BLADES IN THE DARK

QUICK START KIT
VERSION III
ONE SEVEN DESIGN
About This Quick Start PDF

This quick start gives you the basics so you can start playing Blades before the final game is released. By definition, it’s missing some pieces, particularly some instructional text and examples as well as the full guide to Duskwall city which will be in the final game. As such, it’s a document that you’ll have to interpret and bolster with your own understanding of roleplaying practices. If you’re brand-new to RPGs, maybe ask a more experienced friend to run this for you.

I’m so excited to share the complete game with you (plus all the amazing add-ons you unlocked during the project). Until then, I hope you can have fun playing with this incomplete shard.

If you have questions or want to give feedback, head over to the G+ Community:
https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/112767357581554417629

The people there are helpful and friendly and I’m usually on hand to answer questions, too.

Please feel free to talk about the game online and share your experiences from actual play. However, this PDF is for backers of the Blades in the Dark kickstarter only, so please don’t redistribute it. Thanks!

Attention Game Hackers

If you’re excited to use this game as the basis for a hack or your own game design, I’m glad to hear it! But be advised:

There will eventually be a CC-licensed, SRD kind of thing for Blades. This is not it! So hold your horses on doing any kind of full-on supplements or creating actual products or anything. That will come along once the full game is launched. I know you’re hyped to make stuff. Which is great! But I’ll have a more polished final version for you at launch later this year. In the mean time, go ahead and toy around, just in moderation.

Version III Changelog

If you played previous versions of the Quick Start, you’ll find a lot of changes here. This is good and normal! The game design was initially tested with a smaller group of players (about 100, all with common experience in gaming) in order to get 90% finished. Now that’s it’s been out in the wider world, I’ve gotten a lot of great feedback on how to tweak the game to make it more successful across a wider spectrum of gamers. Imagine the game as an aircraft going from its flying prototype into the production model. A few modules get pulled out, and the rest all get tightened down, simplified, and standardized.

1. New actions! The Stalk action is gone; it’s now covered by Hunt (which also covers shooting). Slip and Secure have been combined into one action: Finesse. Murder and Mayhem are gone; for melee combat, use the new Skirmish action. For destroying stuff or employing sabotage, use the new Wreck action. For a description of all the actions, see page 22.

2. Attributes! The 12 actions of the game are grouped into 3 sets. These sets are called attributes. They are: Insight, Prowess, and Resolve. See page 8 for details.

3. Effect ratings and effect rolls are gone. Effect levels are determined by the situation, modified by the action roll result. Abilities and items which formerly added effect dice now add +1 effect level. Resistance rolls are now made with Attributes.

4. Modified Actions rolls. The results from the three action rolls have been clarified and standardized, so they’re easier to use. Also, the names of the rolls have been changed to Dominant, Daring, and Desperate. The old names (Controlled, Risky, Desperate) were a little confusing since situations are never really controlled, and any situation can be considered risky.

5. The Fortune Roll. The GM now has a simple roll they can use to establish outcomes outside the PC’s actions. You can make a fortune roll to find out how a faction fares in a conflict, how well-prepared an enemy crew is, how much evidence the Bluecoats collect from a crime scene, etc.

6. New harm system. The new system combines narrative flexibility with clear mechanical effects.

7. Simplified XP. You now get experience points two ways during play: when you make a desperate roll and when you fulfill your playbook xp trigger. You also check for extra xp at the end of each session. When you mark xp, you can put the mark wherever you like; either toward an attribute or toward your playbook advancement.

8. Crew claims! Crews now have a roadmap of possible turf and advantages they can pursue as they move up in the world. See page 6.

9. Gangs and Experts. Gangs have been modified slightly to make them easier to use, and a new crew upgrade type has been added: experts. You can now hire an expert alchemist, doctor, blacksmith, etc. to work exclusively for your crew.

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Version 3F | 08.24.2015
The Game

Blades in the Dark is a game about a group of daring scoundrels building a criminal enterprise on the haunted streets of an industrial-fantasy city. There are heists, chases, escapes, dangerous bargains, bloody skirmishes, deceptions, betrayals, victories, and deaths.

We'll play to find out if the fledgling crew can thrive amidst the teeming threats of rival gangs, powerful noble families, vengeful ghosts, the bluecoats of the City Watch, and the siren song of the scoundrel's own vices.

The Setting

It is the year 847 of the Imperium which united the shattered islands of the cataclysm under one rule—all glory to his majesty the Immortal Emperor.

The unquiet spirits of the dead—free to roam the world since the gates of death were shattered in the cataclysm—prey on every living thing in the blasted deadlands between cities.

The port of Duskwall, like every city-stronghold of the Imperium, is encircled by crackling lightning-towers which create an electrical barrier that spirits cannot pass. By law, all corpses are incinerated with electroplasm (to destroy the spirit essence within). However, wealthy citizens, heretics of the spirit cults, and the criminal element often arrange for a spirit to escape destruction at the crematorium.

Rogue spirits and the illegal spirit essences derived from them are rich trade for the black market.

The docks of Duskwall, on the cold, windswept northern tip of Akoros, are home port for the titanic iron steamships of leviathan hunters. The blood of those massive demons is the catalyst which gives potency to the plasmic oils which power the city. The noble elite make their fortunes from the fleets of leviathan hunters they deploy on the ink-dark waters of the Never Sea.

The Characters

The scoundrels attempt to develop their crew from a ragtag group of poor independents to a serious mid-level criminal organization with established turf. They do this by taking illegal jobs from clients, planning their own devious missions, making alliances, destroying their enemies, and trying to stay one step ahead of the law.

The Players

Each player creates a scoundrel character and works with the other players to create the crew to which their characters belong. Each player strives to bring their PC to life as an interesting, daring, conflicted fantasy adventure character who reaches boldly beyond their current safety and means. The players decide as a group on the tone and style of the game by making judgment calls about the dice and actions, along with oversight from the GM.

The Game Master

The GM establishes the dynamic world around the characters, especially the law-abiding civilian world and the shadowy criminal underworld. The GM plays all the non-player characters in the world by giving each one a concrete desire and preferred method of action. They present opportunities to the PCs. Then they follow the chain of action and consequences wherever it leads.
This page describes the situation for the Quick Start. Give the players this overview before going on to character and crew creation. See page 33 for more details.

**War in Crow’s Foot**

Your crew of thieves is caught up in a perilous (and possibly profitable) situation in the Crow’s Foot district.

Roric, the ward boss who ran the criminal operations in Crow’s Foot, has been killed. People say it was his second in command, Lyssa, who did it. She now controls Roric’s impressive gang of cutthroats, who call themselves the Crows. Can she establish dominance over the district the way Roric did?

When Roric died, the peace he had brokered between two enemy gangs fell apart. The Lampblacks and the Red Sashes have once again exploded into open war on the streets. Will their old feud finally be resolved with bloodshed?

Your crew of thieves is poised to profit from all of this, or be swept up in the chaos and destroyed. Who will you side with? Do you have loyalties and friendships in the mix, or are you detached outsiders coldly exploiting the situation? We’ll play to find out!

See Starting the Game, page 33.

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**THE LAMPBLACKS**

The former lamp-lighter guild, turned to crime when their services were replaced by electric lights.

*Turf:* HQ in the office of a coal warehouse. Operates a handful of brothels and cheap drug dens across the district.

*NPCs:* Bazso Baz (leader, charming, open, ruthless)

*Notable Assets:* A fearsome gang of leg-breakers and mayhem-makers. A number of smugglers on the payroll who run their drugs.

*Allies:* The Fog Hounds, Gondoliers, Ironhook Prison.


*Situation:* The Lampblacks and the Red Sashes are at war over turf and vengeance for deaths on both sides. Bazso Baz is recruiting every free blade in the district for extra muscle and doesn’t take no for an answer. You’re either with them or against them.

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**THE RED Sashes**

Originally an Iruvian school of swordsmanship, expanded into criminal endeavors.

*Turf:* HQ in their sword-fighting school / temple. Operates a handful of high-end drug dens across the district.

*NPCs:* Mylera Klev (leader, ruthless, aggressive, art collector).

*Notable Assets:* Small contingent of master sword-fighters. Master alchemist; many potent potions and essences.

*Allies:* The Path of Echoes, Dockers, Cabbies, Inspectors.

*Enemies:* The Lampblacks, The Bluecoats, Gondoliers.

*Situation:* The Red Sashes and the Lampblacks are at war over turf and vengeance for deaths on both sides. Mylera is recruiting every free blade in the district for extra muscle and doesn’t take no for an answer. You’re either with them or against them.
Factions, Tier, & Hold

Faction Ladder
The goal of the game is to advance your crew up the faction ladder, to tier 3 (or beyond!). Your crew begins at tier 0, with 0 hold.

Tier represents the wealth, influence, and scale of a crew or faction. The higher the tier, the more powerful the group.

Hold represents how strongly a faction can maintain their position at their current tier. The more hold you have, the harder it is for you to lose your position. Hold is generated in two ways:
- Claims are specific locations, turf, or assets controlled by a faction or crew. Some claims are worth hold (1-4).
- Rep is the reputation, clout, and renown of a faction or crew. Rep is gained by performing successful operations. Each point of rep equals one hold.

A crew or faction’s total hold is equal to the hold from their claims plus their rep.

Advancement
To advance up one tier, you must have hold equal to 6 times the next tier level, then do one of the following:
- Achieve +3 faction status with a faction one or two tiers above you and successfully perform the special mission they request. Then spend 4 coin and advance 1 tier.
- Take advantage of a faction one or two tiers above you when they’re vulnerable (because of special circumstance or when their hold is less than 6x their Tier). Successfully perform a mission to exploit their weakness and knock them down one tier. Then spend 4 coin and advance 1 tier.

When you advance in tier, add a dot to the tier rating on your crew sheet and reset your Rep to zero. You also attract more members to your crew, increasing the scale of your gangs (see Tiers & Scale, below).

Tiers & Scale
Tier level determines the overall power and influence of a faction as well as the scale of that faction’s gangs.
- Tier IV. Massive gangs. (80 people per gang)
- Tier III. Huge gangs. (40)
- Tier II. Large gangs (20)
- Tier I. Medium gangs (10).
- Tier 0. Small gangs (5).

Faction Status
In addition to tracking tier, you also track your status with each faction on the ladder. Status is rated from -3 to +3, with 0 (neutral) being the default starting status.

When you create your crew, you’ll assign positive and negative status ratings to reflect your recent history with factions in the city. Then, through play, the status ratings will change over time based on your actions.

Status Changes
When you execute an operation, you gain -1 or -2 status with any factions that are hurt by your actions. You may also gain +1 status with a faction that your operation helps. If you keep your operation completely quiet (no one knows it was you) then your status doesn’t change.

If you take on a mission given by a faction, you gain +1 status with them when you complete it, and -1 or -2 status with their enemies if the operation isn’t quiet.

Status Levels
+3: Allies. This faction will help you even if it’s not in their best interest to do so. They expect you to do the same for them.
+2: Friendly. This faction will help you if it doesn’t create serious problems for them. They expect you to do the same.
+1: Helpful. This faction will help you if it causes no problems or significant cost for them. They expect the same from you.
0: Neutral.
-1: Interfering. This faction will look for opportunities to cause trouble for you (or profit from your misfortune) as long as it causes no problems or significant cost for them. They expect the same from you.
-2: Unfriendly. This faction will look for opportunities to hurt you as long as it doesn’t create serious problems for them. They expect you to do the same, and take precautions against you.
-3: Hostile. This faction will go out of its way to hurt you even if it’s not in their best interest to do so. They expect you to do the same, and take precautions against you.
NPC Faction Project Clocks

You may also add or remove segments on a faction’s project clock when you perform a mission or pull off a score that impacts their project. The GM determines the impact your actions have on that faction’s projects, and if any other faction’s projects are affected.

Disrupting one faction’s project can help another faction’s progress, or vice versa.

Reducing a Faction’s Hold

You may perform an operation specifically to reduce the hold of another faction, if you know of a way they’re vulnerable. Reduce the faction’s hold according to the following factors in the operation:

- Target faction is lower tier than you, or lower than an ally who’s supporting you for this operation.
- Operation seized or destroyed a claim controlled by the target faction.
- Operation is high-profile; especially damaging to the faction’s reputation or renown.

For each factor, reduce the faction’s hold by 1 or 2, depending on the circumstances. So you might reduce hold by 1 (very little) to 6 (a lot).

Claims

Each crew sheet has a map of claims available to be seized (see the example for Thieves, at right). The claim map for your crew describes a default roadmap for your crew type. Claims should be seized in order, by following the paths from the central square, the crew’s lair.

You may attempt to seize any claim on your map, ignoring the paths (or even seek out a special claim not on your map) but these operations will always be especially difficult and require exceptional efforts to discover and achieve. The claim roadmap shows typical paths for advancement, not an absolute restriction on your operations.

Seizing a Claim

Every claim in Duskwall is already controlled by a faction. To acquire one for yourself, you have to take it from someone else. To seize a claim, tell the GM which claim on your map your crew intends to capture. The GM will detail the claim with a location and a description and will tell you which faction currently controls that claim. Or the GM might offer you a choice of a few options if they’re available.

If you choose to ignore the roadmap paths when seizing a claim, the GM might tell you that you’ll need to investigate and gather information in order to discover a claim of that type before you can attempt to seize it.

Plan the operation like any other score, and if you succeed, you seize the claim and the targeted faction loses the claim (and associated hold).

Seizing a claim is a serious attack on a faction, usually resulting in -2 faction status with the target, and potentially +1 status with its enemies.

Losing a Claim

If you lose a claim, you lose all the benefits of that claim. If your lair is lost, you lose the benefits of all of your claims until you can restore your lair.
Rolling the Dice
Blades in the Dark uses six-sided dice. You roll several at once and read the single highest result.

- If the highest die is a 6, it’s a full success. Things go well.
- If you roll multiple 6s, it’s a critical success.
- If the highest is a 4 or 5 that’s a partial success. It’s reduced performance or a mixed result — some good, some bad.
- If the highest is 1-3 it’s a bad outcome. Things go poorly.

If you ever need to roll but you have zero (or negative) dice, roll 2d and take the lowest result.

That’s the core dice mechanic for the game. You roll a pool of dice, take the highest die, and judge the result. All the other systems in the game are expressions of this core. When you’re first learning the game, you can always “collapse” back down to a simple roll, use the outcome to judge how things go, then move on, to keep the flow of the game going. Look up the full mechanic later when you have time to learn it.

To create a dice pool, you’ll assess the trait being used as well as situational factors. You’ll end up with a number of dice from zero to six. The most common trait you’ll use are the action ratings of the player characters. A player might roll dice for their Skirmish rating when they fight an enemy, for example.

You’re also free to assess abstract traits for some rolls. You might assess an NPC’s loyalty, for example, to make a fortune roll to see if they keep their mouth shut when questioned by the Bluecoats. Are they extremely loyal (5 dice) or hardly loyal at all (1 die)? By using abstract traits and simple rolls on the fly, you can roll for any kind of situation that crops up during play.

