disorient 2, Knockdown), spiked chain (Ranged; Damage 7; Critical 5; Range [Short]; Ensnare 2, Knockdown), scavenged armor (+2 soak).

CHAPTER 2: STEAMPUNK

Although the term steampunk originated in the 1980s, the foundations of the genre go back much further. As is often the case when it comes to defining and categorizing fiction and its genres, opinions differ. But a strong argument can be made that the origins of steampunk lie in what are more commonly considered

the earliest science fiction stories, period. The fantastic science and contraptions shown in the works of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Mary Shelley are based in the technology of the 1800s but go far beyond what was actually possible at the time. This advance beyond historical realism is the core of steampunk.

TROPES

Steampunk means different things to different people. At its most basic, steampunk is putting a gear on a stovepipe hat. And in many ways, that's a good representation of the genre. In steampunk, familiar, old-time items, characters, and concepts get an anachronistic, industrial technology twist. Steampunk can encompass an aesthetic, a technology, a quasi-historical culture, and more. Steampunk

settings range from nineteenth-century England with elements of fictitious technology to alternate presents and futures dominated by advanced retrofuturistic technology alongside delightfully antiquated customs.

Steampunk is a broad genre, with plenty of room for variation and adaptation. Some steampunk settings feature elements of other genres, commonly fantasy or sci-fi. It's easy to customize your steampunk campaign by taking elements from the other settings presented in this book and adding your own rules where you like. For instance, if your steampunk world features clockwork technology alongside magic and mythical monsters, use the appropriate rules and character creation options from the **fantasy** setting, on page 138.

Setting aside such hybrid settings, here are some of the tropes we feel define steampunk in any time or place.

IMPROBABLE TECHNOLOGY

Certainly, the most vital trope of any steampunk setting is its technology. This, of course, primarily consists of steam-powered contraptions of all kinds; take away this focus on steam power, and you are simply no longer talking about steampunk. However, steampunk also frequently features impossibly sophisticated clockwork machines and outlandish experimentations in electricity—usually of the mad science variety. You might find clockwork robots, flying cars propelled by steam engines, and Tesla coils run amok.

Steampunk technology can do nearly anything modern technology can, and may even go further—or at least take it in a different direction. Technologies that failed or ran their course in reality might flourish, from dirigibles and ornithopters to difference engines and cogwork computers. The setting may be one with technologies



WHAT'S MY INSPIRATION?

There are three primary operative forces behind the technology in most steampunk settings: steam power, clockwork, and electricity. As in reality, these need not be overly distinct, and many devices could use more than one motive force. Steam turbines can generate electricity, an experimental battery might supply the initial jolt to a complex array of clockwork mechanisms, and so on.

When it comes to steampunk technology, there is little that's off the table. You don't need to know exactly how a machine operates, or if it's even possible. It is, however, generally a good idea to think about the primary motive force for a device and the end result, even if you have no idea of the interim steps. Your players should know that the flying machine they are embarking upon is steam

powered, and that its insect-like wings keep it aloft, but there's no need to get into the details of how that all works. If you consider steampunk a subgenre of science fiction, it definitely veers toward the softer side. (See page 170 for more on this distinction.)

It's typically more important that a technology "feel" right. This is a matter of taste and discretion, but it generally means keeping things from getting too close to the modern day real world. For instance, an electrically powered computer doesn't seem very steampunk, while a steam-powered difference engine is right at home. Likewise, electricity running to every home feels too modern and mundane, even though much more advanced applications, such as directed energy weapons, are perfectly appropriate.

that are simply ahead of their time compared to those of the real-life 1800s, an alternate present in which internal combustion engines never replaced steam power, or an entirely fictitious world where steam engines have reigned supreme for centuries.

Steam-powered machines may be clanking, hissing experiments liable to explode at the slightest provocation or reliable technologies that have functioned for years, and both extremes often exist alongside each other. It's an age of invention, regardless of what age (or universe) it happens to be! Generally, steampunk technologies are bigger, louder, and smokier than their modern digital equivalents, replete with gears, pipes, smokestacks, and brass tubing, but this isn't always the case. You might also have tiny mechanical insects operated by the most delicate clockwork mechanisms, or other such miniature marvels.

VICTORIAN AESTHETIC (AND THEN SOME)

Hand in hand with improbable technology, a Victorian, or at least pseudo-Victorian, aesthetic marks out most steampunk works. Steampunk stories often take place in a fictionalized version of London or some other part of the British Empire during the nineteenth century (or perhaps a twentieth century dominated by steam power), but even those set in a different world entirely tend to feature a heavy, even embellished sense of Victorian style. This includes not only matters of dress and architecture, but decorum as well. Even should their adventures take them far from the heart of civilization, steampunk heroes are quite often high-society types with the freedom and resources to pursue a life of adventure.

It's worth noting that the social problems and exploitation of the 1800s may or may not be visible in steampunk. Some lighter steampunk adventures gloss over such issues, but darker tales might place a lot of emphasis on exploited workers and poverty, with heroes fighting to be more than just cogs in a machine (and putting the "punk" back in "steampunk").

However, steampunk stories and games don't have to closely resemble Victorian England. They might be set in the American Old West, with gunslingers, desperadoes, and railroad tycoons using (or working against) fantastical steam-powered machines well beyond the locomotives of history. However, even if your game takes place somewhere else on the globe or in a different world entirely, it's a good idea to still include some of the more recognizable fashions and mannerisms of Victorian British culture, since idealized or exaggerated versions of these are a major component of steampunk in the eyes of many.

INDUSTRY AND AUTOMATION

Steampunk takes all the promise of the Industrial Revolution and ensuing innovation and runs with it. In part, this is simply the catalyst for improbable technology (as we already discussed), but it's much more than that. Particularly significant advances in technology lead (both in reality and conceivably in most imaginary worlds) to all sorts of drastic social changes, and the more advanced the steampunk tech gets, the more potential there is for upheaval. Class distinctions and the way technology affects them could be a major element of a steampunk

story or could fade into the background, and the same holds true for an RPG campaign.

Workers displaced by automated factories and other machines might take up adventuring, set out for the frontier, or turn to piracy to support themselves and their families. These same technological advances that reduce the need for human staff might also allow enterprising businesspeople to threaten the power of the traditional aristocracy. And all this is only dealing with realistic steam technology. Fleets of steam-powered airships could radically alter the way wars are fought, while coaches carried aloft by balloons might make flying cars a reality before (or instead of) automobiles. While steampunk is typically anchored in Victorian society, playing with the “what-ifs” of sophisticated steam technology can open up great possibilities for an exciting and unique campaign.

THROUGH A GLASS, FOGGY

Steampunk has been described as retrofuturism, and this holds true to an extent whether your steampunk game is set in an alternate past, an alternate present, or an alternate future. Heavily informed by popular conceptions of Victorian England and by definition heavily informed by the steam-powered technologies of the nineteenth century, steampunk pushes that technology

forward, but along a much different path than taken in reality. The result is a world like Earth in the 1800s, but different, and possibly nearly unrecognizable except on certain fundamental details.

In a way, this trope highlights all the previous ones we’ve discussed. Steampunk fashion is like Victorian England’s...but not; it’s a thing all its own, with symbols of machinery (cogs, pipes, who-knows-what) embedded directly into clothing and accoutrements. Steampunk technology is like that of the 1800s, except it does things that are quite probably impossible for such power sources and materials. Society likewise resembles an outdated era, but with exaggerated versions of the things that interest us about that time, the exclusion of the more troubling parts, and the addition of whatever else just makes the setting feel right.

Steampunk can be the future viewed through the eyes of the past. Or it can be the past seen through a contemporary lens. You might put yourself in the shoes of someone living in the nineteenth century and imagine what the future might hold based on recent advances (looking at Victorian writers’ and inventors’ ideas that never worked in reality can be a good place to start), or you might take modern technology and work back, adapting it for a steam basis. Either way, steampunk is about keeping one eye on the past and one on possibility.

EXAMPLE SETTING: SOVEREIGNS OF STEAM

The sun never sets on the Heliotrope Sovereignty, the vast empire stretching from the heart of long-civilized Margosa to the sands of Tortogos in the North and the ice wastes of the South. After a century of exploration, expansion, and conquest, the other nations on the continent have been brought to heel through diplomatic maneuverings, complex marriage arrangements, and the mighty airships of the Royal Navy. No suitable rival exists to challenge the majesty of Queen Vertiline and the House of Heliotropa.

Long the dynastic seat of the Heliotropans, the city of Steelhearthe has grown into a sprawling metropolis capable of administrating a continent-wide empire. Towering brick-and-iron buildings run for miles along the banks of the mighty Airis River, and sprawling factories stain the waters and fill the air with the brown smoke of burning coal. Each factory is surrounded by a belt of tenements full of the workers who keep the boilers lit and assembly lines running. The air of Steelhearthe is

so fouled by industry that the Queen employs a small army of laborers to constantly clean and polish the crystalline walls of the towering Azurite Palace.

Here, within the indigo walls of the palace and the various manors and estates that ring the city, exist the rarefied heights of continental culture. Everyone, even foreign dignitaries and nobles, travels to Steelhearthe in the fall, when the southern winds blow away the worst of the smog. For months, they mingle, gossip, and scheme, striving to improve their stations and the fortunes of their families. Most young debutantes and beaux dream of marrying into the vast Heliotropan Dynasty. Not only does this offer wealth and prestige, but it also guarantees a job in the sprawling Imperial bureaucracy. (For this reason, the dynasty often arranges marriages based on ability, intellect, and drive.)

Outside the halls of power, the lower classes toil in Steelhearthe’s factories or struggle for survival in its dark alleys and soot-stained tenements. The best that

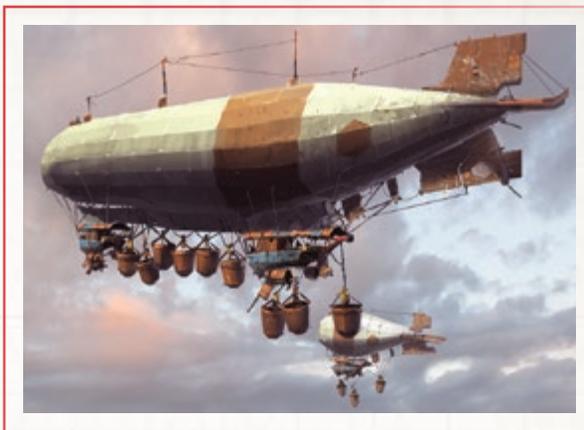
most of Steelhearthe population can hope for is a meager salary to pay for cheap bourbon and exorbitant rents. Revolutionary fervor flourishes in this climate. Even with the constant presence of the Royal Army and Imperial Inspectors, dozens of radicals plot to overthrow the Sovereignty from within.

A vast spiderweb of rail lines stretches out from Steelhearthe and links all of Margosa. The fruits of the Heliotrope Sovereignty's industries flow along these lines to every corner of the continent, ensuring the Empire's economic dominion. Many of the smaller countries grumble quietly that the railroad—along with the recently completed telegraph network—ensures military domination as well. Few wars or uprisings last long when the Queen's countless regiments of fusiliers and hussars are only days away by rail.

Those who chafe under Imperial hegemony look to the Tyrenia Colonies as the last refuge for freedom and independence. For centuries, the scalding waters of the Boiling Sea blocked all attempts at exploring the unknown West. However, during the great Age of Expansions, the invention of the rigid airship allowed Agatha Scarborough and her crew to breach the steam clouds. On the far side of the Boiling Sea, they found a boundless expanse of islands and archipelagoes—uninhabited, pristine, and full of valuable natural resources.

Scarborough's discovery set off a furious land rush. Though the Sovereignty claims nearly all of the Tyrenia Colonies in name, enforcing this edict proves difficult in practice. Tyrenia has become a haven of entrepreneurs, inventors, criminals, and revolutionaries. Anyone who loathes the stifling class restrictions of Steelhearthe and wants to build a new life for themselves need merely find an uninhabited island and set up shop. Plenty of colonies have been founded on the ideals of liberty, socialism, and equality for all, and their inhabitants stand ready to defend those ideals to the death.

Of course, not all of those founding motives are so pure. Some of the sandy coves and green canopies of the farthest islands hide refuges of depravity and dark science. More than one former member of the Royal Society has fled to the Colonies after being expelled for unspeakable experiments. Alchemical elixirs able to transform humans into ravening beasts have begun making their way back across the Boiling Sea in recent years, causing chaos and mayhem on the streets of Margosa's cities. Even darker rumors have sprung up concerning long-lost family and friends shambling into a colonial town in some ghastly parody of unlife. Imperial Inspectors roam the Colonies searching for these mad scientists, and also to quash the stories claiming



that a few aristocratic families have paid handsomely to resurrect a dear child or loved one. Some even claim that the Royal Society has established its own clandestine laboratory where it works to design a new clockwork soldier so it can fill the Queen's armies with metal automatons. More than one revolutionary group would pay dearly to find out if this is true.

The new charter corporations complicate matters further. Founded by royal decree, these organizations nevertheless have few aristocratic ties. The mercantile classes control the charter corporations, giving new luster to names like Sirius, Ward, Beryl, and Danburite in Steelhearthe's halls of power. These merchant families see great opportunities in exploiting the Colonies for their own profit. Already, Ward-Danburite colliers bring back tons of fuel to Steelhearthe's furnaces, and if you travel to the Colonies, you likely do it aboard a West Sirius airship.

Even those Colonies run by the Queen's agents or proper members of aristocratic households cannot be counted on for loyalty. Victor Caine—governor of Deckland, the largest and most “civilized” colony—may fly the Imperial flag over his estate. However, he happily takes money to let the Beryl family run its quartz mines how it pleases, and he dispatches Royal Hussars of his Argent Guard to break strikes at the galvanite refineries. On the other hand, Coveward Colony and the wayward Heliotropan scion Mackenzie Heliotrope-Augustus don't even pretend loyalty to the crown, and they have shot down at least one Navy airship to prove it.

These issues, plus the airship pirates, lost and abandoned colonies, secret military expeditions from rival nations, and the occasional armed rebellion, make the Colonies a patchwork web of conflicting interests. All too often, these conflicts boil over into raids, plots, and outright war.

NEW STARTING CHARACTER OPTIONS

Characters in most steampunk settings are simple humans, as detailed on page 36. However, we could imagine that a setting like *Sovereigns of Steam* has a few non-human characters as well.

MONGREL

The so-called mongrels are products of science run amok. In *Sovereigns of Steam* these poor creations were once human, but they had the misfortune of becoming the experimental fodder of some mad reject from the Royal Society. This depraved scientist used them to test a certain alchemical elixir that unlocks their inner bestial nature, turning them into a monstrous hybrid of human and animal. After a time, the elixir can wear off, returning these poor individuals to their human form. However, the dark secret is that once the elixir enters the blood, it works irrevocable changes on the imbiber's biology. Thus, the change can return at any time.

In our setting, unscrupulous smugglers have been returning this elixir to major cities for various reasons. So, while your character could have been the unfortunate results of a forbidden experiment, they also could have been exposed to the elixir in their daily life. Of course, once they drank it, their life changed forever!

Needless to say, so-called mongrels are shunned in all levels of society, and they are actively hunted by various agencies of the Empire. Many flee to the Colonies to escape persecution and arrest.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 10+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 8+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 100 XP
- **Special Abilities:** Mongrels begin with one rank in Discipline. You still can't train their Discipline above rank 2 during character creation.
- **The Beast Within:** Mongrels generally look just like any other human. However, when your character is incapacitated due to exceeding their strain threshold while in human form, they undergo the following change as an out-of-turn incidental. They heal all strain; increase their Brawn and Agility by one, to a maximum of 5; and reduce their Intellect and

Willpower by one to a minimum of 1. They deal +1 damage when making unarmed attacks, and their unarmed attacks have a Crit rating of 3. In addition, their jaws elongate into muzzles, their hair thickens and they grow more all over their bodies, and their eyes become those of a hunting cat or wolf. Your GM should ensure that NPCs react appropriately to this (at the very least, upgrading the difficulty of all social skill checks twice). Your character reverts to human form after eight hours, or if they are incapacitated (by exceeding either their wound threshold or their strain threshold).

- **The Human Spirit:** Once per session, your character may make a **Hard** (◆◆◆) **Discipline check** as an out-of-turn incidental. If they succeed, they may either trigger *The Beast Within* or avoid triggering it when they exceed their strain threshold.

REVENANT

Revenants are human corpses brought back to a semblance of life through strange and horrible medical techniques, a galvanic volt providing the final spark to induce animation. Like mongrels, this is a very popular type of character for steampunk settings.

A revenant may be created at the behest of a wealthy grieving family willing to pay anything to bring back a loved one. Alternatively, revenants may be created by mad galvanists seeking to unlock the secrets of eternal life. In either case, revenants have no memory of their former lives, even should they retain their original brain. Most who would pay to resurrect a loved one have no idea of this sad fact until the deed is done. Still, there are rumors of the occasional revenant eventually recovering piecemeal memories of their former life.

Revenants are universally feared and reviled in regular society. A revenant who cannot pass as a normal human is likely to earn a bullet from the Imperial Inspectors, so most stay in the underworld or, like mongrels, flee to the Colonies to start a new life.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 11+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 9+Willpower

- **Starting Experience:** 100 XP
- **Special Abilities:** Revenants begin with one rank in Coercion. You still can't train their Coercion above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Reanimated:** As reanimated corpses, revenants have several quirks, some beneficial and some detrimental. Your character does not recover wounds through natural rest, but they add ■ ■ to any Medicine checks to heal them (they don't flinch). Your character also cannot be affected by poisons (although they

must be wary of insects and carrion feeders trying to make a meal from or to nest on their bodies). As with mongrels, your GM should ensure that NPCs react appropriately if they are aware of your character's condition (at the very least, upgrading the difficulty of your character's social skill checks twice). Also, perfume is a good idea. Lots of perfume.

- **Dead Nerves:** Your character removes ■ ■ added to any checks they make due to fatigue or injuries (including Critical Injuries).

SETTING-SPECIFIC GEAR

Steampunk is really only steampunk with the right technology. And that means fantastical steam-powered contraptions, mad science, and lots of cogs and pipes. In this section,



we present a small sampling of the items you might encounter in Sovereigns of Steam or in nearly any steampunk setting. This should get you started, but when it comes to steampunk technology, there are few limits.

WEAPONS

In addition to the wilder weapons we present here, most modern and fantasy weapons also fit into the **steampunk** setting. You may just need to make some slight modifications in their description.

SPRING-FIST

A spring-fist is essentially a clockwork pair of brass knuckles. At one end is a glove reinforced with metal banding. The rest of the spring-fist is a series of coil-springs connected to a sturdy framework that runs the length of your character's arm. When activated, it lets your character strike with bone-breaking force. However, the springs require time to retighten after each use, hence the Slow-Firing item quality.

The Slow-Firing quality does not stop your character from making unarmed attacks in the intervening rounds, but they do not benefit from the spring-fist's profile while doing so.

ROTORSWORD

This heavy "sword" features a rotating, bladed chain that runs most of the length of the weapon. It is little more than a steam-powered chainsaw held like a two-handed sword. Although a rotorsword is extremely deadly, the impracticality of having to fuel it before battle has prevented it from becoming a mainstay of fighting forces. Additionally, bringing it to a gunfight is still risky.

TABLE II.2–1: STEAMPUNK WEAPONS

NAME	SKILL	DAM	CRIT	RANGE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY	SPECIAL
BRAWL WEAPONS								
Spring-Fist	Brawl	+4	4	Engaged	2	525	5	Concussive 1, Slow-Firing 2
MELEE WEAPONS								
Rotorsword	Melee	+3	2	Engaged	5	400	7	Cumbersome 3, Inaccurate 1, Pierce 2, Sunder, Vicious 2
Sword Cane	Melee	+1	2	Engaged	1	110	3	Defensive 1
RANGED WEAPONS								
Auto-Rotary Gun	Ranged (Heavy)	11	3	Long	7	1,100	6	Auto-fire, Cumbersome 4, Prepare 1
Clockwork Grenade	Ranged (Light)	8	3	Short	1	50	6	Blast 5, Burn 1, Limited Ammo 1
Death Ray	Ranged (Heavy)	12	1	Short	5	4,500	10	Breach 2, Inaccurate 2, Slow-Firing 1, Vicious 5
Hand Cannon	Ranged (Light)	9	3	Medium	3	400	5	Knockdown, Limited Ammo 1, Prepare 1
Repeating Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	8	3	Long	4	500	4	
Rotor Pistol	Ranged (Light)	5	4	Short	2	280	7	Auto-fire, Limited Ammo 1

We've given this grisly weapon the Vicious, Sunder, and Pierce qualities to represent the horrible damage its heavy rotating blade inflicts. To represent the weight and impracticality of the weapon, we've added Inaccurate and Cumbersome.

Rotorswords require two hands to wield (and use the Melee (Heavy) skill if in settings that include that skill).

SWORD CANE

A sword cane fits this setting quite well: a deadly weapon concealed in aristocratic accessories. The blade remains hidden in the cane, while the hilt is disguised as the cane's top. The sword cane has the Defensive quality (as do most swords), and it has a special rule to reflect how easy it is to hide.

Those searching a character add ■ to any Perception checks they make to find the sword inside the cane.

AUTO-ROTARY GUN

This is a multi-barrel machine gun, like a real-world Gatling or Maxim gun. However, rather than achieving its high rate of fire through hand cranking or recoil operation, the steampunk auto-rotary gun is driven by a steam engine. This results in a rather large and heavy weapon that consumes a voracious amount of ammunition and coal (which take some time to arrange before firing, represented by the Prepare quality). For obvious reasons, this weapon has the Auto-fire and Cumbersome qualities.

CLOCKWORK GRENADE

Our steampunk take on the common hand grenade is a bulky canister containing a simple boiler heated by combining two chemicals. When the user vigorously cranks the device, the chemicals combine, generating ferocious heat. This builds a massive amount of steam pressure, giving the user a few moments to throw the grenade before the canister fragments. The explosive pressure flings the metal shards in all directions at high velocity, and splatter from the chemicals may burn the targets as well (represented by the Burn quality).

Because the whole device is horribly unstable, if the user generates ☼ on the check, the device blows up in their hand, and they suffer an automatic hit dealing the weapon's base damage.

DEATH RAY

Death rays are guns that fire a beam of energy with (as you might have guessed) deadly results. Each death ray is unique, the product of a deranged inventor or brain-fried galvanist. The exact nature of the energy beam and its creation vary depending on the inventor. More than one inventor has claimed to have created their death ray for peaceful purposes, and that the existence of such a weapon will mean an end to war. Of course, it's actually only resulted in a death-ray arms race.

Our death ray fires a beam of electricity, radiated ions, charged aether, or what-have-you in an erratic path, like that of a lightning bolt. This is why we've given it short

range and the Inaccurate quality. In addition, it must recharge between shots, represented by Slow-Firing. It's still exceedingly deadly, of course. Having a Critical rating of 1 means that this thing could be very dangerous when used against player characters, so if you're a GM, think long and hard before you give this to an NPC!

HAND CANNON

A hand cannon is quite literally a breech-loading, large-bore pistol that operates much like its larger kin. The weapon is typically used for big-game hunting, and its effects on a human target are predictably devastating. The term is also sometimes applied to oversized revolvers with similar stopping power. While hand cannons of all makes generally take the form of a large pistol, the recoil is such that all but the largest and strongest individuals are advised to place both hands firmly on the grip before pulling the trigger.

Someone firing a hand cannon probably has to brace themselves to deal with the significant recoil, which we've represented with the Prepare quality. It has to reload, so characters only get one shot (but that's usually enough).

REPEATING RIFLE

This profile covers any rifle that holds multiple cartridges. It could be bolt or lever action, and fed by an internal or external magazine, but these subtle differences don't affect the profile. It can't fire quickly enough to warrant the Auto-fire quality. However, you might describe an attack that deals significant damage or a Critical Injury as multiple bullets striking the target.

ROTOR PISTOL

Something like the Gatling gun of the nineteenth century, a rotor pistol consists of a number of barrels that rotate rapidly in order to achieve a high rate of fire. Unlike a Gatling gun, though, a rotor pistol isn't hand cranked; it is fired with a pull of the trigger. This is achieved by means of a quartz-galvanite battery that unleashes a single strong pulse of electricity that sends the gun's mechanisms into motion. After firing, you have to not only completely reload the internal magazine of the pistol, but also replace the battery.

The Limited Ammo quality doesn't mean a rotor pistol only holds one bullet, of course, but that a single burst of fire consumes all its ammunition.

ARMOR

Armor in a steampunk setting can be a strange mix of the archaic and the weirdly advanced. You already have the profile for heavy clothing (see **Heavy Jacket**, page 93), and most steampunk settings can use the concealing robes, leather armor, and chainmail from the **fantasy** setting (page 138). Here, we decided to focus on some of the more exotic types of steampunk armor.

ADMIRAL ARTHUR'S ASTOUNDING AMPLIMOTIVE ARMOR

This is a large, heavy suit of armor. The thick metal plating completely covers the wearer, although the helmet may be easily removable or have a hinged faceplate. This armor provides the best protection possible short of an actual tank, but it is far too heavy for anyone to support. That's where Admiral Arthur Schilling's patented steam-powered amplimotive architecture comes in. By way of a complex system of gears and hydraulics, the armor responds to and enhances each movement by the wearer.

A character wearing this armor increases both their silhouette and Brawn by one. (This does increase your character's soak accordingly.)

COGSUIT

A cogsuit is a suit of makeshift armor assembled from scavenged armor plates and machine parts (which sometimes include cogs). Such armor is common among pirates and other riffraff. However, these days the name is also often used for specially made armor worn by adventurers and agents of the Imperial Crown. Units in the military use a variant of the cogsuit that provides equivalent protection but looks much more professional.

INSULATED GARB

This covers any sort of outfit designed to protect the wearer from hostile environments. It may incorporate cotton, rubber, asbestos, lead, or pretty much anything that does, or might, protect against a particular hazard.

TABLE II.2—2: STEAMPUNK ARMOR

TYPE	DEFENSE	SOAK	ENCUMBRANCE	PRICE	RARITY
Amplimotive Armor	1	+2	3	1,250	9
Cogsuit	1	+1	3	275	3
Insulated Garb	0	+1	3	175	2

In addition to its soak, insulated garb provides ■■ to any Resilience checks made to resist environmental extremes appropriate to the garb. If you need insulated garb, an air mask (below) is probably also a good call.

GEAR

Gear in a steampunk setting often is some bizarre version of items we use every day. So, feel free to give your characters a pair of binoculars, for example, but perhaps describe them as goggles with dozens of lenses that fit over their head and give them a bug-eyed appearance.

AIR MASK

An air mask, sometimes called a breath mask or gas mask, filters the air for its wearer. Sophisticated and expensive models might instead include an air supply, likely in the form of a backpack or hip canister.

An air mask allows a user to avoid being poisoned by airborne toxins and to operate in corrosive atmospheres without penalty. The more expensive version with a built-in air supply allows the user to operate underwater for one hour without penalty.

AEROPACK OR AEROSUIT

This is any sort of personal flight device. Such items vary greatly in operation and appearance, and most are unique inventions. An aeropack might feature a steam rocket, a propeller, or flapping wings of clockwork and canvas.

A character wearing an aeropack can fly (see page 100). However, flying doesn't come naturally to humans, and your GM might call for a Piloting check in dangerous or unusual circumstances. In addition, none of these devices are incredibly reliable, so a ✖ result means it runs out of power at the end of your character's turn and remains unpowered for the rest of the session. (It also means that if your character doesn't make it to solid ground by that point, they're in for a fall!)

DR. WILSON'S INCOMPARABLE MIRACLE TONIC

This curious elixir is, despite its name, only one of countless such cure-alls available for purchase (also, it was not developed by a real doctor). As with most such products, both the ingredients and the effect of the tonic are vague, but it indeed fulfills its promise to soothe pain and enhance the user's vigor and alertness.

A character who uses a maneuver to drink the tonic increases their wound threshold and strain threshold by five until the end of the current encounter, but must succeed at an **Average** (◆◆) **Resilience check** as an

incidental or suffer 5 strain—an unfortunate side effect of the quicksilver included in the tincture. If your character is already benefiting from the use of the tonic, additional uses have no further effect. Furthermore, once the effects wear off, if your character's wounds or strain now exceed their threshold, they're immediately incapacitated and suffer all related effects.

HOODED LANTERN

A simple but ingenious modification of the common lantern, the hooded lantern uses a metal hood and glass lens to focus the lantern's light, making the beam travel farther and also making the light harder to spot when it's not directed squarely at an observer.

A lit hooded lantern provides light and removes ■ added to checks due to darkness. (If it becomes important to determine how far the light reaches, a focused hooded lantern's light can reach out to medium range.) In addition, your character can use a hooded lantern and not automatically be spotted at night or in the dark (although they still need to add ■ to any Stealth checks they make, because the light still makes it easier to be noticed).

VAN RYN'S POTION OF PARALYZATION

This tonic does have the distinction of being created by an actual doctor, who was attempting to invent an anesthetic. However, various unscrupulous individuals have repurposed it as a incapacitating poison.

A character may covertly drug someone's food with this poison (requiring an **opposed Skulduggery vs. Vigilance check**) or apply it to a weapon such as a knife as a maneuver. If the target ingests the poison or it enters their bloodstream by other means, they must make a **Hard** (◆◆◆) **Resilience check** as an out-of-turn incidental or become immobilized for the next three rounds. The target also suffers 1 strain per ☠, and your GM can spend ✖ to make them test against the poison again at the start of their next turn, as it remains in their system.

TABLE II.2–3: STEAMPUNK GEAR

ITEM	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY
Air Mask	1	75	3
Air Mask (with Tank)	3	150	5
Aeropack	5	1,000	7
Hooded Lantern	1	75	4
Miracle Tonic	0	200	5
Potion of Paralyzation	0	525	6

SETTING-SPECIFIC ADVERSARIES

This section presents some adversaries particular to steampunk settings. As always, remember that you can adapt NPCs from other settings by simply changing their equipment and maybe a skill or talent.

AIRSHIP PIRATE (MINION)

Air pirates ply the skyways across the Boiling Sea and beyond (and honestly, any setting with airships is going to have airship pirates). This profile is typical of any human opponents and can also serve for a brigand or mercenary.



Skills (group only): Coercion, Melee, Perception, Piloting, Ranged (Light), Vigilance.

Talents: None.

Abilities: None.

Equipment: Revolver (Ranged [Light]; Damage 6; Critical 3; Range [Medium]), cutlass (Melee; Damage 4; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]), vest and storm coat (+1 soak).

ROYAL MARINE (RIVAL)

Royal Marines are the elite soldiers of the Royal Navy. They train to fight in any environment, and the Navy's airships allow them to deploy anywhere they are needed.



Skills: Discipline 2, Melee 2, Perception 2, Piloting 2, Ranged (Heavy) 2, Vigilance 2.

Talents: Eagle Eyes (once per encounter before making a ranged combat check, the Royal Marine may increase their weapon's range by one range band [to a maximum of extreme range]; this lasts for the duration of the combat check).

Abilities: Honor and Grit (when a Royal Marine exceeds their wound threshold, they can immediately attempt a **Hard** [◆◆◆] **Discipline check** as an out-of-turn incidental, healing 1 wound per ✨; if this reduces their current wounds below their wound threshold, the Marine gets back on their feet to continue fighting).

Equipment: Fusil (Ranged [Heavy]; Damage 7; Critical 3; Range [Medium]; Accurate 1), saber (Melee; Damage 5; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]), armored uniform (+1 soak).

CLOCKWORK ANIMAL AUTOMATON (RIVAL)

Clockwork automata tend to be powered by coil-springs, their actions dictated by a complicated series of wax cylinders. Any kind of actual sentience, of course, is impossible, but certain animal behaviors can be worked into their clockwork minds.



Skills: Brawl 1, Perception 1, Survival 1, Vigilance 1.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Mechanical (does not need to breathe, eat, or drink, and can survive underwater; immune to poisons and toxins), clockwork fragility (if the automaton suffers a Critical Injury, add +20 to the result). Some bird automata also have the **Flyer** ability (can fly, see page 100).

Equipment: Fists or claws (Brawl; Damage 5; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]; Disorient 2 or Vicious 1).

COLONIAL GOVERNOR (NEMESIS)

Governors are powerful individuals without exception. Their abilities are primarily focused toward social encounters, and they usually show up for a fight backed by Marines, mercenaries, or even pirates.



Skills: Charm 3, Coercion 3, Deception 3, Leadership 3, Melee 2, Negotiation 3, Perception 2, Ranged (Light) 2.

Talents: Adversary 2 (upgrade the difficulty of all combat checks against this target twice), Ruinous Repartee (once per encounter, use this talent to make an **opposed Charm or Coercion versus Discipline check** targeting one character within medium range; if successful, the target suffers 6 strain, plus 1 strain per ✨; the colonial governor heals strain equal to the strain inflicted).

Abilities: For the Colony! (once per round when targeted by a combat check, may choose one ally within short range, and the attack then targets that character instead of the colonial governor).

Equipment: Dueling pistol (Ranged [Light]; Damage 6; Critical 2; Range [Medium]; Accurate 1, Limited Ammo 2), rapier (Melee; Damage 3; Critical 2; Range [Engaged]; Defensive 1, Pierce 2), fine clothing.

CHAPTER 3: WEIRD WAR

Weird war settings are alternate-universe historical settings where one or another of humanity's global wars spun out of control and changed history as we know it. Rooted in historical fiction and war stories, weird war settings combine real-world history and alternate history, liberally sprinkling them with horror and sci-fi elements to create unique and exciting stories.

Weird war settings can take place in any historical era. You can fight werewolves with the Roman legions, chase ghost ships during the Napoleonic Wars, or protect villagers from packs of ghouls in the mountains of Afghanistan. You can even combine elements of science fiction, building a setting where space marines fight demons in abandoned starships.

TROPES

Now that we've discussed, in general terms, what a weird war setting is, let's talk about some weird war tropes. The following section presents a few common tropes found throughout weird war settings. As with everything else in this book, the following list should not be considered definitive. Instead, you should use the tropes presented here as a springboard to get you started on your own custom setting.

ALTERNATE HISTORY

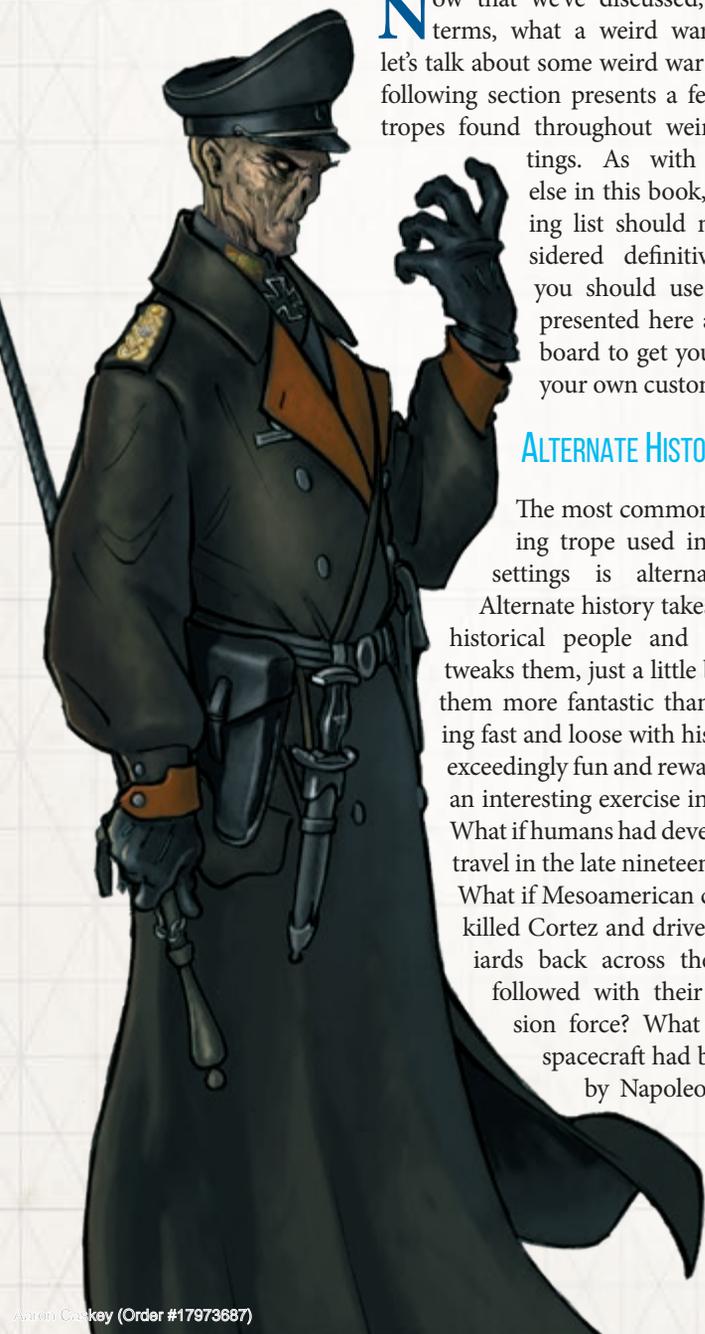
The most common and defining trope used in weird war settings is alternate history. Alternate history takes real-world historical people and events and tweaks them, just a little bit, to make them more fantastic than fact. Playing fast and loose with history can be exceedingly fun and rewarding and is an interesting exercise in "What if?" What if humans had developed space travel in the late nineteenth century? What if Mesoamerican cultures had killed Cortez and driven the Spaniards back across the sea, then followed with their own invasion force? What if an alien spacecraft had been dug up by Napoleon's army in

1800 beneath the Great Sphinx? What if the Nazis actually had succeeded with all of their bizarre occult nonsense? How would any of these events have reshaped history? Ask yourself questions like these when designing your weird war setting and see where they take you.

Once you have your alternate history all laid out, you may wish to take a hard look at it to see what you can eliminate from actual history to make your setting more fun to play in. It's a sad fact that much of history is ugly and complicated, a far cry from the sanitized stories and heroic myths that most people know. As you create your own setting, you may want to excise some of those ugly and complicated elements in order to create a more entertaining world to go adventuring in. At the very least, you should check with your group to see what level of historical realism they are comfortable with.

Take, for example, Fantasy Flight's Tannhäuser setting which takes the "cool" parts of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century history and adds in a liberal dose of the occult, myth, mad science, and conspiracy theories. In Tannhäuser, a secret society of German nobles and powerful occultists raised a long-dead German hero to lead their country to greatness. This ancient and powerfully evil leader united Germany, consolidated power, and declared himself Kaiser of a new Reich. Then, of course, this new Kaiser set out to conquer the world.

The Reich in Tannhäuser is very loosely based on the Nazis' Third Reich, but only loosely. Hitler was never born, the Nazis never rose to power, and the real horror of concentration camps and war crimes has been replaced by werewolves and demon soldiers. An undying, all-powerful, 400-year-old Kaiser wields ultimate power in Germany, backed by the toadying quislings of the nobility. These changes remove much of the real-world



ugliness and tragedy of history, and it makes the bad guys the Kaiser and the nobles. The average German is a pawn in their malicious games, not another Nazi. This allows players to enjoy a more storybook-like version of history, where good and evil are clearly defined, and heroes wear bomber jackets and punch out demons.

THE OCCULT

Another major component of weird war settings is the occult. Paranormal forces and strange happenings mix very well with the horrors of war, and there is no shortage of real-life historical occult shenanigans out there to pull from. Whether instigated by humans or “natural” phenomena, paranormal activity in your weird war setting should be at the forefront.

The exact nature and amount of occult influence in your game is, of course, entirely up to you. Perhaps the occult exists only to the extent that secret societies are using myths to control a populace. Or maybe you have regiments of minotaurs charging Mk.I tanks with prototype Panzerfausts. Are enemy scientists raising the dead or creating supersoldiers by grafting the souls of ancient heroes into living beings, or is it all a bunch of hogwash meant to keep the populace in line?

MAD SCIENCE

Mad science is, along with the occult, another common trope in weird war settings. The idea of advanced or fantastic technologies developed years or generations before their real-life counterparts is extremely compelling. Mad science, as it pertains to weird war settings, is largely focused on weapons of war, especially super-weapons and doomsday devices, and these devices often take the place of nuclear weapons.

As with the occult, the exact level of mad science can vary from setting to setting. You can have a Napoleonic

War setting with flying machines and primitive internal combustion, or a mid-twentieth-century setting with death rays and alien technology. If you can imagine it and you explain it well enough, your setting can handle just about any strange technology.

Remember, though, no matter what your tech level is, make it fantastic. Mad science is only similar to regular science. Alchemy stands alongside chemistry as legitimate science. All the promises of atomic power come true. New types of elements allow for wondrous and unexpected creations. Whatever the basis of your science is, it should be relatively uncommon and absolutely amazing.

MONSTROUS REGIMENTS

Paranormal, monstrous, or superhuman soldiers are another popular theme in weird war settings. As a world delves deeply into the occult and develops fantastic technologies, inhuman creatures begin to appear on the scene. Perhaps they were always there, lurking on the fringes of modern society, waiting to make their presence known, or maybe they were brought forth from some nether dimension through black magics. They can be creatures of myth or simply successful (or unsuccessful) experiments on living or dead people.

Once there are fantastic creatures in a setting, it doesn't take long for them to appear in armies. Commando groups composed of werewolves, infantry divisions of the walking dead, or airborne regiments whose members are all angels (or demons) are all possibilities. Weird war military units that are composed in part or wholly of inhuman creatures are usually special forces units: small bands of highly trained creatures who act as shock troops, commandos, infiltrators, saboteurs, and the like. That's not to say that all paranormal forces are spec-ops (see the aforementioned zombie infantry), but due to their power and rarity, fantastic creatures are usually seen as too important to be used as cannon fodder.

EXAMPLE SETTING: TANNHÄUSER

A solid example of a weird war setting is Fantasy Flight's Tannhäuser. This setting is rooted in reality but has departed radically from real-world history. It depicts an Earth that is both familiar and strange, and is embroiled in a decades-long war between nations and between the natural order and the occult.

In 1877, a German lodge called the Triberium Carium (Lodge of Rot) succeeded in resurrecting Heinrich Reffle von Richtenberg, the thirty-third Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, who had died at Königsberg in 1477.

Within months, von Richtenberg had united the disparate provinces, duchies, and kingdoms of what had been the Holy Roman Empire into a unified German Empire, or Reich, and declared himself Kaiser. For the next thirty years, the undead Kaiser consolidated power and prepared his new Reich for war, pouring money, resources, and manpower into occult (specifically raising and making deals with demons) and technological research.

Meanwhile, in Russia, the October Revolution never happened. The Romanovs remained in power, advised



by the undying Grigori Rasputin. Working hand in hand with the Orthodox Church and guided by Rasputin, the Russian government slowly evolved into a powerful theocracy called the Directorate. Rasputin's cunning machinations set him up as the real power in the country. Like the Kaiser, Rasputin seeks to harness occult power to conquer the world. Specifically, he works to resurrect the Slavic gods and enslave them to steal their power.

In far-off Japan, the end of the nineteenth century saw Emperor Meiji attempt to overthrow the Shōgun in an effort to wipe out the samurai class and consolidate his power. This failed spectacularly, however, and the ruling class revolted against the Emperor. A civil war raged for decades, until, using some combination of unknown technology and occult sciences, Meiji finally brought the war to an end, and saw his country become an arcane and technological powerhouse in the process.

World tensions ratcheted up during this time, as the Reich, the Russian Matriarchy, and the Japanese Empire flexed their might and rattled their sabers at one another. Western powers, led by the United States and the British Empire, began tooling up for war even while diplomats and spies worked tirelessly to suss out the situation in Europe and Asia. Finally, in the wake of the Tunguska Event in remote Siberia, the world erupted in violence and was soon engulfed by a war the likes of which had never been seen: the Great War.

The Reich captured nearly all of Europe, and the Kaiser raised demonic forces to enhance his ruthlessly efficient military machine. Through Project SVAROG, the Russian Matriarchy, with the help of the reclusive genius Nikola Tesla, succeeded in summoning and binding an ancient

Slavic god into the combat armor of a warrior-nun. This woman, now known as Zor'ka, was put in charge of the Russian military. The Japanese Shōgunate, under the leadership of the elderly Emperor Meiji and the mysterious Shōgun Hatamoto Omokaze, seized much of mainland China and portions of eastern Russia. Not to be left behind in the field of occult sciences, Japan seems to have summoned ancient *oni* and the demon general Itami.

Standing against this tide of war and chaos is the Union, an alliance of western democracies led by the United States and Great Britain. A technological and industrial powerhouse, the Union is a spoiler, a bulwark against the rising tide of occult forces flowing from the battlefields of Europe and Asia. Wreckage of an alien spacecraft that crashed in the American Southwest in 1947 kick-started the Union's advanced weapon programs. Since then, the Union's arms consortiums and military labs have been scrambling to develop better and more advanced weapon systems.

Forty-some years after hostilities began, the Great War continues to grind on between the great powers. There seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel, however, although not one borne of peace accords and cease-fires. The major powers are exhausted and desperate, short of soldiers and materiel and the will to continue on. Treaties between the Union, Matriarchy, Reich, and the Shōgunate have created powerful blocs and have ushered in the endgame of the Great War. Each belligerent faction grows increasingly reckless in its pursuit of victory. Some great cataclysm seems to loom over the world as increasingly powerful weapons are introduced in an effort to end the conflict once and for all.

SETTING-SPECIFIC GEAR

The following is a selection of weapons and armor with a decidedly weird war flavor. This list is not an exhaustive one. Instead, it's a guide to help you create your own special weird war weapons and gear.

WEAPONS

Weird war's weaponry tends to have a lot of similarities with modern weaponry. To flesh out your setting, you should use the weapons from the **modern day** section, found on page 164.

DEW PISTOL AND RIFLE

Currently rare and experimental, directed energy weapons (DEWs) project highly focused energy (light, electricity, or more esoteric energy), rather than solid projectiles, at a target. Directed energy weapons are equal in power to lasers from other settings, but they tend to have a shorter range and to dissipate on the surface of a target (no Pierce quality). They more than make up for that by regularly setting targets on fire (via the Burn quality).

FLASH GUN

Flash guns are a varied collection of weapons—submachine guns, automatic rifles, machine guns—fitted with propulsion units powered by Illirium batteries that give them unparalleled rates of fire and stopping power. The lingering effects of the energy propulsion system tend to rattle enemy troops they don't kill outright. This flash gun is based off of a basic submachine gun, while flash technology provides the Disorient and Pierce item qualities. Other flash guns can be created by using the rifle or pistol stats and adding Disorient and Pierce.

TABLE II.3–1: WEIRD WAR WEAPONS

NAME	SKILL	DAM	CRIT	RANGE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY	SPECIAL
MELEE WEAPONS								
Electric Truncheon	Melee	+2	3	Engaged	1	150	5	Disorient 3, Stun Damage
Razor Whip	Melee	+1	3	Short	1	290	7	Ensnare 1, Pierce 3, Unwieldy 3
RANGED WEAPONS								
DEW Pistol	Ranged (Light)	6	3	Short	4	450	8	Burn 1
DEW Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	8	3	Medium	6	900	8	Burn 2
Flash Gun	Ranged (Heavy)	6	3	Medium	4	900	7	Auto-fire, Disorient 2, Pierce 2
Flash Machine Gun	Gunnery	10	2	Long	8	1,450	9	Auto-fire, Cumbersome 3, Disorient 2, Inaccurate 1, Pierce 2, Vicious 3
Meteop Launcher	Gunnery	12	2	Medium	6	850	7	Blast 8, Cumbersome 3, Limited Ammo 1

CHARACTER OPTIONS

Our basic weird war setting uses the human archetypes as starting character options (see page 35). This is because, more often than not, the heroes of these settings are the people fighting the monsters, not the monsters themselves!

However, if you want to play a more monstrous hero, we recommend using the mongrel species as a werewolf derivative, and the revenant species as a resurrected soldier (see page 152).

FLASH MACHINE GUN

The flash machine gun (the A6a) uses the same Illirium batteries as the flash gun to propel its rounds, but it shoots larger bullets at a higher rate of fire. Bulky and finicky, these new weapons are extremely good at pinning down enemy formations or scything through occult horrors. They are big and bulky enough that only the strongest individuals can wield them without a tripod or other support.

METEOP LAUNCHER

Meteops are small, dome-shaped explosive devices that are, essentially, high-powered anti-personnel weapons. They are fired from bulky, single-shot launchers and are typically used to break up enemy formations or clear rooms and vehicles. The launchers themselves are heavy and awkward, which gives them the Cumbersome quality. The meteop munitions provide the raw damage, low Crit rating, and high Blast quality.

TABLE II.3—2: WEIRD WAR ARMOR

TYPE	DEFENSE	SOAK	ENCUMBRANCE	PRICE	RARITY
Illirium BG-42 Vest	0	+2	4	600	6
Tesla Coil	2	+0	2	550	8

ELECTRIC TRUNCHEON

Electric truncheons are nasty, ostensibly non-lethal weapons designed for crowd control. Think of them as clubs that also shock their targets on contact. The Disorient quality reflects the truncheon’s electrical charge. The charge is not necessarily enough to be lethal, hence the Stun Damage quality (but a powerful shock can still kill someone, so the weapon has a Critical rating).

RAZOR WHIP

Razor whips are made of flexible, braided alloy with razor-sharp blades embedded within. They can shred through armor and flesh (the Pierce quality) and can be used to entangle targets (the Ensnare quality). Whips also tend to have a special rule allowing wielders to attack targets that are farther away.

A razor whip can be used to make melee attacks against targets at short range. The difficulty for this attack is **Average** (◆◆).

ARMOR

Wars in the nineteenth and early twentieth saw very little armor. However, in our alternate reality, science can provide novel protections against bullets and werewolf claws.

ILLIRIUM BG-42 VEST

One of the factors that has allowed the Union to match its supernatural foes in the field is the rare and powerful element known as Illirium. Illirium batteries power Union flash guns, and Illirium-reinforced armor vests not only can absorb bullets (hence the soak value), but can temporarily be energized to create a force field.

When wearing a BG-42 vest, once per encounter as an incidental, your character may activate the force field to gain melee and ranged defense 2 until the end of their next turn.

TABLE II.3—3: WEIRD WAR GEAR

ITEM	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY
First Aid Kit	1	100	3
“Nighteyes” Goggles	1	800	7
Unholy Tome	1	3,000	9
Warding Icon	0	800	7

TESLA COIL

The Matriarchy pioneered Tesla coils as personal force fields. Made largely of glass and alloy and worn on a belt or strap, they project a crackling electric field to deflect enemy fire (represented by the item’s defense rating).

GEAR

Most of the gear in the **modern day** setting works for this setting (the notable exceptions being anything with microchips), so feel free to pull from that list as well.

FIRST AID KIT

These are not medical kits, but they provide just enough medical material to be useful while being small and cheap enough to issue to most infantry on the battlefield.

This kit provides your character with the equipment needed to make Medicine checks to heal wounds or Critical Injuries without penalty. However, ☠ ☠ ☠ or ☠ means your character has used all of the kit’s supplies.

“NIGHTEYES” GOGGLES

These fantastic goggles are based on alien technology. They allow the wielder to see through smoke, fog, and darkness and even enhance their aim.



While wearing “Nighteyes,” your character removes ■ added to their checks due to smoke, darkness, or concealment. When performing the Aim maneuver, they can choose to add automatic ▲ to their check instead of ■.

UNHOLY TOME

This could be almost any book or parchment that describes dread rituals to summon and control the infernal.

If your character reads from an unholy tome, for the remainder of the encounter they add automatic ✨ ✨ to

any social skill checks with supernatural or occult creatures. However, if your character generates ☒ on those checks, the creature immediately attacks your character.

WARDING ICON

A warding icon protects against the occult and can be worn around the neck or on one’s clothing.

If your character is wearing a warding icon, any supernatural or occult creature engaged with them is disoriented while they remain engaged.

SETTING-SPECIFIC ADVERSARIES

The following are a selection of adversaries appropriate for use in a weird war campaign. These are only a suggestion, however. You can use adversaries from other settings (or, even better, create your own).

INFANTRY (MINION)

This profile presents the kind of basic infantry soldier found on the front lines of all sides, even in weird wars.



Skills (group only): Discipline, Melee, Ranged (Heavy).

Talents: None.

Abilities: None.

Equipment: Battle rifle (Ranged [Heavy]; Damage 8; Critical 3; Range [Long]), bayonet (Melee; Damage 4; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]; if attached to the end of a rifle, gains the Defensive 1 quality), armor vest (+1 soak).

OCULT COMMANDO (RIVAL)

Whether they’re zombies, magically animated suits of armor, or humans possessed by ancient spirits, all occult supersoldiers are individuals who combine intense training and arcane enhancements to create a terrifying combatant. This one is a human possessed by some sort of malign entity (probably a demon).



Skills: Brawl 2, Coercion 2, Discipline 2, Perception 2, Ranged (Light) 2, Skulduggery 3, Stealth 3, Vigilance 3.

Talents: Adversary 1 (upgrade the difficulty of all combat checks against this target once).

Abilities: Arcane Weakness (silver, blessed, or holy weapons and ammunition count their Crit rating as 1 when used against this character), Unholy Animation (when hit by a combat check, spend ☒ to ignore all damage from the attack).

Equipment: Rune-covered pistol (Ranged [Light]; Damage 8; Critical 3; Range [Medium]; Accurate 1), wicked knife (Melee; Damage 5; Critical 2; Range [Engaged]; Pierce 3, Vicious 2), combat armor and curiously tough skin (+2 soak).

ARCANE SCIENTIST (NEMESIS)

This profile presents an occult researcher who specializes in medical experimentation using arcane abilities. If you want, you can change out the Medicine skill for Mechanics to reflect a mad scientist who creates death rays and walking tanks as opposed to biological horrors.



Skills: Charm 2, Coercion 3, Discipline 3, Knowledge 3, Medicine 3, Ranged (Light) 1.

Talents: Adversary 2 (upgrade the difficulty of all combat checks against this target twice), Scathing Tirade (use this talent to make an **Average** [◆◆] **Coercion check**; for each ✨, one opponent within short range suffers 1 strain; for each ▲, one affected opponent suffers 1 additional strain).

Abilities: Rise, My Minions! (once per session, may make a **Hard** [◆◆◆] **Mechanics** or **Medicine check** [depending on the type of minions the arcane scientist has]; for each uncanceled ✨, one incapacitated minion within medium range heals all wounds and rejoins the encounter; it may act in the current round).

Equipment: DEW pistol (Ranged [Light]; Damage 6; Critical 3; Range [Short]; Burn 1), lab coat, goggles.

CHAPTER 4: MODERN DAY

Modern day settings are a catchall that encompass a number of subsettings including, but not limited to, modern horror, spy thrillers, detective stories, and military adventures. These settings are home to countless action movies, modern warfare video games, spy novels, and a host of police procedurals and hard-boiled detective stories. In modern settings, hard men and women battle against crooked bureaucrats, vicious killers, terror cells, and the Mob. It's basically the stuff of modern day escapism and wish fulfillment, and is a fun and interesting departure from elves, zombies, and spaceships.

TROPES

With that in mind, we've put together a short list of tropes that exemplify a modern day setting. It's not a definitive list, but it does give you a good place to start and is mostly presented as a way to give you some examples so you can kick-start your own setting.

MOVIE REALISM

While modern settings are heavily based in the modern real world, they are not intended to be entirely real. “Verisimilitude” is the watchword of the modern setting, and the best example of that is movie realism. In the movies, shotguns blast people through heavy wood doors, and spies leap from rooftop to rooftop or jump out of airplanes without messing up their perfectly coiffed hair. Heroes survive numerous gunshot wounds or falls through plate-glass windows and villains concoct convoluted schemes that would make Machiavelli jealous.

When designing your modern setting, keep in mind that movie realism trumps real-world rules and laws every time. Never let physics get in the way of a good brawl, AK-47s are perfectly accurate when fired from the hip at full auto, and hacking into secure government computer systems always involves a slick graphical user interface. Follow the Rule of Cool (on the next page) and keep the action moving, and your players will stay happy.

GROUNDING TECH

The technology in modern settings is rarely, if ever, more advanced than what we might see next month or next year in the real world. Cars are still cars, guns are still guns, and

As with the other settings described in this book, modern isn't a particularly rigid genre. While most modern day settings take place “now” or “next Tuesday,” they don't need to if you don't want them to. If you like, you can set your modern game during the Cold War and play it as an espionage thriller. Or maybe your game is based on exploitation films and takes place in the 1970s with plenty of crooked cops and kung fu. Think of modern settings as happening in the latter part of the twentieth century or the first few decades of the twenty-first century, and you'll get the picture.

any significantly advanced technology—optical camouflage, jetpacks, smart guns—are either rare prototypes or one-off special gear for use by government agents.

The tech level in a modern game should be believable and should roughly match the era in which the game is set. Don't include cell phones in a Cold War setting, for example. When designing equipment for your setting,



THE RULE OF COOL

The Rule of Cool states that “The limit of the willing suspension of disbelief for a given property is directly proportional to its degree of coolness.” In other words, something ridiculous is easy to accept in media if it’s sufficiently cool. Two spies chasing one another along construction gantries hundreds of feet in the air? Cool. Blasting a bad guy through a sheetrock wall with a shotgun? Cool. Escaping in a stylish European sports car that turns into a submarine? Very cool. Basically, if it’s exciting, makes even a little bit of sense, and doesn’t fly in the face of the laws of physics and nature too much, it’s cool.

This can be taken too far, however. You have to keep two important things in mind when including things in a setting just because they’re cool. First, people (even gamers) can only suspend their disbelief so far. Second, cool is subjective. The Rule of Cool doesn’t give you a free pass to run roughshod over game realism and suspension of disbelief. It’s supposed to be a way of spicing up a setting and

incorporating exciting and explosive scenes with a healthy serving of movie logic. Always keep in mind the stated tone and themes of your game, and remember that verisimilitude—the appearance of truth or reality—is every bit as important to keeping your players engaged as coolness is.

For example, if you’re playing a modern horror or horror survival game, you expect to encounter things like zombies and sorcerers and bloody sacrifices in jungle temples. If you’re playing a gritty, reality-based, modern warfare game in which you’re trying to save the world from a globe-spanning terror cabal, you expect to find rogue generals and warlords and corrupt politicians, not zombies. If suddenly your hard-bitten, high-speed/low-drag modern warfare characters are jumped by a pack of zombies without your having stated at the beginning that “Hey, there will be some supernatural elements in this game,” your players are going to object, no matter how cool you think zombies are.

we recommend checking out real-world information on emerging technologies (or historic technological dead ends) and extrapolating from there. Remember your verisimilitude, and you’ll never go wrong.

AGENTS OF THE STATE

In modern game settings, players are commonly members of official government agencies. They are the police, the army, espionage agents, or some other agent or functionary with governmental authority and the clearance to use it. Typically, they are special units or lone-wolf types, a trick that lets a player group of, say, U.S. Marines, go on an adventure unsupervised in the middle of Afghanistan. However, depending on your game and the themes

you’ve decided on, your players could be mercenaries, burned spies, or disgraced police officers struggling to get the bad guy while repairing their reputation.

Having your players take on the role of soldiers, secret agents, police officers, or members of some other government-sanctioned organization gives them both a believable motivation for their actions and at least some authority. In the real world, you can’t just take up a shotgun and become a vigilante, at least not without incurring some serious legal trouble. In a modern role-playing game, though, your players could be members of a secret federal law enforcement agency tasked with taking down the worst criminals in the country by any means necessary. This allows for spectacular adventures without the threat of arrest, jail time, or worse.

SETTING-SPECIFIC GEAR

This section presents a list of weapons and armor commonly found in modern settings. While there is a lot to choose from here, this list is by no means meant to be exhaustive or definitive. Instead, the weapons and armor presented here are meant to provide a base from which you can build up your own specific gear lists to fit the flavor of your game.

MODERN DAY EXAMPLE SETTING?

Unlike our other settings, the modern day setting doesn’t come with an example, because you’re living in one. Your everyday life is the modern setting, as are most of the movies, books, and video games you consume (all of which work for inspiration).

WEAPONS

Throughout this section, we've provided insights into how each weapon was designed and why specific characteristics and qualities were assigned to them. These tips are included to help you create your own weapons.

BRASS KNUCKLES

Brass knuckles are very simple weapons: chunks of brass designed to slip over your fingers and add power to your punches. Brass knuckles really are simple weapons, and this profile could also represent a roll of quarters.

COLLAPSIBLE BATON

Simple but effective, this is a telescoping baton with a weighted tip. A powerful swing can break bones. If you want to do a larger riot-control baton instead, increase the damage by one or two, but increase the encumbrance by the same amount.

STUN GUN

The name "stun gun" is a bit of a misnomer; it's a hand-held device with protruding electrodes. Push

the electrodes into an opponent, and they get shocked. That's why the weapon has damage that can't be modified by your character's Brawn (you don't hit people with a stun gun; you just touch them with it), and any similar weapon should follow a similar profile. Obviously, the Stun Damage quality is another must, and we added the Stun quality to represent some people suffering worse effects than others from the electric shock. We also gave it a Critical rating; after all, an electric shock can occasionally do lasting damage!

ASSAULT RIFLE

While clattering, hard-hitting assault rifles are ostensibly military weapons, they can and often do fall into the hands of gangs, crime syndicates, and insurgents. The assault rifle presented here is a basic AR- or AK-pattern rifle like those carried throughout the world. The Auto-fire quality is the primary thing that separates these weapons from other types of rifles, although they can be fired on semiautomatic as well (your character may choose whether or not to use Auto-fire). Assault rifles do roughly the same damage as other "long guns."

Many militaries make carbine versions of their assault rifles, such as the U.S. military's Colt M4. They're more compact than full-sized rifles and a bit easier to wield.

TABLE II.4-1: MODERN WEAPONS

NAME	SKILL	DAM	CRIT	RANGE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY	SPECIAL
BRAWL WEAPONS								
Brass Knuckles	Brawl	+1	4	Engaged	1	40	1	Disorient 3
MELEE WEAPONS								
Collapsible Baton	Melee	+2	3	Engaged	1	70	2	
Stun Gun	Melee	5	6	Engaged	1	100	1	Stun 3, Stun Damage
RANGED WEAPONS								
Assault Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	8	3	Long	4	1,000	7	Auto-fire
Heavy Pistol	Ranged (Light)	6	3	Medium	1	300	3	
Hunting Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	8	3	Long	4	750	4	Accurate 1, Limited Ammo 2
Light Pistol	Ranged (Light)	5	4	Short	1	100	3	
Machine Gun	Gunnery	10	3	Long	6	1,500	6	Auto-fire, Cumbersome 2, Pierce 2, Vicious 2
Portable Missile Launcher	Gunnery	20	2	Extreme	8	100,000	8	Blast 10, Breach 2, Cumbersome 3, Guided 3, Limited Ammo 1, Prepare 1
Shotgun	Ranged (Heavy)	8	3	Short	3	500	3	Blast 4, Knockdown, Vicious 2
Submachine Gun	Ranged (Light)	5	3	Medium	2	400	6	Auto-fire
Sniper Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	9	2	Extreme	4	1,200	6	Accurate 2, Limited Ammo 4, Pierce 2

Carbines change their range to medium, but decrease their encumbrance by one.

HUNTING RIFLE

Hunting rifles are nearly as ubiquitous as pistols in developed countries with a long history of hunting and sporting. These rifles have long barrels and are often fitted with long-range telescopic sights to increase their performance and accuracy.

The hunting rifle presented here is a double-barreled deer rifle in a standard hunting caliber like .30-06, .308, or 7 mm. You may reduce the damage by one for smaller varmint rifles, or increase it by one for big-game weapons like elephant guns. Most hunting rifles should have the Accurate quality, since they're built for single-shot accuracy. Finally, a hunting rifle can have an internal magazine. These rifles lose the Limited Ammo 2 quality, but increase their price by 100.

LIGHT AND HEAVY PISTOL

The ubiquitous pistol is the go-to solution for law enforcement, sport shooting, self-defense, and criminal activity throughout the world. For game purposes, modern pistols are separated into two categories: light and heavy.

The light pistol listing is for a basic, medium-caliber pistol: a 9 mm or .38 caliber weapon, for example. If you want, say, a .22 caliber pistol, you could reduce the damage by one and increase the Critical rating by one. If it's a cheap, disposable "Saturday night special" kind of gun, maybe give it a rank or two in the Inaccurate or Inferior qualities instead. Heavy pistols are the big, bulky hand cannons that show up in movies in the hands of cops on the edge or great big heroes. Their damage and Critical rating can also be adjusted up or down by one (but not more) to reflect larger or smaller calibers.

MACHINE GUN

Machine guns are large, heavy, often crew-served weapons. Depending on the type, a machine gun can be anything from a medium-weight, man-portable squad-support weapon to a heavy, turret-mounted .50 cal.

The machine gun presented here can be used for any of the medium-caliber squad-support weapons like the M60, M249, or MG4. They're designed to be carried in the field, but they still have a high encumbrance (check out page 207 for rules for a bipod or tripod for this weapon). Heavier machine guns can have their damage increased by two, although you should increase their encumbrance and Cumbersome rating by two as well.



PORTABLE MISSILE LAUNCHER

The weapon presented here represents one of the countless shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles used throughout the world, such as the Stinger missile. Their extreme range and Guided quality reflect the fact that they are long-ranged anti-vehicle weapons. They, of course, only hold one missile at a time and need a few moments to set up, so the Limited Ammo and Prepare qualities are a must for these weapons (reloads for these launchers should cost half of the weapon's initial cost). If you want to create an anti-armor weapon like a TOW, the Breach should be increased to 5 and Prepare to 2.

SHOTGUN

When you really want to make an impression in a fire-fight, a shotgun is a great way to go. Pulling a pistol from a hidden pocket just doesn't have the same dramatic effect as, say, drawing a lever-action 10 gauge out of a box of roses in slow motion. The flat thump of the report, the muzzle flash, the shocking recoil, even the loud *clack-clack* noise of working a pump action make these weapons an assault on everyone's senses, and also is what makes them so popular in action movies!

The stat line in **Table II.4-1** is for a basic pump or semiautomatic hunting weapon with buckshot. Shotguns possess the Blast quality due to the cloud of shot they fire and the Knockdown quality due to the concussion

TABLE II.4–2: MODERN ARMOR

TYPE	DEFENSE	SOAK	ENCUMBRANCE	PRICE	RARITY
Flak Vest	0	+2	3	475	5
Ghillie Suit	1	+0	1	95	4
Riot Armor	2	+1	5	675	6

of their blast (and, honestly, the Rule of Cool). The basic shotgun stat line also assumes a magazine-fed weapon. If you wanted to have a simple break-action single- or double-barreled shotgun, you would give the weapon the Limited Ammo 1 or 2 quality. Sawed-off shotguns have their encumbrance reduced by two, and they gain the Inaccurate 1 quality.

If you really want to dress up a scene, a character wielding a shotgun could add ■ to any Coercion checks, especially if they rack the slide and glare menacingly at the target.

SUBMACHINE GUN

Submachine guns (SMGs) use pistol-caliber ammunition and a high rate of fire to provide a whole lot of damage capacity in a small, easy-to-use package. They are popular among criminals, police, and special forces operators the world over.

The SMG presented in **Table II.4–1: Modern Weapons** on page 166 is a typical 9 mm weapon that might be used by a metropolitan police force or carried by a drug lord’s bodyguard. It deals the same damage as a light pistol, since they share calibers. It can fire full auto, so it has the Auto-fire quality. Even when it doesn’t fire on full auto, we imagine each “shot” is actually several bullets, and so we gave it a lower Critical rating to represent the sheer amount of lead it puts in the air.

SNIPER RIFLE

While they vary by service and country, all sniper rifles are designed to fire high-caliber, high-velocity rounds over long distances.

The sniper rifle entry here is a basic dedicated sniper rifle like the U.S. Army’s M24 rifle. The range is extreme to represent its ability to reach farther than even regular hunting rifles. Sniper rifles possess the Accurate and Pierce qualities to reflect their excellent balance and specialized rounds. They do, however, have a smaller magazine, hence the Limited Ammo quality.

ARMOR

Many modern militaries provide body armor to their members, as do police departments. Even private

individuals can buy it, although it tends to be expensive. Also, keep in mind that these items work for the **weird war** and **science fiction** settings as well.

FLAK VEST

In modern times, most militaries, police departments, and people in a war zone use flak vests. These are made from lightweight polymers and ballistic fabrics and provide decent protection from small arms and shrapnel (as represented by the vest’s soak value).

RIOT ARMOR

A staple of police departments the world over, riot armor is designed to protect from stones, bottles, shrapnel, and small-arms fire. The suit includes a helmet with eye protection and a large polycarbonate shield for deflecting blows and pushing crowds. We represent this with the higher defense and moderate soak, since the armor deflects hits better than it stops bullets.

Your character must use one hand to carry the riot shield. If they do not, the armor’s defense drops to 1.

GHILLIE SUIT

Ghillie suits are simple camouflage suits that conceal snipers and forward observers. A suit is little more than a baggy shirt and pair of trousers covered in countless strips of fabric, clumps of grass, and other detritus. Since ghillie suits are designed to obscure rather than protect, they have a single point of defense but no soak.

Characters trying to spot someone wearing a ghillie suit upgrade the difficulty of their check once.

GEAR

The following are just a few examples of modern gear. A lot of this also works well in other settings (especially the extra clips, which can fit in any setting).

EXTRA CLIP

This is exactly what it sounds like: an extra clip of ammunition for a ranged weapon.

If your character has an extra clip, they may spend a maneuver to reload and continue to use their weapon

if it runs out of ammo. This uses up the extra clip. (You can't use this to reload weapons with the Limited Ammo quality, as they usually have special costs for their reloads or are one-use weapons.)

PORTABLE MEDIKIT

A well-equipped portable medkit comes with everything someone might need to treat all manner of injuries, from bullet wounds to broken legs.

A portable medkit allows your character to perform Medicine checks to heal wounds and Critical Injuries without penalty. The inclusion of modern drugs adds automatic **A** to the check results.

TABLE II.4-3: MODERN GEAR

ITEM	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY
Extra Clip	0	25	2
Night Vision Goggles	1	500	5
Portable Medkit	2	200	4

NIGHT VISION GOGGLES

These goggles allow the user to see normally in the dark.

When wearing night vision goggles, your character removes up to **■ ■** added to their checks due to darkness.

SETTING-SPECIFIC ADVERSARIES

The list below presents a handful of adversaries appropriate for use in a modern setting. We chose adversaries who would fit the themes of espionage, military adventures, or crime drama.

MILITIA (MINION)

Militia are irregular fighters driven by a political or religious cause. They are typically undisciplined, poorly trained, and poorly equipped individuals who, although not a match for professionals, are dangerous in groups.



Skills (group only): Brawl, Coercion, Ranged (Heavy).

Talents: None.

Abilities: None.

Equipment: Assault rifle (Ranged [Heavy]; Damage 8; Critical 3; Range [Long]; Auto-fire), fatigues (+1 soak).

CORRUPT OFFICIAL (RIVAL)

Wherever there is a bureaucracy, corrupt officials flourish. Whether a crooked politician, a bent cop, or a corrupt small-town sheriff, these opponents can make life exceedingly difficult for anyone who crosses them.



Skills: Charm 2, Cool 2, Deception 2, Knowledge 2, Negotiation 2, Vigilance 1.

Talents: Natural (once per session, use this talent to reroll any one Negotiation or Skulduggery check).

Abilities: Local Politics (once per session, may choose one character operating in their area of influence [community, precinct, or county, for example]; until the end of the session, the target must upgrade the difficulty of any social skill checks they make to interact with inhabitants of this area once).

Equipment: Cell phone, tablet.

INTELLIGENCE AGENT (NEMESIS)

Intelligence agents—or spies, if you prefer—are some of the most cunning and elusive opponents encountered in modern day settings. Our spy is a jack-of-all-trades; they're not an overly dangerous combatant, but their Adversary talent and One Step Ahead ability should make them a frustrating foe.



Skills: Charm 2, Coercion 2, Deception 2, Ranged (Light) 2, Brawl 2, Skulduggery 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Vigilance 2.

Talents: Adversary 2 (upgrade difficulty of all combat checks against this target twice), Natural (once per session, reroll any one Skulduggery or Stealth check).

Abilities: One Step Ahead (once per round, after an opponent performs an action or maneuver, may spend one Story Point to perform an action or a maneuver as an out-of-turn incidental).

Equipment: Silenced pistol (Ranged [Light]; Damage 5; Critical 4; Range [Short]), encrypted cell phone.

CHAPTER 5: SCIENCE FICTION

Science fiction is, as the name implies, a genre that merges scientific theory and accuracy with fictional stories. People often use the term to describe so-called “hard sci-fi” and “soft sci-fi” interchangeably. Hard sci-fi focuses more on grounding the story with scientific realism, while soft sci-fi worries less about scientific accuracy and generally has many more fantastical elements.

One thing you should keep in mind about hard and soft science fiction is that these aren't rigorous definitions.

Each is one end of a broad spectrum, with most works of science fiction falling somewhere in between. Most of the science fiction you read or watch will have elements of realism alongside fantastical inventions, but will probably trend toward one end of the spectrum or the other.

In **Chapter 5**, we focus on the more traditional definition of science fiction as fiction grounded (mostly) in science, while **Chapter 6** looks at the other end of the spectrum (which we call “space opera”).

TROPES

With all this in mind, we've assembled some tropes that we think characterize hard science fiction. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it should serve as a solid starting point if you want to build your own setting.

LIMITED SPACE TRAVEL

Science fiction settings may not have any space travel beyond our modern space-flight capabilities. If they do, it's often still limited in scope. In many hard science fiction settings, humans have built space stations around the Earth and colonies on the Moon and other nearby worlds (Mars, for example). They may even have outposts across the solar system, and may have explored most of it with crewed and automated vehicles.

However, space travel is still likely to be expensive, dangerous, and slow. Getting from one planet to another takes weeks or months, plenty of things can go wrong, and only major businesses and governments are rich enough to afford spacecraft. You should think of space travel as more akin to crossing oceans during the Age of Sail, rather than flying across them in a modern jet.

Finally, interstellar travel is likely nonexistent. Any spacecraft sent to another star would take centuries (or longer!) to reach its destination, and there's no way to sneak around the light barrier.

RECOGNIZABLE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES

Hard science fiction tries to present a realistic (or at least recognizable) world. When you create your setting, an easy way to accomplish this is to use economic and political structures that are very similar to those of today.



For example, it's unlikely that the nations of Earth are going to unify into a single world government any time soon. Instead, consider close alliances modeled after the European Union (a more closely unified African Union, perhaps?) The United Nations may still exist, but its power may have grown or shrunk. Perhaps some nations have changed drastically in your setting. The USA may have morphed into the American Empire, or maybe it has failed and fractured into patchwork alliances of nation-states fighting among themselves.

Likewise, businesses and corporations may look very similar but have greatly expanded power and authority in your setting. This is a popular theme in modern hard science fiction, and it touches on our concerns about society being dominated (and even ruled) by faceless multinational corporations.

THE GOOD...AND THE BAD

One easy way to keep your hard science fiction setting feeling realistic is to incorporate a good side and a bad side into your major technological and societal changes. Upsides and downsides are something we tend to associate with real life, while in fiction, things tend to be good or bad, but not both.

So, when working on your hard science fiction setting, try to add some realistic tradeoffs for some of the biggest ways your setting differentiates from the real world. For example, if your setting has a lot of space travel, maybe mention some of the health risks associated with prolonged zero-g. If society has started using lots of robots for manual labor, remember all the human workers who lost their jobs to an android. And if a more powerful UN keeps Earth's nations from starting wars, consider the potential resentment of people who see their liberties being taken away by a distant central government.

TECHNOLOGY IS ONE STEP AHEAD

One way to keep your sci-fi setting feeling relatable and realistically plausible is to keep the technology levels "one step ahead" of what we can do in the modern world. For example, faster-than-light communications are pretty unbelievable, but it's easy for us to accept the idea of a bigger, more complicated Internet with a virtual reality component. Likewise, your spaceships and buildings are probably going to be built out of some composites or alloys made from existing materials, not super-strong "star-steel" mined from distant worlds.

When deciding on the technology level of your setting, spend some time reading up on current

technological advances and what the experts think might be the next likely breakthroughs. You don't need to get too detailed, but some broad information is going to help your setting feel like it's grounded in reality. On that note, let's talk about some specific technologies and why you might focus on them.

THE NEW FRONTIER

One of the core themes of science fiction is exploring the effects of new technologies on humanity. Of course, what is "new" can vary depending on when a work of sci-fi is created, which is why we've seen the focus of science fiction shift drastically over the past century. So, some of the technologies we talk about have only come into the public eye in the last few decades. Others, of course, have been around since the beginnings of science fiction.

CLONES, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, AND ROBOTS

While the idea of cloning humans is fairly recent, robots have been a staple of science fiction since before science fiction was a recognized literary genre. (In fact, the idea of an artificial person has appeared in myths, legends, and stories throughout history.) After all, if science fiction is supposed to explore the effects of new technologies on humanity, what better way to do that than to have the new technology bring up questions of what it means to be human?

Using clones, AI, and intelligent robots in your setting gives you a chance to ask a lot of questions about the definition of humanity and intelligence. Are these clones less than human because they were grown in a lab? Does a corporation own a sapient robot just because that corporation built it? Can an artificial intelligence with no physical body truly be "alive?" By forcing your players to grapple with these questions, you also may get them to ask some questions about their own humanity. And at the very least, it's fun to think about.

GENETIC MANIPULATION

If clones and robots raise the big questions about what it means to be human, genetic manipulation and modification is a technology that asks similar questions in a subtler way. How much can we change our own genetic code and still remain human? Is modifying an unborn baby's genes to protect against certain illnesses or birth defects ethical? And what about modifying genes for cosmetic reasons, such as physical appearance? What if we could make ourselves stronger, smarter, or faster from birth? Wouldn't we want to give the next generation the best chance to survive and thrive?

This is something that may be very interesting for you to explore in your setting, because the ethical questions of genetic manipulation are ones our society is wrestling with right now. Just remember, don't treat genetic manipulation as magic. In a hard science fiction setting, it's unlikely that splicing a human embryo with tiger genes will lead to a baby were-cat.

CLIMATE SCIENCE

The technologies we've talked about up until now have let us look at how they affect humans directly. While it is not a technology, climate science is a topical issue that lets you look at how humans can affect the world around them. How humanity handles this issue can also set the tone for your setting—whether more optimistic or more pessimistic. Even touching briefly on it, perhaps by depicting the Statue of Liberty surrounded by seawalls, can remind your players that they're in the future.

NANOTECH

Nanotechnology is a popular topic of science fiction, and something that certainly has a place in some hard science fiction settings. However, when you add nanotech to your setting, be careful how you go about it! Often, writers and filmmakers treat nanotech as some sort of magic panacea, by which a dose of microrobots can do anything from cure disease to construct dinner out of component molecules. This highly advanced (and highly theoretical) technology is going to feel out of place in a hard science fiction setting. If you use nanotech, limit it to very specific uses, and keep in mind some potential side effects and risks.

BREAK THE RULES...ONCE OR TWICE

Hard science fiction is predicated on the idea that the fiction is based on existing scientific principles as much as possible. There's no set minimum for how much science you need to have in a science fiction setting, but the more fantastical elements you introduce, the more your setting becomes "science fantasy" or "space opera." (See page 179 for more information about the **space opera** setting.)

Some people who develop hard science fiction settings keep their settings firmly grounded in existing scientific principles. These settings only have technologies that already exist or are likely to be invented in the next few decades based on existing scientific research. However, this imposes some pretty sharp limitations on what they can do in their own settings.

Therefore, an option many people take is to choose one or two technologies that break from those

limitations: a couple of technologies that may seem reasonable, even if we as a species have no idea how to figure them out quite yet. For example, in the **ANDROID** setting, the creators added two technologies that are currently outside our grasp. One is plentiful, reliable fusion power (as of this writing, we know it can be done, but we don't know how to replicate it in a lab and make a surplus of energy out of it). The other is braintaping, the technology that allows corporations to record a human mind and use the recording to create a thinking android or cloned human. It's something that seems reasonable when you hear it described, but nobody has any idea how to do it.

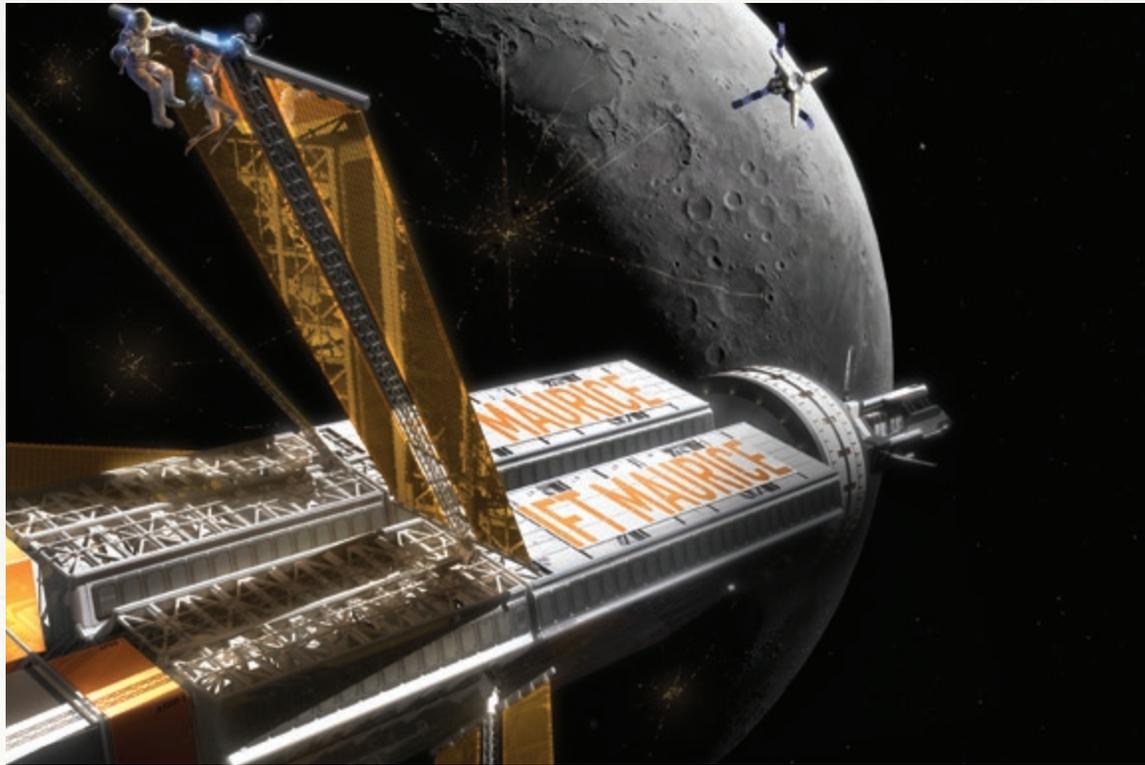
RULES THAT SHOULDN'T BE BROKEN

However, there are some technologies that are too far-fetched to be believable. If you use these in your setting, you will probably push it from a science fiction setting to a space opera setting. There's nothing wrong with this, but again, you may want to check out page 179 in that case.

Here are some common technologies that cross the line into the realm of the fantastical:

- **Faster-than-light travel:** Given everything we know now, faster-than-light travel is a lovely fantasy, but not in any way realistic. If you want your setting to feel scientifically accurate, stay away from this.
- **Artificial gravity:** This idea stems largely from science fiction movies and television shows. Simply put, it's a lot easier to film people walking around a spaceship just like they do on Earth, rather than try to simulate the effects of zero-g. Unfortunately, artificial gravity created through gravity generators, floor plates, or some other incredibly convenient and equally improbable method is probably going to remain a sci-fi writer's fantasy for a long time to come. Since you're making a roleplaying game and don't have to worry about the limits of filming in zero-g, this is also easy to avoid.
- **Time travel:** Besides being a major headache when creating a plot for your game, anything involving time travel is incredibly theoretical.
- **Teleportation:** Like artificial gravity, teleportation got its start in science fiction as a way for television shows to save money (in this case, to teleport onto a planet's surface without showing a shuttle take off and land). As such, we're unlikely to be beamed from place to place anytime soon.

Overall, if the technology you want to use feels exactly like magic, it's probably too advanced for a traditional science fiction setting.



EXAMPLE SETTING: ANDROID

A great example of a setting that is on the “harder” end of the science fiction spectrum is Fantasy Flight Games’ very own **ANDROID** universe. **ANDROID** depicts a not-so-distant future where the world has changed—but people have not.

Atop the highest peak on the equator, in the heart of the largest city the Earth has ever seen, a glittering tower of buckyweave stretches into the heavens. The Beanstalk—a space elevator reaching into orbit around the Earth—has unlocked the solar system and transformed it into a brave new frontier for humanity. Mars and the Moon have both been colonized, and spaceships explore the asteroid belt and beyond. From the Moon flows a constant stream of helium-3, a rare isotope used in the fusion reactors that now power the solar system.

That incredible wealth has created New Angeles, a vast megapolis sprawling across tens of thousands of square kilometers of South America where hundreds of millions of people live. New Angeles is the largest, grandest, richest, poorest, most splendid, and most awful city in all the worlds. It is diverse, sophisticated, and powerful, while also wracked by corruption, unrest, and crime.

The worlds of **ANDROID** are linked together by the Network, a web of information that links nearly every

device (and by extension, every person) on the planet. The Network arose from the ashes of the old Internet. Instead of linking computers, the Network links every electronic device using universal gateway protocols and encryptions. Secure, fast, and nearly indestructible, the Network truly is the digital frontier imagined by twentieth-century futurists. And just like on any frontier, lawlessness reigns on the fringes. Hackers known as runners haunt the Network, breaking into corporate records, stealing from bank accounts, and liberating secret information. With a system as pervasive as the Network, these criminals could be anyone, anywhere.

Most importantly, the **ANDROID** setting has recently seen the introduction of true androids, or artificial humans. These come in two forms: clones and bioroids (humanoid robots). An invention known as braintapping allows these androids to be given human thoughts and personalities. Crucially, however, they’re still owned by the corporations that created them. Earth, Luna, and Mars teeter on the edge of a revolution as androids increasingly dominate the workforce and leave millions of humans jobless. At the same time, people are starting to wrestle with the question, “Just how human are these androids, and should they be treated as property at all?”

NEW STARTING CHARACTER OPTIONS

Given that this setting is more grounded in reality than a fantasy or space opera game, you're not likely to find aliens or entirely different species. However, depending on the technologies you want in your setting, these two starting character options may make sense.

BIOROID

This profile works for just about any humanoid robot with human-level intelligence and a certain degree of free will. Because robots are built to meet certain specifications, we gave the bioroid low starting characteristics but a lot of experience. That way, you can customize your characteristics and skills to represent any of the different "models" of bioroid.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 11+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 8+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 155 XP
- **Special Abilities:** Bioroids do not need to eat, sleep, or breathe, and are unaffected by toxins and poisons. Bioroids do not reduce their strain threshold when they receive cybernetics (in the case of bioroids, the cybernetics can represent upgraded mechanical components instead of true cybernetics).
- **Inorganic:** Since bioroids are inorganic, they do not gain the benefits of healing wounds with painkillers or a Medicine check. Bioroids can heal wounds and strain naturally by resting, as their systems attempt self-repairs. Bioroids can also be "healed" by using the Mechanics skill instead of the Medicine skill, but otherwise following the guidelines detailed on page 116.

CLONE

This profile is of a human clone. We assume this is a corporation-produced clone that has been tailored for a certain job (otherwise, if this were an unmodified clone, you could simply use the average human profile on page 36). Like bioroids, clones have customization options to represent their "designed" nature, but in their case, we did this by giving a clone focused skill

options, but less experience. The "A Face in the Crowd" rule represents a clone blending into an urban setting (after all, they look exactly like a bunch of other clones), but may have to deal with anti-clone bias.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 11+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 10+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 80 XP
- **Special Abilities:** You may select two skills when creating a clone character. Your clone character starts play with two ranks in each of these skills. You still can't train their skills above rank 2 during character creation.
- **A Face in a Crowd:** Characters add ■ to any checks they make to pick a clone out in a crowd. Clones also add ■ to social skill checks they make when interacting with people who don't know the specific clone.



TABLE II.5–1: SCIENCE FICTION WEAPONS

NAME	SKILL	DAM	CRIT	RANGE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY	SPECIAL
MELEE WEAPONS								
Monoblade Knife	Melee	+1	2	Engaged	1	240	3	Pierce 2
Stun Baton	Melee	6	4	Engaged	1	160	2	Disorient 3, Stun Damage
RANGED WEAPONS								
Flechette Pistol	Ranged (Light)	4	2	Short	1	500	5	Pierce 2, Vicious 2
Flechette Launcher	Ranged (Heavy)	4	2	Medium	3	800	5	Blast 4, Pierce 2, Vicious 3
Laser Pistol	Ranged (Light)	6	3	Short	2	650	7	Accurate 1, Burn 1
Laser Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	8	3	Medium	4	900	7	Accurate 1, Burn 1
Gauss Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	10	2	Extreme	5	2,000	6	Cumbersome 3, Pierce 5, Slow-Firing 1
Micro-Missile Launcher	Gunnery	12	4	Long	5	3,000	6	Blast 10, Cumbersome 4, Guided 3, Limited Ammo 3, Prepare 1

SETTING-SPECIFIC GEAR

The following are some examples of weapons, armor, and gear that may be unique to a science fiction setting. This is not supposed to be an exhaustive list by any means; it should instead serve as inspiration when you create your setting, particularly if you make your own weapons (see page 197).

You should also use some or all of the gear from the **modern day** setting in this setting, since any near-future settings are still going to have a lot of modern day tech.

WEAPONS

In each entry, we explain why the weapon has some of the characteristics and item qualities it does. For example, a laser pistol has the Burn quality because we think it reasonable that a laser could light a target on fire. We do this so that when building your own gear (a laser cannon, perhaps?), you know what characteristics help define the gear as that particular type of gear, and what characteristics are more flexible.

FLECHETTE PISTOL AND LAUNCHER

The flechette pistol uses electromagnetic coils to fire bursts of tiny metal spears called flechettes. These benefit from significant penetrative power and can sometimes punch straight through an opponent (represented by the Pierce 2 quality), but they don't have a great deal of stopping power (hence the lower damage). Since each shot is actually a burst of several flechettes, the low Crit rating and Vicious 2 quality represent the high chance of internal damage. The flechette launcher

is a larger, heavier version of the pistol, similar to a shotgun in that it fires larger bursts of flechettes (hence the Blast 4 and higher Vicious quality).

LASER PISTOL AND RIFLE

Laser weapons fire a beam of coherent light, causing damage through intense, searing heat. In this setting, we're assuming that handheld lasers are still being refined, so these early models have some drawbacks. One issue with laser weapons is beam diffusion over long distances, which is why our laser weapons are relatively short ranged. These lasers don't have a lot of penetration, since they expend their energy on the surface of whatever they hit, so no Pierce. But they are very accurate and can light targets on fire, hence the Accurate and Burn qualities.

GAUSS RIFLE

A gauss rifle uses an electromagnetic rail or coil to hurl a metal projectile over a long distance at incredible speed. The main drawback of this weapon is that it takes some time to recharge its capacitors after firing, so we gave it Slow-Firing (it's also important to do this for balance reasons, since this weapon is very powerful). We gave it Cumbersome as well, so a character needs to be strong to carry it around, or must use a bipod (see page 207).

MICRO-MISSILE LAUNCHER

One thing we can expect in the future is the further miniaturization of computers, which leads us to the micro-missile launcher. This portable weapon fires miniature

missiles that lock onto a target, pursue it, and detonate. The tracking ability comes with the Guided quality (and the time to lock onto a target is represented by the Prepare quality). As with the gauss rifle, a weapon this powerful needs drawbacks to compensate, which are the weapon's high Cumbersome rating and encumbrance.

MONOBLADE KNIFE

This is an age-old weapon with a futuristic twist, a knife given an impossibly sharp edge through materials sciences. This is just like the knife on page 91, except that this knife has a better Crit rating and the Pierce quality; it can cut through tough materials and is more likely to inflict deadly wounds. If you want to make a mono-blade sword (or katana), up the damage to +3, give it the Defensive 1 quality, and multiply the price by 2.

STUN BATON

This is supposed to be a slightly more futuristic version of a police riot club, a weapon that shocks opponents into submission. One thing to note is that even though this is a Melee weapon, it doesn't add your character's Brawn to the damage (signified by the lack of a "+" before the damage value). Since the weapon discharges an electric shock whenever it touches an opponent, how hard your character swings it doesn't matter. Also, this weapon is non-lethal, so it has the Stun Damage quality.

ARMOR

Flak vests from the **modern day** setting are very appropriate for a sci-fi setting. Meanwhile, we've turned our focus to more futuristic protection.

PLASTEEL CARAPACE

Made from semifuturistic materials, a suit of plas-teel carapace armor completely covers your character from head to toe, and with the right attachments can even be environmentally sealed. The armor has a rigid outer shell that deflects or blocks incoming attacks (represented by the reasonably high soak value and a defense value).

OPTICAL CAMO SUIT

An optical camo suit plays with the idea that holographic projectors and other similar technologies will, in the future, allow people to wear armor that "cloaks" them and makes them invisible to the naked eye. Our optical camo suit doesn't quite go that far, but it does use holoprojectors to blur and obscure the wearer, making them much harder to hit (hence the defense value). Unfortunately, the complicated projector tech doesn't do much if someone manages to land a lucky blow, which is why this armor has no soak value.



TABLE II.5–2: SCIENCE FICTION ARMOR

TYPE	DEFENSE	SOAK	ENCUMBRANCE	PRICE	RARITY
Plasteel Carapace	1	+2	4	750	5
Optical Camo Suit	2	+0	2	580	7

GEAR

Most of the items on pages 93 and 168 work for this setting, but the following items may be unique to sci-fi.