A dice pool is always created by assessing the details of the fictional situation in play. What is your character doing, specifically? This determines which action rating you use to create your dice pool. The other systems of the game depend on this “fiction first” approach. In order to judge position, effects, and consequences, we need to establish what’s going on in the fiction — on the “movie screen” of our imaginations.

Judging Position & Effect
When a player character takes action that’s blocked by an obstacle, you assess their position. This is something the group does together, but the GM is responsible for making the final call. There are three positions: Dominant, Daring, and Desperate. Each position sets a range of bad outcomes that the PC is risking when they attempt their action. The stronger the position, the less severe the consequences.

The GM also sets the likely effect level for the action. Is it limited, standard, or great? Can the PC accomplish a little, a lot, or something in between?

This combination of position and effect is something the GM assesses a lot. A player announces their action, and the GM responds with position and effect.

Player: “I sneak up and stab him in the back!”
GM: “He has no idea that you’re there. Sounds like a dominant position and great effect.”

Sometimes the players and GM negotiate a bit about the action, position, and effect, before settling on a final choice.

Player: “I rush across the courtyard and vault over the hedge, hiding in the shadows there.”
GM: “Sounds pretty daring to me! There are a few lamps in the courtyard. If any of the guards happen to glance in that direction, they’ll spot you. Plus, I don’t think you can make it across in one quick dash. Limited effect. You’ll make it halfway across, then we’ll see what happens.”

Player: “Oh, I didn’t realize it was that big. I thought I could just dash across real fast. Hmm. If I don’t catch up with the Countess before she gets on the gondola, we’re screwed. Okay, I’m going to just run as fast as I can, I don’t care if I make some noise. Can I get more effect if I make a desperate roll?”

GM: “Yep, sounds good to me!”

Position, effect, and consequences are judged by assessing the fictional details of the situation. Given the maneuvers and vulnerabilities at hand, how effective is this action? When things go badly, what are the consequences? Is there just one consequence, or several? Are they mild or severe?

The GM has a menu of options to choose from. By comparing the details of the fictional situation to the possible choices, the GM can make a quick judgment call and communicate their choice succinctly to the players, so they understand the stakes of the action.

The Conversation, Back & Forth
So this is the core of it: When the players have the initiative, they say what their characters do, using the details of the situation as established by the GM. The GM judges their actions and the reactions of the NPCs to determine position, effects, and consequences, then the dice are rolled and the outcome resolves the situation into something new.

When the NPCs have the initiative, the GM says what they do, using the details of the situation as established. The players say how their characters react, resisting consequences and responding with their own actions, as necessary. The GM judges consequences and effects, the dice are rolled, and the outcome resolves the situation into something new.

As you can see, the game is a conversation, back and forth between the GM and the players. The players determine the actions of the characters; the GM judges the details of the situation, which determines how the systems are engaged. The outcomes of the mechanics change the situation, leading into a new phase of conversation — new actions, new judgments, new rolls — changing the fiction and building “the story” of the game, organically, from a series of discrete moments.
**Actions & Attributes**

**Action Ratings**

There are twelve actions in the game system that the player characters use to overcome obstacles. The actions are divided into three sets of four actions each, grouped by attribute. The **Finesse, Prowl, Skirmish** and Wreck actions are grouped under the **Prowess** attribute, for example.

Each action has a rating (from zero to four) which tells you how many dice to roll when you perform that action. Action ratings don’t just represent skill or training — you’re free to describe how your character performs that action based on the type of person they are. Maybe your character is good at **Command** because they have a scary stillness to them, while another character barks orders and intimidates people with their imposing size.

You choose which action to perform to overcome an obstacle, by describing what your character does. Actions that are poorly suited to the situation will put the character in a more challenging position, but they can still be attempted. If it’s something you’re really good at, maybe it’s worth it. It’s up to you which action your character performs to overcome a problem. See How to Choose an Action, page 63.

**Action Roll**

You make an action roll when your character pursues a goal that’s blocked by a dangerous obstacle.

The possible results of the roll depend on your character’s position. There are three positions: Desperate, Daring, and Dominant. If you’re in a dominant position, the possible consequences are less serious. If you’re in a desperate position, the consequences can be severe. If you’re somewhere in between, it’s daring, and the risk and reward are more balanced.

For the details on Action Rolls, see page 11.

**Attribute Ratings**

There are three attributes in the game system that the player characters use to resist danger. Each attribute has a rating (from zero to four) which tells you how many dice to roll when you use that attribute.

The rating for each attribute is equal to the number of dots in the first column under that attribute. The more well-rounded your character is with a particular set of actions, the better their attribute rating.

**Resistance Roll**

Each attribute resists a different type of danger. If you get stabbed, for example, you resist physical harm with your Prowess rating. The better your roll, the less stress it costs to reduce or avoid the danger.

When the enemy has a big advantage, you’ll need to make a resistance roll before you can attempt your own action. For example, when you duel the master sword-fighter, she disarms you before you can strike. You need to make a resistance roll to keep hold of your blade if you want to attack her. Or, perhaps you face a powerful ghost and attempt to attune with it to control its actions. But before you can make your own roll, you must resist possession from the spirit.

The GM judges the threat level of the enemies and uses these ‘preemptive’ resistance rolls as needed to reflect the capabilities of especially dangerous foes.

For the details on Resistance Rolls, see page 13.

Example of Action and Attribute Ratings

This character has action ratings of Attune 2, Command 1, Consort 0, and Sway 1.

Their Resolve attribute rating is 3 (the first column of dots).
STRESS & TRAUMA

Stress
Player characters in Blades in the Dark have a special reserve of fortitude and luck called Stress. When they suffer a consequence that they don’t want to accept, they can take stress instead. The result of the Resistance Roll (see page 18) determines how much stress it costs to avoid a bad outcome.

During a knife fight, Daniel’s character, Cross, gets stabbed in the chest. Daniel rolls his Prowess rating to resist, and gets a 2. It costs 6 stress, minus 2 (the result of the resistance roll) to avoid the consequences. Daniel takes 4 stress and describes how Cross survives the dagger to the chest and keeps on going.

In this case, the GM says that the harm is reduced by the resistance roll. Cross suffers level 2 harm (‘Chest wound’) instead of level 3 harm (‘Punctured lung’).

Pushing Yourself
For any action your character takes, you may push yourself for greater performance, by taking 2 stress and choosing a bonus, below:
- Add +1d to your roll. (See Action Rolls, p. 11.)
- Add potency to your effect. (See Effects, p. 12.)
- Take action despite severe harm (See Consequences, p. 13)
A given bonus can be chosen once per action.

Trauma
When a PC marks their 8th and final stress box, they suffer a level of Trauma. When you mark a level of trauma, clear all of your stress, resetting to zero. You also improve your Vice rating by 1 (this is the only way Vice rating advances). When you suffer trauma, you’re taken out of action. You’re “left for dead” or otherwise dropped out of the current conflict, only to show back up later, shaken and drained.

Trauma levels are permanent. Trauma represents how worn down your character is. When you mark your fourth trauma box, your character cannot continue as a daring scoundrel. You must retire them to a different life at your first opportunity.

Retirement
When you fill your last Trauma box and retire, the amount of coin you’ve managed to stash away determines the fate of your character.
- Stash 0-10: Poor soul. You end up in a reeking flophouse, awash in vice and misery.
- Stash 11-20: Meager. You end up with a tiny (but warm) hovel that you can call your own.
- Stash 21-39: Modest. You end up with a simple home or apartment, with some small comforts. You might operate a tavern or other small business.
- Stash 40: Fine. You end up with a well-appointed home or apartment, claiming a few luxuries. You might operate a medium business or several small ones.

Stress & The Supernatural
A close encounter with a spirit or demon is a harrowing experience. By default, the standard effect is to first freeze a person in place with fear, then panic them into fleeing from its presence. A PC can choose to roll and take stress as normal to resist these effects. Exceptional NPCs, such as Rail Jacks and occult weirdos, are more resistant to the supernatural terror of spirits but it still takes its toll eventually.

Being possessed by a spirit inflicts a level of Trauma at the end of every week. Once the possessed body suffers its fourth level of trauma, it can no longer sustain its life. The possessing spirit must either bond with the corpse (becoming a vampire) or abandon it and seek out a new host.
Progress Clocks

Use a progress clock to track an obstacle that takes several actions to overcome.

_Sneaking into the Bluecoat watch tower? Start a clock for the security coverage of the patrols. When the PCs make progress against the security, fill segments on the clock to track how well they’re doing._

Generally, the more complex the problem, the more segments in the progress clock.

A complex obstacle is a 4-segment clock. A more complicated obstacle is a 6-segment clock. A daunting obstacle is an 8-segment clock.

The effect level of an action or circumstance is used to tick segments on a clock (see Effect Levels, page 12). _It’s the GM’s job to tick a clock so it reflects the fictional situation._ If the PCs are making a lot of progress, the clock should be ticked a lot. This comes with practice, by properly judging effect levels. But you should always feel free to adjust a clock in play to better reflect the situation if you make a mistake.

You can’t usually fill a clock with the effect of a single action. This is by design. If a situation is simple enough for one action, don’t make a clock, just judge the outcome based on the effect level of the action.

When you create a clock, make it about the obstacle and not the method. The clocks for an infiltration should be “Interior Patrols” and “The Tower”, not “sneak past the guards” or “climb the tower.” The patrols and the tower are the obstacles — the PCs can attempt to overcome them in a variety of ways.

Complex enemy threats should be broken into several “layers”, each with its own progress clock. For example, the Lampblack’s HQ might have a “perimeter security” clock, an “interior guards” clock, and a “Bazso’s office security” clock. The crew would have to make their way through all three layers to reach Bazso’s personal safe and whiskey collection.

Simple Obstacles

Not every situation and obstacle requires a clock. Use clocks when a situation is complex or layered — otherwise, resolve the result of an action with a single roll.

Clock Examples

_Danger Clock_

The GM can use clocks to represent progressive dangers like suspicion growing during a seduction, the proximity of pursuers in a chase, or the alert level of guards on patrol. In this case, when the complication manifests, the enemy ticks 1, 2, or 3 segments on the clock, depending on its intensity. When the clock is full, the danger comes to fruition — the guards hunt down the intruders, activate an alarm, release the hounds, etc. (See Consequences & Resistance, page 13.)

_The crew is infiltrating the Spirit Wardens headquarters. The security patrols are legendary, presenting four clocks worth of obstacles. The guards also have a danger clock for their Alert level. Whenever a PC suffers a complication, the GM fills segments on the Alert clock. When the Alert clock fills, the guards are aware of the intruders and react appropriately._

_Linked Clocks_

You can make a clock that unlocks another clock once it’s filled. In the Spirit Wardens example, above, the GM might make linked clock called “Trapped” after the “Alert” clocks fill up. When you fight a veteran warrior, she might have a clock for her “Defense” and then a linked clock for “Vulnerable”. Once you overcome the Defense clock, then you can attempt to overcome the Vulnerable clock and defeat her. You might affect the Defense clock with violence in a knife-fight, or you might attempt to lower her defense with lies and deception if you have the opportunity. As always, the method of action is up to the players and the details of the fiction at hand.

_Mission Clocks_

The GM can make a clock for a time-sensitive mission, to represent the window of opportunity you have to complete it. If the countdown runs out, the mission is scrubbed or changes—the target escapes, the household wakes up for the day, etc.

_Long-Term Project Clocks_

Some projects will take a long time. A basic long-term project (like tinkering up a new feature for a device) is 8-segments. Truly long-term projects (like creating a new designer drug) can be two, three, or even four clocks, representing all the phases of development, testing, and final completion. Add or subtract clocks depending on the details of the situation and complexity of the project.

_Tug-of-War Clock_

You can set up a clock that can be filled and emptied by events, to represent a back-and-forth situation. For example, you might make a “Revolution!” clock that indicates when the refugee Skovlanders in the city start to riot over the annexation of their homeland. Some events will tick the clock up and some will tick it down. Once it fills, the revolution begins. A tug-of-war clock is also perfect for an ongoing turf war between two crews or factions.

_Faction Clocks_

Each faction has a long-term goal they’re working on when the game begins. When the PCs take_downtime_ (page 18) the GM ticks forward the faction clocks that they’re interested in. In this way, the world around the PCs is dynamic and things happen that they’re not directly connected to, changing the overall situation in the city and creating new opportunities and challenges.

The PCs may also directly affect NPC faction clocks, based on the missions and scores they pull off. Discuss known faction projects that they might aid or interfere with, and also consider how a PC operation might affect the NPC clocks, whether the players intended it or not.
When your PC pursues a goal that’s blocked by an obstacle you make an action roll. This is the mechanic the players use to solve problems and get what they want. Along with resistance rolls (see page 19), action rolls determine how things go when the crew is on the job, tangling with enemies, and pulling off daring scoundrel moves.

**Describe Your Goal & Assess the Obstacle**
Your goal is the concrete outcome you’ll achieve when you overcome the obstacle. Your goal might be “get into the manor house” or it might be “see who comes and goes at the house” — in both cases the obstacle might be “the guard patrol”. The guards are the problem you have to deal with in order to get what you want.

**Choose Your Action**
Tell the group which action your character performs to overcome the obstacle. It’s usually obvious, but make it explicit anyway. There’s some overlap among actions, meaning several of them might apply, depending on the specific approach you take. The choice is yours, as long as your character actually performs the action in question. You can’t roll sway unless you manipulate by interacting with someone.

**Determine Your Position & Effect Level**
Assess the character’s position to perform this action. There are three positions: Dominant, Daring, and Desperate. Read the profiles for each position. Which of the various phrases best matches the intersection of the character’s goal, obstacle, and action? If there’s a position you’re angling for, ask the GM how you might make that roll.

Assess the character’s likely effect level. Will they have limited, standard, or great effect with this action? In general, a player can try to push for a greater effect by accepting a bigger risk with a worse position, and vice versa. “Sounds like a daring position, with limited effect.” “What if I run across, instead?” “Yeah, okay, we can call that desperate, with standard effect.” See page 12 for details on effect levels.

**The Devil’s Bargain**
PCs in Blades are reckless scoundrels addicted to destructive vices—they don’t always act in their own best interests. To reflect this, the GM or any other player can offer you a bonus die if you accept a devil’s bargain. Common devil’s bargains include:

- Reveal a valuable secret.
- Make a dangerous promise.
- Sacrifice coin or an item.
- Add heat to the crew from evidence or witnesses.
- Betray a friend or loved one.
- Suffer harm.
- Anger a powerful enemy.

There isn’t always an interesting devil’s bargain in every situation. If one doesn’t occur to anyone right away, that’s fine. "Add 1 heat" is a good simple bargain if you need it. The devil’s bargain occurs regardless of the outcome of the roll. You make the deal, pay the price, and get the bonus die.

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**The Action Roll**

- **Dominant**
  - You act on your terms. You exploit a dominant advantage.
  - **Critical**: You do it with increased effect.
  - 6: You do it.
  - 4/5: You do it, but there’s a consequence: it takes extra time, you have reduced effect, you suffer lesser harm, you end up in a daring position.
  - 1-3: You’re blocked, you hesitate, or you falter. Press on by seizing a daring opportunity, or withdraw and try a different approach.