CYBER-RIG

Hackers use cyber-rigs to delve deep into the Internet (or its equivalent) and defeat the most dangerous firewalls and programs. These things are big, with multiple monitor screens, towers full of electronics, and countless wires.

A cyber-rig does everything a personal computer does. It also adds automatic ✨ to any checks made to hack into protected servers, and adds automatic ✖ to any checks by opponents to hack into its own systems.

PAD

Personal access devices (PADs) are small, handheld computers not too dissimilar to today’s smartphones and tablets (although their capabilities are notably superior).

A PAD does everything you would expect a personal computer to do, just slightly faster and more easily.

CYBERNETICS

Although modern cybernetics can give a disabled individual a replacement for a missing extremity, in the future they may do much more. These cybernetics are special pieces of gear that must be installed on a character with an **Average** (◆◆) **Medicine check**. They cannot be removed without surgery, requiring a second successful **Average** (◆◆) **Medicine check**.

TABLE II.5–3: SCIENCE FICTION GEAR

ITEM	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY
Cyber-Rig	8	2,000	5
PAD	1	200	3
CYBERNETICS			
Cybernetic Arm or Leg	–	2,000	5
Skulljack	–	2,500	5
Cybereyes	–	800	5
Implant Armor	–	1,000	5
Cyberorgan	–	750	5

Thematically, cybernetics are supposed to enhance a character, so the ones presented here increase a character’s derived stats, skills, or characteristics. To avoid letting increases get out of control, each stat, skill, or characteristic can only be increased by +1 due to cybernetics, no matter how many different cybernetics your character has that would increase that number.

CYBERNETIC ARM OR LEG

Besides replacing a missing limb, a cybernetic arm or leg adds +1 to your character’s Brawn or Agility rating (your choice when your character obtains the limb). If your character has one or more cybernetic arms, they decrease their strain threshold by one, and if they have one or more cybernetic legs, they decrease their strain threshold by one.

SKULLJACK

A skulljack is a cerebral point that allows your character to access a computer with their mind. As long as the skulljack is linked to a computer (either wired or wirelessly), it increases your character’s Intellect rating by one. If your character has a skulljack, they decrease their strain threshold by one.

CYBEREYES

Cybernetic eyes provide +1 rank to your character’s Perception and Vigilance, and remove ■ added to their checks due to darkness. If your character has one or more cybereyes, they decrease their strain threshold by one.

IMPLANT ARMOR

Implant armor is added beneath your character’s skin, giving them discreet protection. Implant armor provides +1 soak. If your character has implant armor, they decrease their strain threshold by one.

CYBERORGANS

Cyberorgans allow individuals to survive heart disease, lung cancer, and other deadly ailments. However, these devices also can be bought as implants that improve performance. A cyberorgan provides either +2 wound threshold (this is a special exception to the +1 increase limit, but cannot be increased past +2), +1 Resilience, or +1 Athletics (you choose when you buy the organ). For each cyberorgan your character has, they decrease their strain threshold by one.

SETTING-SPECIFIC ADVERSARIES

The following are some adversaries specific to the science fiction setting. Again, keep in mind that you can also use adversaries from other settings, especially those from the modern day setting.

COMBAT DRONE (RIVAL)

Combat drones may be built in any number of shapes and designs. This one is a futuristic quad-rotor drone with weapons and with a weak AI that can let it operate somewhat autonomously.



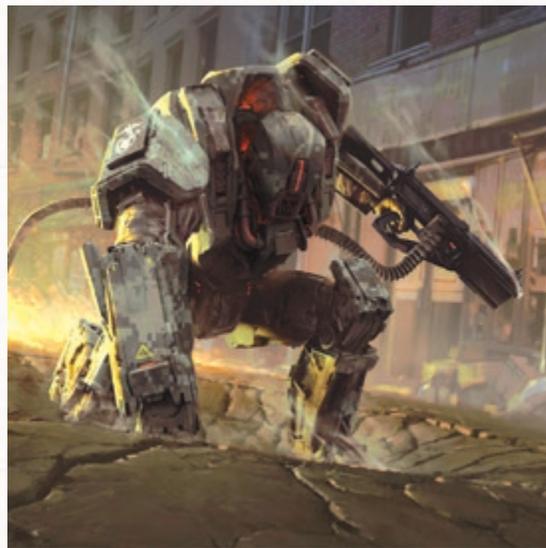
Skills: Coordination 1, Perception 2, Ranged (Light) 1, Vigilance 2.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Flyer (can fly; see page 100), Mechanical (does not need to breathe, eat, or drink, and can survive in vacuum and underwater; immune to poisons and toxins), Telepresence (can operate independently, or can be controlled directly by an operator via wireless link; if being controlled, the combat drone counts as having ranks in a skill equal to the controller's ranks in that skill).

Equipment: Rapid-fire flechette gun (Ranged [Light]; Damage 4; Critical 2; Range [Medium]; Auto-fire, Pierce 2, Vicious 2).

Equipment: Portable laser cannon (Ranged [Heavy]; Damage 10; Critical 3; Range [Long]; Accurate 1, Burn 1, Cumbersome 4), laser pistol (Ranged [Light]; Damage 6; Critical 3; Range [Short]; Accurate 1, Burn 1), exosuit fists (Brawl; Damage 6; Critical 4; Range [Engaged]; Disorient 3, Knockdown), exosuit (+1 defense, +2 soak, +1 Brawn, +4 wound threshold; allows wearer to operate underwater and in vacuum for up to 1 hour).



EXOSUIT TROOPER (RIVAL)

For a hard science fiction setting, we can assume at least some professional soldiers are equipped with full-body exosuits that enhance their strength while protecting them from damage. An exosuit increases the character's Brawn, soak, and wound threshold, which we've incorporated into the profile stats and noted in the equipment. If you use an exosuit trooper without a suit, make sure you remove the increases from the profile stats.



Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Discipline 1, Ranged (Heavy) 2, Ranged (Light) 2, Vigilance 1.

Talents: None.

Abilities: None.

HACKER (NEMESIS)

Since computers and hacking often are a large part of a hard sci-fi setting, we've included one hacker profile. You can use this adversary as a sysop employed by a government or corporation, or as a criminal hacker. In all cases, this is a dangerous adversary in the electronic realm.



Skills: Cool 3, Computers 2, Mechanics 1, Piloting 2.

Talents: Adversary 1 (upgrade difficulty of all combat checks against this target once), Defensive Sysops (when defending a computer system against intrusion, add ■■ to opponents' checks), Distinctive Style (before making a Computers check to hack a system, use this talent to add ✨ ✨ 🌀 🌀 to the results).

Abilities: None.

Equipment: Custom computer terminal, energy drinks.

CHAPTER 6: SPACE OPERA

At its simplest, space opera could be thought of as science fiction that's heavy on the adventure and light on the actual science. Space opera, at least originally, was defined by what it's not—hard science fiction. Although the term was initially meant as a disparaging label, fans and creators have embraced it in the decades since it first came into use.

TROPES

Space opera takes the tropes of hard science fiction that we discuss on page 170 and tosses them aside, but there are some other tropes we think help make a setting feel like space opera. Of course, this list isn't complete, and much of what defines space opera is open to debate. However, if you set out to run a space opera game, we think you'll find many of these tropes naturally fall into place.

GRAND STORIES, SINGULAR HEROES, HIGH STAKES

Most space opera stories focus on small groups of plucky heroes and their actions, which are likely to have a noticeable impact even at the huge scales found in many settings. The protagonists might not seem like important people; although they could be royalty or military leaders, they could just as easily be small-time outlaws or ordinary people caught up in events.

The scope of a space opera setting is often immense. It's not uncommon for the action, or even a unified government, to stretch across an entire galaxy. In some cases, characters might travel from one end of the galaxy to the other in a relatively short time. Space opera settings are huge not only in a physical sense, but often in a historical sense as well. Space operas often include civilizations that have been around for centuries or millennia.

Even space opera stories with a limited scope are likely to feature high stakes, at least relative to the scale. A setting that encompasses a galaxy might see the heroes facing threats to that entire galaxy, whether we're talking complete destruction or merely utter subjugation by an evil regime. Not all space opera settings or stories are so big, though. What matters is that the risks and dangers facing your characters make for high drama and

excitement. Although it's not the only type of soft science fiction, space opera definitely falls toward that side of the spectrum. There's no reason you can't incorporate some scientific rigor into your space opera setting, despite the term's origins. For it to truly feel like space opera, though, the focus should be on your characters and the adventure, not the science behind your setting's advanced technologies.

It's perfectly possible to have a space opera campaign, if not an entire setting, take place within a single solar system. Just make sure that you scale the stakes appropriately: if the setting is a star system, then the stakes can be the fate of that star system. Always think big.

IMPOSSIBLE TECHNOLOGY? NO BIG DEAL

Unlike in hard science fiction, in space opera technology is rarely a focus, although at the same time, it is impossibly advanced. It exists to serve the story, but it doesn't drive the story. Characters likely use exciting but implausible weapons, such as laser pistols that fire visible and explosive beams, energy swords that can cut through anything, and rifles that disintegrate targets. Flying cars, force fields, tractor beams, invisibility devices, planet-destroying weapons, and other such marvels are introduced because they are cool and help the story, not because they are a logical extrapolation of current scientific developments.

A common example is faster-than-light travel, a staple of space opera settings. It's necessary in order to tell the sweeping, galaxy-spanning



stories space opera is known for, but any explanation of its function tends to be cursory and certainly can't hold up to any sort of scrutiny. It may rely on fantastical assumptions such as a parallel universe or a miraculous—yet readily available—fuel source. The speed of interstellar travel varies between settings, and may have some basis in the explanation behind the technology. Ultimately, however, travel in space operas tends to be as fast or slow as the story needs for the best dramatic effect. You might explain it as gravity fluctuations, particle storms, or some inherent unpredictability of the technology, but don't worry about defining the travel time between various planets in your setting (unless you really want to).

BROAD STROKES FOR A BIGGER CANVAS

To allow for the sense of grand scale common to space opera, facets of the setting are often covered in a simplified, brief fashion. This includes planets dominated by a single, recognizable ecosystem—desert worlds, ice worlds, and so on—as well as a single alien species. While humans likely show much of the diversity they do in reality, alien races tend to abide by cultural and personality traits across their entire home planet and beyond, with the potential for rare exceptions. Even humans are likely bound by planetary or galaxy-wide governments and cultures, in stark contrast to the fractious civilization of present-day Earth. Though unrealistic, these convenient simplifications make it possible to tell stories encompassing numerous intelligent species and countless star systems without collapsing under the weight of details. Space opera is about drama and story, not minutia.

Governments and other such organizations are often covered in similarly broad strokes. In space opera, it's not uncommon for an empire to rule over the known galaxy, or at least those planets inhabited by humans.

ALIENS AND ANDROIDS

Many space opera settings feature a variety of intelligent humanoids that aren't quite human. Intelligent machines and humanlike aliens are probably the most common, but mutants, genetically engineered hybrids, holograms, and anything else you might imagine are also possible. These entities usually have very human personalities, and language barriers are rarely an issue unless they serve an important part of the plot. Depending on the setting, these various beings might be insular and live apart, or commingle across the galaxy. Regardless, they are certain to interact at some level, and interspecies diplomacy might be a large part of the story.

This is one of the great concessions space opera makes in placing the story and excitement over realism. In reality, extraterrestrial life—should it exist at all—is pretty unlikely to resemble humanity. In space opera, however, not only do aliens frequently look and act like us, but they even emulate distinctly recognizable human cultures. This approach may require some suspension of disbelief, but it avoids many of the obstacles that can arise from a more realistic treatment. It also ensures that non-human characters are relatable not only to the audience (or players, in the case of an RPG), but to the humans—and other aliens—within the setting. From a roleplaying game standpoint, it's fun to have the option to play an alien, and keeping them very human-like makes it easier to get in character.

Of course, this isn't to say your space opera setting shouldn't also include incomprehensible, utterly inhuman alien beings. The horror and revulsion such creatures might inspire can even be elevated by the commonality of human-like aliens. If the laws of nature across the galaxy have resulted in humanoids, where did this energy cloud that defies all attempts at communication come from?

THIS SEEMS FAMILIAR

Often, space opera settings feature familiar tropes from other genres. This likely stems from space opera's favoring of adventure and excitement over scientific accuracy. Whether it takes place in the future or another galaxy altogether, a space opera setting might feature elements that would be right at home in a Western, medieval fantasy adventure, detective story, or just about anything else. A space opera setting could include duty-bound, star-faring knights or desperadoes with high-tech revolvers. Characters might wield advanced melee weapons, even though the guns are equally advanced and feature all the advantages guns always do in a knife fight. Depending on the setting, plausible explanations might be provided for such anachronisms, or they might simply come down to the Rule of Cool. (See page 165 for more on this very important law of gaming.)

One advantage this trope has for you as a GM is that you can borrow liberally from your favorite movies, books, and video games. By changing the details, you can insert characters, places, and even whole stories without your players recognizing them. A stagecoach robbery can become an attack on a spaceship. A hidden temple full of lizard people and magic items becomes, well, a hidden temple on another planet, inhabited by lizard-like aliens guarding ancient technology from the height of their civilization.



EXAMPLE SETTING: TWILIGHT IMPERIUM

Fantasy Flight Games' **TWILIGHT IMPERIUM** is a prime example of a space opera setting. **TWILIGHT IMPERIUM** presents an epic panorama of competing civilizations vying to establish a new interstellar empire.

It has been more than three millennia since the fall of the Lazax Empire and the Great Scourge that eradicated the onetime rulers of the galaxy. The intervening Dark Years are finally drawing to a close, as the great races recommit to the Galactic Council and step forward from their fortified borders to reestablish trade and recolonize the neighboring worlds that perished in the conflict. But this is no dawning age of peace and cooperation. Even as a score of stellar nations retake their seats on the Council, these great races scheme against each other and skirmish along interstellar borders and on unclaimed worlds. It's clear to all that each of these factions has its eyes on the throne of a new empire.

In the Twilight Wars, the ancient capital of the Lazax Empire, Mecatol Rex, was bombarded and blasted beyond recognition. Yet the greatest persisting damage wasn't inflicted by Sol dreadnoughts, but by the Lazax councilor who set afire the Hall of Cartography before fleeing with the handful of Lazax who heeded his warning of the threat facing the Empire. Due to the destruction of those records and the ensuing decline, no reliable maps of the galaxy exist today. Despite countless thousands of years of exploration and colonization, in many ways it is as if the great races were stepping out among the stars for the first time.

While the Federation of Sol is still seen as a young upstart by many of the elder races, none have forgotten the key role it played in the destruction of the Lazax Empire. In the years since, the Federation has fortified its ancestral territories, and now it strikes out in a new era of colonization. Humans may live throughout the galaxy, but those of the Federation of Sol have a unique sense of purpose, seeing it as their destiny to rule the stars.

The Emirates of Hacan were among the few to maintain contact with the other great races during the Dark Years, continuing in their role as traders and merchants. This continued contact has put them in an advantageous position to call upon alliances, to say nothing of the information they have collected in the intervening centuries. As a faction and a people, the Hacan prefer diplomacy and commerce over war and bloodshed, but they are more than ready to fight to protect their interests.

Only the warlike Letnev could be said to have played a bigger part in the ignition of the Twilight Wars, through their blockade of the Quann wormhole. Always belligerent, the Barony has eagerly rebuilt its forces since the Twilight Wars in anticipation of a new age of conquest.

The Xxcha Kingdom, the first great interstellar civilization, was entirely pacifist prior to the Letnev invasion of its twin capital worlds of Archon Ren and Archon Tau during the Twilight Wars. Although unable to openly resist at the time, the Xxcha have since developed their military technology and forces to ensure they can defend against aggression. As war brews again,

the Xxcha king believes that only by claiming the Imperial throne can the Xxcha ensure galactic peace.

The Ghosts of Creuss only recently revealed themselves to the wider galaxy, though they are now believed to have been responsible for numerous disappearances of vessels in the region of the Creuss Gate. Since joining the Galactic Council, however, the Creuss have been nothing but diplomatic and respectful—if enigmatic. Little is known of these bizarre energy beings, except that their near-supernatural affinity for wormholes can provide them with great influence and power in an upcoming conflict.

NEW STARTING CHARACTER OPTIONS

Most space opera settings are home to many intelligent species with comparable levels of technology. Humans are often the most numerous and diverse of the great races, but the humanlike personalities and motivations of most space opera aliens make them perfect fits for player characters. The species presented here are generic versions of common tropes, and they can be customized to fit your own setting.

ANIMALISTIC ALIEN

Space opera settings often have alien species that are derivative of some terrestrial species. Fiction abounds with catlike aliens, turtle-like aliens, reptilian aliens, and so forth. Traditionally, these species are stronger, faster, or tougher than humans, and they share some traits with the nonsapient Terran species they mimic. Our animalistic alien species is stronger and faster than most average humans, but trades this for fewer starting XP. The physical appearance of this species is, of course, up to you.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 10+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 8+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 80 XP
- **Special Abilities:** An animalistic alien starts with one rank in Athletics, Coordination, or Resilience during character creation. You still can't train their skills above rank 2 during character creation.

Even as these and the other would-be rulers of the galaxy attempt to outmaneuver each other at the negotiating table and in naval actions, the Lazax have returned from extinction, now calling themselves the L1z1x. It's unclear how much these cold cyborgs really have in common with their imperial ancestors.

But while the great races vie for the throne, another force seeks not conquest, but utter annihilation. The Nekro Virus is an omniphagic biotechnological plague, adapting and incorporating the technology of its victims even as it destroys all biological life in its path. If the Nekro Virus triumphs, there won't be a galaxy left to rule.

- **Natural Weapons:** An animalistic alien adds +2 damage to any Brawl combat checks they make. Their Brawl combat checks also gain the Vicious 1 quality or increase an existing Vicious quality by one.

PSIONIC

Psionic or psychic aliens are a perennial favorite in science fiction. We made our psionic alien with a formidable Willpower and Intellect, with the tradeoff of being extremely physically weak. However, what your character gets in return are three unique abilities allowing them to read minds, manipulate emotions, and even harm opponents with a thought. What a psionic alien looks like is up to you. Traditionally, they tend to be physically frail—withered bodies with oversized heads, or spindly creatures with fragile limbs and ethereal grace.



SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 7+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 11+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 70 XP
- **Mind Reader:** As an action, a psionic may make an **opposed Discipline versus Discipline check** targeting one living creature within medium range. If the check succeeds, the psionic knows the target's current thoughts and emotional state. \blacktriangle \blacktriangle \blacktriangle or \otimes may be spent to discover other thoughts or memories, at your GM's discretion.
- **Mind Shaper:** As an action, a psionic may make an **opposed Discipline versus Vigilance check** targeting one living creature within medium range. If the check succeeds, the psionic may cause the target to adopt an emotional state of the psionic's choice for the next minute (or one round of structured time). \blacktriangle or \otimes may be spent to increase the duration by one round (and may be spent multiple times). However, if the check fails or generates \otimes \otimes \otimes or \otimes , the target realizes their emotions are being manipulated.
- **Mind Breaker:** As an action, a psionic may make an **opposed Discipline versus Resilience check** targeting one living creature within medium range. If the check succeeds, the psionic causes the target to suffer 1 strain, plus 1 additional strain per \star \star generated on the check. \blacktriangle \blacktriangle \blacktriangle or \otimes may be spent to cause the target to suffer 1 wound as well.

ROBOT

Robots in a space opera can be found in all shapes and sizes. It could be roughly humanoid but built from nearly impervious alloys; a giant, crab-like tank; or a featureless, hovering sphere. Due to the diversity of options for a robot character, we took an approach similar to that for the bioroid on page 174, starting with low characteristics but a lot of XP.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 10+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 10+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 175 XP

- **Special Abilities:** After selecting their career, your robot character may train one rank in six of the eight career skills (instead of the usual four).
- **Special Abilities:** Robots do not need to eat, sleep, or breathe, and are unaffected by toxins and poisons. If you are using the cybernetics rules from the science fiction setting (see page 177), robots do not reduce their strain threshold when they receive cybernetics (the cybernetics can represent upgraded mechanical components instead of true cybernetics).
- **Networked Intelligence:** A robot adds automatic \star to its Intellect- and Willpower-based checks for each other friendly character of the same species within medium range—to a maximum of \star \star \star .
- **Inorganic:** Since robots are inorganic, they do not gain the benefits of recovering wounds with painkillers or a Medicine check. Robots can recover wounds and strain naturally by resting, as their systems attempt self-repairs. Robots can also be “healed” by using the Mechanics skill instead of the Medicine skill, but otherwise following the guidelines detailed on page 116. A robot also increases its soak by one.

VANGUARD

Our vanguard species is an alien race that is humanity's superior in the galaxy. These aliens are more advanced scientifically, culturally, and even artistically than us poor, primitive humans—which inevitably makes it all the more satisfying when the human protagonist of a story accomplishes something they thought impossible.

SPECIES ABILITIES



- **Wound Threshold:** 9+Brawn
- **Strain Threshold:** 9+Willpower
- **Starting Experience:** 100 XP
- **Special Abilities:** A vanguard starts with one rank in Knowledge during character creation. You still can't train Knowledge above rank 2 during character creation.
- **Space Is Our Birthright:** A vanguard adds automatic \blacktriangle to the results of any Astrocartography or Knowledge checks they make.
- **High Tech Baubles:** A vanguard starts the game with an additional 500 credits' worth of starting gear (this is in addition to their normal starting gear allowance).

SETTING-SPECIFIC GEAR

In this section, we have an assortment of advanced equipment the likes of which you might find in a space opera setting. This is really only a starting point—space opera settings can encompass any sort of technology imaginable, and that applies to weapons, armor, and other gear PCs might use as much as anything else. To help you in creating additional items for your game (see page 197), we’ve included some notes on why we gave these items the profiles we did.

WEAPONS

In addition to these, most of the weapons from the **science fiction** setting could find a place in a space opera campaign, at least among backwater worlds with a lower technological base.

ASSAULT CANNON

This is the evolution of modern day autocannons and heavy machine guns. It may or may not feature multiple rotating barrels, or use explosive or armor-piercing shells, but the end result is much the same, since

we are assuming the explosive radius isn’t enough to justify the Blast quality. Instead, the Pierce and Vicious qualities combine with high damage to make a weapon that’s probably overkill against infantry and enough to threaten light vehicles.

GRENADE LOBBER

We’ve given this grenade launcher a profile reflecting a standard grenade. If you use a different kind of grenade (such as the particle grenade), change the damage and Crit ratings accordingly, and add the relevant qualities (you wouldn’t change the launcher’s Limited Ammo quality, for instance). Although this weapon is similar to a modern-day grenade launcher, sophisticated targeting systems help the user fire at the right trajectory to hit even distant targets, hence the long range and Accurate quality.

LASER PISTOL, RIFLE, AND CANNON

These weapons fire beams of energy, which is really all the explanation you need in a space opera setting.

TABLE II.6—1: SPACE OPERA WEAPONS

NAME	SKILL	DAM	CRIT	RANGE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY	SPECIAL
MELEE WEAPONS								
Shudder Blade	Melee	+2	2	Engaged	1	450	5	Pierce 2, Vicious 3
RANGED WEAPONS								
Assault Cannon	Gunnery	15	3	Long	6	4,500	3	Auto-fire, Cumbersome 4, Inaccurate 1, Pierce 3, Vicious 3
Grenade Lobber	Gunnery	8	4	Long	5	1,000	5	Accurate 2, Blast 6, Limited Ammo 6
Laser Cannon	Gunnery	9	3	Extreme	8	3,120	6	Breach 2, Cumbersome 3
Laser Pistol	Ranged (Light)	5	3	Medium	2	360	4	Pierce 2
Laser Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	6	3	Long	4	860	4	Pierce 4
Particle Grenade	Ranged (Light)	6	4	Short	1	200	5	Blast 3, Concussive 1, Disorient 3, Limited Ammo 1, Stun Damage
Plasma Cannon	Gunnery	10	2	Long	7	2,000	7	Blast 10, Burn 1, Cumbersome 3, Slow-Firing 1
Plasma Pistol	Ranged (Light)	10	2	Short	2	1,200	4	Burn 1
Plasma Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	10	2	Medium	4	1,400	4	Burn 1
Sliver Rocket Launcher	Gunnery	15	2	Extreme	7	10,000	6	Breach 4, Cumbersome 3, Guided 4, Limited Ammo 3, Prepare 1, Vicious 5
Slug Pistol	Ranged (Light)	6	4	Short	1	200	1	
Slug Rifle	Ranged (Heavy)	7	4	Medium	3	375	1	Auto-fire

Unlike the laser weapons presented in the hard science fiction setting on page 175, we assume these weapons are sophisticated enough that diffusion over distance isn't a problem. We also decided that the focused beams of these weapons can easily punch holes in armor, hence the Pierce (or even Breach) quality.

PARTICLE GRENADE

This grenade releases a blast of highly energized particles that disrupt the nervous systems of most organic creatures. For this sci-fi take on the classic stun grenade, we figured the particles have a potent enough effect to leave the target dazed even once they regain control of their body, represented by a higher Disorient rating in addition to Concussive.

PLASMA PISTOL, RIFLE, AND CANNON

These weapons all fire spherical bolts of high-energy ionized gas. The exact chemicals and technology involved are sure to differ between manufacturers and species, but the result is devastating, superheated energy projectiles. Even the larger weapons in this category have a fairly limited range, since we figure the electromagnetic field generated for each projectile can only maintain its coherency for a short time. The bolts of superheated gas leave flesh sizzling and armor

smoldering, hence the Burn quality. The largest weapons—plasma cannons—need time to cool down after each shot (hence the Slow-Firing quality).

SHUDDER BLADE

This weapon is essentially a combat knife with a carbon alloy blade that vibrates at an ultrasonic frequency, allowing it to slice through even the strongest materials. These traits are represented with the Pierce and Vicious qualities as well as a good Crit rating, giving the weapon a chance to inflict significant injuries on even armored targets.

SLIVER ROCKET LAUNCHER

A sliver rocket launcher is named for the appearance of its narrow, supersonic projectiles. Sliver rockets don't have an explosive payload, but their armor-piercing warheads are immensely effective against even the toughest vehicles. We've given the weapon Breach to account for the devastating effects of impact against both vehicles and flesh.

SLUG PISTOL AND RIFLE

Despite thousands of years of innovation, handguns and rifles that chemically propel solid metal bullets remain a mainstay of fighting forces. These are common among poorer and less technologically advanced forces.



ARMOR

Space opera armor can be very effective and exotic, with force fields and powered systems.

ELITE SHOCK ARMOR

Elite shock armor is the kind of horribly effective, horribly expensive armor that governments and armies only give to their very best soldiers. These might be marines assigned to board enemy starships, commando raiders sent behind enemy lines on the most dangerous missions, or the elite bodyguards of powerful emperors and rulers.

When wearing this armor, characters increase their Brawn by 1, to a maximum of 5 (this does increase their soak value) and count their encumbrance capacity as 10+Brawn. This armor is also environmentally sealed, meaning that it counts as a space suit (see the next page).

INFANTRY COMBAT ARMOR

The combat armor used by foot soldiers of various interplanetary governments is pretty similar across the galaxy, providing a solid soak value with minimal encumbrance.

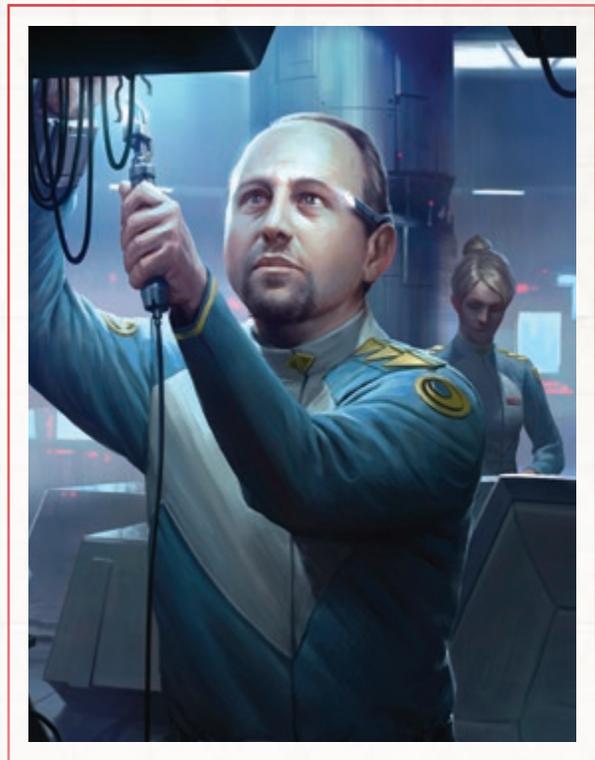
If you are using the hard point customization rules (see page 206), infantry combat armor has three hard points (instead of the usual one).

PERSONAL FORCE FIELD

Force fields are a mainstay of space opera sci-fi, although in many settings they are primarily or exclusively used to protect ships and other large targets. The sophisticated technology and high power draw mean that personal force fields are rare and expensive. Mechanically, a high defense is less predictable than soak, but has the potential to cause otherwise successful attacks to fail.

GEAR

Most gear in a space opera setting is actually very similar to the gear you might see in other settings, but with a fancier aesthetic and more flashing lights.



COMM-BEAD

This communications device fits into a sentient's ear (or other auditory orifice) and allows them to communicate with friends and allies within 100 kilometers. If the comm-bead can tie into a planetary communications network (the kind that any civilized planet has), then it can communicate with anyone on the same planet.

PORTABLE MOTION SENSOR

This handheld device, easily stored in a pocket or pouch, detects nearby movement. The user can calibrate sensitivity to avoid false alarms by small vermin.

Under normal conditions, a character using the sensor automatically detects any moving creatures within medium range. Of course, it can't distinguish friend from foe or identify the creatures. If creatures within range are actively hidden, your character adds ■ ■ to Vigilance or Perception checks to notice them while using the motion sensor (instead of spotting them automatically).

TABLE II.6—2: SPACE OPERA ARMOR

TYPE	DEFENSE	SOAK	ENCUMBRANCE	PRICE	RARITY
Elite Shock Armor	1	+2	5	4,000	6
Infantry Combat Armor	0	+2	2	700	5
Personal Force Field	3	+0	1	2,000	8

SMART-SYSTEM

The next evolution of personal computing, this handheld device fits into a pocket or can be worn on a wrist and functions as a personal computer with an incorporated weak AI. Basically, this means your character can talk to their computer and it answers back. The AI isn't as smart as an average person, and its "weak" status means it can't learn or evolve, but it does everything a modern computer can do and can even allow futuristic hackers to access and attempt to override security systems.

In addition to functioning as a personal computer, the smart-system has information stores that allow the wearer to add ■ to any Intellect-based checks they make.

SPACE SUIT

Space suits are a must in every space opera setting. After all, one of the mainstays of the setting is traveling

TABLE II.6-3: SPACE OPERA GEAR

ITEM	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY
Comm-Bead	0	25	1
Portable Motion Sensor	1	120	4
Smart-System	1	3,000	5
Space Suit	2	100	2

through space. They all do roughly the same thing: keep the wearer alive in a vacuum.

Generally, space suits include the following: multi-directional maneuvering thrusters, a built-in light, a communications device, magnetic-soled boots, and an emergency repair kit that allows the user to fix any small leaks or tears as a maneuver. The space suit also allows the wearer to survive in vacuum for up to four hours.

SETTING-SPECIFIC ADVERSARIES

Any space opera setting is bound to be a big place with an almost limitless variety of potential adversaries for PCs. The following is just a small sample, including "typical" adversaries as well as more exotic creatures. Nearly any human NPC profile from other settings can be adapted for a space opera game with some changes to equipment. Also, a minor tweak to the profile or addition of ■ to the right checks can represent a humanoid alien.

SPACE PIRATE (MINION)

Space pirates are a staple in many space operas. They resemble their high-seas cousins of story: swaggering, uncultured rogues with a taste for plunder and mayhem.



Skills (group only): Coercion, Coordination, Gunnery, Ranged (Heavy), Melee, Vigilance.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Strength in Numbers (adds ■ to combat checks when there are at least two other friendly nemeses, rivals, or minion groups engaged in the encounter. Add ■ to combat checks when there are no other friendly nemeses, rivals, or minion groups engaged in the encounter).

Equipment: Laser rifle (Ranged [Heavy]; Damage 6;

Critical 3; Range [Long]; Pierce 4), mono-molecular cutlass (Melee; Damage 4; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]; Pierce 2), armored space suit (+1 soak).

A minion group of two space pirates may be armed with a short-ranged cutter laser equipped with a hover-platform instead of laser rifles (Gunnery; Damage 9; Critical 3; Range [Medium]; Breach 2, Inaccurate 2).

XENOMORPH HORROR (RIVAL)

On the countless planets in the galaxy, your characters are likely to encounter all manner of alien beasts. This specimen is some breed of alpha-predator on its homeworld. We've left the physical description vague, so you can use it as some saurian carnivore, tentacled lurker, or aquatic devil-fish.



Skills: Brawl 2, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Vigilance 3.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Apex Predator (at the start of their first turn in the encounter, all opponents must make a **Hard** ◆◆◆ **Discipline check** as an out-of-turn incidental. If they fail, they are immobilized until the start of their next turn. If they fail with ⚡, they are staggered until the start of their next turn instead. If

you're using the fear rules [see page 243], this counts as a fear check, and other effects may apply as well.)

Equipment: Thrashing appendage (Brawl; Damage 8; Critical 4; Range [Engaged]; Knockdown, may spend \blacktriangle \blacktriangle to knock all other characters engaged with the target prone), vicious maw (Brawl; Damage 10; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]; Pierce 3, Vicious 3).

NANO-SWARM (RIVAL)

Nanites as presented in fiction are a popular (and terrifying) danger in space opera settings. They appear as buzzing clouds or even amorphous blobs of micro-machines, swarming across the ground and breaking down anything in their path to turn into more nanites.



Skills: Brawl 1, Coordination 2.

Talents: None.

Abilities: Swarm (halve the damage dealt to the swarm before applying soak, unless the weapon has the Blast or Burn quality [regardless of whether the quality is activated]), consuming swarm (may spend a maneuver to make an **opposed Coordination versus Coordination check** targeting one engaged opponent to immobilize that opponent until the end of its next turn. At the start of its next turn, the opponent suffers 3 wounds, and the swarm heals 3 wounds), Silhouette 2.

Equipment: Tiny pincers (Brawl; Damage 1; Critical 3; Range [Engaged]; Pierce 3, add \blacksquare \blacksquare if target is immobilized).

ALIEN WARLORD (NEMESIS)

This is a sapient individual from some alien species. While most of this species may be peace-loving or honorable, this character has decided to conquer a significant portion of the galaxy by force. When you describe this individual, keep in mind that the profile represents a big, tough, charismatic leader. If you don't want to invent your own foot soldiers, you can use the space pirates as their warriors, and maybe the xenomorph horror as some sort of awful, awful pet!



Skills: Coercion 3, Cool 2, Leadership 2, Perception 3, Ranged [Light] 3, Melee 3, Vigilance 3.

Talents: Adversary 1 (upgrade difficulty of all combat checks against this target once), Coordinated Assault 3 (may spend a maneuver to use this talent to let all allies at medium range add \blacktriangle \blacktriangle to all combat checks they make until the end of the alien warlord's next turn).

Abilities: Tactical Direction (may spend a maneuver to direct one friendly minion group within medium range; that group may immediately perform a free maneuver or add \blacksquare to its next check).

Equipment: Finely crafted shudder blade (Melee; Damage 6; Critical 2; Range [Engaged]; Pierce 2, Vicious 3), laser pistol (Ranged [Light]; Damage 5; Critical 3; Range [Medium]; Pierce 2), heavy sealed armor (+2 soak), platinum-weave cloak, crimson banner of glorious conquest, sniveling servant to carry banner of glorious conquest.

TELEPATH (NEMESIS)

Throughout the galaxy, some of the alien species your characters encounter are going to have strange and terrible abilities. How this particular creature possesses the powers of telepathy is unknown, but it seems to be able to control and dominate minds.



Skills: Coercion 3, Discipline 3, Negotiation 2, Perception 3, Vigilance 3.

Talents: Adversary 2 (upgrade difficulty of all combat checks against this target twice).

Abilities: I Know What You're Thinking (when targeting an opponent with a social skill check, downgrade the difficulty a number of times equal to the number of \heartsuit in the pool [effectively replacing all \heartsuit with \diamondsuit]). When targeted by a social skill check, downgrade the ability of the check a number of times equal to the number of \clubsuit in the pool [effectively replacing all \clubsuit with \diamondsuit]).

Mind Bleed (as an action, may make an **opposed Discipline vs. Discipline check** against one living target within medium range. If successful, the target suffers 2 wounds and 2 strain per \star , and the telepath may spend \blacktriangle \blacktriangle \blacktriangle \blacktriangle or \ominus to inflict a Critical Injury).

Dominate (Once per encounter, as an action, may make an **opposed Discipline versus Discipline check** against one living target within medium range. If successful, during the target's next turn, the telepath dictates what actions and maneuvers they perform. GMs should avoid actions that lead to unavoidable character death, however, such as jumping off towering cliffs or shooting oneself in the head, since that's just not fun).

Equipment: Hoverchair, robes.

GAME MASTER'S TOOLKIT

CUSTOMIZING RULES 190

ALTERNATE RULES 204

BUILD AN ADVENTURE 236

TONES 241

Part I presented the core rules that you'll use no matter what setting. **Part II** augmented the core with setting-specific rules. In **Part III**, we discuss how to make **GENESYS** your own unique game.

This section includes several ways to do this. The first chapter discusses ways to customize the game by creating new skills, talents, items, and adventures. The second chapter discusses alternate rules that you can add to most or all settings, or leave out if you don't think you need them. The third chapter explains how to build your own adventure for your players. Finally, the fourth chapter discusses tones that you can apply to any setting to drastically shift the type of game you're running.

WHAT'S IN THIS PART OF THE BOOK

Let's go over what you're going to find in this part of the book.

- **Chapter 1: Customizing Rules.** This section explains how you can customize existing rules for your own games set in your own settings. Specifically, we go over how to create your own skills, species, talents, items, and adversaries.
- **Chapter 2: Alternate Rules.** This chapter is full of alternate rule sets you can add to your game. We didn't feel these rules were core enough to **GENESYS** that they belonged in **Part I** of the book, but they are important for certain settings. Besides rules for beefing up your nemeses and unlinking skills from characteristics, we also have rules for magic, futuristic hacking, playing games with vehicles and spaceships, and customizing weapons and armor.
- **Chapter 3: Build an Adventure.** This chapter gives you some advice on how to build your own adventure. We talk about conflicts for your PCs, types of adversity, and encounter structure.
- **Chapter 4: Tones.** Tones can work in any setting and are an additional layer of detail you can add to your game. Changing the character of the game you're running, tones include pulp, horror, mystery, intrigue, romance and drama, and superheroes. All of these sections include advice on how to incorporate that tone into your game. Some of the sections also include special rules, such as fear and sanity rules in the horror section.

CHAPTER 1: CUSTOMIZING RULES

Now that you know the core and setting-specific rules, you might want to customize the game with your own unique skills, species, archetypes, talents, items, or adversaries.

As you create your own rules, keep in mind that the guidelines we provide here are intended to be just that: guidelines. There's a lot that goes into making a role-playing game, and we cannot cover all the aspects of game development in these pages. What we can do is give you a good starting point. We hope you take what

we tell you here and run with it. As you spend more time tweaking, modifying, and creating your rules, you're going to learn more about the entire process.

Just keep two things in mind as you go forward.

1. Don't assume the initial reaction to something you've created is the "right" reaction. Always test a rule in play before you make a final judgement about whether it works or not.
2. Don't be afraid to scrap something that isn't working.

CREATE A SKILL

We already defined and explained skills (if you missed this, check out page 52 in **Part I**). However, even though our list is fairly extensive, we expect you may want to create some additional skills for your own game.

DESIGNING A SKILL

The first thing to keep in mind is that skills are pretty simple. Since a skill is a measure of a character's ability to complete a certain type of task, creating a new skill just requires you to define a task you want characters to accomplish. For example, let's say you want to measure how well characters in your game swim. You create a new skill, Swim.

CHARACTERISTIC LINK

Once you create a skill, you need to decide what characteristic the skill links to. This characteristic helps determine the dice pool when a character makes a check using your new skill. Thus, you need to pick the characteristic that makes the most thematic sense for the skill at hand.

Going back to our example, let's look at our new Swim skill. Consider the six characteristics in the game: Brawn, Agility, Intellect, Cunning, Willpower, and Presence. Being a good swimmer relies on physical fitness and conditioning, so we can immediately narrow it down to two characteristics, Brawn and Agility. Between the two of them, Agility depicts more a measure of manual dexterity, hand-eye coordination,

reflexes, and precision. Brawn measures physical strength, stamina, and conditioning. Swimming fits better with the latter, so we'll link it to Brawn.

Sometimes, you may think of multiple characteristics that make sense with your new skill. Often, this is because there may be multiple approaches to accomplishing the task your skill lets characters execute. For example, maybe your Fly Drones skill should be linked to Agility because piloting things remotely requires hand-eye coordination and reflexes, or maybe it should be linked to Intellect because it requires using a computer. In cases like this, pick the one you feel fits better. If both seem to work equally well, consider the number of other skills linked to each characteristic, and pick the characteristic that has fewer skills linked to it.

THE DO AND DON'T LIST

Once you've created the skill, write up a brief description of when characters will use this skill. You want to define this so that your players know what they're getting if they buy this skill for their characters!

One of the best ways to communicate a skill's uses is to create Should and Should Not lists. These provide examples of when a character should use this skill and when they should not use it (and what they should be doing instead). Generally, your lists should have at least three entries. If they don't, then the one or two entries you have better be situations that come up quite often in your game! Otherwise, people aren't going to feel the skill is worth investing XP in.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATING A SKILL

Think of these as guidelines to help make sure your skill is useful in your game.

DOES ANOTHER SKILL ALREADY DO THIS?

When you create a skill, think about the skills that already exist in your game. Ask yourself if any other skills already do what your skill does.

Going back to our previous example of the Swim skill, consider that the Athletics skill already exists. Normally, this skill covers swimming. If you add the Swim skill to your game, you create a situation where your players can buy a very specific skill for their characters—or they can buy a skill that lets their characters accomplish a wider variety of tasks, including the task your new skill focuses on. So why would anyone take ranks in Swim?

There are a few ways to address this situation.

- **Don't Use the New Skill:** This is the simplest and most obvious solution. Generally, if there's not a good reason to create a new skill, it's better not to.
- **Eliminate the Old Skill:** This happens in most settings that have two separate Ranged or Melee skills for different types of weapons. We get rid of the old skill, and replace it with two or more new skills. Just keep in mind that if you do this, you need to make sure the new skills cover everything the old skill did. Also, remember this increases the total number of skills, so watch out for skill bloat.
- **Eliminate the Particular Use in the Old Skill:** This is pretty similar to the previous solution, actually. Rewrite the old skill so that it doesn't cover the task that you want your new skill to perform (you still need to consider the previous issues).

HOW USEFUL IS THIS IN MY GAME?

When developing a new skill, think about how your group's characters are going to use it in the game. Try to imagine when and where they'll use it. Speak to your players, and ask them what kind of adventures they want to participate in. What they want to do in the game can be a good guide as to what skills they'll want to invest in. Finally, consider the setting. Is the skill appropriate for the setting? A science fiction setting doesn't need a Woodcarving skill any more than a fantasy setting needs the Computers skill.

TOO BROAD

When you create a skill, you need to make sure that the skill isn't so broad that it lets the character accomplish

SKILL BLOAT

When creating skills, the primary thing to avoid is so-called “skill bloat.” Skill bloat is a problem games can develop when they have a very long skill list, and each skill lets a character perform a very specific task. If the list is too long and the tasks are too specific, a player may buy a rank in a skill, only to find that their character doesn't use that skill for several game sessions. This is going to be frustrating for the player who feels like the investment of XP wasn't worth it.

Skill bloat also means players must keep track of a wider variety of skills. This is problematic for players trying to figure out what skill is most appropriate for a check. It also makes things harder for GMs, who now must try to include more chances to use a wider range of skills in their adventures, so that those skills seem relevant.

That's skill bloat. However, if you consider the points we lay out in this section, you should be able to avoid it.

too wide a range of tasks. You don't want to create one skill that's mechanically “better” to invest in than all the others, lest your players all invest their experience into that one skill.

TOO FOCUSED

Unlike a skill that is too broad, one that is too focused on a specific kind of task won't break your game. However, your players won't be very interested in using the skill. We consider a skill to be too focused when opportunities for using it come up less than once every other session. In cases like that, your players will quickly stop investing experience points into advancing the skill.

Sometimes it can be hard to notice when a skill is too focused or too broad. You may have to put the skill in the hands of your players and let them try it out.

COUNTING SKILL/CHARACTERISTIC LINKS

When developing skills, you need to keep in mind how many are linked to each characteristic, and how useful those skills are. After all, since PCs and NPCs don't make characteristic checks, linked skills determine how useful characteristics are. Generally, make sure no one characteristic has too many linked skills. However, if a skill is particularly useful and comes up a lot, its characteristic can have fewer skills linked to it overall.

CREATE A SPECIES OR ARCHETYPE

Depending on the setting you're using, quite a few species or archetypes could be available to players. This book barely scratches the surface of the available options, and that's just when you consider our settings. If you're creating your own setting, you're undoubtedly going to want to create your own species or archetypes to go with it.

Before we get started, a brief note on terminology. Species is the word we use to describe anything that's sentient, but not human. In a fantasy setting, your elves, dwarves, orcs, and gnomes would all be different species. In a sci-fi setting, your intelligent aliens are all different species.

Archetypes are what we call different types of humans. You see this in movies and books: the archetypical jock or nerd, for example. Basically, it's a specific kind of person. We created archetypes so that players have character choices in settings where everyone's playing a human.

CREATING A SPECIES OR ARCHETYPE

One of the first things you should know is that there's not much of a mechanical difference between a species and an archetype. Thematically, plenty of difference exists, of course, but that doesn't matter for our purposes. Going forward, we're going to simply say "species" and know that we're talking about either.

BASIC SPECIES PROFILE

All species profiles consist of the following parts:

1. **Starting Characteristics:** These represent different species' general physical and mental attributes. Most settings with different species exaggerate the differences between those species (some are stronger, some are faster, some are smarter, etc.). Different starting characteristics also give you something concrete to choose between at character creation.
2. **Wound Threshold:** Basically how much damage the species can take before being incapacitated. You always add the species' Brawn (after spending starting experience) to the total wound threshold.
3. **Strain Threshold:** How much stress a species can take before passing out or capitulating. You always add the species' Willpower (after spending starting experience) to the total strain threshold.
4. **Starting Experience:** How much experience you begin with when building a character. We tie starting XP into the species choice, because it is our

prime balancing mechanism between different species. We'll get to that more later.

5. **Special Abilities:** Almost always something that gives your character a rank in a specific skill. The idea is that individual species are better at some things than they are at others. This section might include additional rules as well, but generally those should be saved for part six.
6. **Other Unique Rules:** Many (but not all) species have some special rule that can't be obtained in any other way during the game. This rule might be something like Amphibious (can breathe underwater without penalty and never suffers movement penalties for traveling through water), or perhaps something like the Bioroid's Inorganic rule, on page 174. Usually this is something intrinsic to the nature of the species.

When building a species, you should start with four of your six characteristics (your choice) with a value of "2," one with a value of "1," and one with a value of "3." Your wound and strain thresholds should be at "10+Brawn" and "10+Willpower," respectively. Your starting experience is set to 100 XP. Finally, your special ability is one rank in one skill.

MODIFYING THE BASIC SPECIES PROFILE

When modifying the profile, keep in mind how many experience points each modification would cost (think about **Step 4: Invest Experience Points** during character creation). Then adjust the starting XP appropriately.

Let's say you wanted to make the average human archetype on page 36. All of that archetype's characteristics start with a value of 2. If you lowered the 3 in our framework to a 2, the species would now be missing 30 XP (the cost to raise a 2 to a 3 when purchasing ranks in characteristics). On the other hand, you are raising the 1 in the framework to a 2, but that's only the equivalent of giving our new species 20 XP (again, the cost to raise a 1 to a 2). The species loses 30 XP and gains 20, for a net loss of 10 XP. To compensate, you increase the species' starting XP from 100 to 110.

Likewise, increasing or decreasing a wound threshold by two or a strain threshold by one is worth about 5 XP. If you increase a wound threshold by four or more, or a strain threshold by two or more, it's worth about 15 XP instead. We say "about" because these modifications don't have to be an exact science. Sometimes, you can make some minor adjustments (such as changing

the wound threshold by only one) without changing the starting XP total at all.

Special abilities (as long as they're ranks in skills) are easy to price. A single rank in a skill is worth 5 XP, unless that skill synergizes well with the species' starting characteristics. If the skill is linked to a characteristic that starts as a 3 or higher, it's worth 10 XP.

Other unique rules are the hardest to price out. Generally, they should be about the power level of a Tier 1 talent (see page 196). If they feel more powerful than that, decrease starting XP by 5 or 10 XP to compensate.

OTHER GUIDELINES TO KEEP IN MIND

Here are a few other things you should keep in mind as you're designing your species. These aren't rules, but rather guidelines that will help you create a species that people are going to want to use, but won't break your game.

WHAT IS YOUR SPECIES' FOCUS?

Keep this question in mind as you're designing your species. Do you see this species being better in melee or ranged combat? Social encounters? Exploration? Certain skills, characteristics, and abilities are going to be better for different focuses. That doesn't mean you must make everything about your species optimized, however. Generally, we recommend you make most of the options mesh up with the species' focus, but include one or two elements that go against type. This makes a species a lot more interesting than if it's ruthlessly optimized.

WOUND AND STRAIN THRESHOLDS

When determining wound and strain thresholds, don't forget that you add Brawn and Willpower to those values! If your species has a starting Brawn of 3, their wound threshold is going to be a minimum of three higher than the listed value.

When you're making a species, you want to keep wound and strain thresholds (with Brawn and Willpower) somewhere between 10 and 15 for most species. If you go slightly lower or higher for some species, you may want to lower or raise their starting XP accordingly.

Also, we recommend only having one of the two thresholds be high while the other is lower, or have both of them at an average final value of 12 or 13. Having both thresholds high would make the species seem overpowered, while having both thresholds low would make it seem weak.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD UNIQUE ABILITY?

The best unique abilities are those that define a physiological element of a species that can't be defined

through skills or talents. This includes things like the ability to fly, breathe underwater, or not breathe the same atmosphere as the rest of us. Most of these are benefits, but not all, and while benefits decrease starting XP, drawbacks can increase starting XP.

Here are a few example unique abilities to help you create your own, as well as how much you should increase or decrease starting XP by.

- **Amphibious:** This species can breathe underwater without penalty and never suffers movement penalties for traveling through water (-10 XP).
- **Exotic-Atmosphere Breather:** This species does not breathe oxygen, but some other gas instead. This means its members must always wear some sort of respirator when not on their home planet. Characters of this species start with a respirator, and treat oxygen as a corrosive atmosphere with rating 8 (as per page 111) (+10 XP).
- **Regeneration:** Whenever this species heals wounds due to natural rest, they heal 1 additional wound. They do not recover 1 additional wound when receiving first aid or medical treatment. This species can also regrow lost limbs, which takes roughly a month before the limb is usable (-15 XP).
- **Environmentally Adapted:** This species has adapted to living in a particular climate. When making skill checks, they may remove ■ imposed by conditions matching their native climate (-5 XP).
- **Artificial:** This species is an artificial construct. It does not need to eat, sleep, or breathe, and is unaffected by toxins and poisons. If you are using the **Cybernetics** rules from the science fiction setting (see page 170), the first six cybernetics this species receives do not reduce its strain threshold (the cybernetics can represent upgraded mechanical components instead of true cybernetics) (-10 XP).
- **Dark Vision:** This species has excellent night vision. When making skill checks, it removes up to ■■ imposed due to darkness (-5 XP).
- **Fearsome:** This species is feared in societies other than its own. Its members add ■ to Charm, Deception, Leadership, and Negotiation checks they make, but they add ■ to Coercion checks they make. This does not apply when interacting with others of their own species (+5 XP).
- **Claws:** This species has claws. When making an unarmed combat check, its members add +1 to their base damage and have a Critical rating of 3. (-5 XP).

CREATE A TALENT

At this point, you've undoubtedly reviewed the talents provided throughout the book. However, the listed talents barely scratch the surface of the number of talents that could exist. There are plenty of options for creating new talents, and the fact that you're reading this section of the book indicates that you're at least interested in creating some talents for your campaign. This section offers a series of pointers and considerations that should make the job a whole lot easier.

WHAT IS A TALENT?

A talent is, at its heart, a way for a character to break the rules. Most of the time, your character operates according to the rules laid down in **Chapters 1, 6, and 7 in Part I** of this book. They make skill checks, they follow the action/maneuver limitations during combat, and they obey the rules governing social encounters. A talent lets your character break (or perhaps a better word would be “modify”) one of those rules, usually when your character meets certain conditions.

So, for example, normally when ■ get added to your dice pool, you roll them with the rest of the pool. If, however, your character has the Knack for It talent (page 73), when you make certain skill checks, you can remove up to ■ ■ from the pool. You've modified how that rule worked for your character.

Let's consider another example. Normally, the only way to disable or destroy an item is to use a weapon with the Sunder item quality or have your character physically interact with the item. However, if your character has the How Convenient! talent (page 80), you can make a check to have the item spontaneously break, without your character having taken any physical actions to break it!

So now that you have an idea of what you're going to be creating, let's begin.

CREATING A TALENT

First, you should have an idea about what your talent is going to do. Is it going to be a defensive talent—a talent that protects your character from certain threats? Is it an offensive talent that allows your character to take some form of aggressive action against an opponent? Is it a utility talent that will make a task your character wants to perform easier, or is it a debuff talent that makes an opponent's task harder?

Once you have a general idea in your mind, ask yourself the following questions.

DO YOU WANT A MECHANICAL EFFECT OR A NARRATIVE ONE?

In our examples in the **What Is a Talent** section, Knack for It has a mechanical effect: it lets you remove dice from a dice pool. How Convenient!, on the other hand, has a narrative effect, because it changes the ongoing story but doesn't interact directly with game mechanics.

If you want your talent to have a narrative effect, then the main part of the talent should describe the narrative effect you want the talent to create. With narrative effects, we recommend providing an example or two, and also adding in some text that reminds players that the GM needs to give final approval to any story changes. You do not want your talent to create a confrontation between the player and the GM!

If you want your talent to have a mechanical effect, then the rest of the questions are going to help define that effect more.

WHICH CHARACTERS DOES THE TALENT EFFECT?

Generally, talents that affect the character who has them benefit that character in some way (otherwise, why take the talent?) Talents that affect others are beneficial if they target allies, and harmful if they target enemies.

DO YOU USE THIS TALENT DURING A SPECIFIC TYPE OF ENCOUNTER?

Some talents are designed to be used in combat. Other talents are supposed to be used in social encounters, exploration, or other activities. Finally, some talents can be used in multiple types of encounters.

IS THE TALENT ACTIVE OR PASSIVE?

Passive talents create a static, unchanging effect that is always working, whether the character wants it to or not. Two of the most common passive talents are Grit (page 73) and Toughened (page 75), which permanently increase your character's strain or wound threshold.

Active talents, on the other hand, require you to make a conscious choice whether or not to use them. A talent like Quick Draw (page 74), for instance, lets you choose to have your character draw a weapon or item more quickly than usual, but they can always pull out their gun at the regular speed.

IF THE TALENT IS ACTIVE, HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO USE?

Active talents usually describe how long it takes to use them, so that they can be used during structured encounters. A talent can take an action to use (requiring

you to spend your character's one action during their turn to use it). It could instead require a maneuver to use (requiring you to spend one of your character's two potential maneuvers to use it). It could even require an incidental to use, which means that your character can use it at any point during their turn, as long as they follow the directions in the talent.

Some talents are designed to be used during other characters' turns instead (see the Dodge talent, on page 78). Talents like this always require an out-of-turn incidental to use. They can't require an action or maneuver, because generally your character can't take actions or maneuvers on other characters' turns!

IF THE TALENT IS ACTIVE, WHAT DOES IT COST TO USE?

Costs are some sort of resource that you have to invest for your character to use the talent.

- **Story Points:** Spending a Story Point is a significant cost for using a talent. This isn't just because Story Points are a limited resource shared among all the players, although that's a big part of it! You should also remember that if you spend a Story Point to activate a talent when making a skill check, you can't spend it to upgrade the difficulty or ability of the check. Thus, a talent that requires spending a Story Point needs to be better than upgrading a check. Reserve Story Points for talents that let characters increase damage on attacks, significantly alter the ongoing narrative, or reroll skill checks.
 - **Strain:** Many talents inflict strain on your character when they use them. Strain is a great cost for a talent, mainly because it's so adjustable. A talent can cost as little as 1 strain to use, or as much as 3 or 4. Generally, do not go higher than 4 for a strain cost, unless the talent is very good. If the cost of strain is tied to another cost (such as requiring an action or maneuver to perform), then keep the strain cost at 1 strain.
 - **Time:** The limited number of actions and maneuvers your character has available each round is also a resource, and therefore a cost. Keep in mind that a talent that requires an action is going to "cost" more of your character's resources than a talent that requires a maneuver or incidental.
- **Once per round on the character's turn:** This is exactly what it sounds like: the character can use this talent once per game round (or its equivalent, if this is a social encounter), and furthermore, can only use the talent when it's their turn. Think of this as your default limiter for active talents. Unless the way your talent works limits it to being used once a round anyway, you want to make sure you include this limitation. Otherwise, you run the risk of creating rules language that lets your players use the talent multiple times on the same turn and compound its effects (possibly to a game-breaking degree).
 - **Once per round:** This is a slightly looser variant of the previous limiter. The character still can only use the talent once per round, but they can use it during anyone's turn, not just their own. If you use this limiter, make sure of two things. First, it can only take an out-of-turn incidental to use the talent (since characters can't perform actions or maneuvers on other characters' turns). Second, make sure you're fine with the talent being able to interrupt other characters' turns!
 - **Once per encounter:** Reserve this for talents that are a bit more powerful and are going to have an impact in an encounter. You can further refine this limitation by adding in "on the character's turn," or leave it so that it can be used at any point during an encounter (in which case you need to take the same considerations that we mentioned in the "once per round" entry).
 - **Once per session:** Reserve this for very powerful talents, or talents that take a lot of time to resolve in gameplay. For example, our "reroll a check" talents are almost always once per session. This is because the ability to reroll a check that you botch is really good, but it's also really time-consuming (you need to roll the check, review the results, decide that they're not good enough, then reroll the check and review the results a second time). Just like with "once per encounter" limiters, you'll need to decide if it only works on the character's turn or at any point.

WHAT TIER DOES YOUR TALENT OCCUPY?

Tiers are the way to price talents. The higher the tier, the more experience points it takes to buy a talent on it. Therefore, better talents should occupy higher tiers, and vice versa. To help you determine the proper tier for your talent, we've listed each of the five tiers with examples of what belongs in each.

As you decide what tier to put your talent on, consider that you can put a good talent on a lower tier if you

HOW OFTEN SHOULD THE TALENT BE USED DURING A SESSION?

Some talents are either very powerful or just slow down gameplay enough that you don't want your players using them constantly. That's why most talents have use limitations, which is a fancy way of asking, "How frequently do you want someone to use this talent?"

increase the resources needed to use it or add some other limiter. Likewise, you can put a weak talent on a higher tier if you let characters use it more easily or more often.

TIER 1

Tier 1 talents are usually simple talents with small effects. Ranked talents that increase your character's strain and wound thresholds are Tier 1 talents, as are talents that increase your character's ability to heal wounds or reduce the impact of Critical Injuries they suffer. None of these are too remarkable if you just purchase them once, but being able to purchase them five times makes them really useful, if you're willing to pay all of that XP.

Most talents that let you remove ■ also belong in Tier 1. Though these talents are useful, they rely on ■ being in the dice pool in the first place, so they are situational. Similarly, talents that are good only in certain situations belong in Tier 1. A talent that lets you add ■ when attacking targets that haven't acted yet is good, but it relies on your character going first, and it only works during the first turn. That limitation makes it a Tier 1 talent.

Finally, talents with basic action economy belong in this tier. These include talents that let your character stand up or pull out a weapon without spending a maneuver: useful but situationally dependent.

TIER 2

Tier 2 is where talents start becoming more interesting. We suggest putting talents on Tier 2 that change how a character is going to behave throughout an encounter. Ranked defensive talents go in Tier 2, such as those that let characters perform maneuvers or actions that protect them from melee or ranged attacks. Additionally, include talents that give characters more combat options, such as letting them wield two weapons without a penalty. Tier 2 also includes talents that allow characters to provide minor but useful bonuses to their allies (such as adding ▲ or ■ to certain types of checks).

Overall, Tier 2 is a good place to add in ranked talents that are useful enough that you want a lot of characters to take them, but that you do not want to become an "auto-include." The step up from Tier 1 means that some characters will find other talents more useful instead.

TIER 3

Tier 3 is a good place to put talents that can really change the way the game is played. A character must invest a lot of experience points to buy a Tier 3 talent, so the payoff should always feel worth it.

These talents can be more versatile defensive or offensive talents, such as the ability to upgrade the difficulty of any combat check that targets your character, or the ability to add more damage to a combat check. They can also be more potent buffs for a character's allies, such as the ability to give them extra maneuvers, or improved versions of previous talents.

Put any talent that lets a player reroll a check here, or a talent that lets a player fundamentally alter an ongoing encounter. You'll also notice talents on this tier that let a character gain a permanent "pet" of some sort. Not only is this a good mechanical bonus, it's the kind of talent that a player feels satisfied at finally being able to acquire.

TIER 4

Tier 4 should be the home of some of your best talents. Arguably, these talents can be "game-breaking" talents that deliberately alter the way the game is going to work for certain characters. For example, a talent that lets you choose a Critical Injury when your character inflicts one, rather than rolling randomly, is a pretty serious change to how the game gets played.

Talents that heavily alter the game's action economy should be Tier 4 talents. If a talent lets a character do something that would normally require an action as a maneuver, that means they can potentially do it three times in a single round instead of once. Likewise, a buff that lets allies perform extra actions belongs here too (because it slows down gameplay, any talent that lets a character roll multiple pools of dice in a single turn should be a Tier 4 talent). Tier 4 should also be home to some ranked talents that you don't want players purchasing many ranks of.

TIER 5

Tier 5 should be limited to a few very good talents. In fact, Tier 5 talents may not be much better than Tier 4 talents, but they're also talents that should be purchased rarely (maybe even only once) in a character's progression. One example is a talent that permanently improves one of a character's characteristics. Another example is a talent that lets a character decrease the difficulty of certain skill checks with minimal cost. These both greatly improve a character's chances of success.

Remember, your game doesn't need to have a lot of Tier 5 talents. Since all ranked talents increase their tier every time you purchase them, they eventually all become Tier 5 talents.

CREATE AN ITEM

As with the other “create your own” sections in this part of the book, this section is less a rule set and more a set of guidelines. If you’ve read **Part I—Chapter 5: Equipment**, starting on page 82 (if you haven’t, you may want to stop and read it first), you know all of the basic parts of a weapon or piece of armor (damage, Critical rating, soak, defense, etc.), and you know all of the item qualities and how they work.

If you want, you can just plug any numbers you fancy into those parts, and create your own item. What these guidelines do is help you build items that will not unbalance your game.

There are three types of items you can construct: weapons, armor, and gear. Weapons and armor are self-explanatory, and gear covers everything else. Gear items are the simplest to construct, so we’ll cover them first.

GEAR

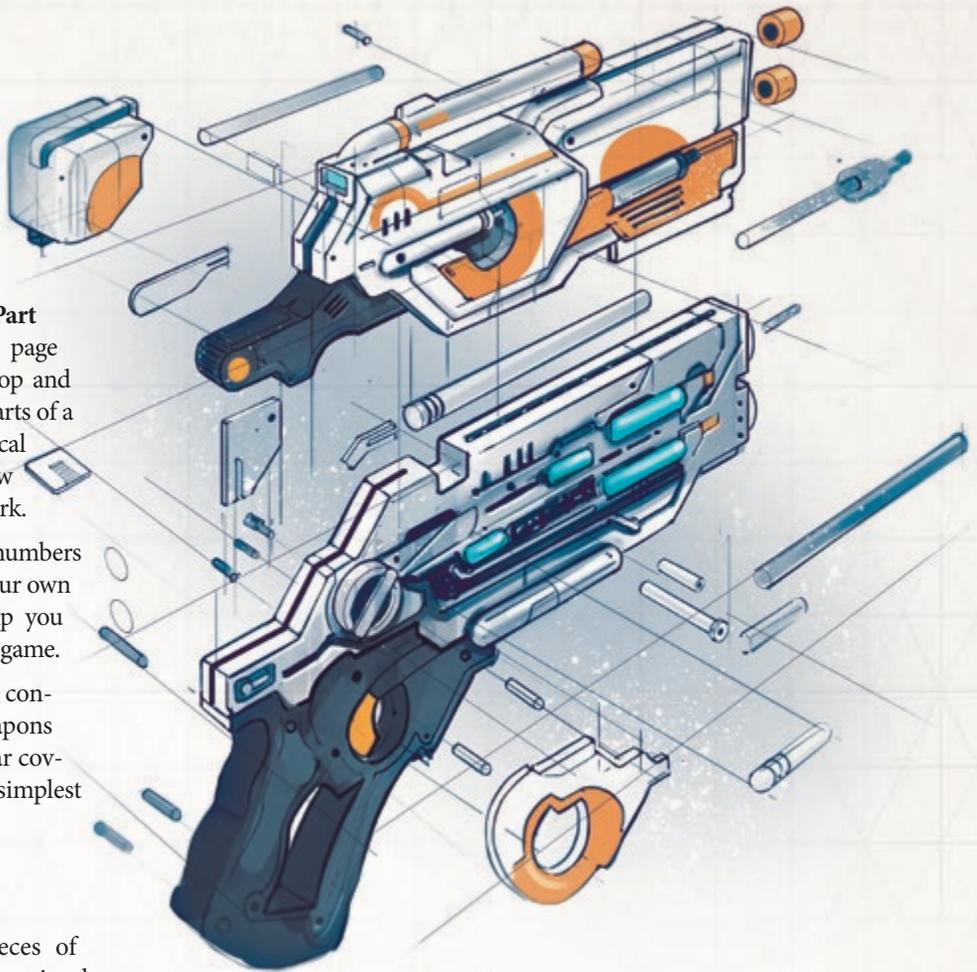
As discussed on page 93, many pieces of gear don’t have any special rules. You simply need to write a description for what the item does in the game. For example, a bottle of alcohol just needs a description explaining its quality (or lack thereof) and that it will get a character intoxicated if they drink too much of it. No rules are necessary. All you need is a roleplaying prompt.

Other pieces of gear are what we call the “right tools for the job.” These are items that characters need to perform a particular task (see page 93). Like roleplaying prompts, these just need a description of what they let a character do, and they don’t need any special rules. For example, a respirator and oxygen tank let a character survive underwater for long periods of time, and without them, the character would drown.

When creating these items, you just need to write a description that says what they let characters do. You can use modern-day or historical equivalents to help determine their capabilities and costs.

GEAR WITH SPECIFIC RULES

Some gear does come with special in-game mechanical modifiers. However, since gear can refer to anything that isn’t a weapon or a piece of armor, guidelines for creating those mechanical modifiers have to be fairly broad.



- **Most gear should not have mechanical modifiers.** Creating too many pieces of gear with specific, unique rules is going to overcomplicate your game with a lot of tedious minutia. Your players aren’t going to want to remember that drinking a cup of coffee lets them add a ■ to Vigilance checks for the next 1d5 hours, for example. (Honestly, you’re not going to want to keep track of that, either!) Before you create a rule for a piece of gear, ask yourself: “Does it have a significant impact on the story or theme?”
- **Make sure the rules interact with existing game mechanics, and don’t create new ones.** We’re not suggesting that you can’t create new mechanical subsystems for your own game, but that a specific item is usually a bad place to do it. For example, a poison should interact with the existing wound/strain threshold system, and not create an entirely new type of damage that your players have to track.
- **It’s better to reduce penalties than add bonuses.** We recommend this because reducing penalties means you also reduce complexity. Removing ■ from a pool is one good example; it increases the character’s chance of success while giving them fewer dice to roll (meaning the dice pool is easier to interpret and physically easier to handle). Decreasing the difficulty of checks is another example of this.

ENCUMBRANCE

Encumbrance is discussed on page 84, but remember that it's basically an abstract numeric value that describes how heavy and bulky something is. When deciding on an encumbrance value for an item, take a look at that section and its examples, and use those values as a guide.

ARMOR

After gear, the next most complicated item to design is armor. Armor's primary characteristics are discussed on page 92. When creating a piece of armor, the two you need to be most concerned about are soak and defense.

SOAK

Soak is likely the single most important aspect of a piece of armor, since it reliably reduces damage. When you choose a soak value, you should consider a value between 0 and 3, with 3 being rare, and potentially coming with some drawback (possibly a high cost or encumbrance) to balance it out.

Something to keep in mind when choosing a soak value is that the GENESYS's combat system was designed with the idea that characters who get hit almost always suffer damage. GENESYS is a fast-paced and exciting game; every hit should be a potential threat to a character.

DEFENSE

Armor is less likely to have defense than soak. This goes back to the goal of keeping dice pools under control. Since defense adds ■ directly to the dice pool, it can contribute to making the dice pool unwieldy if the defense value is too high. Defense is valued more highly than soak, which may seem a bit counterintuitive. It's true that soak is more reliable than rolling a ■, but soak just mitigates damage from successful hits. Since defense can add ✕ to the results, it can stop those hits from happening entirely (likewise, ♻️ can stop Critical Injuries or other effects from triggering). Soak can also be ignored by item qualities like Pierce and Breach (see pages 88 and 87).

ENCUMBRANCE

You can determine armor's encumbrance by following the same guidelines as found in **Chapter 5: Equipment**. However, keep in mind the rule from page 92; the encumbrance value of a piece of armor lowers by three when the armor is worn. Basically, it's a lot easier to wear a heavy coat than it is to carry it. We recommend giving armor an encumbrance value between 2 and 5, with 5 being reserved for armor with a lot of soak.

SPECIFIC RULES AND ITEM QUALITIES

Generally, armor has fewer special rules than gear does. Since armor has a lot more mechanical functions already, special rules are less necessary to make it interesting in your game. If you want to design a special rule, consider something like the stealth penalties found on the fantasy armor on page 145, or perhaps a boost to Coercion checks for frightening armor sets. These rules define something about the character and their actions while wearing the armor. When you design those special rules, use the same guidelines talked about on page 197 for gear.

Also note that there are a few item qualities (see page 86) that work with armor (although most of them are designed for weapons). The Reinforced quality is one obvious choice for armor. It makes armor really good, however, so reserve it for a few rare sets of armor.

COST AND RARITY

Calculating the cost for a set of armor is largely a matter of guesswork and reasonable estimation. However, we have included **Table III.1–1: Armor Cost Calculations**, which provides some values you can use to calculate the cost for your new item (starting from a cost of 0). Use the values as a baseline, but don't be afraid to change them. Rarity should be up to how common the item is in your setting.

TABLE III.1–1: ARMOR COST CALCULATIONS

DERIVED ATTRIBUTE	ADDITIONAL COST
+1 Defense	50
+2 Defense	500
+3 Defense	2,000
+4 Defense	5,000
+1 Soak	50
+2 Soak	500
+3 Soak	1,000
+4 Soak	2,500
–1 Encumbrance	75
–2 Encumbrance	250
–3 Encumbrance	500
The Reinforced Quality	3,000
Other Positive Qualities	50
Other Negative Qualities	–50
Combining low soak with low defense: increase cost by 100–250.	
Combining low value with higher value: increase cost by 250–500.	
Combining high value with high value: increase cost by 1,000–2,000.	

WEAPONS

Weapons are the most complicated items to design, since they have the most attributes.

First, decide whether your weapon is going to be a melee weapon (such as a knife or club), or a ranged weapon (such as a bow or gun). Your choice is going to determine some of those characteristics.

GENERAL ATTRIBUTES

Unsurprisingly, ranged and melee weapons share a lot of the same attributes. So first, we'll discuss the attributes that both weapons share. Then, we'll discuss those that are specific to melee weapons, and then ranged weapons.

CRITICAL RATING

When choosing a Crit rating for your weapon, consider how lethal you want the weapon to be. Crit ratings range from 1 to 6. Values of 1 or 6 are very rare, since checks generate Δ really often and almost never generate $\Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta$. The "average" Crit rating is 3. This should probably be the default for your weapon, as it makes Critical Injuries rare enough to be an event, but still common enough to happen a couple of times per encounter. A Crit rating of 2 should be applied to a more deadly weapon. Likewise, a Crit rating of 4 is a weapon that is going to inflict lasting or immediately lethal injuries less often. A Crit rating of 5 or higher means the weapon is almost never going to inflict a Critical Injury without spending \otimes .

ENCUMBRANCE

When setting the encumbrance value of a weapon, consider the skill being used to wield it. Brawl weapons should have an encumbrance of 1. Melee (Light) weapons and Ranged (Light) weapons should have an encumbrance of 1, maybe 2. Melee (Heavy) and Ranged (Heavy) weapons should have an encumbrance of 3 or 4. Gunnery weapons can have a lot of encumbrance, as much as 8 or 9. This may be too much for one person to wield, but then again, most people can't carry a heavy machine gun around the battlefield in real life, either! Most of these weapons need bipods or slings to help offset their heavy weight and bulkiness, and the optional attachment rules cover this (see page 206).

COST AND RARITY

As with armor, **Table III.1-2: Weapon Cost Calculations** does not give you a perfect means of calculating cost. All we intend for it to do is give you a starting point from which you can modify as needed. Costs should start at 0. Rarity, of course, is entirely up to you.

BASE DAMAGE

Remember that when you set the damage for a weapon, it's only the base damage. When a character uses the weapon, they add additional damage based on the number of \star their check generates. You should think of your weapon as dealing 1 to 2 more damage than the listed damage, on average.

SPECIAL RULES AND ITEM QUALITIES

Most of the item qualities listed on page 86 work with weapons, so you have quite a few qualities to choose from! When choosing qualities for your weapon, think through the interactions of the various qualities. For example, don't give a weapon Pierce and Breach, since they both do the same thing.

TABLE III.1-2: WEAPON COST CALCULATIONS

CHARACTERISTIC	ADDITIONAL COST
4-5 Damage	100
6-7 Damage	250
8-9 Damage	500
10-12 Damage	1,000
13+ Damage	3,000
Crit Rating 5-6	0
Crit Rating 4	50
Crit Rating 3	150
Crit Rating 2	300
Crit Rating 1	600
Short Range	0
Medium Range	100
Long Range	300
Extreme Range	600
Cumbersome and Unwieldy Qualities	-100 per rank beyond 1
Burn, Ensnare, and Linked Qualities	200 per rank
Defensive and Deflection	Use defense costs in Table III.1-1
Disorient, Accurate, and Stun Qualities	50 per rank
Concussive Quality	1,000 per rank
Other Positive Qualities	100 per rank (or 250)
Other Negative Qualities	-75 per rank (or -100)
Melee or Brawl weapons	reduce cost to 50% of total

Overall, you probably want to limit the number of item qualities you give a weapon to three or four at maximum, and don't be afraid to only give it one (or even none). Qualities are meant to add extra interest or utility to a weapon, and sometimes to represent certain unique aspects of its use (for example, a net gun would need to have the Ensnare quality). However, give a weapon too many qualities, and it becomes hard to interpret exactly what that weapon does when you're playing.

Most qualities have a rating associated with them. This rating is a numeric value, and it defines some aspect of the item quality. Deciding what number to give a quality can be tricky, so we have some suggestions.

Burn, Concussive, Disorient, and Ensnare: These qualities all have ratings that affect the duration of their effect. The higher the rating, the more rounds the effect lasts. Disorient is fairly mild, so you can give it higher ratings of 4 or even 5. You don't want to give it a rating of 1, because that's no different than spending \blacktriangle \blacktriangle to add \blacksquare to your target's next check. Burn and Ensnare are more potent. Generally, these should have ratings of 1 to 3, with 4 only very rarely. Concussive is extremely potent and should only be given a rating of 1 or possibly 2.

Cumbersome and Unwieldy: Since these qualities require your character to have certain characteristics or suffer penalties, you should use them to balance out powerful weapons by adding drawbacks. If you use these qualities, just make sure you don't give them a rating of 1. Since the rating is the minimum Brawn or Agility the wielder needs to have, and all species or archetypes start with a minimum of 1 in every characteristic, a rating of 1 does nothing.

Accurate, Inaccurate, Defensive, and Deflection: Since these are qualities that add dice to checks, keep the ratings at 1 or 2, to avoid excessive bloat in your dice pools. Also, remember Inaccurate is a penalty, and should be added to balance weapons that are otherwise cheap or powerful.

Pierce and Breach: Although Pierce and Breach both let you ignore soak, Breach is ten times as effective. Really, Breach is intended to mostly be used with the optional vehicle rules (page 220), so unless you're making a weapon that ignores soak, don't bother with this quality.

With Pierce, just keep in mind that until you get to ratings of 5 or higher, you can think of your Pierce rating as the equivalent of adding damage to checks. Pierce has diminishing returns after the value exceeds average soak values, so price weapons accordingly.

Prepare and Slow-Firing: Both of these qualities represent the extra time it takes to use a weapon, so they should have low ratings of 1 or 2. Waiting three rounds before using something (or having to spend more than a

turn's worth of maneuvers preparing to use something) makes it nearly worthless in most players' eyes.

Blast: When selecting a Blast rating, use the same guidelines you use to determine the base damage for weapons. Blast can have a slightly lower damage than the weapon's base damage, though.

Guided: Guided allows projectiles to "track" and make follow-up attacks if they miss the target. We recommend a rating of 2 to 4 for Guided. A rating of 1 means the projectile will almost never hit, while a rating of 5 is probably better than the initial attack!

Limited Ammo: If you're dealing with a thrown weapon such as a grenade or throwing knife, it should have a Limited Ammo rating of 1 (representing that you can only use it once). Otherwise, you can go with whatever rating makes sense for the weapon.

However, remember that combat encounters generally only last four or five rounds, so if your Limited Ammo rating is higher than that, running out of ammo won't come into play. So, unless each shot costs money, don't give weapons high Limited Ammo ratings.

Linked: Since we used Linked to represent weapons that fire multiple barrels at once, choose a value that best represents the number of shots this weapon can make in a round (counting the number of barrels if you need to). Just remember, the Linked rating determines *additional* hits. If you have a weapon with four barrels, you would give it Linked 3. The weapon can score one initial hit, and three additional hits, for a total of four.

Stun: Keep this quality's rating at 1 to 4. Any more, and you could potentially incapacitate your target in one hit, which we want to avoid.

Vicious: Vicious amplifies the effect of Critical Injuries. Since Critical Injuries are the only way characters can be killed, Vicious makes weapons especially deadly. Any rating of Vicious is powerful (so don't apply this to too many weapons), but don't give a weapon a Vicious rating of 6 or higher. Adding +60 to a Critical Injury result means that the right roll can permanently kill a completely uninjured character, which breaks the spirit of the game.

MELEE (AND BRAWL) WEAPONS

A melee weapon is anything your character uses to attack someone right in front of them. Examples include swords, clubs, brass knuckles, tasers, and laser blades. This section discusses the attributes unique to these weapons.

SKILL

The skill listed for the weapon is the skill your character uses when fighting with it. Here's a list of the applicable skills for close combat weapons.

- **Brawl:** Although Brawl generally covers unarmed fighting, there are some weapons that use the Brawl skill. These include brass knuckles, *cestuses*, *tekkös*, and anything else designed to make you hit harder or do something unpleasant when you punch someone.
- **Melee (Light):** Melee (Light) is a variant of the Melee skill that covers using one-handed close combat weapons, including swords, knives, clubs, katanas, light spears, shock prods, and even shields.
- **Melee (Heavy):** Melee (Heavy) is the other variant of the Melee skill. This covers large, two-handed close combat weapons including greatswords, laser spears, mauls, pikes, halberds, and greataxes.

When deciding what skill to use with the weapon, just pick the description that best fits, keeping in mind which skills exist in your setting.

DAMAGE

The guidelines for damage for ranged weapons apply for close combat weapons, with one important exception. Most close combat weapons have a “+” in front of their damage rating, which means characters add their Brawn to the damage rating to determine the weapon’s base damage. When you’re determining damage rating, mentally add three to the value you’re considering to determine actual damage (most melee-focused characters have a Brawn of at least 3).

One-handed close combat weapons (Brawl or Melee [Light]) have a damage rating of +1 to +3, while two-handed close combat weapons (Melee [Heavy]) have a damage rating of +3 to +5. Close combat weapons tend to have slightly lower damage ratings than ranged weapons. Players can improve the damage simply by increasing their characters’ Brawn, so with less control over the total damage rating, it’s better to err on the side of caution.

RANGE

Close combat weapons almost universally have a range of engaged, for obvious reasons.

RANGED WEAPONS

Ranged weapons are anything your character can use to attack someone at a distance. Examples include bows, slings, pistols, rifles, and futuristic lasers and railguns.

SKILL

The skill listed on the weapon is the skill your character uses when fighting with it. There are quite a few combat skills (most of them specific to certain settings):

- **Ranged (Light):** Ranged (Light) is a variant of the Ranged skill that covers any one-handed ranged

weapons. Generally these are pistols, but Ranged (Light) could also encompass grenades, throwing knives, *shuriken*, and darts.

- **Ranged (Heavy):** Ranged (Heavy) is a variant of the Ranged skill that covers any two-handed ranged weapons. Generally these are rifles, but Ranged (Heavy) could also encompass bows, crossbows, shotguns, and automatic weapons.
- **Gunnery:** Gunnery is a skill that specifically covers the heaviest ranged weaponry, often weapons that are mounted on vehicles. It can also include large “hand-held” weapons such as rocket launchers, catapults, machine guns, swivel guns, laser cannons, and so forth. Basically, if the weapon belongs on a vehicle, is used to destroy vehicles, or needs a tripod or bipod to shoot, it’s probably a Gunnery weapon.

When deciding what skill to use with the weapon, just pick the description that best fits.

DAMAGE

When you set damage for your weapon, it looks like you have a wide range of options to choose from. However, weapon damage should fall into the specific range of 4 to 15, with 4 being damage for the weakest weapons, and 15 being for the heaviest weapons that a person can carry into battle. That range is set to interact with the character’s soak value, which should usually be between 2 and 6, with 4 being the most common.

Finally, we recommend limiting weapons that use a particular combat skill to certain amounts of damage. Basically, Ranged (Light) weapons do less damage than Ranged (Heavy) weapons, and Gunnery weapons do the most damage. These distinctions help separate different types and classes of weapons.

Generally, Ranged (Light) weapons deal 4 to 7 damage, Ranged (Heavy) weapons deal 8 to 12 damage, and Gunnery weapons deal 13+ damage. Feel free to adjust these values, especially when dealing with weapons that don’t quite fit the mold, such as grenades.

RANGE

Ranged weapons should all have a maximum range of short range or higher. Generally, most Ranged (Light) weapons should be short or medium range (and any thrown weapons such as knives or grenades should be short range). Ranged (Heavy) weapons are more likely to be medium or long range, although a sniper rifle or its equivalent might be able to attack at extreme range. Gunnery weapons should almost always be medium, long, or extreme ranged weapons (a grenade launcher or ballista might be medium range, while a guided missile or trebuchet might be long range).

CREATE AN ADVERSARY

There is no single “right” way to create adversaries for your GENESYS game. The process depends not only on your personal preferences, but on the needs of your game and the part the adversary will play. Therefore, this section provides guidance on creating an adversary instead of detailing a step-by-step process. You’ll likely adapt our guidance to create your own process as you become more familiar with our game.

DEVELOP A CONCEPT

Coming up with a concept for an adversary is the obvious starting point, just as with any other NPC, or PC, for that matter. You probably already have an idea of what kind of adversary you want, whether it’s a depraved cultist, aquatic predator, or whatever else you have planned for your adventure. However, sometimes you might simply want to include an adversary to challenge the PCs in a particular type of encounter. If that’s the case, take a few moments to think about your other plans for the adventure. Your overall plans will probably suggest what form this adversary should take.

CHOOSE ADVERSARY TYPE

We have three categories of adversaries in GENESYS: minion, rival, and nemesis. These types, and the differences between them, are described on page 131. Although you might decide on an adversary’s type after building its profile, most of the time you’ll decide on a type based on the part you expect it to play in the adventure.

Most of the time, your original concept is going to suggest the appropriate adversary type. A group of outlaws intended to harass your PCs during a journey are probably just minions, while their leader may be a rival. Nemeses are the rarest type and are almost always highly defined NPCs with a name, strong motivations, and a big part to play in the ongoing story.

BUILDING THE PROFILE

Once you have a concept for the adversary, you can start the actual process of “building” the adversary profile. As we’ve previously stated, adversaries are not confined by the rules for player character creation and progression. This is especially important to remember when designing your own adversaries.

Designing an adversary’s profile is simpler than you might think. As a guiding principle, always remember that adversaries exist to interact with your players’ characters, and they’re only ever going to see a few aspects

of the adversary, so keep things simple! Only include skills you think your adversary will use, and add one or two significant talents and abilities that will make a big impact in an encounter instead of a lot of minor abilities that probably won’t come up. An adversary is not a player character, so don’t treat them like one.

NAME AND DESCRIPTION

A good name is important for any NPC, since that’s what your players will remember. The rest of the description can be a few bullet points or notes to record the adversary’s most memorable attributes and personality quirks.

CHARACTERISTICS

When assigning characteristics, remember that your goal should be to challenge the player characters, but not defeat them. So, most adversaries should have a few strong characteristics, a few average characteristics, and at least one weak characteristic.

When creating minions, you can assign characteristics of 2 (human average) in areas you want them to be proficient in, and of 1 in areas you want them to be weak in. Minions work best in groups, so they’ll be relying on their numbers to be dangerous. A powerful minion can have one or two characteristics of 3, but not higher.

Rivals work alone, so you should give them characteristics of 3 in the areas you expect them to be proficient in (a combat-focused rival should have Brawn 3 or Agility 3, for example), the rest of their characteristics being a 2 or 1. Nemeses follow these guidelines as well, but they can have slightly higher overall characteristics than rivals. Monsters and creatures can have even higher characteristics to represent their inhuman nature. Remember that we try to limit characteristic values to 5; however, you might decide a characteristic of 6 is necessary for an inhumanly potent foe. Do this rarely, and your players are sure to be impressed when you assemble the dice pool!

THRESHOLDS AND SOAK/DEFENSE

Thresholds represent an adversary’s ability to suffer physical and mental injury, stress, and other punishment and keep on going. Although there is no set formula for determining thresholds, we do have some guidelines.

Minions should generally have wound thresholds of 3 to 5, never higher than 7. Rivals should have wound thresholds between 10 and 15 (unless the rival is a creature or monster, in which case you can go as high as 20 to 25). Nemeses can have wound thresholds of 10 to 20 (with giant creatures and monsters being potentially higher).

Nemeses also get strain thresholds. These should usually be lower than wound thresholds, probably in the 10 to 15 range. Also, consider giving a nemesis with a higher wound threshold a lower strain threshold, and vice versa.

When selecting a soak and defense for your adversary, you can use their Brawn characteristic and armor as a starting point, then increase as needed. Just remember that a defense of 2 and soak of 4 or 5 is good, and a defense of 3 or soak of 6 or 7 is very hard to overcome.

SKILLS

Most adversaries really only need a few skills that reflect their areas of expertise. Keep in mind that a character can attempt a skill check even without any ranks in the skill, so a high characteristic can be just as good in some cases. When deciding which skills to include in an adversary profile, think not only about your adversary concept, but also about the part you expect it to play in the game. An adversary intended to pose a combat challenge only needs combat skills, while one planned for a social encounter might not need combat skills at all. Also, when designing a combat-focused adversary, only give it the combat skills it needs to use its weapons.

An adversary's type also affects its skills. Minions, of course, don't possess ranks in skills, but they can have skills that they gain as a minion group. Minions are throw-away opponents and only need two or three skills. Rivals and nemeses can have more, but keep in mind our advice about keeping things simple.

TALENTS

It can be tempting to load an adversary up with talents, but keep your focus on usability during the game. Choose talents that are important, likely to come up, and do something interesting. Remember that there is no need to include talents that directly modify other parts of the profile, like Grit or Toughened—you can just modify those values directly.

We recommend that minions never have talents. A rival doesn't have to have any talents, but could have one (or two, but only in rare instances). A nemesis may have more, but three is plenty! In all cases, go with fewer, more potent talents over a lot of minor talents. And of course, adversaries don't have to follow the tier system or other restrictions, so just give them the talents that make the most sense. Finally, instead of giving adversaries lots of defensive talents, just give them the Adversary talent on page 131. Rivals should only have one rank at maximum, and nemeses shouldn't have more than three.

ABILITIES

Abilities are special rules for an adversary that allow them to do things talents and skills don't, which means that these are things they can do that PCs can't. There are few limits on the possibilities, and coming up with unique new abilities can be the most fun part of creating an adversary. Just keep these principles in mind.

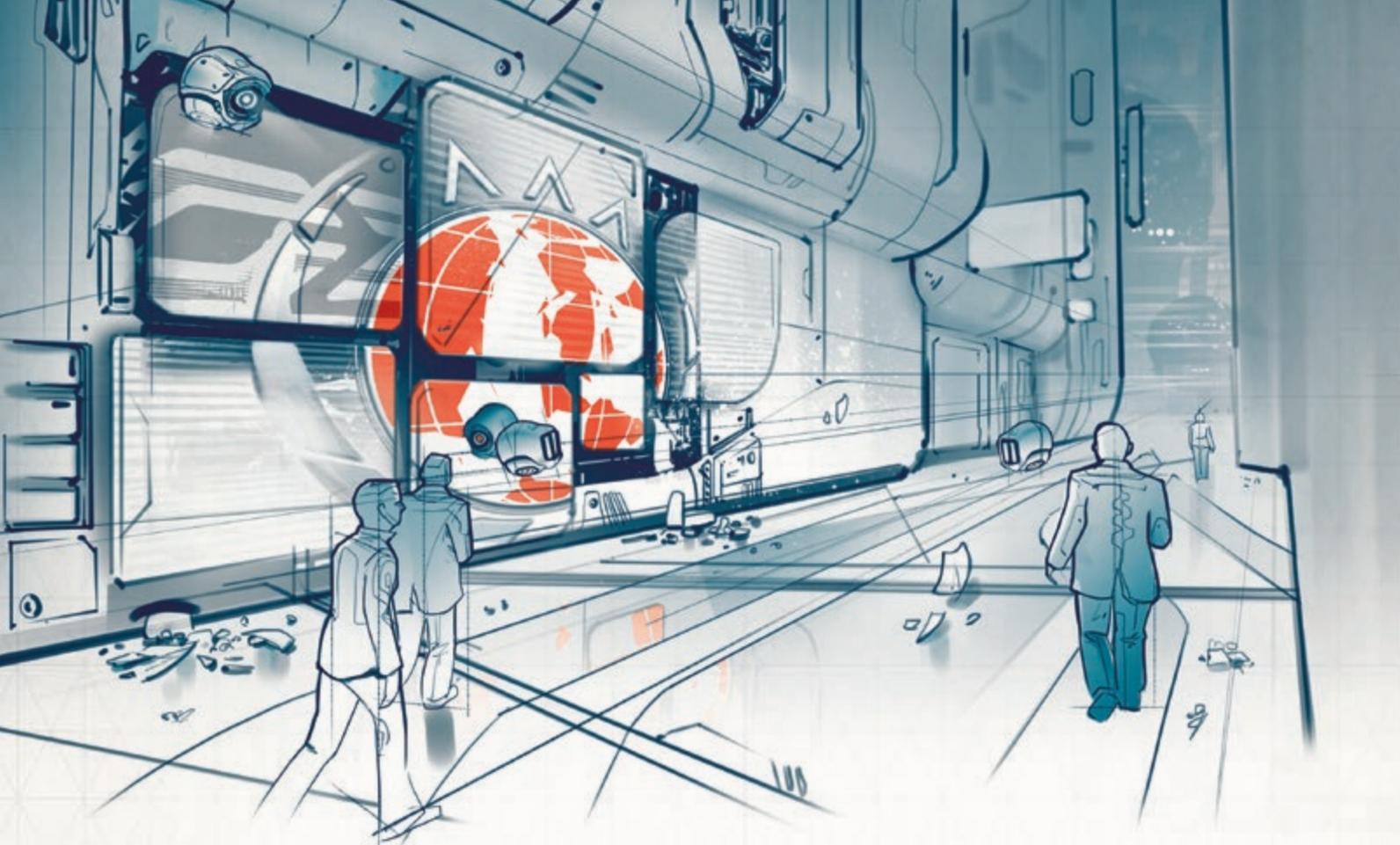
First, follow the same guidelines as with talents. Make sure your abilities are few in number and impactful in the game. Take a look at the abilities of the adversaries in this book. This can help you get an idea of what works well as an ability, and you also might find an existing ability that works perfectly for your new adversary.

When designing a new ability, avoid unnecessary complication. Abilities should work within the existing structure of the rules. Don't design a new damage type when your spider's venom can just inflict strain, and don't invent new gliding rules when the flying rules work just as well in nearly every situation.

EQUIPMENT

There are no special rules to follow when equipping adversaries. We just recommend limiting your adversary to one or two weapons (perhaps a ranged and melee weapon) and one piece of armor (or none if your adversary wouldn't wear any). Other equipment can be handled narratively.





CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATE RULES

Alternate rules are rules that we think could be useful to some of your games, but not every game. Some of these rules are just extra game systems that could be tacked onto most settings, but aren't needed in any of them. Magic is a good example of this. You can have magic (as actual “magic” or reskinned as psychic powers or some vaguely more scientific variant) in pretty much any setting. But any setting can work without it, even the weird war and fantasy settings.

Other alternate rules are rules that change how the game plays. These are rules like unlinking skills and characteristics (so you can use whichever characteristic

makes the most sense for the situation at hand when making a skill check). These alternate rules have a fundamentally game-altering nature. You and your groups are probably going to have to make adaptations on the fly to make sure these rules don't have negative effects on your game.

Luckily, that's why these rules are alternate. You don't have to use any of them. Since implementing these rules could have unforeseen consequences, we do our best to address potential issues in each rules entry. That way, you can make an informed decision about using the rules and plan ahead to address any problems.

NEMESIS EXTRA ACTIVATION RULES

Although nemeses are supposed to be a challenge for an entire player group, it doesn't always work out that way. In practice, when one character faces off against an entire group of characters, the group nearly

always wins, and does so quickly. This is because of the group's activation advantage: the extra number of turns they get to take each round because of their greater numbers.

More turns means more actions, which means more attacks. Even if a nemesis can reliably eliminate a player character every round, they are going to be on the receiving end of three or four additional attacks from the rest of the group. Characters in **GENESYS**, even nemeses, aren't designed to withstand that kind of punishment for more than a couple of rounds.

To make a lone nemesis into more of a challenge for a group of PCs, you can use the extra activation rule.

EXTRA ACTIVATION RULE

When rolling for Initiative for a nemesis-level adversary, roll twice, recording both results. These both become NPC Initiative slots.

Your nemesis may take two turns during a single round. Any abilities that last “until the end of their following turn” last until the end of their first turn on the subsequent round.

THE EFFECTS, BOTH GOOD AND BAD

Your nemesis is going to be more of a threat, because they're going to make more attacks and probably incapacitate more of your PCs faster. All of this is great if you're looking to make a nemesis feel like a worthy challenge. However, if you're not careful, the danger level of the encounter could change from “challenging” to “total party kill.” Some nemeses also have powerful attacks that are balanced by the fact that they can only make one powerful attack per round.

We recommend you review the nemesis profile carefully before you use this rule. We also recommend that you only use this with nemeses that confront your PCs alone, as in without other NPC allies to fight alongside them. Finally, you should probably let your players know that you're going to use this rule at the beginning of the encounter, just so they won't feel blindsided.

UNCOUPLING SKILLS FROM CHARACTERISTICS

In **GENESYS**, whenever you or your players make a skill check, the skill determines what characteristic you use to set the dice pool. This alternate rule throws out that link. Instead, whenever you make a skill check, you choose which characteristic to use with the skill.

Your choice needs to make sense in the game, so it depends on the approach a character is taking to accomplish the task at hand. When a player chooses what characteristic to use, they should briefly explain to their fellow players why this characteristic makes the most sense to use. If you, the GM, feel the explanation doesn't make sense, you can reject it and require them to choose a different characteristic (or determine the characteristic for them).

EXAMPLE: DECOUPLING SKILLS

Huck and Mercedes are both interrogating a suspect in police custody, using Coercion. Normally, Coercion is linked to Willpower. However, Huck says he'll offer the suspect a cup of coffee and chat them up to get more information out of them. He proposes using Presence with Coercion. Mercedes, on the other hand, chooses to rough the suspect up. Since her character is physically attacking the suspect, she proposes using Brawn with Coercion.

THE EFFECTS, BOTH GOOD AND BAD

The good part about this rule is it lets you and your group be more creative with roleplaying, and go with whatever makes the most narrative sense at the time. It can lead to a richer game with more potential for storytelling.

However, the current skill/characteristic pairings make it very hard for a character to be good at everything. This was done so that no one character can dominate a game session and everyone gets their own chance in the spotlight. Decoupling skills and characteristics makes it easier for everyone to be better at everything while spending much less XP. All your character needs is one high characteristic and a good justification for why that characteristic should be used in a given situation.

This rule can lead to players spending all of their XP to maximize one characteristic, then trying to justify using that characteristic on all of their skill checks. You may end up with a lot of arguing at your gaming table! For these reasons, here is a variant of this rule: Keep the link between skills and characteristics, but let players use a different characteristic for a specific skill check if they first spend a Story Point. The additional cost should keep this rule from being abused.

ITEM ATTACHMENTS AND HARD POINTS

Item customization: done correctly, it can be a great way to expand item options and let your players add some extra customization to their characters. Of course, if you do it wrong, you can easily become bogged down in tedious minutia.

Either way, however, it's something a lot of us enjoy exploring. Although the item customization rules aren't a part of the core rules of **GENESYS**, they are an alternate rule set. The rules incorporate two concepts: hard points that represent the amount of "space" an item has for customization, and attachments, which are what fills those hard points.

HARD POINTS

When customizing an item, there are only so many improvements you can add. A rifle can't have ten scopes, and if you try to give a sword a spiked hilt, saw-toothed edges, an electrified blade, and a compass in the pommel, you're probably going to end up with an unwieldy monstrosity! In **GENESYS**, hard points determine how many attachments an item can reasonably hold.

Each item has a certain number of hard points. Since an item's hard points aren't listed in its item profile, here is a simple system for determining how many hard points each item possesses.

DETERMINING HARD POINTS

If you're using the item customization rules, then each item has a number of hard points equal to half of its encumbrance value, rounded up. Items with an encumbrance of 1 or 2 have 1 hard point, items with an encumbrance of 3 or 4 have 2, items with 5 or 6 have 3, and so forth. When calculating the number of hard points, use the item's base encumbrance, before any modifiers (this is important, because some attachments can decrease an item's encumbrance and make it easier to carry).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are physical components that can attach to (or are installed) in items to improve their performance or add capabilities. Each attachment requires a certain number of empty hard points in order to install it. Once you've installed an attachment on an item, it now occupies those hard points, and they're no longer considered empty.

WHAT ABOUT GEAR?

These rules primarily cover weapon and armor customization, but not customizing other types of gear. This is mostly a matter of resources. Gear covers such a wide category of items that you could spend a whole book creating different attachments that could end up on different everyday items. Also, since most roleplaying games tend to focus a bit more on combat, you're probably going to care more about customizing your favorite sword than your favorite canteen.

INSTALLING ATTACHMENTS

Installing an attachment requires roughly an hour of work. In addition, the character doing the installing needs to make a successful **Average (◆◆) Mechanics check**. Failure simply means that the attachment isn't installed, and the character needs to try again. Failure with a ⚡ (not likely unless you upgrade the check's difficulty) means that the character clumsily destroys the attachment in the process! Success with ⚡ means that the installation is successful, but the attachment may fall off or stop working at an awkward time (which is what happens when you duct tape a flashlight to an assault rifle).

ATTACHMENT BREAKDOWN

Each attachment entry has set information associated with the entry.

- **Description:** This explains what the attachment is, and what settings it is most likely to make sense in.
- **Use With:** This explains what kinds of items you can put this attachment on.
- **Modifiers:** This explains what the attachment does within the mechanics of the game system.
- **Hard Points Required:** This is how many hard points you need empty to add this attachment to the item.

The price and rarity for the attachments are listed in **Table III.2-1: Weapon Attachments** on the next page and **Table III.2-2: Armor Attachments** on page 208.

WEAPON ATTACHMENTS

To go with these rules, we've included a list of basic weapon attachments designed to be as broad as possible. However, most attachments are still only going to work with certain weapons, and only make sense in certain settings.

BALANCED HILT

This attachment represents modifying a melee weapon's balance (particularly around the hilt or haft) to make it easier to control. This kind of attachment makes sense for any setting (even futuristic combat knives can benefit from being finely weighted or balanced).

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any weapons that use the Melee (Light) skill and to one-handed weapons that use the Melee skill.

Modifiers: The weapon gains the Accurate 1 quality, or increases any existing Accurate quality by 1. (If the weapon has the Inaccurate quality, it reduces that quality's rating by 1 to a minimum of 0, instead.)

Hard Points Required: 1.

BIPOD MOUNT

A bipod (a folding, two-legged stand) can be attached to the barrel of a firearm. The legs stabilize the firearm and take up some of its weight. This kind of attachment makes sense for the **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any Ranged (Heavy) or Gunnery weapon.

Modifiers: If the user spends one preparation maneuver to deploy the bipod, the weapon's Cumbersome or Unwieldy qualities are reduced by 2, to a minimum of 0, and the weapon's encumbrance is reduced by 2, to a minimum of 0, while the user fires from a crouched or prone position (or can brace the bipod against something solid).

Hard Points Required: 1.

DUELIST CROSS GUARD

This attachment represents modifying the cross guard of a sword to better catch and lock the blade of an opponent. This kind of attachment makes sense for the **fantasy** setting, but could make sense for any setting where dueling with swords is common.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any sword, whether one-handed or two-handed.

Modifiers: When an opponent resolves a melee combat check against the wielder, if the check generated at least one uncanceled , the wielder may suffer 1 strain as an out-of-turn incidental to add   to the results.

Hard Points Required: 1.

EXTENDED BARREL

This attachment extends the barrel (or makes similar modifications) to make the weapon fire farther. This kind of attachment makes sense for the **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any Ranged (Light), Ranged (Heavy), or Gunnery weapons (you may exclude weapons such as grenades, or weapons that fire self-propelled ammo such as missile launchers).

Modifiers: The weapon's range increases by one range band, to a maximum of extreme range. The weapon gains the Cumbersome 2 quality, or increases its existing Cumbersome quality by 2.

Hard Points Required: 2.

HAIR TRIGGER

A "hair trigger" represents a modification that allows the user to fire a weapon very quickly, although this can be at the expense of accuracy. This kind of attachment makes sense for the **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any pistol.

Modifiers: When the user makes the first combat check with this weapon in an encounter, add   to the results.

Hard Points Required: 1.

TABLE III.2—1: WEAPON ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT	PRICE	RARITY
Balanced Hilt	1,000	6
Bipod Mount	250	2
Duelist Cross Guard	800	5
Extended Barrel	1,000	4
Hair Trigger	150	3
Razor Edge	1,250	6
Recurve Limbs	300	4
Serrated Edge	75	2
Superior Weapon Customization	750	7
Telescopic Sight	200	3
Tripod Mount	400	3
Under-Barrel Flamethrower	3,000	6
Under-Barrel Grenade Launcher	1,500	5
Under-Barrel Shotgun	1,000	4
Weapon Sling	25	1
Weighted Head	250	2

RAZOR EDGE

This attachment represents sharpening a blade to a razor edge, then reinforcing or treating that edge so that it can withstand repeated blows. This kind of attachment makes sense for any setting.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any close combat weapon that has a blade.

Modifiers: The weapon gains the Pierce 2 quality, or increases any existing Pierce quality by 1. The weapon also decreases its Crit rating by 1, to a minimum of 1.

Hard Points Required: 1.

RECURVE LIMBS

Making the limbs of a bow or crossbow curve away from the wielder increases the penetrating power of the bow's shots, even if it also makes the bow larger and more difficult to wield. This kind of attachment makes sense for **fantasy** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any bow or crossbow.

Modifiers: The weapon gains the Pierce 2 quality, or increases any existing Pierce quality by 1. The weapon also gains the Unwieldy 2 quality, or increases any existing Unwieldy quality by 1.

Hard Points Required: 1.

SERRATED EDGE

Adding jagged sawteeth to a bladed weapon means the wounds it makes are particularly brutal and damaging. This kind of attachment makes sense for any setting.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any close combat weapon that has a blade.

Modifiers: The weapon gains the Vicious 1 quality, or increases any existing Vicious quality by 1.

Hard Points Required: 1.

SUPERIOR WEAPON CUSTOMIZATION

This simply represents the weapon being modified by a master craftsman to be better than other examples of its type. This kind of attachment makes sense for any setting.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any weapon.

Modifiers: The weapon gains the Superior quality.

Hard Points Required: 1.

TELESCOPIC SIGHT

A telescopic sight magnifies a target, allowing the user to shoot targets that they could normally barely be able to see (futuristic versions may use special enhanced optics, rather than simple lenses). This kind of attachment makes sense for the **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any ranged weapon that could logically benefit from the addition of a telescopic sight.

Modifiers: The user reduces the difficulty of ranged combat checks made with this weapon at long and extreme range by 1.

Hard Points Required: 1.

TRIPOD MOUNT

Like a bipod, the tripod mount is a set of three folding legs that deploy from the center of the weapon to provide a stable stand to fire from. This kind of attachment makes sense for the **weird war**, **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any Ranged (Heavy) or Gunnery weapon with an encumbrance of 4 or more.

Modifiers: If the user spends two preparation maneuvers to deploy the tripod, the weapon's Cumbersome or Unwieldy qualities are reduced by 3, to a minimum of 0, and the weapon's encumbrance is reduced by 4, to a minimum of 0. The weapon may not be moved (except to pivot on the tripod mount) once it has been set up. The user must spend two preparation maneuvers to take the tripod down.

Hard Points Required: 2.

UNDER-BARREL WEAPON ATTACHMENT

Modern firearms sometimes have secondary weapons attached under the barrel, allowing the wielder to effectively carry two weapons in one. This kind of attachment makes sense for the **modern day**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any rifle-sized Ranged (Heavy) weapons.

Modifiers: When installed, the user chooses one of the following secondary weapons. The weapon can then fire using the associated secondary profile.

- **Flamethrower:** (Ranged [Heavy]; Damage 10; Critical 2; Range [Short]; Blast 6, Burn 4, Limited Ammo 2).

TABLE III.2–2: ARMOR ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT	PRICE	RARITY
Deflective Plating	450	4
Enhanced Lifting Servos	1,500	5
Intimidating Visage	125	3
Rare Metals	1,000	8
Reinforced Plating	8,000	7
Vacuum Sealed	600	4

- **Grenade Launcher:** (Ranged [Heavy]; Damage 8; Critical 4; Range [Medium]; Blast 6, Limited Ammo 1).
- **Shotgun:** (Ranged [Heavy]; Damage 8; Critical 3; Range [Short]; Blast 5, Knockdown).

The weapon gains the Cumbersome 2 quality, or increases its existing Cumbersome quality by 1. The weapon also gains the Unwieldy 2 quality, or increases its existing Unwieldy quality by 1. Finally, the weapon increases its encumbrance by 2.

Hard Points Required: 2.

WEAPON SLING

A sling helps a user carry a particularly heavy weapon by taking up part of the weight. This kind of attachment makes sense for any setting.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any Ranged (Heavy) weapon or ranged weapons that require two hands to wield.

Modifiers: The weapon decreases its encumbrance by 2.

Hard Points Required: 1.

WEIGHTED HEAD

Adding extra weight to the head of a blunt weapon lets the wielder strike with greater impact and do more damage. This kind of attachment makes sense in any setting.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any close combat weapon that deals bludgeoning or crushing damage (not one with a cutting edge).

Modifiers: The weapon increases its damage by 2. The weapon gains the Cumbersome 2 quality, or increases its existing Cumbersome quality by 1.

Hard Points Required: 1.

ARMOR ATTACHMENTS

We've also included a list of basic armor attachments to go with these rules. Again, these are designed to be as broad as possible, but some only make sense in certain settings.

DEFLECTIVE PLATING

This attachment applies angled plates or mildly reflective surfaces to help deflect incoming ranged attacks. This kind of attachment makes sense in **fantasy**, **science fiction**, and **space opera** settings (in the past, armor might be designed to deflect arrows or throwing knives, while in the future, it could reflect lasers or energy blasts).

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any armor.

Modifiers: Wearer increases their ranged defense by 1.

Hard Points Required: 1.

ENHANCED LIFTING SERVOS

Futuristic servos (or other, similar devices) can be worked into suits of hard carapace armor to make them powered and let the user lift and carry far more than they could normally. This kind of attachment makes sense in **science fiction** and **space opera** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any armor composed of a hardened carapace.

Modifiers: When wearing this armor, the user increases their encumbrance threshold by 5. The user reduces the rating of the Cumbersome quality of any carried weapons by 1, to a minimum of 1.

Hard Points Required: 2.

INTIMIDATING VISAGE

Warriors from many cultures paint their armor or add imposing face masks to intimidate opponents. This kind of attachment makes sense in all settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any armor.

Modifiers: When wearing this armor, the user adds ✨ to Coercion checks they make, and automatic ✖ to Charm checks they make.

Hard Points Required: 0.

RARE METALS

Many fantasy settings feature rare, nearly magical metals that can be used to create superior armor. This kind of attachment makes sense in **fantasy** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to chain or plate armor.

Modifiers: The armor reduces its encumbrance by 2, and it adds one fewer ■ to Stealth checks.

Hard Points: 2.

REINFORCED PLATING

This attachment represents adding extra layers of armor or using stronger materials to reinforce the armor. This kind of attachment makes sense in any setting.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any armor that uses hardened plates for protection.

Modifiers: The armor gains the Reinforced quality. The armor also increases its encumbrance by 1.

Hard Points Required: 2.

VACUUM SEALED

This attachment equips the armor with breathing gear and seals it against vacuum. This kind of attachment makes sense in the **science fiction** and **space opera** settings.

Use With: This attachment can be applied to any armor.

Modifiers: While wearing this armor, the user may ignore the effects of vacuum or poisonous atmospheric environments for up to one hour.

Hard Points Required: 1.

MAGIC RULES

Magic permeates the world of many fantasy settings, though the ability to harness its power remains beyond the grasp of most mortals. Of course, both PCs and their enemies tend to be a cut above, so magic is likely to feature prominently in your fantasy game.

We've described several magic skills already (Arcana, Divine, and Primal, on page 70), and as a GM, you may use some combination of these skills or create entirely new magic skills unique to your campaign. Regardless, magic skills have certain commonalities that require some additional rules, much like combat skills.

For the sake of convenience, we might sometimes refer to actions using magic skill checks as spells, regardless of the source of the magic. Within the campaign world, it can add a lot of flavor if you use various terms to differentiate kinds of magic, especially when it comes to in-game dialogue. For instance, priests using the Divine skill might perform miracles, while druids may summon animal allies, and wizards may use the Arcana skill to fling bolts of fire at their foes.

SPELLCASTERS

Spellcasters, or individuals who can use magic, are anyone who has at least one rank in a magic skill. **If your character does not have at least one rank in a magic skill, they cannot attempt to use magic.** This includes performing any of the magic actions and maneuvers listed later in this section.

All spellcasters, no matter what type of magic they use, also need to have a certain amount of knowledge concerning magic and its possibilities. For this reason, your character is going to benefit greatly from

TABLE III.2–3: PENALTIES WHEN CASTING SPELLS

CONDITION	PENALTY
The character does not have at least one free hand.	+ ■
The character is gagged, silenced, or otherwise unable to speak.	+ ■ ■
The character is wearing heavy armor that might hamper their gestures (armor with +2 soak or more), or carrying a shield. This could also include other restrictive outfits, at your discretion.	+ ■
The character is in circumstances that interfere with their ability to concentrate, such as trying to cast while swimming or hanging from a rope, being buffeted by a sandstorm, or casting a spell that doesn't target the person they're fighting in hand-to-hand combat.	Upgrade the difficulty once (or more at your GM's discretion).

LEARNING MAGIC

Magic skills are potent and incredibly versatile. Although we suggest rules restrictions on training magic skills, as the GM you might want to consider imposing additional in-game requirements. Not only does this add more challenge for PCs seeking such power, but it provides an opportunity to underscore the rarity and power of magic and to illustrate how it fits into your setting. A character who wants to advance in Thaumaturgy might be required to abide by the rules of their religious order to receive training. You may require a would-be wizard to seek out a tutor and convince them to accept an apprentice, or to discover and study an ancient tome of spells.

having a couple of ranks in the Knowledge skill if they want to be a spellcaster.

USING MAGIC IN NARRATIVE ENCOUNTERS

Magic checks are fundamentally handled like any other skill check, and called for in the same circumstances. As with any other skill, you should generally only require a check when there are dramatic results or consequences for failure. For instance, a character who regularly manifests fire-based effects using their magic skill shouldn't need a check to magically light a torch or campfire. Similarly, a priest who has shown himself to be a master of the healing arts shouldn't need a check to ease the pain of a dying NPC.

With magic skills being so open ended, judging and resolving magic skill checks may seem challenging, but it really doesn't need to present much more complication than using any other skill. Instead of looking at the "how" of the spell, focus on the end result to decide on a difficulty for the check. If the spell is basically replicating the effects of a mundane skill, assign the difficulty correspondingly, but consider increasing it by one. Magic shouldn't be a catchall skill that eliminates the need for any others. Magically levitating over a river is more difficult than swimming across from an objective view, although your character might find it easier if they aren't trained in Athletics (or don't want to get wet).

Resolving a magic skill check is really no different from resolving any other check. If the check succeeds, the

TABLE III.2–4: SPENDING ☞ AND ☞ ON MAGIC SKILL CHECKS

COST	RESULT OPTIONS
☞ or ☞	The magical energies exhaust the character, and they suffer 2 strain or 1 wound (controlling player's choice). This character and all allied spellcasters in the encounter add ■ to any attempts to cast spells until the end of the controlling player's next turn.
☞ ☞ or ☞	The spell doesn't take effect until the start of the next round, or after a minute in narrative gameplay. If the character is using a magical item, it becomes damaged one step (see Table I.5–4: Repairing Gear , on page 89). Until the end of the encounter, enemy spellcasters add ■ when casting a spell that targets this character.
☞ ☞ or ☞	The spell is slightly more powerful than expected. One character of the GM's choice is targeted or otherwise affected by the spell as well. All other spellcasters and creatures attuned to magical energies within a day's travel become aware of the character (and depending on their disposition, may be very interested in finding them and doing them harm).
☞	The character overexerts themselves or loses their magical connection and is unable to cast spells for the rest of the encounter or scene. The GM picks the target of the character's spell. If the caster is an NPC, the controlling player picks the target of the spell instead.
☞ ☞	The character completely lose control of their magical energies or draws the ire of their deity, suffering one Critical Injury (at the GM's discretion, this may instead take the form of some of terrible or hilarious misfortune, such as temporarily being turned into a small woodland creature, being struck by lightning on a clear day, swapping bodies with someone else in the encounter for the remainder of the day, or summoning an avatar of divine or infernal wrath). If the character is using a magical item, it is completely destroyed.

character achieves what they set out to. How exactly that happens is shown by the positive and negative symbols left in the pool, as interpreted by you and your players. **One good guideline for magic, however, is that accomplishing something through the use of magic should rarely be as easy as accomplishing the same task by using the skill designed for it.** Magic can be a generalist skill, but it shouldn't be a way to master everything.

Magic is more taxing than other activities in one other respect. **When your character casts a spell that requires a check (whether or not the check succeeds), they suffer 2 strain after resolving the check.** This limit keeps magic-using characters from using magic indiscriminately. Note that magic-using characters only suffer strain when they need to make a check to cast a spell, so minor and narrative spell effects do not impose this penalty.

Generally, magic also has unique requirements for use. The character may have to make certain gestures, say specific words, or just spend a few precious moments focusing on the spell. If your character can't do that, casting the spell becomes harder. See **Table III.2–3: Penalties When Casting Spells**, on the previous page, for some conditions that may make it harder for a character to cast a spell.

Magic can also be risky, and casting it can come with consequences. **Table III.2–4: Spending ☞ and ☞ on Magic Skill Checks** lays out some of the consequences, and the ☞ and ☞ needed to trigger them. You may note that the consequences tend to be worse than the consequences characters normally suffer for ☞ and ☞. We did that deliberately, as a balance for magic's power and flexibility. After all, with great power comes the occasional risk of turning yourself into a toad.

The effects of magic skill checks may be instantaneous or, rarely, permanent. Generally, spells used in structured gameplay either have an immediate effect or a persistent effect for as long as the character uses maneuvers to concentrate on the spell. At your discretion, outside of structured gameplay, some effects may last for the duration of an encounter or scene.

TYPES OF SPELLS

Since magic skills are more versatile—and thus potentially more useful—than other skills, we narrow down what is possible to accomplish with a particular magic skill by defining broad categories of actions, or **spells**. For structured encounters, we divide spell types up fairly rigorously. For narrative encounters, we keep things more flexible but still follow those same guidelines.

In this section, we list the different types of spells and talk about how to use them in narrative encounters. Later we talk about using these spells in structured encounters.

Each spell entry talks about the things a character can do with that spell—such as make themselves invisible, hex a target, or heal an ally. Often, we refer to the **Magic in Structured Encounters** rules, starting on page 214, for particulars on how to use a spell to accomplish a goal. Those rules work equally well for narrative encounters.

Also, you'll quickly note that none of the three magic skills (Arcana, Divine, and Primal) are able to accomplish all of the different types of spells. We did this deliberately; each type of magic should be better at some things than others, and this way no one character can be a master at everything. We don't recommend disregarding this rule, since it makes magic users even more powerful.

DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Magic skills may be treated differently depending on the setting. In some settings, Divine, Arcane, and Primal spellcasters each tap into a different energy and are unable to access the other powers. If your setting fits this description, you may rule that once a character has taken a rank in one of the three magic skills, they cannot take ranks in the other magic skills.

In other settings, although the three magic skills represent tapping into different energies, a trained spellcaster can tap into any of those energies by changing their approach or rituals. If your setting fits this description, you may allow characters to purchase ranks in all three skills (if that character wants to be able to perform all types of magic).

Finally, in some settings, magic is a gift (or curse) that only a select few individuals can manipulate. In this case, you can rule that only characters who have a magic skill as a career skill can buy ranks in that skill. This makes magic use much more limited to a few characters in a party.

ATTACK

Skills: Arcana, Divine, Primal

Attack spells include any combat check or other action that directly or indirectly deals damage or strain to an enemy. Examples include throwing a fireball, shooting lightning, smiting a foe with magical force, or knocking a foe around the battlefield with invisible blows.

We recommend using the rules found on page 215 for making a magic Attack action whenever you want your character to attack someone with magic. Attacking generally happens in structured combat encounters, anyway. If you need to make an attack outside of combat (by shooting a bolt of force to cause a landslide to block a road, for example), your players can still follow the rules for the magic Attack action, and you can decide on the minimum damage needed to trigger the desired result.

AUGMENT

Skills: Divine, Primal

Augment spells magically enhance characters or objects. Sometimes, the distinction is mostly narrative—it may be purely a matter of description whether a spell imbues a sword with power or improves the reflexes of the character wielding it. Although these effects are often helpful in combat, such spells can be useful in many circumstances,

from helping an ally scale a sheer surface to keeping the party's horses galloping past their normal limits.

When determining the effect of an augment spell, see the Augment action's effects, on pages 215 and 216, for some of the possibilities. Of course, you or your players may want to try something not covered by those effects, such as temporarily repairing a weapon so that you can continue to wield it. In this case, you may set a difficulty by looking at the difficulty to repair the item (see **Table I.5–4: Repairing Gear**, on page 89). These spells could also be used to improve the effectiveness of gear (perhaps the augmented item adds  to checks related to its use). Augment could even let a character turn invisible or fly, although we recommend a difficulty of at least **Hard** (  ) for this!

BARRIER

Skills: Arcana, Divine

"Barrier," or protective, spells are fairly straightforward in structured encounters: they reduce incoming damage for your character and their allies. However, they have some interesting narrative uses as well.

Barrier magics let the spellcaster protect themselves from adverse conditions of all types. Your character may create a bubble under the ocean so they can travel underwater, a barrier that shields them from flames as they walk through a burning building, or even a barrier that deflects an onrushing avalanche. When using a Barrier spell in narrative situations like these, first define what you want the barrier to do (protect a character from heat or cold, create a bubble of air, deflect snow in an avalanche). Then, use the base difficulty for the check as defined on page 216, and follow the additional effects rules if the character wants to affect other targets.

CONJURE

Skills: Arcana, Primal

Conjuration magic allows a character to summon allies and create items out of the raw stuff of magic (whatever that may be in your setting).

Conjure's structured encounter rules, on page 216, are fairly good guidance for using Conjure in narrative encounters. However, we admit that the Conjure action is one of the most loosely defined rule sets because of the sheer number of items or creatures you could summon or create. When using Conjure to summon or create something in a narrative encounter, what you need to determine is the size or complexity of the conjuration. How elaborate the spell gets can be a matter of common sense for you and your players. Summoning a glowing sword and fighting with it seems reasonable, but summoning a cannon does not (especially if the cannon doesn't exist in your setting!) Likewise, summoning a

door to bar a portal or brush and brambles to make an area difficult terrain is within the scope of a spell, but summoning a canyon filled with molten lava is not!

CURSE

Skills: Arcana, Divine

What we call a "Curse" is any sort of affliction that applies a negative effect to a character, whether it be a penalty to combat checks, a wasting sickness incurable by mundane means, or an inability to speak a certain name. The most extreme afflictions might even bend a victim to the spellcaster's will. The distinction between affliction and attack might not always be clear. As a general principle, if a magical action inflicts damage or strain, it's an attack. If it simply makes a target more susceptible to damage or strain, it's a curse.

Outside of structured encounters, curses could take any number of forms. Some could be annoying, such as someone sneezing uncontrollably or feeling inexplicably lethargic. The effects could be represented mechanically by adding a ■ or two to the target's checks. The check to inflict such a minor curse should either be opposed (see page 25), or **Easy** (◆) if the target is a minor character. Other curses could be more dangerous, such as a hex that causes dangerous things to happen to the target for no reason (ladders breaking, tree branches falling on them, and the like). Not only should the difficulty of the spell be higher—if it's not an opposed check, it should be at least **Average** (◆◆) and possibly **Hard** (◆◆◆)—but the effects can be represented narratively. If a character falls from a broken ladder, for example, use the falling rules on page 112.

MAINTAINING SPELLS IN NARRATIVE ENCOUNTERS

Quite a few of our spells are supposed to be maintained over multiple rounds to provide an ongoing effect. In structured encounters, your character does this by performing the Concentration maneuver. However, in narrative encounters, tracking individual maneuvers can be unnecessarily tedious.

Instead, we suggest taking a more narrative approach to concentration and maintaining spells. You can decide that a character can't perform some activities while also concentrating on a spell, such as tasks that might take a lot of their attention. A character might also start suffering strain if they try to maintain a spell over time. Finally, if something happens that could interrupt a character's concentration, you can have your player make an **Average** (◆◆) **Discipline check**. Failure means their character loses concentration, and the spell ends.

Of course, there are some truly terrible curses: blindness, disease, madness, or being turned into a toad. These checks should almost always be opposed (either by the target's Discipline or Resilience, depending on whether the curse affects the mind or the body). You can pull effects from the **Table I.6-10: Critical Injury Result** on page 115, the fear and sanity rules on page 243 and 244, or use similar inspiration when figuring out what the curse does.

DISPEL

Skills: Arcana

We've made dispelling an opponent's magics the province of Arcana magic—primarily to balance out healing being limited to the Divine and Primal skills. (You may decide to ignore this limitation in your own setting, but just remember, we did it for balance reasons.) Dispel-ling should work the same in structured encounters and in narrative encounters, so just use the rules on page 217 if a character wants to dispel something narratively.



HEAL

Skills: Divine, Primal

At its most basic, healing magic can remove damage or strain from a character. The most powerful spells might cure deadly diseases or even raise the dead. Healing magic works much like the Medicine skill, but of course medicine in most fantasy worlds is fairly primitive.

In game terms, healing magic is more difficult than an equivalent Medicine check. However, in exchange for this increased difficulty, healing magic can do things that a skilled doctor cannot. These include healing targets from afar, healing multiple targets at once, and on rare occasions, bringing the deceased back from the dead. Healing magic can also affect targets multiple times per encounter.

When using healing magic, the additional affects listed in **Table III.2–11** should cover most of what you want to do in narrative time as well as structured time. For other effects—such as a spell to double the rate of natural healing for a target—you, the GM, can set the difficulty. If you're not sure what difficulty to assign, **Average** (◆◆) works for any acceleration of natural healing, while anything similar in scope and impact to bringing the dead back to life should be **Daunting** (◆◆◆◆) or even **Formidable** (◆◆◆◆◆◆). Generally, we recommend making resurrection a rare and difficult endeavor, so that death doesn't lose its impact in your game.

UTILITY

Skills: Arcana, Divine, Primal

Utility magic covers all the minor things that we expect people to be able to do with magic, such as levitating a book, transmuting a pebble into a butterfly, detecting something magical nearby, summoning a ghostly light source to see in the dark, or making one's voice growl with distant thunder. Basically, these are all cool abilities with a minor benefit, but are more tricks than dangerous or powerful magics. That doesn't mean a player can't figure out how their character can use a utility spell to their best advantage—that's half the fun of being a spellcaster!

Utility magic doesn't have an equivalent action for structured encounters, since the effects are almost entirely narrative in nature. A check to cast a utility spell should always be **Easy** (◆). If that check seems too easy for what you want to accomplish, then what you want to do is probably beyond the scope of utility magic!

MAGIC IN STRUCTURED ENCOUNTERS

Magic can be used to attack opponents, protect allies, summon items or weapons, and do other impressive and amazing things. The core of these actions follows the same skill check system that forms the core of GENESYS.

RESISTING MAGIC

High-level adversaries such as nemeses usually have a rank or three in the Adversary talent, which makes them more of a challenge in a fight. The Adversary talent upgrades the difficulty of combat checks targeting the NPC, and this obviously applies to Attack spells. However, other spells may seem like a way to get around the Adversary talent. Therefore, we recommend that you upgrade the difficulty of *any* spells targeting an NPC a number of times equal to that NPC's ranks in Adversary. This should be enough to make nemeses feel dangerous.

The difference is that magic is much more customizable. You can do quite a bit with magic, but the more you want to do, the more difficult the check becomes.

MAGIC ACTIONS AND MANEUVERS

As with anything else characters might attempt in structured encounters, spells are categorized as either actions or maneuvers. This section presents example magic actions that cover some of the most common things characters might attempt. We try to leave the narrative descriptions up to you and your players; it's fun to describe the appearance of spells in ways unique to your characters. These actions are presented in the same format as those in **Part I—Chapter 6: Combat Encounters**, and they can be used alongside other combat actions. Like standard actions and maneuvers, many of these can also be used outside of combat.

Again, these are only examples of what characters might do with magic—common uses that we thought could use some detail and guidance. As you've doubtless already guessed, adjudicating activities other than those described here is up to you and your players.

ACTIONS

Here are a few of the most likely actions characters might attempt using magic. Of course, these are just some of the possibilities, and GMs, you can use these as guidelines for creating your own magic actions if you like.

Each entry specifies whether the spell can be sustained using the Concentration maneuver and what skills can be used to perform the action. Not all skills can be used to perform each action; some magic skills are better at performing certain kinds of magic than others. **A character must have at least one rank in the skill required by the magic action to perform that magic action.**

TABLE III.2–5: MAGIC ATTACK ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

EFFECTS	DIFFICULTY MOD
Blast: The attack gains the Blast quality with a rating equal to your character's ranks in Knowledge.	+ ◆
Close Combat: May select a target engaged with your character.	+ ◆
Deadly: The attack gains a Critical rating of 2. The attack also gains the Vicious quality with a rating equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge.	+ ◆
Fire: The attack gains the Burn quality with a rating equal to your character's ranks in Knowledge.	+ ◆
Holy/Unholy (Divine Only): When dealing damage to a target that the GM determines is the antithesis of the character's faith or deity (such as a priest of a god of life attacking an undead zombie), each ✨ deals +2 damage, instead of +1.	+ ◆
Ice: The attack gains the Ensnares quality with a rating equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge.	+ ◆
Impact: The attack gains the Knockdown quality. The attack also gains the Disorient quality with a rating equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge.	+ ◆
Lightning: The attack gains the Stun quality with a rating equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge. The attack also gains the Auto-fire quality. (You must increase the difficulty by one to use the Auto-fire quality as normal.)	+ ◆
Manipulative (Arcana Only): If the attack hits, you may spend ⚡ to move the target up to one range band in any direction.	+ ◆
Non-Lethal (Primal Only): The attack gains the Stun Damage quality.	+ ◆
Range: Increase the range of the spell by one range band. This may be added multiple times, increasing the range by one range band each time.	+ ◆
Destructive: The attack gains the Sunder quality. The attack also gains the Pierce quality with a rating equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge.	+ ◆◆
Empowered: The attack deals damage equal to twice the characteristic linked to the skill (instead of dealing damage equal to the characteristic). If the attack has the Blast quality, it affects all characters within short range, instead of engaged.	+ ◆◆
Poisonous: If the attack deals damage, the target must immediately make a Hard (◆◆◆◆) Resilience check or suffer wounds equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge, and strain equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge. This counts as a poison.	+ ◆◆

Where magic gets interesting is in the options a character has for customizing their spell. Before making a magic action, the character may choose any number of additional effects to add to that action (these effects are listed on an associated table). However, each effect has a difficulty increase associated with it. You add each difficulty increase to the overall difficulty of the check. You may not add an effect if it would increase the difficulty beyond **Formidable** (◆◆◆◆◆) (after any reductions, such as from magic implements, are applied; see page 218). Each effect can be added once, unless the effect specifies otherwise.

Since all magic actions require a check (and are thus spells that require a check), whenever a character performs a magic action, they suffer 2 strain.

ATTACK

Concentration: No

Skills: Arcana, Divine, Primal

Magic attacks are combat checks, and they follow the normal rules for performing a combat check, on page 101, using the character's magic skill instead of a combat skill. There are some exceptions, however, which we detail here.

When making a magic attack, the character must select one target at short range (but not engaged). The default difficulty of the check is **Easy** (◆). The attack deals damage equal to the characteristic linked to the skill used to make the attack (so if the character uses Arcana, they would deal damage equal to their Intellect), plus 1 damage per uncanceled ✨. The attack has no set Critical rating, so you may only inflict a Critical Injury with a ☠.

Before making a magic attack check, choose any number of additional effects listed on **Table III.2–5: Magic Attack Additional Effects**. These effects are added to the attack.

AUGMENT

Concentration: Yes

Skills: Divine, Primal

This is using magic to enhance people. A character selects one target they are engaged with (which can be themselves), then makes a Primal or Divine skill check. The default difficulty of the check is **Average** (◆◆). If the check is successful, until the end of your character's next turn, the target increases the ability of any skill checks they make by one (in effect, this means they add ◆ to their checks).

TABLE III.2–6: AUGMENT ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

EFFECTS	DIFFICULTY MOD
Divine Health (Divine Only): The target increases their wound threshold by a value equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge for the duration of the spell.	+ ◆
Haste: Targets affected by the spell can always perform a second maneuver during their turn without spending strain (they may still only perform two maneuvers a turn).	+ ◆
Primal Fury (Primal Only): The target adds damage equal to the character's ranks in Knowledge to unarmed combat checks, and their Critical rating for unarmed combat checks becomes 3.	+ ◆
Range: Increase the range of the spell by one range band. This may be added multiple times, increasing the range by one range band each time.	+ ◆
Swift: Targets affected by the spell ignore the effects of difficult terrain and cannot be immobilized.	+ ◆
Additional Target: The spell affects one additional target within range of the spell. In addition, after casting the spell, you may spend ⚡ to affect one additional target within range of the spell (and may trigger this multiple times, spending ⚡ each time).	+ ◆◆

A character may not be affected by more than one Augment spell at the same time (so no stacking effects).

Before making an augment check, choose any number of additional effects listed on **Table III.2–6: Augment Additional Effects**. These effects are added to the check.

BARRIER

Concentration: Yes

Skills: Arcana, Divine

Both arcane and divine spellcasters have the power to create barriers of magical energy to protect themselves and their allies. The character selects one target they are engaged with (which can be themselves), then makes an Arcana or Divine skill check. The default difficulty of the check is **Easy** (◆). If the check is successful, until the end of the character's next turn, reduce the damage of all hits the target suffers by one, and further reduce it by one for every uncanceled ✨ ✨ beyond the first.

Before making a Barrier check, choose any number of additional effects listed on **Table III.2–7: Barrier Additional Effects**. These effects are added to the check.

CONJURE

Concentration: Yes

Skills: Arcana, Primal

This action represents the ability of a spellcaster to animate objects or create items (or even allies) out of thin air and the aether. The character makes an Arcana or Primal skill check. The default difficulty for the check is **Easy** (◆). If the check is successful, the character summons a simple tool with no moving parts (such as a shovel or pickax), a one-handed melee weapon with no moving parts (such as a sword or knife), or a minion no bigger than silhouette 1 (such as an animal, magical creature, elemental spirit, or even undead monstrosity). These appear engaged with the character. The summoned minion or item remains present until the end of the character's next turn.

If the character summons a creature, the creature behaves in the best approximation of its natural instincts (as determined by the GM). It is not controlled by the character, and may even be hostile to them. In a structured encounter, it takes its turn immediately after the character.

TABLE III.2–7: BARRIER ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

EFFECTS	DIFFICULTY MOD
Additional Target: The spell affects one additional target within range of the spell. In addition, after casting the spell, you may spend ⚡ to affect one additional target within range of the spell (and may trigger this multiple times, spending ⚡ each time).	+ ◆
Range: Increase the range of the spell by one range band. This may be added multiple times, increasing the range by one range band each time.	+ ◆
Add Defense: Each affected target gains ranged and melee defense equal to your ranks in Knowledge.	+ ◆◆
Empowered: The barrier reduces damage equal to the number of uncanceled ✨ instead of the normal effect.	+ ◆◆
Reflection (Arcana Only): If an opponent makes a magic attack against an affected target and generates ☁ ☁ ☁ or ☁ on the check, after the check is resolved, they suffer a hit dealing damage equal to the total damage of the attack.	+ ◆◆
Sanctuary (Divine Only): Opponents the GM determines are the antithesis of the character's faith or deity automatically disengage from affected targets, and may not engage them for the duration of the spell.	+ ◆◆

TABLE III.2–8: CONJURE ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

EFFECTS	DIFFICULTY MOD
Additional Summon: The spell summons one additional item, weapon, or creature. In addition, after casting the spell, you may spend △ △ to summon one additional item, weapon, or creature (and may trigger this multiple times, spending △ △ each time).	+ ◆
Medium Summon: The character may summon a more complicated tool with moving parts, a rival no larger than silhouette 1, or a two-handed melee weapon.	+ ◆
Range: Increase the range of the spell (the distance from the character that the summoned item or creature appears) by one range band. This may be added multiple times, increasing the range by one range band each time.	+ ◆
Summon Ally: The creature the character summons is friendly to them and obeys their commands. The character may spend a maneuver to direct the creature, allowing them to determine its action and maneuver. (If the character summons multiple creatures, the character may spend one maneuver on their turn to direct the turns of all summoned creatures.)	+ ◆
Grand Summon: The character may summon a rival of up to silhouette 3.	+ ◆◆

Before making a conjure check, choose any number of additional effects listed on **Table III.2–8: Conjure Additional Effects**. These effects are added to the check.

CURSE

Concentration: Yes

Skills: Arcana, Divine

This action represents the combat use of curse magic. Your character selects one target within short range, then makes an Arcana or Divine skill check. The default difficulty of the check is **Average** (◆◆). If it is successful, until the end of the character’s next turn, the target decreases the ability of any skill checks they make by one (in effect, this means they remove one ◆ from their checks).

Before making the curse check, choose any number of additional effects listed on **Table III.2–9: Curse Additional Effects**. These effects are added to the check.

DISPEL

Concentration: No

Skills: Arcana

The ability to nullify magic is a strange and wondrous art that only certain arcane spellcasters possess. The

character selects one target within short range that is under the effects of a spell, then makes an Arcana skill check. The default difficulty for the check is **Hard** (◆◆◆). If the check is successful, the effects the target is under immediately end (if the spell affected multiple targets, the other targets remain affected).

Before making a dispel check, choose any number of additional effects listed on **Table III.2–10: Dispel Additional Effects**. These effects are added to the check.

HEAL

Concentration: No

Skills: Divine, Primal

Priests and other practitioners of divine magic are often known for their healing abilities. Often, those in touch with nature also possess the capacity to heal wounds and illness. The character can use the Divine or Primal magic skill in place of a Medicine check in order to remove damage or heal Critical Injuries. When making the check, the character selects one target they are engaged with who is not incapacitated. The default difficulty of the check is **Easy** (◆). Upon success, the character heals 1 wound per uncanceled ✨, and 1 strain per uncanceled △.

TABLE III.2–9: CURSE ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

EFFECTS	DIFFICULTY MOD
Enervate: If a target suffers strain for any reason, they suffer 1 additional strain.	+ ◆
Misfortune: After the target makes a check, you may change one ■ to a face displaying a ✖.	+ ◆
Range: Increase the range of the spell by one range band. This may be added multiple times, increasing the range by one range band each time.	+ ◆
Additional Target: The spell affects one additional target within range of the spell. In addition, after casting the spell, you may spend △ to affect one additional target within range of the spell (and may trigger this multiple times, spending △ each time).	+ ◆◆
Despair (Divine Only): The target’s strain and wound thresholds are reduced by an amount equal to the character’s ranks in Knowledge. This effect may not be combined with the additional target effect.	+ ◆◆
Doom (Arcana Only): After a target makes a check, you may change any one die in the pool not displaying a ☉ or ☿ to a different face.	+ ◆◆
Paralyzed: The target is staggered for the duration of the spell. This affect may not be combined with the additional target effect.	+ ◆◆◆

TABLE III.2–10: DISPEL ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

EFFECTS	DIFFICULTY MOD
Range: Increase the range of the spell by one range band. This may be added multiple times, increasing the range by one range band each time.	+ ◆
Additional Target: The spell affects one additional target within range of the spell. In addition, after casting the spell, you may spend A to affect one additional target within range of the spell (and may trigger this multiple times, spending A each time).	+ ◆◆

TABLE III.2–11: HEAL ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

EFFECTS	DIFFICULTY MOD
Additional Target: The spell affects one additional target within range of the spell. In addition, after casting the spell, you may spend A to affect one additional target within range of the spell (and may trigger this multiple times, spending A each time).	+ ◆
Range: Increase the range of the spell by one range band. This may be added multiple times, increasing the range by one range band each time.	+ ◆
Restoration: Select one ongoing status effect the target is suffering. This status effect immediately ends.	+ ◆
Heal Critical: Select one Critical Injury the target is suffering. If the spell is successful, the Critical Injury is also healed.	+ ◆◆
Revive Incapacitated: The character may select targets who are incapacitated.	+ ◆◆
Resurrection: The character may select a target who has died during this encounter. If the check is successful, the target is restored to life, suffering wounds equal to their wound threshold. If the check fails, no characters may attempt to resurrect the target again.	+ ◆◆◆◆

Before making a heal check, choose any number of additional effects listed on **Table III.2–11: Heal Additional Effects**. These effects are added to the check.

MANEUVERS

These maneuvers are specific to characters who use magic skills. Like most maneuvers, these don't actually require checks, but affect the character's skill checks.

Of course, you and your players might also describe common maneuvers in terms of magic when it seems appropriate. For instance, a player might describe guarded stance (page 99) as their character focusing their attention on erecting a minor magical barrier, or they might narrate assist (page 98) as a subtle push of magical energy to guide an ally's sword strike.