- **Daring**
  - You go head to head. You act under fire. You take a risk.
  - **Critical**: You do it with increased effect.
  - 6: You do it.
  - 4/5: You do it, but there’s a consequence: you suffer harm, a complication occurs, you end up in a desperate position.
  - 1-3: Things go badly. You suffer harm, a complication occurs, you end up in a desperate position.

- **Desperate**
  - You overreach your capabilities. You’re in serious trouble.
  - **Critical**: You do it with increased effect.
  - 6: You do it.
  - 4/5: You do it, but there’s a consequence: you suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs, you lose this opportunity for action.
  - 1-3: It’s the worst outcome. You suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs, you lose this opportunity for action.

The GM sets the consequences according to the situation. You may suffer one, some, or all of the listed consequences. You may attempt to avoid or reduce a consequence with a resistance roll.
**Effect Levels**

In *Blades in the Dark*, you achieve goals by taking actions and facing consequences. But how many actions does it take to achieve a particular goal? That depends on the effect level of your actions.

The GM judges the effect level using the profiles at right. Which one best matches the action at hand—**Limited**, **Standard**, or **Great**? Each effect level indicates the questions that should be answered for that effect, as well as how many segments to tick if you’re using a progress clock for this obstacle.

When assessing the effect level, consider three factors: **Quality**, **Scale**, and **Potency**. If the PC has an advantage in a given factor, consider a higher effect level for their action. If they have a disadvantage, consider a reduced effect level.

When considering factors, an effect might be reduced below limited, resulting in no effect at all — or increased beyond great, resulting in an extreme effect (4 ticks on a clock). Cases of zero or extreme effect should be uncommon, though.

**Effects in the Fiction**

Effects aren’t simply a matter of ticking clock segments. To bring an effect to life in the game, answer the effect questions and describe what happens “on screen.” The answers to the questions will tell the group what remains to be done, creating a natural bridge to the next actions and risks at hand.

For **simple actions**, judge what the effect level means based on the situation. Do you achieve your goal partially, fully, or with great effect? If it’s a simple, direct action, even a limited effect may be enough to get by if the player is willing to accept the poor results.

For a **complex obstacle**, the GM creates a progress clock (or series of clocks) to describe how much effort it takes to overcome. You tick a number of segments on the clock equal to the effect level of your action. When you fill the clock(s), you overcome the obstacle. If not, there’s more left to do (and more risks to take). See Progress Clocks, page 10.

For example, if the player’s goal is “I shove him back and run away down the stairs,” that might be a simple action. The shove will have limited, standard, or great effect on the enemy, resulting in a new situation. The enemy thug might be briefly slowed down (limited), knocked off his feet and delayed in the chase (standard), or even injured by a powerful throw (great)—depending on the assessment of the thug’s prowess compared to the PC and the various factors involved.

If the player says, “I engage this guy in a knife fight to the death,” that would likely be a more complex obstacle, requiring a clock based on the thug’s level of threat.

Tell the players what you’re thinking about the scope of the obstacle and talk about their goal so everyone’s on the same page and can revise as needed. There’s no hard and fast rule for what’s ‘simple’ or ‘complex.’ Go with your gut and use simple or complex obstacles as you like, moment to moment in play.

**Effect Factors**

To assess effect level, first start with your gut feeling, given this situation. If needed, consider each factor and determine if the PC has an advantage or disadvantage there. If the PC has the advantage, consider raising their effect level. If they have the disadvantage, consider reducing their effect level. Every factor won’t always apply to every situation.

**Quality**

The quality factor considers the effectiveness of assets, tools, weapons, or other resources. **Fine items** count as higher quality. Also, crews and factions generally have higher quality assets as their **Tier** rises. A PC crew can purchase quality upgrades as they advance. An NPC faction of higher tier will generally have a quality advantage over a lower tier opponent.

**Scale**

The scale factor considers the number of opponents, magnitude of force, size of an area covered, amount of influence, etc. Larger scale can be an advantage or disadvantage depending on the situation. When trying to secure an area, more people are better. When trying to move unseen, more people are a hindrance.

**Potency**

The potency factor considers particular weaknesses, taking extra time or a bigger risk, enhanced effort from pushing yourself (p. 9), or the influence of arcane powers or preparations. A spirit has a weakness to the electrical discharge of a lightning hook. A human is vulnerable to the possessing powers of a ghost. A sentry is vulnerable to an infiltrator if the sentry’s lantern is extinguished so they can’t see.

**Dominant Factors**

If one factor overshadows the others, the side with that advantage dominates the situation. It doesn’t matter if you have a fine sword and extra effort if you try to fight 20 people at once. Their **scale** dominates the situation. (Unless you’re a Cutter with the Not to Be Trifled With special ability, of course.)

**Great Effect**

3 ticks

How is the effect increased? What extra benefit manifests?

**Limited Effect**

1 tick

How is the effect diminished? What significant obstacle remains?

**Standard Effect**

2 ticks

How does the expected effect manifest? What’s left to do, if anything?

Arlyn is picking the lock to a safehouse run by the Hive. Arlyn has fine lockpicks. However, the Hive is Tier III. The quality of their locks is much better than Arlyn’s tools. She gets a reduced effect level to her lockpicking attempt.

If Arlyn is able to spend extra time on the lock, she can gain potency, thus counter-acting the reduction due to quality.

**Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Potency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you have superior or inferior weapons, tools, or assets?

Do you have an advantage or disadvantage due to numbers or size?

Can a weakness, extra time, or enhanced effort be exploited here?
CONSEQUENCES & RESISTANCE

Enemy actions, bad circumstances, or the outcome of an action roll can result in consequences for the PC. There are six types of consequences:

- It takes extra time.
- You have reduced effect.
- You end up in a worse position.
- You lose your opportunity for this action.
- You suffer a complication.
- You suffer harm.

A given circumstance might result in one, two, or even three consequences, depending on the situation. The consequences and the method to resist them are detailed below.

Extra Time
This consequence represents slow performance. The action takes longer to complete than you’d prefer. Reduce the final effect level by one (after accounting for any factors).

Reduced Effect
This consequence represents impaired performance. The action isn’t as effective as you’d prefer. Reduce the final effect level by one (after accounting for any factors).

Worse Position
This consequence represents losing control of the situation. The action carries you into an inferior position for future actions. Perhaps you make the leap across to the next rooftop, only to end up dangling by your fingertips. Or you manage to get past the swordsman’s defense and cut her, only to be reduced to hanging by your fingertips. Or you manage to get back to the lair before the Bluecoat’s nightly sweep for scoundrels on the streets.

Lose Your Opportunity
This consequence represents shifting circumstance. You had an opportunity to achieve your goal with this action, but it slips away. To try again, you’ll have to try a new approach.

Complication
This consequence represents trouble, mounting danger, or a new threat. When a complication manifests, the GM might tick a countdown clock (like the Alert level of a guard patrol), start a new countdown clock and tick it, introduce a new obstacle or threat, add +1 heat as evidence is left at the scene of the crime, or any other troublesome circumstance you can imagine. A serious complication is the same, but with more ticks on the clock (2 or 3) or a more dangerous obstacle or threat.

Suffer Harm
This consequence represents a long-lasting debility (or death). When you suffer harm, record the specific injury on your character sheet equal to the level of harm you suffer. If you suffer lesser harm, record it in the bottom row. If you suffer moderate harm, write it in the middle row. If you suffer severe harm, record it in the top row. See an example of severe harm, below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HARM</th>
<th>NEED HELP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-1D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your character suffers the penalty indicated at the end of the row if any harm recorded in that row applies to the situation at hand. So, if you have Twisted Ankle harm in the bottom row, you’ll suffer reduced effect when you try to run away from the Bluecoats. When you’re impaired by harm in the top row (severe harm, level 3), your character can only take action if you have help from someone else or if you take 2 stress to perform the action (i.e. you push yourself).

If you need to mark a harm level, but the row is already filled, the harm moves up to the next row above. So, if you suffered standard harm (level 2) but had no empty spaces in the second row, you’d have to record severe harm (level 3) instead. If you run out of spaces on the top row and need to mark harm there, your character suffers a catastrophic, permanent consequence (loss of a limb, sudden death, etc. depending on the circumstances).

Harm takes time and attention to heal. You do this during downtime (page 18). Harm usually manifests as physical injury, but any kind of lasting negative effect can be recorded, as the situation dictates. For example: Seduced, Hunted, Cursed, Demonic Nightmares, Shattered Nerves, etc.

Harm Examples
Lesser: Strained, Tired, Nervous, Confused, Slowed, Battered.
Standard: Exhausted, Knife Wound to Arm, Concussion, Seduced.
Severe: Bleeding Out, Broken Leg, Shot in Chest, Badly Burned.
Fatal: Electrocuted, Disintegrated, Drowned, Torn Apart.

Resistance
PCs have the ability to reduce or avoid a consequence by making a resistance roll (see below). Make an attribute roll and then take 6 stress minus the highest die result to reduce or avoid the consequence. A resistance roll may be called for as a result of an action roll that generates a consequence or because of an enemy action or bad circumstance that befalls the PC. Make a resistance roll whenever a PC wants to reduce or avoid a bad outcome.

The attribute you roll depends on the consequence:

- Insight: Consequences from deception or understanding.
- Prowess: Consequences from physical strain or injury.
- Resolve: Consequences from mental strain or willpower.

If you suffer more than one consequence at once, you may make separate resistance rolls against each one, if you wish. Usually, a resistance roll will reduce the severity of a consequence. If you’re going to suffer fatal harm, for example, a resistance roll would reduce the harm to severe, instead. The GM also has the option to rule that a given resistance roll allows a character to completely avoid a consequence. For example, the consequence from an action roll is a worse position for the character (things will become desperate). The player rolls to resist the consequence and takes 3 stress, and the GM says that the consequence is avoided entirely.

By adjusting which consequences are reduced vs. which are avoided, you establish the overall tone of your game (from gritty and deadly to free-wheeling and daring).

Armor
If you have a type of armor that applies to the situation, you can mark one armor box to reduce or avoid a consequence, instead of rolling to resist. (All of your armor is restored when you recover during downtime.)
The fortune roll is a tool the GM can use to disclaim decision making. You use a fortune roll in two different ways:

- **When you need to make a determination about a situation the PCs aren’t directly involved in** and don’t want to simply decide the outcome.

  The Lampblacks attack the Red Sashes. How does that turn out? The GM makes a fortune roll for the Lampblacks and another for the Red Sashes. The Lamplacks get a good outcome but the Red Sashes get partial effect. The GM decides that the Red Sashes lose their hold on a drug den in the district, but the Lampblacks suffer some injuries in the skirmish.

- **When an outcome is uncertain**, but no other roll applies to the situation at hand.

  While pilfering the workshop of an alchemist, Nails is assaulted by a vengeful ghost and possessed. As his control of his body slips away, Nails desperately grabs a bottle of quicksilver and drinks it down. Will the arcane concoction have an effect on the spirit? Will it poison Nails to death? Who knows? This is uncharted territory and anything might happen. The GM makes a fortune roll to see how it turns out.

When you make a fortune roll you may assess **any trait rating** to determine the dice pool of the roll.

- **When a faction takes an action with uncertain outcome**, you might use their **Tier rating** to make a fortune roll.

- **When a gang operates independently**, you might use their **Quality rating** for a fortune roll (if they face an enemy gang with a leader, though, they may be at a major disadvantage).

- **When a supernatural power manifests with uncertain results**, you might use its **Magnitude** for a fortune roll.

If no trait applies, roll 1d for sheer luck or create a dice pool (from 1 to 4) based on the situation at hand.

If two parties are directly opposed, make a fortune roll for each side to see how they do, then assess the outcome of the situation by comparing their performance levels.

The fortune roll is a tool to help the GM manage all the various moving parts of the living city of Duskwall. Sometimes a quick roll is enough to answer a question or inspire an idea for what might happen next. The fortune roll is the GM’s resource. It should not be used to replace the players’ rolls in the game.

Other examples of fortune rolls:

- **The PCs instigate a war between two factions, then sit back and watch the fireworks.** How does it turn out? Does either side dominate? Are they both made vulnerable by the conflict? Make a few fortune rolls to find out.

- **A strange sickness, the Cold Slumber, is sweeping the city.** How badly is Crow’s Foot hit by the outbreak? The GM assigns a magnitude to the arcane plague, and makes a fortune roll to judge the extent of its effect.

- **Inspectors are putting a case together against the PC crew.** The crew’s wanted level counts as major advantage dice for the inspectors.

- **The PCs decide to sell raw leviathan blood as a new street drug.** What does it do to the users? Are they okay, or are there horrible demonic side effects? The GM uses the Quality rating of the raw substance (which is 0, since it hasn’t been processed) as the relevant trait to see how it goes. She rolls 2d6 and takes the lowest, which is a 2: Bad outcome. The users are getting sick and starting to show signs of demonic corruption!
PLANNING & FLASHBACKS

Your crew spends time planning each score. They huddle around a flickering lantern in their lair, looking at scrawled maps, whispering plots and schemes, bickering about the best approach, lamenting the dangers ahead, and.lasting after stacks of coin.

But you, the players, don’t have to do the nitty-gritty planning. The characters take care of that, off-screen. All you have to do is choose what type of plan the characters have already made. That’s right; the planning phase is over as soon as you start it.

There are five different types of plan, each with a missing detail you need to provide. To “plan an operation,” simply choose the plan and supply the detail. Then the GM will cut to the action as the first moments of the operation unfold at the target location.

There’s no need to sweat all the little details and try to cover every eventuality ahead of time, because the engagement roll (detailed at right) ultimately determines what troubles appear when the plan is put in motion. No plan is ever perfect. You can’t account for everything. This system assumes that there’s always some unknown factors and trouble—major or minor—in every operation; you just have to make the best of it.

The Six Plans

**ASSAULT** You intend to do violence to a target. *Detail: The point of attack.*

**DECEPTION** You intend to lure, trick, or manipulate. *Detail: The method of deception.*

**INfiltration** You intend to trespass unseen where you are not wanted. *Detail: The entry point of infiltration.*

**OCCULT** You intend to confront or exploit a supernatural power. *Detail: The arcane power you will employ.*

**SOCIAL** You intend to negotiate, bargain, or persuade. *Detail: The social connection you’re using.*

**TRANSPORT** You intend to move something from place to place. *Detail: Pickup / drop-off locations & route.*

The Detail

When you choose a plan, you provide a missing detail, like the point of attack, or social connection, etc. If you don’t know the detail, you can scout it out or gather information in some other way. The GM assesses the strength of this detail to determine how many dice you get for the engagement roll. Your plan is more likely to go smoothly if you’re acting on good information.

Engagement Roll

Once you have a plan and the detail, you can make an engagement roll to determine the starting situation the team is in when we cut to the action. Are they smoothly in control? Or have things not started well? If the situation is already well established, you can go without an engagement roll. Use it when you need to.

The engagement roll is a fortune roll, using the vulnerability of the target as the trait for the roll. The more vulnerable the target, the more dice you roll.

Judge the vulnerability of the target by comparing the details of the PC’s plan against the awareness and readiness of the target versus that type of plan.

- **0d Strong:** The target is especially resistant.
- **1d Ready:** The target is well prepared.
- **2d Average:** The target has standard preparations.
- **3d Weak:** The target is ill prepared.
- **4d Exposed:** The target is especially vulnerable.

The GM uses the outcome of this roll to describe the situation when we cut to the action of the operation, already in progress. A bad outcome (1-3) means that the opposition is in control when the action starts, and the PCs are in trouble. A *mixed outcome* (4/5) means the PCs and the opposition are on equal footing when the action starts. No one has an advantage. A *good outcome* (6) means the PCs have an advantage of some kind when the action starts. A critical outcome is the same as a good outcome, but the PCs have momentum: they get +1d to their first die roll on the operation (or some other special bonus appropriate to the situation at hand).

After the GM describes the start of the action, the players select who’s on point (see *Teamwork*, page 16).

Linked Plans

A common scenario is a team that wants to attempt a two-pronged approach. “You create a diversion at the tavern the Dimmer Sisters own, and when they send their thugs over there, we’ll break in to their house.” There are two ways to handle this.

1. The diversion is a setup action that a team member performs as part of the Infiltration plan. If the diversion succeeds, the next teammate who follows up gets increased effect. (See *Teamwork*, page 16, for details about setup actions.)

2. The diversion is its own operation, linked to a future infiltration plan. You play it out as a full series of actions, with the end goal being, “There are no guards at the house when we infiltrate it later.”

Either approach is fine. It’s a question of interest. Is the diversion interesting enough on its own to play out moment by moment? If so, make it a full operation. If not, use a setup action.

Flashbacks

The rules don’t distinguish between actions performed in the present moment and those performed in the past. When an operation is underway, you can invoke a flashback scene to roll for an action in the past which impacts your current situation. Maybe you bribed the district watch sergeant to not patrol here tonight, so you make a *Sway* roll to see how that went.

The GM sets a stress cost when you activate a flashback action:

- **0 Stress** for a normal action for which you had easy opportunity.

- **1 Stress** for a complex action or unlikely opportunity. The *Hound* arranged to *Consort* her pistols under the table ahead of time so she could retrieve them after the pat-down at the door.

- **2 Stress** for an elaborate action which involved several special opportunities or contingencies. The *Whisper* has already *Attune* to the ghost of the former proprietor to divine the secret of the hidden safe.

“No plan extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy.”

—Moltke the Elder
Teamwork
When the team of PCs engages in an operation together, the GM asks the group “Who’s on point?” One of the players chooses to put their character in the point role.

The character on point leads the action of the team. They go first and make decisions about how to deal with obstacles. They’re also the first to face any harm or trouble that comes their way.

All the other PCs on the team are backup for the character on point. The backup characters are following their lead, on the lookout for danger, ready to step in and help.

The point and backup roles shift as the team takes action. During the course of an operation, each PC is likely to have a turn in both roles.

**Moves on Point**
*When you’re on point*, in addition to normal actions and rolls, you have access to two special maneuvers:
- **Lead a group action.**
- **Set up** a character who will follow through on your action.

After you perform any special maneuver on point, you become backup and someone else takes point. The special maneuvers are detailed below.

**On Point: Lead a Group Action**
When you lead a group action, you coordinate multiple members of the team to tackle a problem together. Describe how your character leads the team in a coordinated effort. Do you bark orders, give subtle hand signals, or provide charismatic inspiration?

Each PC who’s involved rolls for the action and the team counts the **single best result** as the overall effort for everyone. However, the character leading the group action takes 1 stress for each PC that rolled 1-3 as their best result.

*This is how you do the “everyone sneaks into the manor” maneuver. Everyone who wants to sneak in rolls their Prowl action, and the best result counts for the whole team. But the player on point suffers stress for everyone who does poorly. It’s tough covering for the stragglers.*

The group action result covers everyone who rolled in the attempt. If you don’t roll, your character doesn’t get the effects of the action.

**On Point: Set Up**
When you perform a setup action, you may perform an action that will have an **indirect** effect on an obstacle. If your action has its intended result, any member of the team who follows through on your maneuver gets +1 effect level.

*This is how you do the “I’ll create a distraction” maneuver. You roll Sway to distract a Bluecoat with your charms, then any teammate who follows through with a Prowl action to sneak past him gets increased effect.*

This is a good way to contribute to an operation when you don’t have a good rating in the action at hand. A clever setup action lets you help the team indirectly. Multiple follow-up actions may take advantage of your setup (including someone leading a group action) as long as it makes sense in the fiction.

Since a setup action increases the effect of follow-up actions, it’s also useful when the team is facing tough opposition that has advantages in quality, scale, and/or potency. Even if the PCs are reduced to zero effect due to disadvantages in a situation, the setup action provides a bonus that allows for limited effect.

*The PCs are facing a heavily armored carriage that is immune to their weapons. Arcy the Cutter uses Wreck as a setup action to pry some of the armor loose with her crowbar, giving follow up actions +1 effect—going from zero effect to limited effect.*

**Moves as Backup**
*When you’re backup*, in addition to normal actions and rolls, you have access to two special teamwork maneuvers:
- **Face a danger** in place of the character on point.
- **Assist** another character on the team.

**Backup: Face a Danger**
When you face a danger in place of the character on point, you roll to **resist the effect** instead of them. Describe how you intervene.

**Backup: Assist**
When you assist another character, **take 1 stress to give them 1 bonus die** to their roll. Only one teammate can assist a given roll. Describe how your character assists.

Do We Have to Use Teamwork?
Teamwork maneuvers are options, not requirements. Each character can still perform solo actions during an operation. If your character can’t communicate or somehow coordinate with the rest of the team, you can’t use or benefit from any teamwork maneuvers.
PC Advancement

Each player keeps track of the experience points (xp) that their character earns. During the game session, you mark 1 xp each time:

- You make a desperate action roll.
- Your character performs an action that matches your playbook xp trigger. For example, the Cutter’s xp trigger is "When you address a tough challenge with violence or threats." To ‘address a challenge’, your character should take a significant action to attempt to overcome a tough obstacle or threat. It doesn’t matter if the action is successful or not. You get xp either way.

At the end of each session, you may earn 1 bonus xp for each of the following:

- You’ve expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background.
- You caused a problem with your obsessions, ambitions, or faults during the session.

Finally, you can earn xp by training during downtime. When you train, mark xp in one of your attributes or in your playbook. A given xp track can be trained only once per downtime phase.

When you mark xp, make a tick in one the xp tracks on your character sheet. Choose any of your four tracks to mark.

Marking xp on the playbook advancement track.

When you fill an xp track, you clear all the marks and your character earns an advance. When you earn an advance in your playbook track, you may choose an additional special ability. When you earn an advance in an attribute track, you may add an additional action dot to one of the actions under that attribute.

This character has filled their Insight attribute track, so the player chooses to take an additional action dot in the Tinker action.

Crew Advancement

At the end of each session:

- Review the crew advancement items, and mark 1 tick for each item that you did during the previous session. If you’ve done the same item multiple times, you can take multiple ticks.

When you mark 8 crew advancement ticks, clear the ticks and choose a new crew upgrade or a new special ability.

In addition, each PC gets 1 coin (+2 per crew tier) as their share of the profits, which they may keep as spendable currency on hand or permanently stash away for retirement. A character can hold up to 2 personal coin. Any excess must be stashed or spent as soon as possible.
The Payoff & Entanglements
After a score, the PCs take stock of their payoff from the operation and deal with any outstanding entanglements that the crew is involved in.

**Payoff**
See page 21 for details on the payoff for a score.

**Entanglements**
Your scoundrels and crew didn’t just spring into existence tonight. You have a complex history of favors, commitments, debts, and promises that got you where you are today. To reflect this, **after each score**, you roll dice to find out which entanglement comes calling. An entanglement might be a rival crew looking to throw their weight around (and demand some coin), an Investigator of the City Watch making a case against them (but ready for a bribe), or even the attention of a vengeful ghost. See page 21 for a list of entanglements.

**Coin**
When the crew completes a profitable score, they’re rewarded with **coin**. Coin is an abstract measure of wealth and liquid assets. The few silver pieces the scoundrels use in their daily lives are not tracked. If a scoundrel wants to toss a few silver around (and demand some coin), an Investigator calling. An entanglement might be a rival crew looking to throw their weight around (and demand some coin), an Investigator of the City Watch making a case against them (but ready for a bribe), or even the attention of a vengeful ghost. See page 21 for a list of entanglements.

You can spend coin 1-for-1 to increase the result level of any roll to see how it turns out.

You can do this after the roll:
- 1 coin: A full purse of silver pieces. A fine weapon. The weekly take of a small business.
- 6 coins: Liquidating a significant asset—a boat, a property deed.

More than 4 coin is an impractical amount to keep lying around. If the crew has a vault, they can store up to 8 coin, otherwise any coin beyond 4 must be spent as soon as possible, or distributed among the crew members.

1 unit of coin in silver pieces or other bulk currency takes up 1 item slot when carried.

**Crew Downtime**
Between scores, your crew spends time recovering from stress and injuries and dealing with other issues. During a downtime phase, each crew member may do two of the following:
- Recover from harm and restore your armor.
- Indulge your vice to clear stress.
- Work on a long-term project.
- Reduce heat on the crew.
- Acquire use of an asset.
- Spend time in personal training.
- Gather information on a subject of your choosing.

A PC can take more actions, but each additional downtime action costs 1 coin or 1 rep. This reflects the extra time or effort spent to squeeze in more opportunities before the next operation. When you complete a new score, you reset and get a “free” downtime phase again.

See page 9 for the rules for all the downtime actions.

**GM:** If a player can’t decide which downtime move to pick, the GM might suggest an idea. If the player likes it, they can choose it. If not, the player gets a +1d bonus when they roll to determine the quality of the information that’s gained. When a gather info roll is made during downtime, the player gets a +1d bonus when a friend or contact is involved, and may spend coin to boost the result of their roll.

**NPC Downtime**
The NPC crews and factions also do things when you take downtime. The GM advances their project clocks and chooses a downtime action or two for each faction that they're interested in at the moment:

- Plan an operation to: seize a claim or generate hold, make an enemy vulnerable, or inflict -1 hold on a vulnerable enemy.
- Execute an operation (above).
- Gather information on the PCs (may be opposed by a PC roll) or another subject.
- Achieve a short-term objective they're in position to accomplish.
- Acquire a new asset.

**Gathering Information**
When a PC wants to know about things that aren’t common knowledge, they can gather information. A PC might consort with a friend to learn secrets. Or they might discern details from a situation. Or they might cipher information from books or records. Or perhaps they command an enemy to spill the beans. Any action can potentially be used to gather info, depending on the circumstances.

If there’s a threat or obstacle involved, make an action roll to gather the information. If not, make a fortune roll to determine the quality of the information that’s gained. When a gather info roll is made during downtime, the player gets a +1d bonus when a friend or contact is involved, and may spend coin to boost the result of their roll.

A player may ask the GM specific questions when they gather info. Some examples are on the bottom of the character sheet. The GM always answers honestly, but with a level of detail according to the level of effort or quality of the roll. Limited effort = incomplete info. Standard = good details. Great = exceptional details.
GM REFERENCE

GM GOALS
Play to find out what happens.
Bring Duskwall to Life.
Convey the world honestly.

GM PRINCIPLES
Be a fan of the PCs.
Let everything flow from the fiction.
Hold on lightly.
Address the characters.
Address the players.
Paint the world with a haunted brush.
Surround them with industrial sprawl.
Consider the risk.

GM ACTIONS
When things are getting started:

- What did you do? (and what’s the detail?)
- Who’s on point?

And when things are underway:

- How do you do that? (which action do you use?)
- What’s your goal? (what’s the effect?)

Cut to the moment of crisis.

Offer a devil’s bargain.
Show the downside of their vice.
Offer a devil’s bargain.
Tell them the consequences and ask.
Cut to the moment of crisis.

CONSEQUENCES

- It takes extra time.
- You have reduced effect.
- You end up in a worse position.
- You suffer harm (1-3).

- You lose your opportunity.
- Complication (Tick a clock, 1-3 segments. Or a new obstacle or threat appears.)

EFFECT
How does the effect manifest?
If there’s a clock for your obstacle, tick segments equal to the effect level.

1. LIMITED: How is the effect diminished?
What significant obstacle remains?
2. STANDARD: How does the expected effect manifest? What’s left to do, if anything?
3. GREAT: How is the effect increased? What extra benefit manifests?

EFFECT MODIFIERS
- QUALITY
- SCALE
- POTENCY

FORTUNE ROLL

1d for eachTrait rating.

1d for a MAJOR ADVANTAGE.

1d for a MAJOR DRAWBACK.

DUSKWALL NOTABLES

The Eye, anonymous leader of The Unseen.
The Hand, chief lieutenant. Groll, a mid-level thug with ambitions.
The Dimmer Sisters. People say they’re witches who drink blood. Never seen outside their home.
Ulf Ironborn, a brutal Skovlander, looking to seize a ward.
Mylera Klev, leader of the Red Sash gang. Prizes fine art.

BASIO BAZ, leader of the Lampblacks. A lover of whisky.
Merrul Brime, a secrets broker, proprietor of the Hooded Fox.
Lady Devira, a city magistrate on the payroll of criminals.

Mordis, a merchant of the night market. A fence. Hides his true appearance under a heavy robe and hood.
Taffer, a merchant of the night market. A cultist.
Jira, a merchant of the night market. A smuggler.

Esierta Avrathi, resident diplomat of Iruvia.
Groll, a mid-level thug with ambitions.

The Hand, chief lieutenant. Groll, a mid-level thug with ambitions.

CRITICAL:

Exceptional outcome.
Great effect.

6: Good outcome. Standard effect.
4/5: Mixed outcome. Limited effect, or a mix of success and trouble.
1-3: Bad outcome. Poor effect.

CITY WARDS

Whitewall
Brightstone
Six Towers
Charterhall
Nightmarket
Silkshore
Charhollow

URBCENTRUM

Whitecrown
Brightstone
Six Towers
Charterhall
Nightmarket
Silkshore
Charhollow

LOCATION:
Undercross
Echo Gardens
The Night Market
The Canal
Chalk Street Bridge
Candle Street Bridge
Gaddoc Rail Station
Heartbreak Square

POLITICAL

The Anvilworks
Black Circle
Bellweather Crematorium
Ironhook Prison

TAVERNS

The Hooded Fox
The Hook & Line
The Leaky Bucket
The Devil’s Tooth
The Black Tree
The Cat & Candle
The Broken Anchor
The Red Lamp
The Nail & Bottle
The Six Arms
The Old Rasp
The Moon’s Daughter
The Sexton
Hazlewood
Quinn’s

CAPITAL:

The Anvilworks
Black Circle
Bellweather Crematorium
Ironhook Prison

NAMES

FAMILY NAMES:

LOOKS:
Affable Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed.
Worn Athletic
Pompous
Handsome
Squat
Open

Bright Scared
Slim
Weathered
Languid

Dark Rough
Delicate
Cold

Fair Chiseled
Striking
Bony
Sad
Fierce

VICE:
When they overindulge or spend coin, their purveyor may offer them a lead on a new score.