COUNTERSPELL

Most skilled mages or spellcasters can attempt to counter an opponent's spells as they are being cast. If the character performs the counterspell maneuver, all opponents within medium range upgrade the difficulty of checks to cast spells once, until the end of the character's next turn.

CONCENTRATE

Some magical effects might require concentration to sustain. If a magical action (or spell) can benefit from concentration, the action description notes this.

Spells that can be sustained through concentration last until the end of the character's next turn (as noted

in their description). However, if the character performs the concentrate maneuver during that next turn, the spell's effects last until the end of the character's following turn, instead. This can be sustained indefinitely by performing the concentrate maneuver each turn.

MAGIC IMPLEMENTS

Magic, as with any other skill, can be augmented and enhanced by various items. You may recognize them as magical staples such as staves, wands, and orbs. We call them **magic implements**, and they're a type of equipment.

Each of our magic implements, or tools, has a certain basic effect (all staves help your character increase the range of spells, for example). We selected these basic effects for simplicity and ease of explanation. However, if in your setting you prefer that wands help your spellcasters increase the range of a spell, then just swap the basic abilities around between types of items. Most of the magic tools also boost the base damage of attack spells. This represents magic doing more damage when focused correctly, and it brings the damage totals in line with regular weapons.

There are two hard-and-fast rules when it comes to using magic implements, however. The first is that your character can only benefit from one implement at a time. So, if your character has an orb and a wand, for example, they choose which one to use when casting a spell. The second is that holding an implement does not impose **■** on your character's check for not having their hands free.

DRUIDIC CIRCLETS

Druidic circlets could be simple bands of entwined metal, elaborate headdresses of antlers, or even crowns of ivy. They help those using primal magic commune with the natural world.

When the user casts the Conjure spell to summon a living creature, adding the Summon Ally effect does not increase its difficulty. In addition, the creature remains summoned until the end of the encounter without your character having to use the concentrate maneuver.

HOLY ICONS

Holy icons are items that represent your character's faith and help them focus that faith to cast spells. These are generally religious symbols of some sort, perhaps necklaces, rings, emblems, or medallions. But they just as easily can simply represent your character's beliefs.

Holy icons enable divine spellcasters to perform unique miracles. When they are casting a spell, adding any Divine Only effects increase the spell's difficulty one less than they would normally. In addition, the number of wounds healed by heal spells cast by the user increases by two.

MAGIC ORBS

These can be orbs of glass, gems, or other semitransparent minerals, and are generally small enough to be carried.

Magic orbs help augment the user's ability to affect more targets with their spells. When the user casts a spell, adding the Additional Target and Additional Summon effects do not increase its difficulty. In addition, attack spells cast by the user increase their base damage by three.

MAGIC RINGS

Magic rings are items of great power and danger in most fantasy settings. We decided to stick with that theme, so our rings are items of great power and peril.

When a character obtains a magic ring, you, the GM, choose one type of magic skill, then select three effects that can be added to spells cast by that skill. Two of the effects can normally only increase the difficulty of the spell by one; the third can normally only increase the difficulty of the spell by two. When the user casts a spell, adding these effects do not increase the spell's difficulty. However, when using a magic ring, you must always upgrade the difficulty of any spells you cast once, and ☒ cannot be spent to destroy the ring. In addition, attack spells cast by the user increase their base damage by two.

An example of this might be a ring of protection, which allows your character to add the Range, Additional Target, and Reflection effects to a Barrier spell without increasing the difficulty.

MAGIC STAFFS

Magical staffs have long been a staple of magic in a variety of settings. Used by wizards, druids, and shamans, these can look like ornate, rune-encrusted rods of brass and obsidian, simple wooden staffs, or pretty much anything else.

Magical staffs almost universally augment the user's ability to cast spells at range. When they are casting a spell, adding the first Range effect added to the spell does not increase the spell's difficulty. In addition, attack spells cast by the user increase their base damage by four.

MAGIC WANDS

Magical wands are as much a tradition of magic as staffs. Usually small sticks about the size and shape of a conductor's baton, they can be constructed from just about anything and worked with any number of designs.

Magic wands help augment the user's ability to cast spells in a very specific way. When a character makes or obtains the wand, you, the GM, determine one effect that the wand lets users add to any appropriate spell without increasing the spell's difficulty. The effect chosen must be one that, without a wand, only increases difficulty by one. In addition, attack spells cast by the user increase their base damage by three.

For example, your character could have a wand of fire, which lets them add the Fire effect to any magic attack actions they perform. They could also have a wand of enervation, which lets them add the Enervate effect to any curse actions they perform. However, they cannot have a wand of grand summoning, because the Grand Summon effect increases the difficulty of the spell by two, not one.

TABLE III.2–12: MAGIC IMPLEMENTS

ITEM	DAMAGE	ENCUM	PRICE	RARITY
Druidic Circlet	+0	0	750	5
Holy Icon	+0	0	250	4
Magic Orb	+3	1	1,000	6
Magic Ring	+2	0	10,000	8
Magic Staff	+4	2	400	3
Magic Wand	+3	1	400	5

VEHICLE RULES

Some games make interactions with vehicles abstract enough that you don't need special rules to govern them. However, other games prominently feature mechanized walkers, gadget-filled sports cars, and interplanetary starships. This section provides vehicle rules that integrate directly with GENESYS, opening up these options to imaginative GMs and players.

VEHICLE CHARACTERISTICS

All vehicles are defined through a number of characteristics. These characteristics delineate such attributes as the strength of a starship's shields or how quickly a race car accelerates off the line. The characteristics described here cover the bulk of important mechanical information about vehicles.

- **Handling:** The measure of a vehicle's agility and how well it responds to its pilot.
- **Maximum Speed:** A vehicle's top speed.
- **Silhouette:** An abstract of the vehicle's size.
- **Defense:** A vehicle's first line of defense against attack and accident. Typically representative of a starship's ray shields and particle shields, defense also represents any factors, technological or otherwise, that prevent damage from reaching a vehicle's armor.
- **Armor:** The measure of a vehicle's armor, similar to soak on the personal scale.
- **Hull Trauma Threshold:** A reflection of the sturdiness of a vehicle's construction and its ability to sustain damage and keep operating.
- **System Strain Threshold:** The limit to which a vehicle can be pushed or knocked about before important systems overload or shut down.

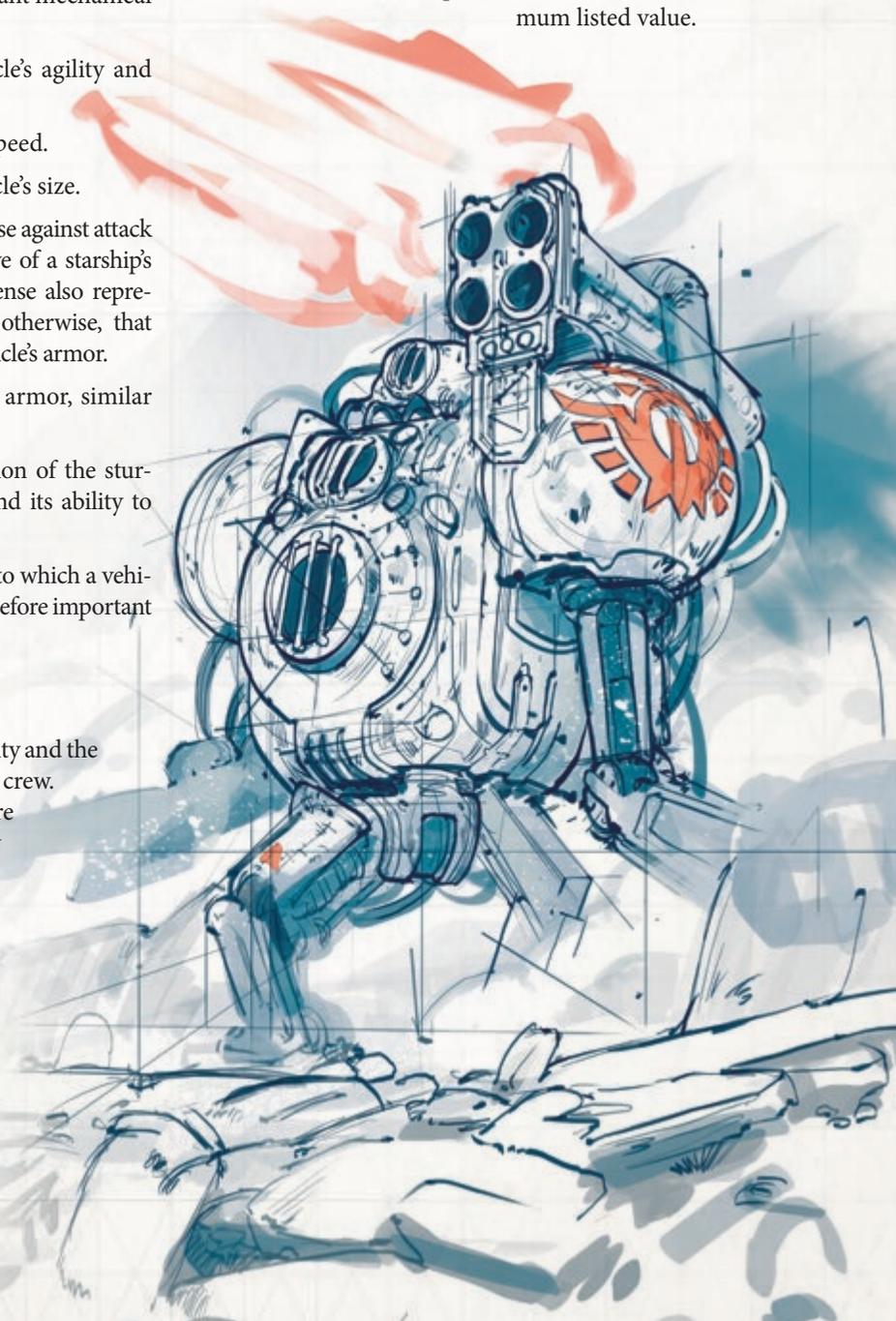
HANDLING

Handling reflects a vehicle's inherent agility and the ways in which it responds to its pilot and crew. Enormous sailing ships might require incredible effort on the part of many crew members to turn, while advanced starships might have automated assistance to help pilots avoid obstacles and maneuver optimally. Factors such as shape, control systems, mass, or just general awkwardness all contribute to handling.

Mechanically, a vehicle's handling characteristic dictates the number of  or  added to your PC's dice pool when making Piloting checks. Pilots add  equal to a vehicle's negative handling value or  equal to a vehicle's positive handling value. See **Table III.2-13: Handling Examples** for types of vehicles and their handling.

MAXIMUM SPEED

An abstraction of both speed and acceleration, a vehicle's speed characteristic dictates how fast it moves relative to its environment and what maneuvers are available to the pilot. The listed speed is the maximum value at which the vehicle can travel. Vehicles can travel at speeds lower than their maximum listed value.



VEHICLE COMPONENTS

Most vehicles have a number of components, and these components can be damaged. We list the components and describe what happens when they become damaged (generally from a Critical Hit) here:

Brakes: If a vehicle's brakes are compromised, its pilot cannot perform the decelerate maneuver. The vehicle can still coast to a stop over a long distance, or stop by colliding with something.

Defenses: If a vehicle's defenses are compromised, reduce its defense to 0.

Hull: If a vehicle's hull is compromised, its armor becomes 0.

Navigation: If a vehicle's navigation is compromised,

its handling becomes -3 (unless already lower).

Propulsion: Propulsion in any form is what moves a vehicle. If a vehicle's propulsion is compromised, its pilot cannot perform the accelerate maneuver, and its current speed drops by one each round, to a minimum of 0.

Weapons: Some vehicles are armed with one or more weapons. If a weapon is compromised, it cannot be used (see **Item Maintenance**, on page 89).

Repairing components requires a **Mechanics** check. Often the difficulty is determined by the severity of the Critical Hit; otherwise, it should be **Average** (◆◆) or **Hard** (◆◆◆), at you, the GM's, discretion.

EFFECTS OF CURRENT SPEED

When using vehicles, you should always track their current speed. A vehicle may be operating at any speed from zero to its maximum. Vehicle maneuvers can be used to accelerate or decelerate (see **Maneuvers** on page 226).

Additionally, while a vehicle's current speed is 1 or higher, certain other effects apply to it (see **Table III.2–14: Vehicle Speeds in Structured Encounters**).

STEERING

Each round, a vehicle moves a certain distance based on its current speed. The pilot's job, in theory, is to control this momentum so as to keep the occupants alive.

When your character is piloting a vehicle, they must steer the craft. At the beginning or end of their turn each

round, you must have the vehicle move a certain number of range bands based on its speed, as detailed in **Table III.2–14: Vehicle Speeds in Structured Encounters**.

A vehicle generally goes where the pilot wants it to as part of this movement. However, given that player characters are known for attempting to ignore such petty constraints as safety manuals, road signs, and consideration of the laws of physics, you can always require the pilot to perform the dangerous driving action (see page 227) to reach their intended destination (if doing is possible). Zigzagging through obstacles, turns harsher than ninety degrees, and anything involving safe embarkation or disembarkation without coming to a full stop should almost certainly require the pilot to use this action. If the pilot fails, you, the GM, determine the final position (and condition) of the vehicle, but at a minimum it should veer off course, and at worst, it might suffer a collision with one or more intervening objects (see **Collisions**, on page 222).

TABLE III.2–13: HANDLING EXAMPLES

HANDLING	EXAMPLE VEHICLES
-4	Downhill sled, single-thruster rocket, train
-3	Aircraft carrier, dogsled, three-masted heavy frigate, space battleship
-2	Combat walker, heavy tank, passenger plane, sloop
-1	Hang glider, horse-drawn cart, light tank, motorcycle
+0	Consumer car, jetpack, motorboat
+1	Bicycle, hovercraft, trained horse
+2	Fancy car, fighter jet
+3	High-performance race car, snowmobile, stunt plane
+4	Neural interface exoskeleton, AI piloting-assisted space superiority fighter

TABLE III.2–14: VEHICLE SPEEDS IN STRUCTURED ENCOUNTERS

SPEED	FORCED MOVE	OTHER EFFECTS
0	0 range bands	–
1	1 range band	–
2	2 range bands	–
3–4	3 range bands	Upgrade the difficulty of all Piloting checks once. Add +20 to the result of any Critical Hit suffered as a result of a collision (see Collisions , on page 222).
5	4 range bands	Upgrade the difficulty of combat checks targeting the vehicle once. Upgrade the difficulty of all Piloting checks twice. Add +40 to the result of any Critical Hit suffered as a result of a collision (see Collisions , on page 222).

REPAIRING HULL TRAUMA

While system strain and the results of some Critical Hits are temporary, hull trauma is more permanent. Repairing hull trauma requires three things: proper facilities, money, and time. Proper facilities have enough tools, light, parts, and workspace to make the repairs to the vehicle.

We recommend paying 100 to repair 1 hull trauma, but the cost can fluctuate based on your characters' reputation, the scarcity of parts, and other factors at your discretion as GM. A good rule of thumb is that light damage (up to a quarter of a vehicle's total hull trauma threshold) should take an amount of time measured in days, while any damage over that takes weeks or even months to repair.

If a vehicle has more than one pilot, steering only occurs on the turn of the first pilot to act each round. If a vehicle has no pilot who can steer it, it still moves—but it does so at the end of the round, and you determine its location and any objects it might hit along the way.

COLLISIONS

There are occasions when vehicles will run into the terrain around them, or into another nearby vehicle. In these cases, there are two possible types of collisions: glancing blows (minor collisions) and head-on hits (major collisions). Collisions can be mitigated by ship's or vehicle's defenses.

In the case of a minor collision, all vehicles involved suffer a single Critical Hit (see **Vehicle Critical Hits**, on page 231). Subtract the vehicle's defense times 10 from the rolled on **Table III.2–19: Critical Hit Result**, on page 230. If the result is reduced to zero or less, the vehicle's shields or other defenses have nullified the collision entirely, and the Critical Hit is canceled.

In the case of a major collision, all vehicles involved suffer a single Critical Hit as well. Subtract the vehicle's defense times 5 from the Critical Hit result. If the result is reduced to zero or less, the Critical Hit is canceled.

At your discretion, some particularly large vehicles might be able to ignore collisions with very small vehicles. However, larger vehicles have a harder time avoiding collisions with terrain features.

SILHOUETTE

Much like the speed characteristic, silhouette is an abstract number, used to describe a vehicle's size and

mass relative to other vehicles. Silhouette factors heavily into scale and is used to calculate the difficulty of attacking targets of different sizes. Generally, large vehicles are easy to hit, and small vehicles are hard to hit.

Silhouettes range from 0 to 10 (or even higher). Silhouette 0 is smaller than a human, silhouette 1 is about the size of an adult human, and silhouette 2 is the size of most cars and large animals. Fighter jets, cargo planes, and tractor-trailer trucks range from silhouette 3 to 4. Navy battleships and starships range from silhouette 5 to 10.

HULL TRAUMA THRESHOLD

Hull trauma threshold is a reflection of a vehicle's sturdiness and resistance to damage. The sturdiness of a ship's hull and mast, the quality of a bicycle's chain and gears, and the resilience of a tank's frame are all represented by hull trauma threshold. Hull trauma generally requires major body work on the vehicle to repair, which can be extremely costly.

Like the wound threshold of a player character, hull trauma threshold represents the amount of physical damage that a vehicle can suffer before it is rendered inoperable or destroyed. In game terms, when a vehicle exceeds its hull trauma threshold, one of two things happen. If it is occupied only by unimportant characters, such as minion NPCs, it is simply destroyed—crashes and crumples, flips over, or explodes. If it is occupied by plot-relevant characters, such as the PCs or rival/nemesis NPCs, it suffers a Critical Hit (see **Vehicle Critical Hits**, on page 231) and becomes inoperable. Until its hull trauma is reduced to its hull trauma threshold or below, all of its components are compromised (see **Vehicle Components**, on page 221).

Hull trauma threshold is measured in planetary scale (see **Planetary Scale versus Personal Scale**, on page 224), meaning that one point of hull trauma equals 10 wounds on an individual.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS

The pilot or crew of a vehicle with hull trauma that exceeds its hull trauma threshold may attempt emergency repairs by scavenging all available parts from the vehicle and making a **Hard** (◆◆◆) **Mechanics check**. Success brings the vehicle back to some semblance of life. The vehicle reduces its hull trauma to one point below its hull trauma threshold, but its defenses, hull, navigation, and weapons remain compromised until it receives more time-intensive repairs.

SYSTEM STRAIN THRESHOLD

System strain threshold represents a vehicle's ability to function under rigorous use and the point at which it overheats, depletes its power source, or otherwise ceases functioning. A sailing ship's system strain threshold might represent the quality of moving parts like the tiller and ropes, while that of a futuristic battle-suit might represent the state of its cutting-edge reactor.

Most often, a vehicle suffers system strain due to the actions of its crew, as they push it to (or beyond) its breaking point. Driving a tank over rough ground or sailing a ship through a storm might well cause it system strain, as might pushing the engine of a car beyond its intended limits. You can also spend ⚔ on the pilot's checks to inflict system strain on a vehicle, representing the character's haste or carelessness causing stress to the craft.

Like the strain threshold of a player character, system strain represents the stress that the vehicle can tolerate before it overheats, breaks down, overloads, or generally ceases functioning temporarily. In game terms, when a vehicle exceeds its system strain threshold, the vehicle's speed drops to 0 at the beginning of the following round. Until its system strain is reduced to its system strain threshold or below, its components cease functioning, as described in the **Vehicle Components** sidebar, on page 221.

System strain is measured in planetary scale (see page 224), meaning that one point of system strain equals 10 strain. It is important to note that, unlike personal strain, system strain cannot be recovered by spending ⚔. It can only be restored through actions taken by the crew or slowly over time.

PROTECTION

In general terms, a vehicle's protection is an amalgam of its maneuverability, the durability of its hull or chassis, the strength of its shields, and the thickness of its armor. In some settings, vehicles have simple protections like thick wood and metal plating, while in others, they are protected by reactive armor, diamond-hard carbon panels, or even energy fields that absorb oncoming attacks.

GENESYS divides these protections into two discrete statistics: defense and armor.

DEFENSE

Defense reflects a vehicle's ability to completely deflect or reduce the damage of incoming attacks or collisions through ablative armor, deflector shields, point defense systems, illusory duplicates, or other, even more esoteric technologies.

REMOVING SYSTEM STRAIN

While the situation aboard a vehicle that has exceeded its system strain threshold is indeed dire, not all is lost. Any crew member can aid the vehicle in removing system strain by performing repairs and damage control such as rebooting systems, bypassing fried circuits, and putting out electrical fires. This is accomplished through the damage control action (see page 228).

Vehicles also recover from system strain slowly over time. For every full day a vehicle spends without taking more system strain, it reduces its total system strain by one.

Defense works the same as described on page 104; each point of a vehicle's defense adds ■ to any incoming attack roll (melee or ranged) made against the vehicle.

ARMOR

Armor is a flying vehicle's second line of defense, and the only protection available to the majority of ground vehicles. It represents deflective plating of all varieties, and it soaks up damage from attacks and impacts that are able to penetrate a vehicle's defense.

A vehicle's armor soaks a number of damage points equal to its rating. Remember that because it functions on planetary scale, one point of a vehicle's armor is equivalent to ten points of soak on a personal scale (see **Planetary Scale versus Personal Scale**, on page 224).

VEHICLE WEAPONS

Vehicle weapons share a number of characteristics. These weapons are very similar to those found in **Part I—Chapter 5: Equipment** (page 82), with some differences.

- **Range:** This is the maximum range of the weapon. Vehicle-mounted weapons use an additional range band for distances—strategic—as described in **Planetary Scale versus Personal Scale**, on page 224.
- **Damage:** This number is the base damage the weapon inflicts with a successful attack. For every ⚔ generated during the attack, the attacker adds +1 damage to the base damage. Unless a vehicle weapon has the Personal Scale quality (see **Planetary Scale versus Personal Scale**, on page 224), remember that each point of damage from a vehicle weapon is equivalent to ten points of damage on the personal scale.
- **Critical Hit Rating:** Vehicles suffer Critical Hits rather than Critical Injuries, and this rating is the

number of **A** required to trigger a Critical Hit on a vehicle with the weapon. If enough **A** is generated and a Critical Hit is triggered, the character firing the weapon rolls 1d100 on **Table III.2-19: Critical Hit Result** on page 230, to determine the Critical Hit's effect on the target. Some weapons and talents modify this Critical Hit roll, potentially making it more or less effective. In addition, a character can only generate one Critical Hit per hit on a target. However, if the roll generates enough **A** to result in multiple Critical Hits, the character can choose to add an additional +10 per additional Critical Hit to the roll result.

- **Fire Arc:** The direction or directions a weapon can be fired, based on its mounting. These are specified in individual vehicle profiles, and are generally a narrative constraint rather than a hard mechanical limitation. For instance, a forward-mounted weapon cannot fire on a target behind the vehicle, but a turret-mounted weapon can rotate to fire at any target not obstructed by the vehicle's hull.
- **Special Qualities:** Many weapons have additional item qualities that affect their performance. Descriptions of these special effects are found on page 86 of **Part I—Chapter 5: Equipment**.

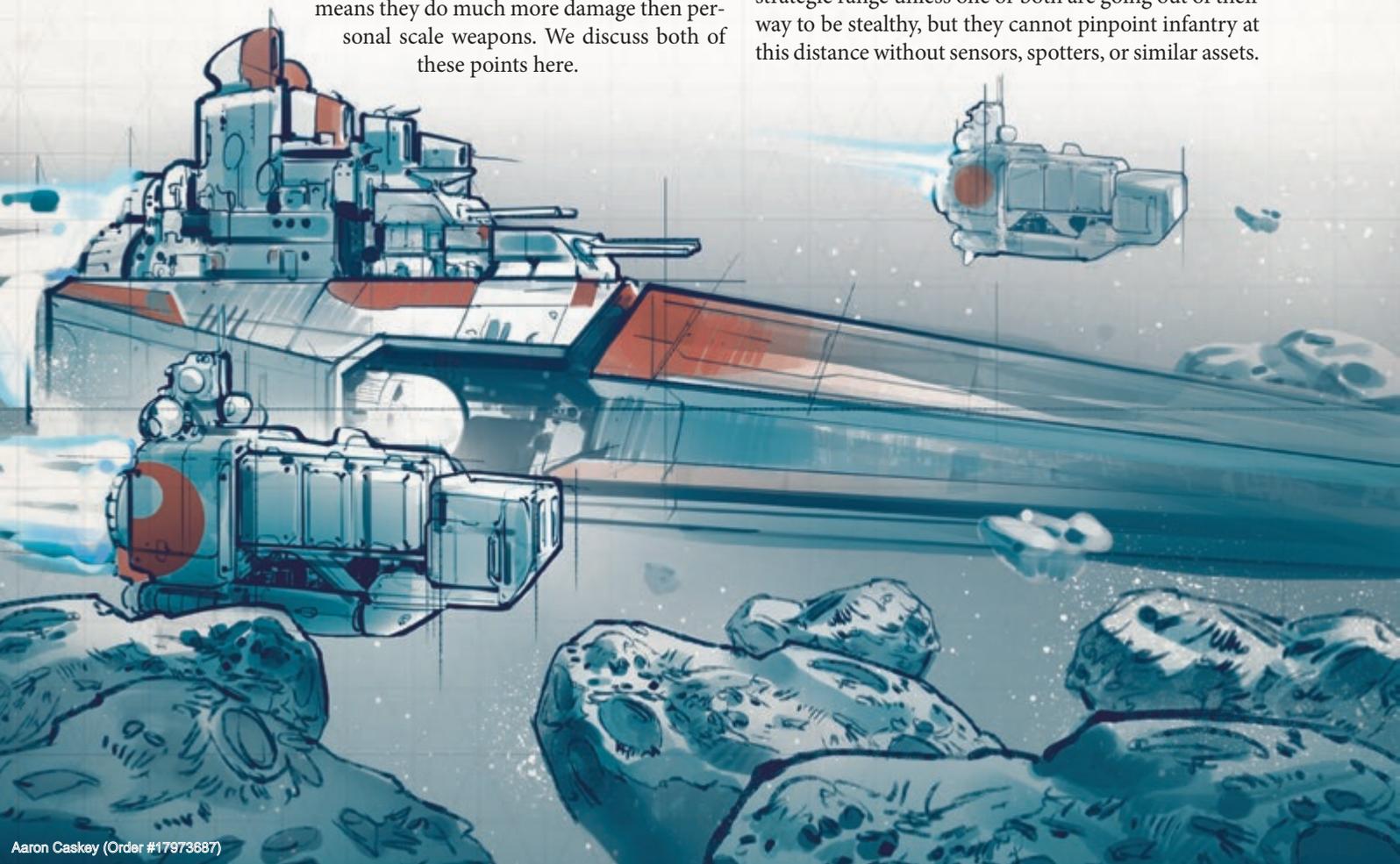
PLANETARY SCALE VERSUS PERSONAL SCALE

Vehicles are bigger than people. They also tend to move faster, and if they have weapons, those weapons are much more powerful than something a person can carry. To represent this, we've created something called **planetary scale** (as opposed to **personal scale**, which is what your characters operate in most of the time).

Planetary scale is just personal scale, but expanded. To accommodate a vehicle's expanded range (and sometimes the expanded range of its weapons), we added in a sixth range band, **strategic range**. Vehicle weapons also operate at planetary scale, which means they do much more damage than personal scale weapons. We discuss both of these points here.

STRATEGIC RANGE

Strategic range is a sixth range band that represents distances beyond extreme range. At this range, people cannot see one another with the naked eye, nor can they interact without technological assistance—thus, it is not included in the standard five range bands. However, when you are using a vehicle, especially one with advanced sensors or other magnification technologies, this is the farthest range at which you can interact with targets. Vehicles can generally detect one another at strategic range unless one or both are going out of their way to be stealthy, but they cannot pinpoint infantry at this distance without sensors, spotters, or similar assets.



Indirect-fire weapons such as artillery often function at strategic range, as do self-guided weapons like homing missiles and torpedoes. However, most vehicle weapons (such as a fighter jet's machine guns or a sailing ship's cannons) do not function at strategic range, and have ranges of long or extreme instead. As a general rule, we limit most weapons requiring direct line of sight to extreme range.

As strategic range is the sixth range band, the difficulty of making ranged combat checks at strategic range is **Formidable** (◆◆◆◆◆◆).

PLANETARY SCALE COMBAT

When dealing with a vehicle's weapons, armor, and hull trauma threshold, every point is equal to ten points of the equivalent characteristic in the personal scale. For example, a machine gun with a base damage of 3 mounted on a helicopter deals three points of damage when fired at another vehicle, but thirty points of damage when fired at a human. Conversely, a human-sized assault rifle would need to deal ten points of damage to a helicopter to inflict even one point of damage on it.

Note that planetary scale weapons deal massive amounts of damage to individuals. Most hits deal enough damage to far exceed a character's wound threshold, automatically incapacitating the target. However, you may feel this is insufficient to represent the power of these weapons, so you may have characters add +50 to the resulting Critical Injury roll. (Also, those "hit" by a planetary scale weapon might be on the periphery of the blast zone, explaining why they survived somewhat unscathed.)

VEHICLE COMBAT

Combat engagements between vehicles function using the same basic combat rules as found in **Part I—Chapter 6: Combat Encounters**, starting on page 95. Vehicle combat is not intended to be a completely separate rules system. Instead, it is designed to be an added layer of detail on the standard combat rules that allows you to run structured gameplay encounters using characters, vehicles, or both.

VEHICLE COMBAT OVERVIEW

Vehicle combat in **GENESYS** follows the same order and rules as those detailed in **Part I—Chapter 6: Combat Encounters**. This section includes guidance for using vehicles in combat, and certain additional rules to facilitate the use of vehicles in battle.

RANGE BANDS IN SPACE

Space is really, really big. When we discuss range bands on page 105, it doesn't seem like those distances are big enough to really represent the distances in space. However, the beauty of range bands is that they're not tied to a specific, measurable distance. So, we recommend that when you use vehicles in space, you scale up the ranges slightly. Engaged may be two spacecraft docked with each other, and short and medium range may be only slightly farther than their equivalents on the ground. But long range and extreme range may represent hundreds of kilometers, while strategic range may represent thousands.

Also note that to avoid having weapons such as pistols dealing Critical Hits to heavily armored combat craft, their damage must exceed a starship's armor before the shot can inflict a Critical Hit.

ITEM QUALITY: PERSONAL SCALE

This quality exists only for vehicle weapons. We use this quality when we want to put small-scale weapons on a vehicle, such as the machine guns on the side of a combat helicopter, or a grenade launcher on an APC.

The quality has the following rule: **this vehicle weapon's entire profile uses personal scale instead of planetary scale.**

SMALL VEHICLE COMBAT

Combat between small vehicles like tanks, fighter jets, personal spacecraft, or attack walkers is relatively straightforward. The pilot has one vehicle maneuver and one vehicle action (or two vehicle maneuvers) during each turn.

Small vehicle combat (especially with high-speed vehicles like fighter jets) is quite abstracted. As they constantly move and strive for the advantage (thanks to their incredible speed and agility), it would be nearly impossible to map out every move a fighter jet makes. Instead, you and your players describe the actions the characters take, embellish them with narrative flair, and then make skill checks to resolve the actions.

PILOT ONLY MANEUVERS AND ACTIONS

Some maneuvers and actions are specified as “Pilot Only.” Pilot Only maneuvers and actions affect the current speed and positioning of the vehicle. As each vehicle has a cap on how far and how swiftly it can move, its maneuvers and actions are limited, as described below.

A vehicle can benefit from only one Pilot Only action per round.

Additionally, a vehicle can benefit from one Pilot Only maneuver per round, and it can benefit from a second Pilot Only maneuver if it suffers 2 system strain. If the vehicle has a single pilot, the pilot must also suffer 2 strain (or downgrade an action to a maneuver) to perform two maneuvers, as per combat rules.

Some vehicles can have multiple pilots, in which case two different pilots can each perform a Pilot Only maneuver. In such cases, the vehicle suffers system strain for the second maneuver, but the second pilot does not.

CAPITAL SHIP COMBAT

Combat in larger, capital-class vehicles such as battleships (of the aquatic or stellar variety) is, by necessity, more abstract due to their complexity and the number of crew members involved. Like small vehicles in combat, capital ships can only perform one vehicle maneuver and one vehicle action (or two vehicle maneuvers) during their turn, as directed by the pilot or captain.

Along with the pilot, each additional crew member can use their personal actions and maneuvers to crew weapons, operate sensors, move about the ship, and generally engage in combat. This all happens in the same round, and it is subject to Initiative order just like personal combat. Something to remember concerning vehicle combat with capital ships is that each capital ship is likely to have hundreds or thousands of crew. GMs and players should not track all of their Initiative slots and actions during combat. Instead, only focus on those individuals who are doing things pertinent to the ongoing encounter, and feel free to ignore the rest.

MIXED PERSONAL AND VEHICLE COMBAT

Sometimes, characters might engage with vehicles despite being on foot, or a battle might contain armor and infantry elements. Characters on foot might even be pursued by enemies with small vehicles like motorcycles or horses, or a character might be thrown from

their vehicle mid-battle. In such cases, the characters in vehicles behave as if they are involved in a small vehicle combat (or even a capital ship combat), while those outside of vehicles take their turns as usual, as described in **Part I—Chapter 6: Combat Encounters** (see page 95).

Although foot soldiers generally do not appreciate fighting tanks, they do have one advantage: they are harder to hit than most vehicles. As smaller targets, they are harder to hit, whereas infantry can hit tanks with ease, even if they struggle to damage them. Although difficulty for combat checks is set based on range, smaller individuals still get bonuses for attacking things larger than they are (see page 109).

COMBAT TURNS

Much like personal combat, combat between vehicles in **GENESYS** is largely an abstract, narrative-driven activity designed for quickness and ease of use. As such, the maneuvers a vehicle performs are open to narration and the interpretation of you and your players.

Player character pilots follow the same rules of combat as detailed on page 95. This means they can perform one action and one maneuver during their turn. They may also be able to perform a second maneuver by either suffering strain or spending **▲**, although they cannot take more than two maneuvers during their turn.

MANEUVERS

Less involved than actions, maneuvers are simple activities that do not typically require a skill check. Beyond all the maneuvers in personal combat, there are several maneuvers that apply specifically to vehicles. These additional maneuvers follow the usual rules governing maneuvers (see page 97). In addition (and especially in larger vehicles), characters are assumed to be able to perform any personal maneuvers such as dropping prone, managing gear, interacting with the environment, or aiming with vehicle or personal weapons (although you should use common sense as to what a character can and cannot do given the situation).

All maneuvers have a current speed, which is how fast the vehicle has to be going to perform the maneuver.

ACCELERATE

Pilot Only: Yes

Silhouette: Any

Current Speed: Any

The pilot may increase the vehicle's current speed by one or more, to a maximum of the vehicle's maximum speed. The vehicle suffers a number of system strain equal to the amount its speed increased minus 1, to a minimum of 0.

HAZARDS AND DIFFICULT TERRAIN

Dangerous obstacles can make a stunt even more hazardous to perform. You should add ■ to checks based on the obstacles involved. See the table below for suggestions.

TABLE III.2—15: NAVIGATION HAZARD SETBACK DICE

NUMBER OF ■	GROUND DESCRIPTION	SPACE DESCRIPTION
-	Flat, clear terrain. Roads, firm fields, grassy plains, or (if flying) clear skies and good weather.	A relatively unchallenging navigational situation. A broad, loosely packed asteroid field, for example, or a thin, calm nebula.
+ ■	Somewhat trickier terrain. Scattered trees, dense brush, rolling hills, sand dunes, or windy weather.	More challenging but not seriously daunting obstacles. Flying over mountains on a moon, or a thick asteroid field or nebula.
+ ■ ■	Dangerous terrain. A thick forest, steep and rock-covered hills, or flying during a violent storm.	A dangerous astronomical feature. Flying around a fracturing comet, or navigating a dense and turbulent asteroid field.
+ ■ ■ ■	Very risky terrain. Sheer cliff faces, deep swamps, or a canyon only just wide enough for the vehicle to fit through are good examples of this.	An extremely dangerous situation, such as approaching gravitational anomalies, flying through asteroid tunnels, or other dangerous and foolhardy pursuits.

BRACE FOR IMPACT

Pilot Only: Yes

Silhouette: Any

Speed: Any

Once per round, the pilot may use this maneuver to adjust the vehicle's position to minimize incoming damage. Until the beginning of the pilot's next turn, whenever the vehicle is dealt damage, the pilot may have the vehicle suffer system strain up to its silhouette to reduce the damage it suffers by that amount, to a minimum of 0.

Additionally, until the beginning of the pilot's next turn, whenever the vehicle suffers a Critical Hit, the pilot may have the vehicle suffer system strain up to its silhouette to reduce the Critical Hit result by ten per point of strain it gains this way, to a minimum of 0. If the result is reduced to 0 this way, the Critical Hit is canceled.

DECELERATE

Pilot Only: Yes

Silhouette: Any

Current Speed: 1+

The pilot may decrease the vehicle's current speed by one or more, to a minimum of 0. The vehicle suffers a number of system strain equal to the amount its speed decreased minus 1, to a minimum of 0.

EVADE

Pilot Only: Yes

Silhouette: 0–4

Current Speed: 3+

Once per round, the pilot may perform this maneuver to dodge incoming fire. Until the beginning of the pilot's

next turn, upgrade the difficulty of all attacks made against the vehicle and by characters in the vehicle.

REPOSITION

Pilot Only: Yes

Silhouette: Any

Current Speed: 1+

The pilot may move the vehicle up to one range band. This maneuver reflects minor repositioning to avoid obstacles, close or widen distance in a chase, or otherwise shift within the environment in small ways.

ACTIONS

In combat involving vehicles, your character can perform some actions that specifically apply to their vehicle. Some of these actions are labeled as Pilot Only actions. A vehicle may benefit from only one Pilot Only action per round (see **Pilot Only Maneuvers and Actions**, on page 226). Pilot Only actions are actions that affect the movement of the vehicle itself, which may only move so fast and so far.

Like vehicle maneuvers, vehicle actions have a current speed requirement that the vehicle has to be traveling at to perform the action. Also remember that any of the actions listed starting on page 101 of **Part I—Chapter 6: Combat Encounters** can also be performed in combats involving vehicles, within the bounds of common sense.

DANGEROUS DRIVING

Pilot Only: Yes

Silhouette: Any

Speed: 1+

The pilot attempts to control the vehicle as it takes a sharp turn, tries to coax the vehicle through a series

DAINGEROUS DRIVING IN NARRATIVE ENCOUNTERS

If a character attempts a particularly difficult or foolhardy trick with a vehicle in narrative encounters, you should have that character make a check as if they were performing the dangerous driving action, determining the speed of the vehicle based on the player's description and the circumstances of the scene.

of narrowly placed obstacles, or otherwise performs an improbable feat of operating prowess.

When performing the Dangerous Driving action, the character makes a Piloting check with a difficulty equal to the silhouette of the vehicle. Keep in mind that the current speed of the vehicle can alter the difficulty of such checks—and amplify the consequences of failure!

BLANKET BARRAGE

Pilot Only: No
Silhouette: 5+
Speed: 0–3

The gunner uses the ship's weapons to raise a curtain of fire around the ship, protecting it from smaller vehicles. Any smaller vehicle attempting an attack run will must brave a hurricane of heavy weaponry. This action also speeds up combat when your vehicle has lots of guns.

When performing the Blanket Barrage action, your character makes an **Average** (◆◆) **Gunnery check** and selects all weapons of a single type that share a firing arc. Those weapons count as firing that round. This action requires at least two weapons to use, and it cannot be used if there are not two weapons of a single type that share a firing arc. Until the end of their next turn, all vehicles of silhouette 4 or smaller upgrade the difficulty of any combat checks made against your character's vehicle once, plus one additional time per ▲▲ on the check. If their combat check generates ☹☹, they suffer one automatic hit, which deals half the base damage (rounding up) of the type of weapon used in the Blanket Barrage action. If their combat check generates ☹, they suffer one automatic hit dealing the full base damage instead.

At your discretion, the Blanket Barrage might not cover all arcs of the vehicle, leaving some areas open.

CONCENTRATED BARRAGE

Pilot Only: No
Silhouette: 5+
Speed: 0–3

The gunner directs the vehicle's fire to focus on a precise point on the opponent's hull. Focusing fire in this way has

the potential to deal significant damage. This action also speeds up combat when your vehicle has lots of guns.

When performing the Concentrated Barrage action, the character selects all weapons of a single type (such as 24-pounder cannons aboard a seagoing craft, or railguns aboard a starship) that share a firing arc. This action requires at least two weapons to use, and it cannot be used if there are not two weapons of a single type that share a firing arc. Although the character is firing multiple weapons, the character makes a single combat check, as per the rules for the Perform a Combat Check with Vehicle Weapons action. If the attack succeeds, the character may spend ▲ once to add damage equal to the number of weapons involved in the attack to one hit of the attack.

The Concentrated Barrage action can only be used to target vehicles with a silhouette of 5 or higher.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Pilot Only: No
Silhouette: Any
Speed: Any

As a vehicle takes damage, sparks fly and systems begin to fail. The Damage Control action can mitigate this stress. When performing the Damage Control action, choose whether you want your character to repair system strain or hull trauma. Then, make a Mechanics check, with the difficulty determined by **Table III.2–16: Damage Control Difficulty**. If the check is successful, reduce the vehicle's system strain or hull trauma by one per uncanceled ✨.

Characters can use the Damage Control action to repair system strain multiple times during an encounter. However, only one Damage Control action can be made to repair hull trauma during an encounter—no matter how many characters are on the vehicle. In both cases, you decide whether your players' characters can use the Damage Control action, depending on the current situation (a fighter pilot probably couldn't climb out of their plane to patch their wing, after all).

Characters can also use this action to repair Critical Hits the vehicle is suffering from. The difficulty of

TABLE III.2–16: DAMAGE CONTROL DIFFICULTY

TOTAL SYSTEM STRAIN	TOTAL HULL TRAUMA	DIFFICULTY
System strain less than half system strain threshold	Hull trauma less than half hull trauma threshold	Easy (◆)
System strain equal to or more than half system strain threshold	Hull trauma equal to or more than half hull trauma threshold	Average (◆◆)
System strain exceeds system strain threshold	Hull trauma exceeds hull trauma threshold	Hard (◆◆◆)

TABLE III.2–17: ADDITIONAL VEHICLE ACTIONS

ACTION	SKILL AND DIFFICULTY	RESULTS
Plot Course	Average (◆◆) Piloting check or Hard (◆◆◆) Perception check	The crew member studies the terrain ahead and plots a course that should take the vehicle safely through it. On a successful check, each uncanceled ✨ reduces the ■ suffered for difficult terrain by one.
Copilot	Average (◆◆) Driving, Piloting, or Operating check	The crew member serves as the vehicle's copilot, managing systems and auxiliary equipment to allow the pilot to focus on flying or driving. On a successful check, each uncanceled ✨ downgrades the difficulty of the pilot's next Driving, Piloting, or Operating check once.
Jamming	Average (◆◆) Computers check	The crew member uses the vehicle's systems to jam the communications of enemy vehicles. On a successful check, the enemy must make an Average (◆◆) Computers check to use its own communication systems. The difficulty increases by one for each additional ✨ ✨, and the jamming affects an additional target for each ▲ spent.
Boost Defenses	Hard (◆◆◆) Mechanics check	The crew member reroutes power from other systems to boost the defensive systems of a vehicle. This only works if the vehicle already has a defense of 1 or greater. On a successful check, the vehicle suffers 1 system strain and increases the defense of the vehicle by one until the beginning of the character's next turn. Each additional ✨ increases the duration by one round.
Manual Repairs	Hard (◆◆◆) Athletics check	In some cases, repairs can be as simple as welding a sturdy metal plate over a damaged system. If the character has the proper tools for the job, they can attempt to use the Damage Control action with Athletics rather than Mechanics. If successful, the character removes one point of hull trauma from the vehicle, plus one additional point for each additional ✨ ✨. This follows the limitations of the Damage Control action, and thus may only be attempted once per encounter.
Fire Discipline	Hard (◆◆◆) Leadership or Discipline check	The character forgoes fighting to analyze the opponents' tactics and direct their comrades in achieving greater accuracy with weapons fire. If the check is successful, the next crew member firing a weapon on the vehicle adds ■ to their check (plus an additional crew member for every additional ✨ ✨). The character may also spend ▲ ▲ to allow every hit from shipboard weapons to inflict 1 system strain on their target as well as regular damage until the beginning of the character's next turn, as the carefully timed shots pummel shields and overload systems.
Scan the Enemy	Hard (◆◆◆) Perception check	The character uses the vehicle's scanners to study the enemy. If successful, the character learns what weapons the targeted vehicle has, its modifications, and its system strain and hull trauma thresholds. The character can also spend ▲ ▲ to learn its current system strain and hull trauma levels.
Hack Enemy's Systems	Hard (◆◆◆) Computers check	The character uses computers to attempt to disrupt the systems of an enemy vehicle. If successful, the character compromises the defenses of the target vehicle for one round per ✨ (see the Vehicle Components sidebar, on page 221). A ☉ may be spent to compromise one enemy weapon of the character's choice, and ▲ ▲ may be spent to inflict 1 system strain on the target vehicle.
Intercept Projectiles	Hard (◆◆◆) Computers or Gunnery check or Average (◆◆) Vigilance check	The character tracks incoming attacks and uses vehicle systems to disrupt guided projectiles such as missiles, or drops flares and chaff at an opportune moment. If the check is successful, any attacks against their vehicle using weapons with the Guided quality upgrade their difficulty once (plus an additional upgrade for every additional ✨ ✨) until the start of the character's next turn.

repairing a Critical Hit is listed in the Severity column of **Table III.2–19: Critical Hit Result**, on page 230. Checks to repair Critical Hits can be attempted multiple times, until the Critical Hit is repaired.

GAIN THE ADVANTAGE

Pilot Only: Yes
Silhouette: 1–4
Speed: 4+

This action reflects the frantic give-and-take of a dogfight between small vehicles. It allows a pilot to gain the upper hand against a single enemy vehicle, maneuvering to deny that foe shots while setting up attacks of their own.

To execute this action, the pilot chooses one enemy vehicle and makes a Driving or Piloting check, the difficulty of which is determined by the relative speeds of the vehicles involved in the attack (see **Table III.2–18:**

Speed Advantage Difficulty). If the pilot succeeds, they gain the advantage. While a pilot has the advantage, upgrade the ability of all combat checks made from the pilot's vehicle against the target vehicle **twice**, and upgrade the difficulty of all combat checks made by the target vehicle against the pilot's vehicle **twice**.