FLASHBACK STRESS COSTS:

- 0STRESS for a normal action for which you had easy opportunity.
- 1STRESS for a complex action or unlikely opportunity.
- 2STRESS for an elaborate action which involved several special opportunities or contingencies.

Critical: Exceptional outcome.

Great effect.

6: Good outcome. Standard effect.

4/5: Mixed outcome. Limited effect, or a mix of success and trouble.

1-3: Bad outcome. Poor effect.

SILKSHORE

The Anvilworks
Black Circle
Bellweather Crematorium
Ironhook Prison

RED LAMP
The Hooded Fox
The Hook & Line
The Leaky Bucket
The Devil’s Tooth
The Black Tree
The Cat & Candle
The Broken Anchor
The Red Lamp
The Nail & Bottle
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URBCENTRUM

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Hazlewood
Quinn’s
## Action Roll

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1d</td>
<td>for each <strong>Action</strong> dot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1d</td>
<td>if you <strong>Push</strong> yourself (you take 2 stress).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1d</td>
<td>for <strong>Assistance</strong> (they take 1 stress).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1d</td>
<td>for a <strong>Devil’s bargain</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Dominant
You act on your terms. You exploit a dominant advantage.
- **Critical:** You do it with increased effect.
  - 6: You do it.
  - 4/5: You do it, but there’s a consequence: it takes extra time, you have reduced effect, you end up in a daring position.
  - 1-3: You’re blocked, you hesitate, or you falter. Press on by seizing a daring opportunity, or withdraw and try a different way.

### Daring
You go head to head. You act under fire. You take a risk.
- **Critical:** You do it with increased effect.
  - 6: You do it.
  - 4/5: You do it, but there’s a consequence: you suffer harm, a complication occurs, you end up in a desperate position.
  - 1-3: Things go badly. You suffer harm, a complication occurs, you end up in a desperate position.

### Desperate
You overreach your capabilities. You’re in serious trouble.
- **Critical:** You do it with increased effect.
  - 6: You do it.
  - 4/5: You do it, but there’s a consequence: you suffer harm, a complication occurs, you end up in a desperate position.
  - 1-3: It’s the worst outcome. You suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs.

### Fortune Roll

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1d</td>
<td>for each <strong>Trait</strong> rating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1d</td>
<td>for a <strong>Major Advantage</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1d</td>
<td>for a <strong>Major Drawback</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Critical:** Exceptional outcome. Great effect.
  - 6: Good outcome. Standard effect.
  - 4/5: Mixed outcome. Limited effect, or a mix of success and trouble.
  - 1-3: Bad outcome. Poor effect.

### Resistance Roll

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1d</td>
<td>for each <strong>Attribute</strong> dot.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You reduce or avoid the consequences if you take 6 stress minus your highest die result.

The GM sets the consequences according to the situation. You may suffer one, some, or all of the listed consequences. You may attempt to avoid or reduce a consequence with a resistance roll.
**THE PAYOFF**

A score yields 1 rep per tier of the target and a coin reward based on the nature of the operation (see list at right).

If you’ve seized a claim, you gain its benefits (hold and/or other bonuses).

**ENTANGLEMENTS**

After a payoff, roll an entanglement according to your level of heat plus your wanted level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level: 0–3</th>
<th>Level: 4, 5</th>
<th>Level: 6+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Gang Trouble</td>
<td>1: Gang Trouble</td>
<td>1: Gang Trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Unquiet Dead</td>
<td>2: Unquiet Dead</td>
<td>2: Demonic Notice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Rivals</td>
<td>3: Reprisals</td>
<td>3: Show of Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 5: The Usual Suspects</td>
<td>4, 5: Questioning</td>
<td>4, 5: Interrogation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Cooperation</td>
<td>6: Show of Force</td>
<td>6: Arrest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ARREST.** An inspector presents a case file of evidence to a magistrate, to begin prosecution of your crew. The Bluecoats send a detail to arrest you. Pay them off with 3 coin or take +3 heat.

**COOPERATION.** A +3 status faction asks you for a favor. Agree to do it or give them 1 rep. If you don’t have a +3 faction status, you avoid entanglements right now.

**DEMONIC NOTICE.** A demon approaches the crew with a dark offer. Accept or hide until it trains on you. Lose a move against you. Pay them 1 coin or lose 1 status.

**GANG TROUBLE.** One of your gangs causes trouble due to their drawback. Lose face (-1 rep per tier), make an example of one of the gang members, or face reprisals from the wronged party. If you lack a gang with a drawback, there’s no entanglement.

**INTERROGATION.** The Bluecoats round up one of the PCs to question them about the crew’s crimes. Resist with your resolve to avoid jail time and exposing the crew to warrants for their arrest, or pay them off with 3 coin.

**QUESTIONING.** The Bluecoats grab an NPC member of your crew or one of the crew’s contacts, to question them about your crimes. Make a fortune roll to find out how well they resist spilling some info that they shouldn’t, or pay the Bluecoats off with 2 coin.

**REPRISALS.** A faction who you’ve crossed makes a move against you. Pay them 1 rep and 1 coin as an apology or show them who’s boss.

**RIVALS.** A faction with whom you have a neutral status throws their weight around. Give them 1 rep or 1 coin, or lose 1 status with them.

**SHOW OF FORCE.** A faction with whom you have a negative status makes a play on your turf. Give them 1 claim or go to war.

**UNQUIET DEAD.** A rogue spirit is drawn to you (perhaps it’s a past victim?). Pay 2 coin to a whisper or rail jack to exorcise it, or deal with it yourself. Pay 2 coin to a whisper or rail jack to exorcise it, or deal with it yourself.

**THE USUAL SUSPECTS.** The Bluecoats grab someone in the periphery of your crew, during a routine criminal sweep. One player volunteers one of their friends as the person most likely to be taken. Make a fortune roll to find out how well they resist spilling some info that they shouldn’t, or pay the Bluecoats off with 2 coin.

**HEAT**

After a score, the crew takes heat according to the nature of the operation. Add +2 heat for a high-profile target. Add +2 heat if killing was involved.

+ Any additional heat from complications or devil’s bargains during the score.

- 1 heat: Smooth & quiet; low exposure.
- 2 heat: Contained; standard exposure.
- 3 heat: Loud & chaotic; high exposure.
- 4 heat: Wild; devastating exposure.

**DOWNTIME**

Between scores, each PC gets two downtime actions. Choose from the options below. You may take additional downtime actions by spending 1 coin or 1 rep for each extra action.

For any downtime roll, add +1d to the roll if you get help from a friend or contact. After the roll, you may increase the result level by one for each coin spent, by hiring assistance (so, a 1–3 result becomes a 4/5, 4/5 becomes 6, 6 becomes critical).

**VICE**

Indulge your vice. Clear 1 stress + your vice rating. Also, clear +4 stress if you overindulge.

**BAD DECISION.** You make a bad call because of your vice—in acquiring it or while under its influence. Roll an additional entanglement for the crew.

**BROKE.** You pawn off your assets to pay for a massive indulgence in your vice. Lose access to all but one of your personal items (it’s your choice which one to keep) until you next have downtime.

**TAPPED.** Your current purveyor cuts you off and you need to find a new source for your vice.

**RECOVER**

Remove all level 1 harm. You also recover all of your armor uses. You may also seek treatment for level 2 and level 3 harm. Treating harm is a long term project (GM sets the clock size). Use the crew’s tier as the default trait if nothing else applies. You may treat yourself, but suffer 2 stress when you do so.

**LONG TERM PROJECT**

Work on a long term project. Roll a trait and mark 1-segment on the project clock per result level (1-3: one, 4/5: two, 6: three, crit: four).

**ACQUIRE ASSET**

Acquire temporary use of an asset. Roll the crew’s tier. The result indicates the quality of the asset (1-3: Poor, 4/5: Standard, 6: Fine, Crit: Exceptional).

**TRAIN**

Mark 1 xp for an attribute or your playbook (if you have the appropriate crew training upgrade). You can train a given trait only once per downtime.

**GATHER INFO**

Spend time to gather information away from danger. The action roll result indicates the quality (1-3: Poor, 4/5: Standard, 6: Fine, Crit: Exceptional).

**REDUCE HEAT**

Say how you reduce heat on the crew and roll your crew’s tier. Reduce heat by 1 per result level (1-3: one, 4/5: two, 6: three, Crit: four).
CHARACTER CREATION

1. Choose Playbook
Your playbook represents the nature of your character, their special abilities, and how they advance. Playbooks aren't unique — multiple players can choose the same one.

2. Choose a Special Ability
Choose 1 starting special ability. Note: the Veteran ability can be taken twice, which is why it has two dots. Each time you choose it, fill one dot.

3. Choose a Heritage
...and detail it with a note about your family life. For example, Skovlan: Ore Miners. Assign an action dot based on your Heritage choice (max starting action rating is 2).

4. Choose a Background
...and detail it with your specific history. For example, Labor: Leviathan Hunter. Assign an action dot based on your Background choice (max starting action rating is 2).

5. Assign Action Dots
Assign 2 additional action dots. No action may begin with a rating higher than 2.

6. Items Carried
You have access to all of the items on your character sheet. For each operation, decide what your character’s load will be. During the operation, you may decide that your character has an item by checking the box for the item you want to use — up to a number of items equal to your chosen load. Your load determines your movement speed and conspicuousness (items in italics don't count toward your load):

- **Light** (you're faster and less conspicuous, you can blend in with citizens).
- **Normal** (you look like a scoundrel, ready for trouble).
- **Heavy** (you're slower, you look like an operative on a mission).

Some items count as two items for load (they have two connected boxes). Note that the Cutter playbook can carry a heavier load.

7. Choose a Close Friend and a Rival
You begin with all of your friends. Mark the one who is a close friend, long-time ally, family relation, or lover (the upward-pointing triangle). Mark one who is a former friend turned rival, enemy, scorned lover, betrayed partner etc. (the downward-pointing triangle).

8. Choose Your Vice
Pick your preferred vice. Your vice rating begins at 1.

9. Record Name, Alias, & Look


**Family Names:** Brogan, Tyrconnell, Dunvil, Comber, Millar, Slane, Strangford, Dalmore, Edrad, Lomond, Clerlland, Arran, Scapa, Kinclaith, Coleburn, Penalten, Strathmill, Haig, Morriston, Penderyn, Hellyers, Walund, Templeton, Michter, Bowman, Prichard, Keel, Wathen, Clermont, Rowan, Booker.

Ankhayat, Helker, Jayan, Sevoy, Athanocheck, Karmera, Grine, Helles, Hix, Boden, Farros, Maroden, Karstas, Skellkallan, Basaran, Vedat, Kessarin, Salkha, Daava.

**Alliases:** Birch, Bird, Bliss, Bricks, Bug, Chime, Coil, Cricket, Cross, Crow, Echo, Flint, Frog, Frost, Grip, Hook, Keel, Mist, Moon, Nail, Needle, Ogre, Pool, Prophet, Ring, Ruby, Saber, Silver, Skinner, Song, Spur, Tackle, Thistle, Thorn, Tick Tock, Trick, Vixen, Whip.

**Looks:** Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed.

Affable - Huge - Brooding - Bright - Dark - Fair - Worn - Wiry - Tricorn Hat
Brooding - Chiseled - Handsome - Athletic - Stout - Scarred - Rough - Striking - Chiseled
Bright - Athletic - Slim - Delicate - Bony - Plump - Square - Waxed Coat
Dark - Stout - Suspenders - Delicate - Open - Narrow - Suspenders - Waxcoat
Fair - Scarred - Heavy - Plump - Rough - Bony - Round - Leather - Black
Worn - Rough - Tunic - Plump - Plump - Round - Fall - Thick Greatcoat
Wiry - Striking - Collared Shirt - Plump - Narrow - Fall - Thick Greatcoat

**Actions**

- **Attune** to spirits and the ghost field; channel electroplasmic energy; perceive and communicate with ghosts; understand spectrology.
- **Command** obedience with your force of personality; intimidate or threaten; lead an action with one of the crew’s gangs.
- **Consort** with connections from your heritage, background, friends, or rivals to gain access to resources, information, people, or places.
- **Finesse** an item from someone’s pocket; employ subtle misdirection or sleight-of-hand; handle a vehicle or a mount.
- **Hunt** a target; gather information about location and movements; attack with precision fire from a distance.
- **Prowl** about unseen and traverse obstacles; climb, swim, run, jump, and tumble. Ambush with close violence—a backstab, throat cutting, black-jack, etc.
- **Skirmish** with an opponent in close combat; assault or defend a position; brawl and wrestle.
- **Study** a person, document, or item with close scrutiny to gather information and apply knowledge; gain a deeper understanding; do research.
- **Survey** a location or situation to understand what’s going on; sense trouble before it happens; gather information about opportunities or exploits.
- **Sway** someone with charm, logic, deception, disguise, or bluff; change attitudes or behavior with manipulation or seduction.
- **Tinker** with mechanisms to create, modify, disable, or repair; disable a trap, pick a lock, or crack a safe. Use the ubiquitous clockwork and electroplasmic devices around the city to your advantage.
- **Wreck** a place, item, or obstacle with savage force or carefully applied sabotage; breach defenses with force; create distractions and chaos.
**NAME**

**ALIAS**

**LOOK**

**HERITAGE:** Akoros—the dagger isles—Irivia—Severos—Skovlan—Tycheros

**BACKGROUND:** Academic—Labor—Law—Trade—Military—Noble—Underworld

**VICE**


**STRESS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HARM</th>
<th>NEED</th>
<th>TRAUMA</th>
<th>ARMOR</th>
<th>+HEAVY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>HELP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-1D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>LESS</td>
<td>EFFECT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TRAUMA**

**ARMOR**

- Battlborn
- Other special armor

**RESOLVE**

- Attune
- Command
- Consort
- Swa

**BONUS DICE**

- **MIND**
  - **PUSH** (You take 2 stress)
  - **ASSIST** (They take 1 stress)
  - **DEVIL’S BARGAIN**

**STASH**

**STORAGE**

- COIN
- STASH
- Other special armor

**PLAYBOOK ADVANCEMENT**

**MARK XP:**

- When you roll a desperate action.
- When you address a tough challenge with violence or threats.
- At end of session, if you’ve expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background. And also mark xp if you caused a problem with your obsessions, ambitions, or faults during the session.

**TEAMWORK**

- Lead a group action.
- Set up another character.
- Face danger for a teammate.
- Assist another character.

**PLANNING**

- Choose a plan, provide the detail.
- Assault plan: Point of attack.
- Deception plan: Method.
- Infiltration plan: Entry point.
- Occult plan: Arcane power.
- Social plan: Social connection.
- Transport plan: Locations / Route.

**GATHER INFORMATION**

- What do they intend to do?
- What might I suspect about this? What can I prove?
- What’s the danger here?
- How can I find X?
- What’s really going on here?
- Ask about a detail for a plan.

**INSIGHT**

- **HUNT**
- **STUDY**
- **SURVEY**
- **TINKER**

**PROWESS**

- **FINESSE**
- **PROWL**
- **SKIRMISH**
- **WRECK**

**DANGEROUS FRIENDS**

- △ △ Marlane, a pugilist
- △ △ Chael, a vicious thug
- △ △ Mercy, a cold killer
- △ △ Grace, an extortionist
- △ △ Stras, a clever blade

**ITEMS**

- □ □ Fine hand weapon
- □ □ Fine heavy weapon
- □ □ Manacles & chain
- □ □ Rage essence vial
- □ □ Spiritbane charm
- □ □ Demolition tools

**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

- **Brutal:** Your attacks are more powerful; you hit as if wielding a heavier weapon. You gain *potency* vs. physical targets.
- **Resolve:** When you *recover*, you get +1 level of healing.
- **Tough as Nails:** When you resist with *Prowess*, you get +1d.
- **Savage:** When you make an example of someone, your opponents lose heart. When you *Command* their fear, take +1d.
- **Ghost Fighter:** You may imbue your hands, melee weapons, or tools with spirit energy. You gain *potency* in combat vs. the supernatural.
- **Battlborn:** You get special armor against physical attacks in combat. When you roll a *critical* in combat, clear 1 stress.
- **Not to Be Trifled With:** You’re an expert in group combat. In a melee, you and your team ignore effect reduction due to scale.
- **Leader:** When you *Command* a gang in combat, they stand fast when they would otherwise break or flee. They get 1 armor.

**VETERAN:** Choose a special ability from another source.

**DANGEROUS FRIENDS**

- △ △ △ A Blade or Two
- △ △ △ Throwing Knives
- △ △ △ A Pistol & Shot
- △ △ △ A Heavy Weapon
- △ △ △ An Unusual Weapon
- △ △ △ Armor □ □ +Heavy
- △ △ △ Burglary Tools
- △ △ △ Climbing Gear
- △ △ △ Arcane Implements
- △ △ △ Documents
- △ △ △ Subterfuge Supplies
- △ △ △ Tinkering Tools
- △ △ △ A small personal item

---

**NOTES / PROJECTS**

- Brutal: Y our attacks are more powerful; you hit as if wielding a heavier weapon. You gain *potency* vs. physical targets.
- Resolute: When you *recover*, you get +1 level of healing.
- Tough as Nails: When you resist with *Prowess*, you get +1d.
- Savage: When you make an example of someone, your opponents lose heart. When you *Command* their fear, take +1d.
- Ghost Fighter: You may imbue your hands, melee weapons, or tools with spirit energy. You gain *potency* in combat vs. the supernatural.
- Battlborn: You get special armor against physical attacks in combat. When you roll a *critical* in combat, clear 1 stress.
- Not to Be Trifled With: You’re an expert in group combat. In a melee, you and your team ignore effect reduction due to scale.
- Leader: When you *Command* a gang in combat, they stand fast when they would otherwise break or flee. They get 1 armor.

**Veteran:** Choose a special ability from another source.
**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

- **Predator**: Take +1d to rolls against weakened or vulnerable targets.
- **Ghost Hunter**: Your hunting pet is imbued with spirit energy. It gains **potency** when tracking or fighting the supernatural, and gains an arcane ability: ghost-form, mind-link, or arrow-swift. Take this ability again to choose an additional arcane ability for your pet.
- **Sharpshooter**: You can perform precision and long-range shooting. You can quickly draw and reload your weapons. Your ranged attacks gain **potency**.
- **Sharp**: When you roll resistance with **Insight**, you get +1d.
- **Cold**: You get **special armor** vs. mental effects (fear, confusion, etc.). When you roll a **critical** while engaging a target, **clear 1 stress**.
- **Marked Target**: When you **hunt** a target that you’ve previously tracked or wounded, you get +1d.
- **Vengeful**: After you roll to resist a consequence from an enemy, take +1d to your next roll against it.
- **Veteran**: Choose a special ability from another source.

**DEADLY FRIENDS**

- △ Steiner, an assassin
- △ Celene, a sentinel
- △ Melvir, a physicker
- △ Veleris, a spy
- △ Casta, a bounty hunter

**MARK XP:**

- When you roll a desperate action.
- When you address a tough challenge with violence or tracking.
- At end of session, if you’ve expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background. And also mark **xp** if you caused a problem with your obsessions, ambitions, or faults during the session.

**TEAMWORK**

- Lead a **group action**.
- **Set up** another character.
- Face danger for a teammate.
- **Assist** another character.

**PLAYBOOK ADVANCEMENT**

- **Bonuses** (Italics don’t count for load)
  - △ Fine pair of pistols
  - △ Fine long rifle
  - △ Electroplasmic ammunition
  - △ A fine trained hunting pet
  - △ Spyglass
  - △ Spiritbane charm

**GATHER INFORMATION**

- What do they intend to do?
- What might I suspect about this? What can I prove?
- What’s the danger here?
- How can I find X?
- What’s really going on here?
- Ask about a **detail** for a plan.
**Shadow Binding**

When you address a tough challenge with technical skill or chaos.

-1

**Ghost Ward**

What do they intend to do?

Ask about a Spider

**Ironskin**

What might I suspect about

**Assault plan:**

**Thought**

**standstill**

**Lightning**

prowl

sway

What's really going on here?

**thought**

**GATHER INFORMATION**

- What do they intend to do?
- What might I suspect about this? What can I prove?
- What’s the danger here?
- How can I find X?
- What’s really going on here?
- Ask about a detail for a plan.

**Mark XP:**

- When you roll a desperate action.
- When you address a tough challenge with technical skill or chaos.
- At end of session, if you’ve expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background. And also mark xp if you caused a problem with your obsessions, ambitions, or faults during the session.

**TEAMWORK**

- Lead a group action.

- Set up another character.

- Face danger for a teammate.

- Assist another character.

**PLANNING**

Choose a plan, provide the detail.

- Assault plan: Point of attack.
- Deception plan: Method.
- Infiltration plan: Entry point.
- Occult plan: Arcane power.
- Social plan: Social connection.
- Transport plan: Locations / Route.

**RESOLVE**

- At end of session, if you’ve expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background. And also mark xp if you caused a problem with your obsessions, ambitions, or faults during the session.
BLADES IN THE DARK

LURK

A STEALTHY INFILTRATOR AND BURGLAR

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Ambush:** When you attack from hiding or spring a trap, take +1d.
- **Tenacious:** Take 1 stress to ignore a harm penalty.
- **Infiltrator:** When you bypass security measures, you get +1 effect.
- **Fly on the Wall:** When you gather information through clandestine observation, you get +1 effect.
- **Ghost Veil:** You may hide your spirit from the notice of ghosts, demons, or other arcane powers. You gain **potency** vs. supernatural attention or security measures.
- **Shadow:** You get special armor vs. consequences from detection or security. When you roll a critical on a feat of athletics or stealth, clear 1 stress.
- **Daredevil:** When you make a desperate roll, take +1d.
- **Reflexes:** When there’s a question about who acts first, the answer is you (two characters with Reflexes act simultaneously).
- **Veteran:** Choose a special ability from another source.

DEADLY FRIENDS

- Telda, a beggar
- Darmot, a bluecoat
- Frake, a locksmith
- Roslyn Kellis, a noble
- Petra, a city clerk

ITEMS

- Fine lockpicks
- Fine shadow cloak
- Light climbing gear
- Silence potion vial
- Dark-sight goggles
- Spiritbane charm

MARK XP:

- When you roll a desperate action.
- When you address a tough challenge with infiltration or athletics.
- At end of session, if you’ve expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background. And also mark xp if you caused a problem with your obsessions, ambitions, or faults during the session.

TEAMWORK

- Lead a group action.
- Set up another character.
- Face danger for a teammate.
- Assist another character.

PLANNING

Choose a plan, provide the detail.

- **Assault plan:** Point of attack.
- **Deception plan:** Method.
- **Infiltration plan:** Entry point.
- **Occult plan:** Arcane power.
- **Social plan:** Social connection.
- **Transport plan:** Locations / Route.

GATHER INFORMATION

- What do they intend to do?
- What might I suspect about this? What can I prove?
- What’s the danger here?
- How can I find X?
- What’s really going on here?
- Ask about a detail for a plan.
BLADES IN THE DARK

SLIDE

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Espionage: When you use a disguise or cover, you get +1 effect.

Team Player: When you lead a group action using your highest-rated action, you can suffer only 1 stress at most from any failed rolls.

Tricky Maneuver: Perform a setup action with -1d to give +1d to a teammate who follows your move (in addition to +1 effect).

Adaptation: Take 2 stress to roll your best action rating while performing a different action. Say how you adapt your skill to this use.

Orator: When you manipulate or deceive a group of people, you never suffer effect reduction due to scale.

Subterfuge: You get special armor vs. persuasion or deception. When you roll a critical while using subterfuge, clear 1 stress.

Trust in Me: You get +1d vs. a target you have a relationship with.

Ghost Voice: You know the secret method to interact with a ghost or demon as if it was a normal human, regardless of how wild or feral it is. You gain potency when communicating with the supernatural.

Veteran: Choose a special ability from another source.

VICE

CHARITY—COLLECTION—DRINK—DRUGS—FAITH—GAMBLING—ISOLATION—LOVERS—LUXURIES—OBLIGATION—PAIN—WEIRD

LOOK

HERITAGE: AKOROS—THE DAGGER ISLES—IRUVIA—SEVEROS—SKOVLAN—TYCHEROS

BACKGROUND: ACADEMIC—LABOR—LAW—TRADE—MILITARY—NOBLE—UNDERWORLD

STRESS

HARM

TRAUMA

ARMOR

+HEAVY

NEED HELP

-1D

LESS EFFECT

SUBTERFUGE

STASH

COIN

NOTE / PROJECTS

BONUS DICE

PUSH (You take 2 stress)

ASSIST (They take 1 stress)

DEVIL'S BARGAIN

INSIGHT

HUNT

STUDY

SURVEY

TINKER

Prowess

FINESSE

PROWL

SKIRMISH

WRECK

Resolve

ATTUNE

COMMAND

CONSORT

SWAY

Deadly Friends

Bryl, a drug dealer

Bazso Baz, a gang leader

Lyza, a tavern owner

Nytyx, a prostitute

Harker, a jail-bird

Items (Italics don't count for load)

Fine clothes & jewelry

Fine disguise kit

Fine loaded dice, trick cards

Trance powder

A cane-sword

Spiritbane charm

Mark XP:

Playbook Advancement

When you roll a desperate action.

When you address a tough challenge with deception or influence.

At end of session, if you've expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background. And also mark xp if you caused a problem with your obsessions, ambitions, or faults during the session.

Teamwork

Lead a group action.

Set up another character.

Face danger for a teammate.

Assist another character.

Planning

Choose a plan, provide the detail.

Assault plan: Point of attack.

Deception plan: Method.

Infiltration plan: Entry point.

Occult plan: Arcane power.

Social plan: Social connection.

Transport plan: Locations / Route.

Gather Information

What do they intend to do?

What might I suspect about this? What can I prove?

What's the danger here?

How can I find X?

What's really going on here?

Ask about a detail for a plan.
**Blades in the Dark**

**Whisper**

**Adept and Channeler**

**Special Abilities**

- **Compel:** You can attune to the ghost field to force a supernatural entity to appear before you and follow a direct instruction you give it.
- **Tempest:** Channel energy to produce storm effects (fog, frost, wind, rain, lightning). Costs stress equal to the magnitude of the results (0-6).
- **Occultist:** You may consort with ancient powers, forgotten gods or demons. If you have control over the entity, take +1d.
- **Ritual:** You can study an occult ritual to summon a supernatural effect or being. Costs stress based on the magnitude of the results (2-6). Answer the GM’s questions to create the ritual (page 42).
- **Beyond:** You get special armor vs. supernatural effects. When you roll a critical while dealing with arcane powers, clear 1 stress.
- **Iron Will:** When you roll resistance with Resolve, you get +1d.
- **Strange Methods:** When you tinker with a device, tool, or weapon, you may include electroplasmic or arcane features.
- **Ghost Mind:** You know how to find the weakness in each ghost, demon, or arcane force. You gain potency when you study the supernatural.

**Veteran:** Choose a special ability from another source.

**Deadly Friends**

- Nyrrx, a possessor ghost
- Scurlock, a vampire
- Setarra, a demon
- Quellyn, a witch
- Flint, a spirit trafficker

**Items** (Italics don’t count for load)

- Fine spirit anchor
- Fine spirit mask
- Electroplasm vials
- Demon blood vials
- Ghost key
- Demonbane charm

**Planning**

Choose a plan, provide the detail.

- **Assault plan:** Point of attack.
- **Deception plan:** Method.
- **Infiltration plan:** Entry point.
- **Occult plan:** Arcane power.
- **Social plan:** Social connection.
- **Transport plan:** Locations / Route.

**Teamwork**

- Lead a group action.
- Set up another character.
- Face danger for a teammate.
- Assist another character.

**Bonuses Dice**

- **Push** (You take 2 stress)
- **Assist** (They take 1 stress)
- **Devil’s Bargain**

**Veteran**

- Choose a special ability from another source.

**Notes / Projects**

- Charity—collection—drink—drugs—faith—gambling—
  isolation—lovers—luxuries—obligation—pain—weird

**Teamwork**

- Lead a group action.
- Set up another character.
- Face danger for a teammate.
- Assist another character.

**Planning**

Choose a plan, provide the detail.

- **Assault plan:** Point of attack.
- **Deception plan:** Method.
- **Infiltration plan:** Entry point.
- **Occult plan:** Arcane power.
- **Social plan:** Social connection.
- **Transport plan:** Locations / Route.

**Gather Information**

- What do they intend to do?
- What might I suspect about this? What can I prove?
- What’s the danger here?
- How can I find X?
- What’s really going on here?
- Ask about a detail for a plan.
**STANDARD ITEMS**
- **A Blade or Two**: Perhaps you carry a pair of large fighting knives. Or a sword and dagger. Or a heavy cleaver and long stiletto. Up to you.
- **Throwing Knives**: Six light blades, suitable for throwing.
- **A Pistol & Shot**: A flintlock pistol, devastating at 12 paces, slow to reload. A small pouch of powder and shot.
- **A Large Weapon**: A weapon meant for two-hands. A weapon of war, like a battle-axe, greatsword, warhammer, or pole-arm. A hunting rifle. A blunderbuss. A bow or crossbow.
- **An Unusual Weapon**: A curiosity of the blacksmith’s art or a tool turned into a weapon. A whip, a flail, a hatchet, a shovel, a length of chain, a razor-edged fan, steel-toed boots.
- **Armor**: A thick leather tunic with a high collar, reinforced gloves and boots. +Heavy: The addition of chain mail or metal plates, a metal helm.
- **Documents**: A small collection of slim volumes on a variety of topics, including a registry of the nobility, city watch commanders, and other officials. Blank pages, a vial of ink, a pen. A number of interesting maps.
- **Arcane Implements**: A vial of quicksilver. A pouch of black salt. A spirit anchor in the form of a small, heavy stone. A spirit bottle. A vial of electroplasm, designed to break and splatter on impact.
- **Tinkering Tools**: A set of tools for detailed mechanist work. A jeweler’s loup. Measuring devices.
- **Spiritbane Charm**: A small arcane trinket which ghosts prefer to avoid.