TABLE III.2–18: SPEED ADVANTAGE DIFFICULTY

DIFFERENCE IN SPEED	DIFFICULTY
Initiating vehicle is traveling at the same speed as the target vehicle	Average (◆◆)
Initiating vehicle's speed is one or more higher than target vehicle	Easy (◆)
Initiating vehicle's speed is one lower than target vehicle	Hard (◆◆◆)
Initiating vehicle's speed is two or more lower than target vehicle	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)

TABLE III.2–19: CRITICAL HIT RESULT

D100	SEVERITY	RESULT
01–18	Easy (◆)	Rattled: The vehicle suffers 3 system strain, and its pilot and each occupant suffer 3 strain.
19–36	Easy (◆)	Shrapnel Spray: Chunks of metal or wood are hurled at the occupants at deadly velocity. The pilot and occupants must each make a Hard (◆◆◆) Resilience or Vigilance check or suffer 1 wound, plus 1 additional wound per ✕ on the check; you may spend 🔄 🔄 🔄 or 🔄 from this check to inflict a Critical Injury on the character.
37–54	Easy (◆)	Hull Damaged: The vehicle's hull is compromised (see Vehicle Components on page 221).
55–63	Average (◆◆)	Navigation Damaged: The vehicle's navigation is compromised (see Vehicle Components , on page 221).
64–72	Average (◆◆)	Propulsion Damaged: The vehicle's propulsion is compromised (see Vehicle Components , on page 221).
73–81	Average (◆◆)	Defenses Damaged: The vehicle's defenses are compromised (see Vehicle Components , on page 221).
82–108	Hard (◆◆◆)	Weapons Damaged: One of the vehicle's weapons of the attacker's choice is compromised (see Vehicle Components , on page 221).
109–126	Hard (◆◆◆)	Brakes Damaged: The vehicle's brakes are compromised (see Vehicle Components , on page 221).
127–138	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	All Systems Down: All of the vehicle's components are compromised (see Vehicle Components , on page 221).
139–144	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	Fire! The vehicle catches on fire. While the vehicle is on fire, each occupant suffers damage as discussed on page 111. A fire can be put out with a Hard (◆◆◆) Cool or Athletics check (or multiple checks for big vehicles).
145–153	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	Breaking Up: The vehicle begins to come apart at its seams, disintegrating around the occupants. At the end of the following round, it is completely destroyed, and the surrounding environment is littered with debris. Anyone aboard the vehicle has one round to dive for the nearest door before they are lost.
154+	–	Vaporized: The vehicle is completely destroyed, consumed in a large and dramatic fireball. Nothing survives.

Once one pilot gains the advantage, on the following turn, the opponent may attempt to cancel out the advantage by using Gain the Advantage as well. This works as described earlier, but the difficulty of the Piloting check is increased by one. After all, it is harder to maneuver to get on an opponent's tail if that opponent is already on your tail!

ADDITIONAL VEHICLE ACTIONS

Pilot Only: No
Silhouette: Any
Speed: Any

When aboard a vehicle in combat, those who are not piloting or firing weapons may still want to contribute to the encounter. Although the number of options open to them is limited only by a player's creativity, **Table III.2–17: Additional Vehicle Actions** has a list of actions passengers can attempt during encounters. The table lists the actions, the skill required, the check's attendant difficulty, and the results of a success. These actions are all covered by the perform a skill check action (on page 101), and are by no means an exhaustive list—and obviously, not all of these actions are appropriate for all vehicles or settings, so you should be sure to use common sense when choosing actions. However, they do serve to provide a range of ideas.

PERFORM A COMBAT CHECK WITH VEHICLE WEAPONS

Pilot Only: No
Silhouette: Any
Speed: Any

This is similar to the perform a combat check action, on page 101, with some minor differences in implementation due to the differences between vehicles and individuals. These differences are described below:

- Each weapon on a vehicle may be fired a maximum of once per round.
- Targets must be within the firing arc of the weapon, as determined by the relative position of vehicles (and the GM's discretion).
- Although the attack difficulty is still based on the range to the target (see page 102 and **Table I.6–1: Ranged Attack Difficulties**), vehicle rules do add the sixth—strategic—range band. Attacks made at strategic range have a difficulty of **Formidable** (◆◆◆◆◆). Also, vehicles have wide variance in silhouettes, so you should be sure to use the **Size Differences (Silhouettes)** rules on page 109.
- Most weapons on vehicles deal damage on planetary scale, meaning each point of damage is the equivalent of ten points of damage on a personal scale.
- When a vehicle suffers damage, it reduces that damage by its armor, to a minimum of 0. Any remaining damage is applied to the vehicle as hull trauma.

VEHICLE CRITICAL HITS

Vehicles do not suffer Critical Injuries; instead, when a vehicle would otherwise suffer a Critical Injury due to **A** or **B** on an attack (or any other effect), it suffers a Critical Hit instead. Effects that apply to the results of Critical Injuries, such as the Vicious quality, do not apply to Critical Hits (and effects that apply to Critical Hits do not apply to Critical Injuries).

When an attack generates a Critical Hit, the attacker rolls on **Table III.2-19: Critical Hit Result**, on the previous page, and the target suffers the listed effects. Critical Hits are divided into four severity levels, which dictate the difficulty of the check required to repair the Critical Hit, as listed in the table. These difficulties can be further modified at your discretion.

Once a vehicle suffers a Critical Hit, it counts as suffering that Critical Hit until it is repaired. This status counts even if the effects of the Critical Hit only last a single round. While a vehicle is suffering a Critical Hit, any additional Critical Hits generated against it add +10 to the roll on **Table III.2-19: Vehicle Critical Hit Result** per existing Critical Hit.

Remember that an attack must inflict damage for the attacker to activate a Critical Hit. Because vehicles operate on the planetary scale for damage, a hit from a personal scale weapon must inflict at least 10 damage (1 damage on planetary scale) after reductions for armor for the attacker to be able to inflict a Critical Hit.

EXAMPLE VEHICLES

Although we don't have the space for a wide variety of vehicles, we have included a few to give you an idea of what vehicles look like in **GENESYS**.

THREE-MASTED FRIGATE

Sporting dozens of guns and masts that stretch sixty or more meters into the sky, these sorts of ships are excellent for fending off marauding pirates, exploring lost islands, and fighting sea monsters. An entire campaign could be set on such a ship in the right setting.



Control Skill: Operating.
Complement: 225 crew.
Passenger Capacity: 20.
Price/Rarity: 300,000 (1790s prices)/8.
Consumables: 3 months.
Encumbrance Capacity: 200.

Weapons: 15 starboard and 15 port 24-pounder cannons (Fire Arc Starboard and Fire Arc Port; Damage 6; Critical 3; Range [Long]).

4 starboard and 4 port 9-pounder cannons (Fire Arc Starboard and Fire Arc Port; Damage 4; Critical 5; Range [Medium]).

2 forward “long nines” (Fire Arc Forward; Damage 4; Critical 5; Range [Long]; Accurate 1).

FOUR-DOOR AUTOMOBILE

A staple of the modern era, the automobile has redefined personal mobility across much of the world. We've included a basic profile for a very basic sedan, which you can modify to represent SUVs, pickup trucks, and other variants.



Control Skill: Driving.
Complement: 1 driver.
Passenger Capacity: 3 (5 uncomfortably).
Consumables: None.
Encumbrance Capacity: 20.
Price/Rarity: 2,000–50,000/3.
Weapons: None.

AEROSPACE SUPERIORITY FIGHTER

Barring the existence of armed satellites and advanced orbital platforms, the jet fighter is usually the final word in superiority in the skies of most modern and near-future settings. Note that this profile can function for both combat aircraft and space fighters, though in a sci-fi campaign, you might want to give the weapons new names with words that sound futuristic (involving some combination of “beam,” “pulse,” and/or “plasma”).



Control Skill: Piloting.
Complement: 1 pilot, 1 copilot.
Passenger Capacity: None.
Consumables: 1 day.
Encumbrance Capacity: 5.
Price/Rarity: 100,000,000/9.
Weapons: Rotary cannon (Fire Arc Forward; Damage 2; Critical 5; Range [Long]; Auto-fire).
Air-to-air missiles (Fire Arc Forward; Damage 5; Critical 3; Range [Extreme]; Guided 3, Limited Ammo 6).
Anti-ship missile (Fire Arc Forward; Damage 8; Critical 1; Range [Strategic]; Blast 5, Breach 2, Limited Ammo 1).

HACKING RULES

Dramatized electronic warfare is often presented as a sort of duel between two master technologists. Although this isn't how that works in real life, our game tends to err on the side of an exciting narrative, and so for this setting, we've provided some hacking rules that enable this.

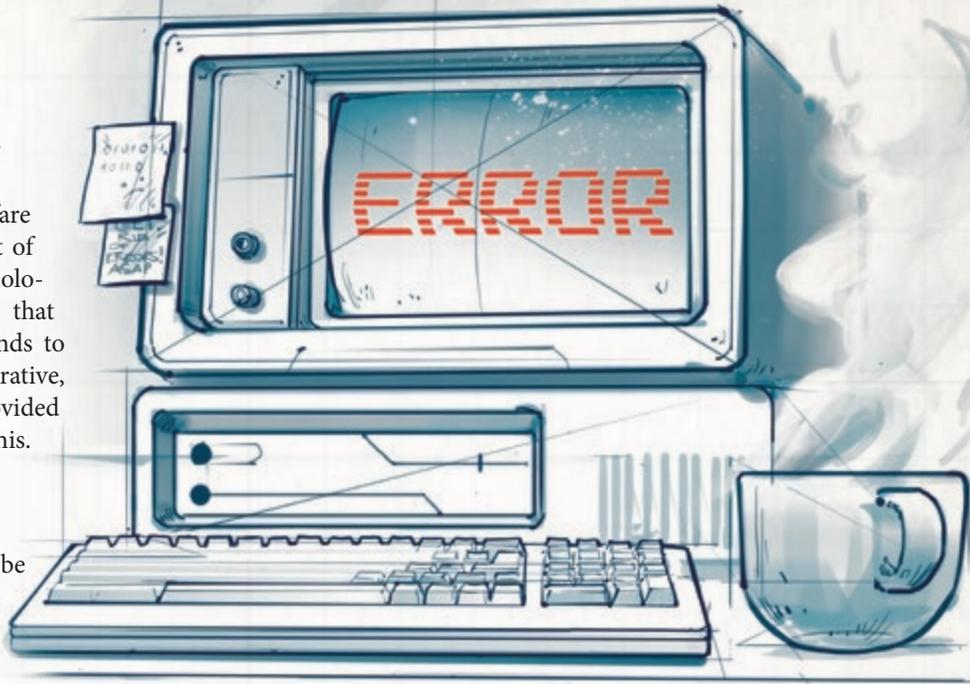
ENCOUNTER STRUCTURE

A full hacking encounter should be conducted in structured gameplay (see page 95). In a hacking encounter, one or more hackers try to access a system, override its security programs, and then do something important in the system—ranging from looping security camera footage and unlocking electronic doors to stealing sensitive corporate data.

You can create an entire hacking encounter where the hackers attempt to overcome automated programs and defenses. However, sometimes the hackers face off against a living opponent. This systems operator (or "sysops") tries to trace the hackers to find out where they are accessing the system from, then attempts to lock them out of the system entirely. If the sysops can lock out the hackers before the hackers accomplish their goals, the sysops wins.

Since hacking encounters take place in structured gameplay, you, as the GM, should use the rules for Initiative (see page 95) to determine the order in which characters act. Also, since hacking encounters use the same structured gameplay rules as combat encounters, you can run a combined hacking and combat encounter easily, instead of leaving the rest of the party with nothing to do while the hacker PC gets their time in the spotlight. You could have the other PCs engaging in other actions (such as a tense firefight with security or an attempt to break into a protected building) while the hacker engages in the hacking encounter. The hacker can even help their fellows, such as by opening doors to allow a quick escape or by activating a fire suppression system right in a security guard's face.

During a hacking encounter, we call any character attempting to break into a computer system a "hacker." We call a character actively working to protect the system a "sysop" (sort for "system operator").



A LINK TO THE SYSTEM

Generally, characters need some sort of link to a computer system to hack it. This involves some sort of hardware (a computer or portable computing device) and a link into whatever network or Internet your setting has.

It could probably go without saying that hackers and sysops must both have this link to a system to be able to hack or protect it. If a character can't access the system, they cannot perform any hacking actions or maneuvers involving that system, and none of their talents or special abilities can affect the system.

ACTIONS

During a hacking encounter, characters can perform a number of hacking actions to accomplish their goals. We describe these actions, listing their difficulty, whether they can be performed by a hacker or sysops (or both), and providing you with a description of how they work.

TABLE III.2—20: SYSTEM SECURITY

EXAMPLE SYSTEMS	DIFFICULTY
Unsecured/passcode known	Simple (-)
Public terminal, PAD, personal computer	Easy (◆)
Small business server	Average (◆◆)
Government network, corporate server	Hard (◆◆◆)
Hacker darknet, military server	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)
Megacorp core system, intelligence agency server	Formidable (◆◆◆◆◆)

ACCESS SYSTEM

Difficulty: Computers check (Difficulty Varies)

Available To: Hacker

Description: Once the hacker has a direct link to the system (through a land-line, wireless connection, USB port, or something more futuristic), they need to access the system. This action represents the hacker accessing the system and gaining control over it, so that they can make the system do what they want later.

As an action, the hacker may make a Computers check to gain access to the system. The difficulty of the check is based on the system's basic security and complexity. See **Table III.2-20: System Security** for suggestions on the difficulty of breaking into various types of systems.

Once a hacker has successfully accessed a system, they can use the exact commands maneuver to do things in the system (what they can do depends on what system they accessed, of course). However, certain parts of a system may be further protected by security programs. The hacker needs to override these security programs before they can access those parts of a system.

OVERRIDE SECURITY PROGRAM

Difficulty: Average (◆◆) Computers Check

Available To: Hacker

Description: Once a hacker has successfully performed the access system action, certain parts of a system may still be protected by security programs. For example, a hacker may gain access to a facility's security camera network and be able to see whatever the security cameras see. However, the part of the system that controls the cameras is protected by a security program, which the hacker must override before they can turn the cameras off.

Each security program has a strength rating. To override the program, the hacker must make an **Average (◆◆) Computers check** and generate a number of ✨ equal to the program's rating. If the hacker fails, something (usually bad) happens, depending on the security program. We provide three example security programs on page 235 to use in your hacking encounters.

If the hacker succeeds, the program shuts down, and cannot be reactivated until the end of the hacker's next turn. Hackers can spend ⚡ or 🌀 to keep a program shut down longer, or completely disable it (see page @@).

TRACE USER

Difficulty: Opposed Computers vs Computers check

Available To: Sysop

Description: Once the sysops knows that their system is being hacked, they still need to find out where the hack is coming from. The more they know about the origin of the hack, the easier it is to lock the hacker out of their system.

TRACE INFORMATION

A sysop can successfully trace a user up to four times, each time gaining more information about the user. Additional traces don't reveal any additional information or further decrease the difficulty of the lockout action, but you can give the character additional narrative information about their opponent for doing so.

Successful traces usually occur via the Trace User action, but can also happen by spending ⚡ or 🌀, or unsuccessfully attempting to override a sentry security program.

TABLE III.2-21: TRACE INFORMATION

TRACES	RESULTS
1	The sysops learns what country the hacker is currently in (or its geo-political equivalent, depending on the setting). The sysops reduces the difficulty of the lockout action once.
2	The sysops learns what state, province, or region the hacker is in within that country. The sysops reduces the difficulty of the lockout action twice.
3	The sysops learns what city or community the hacker is in (or their location within a 10 kilometer radius). The sysops reduces the difficulty of the lockout action three times.
4	The sysops learns the address or exact location of the hacker. The sysops reduces the difficulty of the lockout action four times.

To find out where the hack is coming from, the sysops needs to trace the hacker by performing the trace user action. The sysops makes **opposed Computers vs Computers check** targeting the hacker. If successful, the sysops narrows down the hacker's location once. This makes it easier to lock the hacker out of the system (see the Lockout action), and also provides information about the hacker's real-world location. See the Trace Information sidebar for what a successful trace provides.

Besides making it easy for the sysops to lock the hacker out of the system, the sysops can also use this information for other purposes, such as reporting the hacker to the police (or sending a black-ops team to the hacker's house). You can also rule that a sysops needs to perform the trace user action to learn other key details about the hacker, such as how to access the hacker's computer over the Internet. You can even allow a hacker to perform the trace user action to learn the physical location of someone online, such as an enemy sysops or a rival hacker.

TABLE III.2–22: SPENDING , , , AND  IN HACKING ENCOUNTERS

SYMBOLS	RESULT OPTIONS
 or 	<p>Opportunity Identified: The character finds a useful system exploit. Add  to the character's next Computers check in this system.</p> <p>Thorough Override (Hacker Only): If the hacker successfully overrode a security program, it cannot be reactivated for one additional round.</p>
  or 	<p>Quick Commands: The character may immediately perform an additional Enact Command maneuver as an incidental.</p> <p>Cover Tracks (Hacker Only): The hacker hides their presence, adding  to the sysops' next Trace User action this encounter.</p> <p>Dynamic Code (Sysops Only): The sysops mods the coding on a security program, adding  to all Override Security Program checks targeting it.</p>
  or 	<p>Trolling: The character takes a few moments to mock their opponent. Inflict 3 strain on one other user in the system.</p> <p>Permanent Backdoor (Hacker Only): The hacker sets up a permanent means of accessing the system without needing to deal with its verification protocols. The difficulty of the Access System action becomes Easy () as long as the hacker can access the backdoor.</p> <p>Successful Trace (Sysops Only): The sysops successfully traces the hacker once (in addition to the other results of the check).</p>
	<p>Hard Shutdown (Hacker Only): If the hacker successfully overrode a security program, it is so thoroughly disabled that it cannot be reactivated for the remainder of the encounter.</p> <p>Blurred Sig (Hacker Only): The hacker obscures their signature, canceling one successful trace against them.</p> <p>Backup Firewall (Sysops Only): The sysops activates their emergency defensive protocols. A system immediately gains an active backup firewall with strength 3, protecting one portion of the server chosen by the sysops.</p> <p>Identified Exploit (Sysops Only): The sysops spots a backdoor in the system, removing one permanent backdoor of the sysops' choice.</p>
 or 	<p>Disorganized System: The user gets lost in a maze of poorly-named sub-folders. Add  to the character's next Computers check in this system.</p> <p>Online Distractions: The user gets too focused on the online world. Add   to any non-Computers checks the user makes next turn.</p>
  or 	<p>Limited Access (Hacker Only): The hacker may only perform one hacking action or one hacking maneuver during their next turn.</p> <p>I Know You! (Hacker Only): A sysops on the system recognizes the hacker's style. The next time they successfully use the Trace User action, they successfully trace the hacker one additional time.</p> <p>Careless Protocols (Sysops Only): Reduce the strength of one active security program (hacker's choice) by one to a minimum of 1.</p>
  or 	<p>Major Alert (Hacker Only): All users with access to the system become aware of the presence of an intruder on the network.</p> <p>Permanent Backdoor (Sysops Only): As the sysops attempts to lock the system down, they leave a portion vulnerable. The hacker gains a means of accessing the system without needing to deal with its verification protocols. The difficulty of the Access System action becomes Easy () as long as the hacker can access the backdoor.</p>
	<p>Successful Trace (Hacker Only): Sloppy work allows one sysops on the system to successfully trace the hacker once.</p> <p>Wrong Person (Sysops Only): As the sysops traces the hacker, they get one crucial element of the hacker's identity completely wrong. This does not remove a successful trace, but it does mean that they may have the wrong name, apartment number, or exact location of the hacker, which guarantees the hacker avoids any real-world retaliation and probably embarrasses the sysops in front of their superiors.</p>

LOCKOUT

Difficulty: Formidable (    ) **Computers check**

Available To: Sysop

Description: Since the sysops has direct control over the system, they can lock any users out of the system. As long as they can find the hacker, they can give them the boot.

Once the sysops is aware of a hacker's presence, the sysops may make a **Formidable** (    ) **Computers check**. If successful, the hacker loses access to the system. At the GM's discretion, they may be able to regain access to the system by performing the Access System action again. However, at the very least the difficulty of this action should be increased twice.

Reduce the difficulty of Lockout once for every successful trace against the hacker, to a minimum of **Easy** (.

HACKING MANEUVERS

In a hacking encounter, there are also certain maneuvers that a character can perform while interacting with a

system. They follow the same format as hacking actions, but without a difficulty since they don't require a check.

ENACT COMMAND

Available To: Hacker, Sysop

Description: This maneuver is how characters do things within a system after they access it. What they can do with this maneuver could range from looping the footage of specific security cameras in a facility, locking or unlocking electronic security doors, shutting down power to an elevator, resetting a drone's targeting parameters, or downloading a cache of corporate information.

Enact command should only let a character perform a single command in the system (if what a player wants their character to do is too complex, you can require them to spend two or more enact command maneuvers to do it). However, it doesn't require a check, since once characters have bypassed security, the system thinks they're authorized users (or, if the character is a sysops, they actually are authorized users).

Characters can only perform this maneuver after they have successfully performed the Access System action and gained access to the computer system. Also, remember that some parts of a system may be protected behind firewalls, which must be overridden before the character can enact commands that affect that part of the system.

ACTIVATE PROGRAMS

Available To: Hacker, Sysop

Description: Characters use this maneuver to activate (or reactivate) security programs, as well as any other programs that help or hinder hacking that you may have created for your setting.

SECURITY PROGRAMS

Security programs are static defenses that keep users from running amok on a computer system. You, the GM, get to decide how many security programs a system has, but keep in mind that only the most secure system would have more than a few such programs active at any given time due to the load they put on the system.

We've provided three example security programs (and a fourth that isn't really a security program). This should be enough for you to run basic hacking encounters, and also give you an idea for how to design your own security programs. Each program includes a **strength**, which is how many  a character needs to get on the override security program action to disable it. It also has an **effect**, which is what happens to a character if they fail their attempt to override the security program. If they succeed, the program deactivates until the end of the hacker's next turn.

When designing your own security programs, we recommend not making a strength higher than 5, as this is very hard to overcome.

FIREWALL

Firewalls are effectively barriers in cyberspace that limit access to certain parts of a server or system. If a user tries to penetrate them and fails, they get bumped back to the main system.

Program Strength: 3

Effects: If a character attempts to override this program and fails, they are unable to access the portion of the server the firewall protects (there are no further effects).

SENTRY

Sentries don't stop you from accessing restricted parts of a server. However, they spot unauthorized access and attempt to trace the offender.

Program Strength: 2

Effects: If a character attempts to override this program and fails, the sysops or other system administrators are immediately notified of the intrusion. In addition, the

sentry provides any sysops or system administrators who access the system during the encounter one successful trace against the hacker.

GATE

Gates are authentication programs. If a user has the right credentials (or can override the system to make it think they do), they let the user pass. If the user does not, the program automatically boots them from the system.

Program Strength: 2

Effects: If a character attempts to override this program and fails, they immediately lose access to the entire system, and must perform the Access System action again.

GATE (POP-UP)

This version of a gate is universally reviled marketing gimmick, not a true security program. It won't stop access to a server, but it is annoying.

Program Strength: 1

Effects: If a character attempts to override this program and fails, they suffer 2 strain. They may also feel a fleeting compulsion to buy a new vehicle or invest in a suspect weight-loss plan.

SPENDING , , , AND

When a hacker's check results in , , , or , these symbols may be spent narratively as usual. Additionally, **Table III.2-22: Spending , , , and  in Hacking Encounters** offers further suggestions. Options labeled "Hacker Only" are available only to a hacker, while "Sysops Only" options can only be used by a sysops.

PREPARING HACKING OPPOSITION

Opposition in hacking encounters generally falls into two categories: the security of the system itself and the protection that any associated characters provide to it. We've already discussed the first type of opposition, in the form of the difficulty to access the system and the existence of any security programs. The difficulty to break into a system can run from **Simple** (–) to **Formidable** (), and we've provided some examples in **Table III.2-20: System Security**, on page 232.

Preparing NPC opposition for hacking encounters works in largely the same manner as preparing NPCs for any other purpose. However, if the PCs are unlikely to encounter the sysops in person, then you only need to know the characteristics that are relevant for the sysops' role in the encounter. Providing the foe's Intellect characteristic and Computers skill can often be enough, unless you expect the PCs to later encounter that character in the flesh. Giving the NPC talents like Defensive Sysops can help an especially talented enemy stand out.



CHAPTER 3: BUILD AN ADVENTURE

The adventure is the central element of a roleplaying game session. It encapsulates the backdrop, obstacles, enemies, and plot in an organized fashion. This helps you keep gameplay moving by reducing the need to come up with every story element or search for just the right enemy stat block on the spot at the table.

There are different levels of adventure preparation. Let's talk about them.

Published adventures contain everything you need to run a particular story. They contain the plot, text you can read aloud to your players, maps, illustrations, detailed breakdowns of the encounters, and most of the stat blocks for characters the PCs interact with or battle against. You adapt the story to your specific game as much or as little as needed. A published adventure can't meet the needs of an infinite variety of PCs, but you can adapt it to better match your party's abilities.

Highly prepared adventures approach the level of detail in published adventures. You develop the story, create the majority of the characters, note some read-aloud text for important scenes, and gather all the rules-related material and stat blocks. You have a good idea of where you want the plot to go, and how to adapt the adventure to player character surprises. It takes time to prepare, and many Game Masters enjoy assembling the elements.

Covering-the-basics preparation is exactly what it says. You pull together just enough information to get you through a game session or adventure. You jot down some notes regarding your plans for a plot. You create or bookmark existing stat blocks for your NPCs. You probably sketch rough maps for the most critical scenes. Everything else you deal with as it comes up during the game.

Sometimes, you don't have enough time to prepare before the game, or your players go so far afield that the prepared adventure isn't going to cut it. You must rely on your own storytelling skills, as well as the narrative dice and the players' imaginations, to keep the storyline moving. While this is true of every roleplaying game session, in this case, you don't have time to develop a lot of subplots or completely think through the consequences of NPCs' or PCs' actions. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and many gaming groups use this style of play almost exclusively.

Use whichever level of preparation you are comfortable with. When you are first learning how to be a Game Master, using published adventures gives you everything you need for story and stats. This leaves you free to concentrate on running the game and adjudicating the rules. As you develop your skills as a Game Master, you'll likely become more comfortable with prepping less.

WHERE DO YOU START?

There are two primary elements to creating an adventure: developing a story and assembling mechanically suitable encounters that achieve your narrative goals. You typically start with the story, then assemble the encounters.

Sources for story inspiration can come from anywhere: novels, television, movies, other games, moments in history, or current events. You are not and should not be the sole source of story ideas for your gaming group. The players should have plenty of ideas about the characters they want to play and the sort of adventures they would like to participate in. Their story ideas can provide a great starting point. This section covers some concepts to help inspire you.

SETTING THE TONE

First, select your game's genre, setting, and tone (see **Part II** for example settings). A high magic fantasy game has different elements and expectations than a modern day political thriller. While elements of one can certainly be used in the other, and cross-genre mashup stories are popular in fiction, a genre's defining elements point to types of adventures that are a good fit for your game. In the Narrative Dice System, tones take place within settings. Some settings may be compatible with multiple tones, allowing you to use different tones in different adventures. See **Part III—Chapter 4: Tones**, on page 241, for more information.

STORY CONCEPTS

Adventures feature a specific goal or endgame for the player characters to achieve or experience. As you create your adventure, use this to drive the core storyline,

and continue to support this ultimate story destination, even if the PCs' actual path varies from the original plan (and it will).

Each adventure features several types of conflict. Dramatic clashes between characters form the basis of social encounters. Fighting and combat provide action and danger. Calculated puzzles and challenging natural environments engage problem-solving skills. Mix and match these elements to create a variety of scenes and events.

Adventures support classic narrative concepts found in all types of stories:

- **Person vs. Person:** A specific person actively opposes the PCs' actions and goals.
- **Person vs. Society:** The PCs are fighting to change an established society's evils or oppressive norms.
- **Person vs. Nature:** The PCs struggle in an inhospitable landscape or a natural disaster.
- **Person vs. Self:** This is more commonly used by a single PC to define their character actions and traits for roleplaying and story elements within a larger adventure. However, it is also possible to have a party full of characters who each have their own personal conflicts to resolve.
- **Person vs. Technology:** The PCs work against a form of advanced technology that threatens to take over their lives or wields power over them.
- **Person vs. Supernatural:** The PCs oppose strange and dangerous creatures (or effects) that usually wield powerful magic-like abilities and break all natural laws that limit mortal individuals.

If you find yourself struggling to develop an initial idea, consider using one of the above conflicts to develop a basic adventure framework. Select one of these concepts to establish the PCs' ultimate opposing force, and pick one or two others that could serve as a subplot in the story.

THE PCs VERSUS THE BIG BAD VILLAIN

Many adventures feature a fight against an ultimate bad guy. It could be an evil monarch, mad scientist, rogue religious leader, despotic feudal lord, or even a malevolent computer. In these adventures, the villain is the ultimate linchpin whose defeat will radically change the current circumstances for the better. These adventures are typically person vs. person affairs, but they can easily cross over into person vs. technology or person vs. supernatural, depending on the exact villain.

THE PCs VERSUS THE VERY DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENT

This concept embodies the earliest roleplaying game environment: the dungeon. Your party is out to defeat

the elements of the dungeon, whether they are natural dangers or ones designed by a cunning, mad wizard as wards guarding a tomb. While there are likely living opponents along the way, they typically serve as obstacles to overcome rather than as an ultimate enemy. The dungeon concept is easily adapted to adventuring activities in other environs with similar elements, such as investigating a derelict starship, sneaking into a high-security high-rise, or attacking a military base in any technological era.

THE PCs VERSUS THE NEFARIOUS PCs

In games of high political or personal intrigue, the PCs themselves might actively work with and oppose each other at different times within the story. While this is usually a form of person vs. person, from a party point of view, it can be conceived of as person vs. self. A classic example of this type of adventure features agents of opposing governments who are forced to work together for a common goal, but are expected to fight for an opposing goal that manifests immediately after they achieve the common goal as a team.

STORIES AND GOALS

Each adventure needs an ultimate goal, and the PCs should learn what that is almost immediately. Normally, this occurs in an introduction or during the opening scene. While achieving the goal may involve mysteries and complications along the way, the players need to have a clear direction to keep them motivated and on track. If the players know or learn too little, they're more likely to go in the wrong direction or simply become frustrated.

Common plotlines include variations and combinations of the following:

- The PCs search for something important (or at least important to them) in one area or across multiple locations.
- The PCs must fight a dangerous or superior force to defend themselves or others important to them.
- The PCs become embroiled in an investigation to expose a hidden threat or to reveal criminal activity.
- The PCs must protect an item or individual from attack, theft, or other threat.

Ask the question “What if this happened?” to create theoretical circumstances that the player characters or other inhabitants of the game world must respond to or confront. Use the hows, whys, and whos to generate the plot and encounters.

CHARACTERS

Adventures feature a multitude of non-player characters. They help make the game world feel inhabited, and they add to the tone or flavor of the scene. Minor NPCs typically don't have names or a large impact on the story. Recurring characters usually have names and recognizable features, and are significant threats or allies. Major NPCs have all the aspects of recurring characters, plus developed backgrounds that tie into the events of the adventure.

Every adventure should have at least a couple of major NPCs, even if they are not an enemy to be defeated. Major and recurring NPCs need memorable elements, such as a specific attitude, style of dress, signature device, or recognizable vehicle. Depending on your comfort level with improvisation and voice acting, you might also speak in certain ways or accents. If you're not comfortable with this kind of informal performance, you can always just add those elements to the NPC's description that you give to your players.

LOCATIONS AND SCENES

The adventure's events must take place somewhere, the more interesting the better. That's not to say every single location has to be highly detailed, as those are best used for major scenes. Exciting locations make for memorable scenes and inspire player creativity.

When setting a scene, picture it as you might in a movie or while reading a novel. How bright is it? Are there multiple levels? Balconies? Pools or rivers? Dangerous machinery? Does it change configuration somehow? How many people are there and why? Are there specific noises? What's the weather like?

WHAT IF THIS HAPPENED?

“What if there were a town where each night an entire building disappeared?” The answers lead to very different types of adventures:

- The buildings are teleported to another realm or dimension.
- The buildings dissolve, leaving the people inside behind. Or not.
- The earth swallows them without warning.
- Swarms of nanites reconfigure the buildings overnight, sometimes completely removing one to add to others.
- A local child has a supernatural ability to make “scary” buildings “go away.”

LETTING THE NARRATIVE DICE DRIVE THE NARRATIVE

Most Game Masters love storytelling and creating their own tales. In an RPG, there is always interplay between the GM and players as to how much each contributes to the story. Some GMs work hard to keep their players within their pre-planned plot. This is fine if the players have fun and like that style of play, but too much of this is known as railroading. Usually the players feel more invested when they get to contribute to the story as well.

GENESYS encourages creative actions as a result of the dice pool rolls. The interpretation of , , , and  can take the scene in unexpected directions when coupled with spur-of-the-moment ideas. As a feature of the game system, you and the players are

encouraged to allow the dice to influence the story. An unexpected twist during an encounter can provide a brief moment of fun—or if it affects a critical character or plot point, it could have a dramatic effect on the whole story.

If you want to take advantage of this, be willing to let your players come up with their own ways to spend , , , and . This gives them more ownership of the story. Also, spend a few minutes ahead of time noting specific effects that only occur on certain dice results, and link them to your planned plot. Having them ready ahead of time can keep your story on track but let your players feel like they discovered something special.

Most locations don't require a lot of detail to get the idea across. A straightforward description, especially of typical locales, is often all you need. However, a map helps to describe highly unusual or complicated areas. In some types of adventures, creating a map ahead of time

is critical to the story: for example, when the PCs must search a labyrinthine starship, or set up castle defenses against an invading army. Treasure maps, deck plans, skirmish zones, technical schematics, and similar map variations can also add a lot of flavor to a game.

CONSTRUCTING ENCOUNTERS

Once you know what types of social and combat encounters you need for the adventure, you can turn to building them in game mechanics terms. First, decide your desired encounter difficulty. Is it a brief scene that the PCs are expected to breeze through with low risk? Is it threatening but probably not devastating if things go badly? Is it a climactic scene with difficult odds?

The following elements contribute to an encounter's difficulty. Manipulate the difficulty of each to produce the strength of challenge you are aiming for. The more obstacles the PCs have to overcome, the more difficult the encounter.

In most encounters, the majority of the difficulty comes from the PCs' direct opponents. That makes the numbers and mix of minions, rivals, and nemeses the most important factor to consider from a game mechanics point of view. If you want defeating the main nemesis villain to be the focus, be careful about how many other elements directly affect the PCs. For example, you might want to have one hundred minions running around to

serve the story needs, but to only include a few in your calculations, as the rest probably have problems to deal with other than threatening the PCs.

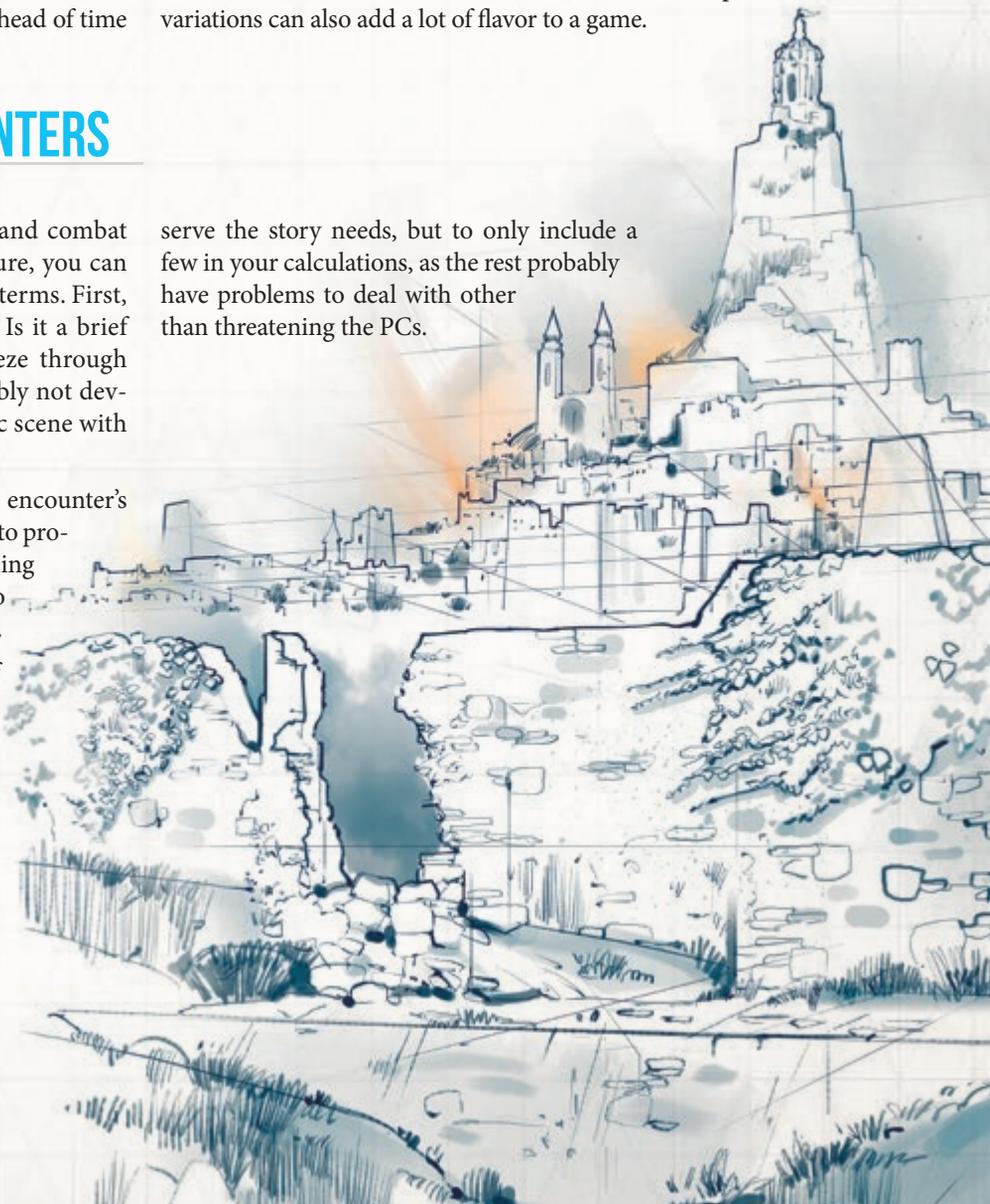


TABLE III.3—1: ELEMENTS CONTRIBUTING TO ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTY

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS
Environment	Weather conditions, lighting level, cover (rocks, trees, trenches, battlements), concealment (mist, smoke, tall grass), difficult terrain.
Bystanders	Crowds that may be hard to move through, allies of the PCs (how motivated are they, and how skilled?), reinforcements for the adversaries (how many, and when/why do they show up?)
Adversaries	How many adversaries (and of which types) are in the encounter, how skilled they are, their soak values, the damage values of their weapons, any special equipment they might have.
Exits and Entrances	Escape routes for the PCs, how easy those routes are to access, routes for additional adversaries to join the battle, whether or not all these routes can be blocked in some way.

ESTABLISHING ADVERSARY DIFFICULTY

Adversaries in combat encounters consist of minions, rivals, and nemeses (see **Adversaries**, on page 131, and **Create an Adversary**, on page 202). Most encounters do not include all three types, with nemeses appearing at critical story moments. Rivals are used as moderately challenging opponents for the PCs in most encounters, while minions exist to bulk out encounters with easy foes.

Use the following guidelines to help establish the strength of adversaries in an encounter:

- **Individual Challenging Opponent:** The adversary (usually a rival or nemesis) should have attack skills and defenses comparable to or slightly higher than the PCs' skills and defenses. They can also have a wound threshold twice as high as an individual PC.
- **If the PCs Are Outnumbered:** Use rivals and/or minions with combat skills and defenses that are one or two Ability dice or points lower than the PCs' skills and defenses.
- **For Advanced PCs:** Increase the combat skills of the NPCs, add one or more minion groups or rivals to the encounter, or increase NPC wound thresholds.

These are common encounter setups for a group of four PCs:

- **Four minions acting individually.** This is a good first encounter for brand-new players.
- **Two groups of minions** (three or four each).
- **One rival with one group of four minions.**
- **Three rivals.** This is a moderately difficult encounter.
- **One nemesis with two groups of minions** (three or four each). This is a difficult encounter.
- **One nemesis, one rival, and one group of five minions.** This is also a difficult encounter.

MECHANICAL BREAKDOWN: ADVENTURE BUILDING

From a game mechanics standpoint, building an adventure is a matter of PC resource management—usually wounds and strain taken (although this can also include using scarce resources in a post-apocalyptic adventure, or recovering from fear in a horror story).

Each encounter expends PC resources. When the resources are easily renewable, the players typically take on more encounters before worrying too much about stopping for rest or recovery time. Combat encounters in particular can be difficult to recover from when a lot of wounds and Critical Injuries are involved.

As you build your adventure, you can use this expenditure to help create tension within the story. Encounters that occur in rapid succession without time for recovery can build tension and stress in the following encounters. The characters must get more creative to work around their limited resources. However, they can easily become frustrated if this occurs too often in the game.

HOW MANY ENCOUNTERS?

How many encounters should your adventure include? If you're playing regularly and aren't overly concerned about the time each encounter takes, use however many you need to tell the story. However, if you have a limited time to play—say just a few hours or a few sessions—you'll need more precision in the number of encounters and encounter length. Remember that there are various types of encounters, including social and exploration, not just combat. Mix them throughout the adventure.

A complete one-session adventure works well with two major encounters and two or three quicker encounters. A longer adventure typically has six to nine encounters, with three or four major scenes. Keep in mind that the longer the adventure, the more likely the PCs are to move the story in unintended directions, especially if everyone gets creative with the dice pool results! For longer adventures, try setting up specific encounters for major events and allowing the PCs more leeway in a sandbox-style environment for traversing those in between.

CHAPTER 4: TONES

Now, let's talk about another element of adventures—the tone. While a setting provides inspiration for the location, era, and types of characters in a game, the tone you select creates an attitude and style that informs how the players will play their characters and what they can expect out of the game. A game using the pulp tone, for example, would likely feature some laughter and humor, along with fast-paced action and a clear line between good and evil. Players in mystery games would get double-crosses and gray shades of morality, and they would expect to spend a lot of time trying to solve puzzles.

Our system includes tones ranging from pulp to horror and from mystery to romance, with lots in between. In the pages that follow, each tone gets its own section, where you'll find what it can offer to your game, its common themes, and tips for using it in your game. Many of these sections also include new rules for situations that can come into play when using a particular tone, such as sanity and fear rules for horror games.

USING TONES

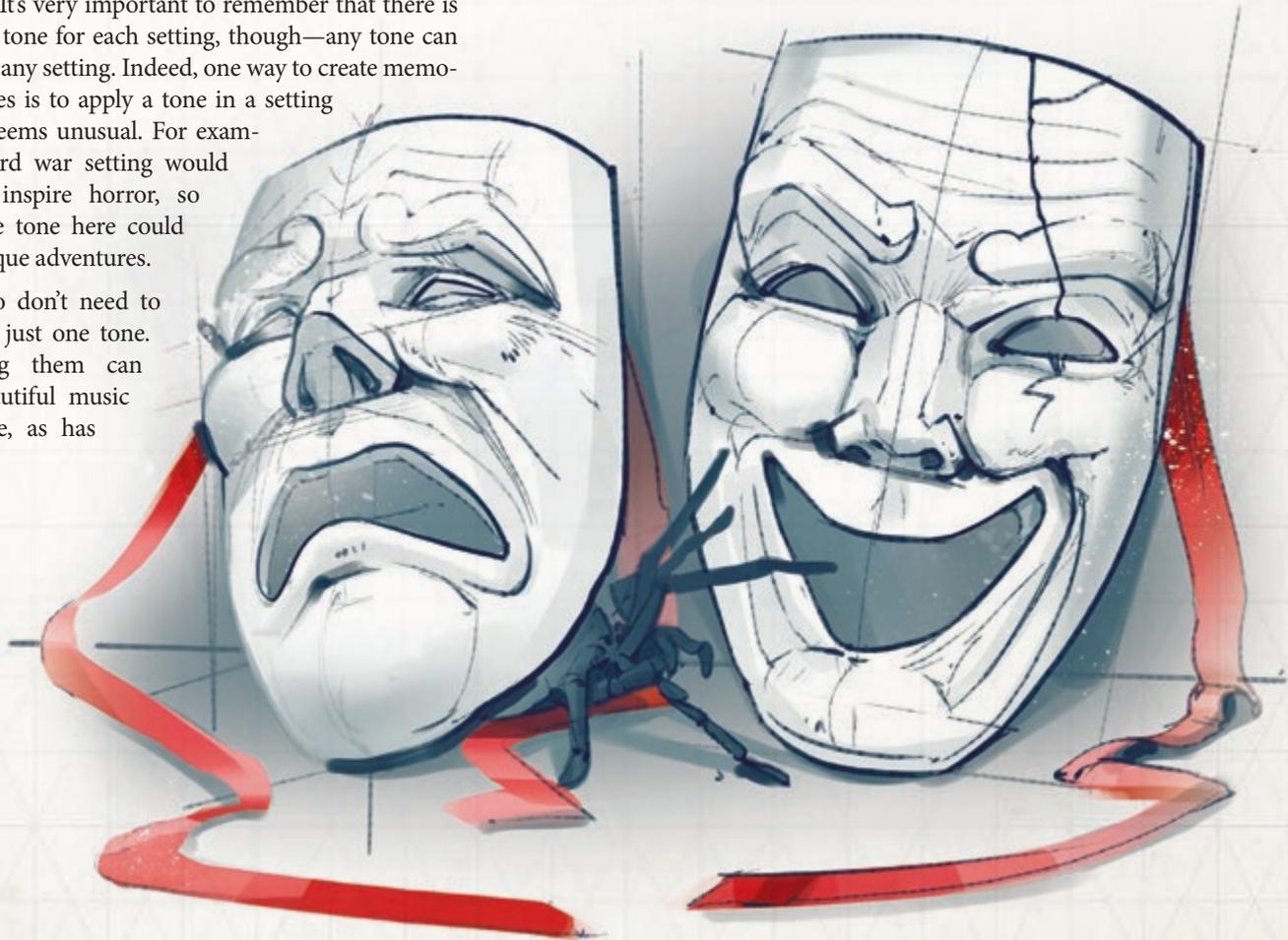
Most games need a tone to set the mood and outlook for the game. It's very important to remember that there is no “right” tone for each setting, though—any tone can be used in any setting. Indeed, one way to create memorable games is to apply a tone in a setting where it seems unusual. For example, a weird war setting would normally inspire horror, so a romance tone here could create unique adventures.

You also don't need to stick with just one tone. Combining them can create beautiful music in a game, as has

been demonstrated many times in movies. This can be done by alternating them (horror punctuated with romance is a common mix), or mixing them into a blend (such as superheroes attempting to solve a mystery).

Tones can do more than just establish moods and characterizations. They can also illustrate aspects of a setting that might not normally be displayed. A modern horror game might illustrate how our world isn't as rational as we thought, and in fantasy, that tone could reveal the darkness in an often morally simple setting.