**CUTTER ITEMS**
- **Fine hand weapon**: A finely crafted one-handed weapon of your choice.
- **Fine large weapon**: A finely crafted two-handed weapon of your choice.
- **Manacles and chain**: A set of heavy manacles and chain, suitable for restraining a prisoner.
- **Rage Essence Vial**: A single dose of Rage Essence, which greatly enhances the user’s strength, resistance to pain, and irrational aggression for the span of several minutes.
- **Demolition tools**: A sledgehammer and iron spikes. Heavy drill. Crowbar.

**HOUND ITEMS**
- **Fine pair of pistols**: A pair of finely crafted pistols.
- **Fine long rifle**: A finely crafted hunting rifle, deadly at long range.
- **Electroplasmic ammunition**: A bandolier of electroplasmically charged shot, suitable for harming spirits and demons.
- **A fine trained hunting pet**: An animal companion that obeys your commands and anticipates your actions, of a species of your choice.
- **Spyglass**: A device which allows you to see clearly over extreme distances.

**LEECH ITEMS**
- **Fine tinkering tools**: A finely crafted set of tools for detailed mechanist work. A jeweler’s loup. Measuring devices.
- **Blowgun & darts, syringes**: A small tube and darts that can carry alchemical loads. Empty syringes.
- **Bandolier of alchemy vials**: A strap worn across the body, fitted with pouches which can hold up to 4 vials of alchemical agents.

**LURK ITEMS**
- **Fine lockpicks**: A finely crafted set of lockpicks.
- **Fine shadow cloak**: A cloak made of rare Iruvian shadow-silk that blends into the darkness around it.
- **Light climbing gear**: A well-crafted set of climbing gear which is less bulky and heavy than a standard set.
- **Silence potion vial**: A vial of golden liquid that negates all sound within 10 paces of the drinker for a span of several minutes.
- **Dark-sight goggles**: A mechanist device that allows the wearer to see in pitch darkness as if it were day.

**SLIDE ITEMS**
- **Fine clothes and jewelry**: An outfit of such fine make as to pass as a wealthy noble.
- **Fine disguise kit**: A theatrical make-up kit equipped with an impressive array of expert appliances to fool the eye.
- **Fine loaded dice, trick cards**: Gambling accoutrements subtly altered to favor particular outcomes.
- **Trance powder**: A dose of the popular drug, which induces a dreamlike state.
- **A cane-sword**: A slim sword and its sheath, disguised as a noble’s cane.

**WHISPER ITEMS**
- **Fine spirit anchor**: An arcane item which can hold a ghost in place near it.
- **Fine lightning-hook**: A long, two-handed pole with a loop of heavy wire at the end, connected to an electroplasmic capacitor. Suitable for grappling a spirit and dragging it into a spirit bottle.
- **Fine spirit mask**: An arcane item which allows the trained user to see arcane energies in great detail. Also affords some measure of protection against ghostly possession.
- **Demon blood vials**: A small set of vials, containing the faintly luminous blood of a demon. Useful for empowering channeling or summoning, but dangerous to imbibe.
- **Ghost key**: An arcane device which can open ghost doors.
- **Demonbane charm**: An arcane trinket which demons prefer to avoid.
CREW CREATION

1. Choose Crew Type
Your crew type represents the nature of your crew, its special abilities, and how they advance. In the full game, there are several to choose from. In this quick start, you’re Thieves.

2. Choose a Special Ability
Choose 1 starting special ability for the crew.

3. Choose Reputation
Your crew’s reputation represents how you’re known in the criminal underworld. You earn crew XP when you bolster your crew’s reputation.

4. Assign Crew Upgrades
Mark 2 upgrade boxes. If you choose a gang, create it using the procedure at right.

5. Choose A Favorite Contact
You begin with all of your contacts. Mark the one who is a close friend, long-time ally, or partner in crime.

6. Assign Faction Status Ticks
Each player assigns a positive tick and a negative tick with any Tier 1 or Tier 2 faction (to represent past interactions). Then, as a group, assign one positive and one negative tick at Tier 3. Say why you have good or bad status with these factions.

7. Crew Name, Lair Details
Thinking of a name for your crew can be very hard at first. It’s okay to start out without a name and later acquire one based on what the crew is like. Describe the location of your lair and what it looks like.

8. Tier, Hold, Rep & Cash
You begin at Tier 0, with 0 Hold and 0 Rep. You start with 2 coin.

Creating a Gang
Choose the gang type:
◆ Adepts: Scholars, tinkerers, occultists, and chemists.
◆ Killers: Assassins and murderers.
◆ Rooks: Con artists, spies, and socialites.
◆ Rovers: Sailors, carriage drivers, and death-lands scavengers.
◆ Shadows: Scouts, infiltrators, and sneak-thieves.
◆ Thugs: Toughs, brawlers, and roustabouts.
(When you upgrade a gang, you can choose an additional type. When a gang performs actions to which its types apply, it uses its full Quality rating. Otherwise, its quality is zero.)

Choose an advantage:
◆ Fearsome: The gang is terrifying in aspect and reputation.
◆ Loyal: The gang can’t be bribed or turned against you.
◆ Tenacious: The gang won’t rest in pursuit of a task.

Choose a disadvantage:
◆ Principled: The gang has an ethic or values that it won’t betray.
◆ Savage: The gang is excessively violent, drunken, and debauched.
◆ Unreliable: The gang isn’t always available.
(When you upgrade a gang, you can add an advantage or remove a disadvantage.)

List the names of the NPCs in the gang roster.
You gang begins with a Quality of 1. (When you upgrade a gang, you can increase its quality by 1.)

When you send a gang to achieve a goal, roll their Quality to see how it goes. Or, a PC can oversee the gang operation by leading a group action (the PC rolls Command, the gang rolls Quality). The quality of any opposition relative to the gang’s quality affects the position and effect of the action.

Crew Upgrades
◆ Carriage House: You have a carriage, horses, and a house/stables for them.
◆ Boat House: You have a small boat, a dock, and a small house to store boating supplies.
◆ Investments: +1 stash per PC, per score.
◆ Hidden Lair: Your lair has a secret location and is disguised to hide it from view.
◆ Prowess, Resolve, Insight Training: If you have the appropriate training upgrade, you can choose to train that attribute during downtime.
◆ Quarters: Your lair includes living quarters for the crew.
◆ Secure Lair: Your lair has locks, alarms, and traps to thwart intruders.
◆ Vault: Your lair has a secure vault. You can store up to 8 cash, instead of just 4. Your vault can also be used as a holding cell.
◆ Workshop: Your lair has a workshop appointed with tools for tinkering and alchemy, as well as a library of books, documents, and maps. You may accomplish long term projects with these assets without leaving your lair.
◆ Mastery: Your crew has access to master level training. You may advance your PC action ratings to 4. This upgrade costs 2 advances to unlock.

Initial Hunting Grounds
Your crew of thieves begins with a single area in the district that they use as hunting grounds for burglaries, robberies, and shakedowns. The local ward boss (Lyssa) has given them permission to operate there.

The area is small (a few streets) and starts with a Quality of 1. The GM can make a fortune roll using the quality of the hunting ground to determine if there are currently any passing opportunities for thievery and how lucrative they may be.
**Thieves**

**Special Abilities**

- **Everyone Steals:** Each PC may raise one action rating from zero to 1, from the following options: Prowl, Finesse, Swag, or Tinker.
- **Pack Rats:** Your lair is a jumble of stolen items. When you roll to acquire an asset, take +1d.
- **Slippery:** When you roll entanglements, roll two dice and keep the one you want. When you reduce heat on the crew, take +1d.
- **Warm:** When you perform a group action, you do +1 effect.
- **Shadows:** All of your gangs get the Shadows type for free (so you can choose another one).
- **Second Story:** When you execute an infiltration or burglary, you get +1d to the engagement roll.
- **Hardcases:** When you execute a robbery or shakedown, you get +1d to the engagement roll.
- **Ghost Echoes:** From weird experience or occult ritual, all crew members gain the ability to see and interact with the ghostly objects, structures, and passages that exist across Duskwall.

**Crew Advancement**

- Execute a profitable burglary, robbery, or shakedown.
- Improve the quality or variety of your hunting grounds.
- Bolster your crew’s reputation or develop a new one.
- Contend with challenges above your current station.

**Crew Upgrades**

- **Gangs / Experts**
  - Add a gang
  - Add an expert
- **Item Quality**
  - Documents
  - Gear
  - Implements
  - Supplies
  - Tools
  - Weapons
- **Lair**
  - Carriage House
  - Boat House
  - Hidden
  - Quarters
  - Secure
  - Vault
  - Workshop
- **Enhancement**
  - Prowess Training
  - Resolve Training
  - Insight Training
  - Mastery
- **Item Quality**
  - Fine Building Plans
  - Fine Rooftop Routes
  - Elite Shadows (+1 Quality)
  - Prison Escape Methods
  - Safe Houses
  - Thief Rigging (-1 load weight)

**Crew Details**

- **Name**
- **Reputation**
  - Ambitious
  - Brutal
  - Daring
  - Honorable
  - Professional
  - Savvy
  - Subtle
  - Strange
- **Heat**
- **Wanted**
- **Coin**
- **Claims Hold**
- **Total Hold**
- **Tier**

**Hunting Grounds**

- **Luxury Fence**
  - +1 coin for burglary scores
- **Gambling Den**
  - +3 hold, +1 coin per downtime
- **Bazaar**
  - +1d engagement roll for shake-down
- **Lookouts**
  - +1d to spot or escape trouble
- **Turf**
  - +4 hold
- **City Records**
  - +1d to gather info on targets
- **Street Fence**
  - +1 coin for robbery scores
- **Drug Den**
  - +3 hold, +1 coin per downtime
- **Ambush Points**
  - +1d engagement roll for robbery

**Contacts**

- Dowler, an explorer
- Laroze, a bluecoat
- Amancio, a broker
- Fitz, a collector
- Adelaide Phroaig, a noble
- Rigney, a tavern owner

**Notes / Claims Details**

- **City / Gangs / Experts**
  - +1 Effect
- **Item Quality**
  - Fine Building Plans
  - Fine Rooftop Routes
  - Elite Shadows (+1 Quality)
  - Prison Escape Methods
  - Safe Houses
  - Thief Rigging (-1 load weight)

**Summary**

- **Heat**
- **Wanted**
- **Coin**
- **Claims Hold**
- **Total Hold**
- **Tier**

**Crew Details**

- **Name**
- **Type**
- **Quality**

**Expert**

- **Name**
- **Type**
- **Quality**
# Factions of Duskwall

## Criminal Underworld
- The Unseen
- The Silver Nails
- Lord Scurlock
- The Hive
- The Circle of Flame
- The Crows
- The Lampblack
- The Red Sashes
- The Dimmer Sisters
- Ulf Ironborn
- The Fog Hounds
- The Eels
- The Lost

## City Institutions
- Duskwall Council
- Ironhook Prison
- Spirit Wardens
- Bluecoats
- Skovlan Consulate
- Inspectors
- Ink Rakes
- Sparkwrights
- Imperial Guard
- Iruvian Consulate
- Severosi Consulate
- Dagger Isles Consulate

## Labor & Trade
- Ministry of Transport
- Leviathan Hunters
- Ministry of Provisions
- Merchant Guild
- Sailors
- Dockers
- Gondoliers
- Cabbies
- Rail Jacks

## Faith & Weirdness
- Ecstasy of the Flesh
- The Horde
- The Weeping Lady
- The Reconciled
- The Path of Echoes
- The Forgotten Gods
- Deathlands Scavengers

## Others
- Skovlander Refugees
Starting the Game

Explain the Situation
Read or summarize the info on page 4.

Make Characters and the Crew
Follow the procedures on page 22 and page 30. Ask some of these questions while they do it:

- Have you ever been locked up? For what crime?
- Why did you become a scoundrel?
- How did you join this crew? Did another member vouch for you? Were you a founding member?
- What’s your vice? What is it, specifically? (what kind of drug, etc.) Why does that thing consume you?
- When’s the last time you used your blade? Why?
- Who do you trust the most on the crew? Who do you trust the least? What’s that about? Or will we find out in play?
- Has [faction] ever tried to recruit you? What happened? You, uh, don’t secretly work for them, do you?

The First Scene
After they make characters and the crew, tell them this:

You’re in the office of the Lampblack’s leader, Bazso Baz. He wants your answer. Are you with them, or against them? What do you say? Will you side with the Lampblacks? Will you just pretend to? (Good luck, Bazso is very sharp). Will you tell him to fuck off?

Are you actually here to kill him for the Red Sashes? (If so, do a flashback and pick a plan for the assassination.)

Play Bazso. React to their answer how he’d react. If they’re with him, he has the perfect assignment for thiefy types like them: go steal the Red Sashes treasury from their vault. If they’re against him, he says he’s very sorry to hear that. They better get off his turf and stay out of the war, or they’re all dead. He threatens them with easy confidence. What are they gonna do?

The Next Scenes
Play the NPCs. Mylera, Bazso, and Lyssa all have thiefy things that need doing, so they’ll offer the PCs jobs (until the PCs make an enemy of them, of course). Use the scores tables on page 40 for ideas. Also, each faction is vulnerable to thievery in some way. How can the players use their crew’s strengths to profit from this situation? Ask them how they want to gather information, which leads to a plan (or vice versa).

Don’t waste time wafting around. Give them straightforward avenues to pursue at first. "Do you want to rob the Crow’s card game on Bell street? It’s probably not defended much right now."

There are three sample starting scores, at right. Offer those, ask them which they want to pursue. Ask them to pick a plan and provide the detail, then ask who’s on point, and get to it.

The Campaign
This quick start isn’t really meant for a campaign, but, you can easily play out the consequences of the starting situation over several sessions. Who ends up running the ward? Do the PCs use the situation to rise up in the faction ranks? Do they manage to play for all three sides, or do they have to take a stand? Plenty of material to work with there.

Score I
One of the gang leaders (Bazso Baz or Mylera) offers you a score: Go rob the treasury of their rival.

- Where is it? Maybe it’s a secret.
- What’s the plan? Provide the detail.
- Who’s on point?

Score II
One of the gang leaders (Bazso Baz or Mylera) offers you a score: Plant this strange artifact somewhere in their rival’s HQ.

- What does it do? It’s covered in weird runes and makes your head go swimmy when you hold it in your hand. Want to bother to find out what it is, or not?
- What’s the plan? Provide the detail.
- Who’s on point?

Score III
Lyssa is vulnerable. She needs assistance if she’s gonna seize control of the ward.

- Steal some loot and bring it to her to help her pay for bribes and thugs to seize the ward. Profit and status both, for you.
- What’s the plan? Provide the detail.
- Who’s on point?
### 1. CLIENT / 3. TARGET
- **CIVILIAN**
  - 1. Academic or Scholar
  - 2. Laborer or Tradesman
  - 3. Courier or Sailor
  - 4. Merchant or Shopkeeper
  - 5. Artist or Writer
  - 6. Doctor or Alchemist

- **CRIMINAL**
  - 1. Drug Dealer or Supplier
  - 2. Mercenary or Thug
  - 3. Fence or Gambler
  - 4. Spy or Informant
  - 5. Smuggler or Thief
  - 6. Crime Boss

- **POLITICAL**
  - 1. Noble or Official
  - 2. Banker or Captain
  - 3. Revolutionary or Refugee
  - 4. Clergy or Cultist
  - 5. Constable or Inspector
  - 6. Magistrate or Ward Boss

- **STRANGE**
  - 1. Ghost of (roll again)
  - 2. Occult Collector
  - 3. Vampire or Other Undead
  - 4. Demon (disguised)
  - 5. Possessed or Hollow

### 2. WORK

#### SKULDUGGERY
- 1. Stalking or Surveillance
- 2. Sabotage or Arson
- 3. Lift or Plant
- 4. Poison or Arrange Accident
- 5. Burglary or Heist

#### VIOLENCE
- 1. Assassinate
- 2. Disappear or Ransom
- 3. Terrorize or Extort
- 4. Destroy or Deface
- 5. Raid or Defend

#### UNDERWORLD
- 1. Escort or Security
- 2. Smuggle or Courier
- 3. Blackmail or Discredit
- 4. Con or Espionage
- 5. Locate or Hide

#### UNNATURAL
- 1. Curse or Sanctify
- 2. Banish or Summon
- 3. Extract Essence
- 4. Place or Remove Runes
- 5. Perform / Stop Ritual

### 3. WORK

#### SKULDUGGERY
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### 4. LOCATION

#### MOOD
- 1. Haunted or Cursed
- 2. Abandoned or Decrepit
- 3. Busy or Crowded
- 4. Lavish or Refined
- 5. Dank or Dismal
- 6. Serene or Silent

#### TYPE
- 1. Ship or Dockside
- 2. Canals or Grotto
- 3. Town House or Apartment
- 4. Tavern or Restaurant
- 5. Shop or Marketplace
- 6. Tower or Keep

#### WARD
- 1. Whithcrown or Brightstone
- 2. Six Towers or Charterhall
- 3. Mightmarket or Silkshore
- 4. Coalridge or The Docks
- 5. Crow’s Foot or Dunsloough
- 6. Barrowcleft or Charhollow

### 5. TROUBLES

#### BARRIERS
- 1. Stronghold (high walls, etc.)
- 2. Masterwork security (locks, etc.)
- 3. Natural Feature (cliff, island)
- 4. Safe, lock-box, vault
- 5. Runes / Wards
- 6. Electroplasmic Security

#### DANGERS
- 1. Traps (deadly or entangling)
- 2. Toxic Substances
- 3. Clockworks / Automatons
- 4. Alarms
- 5. Rogue spirits
- 6. Electroplasmic Devices

#### OPPOSITION
- 1. Guards / Scouts / Sentries
- 2. Bluecoats / Imperials
- 3. Guard Dogs / Lookouts
- 4. Trained Killers / Thugs
- 5. Whispers / Bound Spirits
- 6. Hollows

### 6. TWIST OR COMPLICATION

- 1. An element is a cover for heretic spirit cult practices
- 2. A seer has foreseen this job and warned the parties involved
- 3. Rogue spirits possess some/most/all of the people involved
- 4. Rogue spirits haunt the location
- 5. The job furthers a demon’s secret agenda
- 6. The job furthers a vampire’s secret agenda

- 1. Job requires travel by electro-rail
- 2. Must visit the death-lands to do the job
- 3. Job requires sea travel
- 4. The job furthers a revolutionary’s secret agenda
- 5. The job furthers a merchant lord’s secret agenda
- 6. The job furthers a crime boss’s secret agenda

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To generate a score, roll or choose on the following tables. Still a work in progress.
AFFILIATION
- The Silver Nails, a mercenary company.
- The Unseen.
- The Hive.
- The Circle of Flame.

DRINK
- Mardin Gull, The Leaky Bucket, Crow's Foot.
- Pux Bolin, the Harping Monkey, Nightmarket.
- Helene, Silver Stag casino, Silkshore.
- Freyla, The Emperor's Cask, Whitecrown.

DRUGS
- Avrick, powder dealer, Barrowcleft.
- Rolan Volaris, The Veil, Nightmarket.
- Traven's smoke shop, Coalridge.
- Eldrin Prichard, The Silver Swan pleasure barge, Brightstone canals.

FAITH
- Sister Narya of the Weeping Lady.
- The ruins of the Temple to Forgotten Gods, Coalridge.
- Nelisanne, Church of the Ecstasy of the Flesh, Silkshore.

GAMBLING
- Spogg's dice game, Dunsloough.
- Grist, boxing, the Docks.
- Helene, Silver Stag casino, Silkshore.
- Master Vreen, hound racing, Nightmarket.
- Lady Devera, The Dusk Manor Club, Whitecrown.

LOVERS
- Jewel, Bird, and Shine, Catcrawl alley, the Docks.
- Rolan Volaris, The Veil, Nightmarket.
- Eldrin Prichard, The Silver Swan pleasure barge, Brightstone canals.

LUXURIES
- Singer, bath house, Crow's Foot.
- Traven's smoke shop, Coalridge.
- Dunridge & Sons fine fabrics and tailoring, Nightmarket.
- Maestro Helleren, Spiregarden theater, Whitecrown.

WEIRD
- The hooded proprietor of a half-flooded grotto tavern near the docks. Strange passageways lead to stranger chambers beyond.

[... MORE TO COME HERE ...]
"They say anything can be sold on the streets of Duskwall. But have you ever tried to unload a cursed spirit bottle? Yeah, all of sudden the market dries up."
—Flint

DETAILS

- A spirit rises from its corpse three days after death, unless the body is dissolved in electroplasm before then.
- Bellweather Crematorium (operated by the bronze-masked Spirit Wardens) handles most of the corpse disposal in Duskwall. But some rogue spirits still haunt the city.
- Ghosts are not the only undead. A variety of strange beings stalk the darkest shadows.

SPECTROLOGY

It’s said that the cataclysm which shattered the earth, banished the sun, and turned the seas to black ink was caused by a sorcerer who dabbled in forbidden magic and tore down the Gates of Death. But who believes such ancient tales? Whatever the truth of it, one thing is certain: once a body dies, its spirit does not disperse as they once did long ago. It becomes a ghost: a spectral entity composed of electroplasmic vapors.

It takes roughly three days for a ghost to become free of the corpse. It is then free to wander the world, consumed by darker and darker urges until it goes entirely mad and monstrous. If the corpse is dissolved in electroplasm before then, the spirit, too, is destroyed. But there are other ways for body and spirit to relate...

- **Soul.** A living body with its own spirit. The normal state of affairs.
- **Possessed.** A living body containing two (or more) spirits.
- **Hollow.** A living body without a spirit. Usually dim-witted and easily controlled.
- **Hull.** A clockwork body animated by a bound spirit.
- **Undead.** A dead body animated and sustained by a spirit. Sometimes called a “vampire”—though only some crave hot blood.
- **Ghost.** A spirit without a body. Craves life essence and vengeance on its earthly enemies. Can coalesce into semi-solid electroplasmic vapor or diffuse into a fine haze.
- **Spirit-Well:** A rift in reality where ghosts and other supernatural beings congregate to draw energy. In ancient myth, a spawning ground for demons.
- **Electroplasm:** The energetic residue distilled from spirits and leviathan blood.
- **Whisper:** A person sensitive to spirits. May be able to summon and communicate with ghosts.

THE SPIRIT BELLS

[A set of arcane bells at Bellweather Crematorium that ring when someone dies in the city. A deathseeker crow leaves the belfry and flies to the district where the dead may be found, circling ever closer to the corpse every hour.]
Ancient Magic, Modern Science

Whispers

Ritual Questions

- What is the effect you want to achieve and how do you make it weird? I want to search the scene for traces of those who attacked. I do this by seeing the ghosts of the actions they left behind.

- What is the weird ritual you perform? I pull out my pipe and drop in a ball of the good stuff. You know, black lotus laced with crematory ash.

- Why does that work? That’s easy. You want to see beyond the veil, you gotta take a little trip there yourself.

- What is the price and to whom do you pay it? Well the door swings both ways right? You borrow some death. They borrow some life.

- How did you learn this technique? I bought some shit off this guy once and it turns out he gave me some of his personal stash by mistake. Now I’m a regular buyer.

Demons

Alchemy

Alchemical creation questions... not done yet!
CROW'S FOOT

THE LAMPBLACKS

THE CROWS

THE RED SASHES

THE LEAKY BUCKET TAVERN

CITY WATCH STATION
**THE WIDE WORLD**

**Akoros**
Dark forests, rocky hills. Rich coastal cities and some mining colonies deep inland.

**Severos**
Windswept grass plains. Outside the Imperial cities, some native Serverosi still live in tribes, scavenging the death-lands on their ghost-hunting horses.

**Iruvia**
Golden deserts. People say that some positions of power are openly held by demons in Iruvia.

**The Dagger Isles**
Tropical, jungle. People there live without lightning barriers. How do they manage that?

**Skovlan**
Cold, mountainous, wild. The last holdout from Imperial control. The war of Skovlan Unity ended only a few years ago.

**Tycheros**
A far off land, disconnected from the Empire. People say the Tycherosi (rudely called "Strangers") have demon blood. If you play one, tell the group what your telltale demonic feature is.

**A NOTE ABOUT THE WORLD**
The islands have wildly different climates due to magical weirdness from the cataclysm. The "water" of the Never Sea seems to be composed of opaque black ink, but it’s possible to see constellations of shimmering stars far below the surface. The sun is a dim ember, providing only purpleish twilight at dawn and dusk; leaving the world in darkness otherwise.

Don’t expect realism here.
Case a Target
When you observe a location or victim for weaknesses or opportunities, make an action roll if hostile agents might thwart your efforts (your position is determined by their threat level) or make a fortune roll if there’s no direct danger. You might need to first prowl to a hiding spot to observe undetected or hunt to follow a cautious target. You can survey a location to spot weaknesses or hidden dangers. You can sway an informant to reveal secrets without arousing suspicion.

Your position is...

- Dominant if you case a vulnerable target or one with which you have extensive familiarity.
- Daring if you case a target that secures their privacy or if you attempt shortcuts or court dangers to gather the info.
- Desperate if you case a target with extensive security and/or aggressive countermeasures, or if you rush the job without proper precautions.

Consequences
Harm: You might be tired; you might pull a muscle or twist an ankle while traversing the rooftops and sky-ways.

Worse Position: You traverse into a dangerous area, raising the stakes: a smuggler’s cache, a secured factory, a haunted house, a crime in progress.

Complication: You attract the attention of a bluecoat patrol or a gang of enemies that move to follow your trail (start a clock: followed).

Effects
- Limited: How is the effect diminished? You have difficulty finding a good route, backtracking several times. What significant obstacle remains? The rest of your journey remains; you’ll arrive later than expected.
- Standard: How does the effect manifest? You find a good path across sky-bridges and rooftops. You travel at normal speed.
- Great: How is the effect increased? You use secret shortcuts, covering a lot of ground quickly. What extra benefit manifests? You travel faster than expected.

Travel in Darkness
When you slip through the shadows across the streets of the city, your position is...

- Dominant if you prowl across friendly turf, or where watchful eyes are otherwise distracted.
- Daring if you prowl across neutral ground or where watchful eyes look out for trouble and strangers.
- Desperate if you prowl across hostile turf or where watchful eyes seek to exploit every opportunity.

Consider your position stronger if your destination is nearby or your route is well practiced or especially concealed. Consider your position weaker if your destination is far, your route leaves you exposed, you push for greater effect (a faster journey), or you eschew prowling for another action to make your way.

Consequences
Harm: You might be tired; you might pull a muscle or twist an ankle while traversing the rooftops and sky-ways.

Worse Position: You traverse into a dangerous area, raising the stakes: a smuggler’s cache, a secured factory, a haunted house, a crime in progress.

Complication: You attract the attention of a bluecoat patrol or a gang of enemies that move to follow your trail (start a clock: followed).

Effects
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- Standard: How does the effect manifest? You find a good path across sky-bridges and rooftops. You travel at normal speed.
- Great: How is the effect increased? You use secret shortcuts, covering a lot of ground quickly. What extra benefit manifests? You travel faster than expected.

Duel
When you fight toe to toe, pitting your skill against the enemy, your position is...

- Dominant if you skirmish with an inferior opponent, or in a manner well-suited to your abilities and weapons, or ill-suited to theirs.
- Daring if you skirmish with an opponent on equal footing.
- Desperate if you skirmish with a superior opponent, or in a manner ill-suited to your abilities and weapons, or well-suited to theirs.

Consider your position weaker if they know yours, or if they have long experience in combat.

Consequences
Harm: You might be killed by a fatal blow; you might be seriously wounded or bashed and battered; you might be exhausted from the effort; you might be shaken by the violence.

Worse Position: You lose the initiative and your opponent seizes an advantage. You’re disarmed or grappled and pinned. You’re backed into a corner or a precarious spot.

Complication: You attract the attention of a bluecoat patrol (start a clock: wanted). The opponent’s allies join in the fray. You’re cut and bleeding, or concussed and woozy (clock: incapacitated).

Extra Time: You’re entangled in the duel for some time, feinting and probing as you or your opponent plays it safe and cautious.

Effects
- Limited: How is the effect diminished? You manage to land only indirect blows, diminished by the enemy defense.
- Standard: How does the effect manifest? You maneuver and counter to land a solid blow.
- Great: How is the effect increased? You manage to land a serious blow, striking a vulnerable point—you smash them in the temple, cut a deep wound, twist and crush a joint, etc.
**Instances in the Shadows of Duskwall**

**Hold Steadfast**
When you want to press on in the face of intimidation, suffering, supernatural terror, or pain, roll your **Resolve** to resist the consequences.

**Consequences**
- **Harm:** You might be uncertain or unwilling; you might be subdued or drained; you might be panicked.
- **Worse Position:** Because of the pressure, you make a mistake that puts you in a bad spot. You let the opposition gain an advantage.
- **Complication:** You fail to notice something important. You give the opposition an opportunity (they tick a clock).
- **Extra Time:** You hesitate and lose time.

**Attune to the Ghost Field**
When you **attune to the ghost field to gather information**, make an action roll if hostile spirits are involved (your position is determined by their threat level and the intensity of the electroplasmic energies) or make a fortune roll if there’s no direct danger at hand.

**Questions**
- What do the ghost echoes show me about what happened here recently? Are there any echoes strong enough to view the more distant past?
- Where is the greatest concentration of plasmic energy here?
- Which spirits might I summon forth here?
- How is this spirit corrupted in death and what does it crave?

**Survive an Ambush**
When you are set upon by enemies lying in wait, roll your **Insight** to resist the consequences.

**Read a Person**
When you ...

**Questions**
- What do they intend to do?
- What are they really thinking or feeling?
- How could I get them to X?

**Read the Situation**
When you ...

**Questions**
- What should I be on the lookout for?
- What’s really going here?
- What’s a good way in or way out?

**Infiltrate Security**
When you ...

**Bull’s-eye**
When you shoot to kill your victim at range, your position is...