Like almost everything else in running a successful roleplaying game, it is essential that you not only discuss with your players the major tone or tones planned for the campaign, but also ensure that everyone agrees on what they mean. For example, for a horror game, make sure the players know what kinds of frights could occur. This doesn't mean revealing details, but perhaps saying it will feature supernatural possession, lots of gore, or intense real-world terrors, and then determining how everyone feels about that. If any players have issues with any aspects, discuss and change things as needed. Prep work like this for using tones is essential for an enjoyable game, so don't skimp on it!



HORROR

They found Paulie exactly where the encrypted message said he would be, shackled in a hologuised room, but his back was carved with odd, freshly dripping icons that looked like a neural net diagram. When he said it was Kale who had imprisoned him, they grew still. They remembered months ago when they had stopped her from stealing some bleeding-edge corp tech. Stopped her with a hail of flechette fire, and watched her die screaming for revenge.

So, you want to scare some people? Excellent! Horror-themed games can be great fun. In this section, we'll talk about the horror tone, what it means, and what it can offer in the way of adventure ideas, themes, and tips for horror games. You'll also find rules for fear and sanity, allowing you to represent the mental trauma that horror can cause.

First, let's talk about horror itself. At its core, horror is what inspires fear—but not just any fear. There is the fear of flunking a test or missing a flight, and then there is the fear of a monster eating you or of losing your soul. It's the latter that this tone is about: characters facing extraordinary dangers outside their experience, control, or understanding. Ones that can kill them—or worse. The “or worse” is often a primary part of horror, and often an easy death might be a character's best choice.

WHY USE HORROR?

This all sounds pretty grim, so why use it in a game? Simply put, most people enjoy being scared. More precisely, they enjoy it in a controlled manner. Like riding roller coasters and seeing monster movies, facing fearsome situations and “surviving” can be an exhilarating experience when there is no real danger. In this aspect, roleplaying games are perfect for horror: the players surrender control over their environment (and often their characters), suspend disbelief, and willingly enter the story you create and control. Loss of control is a major theme in horror.

Horror can also introduce elements to other games, such as tension. It can twist player expectations, turning a mundane investigation in supernatural directions, for example. Horror can transform the very setting, revealing layers of reality beyond normal life or the hidden secrets Humanity Was Not Meant to Know.

THEMES IN HORROR

Let's talk about some types of horror that can apply to games. The most common is the supernatural, such as ghostly hauntings or demonic possession. These often defy science or employ it in unusual fashion, and reality itself might become unreliable. On the opposite end of the spectrum is psychological or realistic horror in which daily threats grow to hideous proportions, like a brilliant and depraved serial killer. The environment itself might be the threat, where the surroundings are out of control and trying to consume you.

These are all external horrors, while body horror concerning your own physical form and how it is no longer under your control is perhaps the strongest form of internal horror. Madness and corruption are two other internal horrors, loss of sanity and loss of purity (or even loss of your soul) being the threats the players must overcome.

Another thing to consider when using horror is how overt or subtle to make it. Grotesque horrors like dismembered corpses or alien parasites can certainly strengthen the mood of a horror adventure, but too much gore can also become laughable. The unknown waiting in the shadows or behind a door, out of sight but still dangerous, can be very effective in building tension. Often just the sounds an unseen creature makes or the stench that accompanies it is more effective in generating fear than is its actual appearance.

REAL VS. FUN HORROR

Keep in mind that horror can be upsetting if used improperly. Some players might have serious phobias, or dislike heavy gore or references to the real-world horrors of war, genocide, or abuse. Player ages should also be a factor here; some types of horror are not appropriate for all ages, after all. Keeping your monsters more on the fantastical side is a good way to ensure this doesn't happen, but as always when using a tone, talk to your players to ensure your plans jibe with their expectations—they might actually want a serious affair linking to real horrors. At the end of the day (or end of the world), horror adventures should be a tension-filled but fun experience for everyone!

RUNNING HORROR-THEMED GAMES

Possibly the most important aspect when using the horror tone is pacing, as an adventure filled with nothing but tension and terror can soon lead to diminishing returns for fright. Weaving in lighter moments, even using comedy, can help refresh things. Think of a horror adventure like a roller coaster: you want to punctuate the scary falls and turns with calmer periods, allowing players to catch their breath, laugh a little, and ready themselves for the next fright.

This also helps sustain the overall mood, because players without a natural time to make jokes will find themselves doing so in moments designed for dread. (That being said, a monster popping out in a lighter moment can nicely show them that they are never safe—often a key point in a horror game.) Suspension of disbelief and buy-in on the premise of the horror are important to monitor, perhaps more so than for other tones. You can encourage this with audio representing the characters' surroundings and handouts that feel “in-universe.”

Creating this universe and its horrors is another aspect to consider. Will you use an existing mythos and monsters (which might be easier to fashion, but players might know quite well), or will you create new ones (probably more work, but also a fresh experience for your group)? Are your horrors ones the PCs can defeat and comprehend, or are they ones that can only be staved off for a time? What can these perils do to your PCs, as mere death could be too prosaic? As they learn of and face these horrors, how might characters grow from life to death (and possibly undeath) in the campaign? These are all things you should establish for yourself, with the PCs possibly learning them as well in their adventures.

A last important note on running these games is that horror is relative. It should always be seriously threatening, but given the setting, the specifics will vary. An attacking orc won't frighten a group of seasoned fantasy adventurers, for example, but could send modern characters

running in terror (and the reverse in the case of a flame-throwing tank). No matter the specifics, horror should also always be fresh and something new to the characters, or at a level beyond anything they have seen before. Familiarity ruins fear, and horror should always be exciting!

NEW RULES: FEAR

Although the circumstances in a horror game may be scary to your players, they should be far more horrifying for your players' characters. (After all, the characters don't have the luxury of knowing that it's all only a game!) To represent this—and also recognize that some characters are braver than others—you can add the fear rules to your game.

When characters in your game confront something that you feel may be terrifying to them, you can have them make a Discipline skill check. We sometimes call this a **fear check**.

As the GM, you set the difficulty of the check. You can use **Table III.4–1: Fear Guidelines** to help figure out how difficult a check should be and what circumstances might elicit a fear check from your PCs in the first place. Typically, once a character has rolled a fear check for a specific set of circumstances, you shouldn't require them to check again for the same circumstances during the same encounter. Remember that if the circumstances relate to the character's Fear motivation (see page 48), you'll want to add the appropriate penalties to the check!

EFFECTS OF FEAR

In the list below, we've provided some mechanical effects for failing fear checks (and succeeding on them as well). Of course, you can also add narrative effects to a check, depending on the circumstances.

Suggested effects for failing or generating ☠ or ☹:

- **Aversion:** The character is unnerved and distracted, and is disoriented for the rest of the encounter. This is a good penalty for simple failure.

TABLE III.4–1: FEAR GUIDELINES

STATE OF FEAR	DIFFICULTY	EXAMPLE
Startled	Easy (◆)	Something momentarily frightening, such as someone leaping out of a closet to surprise you, or unsettling circumstances like being alone in a spooky house. These circumstances may not even elicit a check.
Moderately Afraid	Average (◆◆)	Confronting something unexplainable, such as furniture that moves when you're not looking or voices in an empty house; being stalked by a dangerous animal; danger that appears credible but not mortal.
Very Afraid	Hard (◆◆◆)	Ghostly apparitions and other obviously supernatural occurrences, being hunted by a pack of wild animals (or malevolent humans), danger that appears eminent and could be mortal.
Mortally Afraid	Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	Being actively haunted by a malevolent supernatural being, being attacked by a mythological creature, or facing a situation likely to result in your death.
Utterly Terrified	Formidable (◆◆◆◆◆)	A hopeless and utterly terrifying situation, combat against things incomprehensible to one's mind, being attacked by demons, fear so paralyzing that sanity cracks.

TABLE III.4–2: TRAUMAS AND THEIR EFFECTS

SEVERITY	TRAUMA	IMPACT ON THE CHARACTER
Easy (◆)	Obsession	You can spend ⚡ and ☠ the character generates to represent their obsession affecting their ability to interact with others. ⚡ ☠: Add ■ to the character's social skill checks for the remainder of the encounter. ☠: Increase the difficulty of all of the character's social skill checks by one for the remainder of the encounter.
Average (◆◆)	Phobia	The character gains a new Fear motivation relating to the circumstances that led to the fear check.
Hard (◆◆◆)	Delusion	You can spend ⚡ and ☠ the character generates to represent their delusion affecting their ability to interact with others. ⚡ ☠: Add ■ to the character's Perception and all Willpower-based checks for the remainder of the encounter. ☠: Increase the difficulty of all of the character's Perception and all Willpower-based checks by one for the remainder of the encounter.
Daunting (◆◆◆◆)	Neurosis	Whenever the character gains strain for any reason (voluntarily or involuntarily), they gain 1 additional strain.
Formidable (◆◆◆◆◆)	Broken Mind	The character's strain threshold is halved (rounding up).

- **Adrenaline Rush:** Momentary panic gives the character a rush of adrenalin, but at a cost. The character adds ■ to their next check, but suffers 3 strain. This a good penalty for success with ⚡.
- **Flee in Terror:** The character has to spend their next turn doing nothing but fleeing the source of the fear check (this includes downgrading their actions to maneuvers to move farther away). This is a good penalty for failure with a small amount of ⚡ or a ☠.
- **Frozen in Terror:** The character is immobilized and staggered during their next turn. This is a good penalty for failure with a lot of ⚡ or ☠.

Suggested effects for succeeding or generating ⚡ or ☠:

- **Steady Nerves:** The character keeps their nerve and suffers no ill effects. Obviously, this is a good result for passing their fear check.
- **Stand with Me:** The character's steadfast response emboldens their allies. Any allied characters forced to make a fear check from the same source add ■ to their check. This is a good result for passing a fear check with ⚡.
- **Fearless:** The character faces the source of fear and finds that it no longer has a hold on them. They automatically pass any further fear checks from that source. This is a good result for succeeding with ☠, but you should not apply these results if the source is the character's Fear motivation (see page 48).

NEW RULES: SANITY

Just as fear is an integral part of horror, failure to overcome fear leads to insanity—especially given the types of fearsome threats characters face. These new rules can be used when a character fails a fear check particularly badly, to represent the ongoing effects of mental trauma that hinder the ability to act in rational manner. Note that

all of the normal effects from fear checks still apply, but are now just the tip of the iceberg as sanity slips away...

Whenever a PC fails a fear check with ☠ or ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡, they also suffer a mental trauma. The trauma's severity should be the same as the difficulty of the fear check, although you may select a different trauma or modify the description of the trauma based on the actual fear-causing event. At your discretion, you can also apply a trauma when a character undergoes a particularly stressful encounter that results in them exceeding their strain threshold and falling unconscious. In this case, the exact trauma is up to you, but it should relate in some way to what caused the strain and to the intensity of the encounter. A near-lethal combat encounter, for example, might lead to a Phobia linked to bloodshed. Should a character gain the same trauma as one they already possess, they gain a trauma one severity level higher instead.

☠ on a successful fear check can be spent to remove one mental trauma that has an associated severity level that is the same as or less than the difficulty of the fear check. (For example, a successful **Hard** [◆◆◆] **fear check** with ☠ could be used to remove a single Delusion, Phobia, or Obsession.) With your permission, traumas might also be removed (perhaps temporarily) via other methods such as intense meditation, therapy, medication, or similar means.

You and the player should determine the specifics concerning the character's trauma based on the encounter that created the trauma, and work this into the character's behavior. After all, these traumas should be as much roleplaying prompts as they are mechanical effects. In addition, while a character suffers from one of these traumas, you can spend ⚡ and ☠ from any checks they make to add additional effects to their growing insanity. You can also invent similar effects based off the ones described here.

INTRIGUE

The Queen got us and the Chancellor's self-incriminating letter into the King's war room. We proudly displayed the evidence. Silence. The King declared the letter his master plan to reveal enemy spies and said our interception had destroyed it. Worse, he ordered us and the Queen arrested for taking the letter from a diplomatically protected pouch. As we were led away, his smile told us more—it was a trap set for us, not any spy. The Queen's faction couldn't stop him now.

Do your players like matching wits with you or other players? Do their characters like gaming a setting's social or governmental systems? Do they like outwardly pursuing one goal, but following ulterior motives? They may like intrigue-focused adventures.

Intrigues feature politics, underhanded dealings, betrayals, and shifting alliances. They encourage roleplaying and character background development. Detailed backgrounds provide deeper story connections. Political conflicts range from personal battles within a small group to political maneuvers that can change the world.

WHY USE INTRIGUE?

Intrigue adventures use information manipulation and secrets to inject twists and suspense into the story. Characters have to use investigative skills, persuasive abilities, deductive reasoning, deal making, and diplomacy to defeat their foes when violence isn't an alternative.

Intrigue-focused adventures engage different levels of the setting's society or political intensity. Circumstances can force even relatively inexperienced characters into events of national consequence. The characters swept along with great events might fight to guide or survive them. Intrigue-focused adventures let the players take the lead in their characters' story development. They will actively drive the story to meet their goal, creating plans and taking actions toward their ultimate ends.

THEMES OF INTRIGUE

Intrigue-themed adventures differ based on the politics involved. The intrigue of a royal court is going to play out differently than conflicts between criminal syndicates. Intrigue-focused conflicts are defined by the societal expectations and laws that govern the circumstances, as well as by how and when those rules are broken. Political gamesmanship requires the characters to

understand how far they may bend and stretch societal rules before the backlash hinders their plans.

Small-group intrigue focuses on interpersonal rivalries. It features risks and consequences that are important to the group, but mean little to anyone else. Examples include poor families, groups isolated from civilization, competing small businesses, and groups of friends.

Criminal intrigue features illegal dealings. The groups involved range from rival gangs and competing criminal syndicates to powerful cartels that threaten levels of government. Criminal intrigue involves at least three levels of intrigue. One concerns a character's relationship with their immediate associates and boss. The second concerns the character's reputation among the general public. The third concerns the character's relationship to law enforcement. When your players have to consider all three levels at once before taking any action, intrigue and social manipulation become their default tool.

Noble intrigue focuses on the workings of a particular royal court, where one individual or family holds considerable power over everyone else. The politics may include other nobles and rival governments. Everyone involved in the court has their own agenda and goal, and knows how much they're willing to risk to win. Their limits range from social embarrassment to murder. Noble-style politics also work for organizations such as corporations.

Political intrigue is similar to noble intrigue. However, if the political system resembles most modern political systems, you can add different departments jockeying for influence, reporters digging for a story, and the public perception of events to your game. Generally, political intrigue has characters working within a system to accomplish their goals. If they try to do something illicit or illegal, they risk discovery and destruction in the public eye.

RUNNING INTRIGUE-THEMED GAMES

What your PCs know about the people they interact with is the focus of a game with a tone of intrigue. Motivations and backgrounds are very important, as these provide potential levers for your PCs to discover and use to manipulate an opponent.

The adventure needs a difficult goal, requiring some cooperation between PC and NPC rivals and opponents. The PCs must have an initial idea of how to accomplish this ultimate goal, but not the means. They must make discoveries, negotiate deals, and find ways to get others to reveal vital information. There should never be only one way to achieve the goal.

When you build an intrigue-focused adventure, make sure you add different layers of intrigue. When your players discover important secrets, they should also unlock new opportunities. They should be shocked or horrified to discover allies that are actually enemies, and suffer betrayals of trust. The following are some possible points of intrigue. You should review them, and add at least one to every major NPC and organization in your adventure.

POINTS OF INTRIGUE

- The character's current position, its stability, and the character's desired position.
- The character's visible weaknesses, such as gambling or bad temperament.
- The character's secret weaknesses, such as vices, connections, or mistakes from their past. Maybe the character doesn't even know about this weakness!
- The character's visible strengths that can be used against rivals.
- The character's hidden strengths that could surprise the PCs and derail their plans.
- Who are the character's allies, underlings, and opponents? Are they vulnerable to PC manipulation?
- How far will this character go to get what they

MYSTERY

They broke into the starship's bridge only to find the captain and ambassador both dead. Their course brings them back to Earth in just seventy-two hours. In a ship with fifty passengers and crew, can they solve the murders before the killer vanishes amongst Earth's teeming masses?

Does your gaming group love puzzles and extended roleplaying sessions? Mystery is a classic storytelling construct that shifts the focus of games from fighting monsters to social interactions and deductive reasoning. A great mystery will get your players just as invested in solving it as their characters are!

WHY USE MYSTERY?

Everyone loves a good mystery. It's fun to solve a challenging puzzle, brainstorming how the pieces fit together and seeing how assumptions and conclusions change when new clues are revealed. Drama and suspense grow when

want? Every character should have limits, and most shouldn't want to violate the law or societal norms.

- Who are the character's relatives and friends, and how strong is the bond between them?

Major revelations are key moments. Plan them like you would a major combat or critical social encounter. While you can't control what the PCs reveal, you can set up what they learn. Given that the players might not immediately put two and two together in the midst of the game, consider having a few notes prepared ahead of time. You can hand them out, pointing out connections that they may not immediately think of, but that their characters would. Overuse of this method takes away some of the fun of working things out for themselves.

NEW RULES: MAJOR REVELATION

When a major revelation appears, you can use this rule to see if your PCs recognize how important it is.

One PC should make an **Average (◆◆) Knowledge, Negotiation, or Perception check**, depending on what best fits the situation. If this check is successful, the PC sees a way to use the revelation to their advantage, and the group upgrades the ability of checks related to that revelation until the end of the session. If they fail, they misread the situation and upgrade the difficulty of those checks instead.

characters confront possible thieves, murderers, kidnapers, or worse. There are unexpected twists, false accusations, and red herrings to complicate matters.

Mysteries can occur in any setting. While the specifics may change, people—and crimes—stay largely the same. Burglary, con games, kidnappings, and murder can happen anywhere, and the perpetrator can be anyone from a malfunctioning AI or evil elf to a regular person.

A mystery can make a great change of pace for your group. Mysteries can have a lot less violence, giving your PCs a chance to recuperate after a combat-heavy session. They also let your players engage in serious roleplaying and exercise their characters' social skills.

THEMES IN MYSTERY

Mysteries are easily divided by the type of crime or mysterious situation involved. Your PCs might pursue kidnapers, a crafty cat burglar, or a terrifying murderer. Each brings its own challenges. Kidnapers might impose a time limit to find the victim. Exposing a cat burglar might mean infiltrating high society to take

down a socialite turned thief. A murderer might be picking off victims as fast as the characters talk to them.

Locations also contribute to the theme. Classic whodunit thrillers isolate a group of characters in a house, train, or other location that prevents anyone from leaving. This limits the pool of suspects, as well as increasing the suspense (since everyone knows the perpetrator is present). Murder mysteries can happen anywhere, but a murder at a society function feels very different than a knifing in a back alley. And kidnappings can involve moving the victim to exotic new locales, forcing your PCs to follow.

RUNNING MYSTERY-THEMED GAMES

First, decide how light or dark you want your mystery to be. A lighthearted mystery may involve a crime against property, not a murder or kidnapping. However, you can make life-threatening mysteries more lighthearted by not threatening the PCs or anyone they care about. Conversely, a darker story targets your player's characters and their friends, upping the tension and stakes.

Second, you need to invent the actual mystery. That means you have to invent the crime, which you can do by answering these questions.

- Who carried out the crime?
- Why did they do it?

- How did they do it?
- Where did they do it?
- What did they do it with?
- Who are the victims? Did the perpetrator know them?
- Who are the witnesses, if any?
- What will the perpetrator do to protect themselves?
- What were the flaws in the plan (if there was a plan)? What went wrong during the crime?

The answers to these questions also help you build the clues you will reveal to the PCs as they investigate. As you answer each question, invent a related clue that the PCs can discover. Keep a list so you can mark off clues as your PCs discover them. Keep in mind that mysteries are never straightforward affairs, which is what makes them good puzzles. Each clue should lead to multiple conclusions, so that your group needs to discover multiple clues to figure out which conclusion they have in common.

You'll also get help from the player theories about what is going on. Pay attention, as they also let you know how well you are conveying the information. If the PCs' theories are far afield from what actually happened, you may need to clarify some clues or provide some new ones. Your players can follow a red herring, but you don't want them to do so over multiple sessions!

PULP

Somehow, the professor managed to convince the university to send a team out to the midst of the Atlantic Ocean. Their old, rusty research vessel attested to the school's limited resources and the skeptical opinions of his preposterous theory. Everyone donned their clunky brass diving suit and descended into the deep. To their surprise, a light greeted them at the bottom. Many lights. A city. Atlantis was real. What's more, it was still alive.

Are you looking to play some high-action tales, fantastic weird stories, or gritty, hard-boiled crime adventures? Pulp originally referred to inexpensive fiction magazines printed on cheap, low-quality wood pulp paper in the early to mid-1900s. These magazines were full of weird stories and action-packed adventures—big on excitement even if they were a bit short on character development. Pulp covered a wide variety of genres characterized by an adventuresome spirit and larger-than-life story elements, and the genre ended up influencing comics, stories, and movies right up to present day.

WHY USE PULP?

Pulp stories are exceptionally well-suited to the casual, fantastic action and melodramatic plots that are common to many RPG genres and adventures. Obviously, this is in part because those same RPG settings grew from those original or influential sources. Pulp includes fantasy, horror, Westerns, true crime or hard-boiled crime mysteries, science fiction, and romance.

The tropes of pulp-style adventures are very recognizable. These include expeditions into dangerous wildernesses, clashes between high-society and criminal elements, encounters with horrifying creatures, and battles with evil villains whose motivations seem more about acting the part than accomplishing a reasonable goal.

Your players may generate characters who embody equally recognizable tropes. These might include a retired military commander, a bold but arrogant wannabe hero, a naïve individual on their first adventure, a cynical expert marksman, and more. All of these make pulp a very accessible tone that is easy to roleplay.

THEMES IN PULP

Adventuring for adventuring's sake is a common pulp theme. Your characters may play brave explorers entering a strange wilderness or dangerous location, maybe to make some discovery, maybe to find lost treasures.

"Hard-boiled" crime dramas are classic pulp. This tone is often combined with the mystery tone (see pages 246). However, your crime drama doesn't have to be a mystery. Perhaps your group knows who the perpetrator is and needs to either find evidence to bring them to justice or take them down "the hard way."

Westerns are another pulp classic that you can modernize for a present-day adventure or adapt to a space opera setting. Westerns often focus on the hard life on the edges of civilization, and surviving with only yourself, your friends, and your trusty six-shooter to rely on.

Pulp can also focus on fighting strange and terrifying supernatural creatures. Obviously, this makes sense for pairing pulp and horror. However, a pulp/horror game focuses less on the devastating psychological damage these creatures cause and more on defeating such threats with dynamite and a tommy gun.

RUNNING PULP-THEMED GAMES

Pulp-themed games are filled with adventure. You'll want the characters to take risky actions. To encourage that, make most of your encounters less dangerous or easier for your group to overcome. This emphasizes the larger-than-life action hero element of the characters, and lets you ramp up the danger during climactic encounters to make them more suspenseful.

Use story tropes to your advantage. Play them up to reinforce the theme in the players' minds. Don't be afraid to use melodramatic or cliché elements. The zombies are

always slow, or the criminal mastermind always gives away their plot. Clichés can be central to your story, but even as lesser encounters they support the tone.

Pulp stories are often serialized. Stories are broken up into sections with natural breaks in the action, and often they end abruptly in a climactic moment. This latter technique is called the cliffhanger. It introduces an element of danger and mystery to the main character's fate, right at the end of the story or scene. It encourages the audience to seek out the next segment of the story to find out what happens next. Periodically use this technique to further enhance the pulp feel of your adventures.

NEW RULES: THE CLIFFHANGER

The cliffhanger is a classic trope used to leave the end of a story unresolved and the main characters in immediate danger. You may use this rule at the end of a game session that is not the end of the adventure, or at a major encounter important to the story. At the end of the session or encounter, the PCs are left in immediate peril. At the beginning of the next session (or encounter), place all Story Points in the player pool. The PCs may use these points in one of the following ways:

- As normal while trying to escape the situation.
- By spending all of the points immediately to narratively describe escaping the situation. The players should describe the desired actions of their characters and reactions by the NPCs. You must approve of the events and the outcome, altering only what is necessary to preserve important story or plot elements.
- By spending all of the points to immediately restore one or more dead or incapacitated characters, indicating a miraculous recovery or narrow escape. These characters heal half of their wounds and all of their strain. The PCs then play out the scene.

ROMANCE AND DRAMA

Commander Sinclair stormed into the ambassador's office, slamming the door behind him. "You cold-hearted bastard!"

The ambassador sighed. "I...I had no choice, John. When you told me you'd be rotated back to the capital, I had to use your fleet's absence as leverage in the negotiations. ...I never wanted to hurt you."

Sinclair leaned over the desk, teeth set and tears welling in his eyes. "Too late for that, Vance. What we had between us was...I thought it was special. But now, I'll remember your betrayal forever."

So, have you or your group had enough combat for a while? Are you looking to work new elements into your games? Do your player characters need more story-based development or personal involvement in other aspects of the game setting? Adventures featuring drama, romance, or both may fit the bill.

While romance and drama don't have to be featured simultaneously, they naturally work together. Love and romance are often very dramatic, after all. These tones work well in games with more mature or serious themes, as well as in games that focus on character development and social interactions.

WHY USE ROMANCE AND DRAMA?

Drama requires emotional involvement, conflict, threats, and risks. It highlights interpersonal play between members of the party and NPCs. Drama adds a more serious tone to a game, and even lighter moments affect the tension between characters. If your group wants serious stories, you should add in some drama.

Romance brings different roleplaying and character development opportunities to the table. It could be as simple as romantic involvement between PCs or between a PC and an NPC. However, romantic relationships are no easier to create and maintain in your game than they are in real life, which usually leads to drama. Romance between characters doesn't have to be an adventure's focus. It can work well as a subplot in a larger story. If you're looking to add a layer of character development to an adventure, romance can work well.

THEMES IN ROMANCE AND DRAMA

Drama tends to focus on realistic conflicts and situations, though these can be adapted to fantasy and other fictional environments. The story should move the PCs emotionally (and hopefully your players are a bit moved, too). Subgenres can provide variations when adapted to your setting:

- Courtroom dramas and other investigative stories build tension as your characters reveal evidence and build to a moment of truth with the verdict.
- Historical and alternate history stories can place the players right in the heart of dramatic times. Period pieces are similar, focusing the story on the physical trappings and social rules of the time.
- Melodramas are highly emotional tales that specifically exaggerate characters or storylines in ways that trade realism for story impact. This can work well in roleplaying games where there may be much less time to develop characters and stories.
- Tragedies are classic drama, highlighting character flaws that ultimately destroy a character. If your players don't want to see their characters destroyed, consider doing this with a prominent NPC instead.

Romance tends to apply to subplots in a larger adventure (and most stories have some sort of romantic subplot in them). Even when romance is the focus of the story, there is almost always something else in the narrative that generates a conflict that characters need to overcome. This is often some dramatic element (hence the pairing of these tones), but it can also be an investigation, diplomatic mission, or even straight-up fight. Therefore, a romance's themes tend to be colored by the conflicts it runs alongside.

ROMANTIC AWKWARDNESS

Romantic actions and conversations can be difficult for you and your group to play out. As many players are friends or relatives, romantic scenes can lead to some potentially awkward conversations. Before starting an adventure or scene focusing on romance, you should discuss with your players how they would like to handle it. Some may prefer to avoid any descriptive details and use the mechanics of skill checks to figure out the results. Others may enjoy a narrative approach. Either method works if the players are having fun.

RUNNING ROMANCE- AND DRAMA-THEMED GAMES

Resolving conflicts is the basis of drama. Conflict occurs in many forms and at many levels of intensity, so not every scene rates life-altering importance. You want the scenes to build up tension and suspense, at least at an incremental pace. Ideally, the characters learn new elements that help them resolve the conflict or find reasons behind its existence or possible end. If one aspect of the drama resolves itself, you want a new situation to emerge as a result. It may not be immediately apparent, however, and some conflicts should end completely to prevent the players from feeling like their efforts are futile.

Romance can generate some of these conflicts. If you're working a new romantic plot into your game, you'll need to start with the initial attraction between the two characters. Whether or not the characters pursue the romance is the first conflict. If they do, work some obstacles in, such as disapproving family members, conflicting political or religious viewpoints, or even another love interest! After the characters overcome these obstacles (or don't), you can keep the romance plot going by introducing an occasional conflict into the story. Perhaps a love interest feels ignored by a PC who constantly leaves them to go on adventures. Maybe the relationship ends up producing children. Or perhaps a villain kidnaps a love interest to get at the PC.

NEW RULES: METAGAME MANEUVERING

In games with lots of drama and romance, your players are probably going to know more than their characters about a situation. Why not take advantage of that?

If a player character believes a lie or takes harmful actions directly due to the manipulations of others (in other words, if the player knows the action is against their PC's best interests), you should remove one Story Point from the GM pool and add it to the player pool.

SUPERHEROES

They staggered out of the Panopticon's secret exit into the morning sun, weary but still joking about the battle. It took all night, but the Death Hive was finally contained and safely buried underground in hyperstasis. A request for the Star Patrol to retrieve the alien gestalt, a review of the week's duty roster, and now they could get back to their daily lives. That was, until Halcyon spotted Doctor Zed's venomship streaking toward the Moon. Tired or not, this looked like a job for the Ultra Union.

Get ready for costumed adventurers and superhuman abilities when you use superheroes! With this tone, settings can be transformed to include mad science, post-human characters, alien allies, secret identities, intelligent robots, urban vigilantes, and more. PCs here can face supervillains and planetary-scale threats in campaigns where this happens all the time. So, put on your mask and don your cape—it's time to save the world!

WHY USE SUPERHEROES?

Superheroes can be sources of great fun for players and GMs alike. They can also fit into any setting. Modern adventures with characters who live ordinary lives when not adopting their alter egos are perhaps the most familiar. PCs could also be interstellar heroes who police the stars in space opera, steampunk characters in clanking battlesuits fighting against laser-firing zeppelins, or even weird war super-soldiers as powerful as battleships.

The superhero tone inherently brings a grand scale of action as well. Characters capable of leaping over tall buildings or lifting locomotives inherently require suitable challenges, after all. Such adventures are often filled with dramatic tension, where failure could mean a villain conquering the world, meteors devastating cities, or even the end of all reality. Even in games in which highly skilled humans fight crime, the risks should be high, ranging from gunfire injuries to unmasking. From halting volcanoes to halting a mugging, the action is always serious, even if the characters might toss puns as fast as their fists.

THEMES IN SUPERHERO GAMES

Superhero games are a great way to explore many themes, especially those about the nature of individual effort, something important in most roleplaying games. PCs here often have extra-normal powers that make them stand out from the rest of humanity. Even when

in groups or acting behind masks, they can be icons to show how everyone can individually make a difference.

Identification is another major theme given that many superheroes hide their identity behind a mask or disguise. They might do this to protect themselves or loved ones. Some superheroes might believe their costumed persona is their true identity, through which they can act without societal repercussions. Other characters might not even bother with alter egos, whether due to a desire for fame or simply because it is not how their world works. Maintaining a secret identity is a lot of work, but players could find this as rewarding as the actual heroics—after all, there will likely be many eager to learn who is hiding behind those masks.

Another important theme is how the players relate to local laws and governments. Are they acting in conjunction with standard law enforcement, perhaps even officially supported? Do they act above the law, or against it should they view it as counter to their own code? Here they might fight against corrupt officials as much as against street-level crime.

Given the powers these characters can possess, their own morality might be all that keeps them in check. Thus, conflicting moral codes can be even more powerful. Some characters might refuse to kill or even use guns, while others might have no problem with permanent solutions to their problems. How the PCs resolve situations where lethal force is a tempting solution can make for excellent games.

Last are the themes of character motivation. Is it to fight crime, gain vengeance, or punish the wicked? Or is aiding the helpless and guarding humanity what makes them don their mask? Others might do this just for the excitement of it all or a feeling their gifts are wasted unless they use them. Differing motivations in the group means differences in how characters react to situations and act to resolve them, and might even lead to hero vs. hero battles—a common trope for this tone.

RUNNING SUPERHERO-THEMED GAMES

World-building is perhaps the most important step when using this tone. How did superpowers arise? Have they always been around (perhaps even commonplace), or is this a new, possibly frightening, occurrence? It's even possible the PCs are the only superheroes in this world and share a common origin story. This could tie into their operation as a superteam, perhaps with their own joint headquarters. Even without

YOU'RE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR VILLAIN

The one thing that really makes a superhero adventure work is the archnemesis. No matter the type of campaign, your PCs need to face powerful challenges, and the best have a face behind them. Developing villains to battle your group should be an important part of running a superhero-themed game, and grand fun for you, too.

First off, try to match villains to your players. A scientific genius or magic-using villain would be a good match for groups strong on raw powers, for example. A powerful corporate conspiracy could bedevil those keen on urban patrols or crimebusting. A good villain is the antitheses to the heroes, after all!

Like all antagonists, supervillains should also evolve and grow just like the players. No great villain stays down for long, regardless of the apparently permanent nature of their demise. They should always be ready to show up again, sporting a new bionic arm, costume, superpower, and of course, a renewed desire for vengeance!

powers, the characters might decide to join together to more effectively achieve their common goals.

While most groups aren't that concerned over their characters' clothing, here costumes are a vital element in games. They might be designed to protect the wearer, frighten criminals, stow weaponry (or even be weapons themselves in the case of battlesuits), or loudly identify the superhero's costumed identity to everyone nearby. Most also act to hide real identities, perhaps their most important function. Make sure all the players firmly establish their costumes (assuming they chose to use them) as part of character creation. Changes to their costumes should be major events, perhaps reflecting a new heroic name or operating style.

Even the language of this tone should be a factor in games. How would fellow superheroes address each other, or the public? Would they use real names when in costume, assuming they even know that information? And when they are out of costume, do they talk and act differently to maintain their alter egos? Some might even work to develop their real identity into a radically different persona, to aid in maintaining their life out of costume.

Given the nature of this tone, most players will want to start their characters with existing powers. They should work with you, the GM, to identify such abilities. This should be tied to the power level the group has decided is

appropriate for the campaign. It could be that no one has actual superpowers—that though they wear costumes and fight crime, they are all just very skilled humans. Alternatively, characters could have godlike strength, sound-barrier-cracking speed, flight, and other classic abilities from comic books. Our super-characteristics rule represents this to some extent, and you can also use the magic rules and rules for constructing new talents to invent new superhuman abilities.

NEW RULES: NO MERE MORTAL

Superhero-themed games assume that the PCs are stronger, faster, and better than average people right from character creation. To represent this, during character creation, increase each PC's starting XP by 50 (this can be spent on characteristics) and allow them to increase skills to rank 3.

In addition, since superheroes traditionally fight with their fists, you should allow PCs and supervillains to deal base damage equal to twice their Brawn when making unarmed attacks.

NO MERE MORTAL: PUNY MINIONS

If you want your PCs to feel a cut above regular mortals, you can take the No Mere Mortal rule one step further. When a minion or minion group attacks a PC or supervillain, their attack can inflict a maximum of 1 wound or strain after damage reduction.

NEW RULES: SUPER-CHARACTERISTICS

Super-characteristics represent your characters having attributes that are more than human. Even superheroes who are nominally "normal" people tend to display superior Cunning, Intellect, or other characteristics in a superhero-themed game, so this applies to any superhero.

During character creation, your players should select two of their character's six characteristics. These are their character's **super-characteristics**—super strength, super speed or agility, or super intelligence, for example. You should also do this whenever you create a nemesis NPC that you intend to be a supervillain.

When a character makes a check based on one of their super-characteristics, if the check generates a ⚰, immediately roll an additional 🟡 into the pool. If that 🟡 generates another ⚰, then roll an additional 🟡 into the pool again. The player still gets to resolve all of the ⚰ as usual.

This can lead to some impressive results with lots of ⚰, which you should interpret as appropriately "super." Brawl checks punch opponents into the stratosphere, Coordination checks catch civilians falling hundreds of feet, and Perception checks hear what's going on miles away.

INDEX

A

Accurate (quality)	86, 200
action	
activate an ability	101
perform a combat check	101
perform a skill check	101
actions	97, 101
exchange for maneuver	101
adversaries	131, 202
fantasy	146
modern day	169
science fiction	178
space opera	187
steampunk	157
weird war	163
Adversary (talent)	131
Agility	14
Alchemy (skill)	57
Animal Companion (talent)	77
animalistic alien (species)	182
Arcana (skill)	70
archetypes	35, 192
create an archetype	192
Aristocrat (archetype)	39
armor	92, 198
assistance	26, 98
Astrocartography (skill)	57
Athletics (skill)	58
attack	101
Auto-fire (quality)	86
Average Human (archetype)	36

B

Barrel Roll (talent)	77
Basic Military Training (talent)	75
Berserk (talent)	75
bioroid (species)	174
Blast (quality)	86, 200
Bought Info (talent)	72
Brawl (skill)	67
Brawn	14
Breach (quality)	87, 200
Burn (quality)	87, 200

C

Can't We Talk About This? (talent)	79
career	40
character	
archetype	33, 35
background	33, 34
career	34, 40
generation	33
Motivation	34, 46
species	33, 35
characteristics	13
Charm (skill)	54
checks	
assisted	26
combat	101
competitive	26
opposed	25
Clever Retort (talent)	73
clone (species)	174
Coercion (skill)	55
collisions	222
combat check	101
Computers (skill)	58
concealment	110
Concentrate	218
Concussive (quality)	87, 200
Cool (skill)	59
Coordinated Assault (talent)	75

Coordination (skill)	59
corrosive atmosphere	111
Counteroffer (talent)	75
Counterspell	218
cover	110
Critical Hits	230, 231
Critical Injuries	89, 114, 115
recovery	117
critical remarks	123
Cumbersome (quality)	87, 200
Cunning	15
cybernetics	177

D

damage	102, 112
Daring Aviator (talent)	75
Deadeye (talent)	79
death	116
Deception (skill)	56
Dedication (talent)	81
defense	31, 92, 198
melee	105
ranged	105
starting	46
Defensive Driving (talent)	80
Defensive (quality)	87, 200
Defensive Stance (talent)	75
Defensive Sysops (Improved) (talent)	76
Defensive Sysops (talent)	73
Defensive (talent)	80
Deflection (quality)	87, 200
Desire (Motivation)	47
Desperate Recovery (talent)	73
dice	

Ability	9
Boost	9, 20
Challenge	10
Difficulty	10
percentile	11
pool	13, 19
Proficiency	9
Setback	10, 20
ten-sided	11
difficult terrain	110
difficulty	16, 20
Average	17
Daunting	18
Easy	17
Formidable	18
Hard	17
Impossible	18
Simple	16
Discipline (skill)	60
disoriented	87, 114
Disorient (quality)	87, 200
Distinctive Style (talent)	78
Divine (skill)	70
Dodge (talent)	78
downgrade	21
Driving (skill)	60
Druid (career)	43
Dual Wielder (talent)	76
Duelist (talent)	73
Durable (talent)	73
dwarf (species)	142

E

Eagle Eyes (talent)	78
elf (species)	142
encounters	239
encumbrance	84, 198
threshold	85
Enduring (talent)	80

Ensnare (quality)	87, 200
Entertainer (career)	40
experience points	30, 34, 129
spending	44
Explorer (career)	41

F

falling	112
fantasy (setting)	138
Fan the Hammer (talent)	76
fear	243
Fear (Motivation)	48
Field Commander (Improved) (talent)	80
Field Commander (talent)	78
Fighter Pilot (career)	42
fire	111
Flaw (Motivation)	49
flying	100
Forager (talent)	73
Forgot to Count? (talent)	78
Full Throttle (talent)	78

G

Game Master	6, 125
gang leader (adversary)	134
gear	93, 197
gravity	110
Grenadier (talent)	78
Grit (talent)	73
Guided (quality)	87, 200
Gunnery (skill)	69

H

Hacker (career)	42
hacking	232
actions	233
Hamstring Shot (talent)	73
handling	220
Healer (career)	41
healing	116
Heightened Awareness (talent)	76
Heroic Will (talent)	79
Horror (tone)	242
How Convenient! (talent)	80
hull trauma	222
hull trauma threshold	222

I

immobilized	114
impassable terrain	110
improvised weapons	109
Inaccurate (quality)	87, 200
incidentals	96, 97
Indomitable (talent)	81
Inferior (quality)	88
Initiative	95, 129
Inspiring Rhetoric (Improved) (talent)	78
Inspiring Rhetoric (Supreme) (talent)	80
Inspiring Rhetoric (talent)	76
Intellect	15
Intellectual (archetype)	38
Intrigue (tone)	245
Inventor (talent)	76
items	82, 197
attachments	206
fantasy	143
hard points	206
maintenance	89
modern	165
qualities	86, 199
science fiction	175
setting specific	143, 153, 161, 165, 175, 184
space opera	184

steampunk	153
weird war	161
J	
Jump Up (talent)	73
K	
Knack for It (talent)	73
Knight (career)	42
Knockdown (quality)	88
Knowledge (skill)	66
Know Somebody (talent)	74
L	
Laborer (archetype)	37
Leader (career)	41
Leadership (skill)	56
Let's Ride (talent)	74
Limited Ammo (quality)	88, 200
Linked (quality)	88, 200
Lucky Strike (talent)	76
M	
Mad Inventor (talent)	80
Mad Scientist (career)	43
magic	210
magic implements	218
maneuvers	97
aim	97
assist	98
guarded stance	99
interact with the environment	99
manage gear	99
mount or dismount	99
move	100
preparation	100
stand or drop prone	100
Master (talent)	81
Mechanics (skill)	60
Medicine (skill)	61
melee attack	103
Melee (Heavy) (skill)	68
Melee (Light) (skill)	68
Melee (skill)	67
minions	131
modern day (setting)	164
mongrel (species)	152
Motivations	46, 123, 129
Mystery (tone)	246
N	
Narrative Dice System	6, 130
narrative gameplay	95
Natural (talent)	79
Negotiation (skill)	56
nemeses	133
extra activations	205
O	
One with Nature (talent)	74
Operating (skill)	62
orc (species)	143
Overcharge (Improved) (talent)	81
Overcharge (talent)	80
P	
painkiller (item)	94
painkillers	94, 116
Painkiller Specialization (talent)	79
Parry (Improved) (talent)	79
Parry (talent)	74
Perception (skill)	62
Pierce (quality)	88, 200
Piloting (skill)	62
planetary scale	224
Prepare (quality)	88, 200
Presence	15

Priest (career)	43
Primal (skill)	70
prone	108
Proper Upbringing (talent)	74
psionic (species)	182
Pulp (tone)	247
Q	
Quick Draw (talent)	74
Quick Strike (talent)	74
R	
range	105
bands	105
engaged	106
extreme	107
long	106
medium	106
short	106
strategic	224
ranged attack	102, 103
Ranged (Light) (skill)	68
Ranged (skill)	68, 69
Rapid Archery (talent)	79
Rapid Reaction (talent)	74
rarity	82
Reinforced (quality)	88
Resilience (skill)	63
revenant (archetype)	152
Riding (skill)	63
rivals	132
robot (species)	183
Romance and Drama (tone)	248
Ruinous Repartee (talent)	81
Rule Zero	125
S	
sanity	244
Scathing Tirade (Improved) (talent)	79
Scathing Tirade (Supreme) (talent)	81
Scathing Tirade (talent)	77
science fiction (setting)	170
Scoundrel (career)	41
Second Wind (talent)	74
Side Step (talent)	77
silhouette	109, 222
skills	16, 52, 190
combat	67
creating new skills	190
general	57
knowledge	66
magic	70
social	54
Skulduggery (skill)	64
Slow-Firing (quality)	88, 200
soak	31, 92, 105, 198
starting	46
social encounters	118
Socialite (career)	41
Soldier (career)	41
space opera (setting)	179
species	192
create a species	192
speed	221
spellcasters	210
spells	211
Attack	212, 215
Augment	212, 215
Barrier	212, 216
Conjure	212, 216
Curse	213, 217
Dispel	213, 217
Heal	214, 217
Utility	214
staggered	114
Starship Captain (career)	43
Stealth (skill)	64
steampunk (setting)	148
Story Points	27, 129

Story pools	28
strain	113
strain threshold	31, 113, 122, 193
starting	45
street tough (adversary)	134
Streetwise (skill)	65
Strength (Motivation)	48
structured gameplay	95
Stun Damage (quality)	88
Stun (quality)	88, 200
suffocation	112
Sunder (quality)	88
Superheroes (tones)	250
Superior (quality)	88
Surgeon (talent)	74
Survival (skill)	65
Swift (talent)	75
swimming	111
symbols	
Advantage	11, 23
Despair	13, 24
Failure	12, 23
Success	11, 23
Threat	12, 23
Triumph	12, 24
system strain	223
system strain threshold	223
T	
talents	27, 71, 194
activation	72, 195
tiers	71, 195
tones	241
Toughened (talent)	75
Tractor (quality)	89
Tradesperson (career)	42
two-weapon combat	108
U	
unarmed combat	108
Unremarkable (talent)	75
Unwieldy (quality)	89, 200
upgrade	21
V	
vacuum	111
vanguard (species)	183
vehicle actions	227
Additional Vehicle Actions	230
Blanket Barrage	228
Concentrated Barrage	228
Damage Control	228
Dangerous Driving	227
Gain the Advantage	229
Perform a Combat Check	230
vehicle maneuvers	226
Accelerate	226
Brace for Impact	227
Decelerate	227
Evade	227
Reposition	227
vehicles	220
actions	227
combat	225
Critical Hits	231
maneuvers	226
Vicious (quality)	89, 200
Vigilance (skill)	65
W	
weapons	90, 199
weird war (setting)	158
Willpower	15
Wizard (career)	43
wounds	112
wound threshold	31, 112, 193
starting	45

MOTIVATIONS

STRENGTH:

FLAW:

DESIRE:

FEAR:

CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

GENDER:

AGE:

HEIGHT:

BUILD:

HAIR:

EYES:

NOTABLE FEATURES:

MONEY:

EQUIPMENT LOG

WEAPONS & ARMOR:

PERSONAL GEAR:

NOTES

CRITICAL INJURIES

SEVERITY

RESULT

◇◇◇◇	_____
◇◇◇◇	_____
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TALENTS AND SPECIAL ABILITIES

NAME

PAGE #

ABILITY SUMMARY

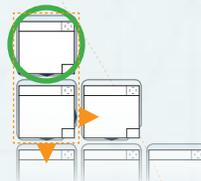
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TALENT PYRAMID

PURCHASING TALENTS

This sheet tracks the talents that you purchase for your character. When you purchase your character's first Tier 1 talent, record it in the upper leftmost box in the Tier 1 column.

When purchasing talents, your character must have more talents in a tier than they do in the next highest tier.



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TIER 1
5XP

TIER 2
10XP

TIER 3
15XP

TIER 4
20XP

TIER 5
25XP

GENESYS

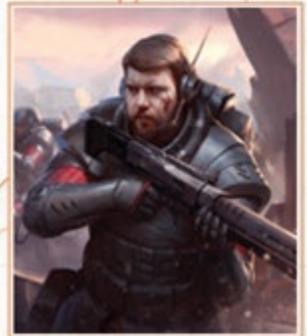


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